

## Seduction

Volume 23 | Nº 1 | Year 2025



# Calibán

Latin American Journal  
of Psychoanalysis



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Latin American Journal  
of Psychoanalysis

## Seduction

Volume 23, N° 1, Year 2025

ISSN 2304-5531 - Biannual

### Official publication of FEPAL

Latin American Psychoanalytic Federation

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## The multiple territories of seduction

*Seduction* is a concept that can be thought of from many perspectives. In its popular usage, it is understood as the power that certain subjects possess. Such power has a singular nature: it is the capacity to influence and persuade the other to comply with the will of the seducer. Seduction can occur in all areas of human affairs, from politics to sexuality. It is interesting to note that the popular use of the term restricts it to the meeting of two people and distances it from mass phenomena, of which the twentieth century provides us with striking examples. I believe that, in different regions, even in different Latin American countries, this word may have different nuances in its meaning. In my country, Chile, it implicitly implies an allusion to the use of carnal sensuality and sexual longings as tools to achieve one's objectives.

It is psychoanalysis that has been able to deal rigorously with the springs that are hidden in the different meanings, both popular and disciplinary, around this process we call seduction. It is natural, then, to begin with Freud himself and his theory of seduction.

For Freud (1896/1986a), seduction was a clinical discovery, a framework describing the process by which his hysterical patients had passively undergone a sexual experience in childhood. Generally, these situations were provoked by an adult and could range from insinuations to overt attacks of a sexual nature. For Freud, the trauma would occur in two stages, separated by puberty: the first, the seduction itself, real and concrete, but not subject to repression. Only in a second time -already in puberty- a new event, not necessarily of a sexual nature, evokes the memory of the first one, so that the memory is repressed. Then we see how the memory produces a greater effect than the fact of seduction itself, since it is this second moment that has the capacity to transform the event into the internal reality of the individual. That is to say, the subject experiences the flow of their life as a continuum, including sexual violence, until, in the second time, the Ego experiences it as aggression, but now as endogenous excitation. In the first theory of seduction, the subject experiences as traumatizing the memory, and not the event itself. Thus, in that period, Freud attributed to seduction great importance in the genesis of repression.

However, in view of the clinical evidence supporting the central importance of phantasies, in 1897 Freud turned his theories upside down and proposed the predominance of internal reality over external reality. In this new theory, the "memory" acquires the value of "psychic reality", of a "foreign body", which will later be considered inherent to the fantasy. However, he did not completely abandon his first theory and continued to



**Roberto Huarcaya**

*The Return of Oblivion* (1997), Havana Biennial, Cuba. Installation of a 5-meter-high spiral iron ladder with 9 images of my family looking outwards, including my dog, and 9 images looking inwards linked to moments of the life cycle. Cibachrome copies (direct positive) measuring 1.20 m x 1.80 m each.

give importance, as a pathogenic value, to situations of seduction in young children. Now understood as a register of the inner world, seduction gives him the first insights into the Oedipus complex: this process is then the backbone of the original fantasies. During the transition from one theory to another, Freud discovers that often these sexual situations are not historical facts, but rather the product of phantasmatic reconstructions, thus revealing infantile sexuality as a structuring factor of mental reality.

Thus, in the pre-oedipal relationship of the infant with the mother, with the bodily care proper to the maternal function, the first pleasurable sensations would be awakened, making it possible to speak of seduction. He soon discovered that these fantasies served to disguise the autoerotic activity of the first years of infancy and that behind these phantasms lay the whole breadth of the child's sexual life. This became in Freud's thinking the beginning of an attempt to explain at its source the mechanism of repression. Freud attributes so much importance to seduction in the genesis of repression that he tries to systematically find scenes of passive seduction, whether experienced with adults or other older children.

The theoretical-clinical problem lies in elucidating whether the phantasm of seduction is a defensive and projective deformation of the component of the Oedipus complex or whether it is necessary to see in it the translation of a fundamental fact: the fact that the sexuality of the infant is structured by something that comes from outside, the desire of the parents, which pre-exists the desire of the subject and shapes it. From this dilemma it

is concluded that seduction would not necessarily be a real fact, locatable in the history of the subject, but a structural datum whose historical transposition could only be realized in the form of a myth. Following Freud, the sexual drive is phylogenetically given and is activated by seduction and erotic stimulation. The consequence of this in his thinking is that he confers to the environment a role only as a trigger of the given.

The discrimination made by Paul Schilder (1935/1958), who says that there is a difference between *recall* and *memory*, is enlightening. Recalling consists of a process of reconstruction. When the difference between these two functions is not understood, one falls into the error of considering that the recall of memories is memory. The confusion between *recall* and *memory* is the basis of a very popular belief in current times: that memories of childhood sexual abuse are accurate historical records. The memories are not fabricated stories; they are stories made up later about the events, stories that would also be made up from original fantasies. Following Schilder, it is not enough to bring something from the past to begin the cure, as in Freud's early theory of seduction; instead, treatment involves remembering (*memory*), reconstructing from internal and external reality.

Laplanche (1987/1989) takes up Freud's theory of seduction and makes it an extensive phenomenon by pointing out the inevitable impact of the child's encounter with the adult in an original relationship of passivity and asymmetry; this act is so transcendental that the author considers it as the fundamental anthropological position. The adult proposes (imposes) to the infant non-verbal and verbal signifiers, behavioral, impregnated with unconscious sexual meanings, which for the infant are enigmatic signifiers. In his "theory of generalized seduction" (Laplanche, 1998), he postulates that in the infant, as in many other higher animals, there is a capacity for translation. It is at this point that the notion of seduction appears as a correlative of the polymorphous perverse infantile sexuality of the adult, but a necessary perversion, inherent to human sexuality. For Laplanche (2003/2009), one of Freud's "mistakes" in his theory of seduction was not to take into account the sexuality of the adult as an enigma for the infant.

The enigmatic messages of adult sexuality are those whose keys are not even known to the sender. Translation is an attempt to symbolize, but such translation will necessarily be incomplete, with an untranslatable remainder, so that the message creates an imperfect circuit. Among these numerous attempts at translation is what Freud (1908/1986b) calls "infantile sexual theories". The residue of the untranslatability of the adult's enigmatic messages would be "the sexual" polymorphous. The adult message is "the sexual", that is why it is enigmatic and traumatic.

Adult messages are gestures, behaviors, sometimes verbal messages, but necessarily infiltrated by the adult's sexual unconscious, which is compromised by the awakening of their own phantasmatic sexuality. The adult-baby relationship is particularly exciting for the adult phantasmatic. The parent, adult who pays attention to the child, suffers an awakening of their most primitive sexuality. (Laplanche, 1998, p. 26).

The theory of seduction affirms the priority of the concrete other in the constitution of the human being and his sexuality: the encounter between the adult and the infant. A perverse adult? Yes, but perverse because their messages are compromised by his own unconscious (Laplanche, 1992/1996).

It could be thought that there would be a universal seduction tendency (pedophilia) that is awakened in the adult upon contact with the infant, which would have to be re-

pressed just like aggressive, criminal, cannibalistic impulses, among others. Thus, according to Laplanche, we would all have been incestuously seduced.

As psychoanalysts, it is important to know the importance of the concept of seduction, not only as a pathogenic and traumatic agent, as in the case of child abuse, but also as a structuring part of the psyche. Freud and Laplanche also bring into play the discussed duality of biology versus environment. Laplanche's approach of how culture, through the *socius* - all those who have close contact with the infant, such as siblings, grandparents, etc. - transmits the enigmatic message of "the sexual", which activates the drives in the child, seems extremely interesting. Therefore, what is not given in the nature/culture pair would be what determines sexuality in the human being, being "the sexual", in my opinion, a central and specific aspect of the study of psychoanalysis.

I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on the issues raised by *Caliban* magazine, such as seduction, intolerance and fanaticism. These are concepts that can be studied from many disciplines. My interest is to highlight the identity and specificity of psychoanalysis, not with the idea of a certain superiority or to establish what is and what is not psychoanalysis, but rather with the responsibility to contribute and open a dialogue with other disciplines. In my opinion, the contribution of other disciplines to psychoanalysis is important and nourishing, but we, as psychoanalysts, can also contribute to other fields of knowledge. If we all look from the same window, we see the landscape to a reduced degree. It becomes necessary to look at the object of study from different angles in order to gain perspective. The psychoanalytic approach is just one more of the views, but it is very important to preserve it, since it often alludes to what is not seen at first glance.

**Lilian Hitelman J.**

President of the Latin American Psychoanalytic Federation

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## Of enchantments and darkness

*It is a marvelous anomaly, a fairy tale in reverse:  
to have dedicated one's life to penetrate  
into the secret of beings and things, idolizing  
their disturbing aspect and their unparalleled defects.*  
Emil Michel Cioran, 2004

*He was rejuvenated in this way,  
and the poor leaves withered on the ground!*  
Soren Kierkegaard, 1844

A certain epic aroma surrounds seduction, which invites me to begin these lines by drawing on a legend and a fable. The first, by Pascal Quignard (1983/2016). The author describes that,

according to legend, the phoenix only sings when it perceives its reflection on a copper surface because it believes it is going to see its congener. It is no one's contemporary. It is what is called being alone. It is singing in two voices when one is alone (p. 349).

The second tells the following anecdote: in front of some fellow diners, dazzled by his stories, Oscar Wilde tells the fable of some steel filings that had the sudden desire to visit a nearby magnet. Little by little they approached the magnet, without knowing how or why, until they were piled up on one of its sides. Then, the magnet smiled because the filings were certain that they had done so of their own free will (Greene, 2001/2020, p. 253).

While echoing Wilde's own seductive skills, this anecdote, as much as Quignard's, also sketches some of the outlines of the complex and enigmatic figure of seduction. In evoking it, its devices emerge almost poetically, more from emotion or intuition than through clear definitions or thorough ideas. It can also be imagined as a prism of heterogeneous crystals reflecting its dual force, attraction and being attracted, in a dance that is sometimes dazzling, sometimes opaque, even malignant. Even if we try to understand the unconscious motivations of its tenacious magnetization, there will always be an enigmatic aspect that remains. Will the one who seduces be like the phoenix that seeks to avoid its solitude? Will the one who is seduced seek to exist illusorily by a certain will, while being dragged by forces unknown to them?

If, as Octavio Paz (1956/1992) states, "every word [...] is a metaphor" (p. 34), of *what* is seduction a metaphor? I would insist that of humanity itself, of the luminous as well as of its penumbra. As everything changes, what gravitates to the human subject, the engine

of seduction, its narrative, and the forces that aim to crystallize it, will be transformed as history passes, impregnated with the servitudes and emotions that inflame each era.

I do not think there is any creation as revealing, in capturing the unthinkability of these changes, and even the imminence of what is to come, like literature or film. For Werner Herzog (1978/2016), "only if it were a film would I believe that all this is real" (p. 11). Thus, for instance, the aesthetics of erotic seduction in *Casanova* or *Don Juan*, impeccable in reflecting his amatory prowess, has been followed by a tenebrous aesthetics of gothic horror, with a magnetism colored with blood, like that of Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and of the successive *Nosferatu*. Here, eroticism is confused with the fascination of the underworld, as if playing to conquer death. More recent films like *Titane* (Ducournau, 2021), *Crimes of the future* (Cronenberg, 2022) or *The substance* (Fargeat, 2024), disturb by showing us a sinister inclination towards the obscene adulteration of the body, violence and human fright.

Today, seduction has become versatile in its approach towards less novel expressions and closer to a collective impact, elevating the figure of the prism with its multiplying effect. This way, the enchantment of eroticism *tête à tête* has spread to the social sphere, expressing itself in a hypnotic power over the behavior of the masses. According to multimedia documentary *The century of the self* (Curtis, 2002), we owe this transformation to Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud's nephew, who devised a plan to use the discoveries about unconscious desires for the benefit of corporations and for the political control of the population, turning them into more docile citizens immersed in unconscious consumption. Without intending to do so, every person would have signed a Faustian pact with an impersonal system that took possession of their innermost desires. This appropriation, in all its polysemy, is at the heart of seduction, be it individual, collective, erotic or evil.

Although there is no certainty that things have happened that way, it seems accurate. This is precisely Baudrillard's (1979/1981) approach to the seduction of the contemporary world, where the truth of the facts does not matter anymore and where everything is simulation. The cultural drive would take this detour towards the exaltation of artificial emotions assumed as real, as much as towards the anesthetic experience, closer to the attraction of nirvana. This inauthentic life is rooted in the seduction of an industry that trades in experiences, without the slightest awareness of the manipulative fact. *The Truman Show* (Weiss, 1998) is a revealing staging of this society of spectacle.

The field of seduction is vast. The fascination of a warm sun, the northern lights, the full moon, or sunsets, is nothing new. The same goes for music, birdsongs, or the sounds produced by the sea. Feeling seduced by someone or something, indistinctly, is not alien to psychoanalysis. The very notion of cathexis and its derivations towards the complex creation of objects in Winnicott (1971/1996) or the objectifying function in Green (1995/1996), account for the extraordinary human ability to attribute a powerful significance to people, objects, myths, ideas, among others.

It is likely that the great seductive power of technology has never been experienced before as it is now, the power of which is related to the *hybris* of the human being, who is too dazzled by the mirror of their own creations to notice the risk of playing with fire. Baudrillard (1995/2016) insists, "Perhaps it is the world that laughs at us, the object that seduces us with the illusion of the power we have over it" (p. 16).

As it is, seduction seems to intrude on everything or to disappear from the radar; at least, from discourse. One might even ask, paraphrasing André Green (1995/1996, 2000), if seduc-



tion still has something to do with sexuality, and if psychoanalysis still has something to say about seduction. Obviously, the answer to these questions is at hand. The cover work, *Objetos París*, by Peruvian photographer Roberto Huarcaya (1997), sensibly insinuates the decadence of a suggestive glow that peeks out at the same time as it seems to slide towards another place.

It is by rescuing seduction from this enigmatic ubiquity that *Caliban* proposed to address it as the theme of this issue and thus delve into the chameleon-like existence it adopts, sometimes opaque to the eye and at other times being able to blind us with so much presence. The importance of paying attention to its effects reaches the psychoanalyst, not only to clarify the enchantments of patients and analyze the consequences of their own seduction on them, but also because of the risk of becoming a prisoner of their own theories.

The issue begins with the Editorial by Lilian Hitelman, current President of Fepal, making a substantial but brief conceptual tour on seduction in psychoanalysis since its Freudian origins.

The texts in **Arguments** reaffirm that place that seduction always had for psychoanalysis from its own desire to know. The different approaches to the subject proposed by the authors put in tension the inclination to know about its operation and the impossibility of reaching a thorough understanding of its mystery.

In **The Foreigner**, the pulsating force of seduction that transforms everything comes to us from Mozart's Don Giovanni, a beautiful opera that plays with light and shadow like no other.

The **Dossier**, beautifully brings the journey of *The Word* through different scenarios and geographies, the formation of discourses and freeing itself from its capture.

**Incident** offers us the power of seduction through texts that suggestively question both the analyst's knowledge and their postures and impostures, as well as seduction itself, necessary to attract the human being to life.

Less from enchantment and focused more on the penumbra of seduction, the texts contained in **Vortex**, seem more like thrusts than brushstrokes. With their own theme, *Stolen Childhoods*, they draw back veils to address what no one would like to see because of its urgency and crudeness. Scenarios of transgression and abuse to the infantile existence, whose traces engender impossible adult projects, equally stolen.

Continuing with the crude and *evil* aspects of seduction, **Outside the Walls** discusses the sinister experience of living in a criminal environment where close relatives become the greatest enemies. This piece received the Psychoanalysis and Freedom Award, Fepal 2024. And in **Off the field** we place the 2024 Fepal Award, which also raises important challenges of the contemporary clinic around identity issues.

**Classic and Modern** elucidates the validity of Laplanche's theory of generalized seduction, according to later contributions of Silvia Bleichmar and the author's singular thought. This way, it underlines the inevitability of seduction in the psychic configuration of humans, from the beginning of life.

A special mention deserves **By Heart**, dedicated to the memory of Joyce Goldstein, a committed psychoanalyst from Porto Alegre, very active in the Latin American community. Wania Cidade affectionately offers these lines to her dear friend and colleague of the Fepal Board of Directors 2022-2024. Below, we present the last piece that Joyce presented shortly after leaving. We have left it as it was submitted, so her voice can accompany us imaginatively in the reading.

Finally, in **Binnacle** we have an inspired article that reviews the complexity of the work of Roberto Huarcaya, our artist in this issue. His photographs confirm, accompanying

*Seduction*, the invaluable role that images play in bringing us closer to the unthinkable.

I invite you to immerse yourself in the issue, to read it and to rejoice in its images. May the poem "Strip tease" by Blanca Varela (2001) resonate as you do so, encouraging you to cast off your moorings and venture to dismantle the known and welcome the new.

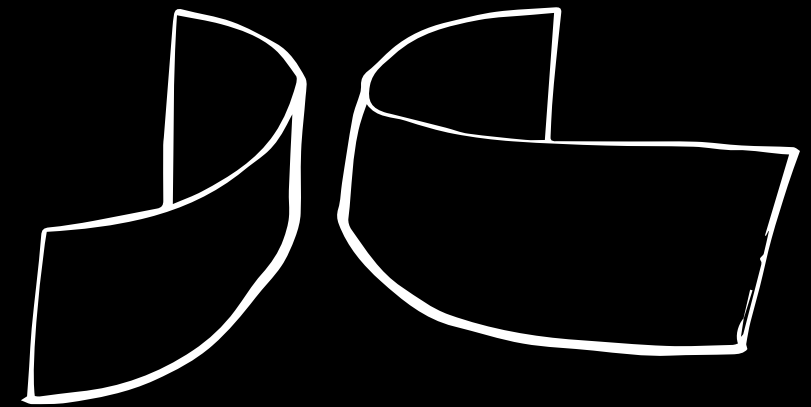
*Take off your hat  
if you have one  
take off your hair  
that abandons you  
take off your skin  
the guts the eyes  
and put on a soul  
if you find it*

**María Luisa Silva Checa**

Editor, Caliban – RLP

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Arguments:  
Seduction

## Seduction as a Cause or Cause as Seduction?

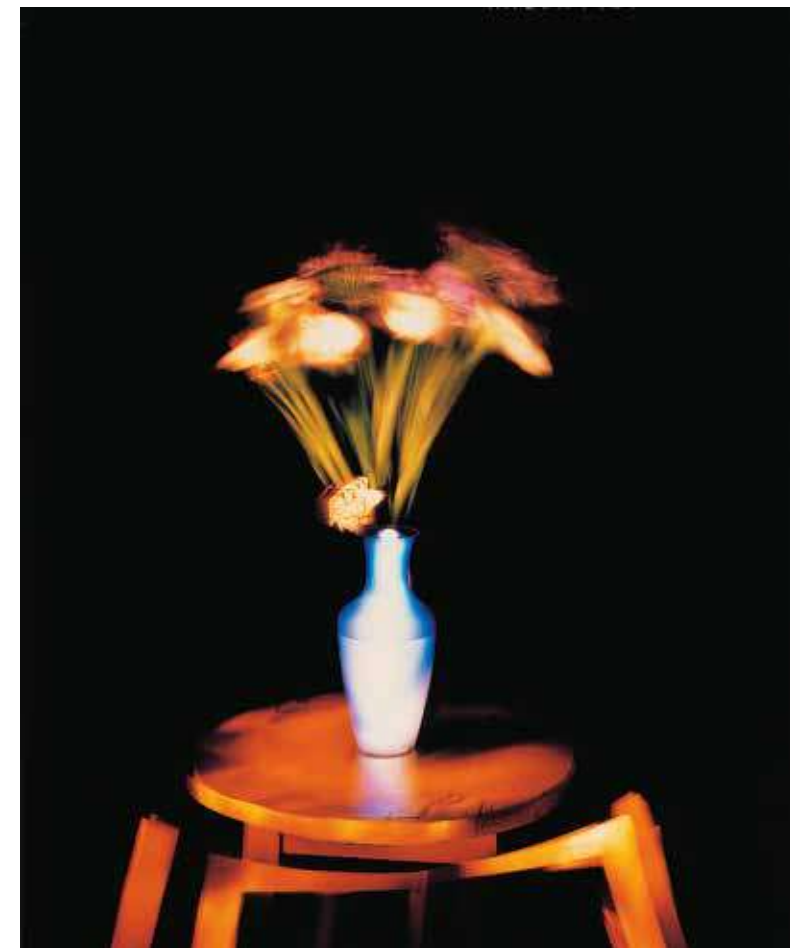
1. We all know that the etymology of the word *seduction* comes from the Latin *seducere*, which refers to leading someone astray, diverting them from the right path, or pushing them toward error. It is in this sense that Freud's Letter 69 (1950 [1892–1899]/1986a) to Fliess, dated September 21, 1897, and written in Vienna, marks a pivotal transition within the theory and practice of psychoanalysis.

Let us recall an excerpt:

I wish to confide in you the great secret that has gradually dawned on me over the past few weeks. I no longer believe in my “neurotica.” Of course, this cannot be understood without an explanation [...]. Therefore, I must present the reasons for my disbelief. The continual disappointments in bringing my analysis to effective completion, the desertion of people who seemed to be better positioned for understanding, the delay in achieving the full success I had anticipated [...]. Then, the surprising revelation that, in all cases, the father had to be incriminated as a pervert, without excluding my own father [...]. Thirdly, the realization that there is no marker of reality in the unconscious, making it impossible to distinguish truth from fiction imbued with emotion. (From this, one solution remains: sexual fantasy almost always seizes on the subject of the parents.) Fourthly, the reflection that in the deepest psychoses, the unconscious memory does not emerge, so the secret of childhood experiences does not surface even in the most disoriented delirium. [...] All of this prepared me for a dual renunciation: of the complete resolution of a neurosis and of certain knowledge of its etiology in childhood. [...] What if these doubts are merely an episode in the progress toward further understanding? [...] Without doubt, I will not tell Dan [he meant Gat] nor speak of it in Ascalon, in the land of the Philistines, but before you and myself, I feel more a sense of triumph than of defeat (although this is not correct). (pp. 301–302)

Curiously, what Freud did not want to reveal was an allusion to II Samuel 1, where David receives news of Saul and Jonathan's deaths.

\* Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina and Asociación Psicoanalítica de Madrid.



Roberto Huarcaya

*Living Nature* (1997). Series that arose intuitively after working for over a year in a psychiatric hospital and a month in a morgue. Picture 1 1.00 m x 1.40 m Cibachrome.

I find it fascinating to highlight Freud's sense of triumph. It is as though the collapse of a prior truth and the transitional moment it implies toward new developments paradoxically embody all that truth can promise. Truth seems to be salvaged when prior truth collapses. Truth and cause are not the property of the unconscious. Rather, we might begin to suspect that the discovery of the unconscious calls into question the very concepts of truth and cause, especially regarding their relationship to origin and primacy. This does not concern only the impact of truth and cause in Freud's method but also what they imply for patients in relation to the truth and cause they received as solutions. Patients wanted and did not want to receive a “truth”; instead, they desired a journey. Similarly, they wanted and did not want to receive a cause, preferring instead to produce one. It was not just resistance but also inefficacy of the method, as Freud himself acknowledges. We might ask whether all resistance arises before an analyst intent on defining a truth—not because the truth is unbearable in its overt revelation but because truth never aligns with what unconscious desire anticipates, making the truth received always a disappointment. Truth exists but never reaches completion because, once it does, it ceases to exist and loses all

meaning. Cause exists, but only retroactively, when it ceases to be cause. Freud notably emphasized in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1992a) the enduring gap between expectation and discovery, which triggers the drive factor repeatedly. This discrepancy could be inscribed within Heidegger's concept of ontological difference, illuminating how unconscious desire is essentially a desire to be, perpetually failing to reconcile being with entity, underpinning the radicality of the death drive. Being never fully becomes entity and perpetually flees from time. No mark can ultimately signify it because only the entity has representation. Every seduction attempts to nullify ontological difference and the flight of being in time.

2. If the task is to not forget the unconscious, and the unconscious has the characteristics that Freud described in Letter 69 (1950 [1892–1899]/1986d), then what must be remembered? And what does it mean to remember the unconscious? We cannot overlook Freud's magnificent work on the forgetting of proper names (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 1901/1991). What does Freud recall when he remembers Signorelli after a long associative path through Botticelli, Boltraffio, Trafoi, Bosnia Herzegovina, etc.? And Signorelli, what does it mean? Is it anything more than the name whose recollection allows him to forget Signor and Elli, the master of finitude, death as an Oedipal punishment? Finitude and death are always experienced as terror because they are perceived as punishment. Yet, if they are punishment, there may also be hope for eternity as forgiveness. And how much-sustained guilt harbors that hope! For the paintings of the Last Judgment remained present, but the forgetting itself was the fault that had to be forgotten and metaphorized in the act of forgetting. Paradoxically, this forgetting, once remembered, allowed him to forget the father as the master signifier, the cause of the truth of finitude. Once Signorelli is remembered, finitude does not disappear, but finitude as symptom does. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that, in the same letter where Freud renounces his theory of the seducing father, he alludes to the verse from II Samuel 1. The news that should not be announced in Gat and Ascalon was that of a father's death—Saul—and that of his son, friend, and rival, Jonathan. It was also the death of the seducing father as the cause of “neurotica,” while simultaneously establishing his position as the Oedipal cause.

The free association to which Freud assigned the central role in the cure acquires full significance. Remaining with the question while aiming at the promise reexamines the foundational concepts of Freudian development, avoiding the dilution of their mysteries and allowing them to flourish at the edges of the enigma. In some way, this entails suspicion of any post-Freudianism that paradoxically reinforces the *status quo*, resisting what the discovery of the unconscious implies for speech. Speech opens a narrow crack through which one can slip a question about being. It confronts us with the immensity of the Socratic paradox: “Know thyself,” alongside “I only know that I know nothing.” Here, the distance from the truth increases as knowledge grows, augmenting ignorance. This turns the imperative of knowledge into a symptomatic inquiry into subjectivity itself. A curious dialectic thus emerges: knowledge entails knowing to ignore, and truth assumes the value of ignorance itself (Szpilka, 1989). In Oedipal terms, being able to say *no* to the mother's *yes* and being able to say *yes* to the father's *no*.

Socrates roams Athens, asking a pious man about piety; others, like Hippias, about beauty; Laques about courage (*andreia*); and Ion about friendship. The people offer only examples of piety, beauty, courage, or friendship, but not concepts. Concepts, after all, lead to total vulnerability. This irony defines Socrates: “Know thyself,” as inscribed at Delphi, recognizing one's limits to know one knows nothing.

Socrates appears to affirm that he alone knows nothing, while others falsely believe they know. When interrogated conceptually, they cannot answer (Freud, 1901/1991). Freud's feeling of tri-

umph in Letter 69 (1950 [1892–1899]/1986d) can be situated here—in the delight of his Socratic moment of transition, where he discovers the value of not-knowing, the ignorance that allows him to sustain ontological difference without succumbing to seduction.

Free association reveals its true significance: the promise of truth or cause can only refer to an after, where fulfillment coincides with new questioning. This dynamic underscores a methodological flaw I termed long ago as the reversal and empirical misplacement of determination times (Szpilka, 2002), in which the earliest empirical events are mistaken as the most decisive. Freud encapsulated this insight with remarkable simplicity, ironically paraphrasing a servant from one of Nestroy's comedies, who deflected every question or objection with a promise that everything would become clear in due course.

If being always comes after, in deferment, it should not surprise us that the past will also emerge in the future of free association. Freud offers precious references as early as his essay *Screen Memories* (1899/1989), where he insists that childhood memories do not emerge but are constructed in later periods of life. The concept of emergence refers to something that existed beforehand, ready to surface at a certain moment. Speaking instead of memories being formed refers to a subsequent moment in which formation and emergence coincide.

If the past is created in the future and the originality of subjective historization during the cure resides in this, if what was is actually what will be, we can fully appreciate the Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action). What is prior will only exist later, in the future of the word to come. We cannot resist here the temptation to venture into a particular understanding of Nietzsche's eternal return, grounding it in the necessity for the past to exist only in the future, such that what then returns is actually what begins to come into being from the after. This necessarily imposes what was lived as a return.

The historical subject is thus bracketed in a third, virtual space that coincides neither with the referent nor with the word referring to it. A subject always in *offside*, out of place, misplaced. This is not to say that there is no external referentiality, which would never be a bare event anyway, but that the complication implied by speech dislocates the subject from their statement—from both the reference and the uttered word.

I believe this issue closely relates to the psychoanalytic concept of trauma: the essential trauma of the subject of the unconscious is always deferred, as if a hidden trickster repeatedly lies about its location. If each statement creates a new subject of the event, the original will always belong to the mythical order.

Hence the futility of the debate over whether the cure process should focus on the here and now or the there and then. Neither of these places refers to anything other than an empirical subject within a simple linear chronology. The subject is neither in the here and now nor in the there and then. As a fleeting cut through the time of discourse it-

self, the subject appears as what is missing in the statement, fitting only within the time of *Nachträglichkeit*. What is discussed in free association? The subject who, by speaking, is absent in the statement—the subject always in *offside*, waiting for their place in a desire never realized because of the aforementioned ontological difference. Free association thus avoids establishing a supposedly reduced knowledge that finally becomes fulfilled. Instead, it produces the unconscious itself: a promise, a destitution, a questioning, an instant where the hole is created, the space opens, and the mask falls—to find the subject in offside within the pure gap, the pure moment of transition between two lies of being: the previous one dissolving and the new one about to take its place (Szpilka, 1989).

Thus, what constituted knowledge as a solution opposes itself to destituted knowledge, which only constitutes a solution of continuity. Emphasis between two lies is the only way to approach the unconscious thing, the unconscious representation of a thing as that about which one can speak without ever finishing saying it.

Those who are not subjects of speech neither ignore nor have anything to know; nor do they pose the problem of truth. Only when the thing to be known presents itself does the search for truth begin—not because there was a prior truth to be known but because, when the thing to be known arises in speech, something retrospectively presenting as truth becomes problematic. The word that institutes the promise simultaneously institutes the disappointment—an insoluble paradox because what was not before cannot later be. How can one find a loss that never occurred?

In an earlier presentation (Szpilka, May 24, 2024), I emphasized that we are unfinished beings. To exist, we must cease to be mere entities; to be verbs, we must cease to be nouns. If we were finished beings, we would be “finished” in every sense of the word. We would simply be what we are, like a stone that is what it is and cannot be seduced or led astray from its being. Speech allows us to be verbs through this constant *differance*—to paraphrase Derrida—between being as noun and being as verb. Yet, because of this—or despite it—we are always deferred subjects, always lacking. We are what we are not, and we are not what we are. Kojève (1933–1939/2013) explains this well in his introduction to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This incompleteness, as Heidegger would say, makes us the only beings whose being is at stake in their very existence, preventing us from being outside of time. But having being as a verb paradoxically means possessing nothing. It constantly eludes us; when we try to grasp it, it becomes an entity. Being as a verb is unrepresentable and sustains our infinite desiring state. The unconscious is essentially desiring—a desire to be, a desire to retract or even nullify time by repeating an impossible mythical first experience of satisfaction. It is as though being as a verb prevents us from being “real,” yet it is for this very reason that we are the only beings capable of bearing witness to it. Freud (1921/1992b) links the primordial form of identification to the paternal ideal and the prehistory of the Oedipus complex. In the subject of identification, it is not a lack tied to the fields of necessity or anaclitic sexuality—where the mother is the primary object—but a lack marked by cultural ideals. These compel the subject to exist while simultaneously inscribing a lack of being in them, as their biological or ontological being lacks only objects of necessity. In this sense, the father is the first seducer—the one who leads astray, diverts from the good, and pushes toward error by imprinting upon the subject the impossibility of being what they are. Thanks to this, the subject will never be a stone or a god (“I am that I am”), but they will also never stop being. This is why I insist that, in psychoanalytic treatment, one stops being what one never was to become what one will never completely be.

Let us not forget the unique mandate of the superego: “You must be like me; you must not be like me.”

We are like a verb because we are subject to loss, we are like a verb because we know of our lack of being a noun, we are like a verb because we suffer from ontological difference, as we suffer from the unconscious. This obsession with truth arises because truth represents that which exists outside of time—the ever-elusive, eternal noun-being. This is fundamentally why we have an insatiable passion for truth. But not the easy truth, the *adequatio rei et intellectus*, the tautological and uninteresting kind. Instead, the truth of being outside of time and finitude—the truth that was not, is not, and cannot ever fully be. It is the truth of being as a verb outside of time and finitude because only by being as a verb and finite can we testify to the being of substantive things. Thus, the mad passion for truth always has to do with the impossibility of being outside of time, outside of finitude, precisely because being cannot be an entity, and truth does not concern the entity. And if the symptom is a fulfillment of desires that consists in the realization of an impossible identity, we cannot help but wonder whether the passion for truth does not constitute our fundamental symptom, in the search for absolute knowledge or absolute ignorance, instead of the Socratic dialectic of knowing how to ignore.

3. If, as Freud states, there are no markers of reality in the unconscious and truth cannot be distinguished from fiction, how can the unconscious be thought of as a cause? Or could it be that truth, as lack, is itself the cause? This would mean that the lack itself acts as the cause.

The problem of causality has a long history in philosophy. Aristotle, in his *Physics*, attempted to formalize the four causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. He sought to dissociate these from the origin or beginning to avoid an infinite regression of the cause from the cause itself. And curiously enough, the final cause was the only one that would allow the recognition of the necessary existence of a limit (Oñate and Zubía, 2022).

A significant paradox arises in questions such as whether the father is the cause of the son or whether the son is the cause of the father. This intriguing circular paradox suggests that what causes is simultaneously caused by what it causes. Producing the unconscious as cause is, in some way, a subversion of the classical concept of causality, making it difficult to inscribe the symptom within any justification by reason. From the hypothesis of the unconscious, words and speech in general refer not so much to worldly objects as to a meaning that shines by its absence—an object forever lost, an unconscious representation of a thing that, as we have seen, can only be spoken about without ever being fully expressed. These are merely marks, scars, traces of a perennial absence without a present unifying signification. This distinction is critical to avoid confusing unconscious thought with implicit meanings within conscious thought. The implicit belongs to the preconscious: a meaning ignored but accessible within knowable signification. This is why it is essential



to differentiate producing the unconscious as cause from any rational cause, which generally exposes yet another ideology of the world. Producing the unconscious as cause involves the labor of producing the cause itself. Paradoxically, the cause must be produced in the work of free association, where the cause of reason dissolves as a mere semblance, betraying its lie and extinguishing it in the new enactment.

The cause of the unconscious never aligns with the subject's reasons or hidden motivations, which the psychoanalyst's cunning might seek to uncover. These are tricks of the subject of reason, disguising what is already known as ignorance. If this were all, Sartre's critique that the unconscious implies the subject's bad faith would be reasonable. But evidently, this is not the case. Thus, when we speak of producing the cause, we refer to producing the infinitely deferred subject of the cause—the subject of the unconscious itself—who suffers from truth as both cause and lack. The cause of the unconscious is the infinite desire for truth that will never be realized due to ontological difference, where being as a verb can never align with being as a noun. If it did, it would cease to exist. Freud (1920/1992a) explains this difference well when he insists that all substitute and reactive formations, as well as all sublimations, fail to cancel out the tension of the drive. It is precisely the difference between pleasure found and pleasure sought that engenders the drive factor, the *Triebhaft*, as the foundation of the compulsion to repeat beyond the pleasure principle. This rejects any adherence to what is established and perpetually drives forward, untamed. The backward path toward full satisfaction (the zero-point of death, incest?) is obstructed by repressive resistances. Progress is blind and without any ultimate goal.

So, if in the cause of reason the insistence is on the “for this reason”, in the production of the unconscious as a cause the insistence is on the “this”. The “for” multiplies the knowledge of reason by ignorance and divides the subject further from its impossible truth. When we speak of producing the cause, we speak of the subject of the cause, of the subject of the unconscious itself which is always offside (what is the cause of the offside: the overtaking of the fullback or that of the striker, or do the two cause each other?) and which is both the caused and the cause itself, as in the circular paradox of the father and the son. And the symptom itself could be considered as the effect of a cause not yet caused, which more insists as reason the more it suffers from a failed reason. As a nonsense that has not yet finished being produced because it is too subject to the meanings of the world of reason. It is not then a question of not having found the adequate meaning, but of the annihilating nonsense. And, finally, producing the subject of the cause implies producing it as the subject of a lost cause. Hence the urgency of being seduced by a positive empirical cause or by a truth of reason. The cause would always be that of the truth that is suffered.

That is the cause of the production of the unconscious. And the cause is undone when, through speech, the subject takes charge of it, assumes its cause, assumes the cause of its cause, and loses in the moment of transition, for an instant, its offside position to enter again into the game by recovering from its temporal inertia. That is why the criticism of a certain scientific view that psychoanalysis can explain the facts retrospectively without being able to predict them is true. And this is precisely so because the production of the unconscious itself undermines the concept of cause that could emanate from any predictive logical system. It follows that there should be no justification for predictive sciences, precisely because the production of the unconscious does not concern it. There is an inevitable limit that only denounces the friction that occurs in the classical problematic of the correspondence of the logos with being, between the truth implied by the signifier united by a lack to the other signifier with the truth implied by the sign articulated to a signified thing of the world (Szpilka, 1989). From the hypothesis of reason, what is said is; from the hypothesis of the unconscious, what is said is not. In the production of the unconscious, the

articulation of the logos with being is always mediated by the phallus as the signifier of lack. That is why S. Leclaire maintained with such intensity, in his very old visit to Buenos Aires in 1975, that the phallus was the sum of the unconscious representatives. That is why the hypothesis of the unconscious as production brings into play something beyond cause, beyond the logic of truth in reason, beyond freedom, chance or necessity. For it is about the curse that is gestated in being by the act of speech, which implies that, because it is said, one cannot finish saying. Before speaking there was nothing to say to the being, but afterwards one cannot finish saying it. The curse and the blessing go hand in hand, by saying to the being one can no longer finish saying it, by seeking the truth one can no longer find it. So, finally, is the cause of the unconscious truth as lack? Does not Freud say in his wonderful work of 1926 (1926 [1925]/1996) that the fundamental of the repressed is castration? Is this finally the true Socratic knowing how to ignore that Freud suffers and celebrates in his Letter 69 (1950 [1892-1899]/1986d) to Fliess? Is this the meaning of the striking Freudian footnote (Freud, 1923/1993, p. 51, note 2) in which he insists that what is ultimately fundamental to the cure is to give the patient the freedom to choose whether to decide illness or health?

4. Evidently, the common notion of memory as an empirical lived event becomes complicated when discussing the unconscious. This is reflected in phrases such as “hysterics suffer from reminiscences,” “one must remember to avoid repetition,” or “one must lift the repression of infantile amnesia.” Yet in *A Child Is Being Beaten* (Freud, 1919/1990), Freud not only confirms that early events speak through the psychoanalyst but also that the most important aspects of fantasy are constructions of the analyst.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920/1992a), he is unequivocal: the essential repressed material cannot be remembered—it belongs to the realm of transference repetition.

Freud's early letters to Fliess are marvelous pearls that reveal his intricate thinking on this matter. In Letter 52 (Freud, 1950 [1892–1899]/1986a), he proposes the notion of retranscription (Umschrift) for memory, based on new connections. In Letter 59 (Freud, 1950 [1892–1899]/1986b), he discusses a novel insight into hysteria, attributing its origin to the efficacy of a fantasy constructed from things heard early in life but understood much later. Fantasy bridges an early senselessness to a later distorted meaning.

In Letter 61 (Freud, 1950 [1892–1899]/1986c), he highlights the defensive aesthetic tone of fantasy against the rawness of reality. In Manuscript M (Freud, 1950 [1892–1899]/1986f), the sophistication increases: fantasies are constituted through a fusion and distortion akin to the decomposition of one chemical body with another. Memory is falsified

by fragmentation processes that disrupt chronological relations, while unconscious fictions, free from defenses, occupy the place of mnemonic symptoms.

However, if fantasy intensifies and demands entry into consciousness, the symptom regenerates through fantasy's regressive drive toward its original constitutive memory. A curious dialectic emerges in which fantasy stabilizes and heals but at the same time the symptom and the disease are generated regressively from it. Two spaces are thus established: one for the pathogenic memory tied to a worldly scene, and another for memory deformed and distorted by fiction. The primordial is marked by its heterogeneity in relation to fantasy itself, which must be revealed and which only returns from it based on its failure. We have already referred to Letter 69 (Freud, 1950 [1892–1899]/1986d) and its significance in the subsequent development of psychoanalysis, where the boundaries between facts and fantasies began to blur, just as in science the line between facts and theories began to fade. This heightens the question of what must be remembered.

Fantasy increasingly loses its function of deforming a primordial event. Confronting the impossible real—a mythical wandering event that lost its right to be an unconditioned truth (in the Kantian sense)—brings forth the invariable structure of the Oedipus complex.

Fantasy bridges the gap between the missing unconditioned and the absolute structuring condition. Between the impossible real and the structure that occupies its place, Freud ultimately privileges psychic reality and historical truth over material reality.

However, Freud's renunciation of positive material fact is not absolute. Fantasy and psychic reality remain substitutes, something devalued by the scientific causalism of his time. It is as if becoming ill through fantasy meant falling victim to one's inventions. A true cause must lie outside the subject. Yet, fantasy is not a mere invention of the subject or a whimsical mental construction. On the contrary, it is fantasy that invents a subject positioned within a particular world. The subject is its effect, its product—a result of what cannot be fully said because it is spoken. Whatever the subject invents, they are the result of their invention. Paradoxically, cause and effect of the caused. From that point onward, the subject can no longer live by life itself but only through the signifier, which always implies desire and castration. They cannot live without a cause—for living, dying, falling ill, or healing. It is as though cause were the only possibility for being both a verb and a noun for an apparently absolute Other. Cause of their cause, cause of what causes them: fantasy as cause; ultimately, the great Other (Lacan, 1966/2009) as cause. Of course, external suffering produces effects, but not the type of effects attributed to the neurotic symptom. Rather, they are effects of the misery of everyday life, which are primarily addressed through the means of everyday life—politics, economics, sociology, and other state institutions. Sometimes psychoanalysts confuse neurotic misery with the misery of daily life and believe they can address the latter as well, despite Freud's clear criterion that psychoanalysis aims to heal neurotic misery in order to settle into the misery of everyday life. When Freud speaks of granting the subject freedom to choose, it seems he also refers to the freedom to choose which misery they prefer.

However it is difficult to resist the temptation to follow the magnificent reflections of early Freud. In his later letters to Fliess he insists that fantasies are later products projected backwards from the present, that is, that the memory, whether or not it was real, actually appears as a product of the fantasy itself, and finally in Letter 101 (Freud, 1950 [1892–1899]/1986e) he adds that to the question of what happens in early childhood, the answer must be “nothing,” only the germ of a sexual impulse. That is why memory implies being able to traverse the phantasmal, to circulate desire in its dismantling, following Freud in *A child is being beaten* (1919/1990) where the second phase of memory is something that never was. To insist on the memory as positivity, to look for the *arché* in the fact and not in the phantasm only favors its fixation in temporal inertia. That is why

the transference must be fundamentally oriented to produce the unconscious desire between the memory and the fantasy in order to invert the temporalization process. Because if from the fantasy, as Freud taught us in *On the Concealing Memories* (1899/1989), it was projected retroactively conforming a memory, fulfilling the future in the past, suspending itself in a temporal inertia, from the transference the inversion of that determination is offered, trying to produce the past in the future, therefore asymptotic and impossible. And the law of abstinence not only alludes to the psychoanalyst in his performance, but also his donation of meanings and causes, in the place of sustaining the lack, what cannot be said because it is said. In this sense, the transference is fundamentally the place where the question of being is dialectized.

5. If it were possible to enjoy real finitude, to enjoy death, the death drive would be life's treasure. Yet the return to the inorganic, as Freud postulates, cannot be enjoyed. One cannot enjoy being “finished”; one can only enjoy the finishing of the other and within the other. Freud (1920/1992a) argues that the difference between what is expected and what is found ignites the drive factor. This difference can only be actualized through the death drive. Yet he adds that the path backward, the return to the inorganic—to being as a noun, as an entity—is obstructed by repressive resistances. Progress is blind and without any ultimate goal. This is why desire lacks an object; it has only an endless cause, perpetuated by the recurring difference that never fully occurs. If the path backward to the inorganic, to being as a substantive entity, is blocked by repression, does the realization of the death drive face the same obstacles as incest? As a drive, it is destined to remain unrealized, expressing the mortification imposed on the “natural” sexual body by the paternal categorical imperative: “There is a pleasure with the mother that cannot be.” Could it be that incestuous pleasure is one of the essential figures of the death drive?

If we affirm this, then what was not, what is not, and what cannot be—being outside of time and finitude—concerns only being as a verb. For being as a noun, “the stone,” the question of truth is irrelevant.

The Oedipal law normalizes this: what cannot be ontologically cannot be legally. This explains the interest in the ontological foundation of the Oedipus complex, which simultaneously implies truth as lack. To reject this law is to attempt to annul time, disrupting generational distribution and instituting parricidal, filicidal, and fratricidal massacres in all wars.

The risk is that if the being of the entity cannot be a verb, and the being of the verb cannot be an entity, then the being of the entity must disappear! The child breaks the toy to better dominate and possess it, even if they are left with the void of nothingness. The scientist breaks the world and the atom, shaking them to better dominate them. As Freud notes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930 [1929]/1998), this mas-

tery also leads to the destruction of civilization. What about the psychoanalyst? Must they, like Oedipus, decipher the riddle of the Sphinx? And for what “happiness”? Wouldn’t Oedipus have been “happier” not solving it, living within the pleasure principle articulated with the reality principle? Or is living in the good about feeling unfinished, avoiding the tragic incestuous pleasure and the plague of Thebes beyond the pleasure principle?

After all, solving the Sphinx’s riddle is discovering time as finitude. To annul it always implies incestuous realization and the pleasure of tragedy. But could truth itself be the interdicted enjoyment of incest? Living in evil beyond the pleasure principle? As if incestuous pleasure were finally fulfilling the fantasy of being finished and enjoying finitude. This is why our cure implies enduring that we can only be a verb by renouncing our substantiveness. We can only be a verb under the shadow of temporal disappearance that sweeps over us but simultaneously allows us to exist. In Freudian terms, one can only be in castration, enduring the refusal to solve the Sphinx’s riddle to its ultimate consequences—enduring truth as lack. Failing to do so leads to parricide, fratricide, and incest. For the psychoanalyst, this means not seeking the cause with which to seduce the world, like Archimedes sought the lever to move it. To *seducere* is always to lead down the wrong path, divert from good, or push toward error. The alternative is to embrace the enigmatic Socratic message of knowing/ignorance and the infinite mystery of the perennial unconscious desire.

Abstract

Starting from Freud’s Letter 69 to Fliess where he disbelieves his “Neurotica”, an attempt is made to make a critique of the concept of seduction, posing the risk of the psychoanalyst being seduced by the question of cause and truth, instead of following the “triumphal” sense of the alluded Freudian letter, where discovering the transition of a truth as a lie implies a new opening to knowing/ignorance. If in the unconscious, as Freud states, there are no signs of reality and truth is confused with fiction, the unconscious is neither the place of truth nor of cause, but rather the place where all truth and all cause vanish and there is only an infinite desiring position. The psychoanalytic cure then implies accepting and sustaining as cause the impossible truth, which only the Oedipus complex in its legality produces. Language and the symbolic order in general produce a deferred being whose limit is always the Oedipal law, and thus leads to a paradox, what cannot be said because it is said. To force it in search of a cause and a truth is to break the limit and keep the subject in the incestuous parricidal, fratricidal and filicidal seduction. The enigma of the sphinx must never be unveiled because it leads to the Oedipal tragedy sustaining the subject in the fixation of temporal inertia, which constitutes the essence of neurotic misery. The great real violences correspond to the misery of daily life and their resolution goes through the political, the economic, the pedagogical, and the different institutions of the state. The psychoanalyst should not confuse neurotic misery, which is what Freud seeks to cure, with the misery of everyday life, because neurotic misery represents the trauma of ontological difference.

**Candidates to keywords:** *To be a noun, To be a verb, Subject in offside, Cause, To know/ To ignore.*

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Received: 25/08/2024 - Approved 10/10/2024

## Seduction: Bonds with the Real?

*It will be necessary to go further if we do not want psychoanalysis to die.  
It is urgent to re-establish the debate between those who want to debate.  
It is time for texts and theses to be answered with a rigour that does not exclude  
tolerance towards others. Rigour in ideas, tolerance towards subjects.  
Not as it often happens in reverse: laxity in thought  
but an exacerbated and narcissistic polemic towards people.  
Jean Laplanche, 2007*

My psychoanalytic journey and concern have always been closely linked to clinical practice and the various theories that support it. I have never felt like a representative of any particular “school”. However, I do feel part of an attitude of openness, transmitted by many who influenced my training: personal analysts, teachers and supervisors, from whom I have received a theoretical openness and a deep concern for human suffering.

This openness to opinions and debates took place in various contexts and institutions: in hospitals, study and supervision groups and schools. Ultimately, work and study were aimed at broadening perspectives, acknowledging that problems often multiply questions, which compel us to turn to other disciplines, humanistic and biological. Let us accept our limitations and work with the modesty of our resources, without rigid truths or idealizations that harm both our discipline and clinical practice.

The proposal to write a paper for *Calibán* about seduction offered me the opportunity to revisit Laplanche, with his theory of original seduction, and my particular interest in his conception of sexuality extended in the Freudian sense, which opens perspectives on some impasses of Freud and many of his followers. When someone speaks of expanded and extended sexuality, they also speak of, or attempt to approach, a psychoanalysis that is less rigid and, above all, less normative, without pretending to “resume the subversion” that Laurie Laufer (2023) invites us to.

The intention, then, is the search for a more independent psychoanalysis amongst many contextual and historical models that hinder the contemporary clinical practice- movable, changing and highly complex.

It has been too many years since Laplanche worked with these concerns, and I believe it is important to have them at hand for reflection. For him, analysis is in crisis; the practice has been

distorted, reinforcing the ego or working with an incessant wordplay. He asks if his theory of generalized seduction can help to reframe the practice and he attempts to do so.

I have heard that analysts work with the Real. My answer: Unfortunately, no! Because if that was the case, we would be more successful. We work with language, but I believe it matters – as Badiou (2015/2016) argues – that we seek the lost real and perhaps we can deconstruct some of its masks and, with that, state in unison with this author that “the impossible exists” (p. 50).

With what language do we work? Undoubtedly, with the verbal one where speech flows in a free association, enriching, opening new and old worlds, making blunders, forgetting, repeating. But this is not always the case and, even when it is, it is insufficient because affect must be added to the speech, which is always present but in very diverse ways. We need to integrate the transference space in which this speech takes place and pay attention to other forms of language: gestures, signs of anxiety, restlessness, fear, evidence of extreme repression, shame, seduction, anger, pain... Could not affect itself, as Laplanche says, become a signifier and take on the value of representation? And also the signs and evidence within us, the analysts.

We often encounter a language that does not communicate - a cold, “objective,” closed text, or also a chatter that focuses on what others do or say - an empty

We can ask ourselves: can it be analyzed? I believe that Laplanche, despite the significant theoretical contributions he made in his Freudian rereading and in his training with Lacan, would say: No! Because analysis implies detachment, meaning psychoanalytic method and “bucket”; in some way, a return to the original transference.

On the other hand, Lacan, when working on *The Wolf Man* (1952), also states that Freud was an overly supreme father to be truly effective, and I would add that he was excessively immersed in his theorizing, overly concerned with investigating the representational aspects and the mystery of dreams. A passionate, detailed search for traumatic events. These are ongoing risks for us, as analysts, to “lose ourselves” in an overly idealized place and become trapped in our theories. Can we think that Freud, in his work with Sergei, was also in search of “the real,” even if not necessarily intending to?

I would like to highlight some significant aspects pointed out by Lacan: Mack Brunswick, who works with Sergei during the crisis after the conclusion of his analysis with Freud, “*pushes considerably*”<sup>1</sup> (p. 17) on the patient’s “entrenchments” (p. 17) to move him out of his position as the “favorite son” (p. 17). The analyst adopts

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1. All italics in this article are mine.



**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Pictorial recreations* (2010/11). Mary and Mauro, housekeeper and motorcycle taxi driver. 40 cm x 60 cm each. Digital print.

*a certain harshness characteristic of the paternal figure [...]. She knows how to show him that she is not a follower of Freud, meaning that she is not identified with the father and that “she is not too strong.” The subject is reborn through her, and, this time, in the right way. (p. 20)*

Despite these changes, he tells us that what happens is not within the realm of analysis; it is more of a psychopedagogy where reality is discussed. This maybe true because at one point the analyst tells Sergei that Freud does not care for him, and Sergei goes mad. What did the analyst touch?

Was it not an analysis?! Yet, “was the outcome favorable”? Moreover, he emphasizes: “In Ruth Mack Brunswick’s observation, one thing is clear: what remains is more than just a morbid residue; *what lies at the center of the cure with R. M. Brunswick is the transference*” (p. 15), whereas with Freud, for months and years, the sessions did not yield anything. He speaks, speaks, and speaks (p. 8).

Beyond the psychopedagogy that she surely applied, it is clear that Mack Brunswick did other things. She engaged with Sergei, and together, but not entangled, they managed to de-idealize the imposing figure of Freud, which led to some re-signification; her words were able to name what had been nameless and they resonated differently with the patient. Could analysis, after all, be about detaching from the omnipotent father and being able to see and accept that “in reality, he *does not love him that much*” (p. 20)?

Let us remember that Freud configures his patient in terms of an infantile neurosis, while Lacan highlights that a “narcissistic identification [...] fragile and always threatened” (p. 14)<sup>2</sup> defines his passivity; that his oedipal organization is fragmented and this disorients him, that he never accessed the thirdness, and he even suggests that a pre-ego state emerges, aspects with which I agree. In other words, beyond debating psychopathology, where positions diverge, I believe Sergei suffered from very significant and destabilizing conflicts, and the analyst did very well to “push enough” and also needed to ground him in “reality,” in “his” reality, Sergei’s reality, not the analyst’s.

This infantile neurosis, in my view, points to original traces prior to castration and the Oedipus complex, which some theorists, including Freud, tried to resolve, searching for ways to conceptualize “residual manifestations”, the “archaic”, or by proposing a pre-oedipal or pre-castrative stage; as did Winnicott and others, conceptualizing the self as primal and theorizing the object as transitional, describing the time be-

2. Also on page 3, he speaks of a schism between the intellectual life and the instinctive life of the subject. A compulsive sexuality.



tween undifferentiation and otherness. Different approaches seeking to account from the theoretical perspective for the early traces that exist before spoken language and the castration anxiety.

I dare say that theorizing about that initial period – let’s call it *primary, original, archaic, pre-oedipal*, all words that are questionable with strong arguments – forces us to recognize that we are facing an important problem in our discipline; one that has consequences in the clinic and requires further work and investigation. “The Oedipus complex [Lacan tells us, referring to Sergei] remained unfinished; it *stayed in a dual relation and never reached the triangular relationship*. The patient is left with only fragments of the Oedipus complex” (p. 2).

It seems to me that Laplanche makes a contribution for thinking about problems like this. First, he sees the Oedipus complex as something cultural, which remains in our psyche because we belong to a patriarchal generation and we transmit it, but there may be other forms of structuring, which I agree with. It does not mean that the Oedipus complex experienced and imprinted in the subject is not repressed, but only by secondary repression; it is not part of the original unconscious. Moreover, the roles of the parents may be different without necessarily leading to psychic catastrophes; as is sometimes heard among us, in a causalist view that, in fact, is far from our discipline.

Another aspect to question is regarding patients with dual relations. Does this mean they did not reach the triangular relationship? Is there then a symbolic deficiency? In the clinic, we meet patients with significant splits, who at the same time show high symbolic levels and a chaotic and indiscriminate world in terms of affective relationships. Lacan also says that Sergei “failed to symbolize *certain* symbolic relationships in a human way” (p. 8).

Laplanche seeks to free Freudian psychoanalysis from its dependency on biology and phylogenesis, as Lacan also did, but from a different perspective. For him, the central aspect of the structuring of the *infans* is the fundamental anthropological situation, which is determinative in the creation of drives, sexuality, and the unconscious, which are founded, always due to the action of the other (similar). This does not mean denying that every sexual excitement corresponds to a somatic aspect together with the phantasmatic, but the real question is: How is the phantasy generated? It is the participation of the adult who implants mainly somatic messages, “*inseparable from the gestural, mimetic, or sonorous signifiers that carry them*” (Laplanche, 1993/1998, pp. 19-20).

For him, the unconscious “*is like a language, not-structured*” (Laplanche, 1987/1989, p. 61). He does not share the primacy or the hegemony of the signifier in the cure, stressing the possibility of it being a de-signified signifier, both verbal and non-verbal. There are no texts in the unconscious, nor ideas or semantic relations. There are traces, thing-presentations, part-objects detached from each other. For Laplanche (1987/1989), it is a mistake to locate structure at the heart of the unconscious. In the unconscious, there are words as things or as dream images, not as words (1981/1987a, p. 283), characterized by component sexual drives, part-objects, and both primal repression and repression proper.

For all these disturbing changes, he uses the concept of original seduction.

The Generalized Original Seduction

The child is born with its biological regulatory setups, which seek homeostasis; Laplanche (1987/1989) defines it as a somato-bio-psychic individual who exhibits communicative behaviors from the very beginning. The infant is not closed off, or a *tabula rasa*, but is deeply unadjusted

and, although they have capacities from birth, those setups are precarious: “they have to face tasks that are too high for their premature state” (p. 60). When homeostatic imbalances begin, they can not call for help, their cries are overflowing, desperate agitation that the mother learns and decodes as a call. They also do not know what danger is or what emptiness is. This shows that there is no innate knowledge in the child, no instinctive intuition in the face of danger. The original, then, is a child whose adaptive behaviors exist but are imperfect, weak, always prone to being diverted, and a deviating adult, in relation to all norms regarding sexuality and also regarding themselves and their splitting. Freud addresses this in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1992) and other works.

Let’s take key fragments from Freud<sup>3</sup>, where seduction clearly appears:

*The sexual aim of the infantile instinct* consists in obtaining satisfaction by means of an appropriate stimulation of the erotogenic zone which *has been selected in one way or another*. This satisfaction *must have been previously experienced*. (p. 184)

The component instincts, under the primacy of a single erotogenic zone, *form a firm organization* directed towards a sexual aim *attached to some extraneous sexual object*. (p. 197)

A child sucking at his mother’s breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. *The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it*. (p. 222)

A child’s intercourse with anyone responsible for his care affords him an unending source of sexual excitation and satisfaction [...] she strokes him, kisses him, rocks him *and quite clearly treats him as a substitute for a complete sexual object*. A mother would probably be horrified if she were made aware that all her marks of affection were rousing her child’s sexual instinct and preparing for its later intensity. (p. 223)

Here Laplanche reproaches us analysts and also Freud, although in my opinion, his criticism is more justified, for not working more on theorizing about what happens to the mother. The mother “*would pro-*

3. T. N.: Translation by James Strachey. The translation of the fragments below corresponds to Freud, S. (1989) *Three essays on sexuality*. In Strachey, J. (translator), Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (vol. 7). pp. 184-223. Original work published 1901-1905.

*babily be horrified*” if she knew she rouses sexuality in her child, but she would be undoubtedly more horrified if she became aware of what has been awakened in her, in relation to the child; here the mother’s infantile sexuality is also at play, reactivated and culturally justified, given the importance of breastfeeding for her child, which facilitates the loosening of the prohibition resulting from repression.

Freud also addresses sexual deviations and aberrations, which have been worked on and reformulated by many theorists, but the one I highlight is child abuse. He points to people who have excellent social and professional functioning, yet engage in aberrant activities, indicating that “the impulses of sexual life are among those which, even normally, are the least controlled by the higher activities of the mind” (p. 149)<sup>4</sup>.

“Seduction is always, in Freud and in current thought, the link between certain events, an affective reality, and the theorization connected to them” (Laplanche, 1987/1989, p. 107).

Freud conceptualizes an early seduction, when the adult exposes the child to a premature sexual experience, which produces trauma because the child does not yet have the resources to signify and replace (trauma in two stages). In the *New Introductory Lectures* (Freud, 1933 [1932]/1989), he says: “Here, however, the phantasy touches the ground of reality, for it was really the mother who by her activities over the child’s bodily hygiene inevitably stimulated, and perhaps even roused for the first time, pleasurable sensations in her genitals” (p. 120)<sup>5</sup>. Is it the distracted mother, or the one who is unaware of her desire and the pressure of the unconscious drive with her child?

Laplanche (1987/1989) answers: “The mother could not but awaken, it is an ineluctable awakening, it is inscribed in the situation itself and does not depend on any contingency” (p. 123).

This is central to his proposal: indelible traces of early impressions that have to do with the foundational adult messages of the drive, sexuality, and the unconscious, scenes that are *inscribed* and not understood; meaning that, at the same time, they are ready to be reactivated.

What is missing, Laplanche (1992/1996) tells us:

is the sign that “makes a sign.” *A sign proposed by the adult to the child [...]. It is the adult who, in the foreground, presents the breast—and not the milk—and does so in function of their own desire, conscious and unconscious*, what is originary is this uneven and necessary encounter between a child and an adult with very different psyches, where the priority is the other who disposes of, commands a helpless infant. (p. 37)

In a conversation with Marta Labraga<sup>6</sup>, she asked me whether what Laplanche proposes with the concept of original seduction *does not create an expanded field of seduction that occurs in all intimacy, which, for her, always has an element of strangeness, an unsettling foreignness, or the uncanny at play*. I believe the answer is yes, that it always borders on the phantasy of the uncanny. It is the other, the “alien” with “their familiar strangeness,” who has marked the child’s body with their enigmatic fantasies.

4. T. N.: Translation by James Strachey. The translation corresponds to Freud, S. (1981) *Three essays on sexuality*. In Strachey, J. (translator), Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (vol. 7). p.149. Original work published 1901-1905.

5. T. N.: Translation by James Strachey. The translation corresponds to Freud, S. (1981) *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis and Other Works*. In Strachey, J. (translator), Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (vol. 22). p. 120. Original work published 1932-1936.

6. Personal exchanges about seduction during 2024.

For Laplanche, then, the original relationship has a dual register: the possibility (or not) of a vital, mutual interaction in pleasurable exchange, and another register, the sexual envelope, which is highly unequal because it involves a seducer and a seduced, a deviator and a deviated, which implies receiving excesses of excitation in an *infans* who lacks the capacity to signify.

There is an aspect we must highlight here: Laplanche considers that there is only one energy, which is libido. So, where is the violence, where are the destructiveness, harm, and jouissance, which led Freud to postulate the death drive? Laplanche also postulates it, but as a *sexual* death drive. He emphasizes many of Freud’s texts where aggressiveness, hatred, and destruction were highly present. For him, the fundamental idea of Freud’s 1920 proposal is that aggressiveness is first received from the other, becomes stagnant, and then deflects outward as aggressiveness towards the environment (Laplanche, 1970/1987b, p. 117). Thus, he again insists that “the processes in which the individual manifests their activity are all secondary” (Laplanche, 1992/1996, p. 105). Freud himself does not find destructiveness in its pure state, it remains silent; moreover, Laplanche (1999/2001) adds, “the essential of the noise of life comes from Eros” (p. 233), a libido that can be directed toward binding or unbinding activities—that is, a sexual life drive or a sexual death drive. The latter represents the most demonic, destructive, and irreducible aspect of libido.

These constitutive or characteristic aspects of the human psychic reality invert Freud’s statement that everything conscious was first unconscious. On the contrary, the child listens, captures, sees gestures, attitudes, the closeness or distance of the significant other; they have no tools to decode and give meaning, and they must somehow translate this “language.” From that translation, there always remains a residue of “images,” of “things,” of fragments, some of which can be translated into other registers while others remain as remnants. From that original situation (seduction and repression), “it leads to the formation of a residue... the un-symbolized, that is, a de-signified signifier” (Laplanche, 1987/1989, p. 151), “(not primarily verbal) that were excluded and isolated, through repression-translation” (Laplanche, 1999/2001, p. 233). Each unconscious is formed according to the translational modalities achieved by the receiver of adult messages. Priority of the other and priority of sexuality in psychic constitution.

Now, it is worth asking how the messages from the other are translated in the child. Laplanche states that the first messages are implanted as an enigma in the body ego (signifier *a...*), inscriptions in the body that later may or may not become erogenous zones. This is when the “ego agency” is formed, during the first attempt to translate and master those signifiers, but simultaneously, a residue is created, resulting from primal repression.

However, we must not forget that the translator is under the domain of the other, and I would add: also of the cultural systems into which they are born. Therefore, accepting that human beings have a translating capacity, their translation is for too long in a state of submission, with the possibility of rebellion, undoubtedly, but frequently repeating the family culture or fiercely opposing it, which might be the same.

This is linked to the realism of the unconscious; those traces left by the messages of the other will become signifiers that are designated or signs of perception on which primal repression is exercised, forcing the split and the formation of the ego, and they may be open to new translations or not. But even if translation is achieved, there will always be a residue that will form the core of the unconscious.

This approach may carry a risk: the possibility of generating an excess of determinism. We know that there are untranslatable remains, but there is also the possibility that we become overly enthusiastic about the “discovery” of the real. I like the idea of a transformable unconscious, even though it contains indestructible elements, because that does not necessarily mean they are unchangeable. Although sometimes, they are.

The theory of generalized seduction and the analytical practice

“That everything that is analyzable is sexual does not imply that everything sexual is accessible to analysis.”  
Jacques Lacan, 1960, p. 709

Laplanche’s theory seeks to distance itself from certain ideas of Freud that are no longer sustainable and, most notably, to offer a less speculative, more rational, and more coherent approach. We must ask ourselves whether this shift is a virtue for psychoanalysis.

From my perspective, this priority of the other offers an understanding of this asymmetrical adult-child encounter that provides a basis for further research in the clinic, with patients, whether neurotic or not, and brings into question theoretical aspects.

The emergence of sexuality in the baby, perhaps too separated from self-preservation because self-preservation is a word he dislikes, since in the origins of the subject there is nothing “self.” It is the other who invests, excites, and desires; the mother (or the caregiver), with her tone of voice, her way of speaking, completely different from the ordinary, and the things she delights in about her child, allow us to think that the child becomes a fully-fledged *sexual object*. And also in the *infans’* response, with their excitement, laughter, anger, or desperation in the face of absence or excess.

Regarding his conception of analysis, Laplanche distinguishes psychotherapy from analysis and values both. Although it is important to note that he *does not ignore that much of the analysis (even the most classical) involves psychotherapeutic interventions* (Laplanche, 1987/1989, p. 155), he proposes the idea of a “bucket”; disagrees with the term “contract” as insufficient, and views the cure as an instaurative gesture that must be continuously restored, an instinctual or sexual “pure” place is established, which is the original seduction. Adaptive interests are not excluded, but it is crucial that the analyst refuses to give them a place. The presence of a constant space is necessary to promote disengagement and transference, initially established by the analysis and the analyst’s proposal, not by the patient’s neurosis. Establishment of the supposed knowledge of

the analyst, who refuses it. “To resolve, analyze, to dissolve, is to put a knife through where the fissures, the splits, are indicated” (Laplanche, 1987/1989 p. 161).

This approach, based on original seduction, which forces him to deepen the Freudian theory of the first topic with a reformulation that invites thought, seems to create promising perspectives for working in analysis, especially regarding compulsions to repetition of traumatic and infantile origins. However, there are some aspects that raise questions.

Is this perspective of establishing a *pure instinctual place* not also a form of idealization?

I agree with Laplanche that the richest and most transformative moments occur when the patient’s psychic structure allows for deconstruction, for cutting through, when both analyst and patient encounter something new that enables the patient to construct new visions of themselves, expanding their history through a more open process of symbolization. But this inevitably involves repetition and resistance, just as we must acknowledge that creating a bucket is not easy given the cultural shifts of our time.

Are we then compelled to abandon the “pure gold of analysis” and settle for the suggestive and adaptive?

I do not think so. In this regard, I tend to believe that what truly matters is the analyst’s position. This is a topic for further exploration, but in principle I do not share this rigid distinction between analysis and analytic psychotherapy.

First, I believe that no analytic encounter can entirely escape from the suggestive power of the analyst’s word, even if they do not speak, because silence can be more suggestive than the word. While this is not always the case, but it happens. Seduction, whether conscious or unconscious, is also inevitably present. What matters, however, is our positioning: the ability to review these aspects in ourselves and to accept that we are assigned a “supposed knowledge” that is transferential and the key to the changes that can be generated. At times, we might be tempted to believe in this knowledge and strip away the “supposed,” but we must constantly challenge such beliefs and resist them.

On the other hand, many authors draw a sharp distinction between analysis and psychotherapy. I acknowledge that with many patients, we do not reach the point of true analysis, and even if they improve certain traits and they find some meaning in relation to their ways of functioning that benefit them, they are not analytically affected.

There are highly dysfunctional patients who attack the setting with anger, absences, calls, and messages, expressing great intolerance to any boundary. If the analyst can tolerate this without engaging in the game of aggressiveness or urgent demands, very slowly, certain barriers can begin to form, allowing both the patient and the analyst to think. I believe we can understand this in terms of early childhood trauma, linked to hatred, rejection, humiliation, abuse,

the denial of recognition as a different other, and initial messages that intrude upon the infant's psyche, preventing the emergence of otherness.

At first, one finds that the patient is not truly present but instead exists as a repetition of the other, they "are" the other. The path, then, is to help them achieve differentiation, a process marked by interpretations that fail and generate hatred, constructions that are rejected or not, where one must endure significant devaluation on their part along with a greedy demand.

Setting boundaries and avoiding or minimizing engagement in the game can sometimes, in my view, constitute analysis itself, as it leads to transformations in how displacements occur, gradually and laboriously constructing a narrative that is less fragmented and more open, allowing the patient to reconsider their role as a participant and protagonist in their own story, one that was previously projected outward, fostering creative capacities in writing, art, or work and enables new forms of identification.

Achieving this required responses to the patient, moments of silence, constructions, and interpretations that might have been met with mockery or anger; there were absences, yet over time, these elements became instrumental in the process.

Lacan (1952/s.f.) remarks: "Things are approached from the perspective of the analyst's current reality: To what extent is Freud truly present there? R. M. Brunswick shows him that Freud is not interested in his case" (p. 17). Sergei goes mad. Let us acknowledge that it is a very direct intervention, not accepted by the patient, but given Sergei's characteristics, with his passivity and dramatic repetition, does it not warrant "pushing" him enough to move those coagulated traumas? There is no doubt that these are interpretative syntheses; moreover, it is an assertion made by the analyst, a situation we aim to overcome, yet, could this not have been the moment when Sergei began to think and overthrow that idealized father figure?

Constructs are also built by the analyst. I do not know if Freud's other patient (1937/1991) suffered because he felt displaced when his brother was born and he lost maternal exclusivity, it is possible. But perhaps something more confusing and disturbing was happening to him; I would almost say *surely*. What I do think is that the analyst's intervention provided him with something he was trying to deny, disprove, or ignore, and it prepared him to delve into his inner world and his conflicts. A work of synthesis, but surely opportune. And we must accept that there are patients who require relief in order to think for themselves. And it is enough that we do not believe in our own knowledge, but accept that the patient needs to believe in it, in the search for a moment of trust and acceptance of the other/Other; we have gained ground so that the patient can integrate a different perspective of themselves, which undoubtedly contains something of the other, but can become transformable because it is not another who has the truth, it is another who proposes, who generates hypotheses, who "attends".

Laplanche (1987/1989) emphasizes that "the space should provide containment and support, with regularity in the timing of the sessions, consistency in the environment, but *the key element of containment is attention*" (p. 159). I agree with his argument, but I want to highlight his point about attention; it seems crucial to me, not only for the analyst to maintain suspended attention but also the interest. An attentive and interested analyst is very important for the transference relationship, even though we must sometimes refuse.

Sometimes, to be a little ironic about so much knowledge and thoroughness, I think Laplanche hates capital letters. He often critiques the concepts of the Law, the Other, and the Imaginary, finding them overly structured, rigid, and formal. He does not support Freud's idea, which only distinguishes between external (material) reality and psychological (internal) reality. As a follower of the Lacanian triad of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, he disagrees with the

concept of the symbolic, which he finds excessively linguistic, supra-individual, structural, and even metaphysical! (Laplanche, 1999/2001, p. 63 and following). He proposes a different triad based on Freudian principles: External reality - Psychic reality - Unconscious psychic reality. The latter is shaped by de-symbolized signifiers, which he considers more precise than the thing-presentation. The unconscious reality undergoes a strange transformation through repression. The unconscious trace is a sort of waste. That is, it loses its representational quality and becomes a thing that no longer represents (or signifies) anything but itself; *Signifier a*.

I wonder: Does the human being not need the similar, but also the Other, to be able to link the repressed unconscious to language? Another problem is how the Other is conceptualized. Will it only be shaped by the Name-of-the-Father, by the phallus and castration? Or, as Laplanche suggests, are these aspects rooted in culture and capable of change? I think what Laufer (2023) proposes is worth considering, the need to open voices and paths of emancipation "against the psychoanalytic dogmas repeated *ad nauseam*" (p. 14); he also points out that psychoanalysis has been silent about the stage of production in which it was created, which is why it is impoverished and receives so much criticism.

It is also important to review what Leticia Glocer (2015) proposes, regarding the need to "disarticulate the seemingly impenetrable links between the Oedipus complex, paternal function, symbolic castration, and sexual difference" (p. 68).

Lacan notices in *The Wolf Man* (1952/s.f.) that, curiously, it is women who perform the castration on Sergei, and from there begins a whole string of ideas about the feminine phallus or the paternal function in the hands of women, as previously mentioned: "R. M. Brunswick knew how to [...] participate in a certain paternal [...] hardness" (p. 20). I accept that it says "a certain hardness." Period. Was it not maternal? From my point of view, this is ideology. But let us also accept that none of us is free from having it. I think it deserves to be questioned and further investigated.

We must also revisit the issue of thirdness. Today, I still consider it essential for achieving otherness. Can it be linked to the Oedipus complex, castration, and the name of the father, or not? Is it the only possible limit? The only difference that can play a role in psychic structuring?

As Badiou tells Žižek (Badiou & Žižek, 2011/2019), "we must continue debating the concept of the event and the concept of the real" (p. 89), and this is what I would like to encourage with this paper.

"Because we have to be convinced, nowadays, that, despite the mourning that thought imposes upon us, seeking what is real in the real can be, and is, a joyful passion" (Badiou, 2015/2016, p. 89).

Abstract

With *Calibán*'s proposal on seduction, I wanted to convey my concern for psychoanalytic practice and its entanglement with the theories that support it, and I found it appropriate to evoke Laplanche with his contribution of generalized original seduction, which serves as the foundation for a conception of the unconscious, sexuality, and drive based on the encounter with the similar (adults in charge of the infant). For me, his approach has the interest of freeing psychoanalysis from its biological and phylogenetic perspective, while simultaneously highlighting the foundational importance of the original child-mother (or, more precisely, child-adult) relationship. This also frees psychic reality from the structuring normalization at the level of the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, and castration, allowing for a broader and more extended understanding of sexuality, while valuing Freud's early concepts on the subject.

**Keywords:** *Seduction, Metapsychology, Clinic.*

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Received: 01/11/24 - Approved: 03/12/24  
Translation from Spanish: Luisa Marques Berrutti

*Calibán - RLP*, 23(1), 41-49  
2025

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Paradoxes of hate and seduction:  
A reflection inspired by  
George Orwell's *1984*.

*The earth turns from west to east, passes and passes again from day to night,  
but we live according to our own horizon,  
as if East and West were fixed and we inhabited immobile places.  
P. Legendre, 2004.*

I usually look for metaphors in literature that help me understand and process the turbulent times we live in. Ideological confrontations, fanaticisms that divide us, and the fragmentation of our society constitute, as in the Orwellian fiction, our daily life. By taking the ritual of the Two Minutes Hate and the use of Newspeak as points of reference, I will attempt to reflect on some aspects of our current psycho-social functioning that catch my attention.

In fact, it was no coincidence that sales of George Orwell's *1984* (1949/2016) increased dramatically the day Donald Trump came to power in his first term in 2017. During the pandemic, it became the best-selling classic book in the publishing market. *1984* is one of the great novels that best captures the dystopian nature of our world today.

But why discuss *1984* in an issue of *Caliban* dedicated to exploring the theme of seduction?

Let's consider why Russian citizens overwhelmingly support Vladimir Putin despite his invasion of Ukraine and the resulting war. Similarly, why is Donald Trump gaining ground again in the United States despite accusations of corruption and his radical ideas? And in Peru, how is it that, despite having been imprisoned for crimes against humanity, Alberto Fujimori is still considered a viable candidate for the presidency?<sup>1</sup>

What is it about these sinister characters that seduces us, leading us to choose them repeatedly, even when they clearly harm our society's welfare? It seems that authoritarianism, arrogance, and the use of terror as a form of governance—hallmarks of dystopian mechanisms—have a large following among us.

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1. Alberto Fujimori passed away on September 11, 2024.





Roberto Huarcaya  
*The return of oblivion* (1997), La Havana Biennial, Cuba, Santiago (nephew). Cibachrome 1.20 m x 1.180 m.

From the moment we are born, we become the subjects of our parents' unconscious desires and projections. We grow up in the shadow of their expectations, often shaping our identities based on what we are expected to become.

In his proposal on the fundamental anthropological situation, Laplanche (1970/1976) posits that every human being, by the mere fact of being born, is inserted into a world saturated with enigmatic meanings and unconscious knowledge. These are transmitted by parents to their children, forming an integral part of our psychic constitution. We cannot fully develop without the intervention of the adults who care for us and "shape" our desires.

Aulagnier (1977) describes a primary violence exercised by parents, essential for the initial constitution of the self. In other words, this structuring violence is fundamental. Our subjectivity is shaped not only by the gaze of our caregivers but also by the broader official narratives from culture and institutions of power. These narratives silently shape our perception of reality throughout our lives. These "official" or hegemonic narratives, filled with partial truths, prejudices, and stereotypes, can limit and hinder our ability to form bonds and experience new and unknown situations.

According to Blanck-Cerejido (2014), prejudices "are forms of emotional thinking close to the primary process" (p. 29). These prejudices become fixed in the subject's mind from a very

early age, distorting their perception of others. The author states, "Once a person believes that blacks or Jews are evil, wicked, or dangerous, this belief tends to be refractory in the face of perceptual evidence" (p. 22).

Adichie Ngozi, a Nigerian writer, authored a text titled *The Danger of the Single Story* (2018), in which she recounts an experience upon arriving in the United States. Her colleagues were surprised that, being African, she spoke English so well. This cultural mismatch led her to question how stories about others are constructed, what makes some stories official and others not, what kinds of stories we consume, and which stories we prefer to ignore and why. According to Ruggero Levy (2024), human beings are symbolic entities who need to construct familiar and appealing narratives about reality (p. 20). Often, says the author, we may even adopt false and destructive narratives to cope with our feelings of helplessness.

Psychoanalysts are not immune to developing prejudicial ideas about those who are different or about phenomena with which we are unfamiliar, as we, too, are immersed in a particular culture. We have consumed certain discourses we identify with and certain theories that guide our clinical work. Despite changing times, many of us continue to operate under mechanisms of discrimination deeply rooted in our unconscious. We sometimes assume the Freudian oedipal framework as an absolute truth, thereby excluding and pathologizing other ways of being and living that do not conform to the parameters of heterosexuality (Reitter, 2019; Magallanes, 2020; Preciado, 2020; Glocher Fiorini, 2015).

From a Foucaultian perspective, our understanding of mental health and illness is shaped by official discourses that, from a hegemonic position, dictate what is "right" and what is "wrong." This *modus operandi*, inherent to living within a culture, is necessary to maintain social order. However, it also gives rise to segregation, division, and significant social suffering.

In recent years, I have observed a widespread intolerance of differences, coupled with efforts to vindicate many minorities. These minorities call for reflection on issues like discrimination, racism, and fanaticism. However, because they continue to be neglected by our official institutions, they are often compelled to express their rights through anger. From the privileged standpoint of the establishment, this anger is deemed intolerable, inadmissible, and destructive. According to Kiffer (Kiffer and Grabriel, 2020), a distinction should be made between political hatred, which is hatred as a constructive, albeit momentarily disorganizing affection, and the politics of hatred, which corresponds to the systematic practice of silencing and eliminating certain social groups that threaten the desire of certain rulers to perpetuate themselves in power. These dynamics have a correlate in the dystopian ritual of the Two Minutes of Hate described by Orwell (1949/2016).

Orwellian society is organized in a pyramidal structure. At the top of the hierarchy is Big Brother, an omniscient and powerful figure who

governs even the smallest actions of his subjects and who has never been seen by anyone. Below are the inner and outer Party functionaries, belonging to the ruling social classes, and finally, the proletariat, known as “the proles.” In this society, love bonds and any form of subjective activity that denotes an inner life separate from serving the State are forbidden. Every morning, before starting the workday, Party officials gather in front of a giant screen where the image of the Party’s greatest enemy, Emmanuel Goldstein, is projected.

The Two Minutes of Hate seems to encourage productivity, performance, and a fascination with violence. It functions as a driving force or glue that holds them together and gives them a sense of existence, even if it is by submitting to a perverse ideology. Winston Smith, the only character who rebels against the system and who has managed to preserve a certain psychic autonomy by writing a diary, is also seduced by the collective fury.

Smith observes that:

the most horrifying aspect of the Two Minutes of Hate was not the compulsory participation, but the impossibility of not participating. Within thirty seconds, it became unnecessary to feign involvement. A terrifying ecstasy of fear and revenge, a desire to murder, torture, and smash faces with a sledgehammer, seemed to electrify everyone. This overwhelming force transformed even the unwilling into raging madmen. (p. 22)

This vignette clearly alludes to the allure of the ritual of hatred for Party members. It is the ease with which the desire to destroy one another is aroused that puzzles Smith. Is hatred a seductive force? We know that hatred can offer a powerful and quick way to channel frustrations, fears, and insecurities, providing an illusion of control and power in situations where we feel powerless or threatened. This mechanism is described by Primo Levi (1947/2003) in his testimony as a concentration camp survivor, which I will mention later.

In 1915, Freud described a primitive mechanism where a baby projects its bad objects outward to preserve its life. This projection allows the baby to survive and maintain a minimal state of equilibrium. By externalizing “the bad,” the baby can feel safe. Freud referred to this concept as the purified pleasure self.

In turn, Lemlij (December 15, 2022) asserts that hate can serve to reaffirm our identity and consolidate who we are. In other words, hatred may be a very primitive defense mechanism that gives us the illusion, albeit false, of preserving our integrity. This makes me think of Bion (1979/1992), who uses the imagery of war to describe the transferential dynamics with some difficult patients: “In war, the enemy’s aim is to terrify us so much that we cannot think clearly” (p. 246). This observation highlights how, sometimes, when we are overwhelmed by the hostile projections of our patients, we are unable to exercise our analytical function. Does not something similar occur to us as citizens who, being constantly immersed in ideologized systems of thought, lose our ability to think critically and empathize with others? Are not wars and conflicts the extreme consequence of narratives that strip the “other” of their humanity, transforming them into enemies unworthy of existence?

It would seem then that having an enemy, real or imaginary, functions as a defensive formation to which we cling in order to feel a sense of belonging and identity. In times of insecurity and threat, we may need to despise the other to reaffirm our own position. Aren’t the high rates of violence against women a manifestation of this phenomenon? Some men, feeling helpless and vulnerable, may resort to extreme violence, even murder, as a way of protecting themselves and asserting their control.

“It is impossible to see reality except through the eyes of the Party. Whatever the Party says is true, is true” (Orwell, 1949/2016, p. 264), says O’Brien, head of the Thought Police, to Winston Smith.

After the fateful October 7, 2023, when the war between Israel and Hamas broke out, not only did the world erupt in conflict, but social networks also demanded that we take sides, as if the planet was divided into allies and enemies, good guys and bad guys. This phenomenon of polarization, exacerbated by fake news, enveloped us in an atmosphere where it seemed forbidden to think beyond this dualistic logic. If we tried to empathize or understand the “other story,” we were branded as traitors. For me, there was only one way to be Jewish: to agree with Israeli government policy. Just as in Orwellian society, we were required to think a certain way to belong.

Sustaining human complexity can be very painful, and to eliminate bewilderment, discomfort, and doubt, we often adopt rigid thinking that simplifies our existence. This is the essence of what Orwell teaches us: how prone we are to adopt an idea blindly and fanatically when we feel threatened and fragile.

The Party requires stripping its citizens of all subjectivity to easily implement its totalitarian ideology. O’Brien tells Smith:

“You will never again have normal, human feelings. You will be dead inside. You will be unable to love, to feel friendship, to enjoy life, to laugh, to feel curiosity, courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We will squeeze you until you are empty and then you will be full of us.” (p. 271).

This powerful phrase reminds me of the dehumanizing experience of the victims of the Nazi concentration camps. Levi (1947/2003), in his heartbreaking testimony as a survivor, writes about the *Muselmänner*—the weakest Jews, the living dead, those who have lost all traces of humanity.

It is they, the *Muselmänner*, the sunken, the foundations of the camp, they, the anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and work in silence [...]. One hesitates to call them alive [...] if I could enclose all the evil of our time in an image, I would choose the image that is familiar to me; a haggard man, with his head bowed and his back bent, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of thought can be read. (pp. 98-99).

At this point, it seems Orwell’s dystopia and Levi’s testimony converge, both depicting a reality devoid of humanity.

The partisan manifesto of Oceania decrees that “all ambiguities and nuances of thought must be eliminated” (Orwell, 1949/2016, p. 327). This is the objective behind the use of Newspeak, the language enforced by Big Brother’s government. By eliminating words that allude to abstract concepts such as freedom, politics, good, evil, morality, democracy, religion, or justice, a mass of non-thinking beings is created. When these words disappear from the vocabulary, the possibility of contemplating these concepts and, consequently, questioning the dictatorial system, is eradicated.

If we consider language as an instrument for reflection, Newspeak represents a mode of functioning where there is no room for symbolization, curiosity, or learning through experience. This operative mode of functioning prohibits critical reasoning and promotes binary and simplistic thinking. This brings me back to seeing Orwell’s dystopia as a metaphor, allowing us to elucidate a certain climate of de-subjectification that marks our contemporaneity.

I wonder if the mandates of the narcissistic culture we live in, combined with the developments in artificial intelligence and the time we spend in front of screens, might be dulling our capacity to imagine, empathize with others, and be receptive to difference.

This brings to mind what Bollas (2018) refers to as “a fascist state of mind,” characterized by an indisputable certainty and mechanisms that seek to eliminate any opposition. In this state, there is a divorce between experience, from which nothing new can be learned, and a single truth that explains all phenomena. As a result, the mind becomes primitive and rigid, unable to entertain different perspectives, consider the nuances of experience, and sustain the complexity of life.

Let us consider the countless “healing” and “cure” proposals that circulate on our devices, promoting simple explanations for complex problems—an approach far removed from the psychoanalytic slogan. Or think about the language used in cyberspace, filled with images, signs, and cryptic acronyms that create an austere communication code. Similarly, in the use of GPT chat, we might rely on it as a substitute for our original thinking. The more the system provides us with quick “solutions,” the more rigid our thinking becomes. This leads to a withdrawal into monolithic and static ideas of the world, thus closing off the possibility of meaningful dialogues.

Some call it “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2003/2008); others refer to it as “post-experience” (Baricco, 2018/2019). The truth is that we live in a world that values immediacy, acceleration, gratification without waiting, multitasking, and voracious consumption. We are constantly required to gain likes and publicly exhibit ourselves on networks to reaffirm our existence. Like characters in *Black Mirror*, our worth is determined by a “score” awarded by our followers. If we do not reach a certain rating that ensures a specific status, we become second-class citizens—or, in Orwellian terms, proles.

This form of operational functioning easily leads us to cling to closed ideas and ideologies, eliminating the possibility of engaging with the pain, uncertainty, and doubt that are part of our existence. It seems we have adopted an algorithmic way of relating—reduced and “endogamic,” where “the other” and “the unknown” remain outside our mental register because they are difficult to digest and assimilate. These relationship dynamics produce a social malaise that Sadin (2022) describes quite well:

The strained and demanding society in which we live generates a constant malaise. The difficulties faced by many people—the exposure to repeated failures, the incessant worsening of inequalities, the crisis within family environments, and the weariness and desire to give up—likely fuel a continuous animosity against the world. This form of rage has found its expression in language: to have hatred. (p. 214).



**Roberto Huarcaya**

*Lima yesterday and tomorrow* (1991). Series of 36 portraits of people who work in the street, street vendors, as they are known in my country. Analogue copy 40 cm x 50 cm Photo Pedro Fernández, ice-cream maker. Analogue print 40 cm x 50 cm.

In this context of generalized unease, it is easy to be seduced by ideologies and hermetic systems of thought that offer us simple and binary ways of seeing the world. It is understandable to be captivated by discourses that demonize and stigmatize the other, as it is more challenging to look within and connect with the painfulness of the human experience, the unknown, and what we cannot control. Psychic conflict, as we know, has no immediate solution and cannot be “cured” with practical prescriptions.

Could it be that, as we become more efficient and digitalized, we lose certain qualities of introspection, imagination, solidarity with others, and the possibility of envisioning a better common future? Might the

neoliberal and capitalist world in which we live distances us from seeing others as equals, as indispensable for our development and community welfare?

Abstract

It is impossible to see reality except through the eyes of the Party. Whatever the Party says is true, is true,” O’Brien tells Winston Smith. This phrase, that summarizes the totalitarian ideology of the despotic government of Big Brother, seems to me to be a very pertinent image to think about certain phenomena of polarization that characterize our time. This paper takes George Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984* as a starting point to analyze how certain totalizing hegemonic discourses can be, paradoxically, extremely seductive. Human beings tend to consume closed, dichotomous systems of thought in order to escape the complexity and unknowing inherent in our human nature. The phenomena of the Two Minutes of Hate and the use of the *Newspeak* are examined to think about our own psychotic functioning.

**Keywords:** *Seduction, Hate. Candidates to keywords: Dystopia, Big Brother, Polarization, Totalizing discourses.*

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Received: 09/11/24 - Approved: 11/19/24

# Dangerous Seductions: Myths and Characters

*The verb “to read” is averse to being put in the imperative,  
an intolerance it shares with certain other verbs,  
such as “to love” and “to dream.”*  
Daniel Pennac, 1993<sup>1</sup>

## Eros Is a Verb

These are lean times, to put it bluntly. Relationships—an undefined term for something that is no longer love, boyfriend, or fiancé—are chosen as if through a casting process on apps<sup>2</sup>. Chance<sup>3</sup> is reduced to mere algorithm-assigned slots, endlessly repeating predetermined sequences.

Seduction is no longer in vogue—or at least not in the way it was once understood, as explored by authors like Baudrillard (1979), when he contrasted seduction with production, in the capitalist sense. The Playboy might have been the last cultural symbol of an era that faded with the 20th century. Its legacy was tenuously carried forward by the metrosexual, a figure more enamored with his reflection than the pursuit of women. Yet, even he has fallen out of favor.

The Playboy—a figure now obsolete—was often underemployed, a transgression of serious magnitude in today’s world. He was an heir, detached from the demands of production. And, as we know, women—and the arduous task of seduction—demand a considerable investment of time and effort.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1920), Freud observes that what disrupts a man’s cohesion with the collective is his relationship with a woman.

In the age of Tinder, Happn, and the infinite scroll—where there is always the possibility of “something better”—is it not worth revisiting the question: *How do we truly reach the other?* And beyond merely approaching the other, how does one become, through an ineffable and often mysterious process, the object of their desire or the object-cause of their desire?

\* Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina.

1. The quote is attributed to Borges, who might have mentioned it in a 1983 conference: “The verb ‘to read,’ like the verb ‘to love’ and the verb ‘to dream’ does not tolerate the imperative mode.”  
2. It seems that the idea of dating apps is not that the encounter takes place, but that the user remains in the app for an infinite period of time.  
3. The chance encounter is a central feature of the love encounter, which links it to the register of the Real.

A vast expanse separates the subject from the other, man from woman—a wall built from words and other barriers. To cross such an infinite expanse requires, above all, drawing a map and charting a path that is never the same twice. This is why I doubt a universal technique for navigating it could ever exist. In a sense, it evokes the hero’s arduous journey in tragedy. Does it sound exaggerated? Perhaps—but myths have always been there to help us grapple with such questions.

## On Navigating, Living, and Waning through Molasses

I watch a celebrity gossip show on TV. They’re interviewing a famous actor, supposedly blessed by nature (and enhanced by cosmetic treatments). He insists to the audience that, despite what it might look like, when a girl catches his interest, he still has to paddle upstream.

It’s interesting, then, that not even a man endowed with all the imaginable phallic attributes—fame, beauty, money (the list is long, though certainly not infinite)—can access the other directly. Precisely because, when access comes without obstacles, when there is nothing standing in the way, the thrill vanishes. Paradoxical as it may seem, love and desire thrive on effort, on detours, on a journey—a paddling or rowing, like the sailors on Ulysses’ ship, straining toward an other who may be structurally unattainable. That Ithaca we are forever destined to long for.

It all comes down to defining and charting the path through the terrain that separates *you* from *me*. That’s where the very *quid* of love resides<sup>4</sup>.

## Sappho’s Triangle

Anne Carson writes about love in her book *Eros: The Bittersweet* (1986). In the opening chapter, she focuses on the work of Sappho of Lesbos, the archaic poet who defines a geometric space for lovers—a triangle, where a third vertex invariably stands between the two, complicating their relationship.

In her beautiful first book, the Canadian poet and essayist introduces the subject of love by quoting this fragment from a poem by Sappho, written in the 4th century BCE:

That man seems to me to be equal to the gods  
Who is sitting opposite you  
And hears you nearby  
Speaking sweetly

4. The Court of Tendre is a map of an imaginary land, conceived in the 17th century by notable figures, including Catherine de Rambouillet. Inspired by Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Clélie*, a 1654 novel set in Rome, this “topographical and allegorical representation” depicts the stages of love as villages and roads, reflecting the ideals of courtly love in that era.



And laughing delightfully, which indeed  
Makes my heart flutter in my breast;  
For when I look at you even for a short time,  
It is no longer possible for me to speak

But it is as if my tongue is broken  
And immediately a subtle fire has run over my skin,  
I cannot see anything with my eyes,  
And my ears are buzzing  
A cold sweat comes over me, trembling

Seizes me all over, I am paler  
Than grass, and I seem nearly  
To have died.

But everything must be dared/endured, since (even a poor man)...

Sappho's archaic poetry inaugurates a transmission between poets, extending its reach to readers who often find themselves perplexed by the complexities of love affairs. The poet gazes at her lover from afar, accompanied by a young boy with whom she is engaged in conversation.

Carson begins by revisiting one of the myths surrounding the birth of the god Eros. She notes that, for the earliest Greeks, Eros was the son of Poros (Resource) and Penia (Lack). There are multiple versions of Eros's mythical birth, and the poet seems to echo the one shared by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* —a story that Lacan himself favored, dedicating segments of his *Seminar VIII: On Transference* (1960–61) to its analysis. Thus, Eros embodies both hunger and limitation —space that mediates between subjects, the very space through which the god's arrows must travel. It positions and attracts, and it constitutes the impossibility that sets in motion the movement of life. Eros is both sweet and bitter<sup>5</sup>, delirious and sedative, a god who loosens the muscles while hardening the nerves.

What the poem underlines—what matters in it—is not the youngster's jealousy (this is merely an excuse or a euphemism) but the triangle it etches onto the landscape, and which we intuit as the very gorge of desire. The design of this triangle is no trivial mental maneuver. In it we witness the radical foundation of desire, for if Eros represents lack, its activation requires three structural components: the lover, the beloved, and... that which mediates between them.

The scene unfolds through an intricate interplay of words and gazes. I gaze; you speak... but with someone else. "I am looking at you," says the lover, "but my gaze is blinded," and in this blindness, an anxiety sparks—a fire that burns through my body, a cold sweat distilling both desire and unease. And just beyond, only slightly beyond, lies death. For Sappho, for Carson, and for psychoanalysis, it always comes back to this: love and death.

Carson goes further, suggesting that love is not merely about navigating a path riddled with obstacles, but that love itself is "love of obstacles." It's a beautiful definition of "desire."

5. Carson extracts this definition from another poem by Sappho, in which she writes *Eros glucopikrón*, in Greek.

## Technique and Simulation

It's interesting to observe a kind of bibliographical and conceptual divide. On one side, there are those who insist, demonstrate, and argue—often with good reason—that seduction is nothing but pure artifice: disguise, trickery, veils, concealment, simulacra, and simulation. On the other side are those, like Lacan, who place seduction on the side of emptiness—much like art, as viewed by Freud and Lacan.

In Lacan's formulation of true seduction, presented in his *Seminar X*, he states, "I desire you, even if I do not know it". For Lacan, the true seducer is, at least in his reading, castrated by an unconscious desire ('even if I do not know it'). In other words, there is a desire within me that I am unaware of. Desire carves a hole within the seducer-subject. This is the point where something cannot be faked—and that is desire. The desire to seduce, which snares, from the beginning until the end of the game, to the seducer himself. I insist in that which cannot be faked: whether the seducer is genuine (*vero*) or a supposed predator, one thing remains true: they must be consumed by an overwhelming, intense desire. That is what Kierkegaard (1843/2006) states, when commenting Da Ponte and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*<sup>6</sup>:

"Therefore, even if I go on calling Don Giovanni a seducer, I nevertheless do not at all think of him slyly laying his plans, subtly calculating the effect of his intrigues; that by which he deceives is the sensuous in its elemental originality, of which he is, as it were, the incarnation. Shrewd levelheadedness is lacking in him; his life is sparkling like the wine with which he fortifies himself; his life is turbulent like the melodies that accompany his joyous repast; he is always jubilant. He needs no preparation, no plan, no time, for he is always ready; that is, the power is always in him, and the desire also, and only when he desires is he properly in his element."

## That Which Does Not Stop

Seduction is not easily defined. By the way, its Latin roots hint at a passive act—'to let oneself go' or 'to stray from the right path. *Se-ducere* is a verb which says more about the object than of the subject of the action.

In the most traditional children's literature, *Chaperon Rouge*—a tale told countless times—is often included. But the original Little Red Riding Hood is not a frankly moralizing cautionary tale of a naive, wayward girl. Instead, Perrault uses allegory to warn young teenagers of hidden dangers. The male wolf persuades her to stray from her path, and with that purpose he lies and disguises himself of what he is not —

6. It is very likely that Da Ponte, a former libertine and Jewish convert, met with Casanova in Vienna to discuss the *libretto*.

which will become a greater problem. This shows, amongst other things, how seduction has long been seen as dangerous, something inherently wicked and evil that lures who fall prey to it astray from the right path.

Ulysses and the Sirens’ Song

On an ancient vase depicting Ulysses’ boat threatened by the sirens—crafted with clumsy yet skillful artistry by an artisan who may have preceded Homer and his *Odyssey*—the hero is shown tied to the mast. He is resistant but, of course, he is still eager to hear the sirens’ song.



Odysseus and the Sirens. Attic Ceramic, 480-470 B.C., British Museum. Still half birds, not half fish.

What does Homer tell us?  
Homer *The Odyssey* Translated by Ian Johnston Vancouver Island University Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.  
In Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, Circe<sup>7</sup> receives Ulysses and his men upon their return from Hades and warns them of the dangers on their journey to Ithaca. The first one lies at the Island of the Sirens.

“Your next encounter will be with the Sirens, who bewitch everybody who approaches them. There is no homecoming for the man who draws near them unawares and hears the Sirens’ voices; no welcome from his wife, no little children brightening at their father’s return. For with their high clear song the Sirens bewitch him, as they sit there in a meadow piled high with the moldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon their bones. Drive your ship past the spot, and to prevent any of your crew from hearing, soften some beeswax and plug their ears with it. But if you wish to listen yourself, make them bind you hand and foot on board and place you upright by the housing of the mast, with the rope’s ends lashed to the mast itself. This will allow you to listen with enjoyment to the Sirens’ voices. But if you beg and command your men to release you, they must add to the bonds that already hold you fast. When your crew have carried you past the Sirens, two routes will be open to you. Though I cannot give you precise advice.” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by, E. V. Rieu, Penguin Books, p. 130).

Odysseus and his crew set sail and, as they approach the Island of the Sirens, he follows the goddess’s advice. After sealing his companions’ ears with freshly melted wax, he orders them to bind him hand and foot to the mast. When the sirens notice the ship’s presence, they begin their melodious song, laced with tempting words:

7. Circe also had some exceptional knowledge. An expert in magic potions and a direct relative of Medea, she warned Ulysses of the perils ahead, including the threats of Scylla and Charybdis.

“Draw near, illustrious Odysseus, man of many tales, great glory of the Achaeans, and bring your ship to rest so that you may hear our voices. No seaman ever sailed his black ship past this spot without listening to the honey-sweet tones that flow from our lips and no one who has listened has not been delighted and gone on his way a wiser man. For we know all that the Argives and Trojans suffered on the broad plain of Troy by the will of the gods, and we know whatever happens on this fruitful earth” (104).

The promise of wisdom is almost the only thing the sirens utter<sup>8</sup>. They say nothing more, and then they just... sing.

A tradition recorded in Apollodorus’s *Library* tells that Orpheus, from the argonauts ship, sang more sweetly than the sirens. So they jumped to the ocean and were transformed into rocks as their own law dictated when someone resisted their spell. Similarly, the Sphinx leapt from the heights when its riddle was solved.

Kafka has his own version: the sirens are simply silent.

It is precisely this “wisdom” which is at play in Homer—the promise of the sirens, the key that unlocks desire and seduction, and which ultimately leads to the frustration of ‘merely’ an empty voice. The promise of knowing something about which no one knows anything. Nothing is known about it, of this supposed (or not) knowledge, for those who fell prey to the sirens’ song did not survive to tell the tale. But, does knowledge not inspire love? We love those who know something (about us). That’s what Molière writes in *The Learned Ladies* (1672). In the play, the bourgeois ladies are in state of “transference” with the impostor who pretends to know Greek (when he actually ignores all about it, so he is only supposed to know). When they see him, they cry: “What, Sir, you understand Greek? Allow me, I beg, for the love of Greek, to embrace you”.

Beautiful or terrifying, musical or mute, sirens belong to a deadly world. The cliffs from which they sing are littered with the corpses of those who fell victim to their seduction and, tragically, into their grasp.

Is it not the male fantasy of the devouring woman, the one who enjoys—precisely, as the word suggests—to the point of almost leaving them lifeless?

The feminine is that which enjoys without measure and control — the feminine not just as “woman,” but the feminine that anyone, man or woman, can carry within. According to Freud, the bedrock of analysis is a deauthorization of the feminine. A breaking point for any possibility of going beyond. The most despised, the most desired, the most degraded, the most feared.

8. Siren: a supposed marine animal, as described in a brutal dictionary

And yet the sirens tempt, just as their heirs do—the *femmes fatales*, the man-eaters, women, in other words, sex.

Don Juan, Phony Virility, or That “Feminine Dream”

Worshippers of the phallus, some women—“not every woman”—proclaim the existence of the man who has everything and can handle them all.

There are countless Don Juan. Tirso de Molina might have given it its first literary form but, as always, there were predecessors. The womanizing trickster of the Spanish Baroque is not always a seducer. In fact, if we had to define Tirso’s character using this century’s words, we would say he is more of an abuser—someone who exploits the darkness of the night to gain<sup>9</sup>, through deception, a consent that is not truly consent.

By the way, the start of this emblematic man’s sexual adventure begins with the murder of an authority figure—the commander—and a daughter who tries, who swears, who proclaims her revenge<sup>10</sup>. For with this incarnation of the transgressive womanizer, in whom many believe and whom some would like to emulate, we can plainly see what is at play with the sexual encounter. Or the sexual relation which, according to Lacan, there is not.

Depending on the era and its respective ethical horizons, Don Juan becomes more or less similar to the original. Molière creates a cynical, wholly anti-Christian character, while Lord Byron, from a romantic perspective, presents a Don Juan who is the inversion of his counterparts: in his case, it is he who remains in love and abandoned by women. But it is specially through Mozart’s Don Goivanni (after Da Ponte’s libretto) that Lacan weaves his concepts about masculinity and femininity, quoting it in his Seminar on Object Relations (1956-7). In this first approach to the opera, Lacan elaborates on the masquerades of the figure of insatiable virility, leaving in its wake the spoils of his ‘beloved,’ who, like the Trickster of Seville, are many and of all social and marital statuses. For Lacan, it is about the insatiable search for the phallic woman, as if the womanizer were going to great lengths to escape castration (which is always the castration of the other). The tragic end of the punishment is the sinister return of the first scene. The dead father returns for what is his, and the stone guest is what lies just beyond the woman, opening in two directions—toward the Father and toward death. It is there—and perhaps also in the uncanny game of the double, in the costume change with the servant Leporello—that he finds the truth of this mad-denning metonymy of desire, which only ceases in death.

Lacan revisits Don Giovanni in his Seminar’s Book X, *Anxiety* (Lacan, 1962-1963), when he argues that Don Juan is no longer a male figure, but only a ‘feminine dream.’ I, however, would say that it is the hysterical illusion that there exists a man—or, more precisely, someone who can possess everything and have all women, thus evoking the totemic father.

But it is ten years later, in his Seminar’s Book XX, *Encore* (1972-3), that Lacan takes a different approach to reading such a poignant myth as Don Juan. He no longer sees it as an illusion, but through the lens of feminine enjoyment (jouissance)

Leporello, Don Giovanni’s servant, must submissively draw up an obsessive list with the exact number of women conquered by his master. But the servant has a judgment of his own regarding

the behaviors of his master, and meeting on his way an abandoned ex-lover, he reads her the famous list that tells that they are, therefore, *mille e tre*. This *aria*<sup>11</sup> is composed of numbers and a classification based on rank, job, and nationality, all of which recall *opera buffa* and inspire laughter in the audience.

My dear lady, this is the list  
Of the beauties my master has loved,  
A list which I have compiled.  
Observe, read along with me.  
In Italy, six hundred and forty;  
In Germany, two hundred and thirty-one;  
A hundred in France; in Turkey, ninety-one;  
But in Spain already one thousand and three.

Throughout the rest of *Don Giovanni*, the scenes unfold like a comedy of errors, full of disguises and playful trickery—including women taking an active role in the game of courtship. In this vaudeville of romance, there is a whirlwind of misunderstandings which are typical of the dance of love —dislocations and the impossibility of any structure. As an example of “the impossible” is the list of the one thousand and three —Don Juan loved so many, that we might think he didn’t love anyone.

But as the play nears its end, the comedic tone will shift. In the end, the humorous side of the story lets the somber side appear, the return of the dead father as the stone guest. Could there have been a woman on the list who was an exception? Could Don Juan halt his endless pursuit and embody the metaphor of love in a single person? Or, in searching for The Woman, will he never find her? Isn’t it always love that redeems the monster—just as in *Frankenstein* and *Beauty and the Beast*?

I Love You, Even if You Don’t Want Me To

The “dialectic sequence” at work in these dynamics is the tension between love and desire, allowing us to contrast two possibilities. One is the rather improbable formula (which Lacan attributes to Hegel, though the exact quote is hard, if not impossible to find): “I love you, even if you don’t want me.” Lacan (1962-3) says that:

“There’s a very precious little note where he indicates that he could’ve made his whole dialectic pass through there. He also says that, if he didn’t take this path, it’s because it didn’t seem serious enough” (Jacques

9. Before the advent of electric light, darkness could be total—a concept unfamiliar to contemporary society. In a way, light has blinded us.  
10. Borges has given us his factory and suburban version with “Emma Zunz” (1948).

11. A bass aria from *Don Giovanni*, the opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, composed to an Italian libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte.

Lacan, *Anxiety. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book X*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by A.R. Price. Polity Press, 201418)

What prompts our questioning in this quote is primarily the phrase “I love you.” We all know how badly love can end when rooted in narcissism, often turning into hatred and destruction. That is why Hegel’s “I love you” conceals a dimension of desire that cannot be overlooked when discussing seduction.

The other formula proposed by Lacan—“I desire you, even though I don’t know it”—is undeniably irresistible whenever it is heard, despite its difficult articulation. But why? What is one truly expressing to the other with this phrase?

“without knowing it, I take him or her for the unknown object, unknown to me, of my desire. This means that, in our conception of desire, I identify you, thee to whom I’m speaking, with the object that you lack. In going via this circuit, which is obligatory if I am to attain the object of my desire, I accomplish for the other party precisely what he’s seeking” (28)

Thus, through this deviation, the other—my love object—will fall into my arms as I embody for them what ignites their desire: what they are lacking, even though they don’t know what it is.

We should emphasize here that one desires precisely because one does not know what the object possesses—what in the object sparks desire. And this, in a more precise yet simultaneously more indeterminate and unknown way, is what produces the seductive effect. A field of indetermination. In seduction, and in love, an unknown knowledge is asserted. Not knowing what one desires in the other, not knowing why or what the other loves in me. When one gives reasons for love, says Žižek (2004/2005), then it is not love. Leaving space for the unknown within both myself and the other—and essentially accepting that there is “something strange that unites us”—is not a bad place to start. Something like madly trusting in the radical indeterminate. In times of Waze and of Google Maps, where nobody gets lost, can we still afford this unique experience of eternity within the limits of human smallness? One only needs to place oneself and the other, carving out a space that is neither too distant nor too close—an Edenic garden, a lost imaginary country, navigated with a small compass called desire.



Bestiary illumination: a mermaid and a centaur (ca. 1270)

Abstract

What happens with seduction in our times? What space is there to find an other between the mandates of productivity and the imperative of narcissistic enjoyment (jouissance) of constant happiness, so closely related to consumption? We wonder if there is still a place for the diversion and waste of time that is the game of seduction in our days, and if some of that has been lost or is still recoverable. Humanity has taken on various myths of seduction almost always demonic: mermaids and Don Juans correspond to two times and two sexed positions in terms of seduction. But seduction is not always a simulacrum, it engages the subject in the very field of his own desire, in his emptiness and in his lack. And in order to make oneself loved there is a necessary work for the desiring subject to turn himself into an object for the desire of the other.

**Keywords:** *Love, Desire, Jouissance, The feminine.*

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Received: 30/09/2024 – Approved: 30/10/2024

## Seduction in autofiction

*And the true aim of my life is perhaps just this: that my  
body, sensations, and thoughts become writens that is,  
something intelligible and general, my existence completely  
dissolved in the heads and lives of others.*

Annie Ernaux

Seduction has been a theme in psychoanalysis since the dawn of time. With Freud's disbelief in his neurotics, the traumatic *soi-disant* gave way to the phantasmatic. If the seduction-fantasy duo has taken center stage in the narratives elaborated on the couch since then, what changes from 1920 onwards, when we see the traumatic return with force, marking the psychoanalytic experience?

In this paper, I would like to examine the incidental role of seduction in psychoanalytic narratives of autofiction through fragments taken from Catherine Millot's *La Vie avec Lacan* (2017) and Betty Milan's *Lacan, ainda* (2021). Although both works may not be considered psychoanalytic works *stricto sensu*, I understand them from the perspective of "analytic writing as a form of fiction" (Ogden, 2022). I propose that not only the seduction arising from the transference-countertransference play established between the analysand and the analyst served as a source of pleasure and satisfaction at first – since the sexual drive could be sublimated in the *après-coup* of the analysis –, but also the traumatic dimension of the otherness of this encounter could be linked and integrated through psychoanalytic writing or "writing of the self".

It may seem excessive to talk about psychoanalysis and autofiction, but from the first psychoanalytic writings (1893-1899), through *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900/2019) and the vast Freudian epistolography, it is possible to say that it was essentially nothing other than a fiction elaborated around "the self as an other", to use an expression by Ricoeur (1990), the title of one of the best-known essays. Autofiction, or autobiographical novel, is a literary genre situated precisely on the border between the real narrative of the author's life and a fictional narrative that sheds light on his or her lived experiences ("Autofiction", n.d.). Freud uses the term *family romance* to designate the fantasies by which the subject imaginatively modifies the bonds with their parents. Couldn't the family romance of neurotics thus be considered the first form of autofiction? But do we write our novel or are we written by it?

For Winnicott (1971/2019), creativity is a psychic need *par excellence*, and the emotional experience of found/created object is the first creative activity of the baby's mind. From primary creativity, the baby, together with the mother, is capable of co-constructing meaning, linking

internal reality and external reality, between the dreamed (hallucinated) breast and the breast found in reality, thus being able to create and take for oneself a *tiers* breast, which is precisely the result of the integration work.

Returning to Winnicott's ideas and those of authors who draw on his contribution, and in the development of this 'clinic' of creation, Roussillon (2010) proposes that if creation fascinated and seduced, 'it was because its deepest motives were protected from a very raw vision, and the founding illusions of its value and its very essence were sufficiently veiled' (p. 237). It was also necessary to recognize that if the *original phantasmatic* represented one of the masked issues of artistic creation, the erasure of its traces in creation was as characteristic of the process as its unconscious imprint. What is this original phantasm, or rather these primitive or original phantasies? They are the typical phantasmatic structures - the intrauterine route, the primitive or primal scene, castration, and seduction - which organize phantasmatic life, whatever the individual's personal experiences (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967/2004).

Between the action of a creative impulse and the need for its transformation within the creative process, the question proposed by Winnicott can be restated in these terms: if the *infantile sexual* is at the origin of every creative process, this only happens to the extent that it changes its nature when it doesn't remain similar to itself, in other words, when it is the object of an erasure. Thus, if the infantile sexual is considered the obscure part of the creative process, it becomes an *enigmatic sexual*, which can then be interpreted. If it can both represent the desire satisfied in creation and provide the model for all creation, it is because it is no longer identical to itself. After all, it has become sexual by metaphor - or, in Roussillon's expression, the *metaphorical sexual*. There has been a successive slippage of meaning. Ultimately, the sexual will reveal itself as the metaphorizing function above anything else, whose nature will be put into action through its symbol-generating capacity.

How can the question of creativity be articulated with the drive and the sexual? Roussillon (2020) helps us to better understand some aspects of Freud's and Winnicott's thinking in this regard. While for the former sublimation is a particular destination of drive life, for the latter creativity is a fundamental aspect of psychic life. Thus, from a Freudian perspective, creating is a source of satisfaction because the sexual drive is realized through representation. From a Winnicottian perspective, creating is a psychic need *par excellence*, while for Roussillon creativity is the very foundation of psychic functioning. If Winnicott seemed to see the drive only as an overflowing and disruptive excitation, in other words, an unbound and unintegrated drive that attacked the self, Roussillon sees it and the sexual as threatening creativity, play, and transitional processes, but they can also be a source of creative impulses, provided they are placed at the service of the self. The integration of the drive into the self will play a fundamental role here.

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Revisiting the questions proposed by Roussillon on creativity, Minerbo (2023), when dealing with the process of writing a book, on the one hand, brings the desire to create closer to the erotic experience of sublimating the drive, which generates pleasure; on the other hand, she talks about the need to create, as a way of integrating into the self the traumatic otherness of the theme for a new book that haunts her. Starting from the particular to think about the universal of the creative process, the author shows how both desire and the need to create can come together in search of a lost harmony. Describing how she was suddenly captured by the subject of the book, whose otherness bewilders her, Minerbo points out that writing is a desire, but also a necessity, as she needs to 'domesticate' the experience of meeting a subject that is radically new to her - a recent conversation about happiness - to build something that bears her mark.

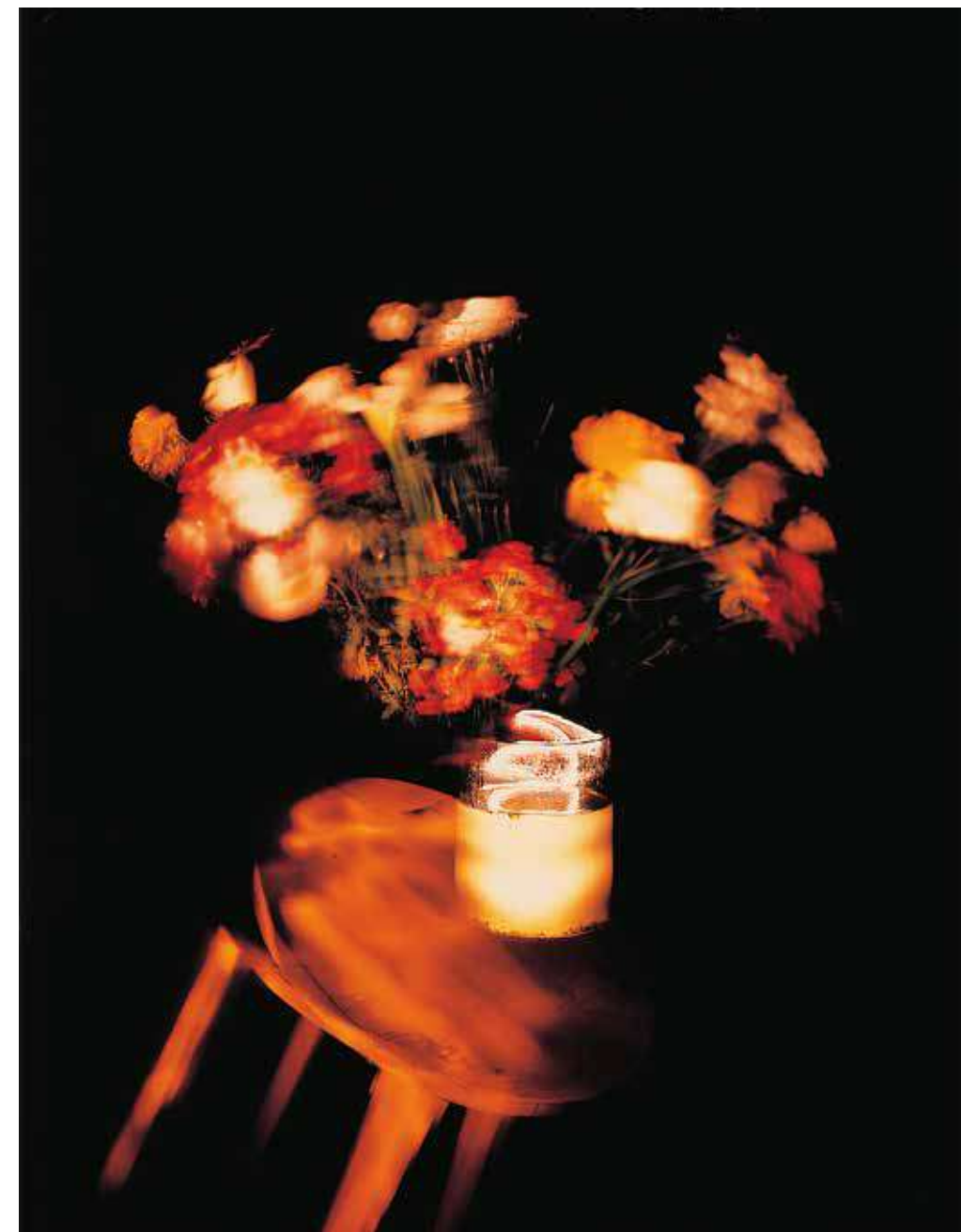
In *La Vie avec Lacan* (2017), a memoir written by writer and psychoanalyst Catherine Millot, we have a *hors norme* portrait of the French master of psychoanalysis. The author reveals with tenderness but sincerity her formative years and personal relationship with Jacques Lacan, from 1972, when they met, until 1981 when he died.

There was a time when I had the feeling that I had grasped Lacan's being in its essence. Of having a kind of intuition about his relationship with the world, a mysterious access to the intimate place from which his connection with beings and things emanated, and also with himself. It was as if I had slipped inside him. This feeling of grasping his essence went hand in hand with the impression of being understood, in the sense of being fully included in this understanding of his, the scope of which went beyond me. His spirit - its breadth, its depth - his mental universe, encompassed mine like a sphere containing a smaller one... I felt transparent to Lacan, convinced he had absolute knowledge of me. Having nothing to conceal, no mystery to preserve, gave me total freedom with him, but not only that. An essential part of my being was handed over to him, he had custody of it and I felt relieved. I lived with him for years in this lightness. (p. 5)

In this opening passage of her memoirs, Catherine Millot, or rather her fictional self - because even in memoirs the narrator, although speaking in the first person, is different from the author of the book - promptly installs Lacan in the place of supposed knowledge. But it is also necessary for the analyst, the object of desire in the transference, to accept this demand emanating from the analysand, so that an analysis can take place. This is what Lacan is going to do in this case, but using the function that he exercised, because he seems to have incurred in a confusion of tongues, mistaking the infantile sexuality for something else.

Through this and other fragments, we can follow how, from the moment that primary creativity is first assimilated by the baby, and later appropriated by the adult, it serves as a matrix for the production of meaning. Instead of the baby and its mother working together to co-construct meaning, we now have the analysand together with her analyst, linking external reality with internal reality, bringing together the hallucinated breast with the breast found in reality, and then being able to 'dream' something of her own, the breast (the memoir we are reading) that she was able to construct with her analyst through the work of analysis. And this book could only be written, and first dreamt of, because the metaphorizing function was installed from the sexual, creating symbols and different forms of language.

In the case of Millot's auto-fictional writing, which sometimes takes the form of a memoir, sometimes of testimony, as if the impressions were collated on paper by the influence of free as-



**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Living Nature* (1997). Series that emerged intuitively after working for over a year in a psychiatric hospital and a month in a morgue.  
 Photo 2 1.00 m x 1.40 m, Cibachrom.

sociation, the narrator gives us some clues as to how she was swept away by the desire to create from the emergence of sexual arousal, in other words, the raw drive awakened by the desire of the other.

In Rome, we met Paola a lot, whom I had met in Paris a few months earlier and who welcomed Lacan with her usual grace and simplicity. Lacan's irruption into my life made it simple for her too, as if natural, and was one of the reasons for my unfailing friendship with her. (p. 20)

In the next paragraph, she describes the effect of that sudden appearance in her life: 'I discovered Rome and Lacan at the same time, who surprised me all the time with his freedom and his fantasy, his inexhaustible energy' (p. 20). A little further on, she gives more news of this rapture: "I wouldn't leave that man's heels who moved in a straight line, driven by a desire whose strength never stopped impressing me" (p. 28).

In another passage, mentioning the moment when Lacan resumed his seminar after a season in Spain, which that year he had entitled *Encore* ('even more' in English), the narrator talks about the enigmatic sexual and her expectation of an interpretation of female desire:

He also spoke of the mystics. It wasn't the first time he had evoked them in his teaching, but this time it's possible that I had something to do with it. Obsessed with mysticism, I brought him the works of a beguine (actually, two), Hadewijch of Anvers, in the hope that he would provide me with an interpretation of their inner experience. I wasn't satisfied. The connection he made that year between mysticism and feminine jouissance was not clear to me. It wasn't the 'voluptuous and rude women,' as he said of Teresa d'Ávila, that interested me in the mystics, but rather those (sometimes the same ones) who annulled themselves. ~~out~~ He didn't say anything about this, but between one lesson and another in the seminar, this question that put the enigma of my desire at stake made me agonize. I was sure that he possessed the key and that he was just slow to provide it. (p. 48)

On the same page, in a passage where she discusses desire and transmission in psychoanalysis, the author talks about something that, by its very nature, escapes her:

Each time there was a glimpse of something new, like a flash of lightning that reverberated an unprecedented, albeit half-known, truth. This gave his teaching the aspect of a spiral. We went there week after week in anticipation of a revelation, which undoubtedly took on the face of each one's desire. Expectations that were always frustrated and compensated for by the unexpectedness of what he brought. 'Even more' was the name of the desire he never ceased to evoke through the enthusiasm that each of his findings aroused. We were often stunned by his formulations, which we then repeated as if to extract their essence. (pp. 48-49)

These excerpts illuminate, in one way or another, how the narrator is swept up by the drive – how, from this “pulsional thrust,” she is seized by the desire to create. But if desire moves us, it can, at first, be absolutely disorganizing, as we see in a passage where the narrator describes how the object of desire was untamable:

I eventually realized that these infidelities took place in July, around the holidays, when he had finished his seminar for the year. On these occasions, I would explode and he would patiently endured. His ability to tolerate female anger was remarkable, making me think that sometimes passivity is a sign of virility. For my part, I would lose my temper, even though I knew he would continue to do whatever he pleased. By the end of July, I was calmer again. (p. 88)

It will be necessary to undertake, in the *après-coup* of the desiring experience, a work of sublimation, which can find a destination for that whole excitation, linking the drive to a representation, the effect of which will be to 'tame' it. However, it's not just the desire to create that is at stake, as a means of sublimation of sexuality.

In the final pages of her memoirs, the narrator (Catherine?) must carry out an impossible task, due to the configuration of her analysis and her loving relationship with Lacan, to integrate the trauma of this double transference within herself.

During all these years, my analysis with Lacan continued. I had gambled my money on seeking him out, and for me the stakes were a matter of life or death. The game had begun, and even though the strategy changed when our relationship took on the appearance of intimacy, I considered it unthinkable to withdraw my bet and take my question elsewhere. Lacan understood this and kept his bet, as did I... He conducted things taking into account the particularity of the situation, eventually taking advantage of it. (p. 111)

The narrator feels the need to write about that overwhelming yet disruptive connection, which will then become a psychic demand, something imperative that will confront her with the disturbing strangeness of the encounter that changed her life so that she can later integrate this experience into herself.

Thus, on the one hand, we have the desire to create in the service of sublimating sexuality, and on the other hand, the need to create in an attempt to deal with the traumatic encounter with the radical otherness of the other. The auto-fictional writing of the memoirs will serve to reconcile desire and demand in a compromise solution.

In *Lacan Still* (2021), the writer and psychoanalyst Betty Milan, emulating the openness that Freud inaugurated when analyzing his dreams, presents her analysis with the French master. In her narrative, we have



the impression that we are reading either a novel or a clinical case report, in which the author is both the object and the subject, the analysand and the analyst, the character and the writer. In a transition between childhood and adulthood, between São Paulo and Paris, and between fantasy and reality, Milan renounces the rules of erasure to get closer to the truth and unveil it.

Right From the opening pages, the narrator (Betty?) describes the shock of her first meeting with Lacan. Upon her justification for not having made an appointment in advance, because she had called and no one had answered, he asked her point-blank:

But if the phone wasn't working, why didn't you come here straight away?  
The question perplexed me. How could I go without prior authorization? From the start, he made me understand that I could - why not? - have done what I wanted. He valued desire and not the young foreigner's imagination... With a smile and a sentence, he won me over. (p. 29)

Still under the effect of the shock, in the *après-coup* of the first interview, she continues:

I didn't leave the consulting room as I had entered... Having induced me to talk about my origins, Lacan took me back to the history withheld from me by my ancestors... In other words, I left without being ashamed of who I was.  
I just can't say I was swept away because to sweep someone away is to violently tear them from their place, and I already wanted to return to number 5 on Rue de Lille. This didn't go unnoticed by Lacan, whose desire to analyze did not subside. (p. 30)

For Lacan, the analyst's desire was important for the effectiveness of the cure. This desire could be organizing at first, allowing the patient's infantile sexuality, which until then had been erased, to emerge.

It was only much later that I understood Lacan's procedure in the first stage of the analysis. The Doctor valued the explicit request - to indicate an analyst who could go to Brazil - so that my unconscious desire could emerge. He treated the request as if it were the manifest content of a dream, whose meaning needs to be discovered and requires associations from the dreamer. I'm sure he only did this because he wanted me to become his analysand. He expressed his desire through *Why didn't you come sooner, Come back tomorrow*, and *Above all, don't stop writing to me*. He made it clear that my engagement in analysis with him was important, and because he did so, the idea of crossing the ocean once again to work with him became a reality. (p. 32)

Later in the narrative, having already completed a preliminary period of analysis, now in its second half, when she asks herself why she felt compelled to go to her analyst's office, the narrator suddenly realizes that she was fulfilling the wishes of her ancestors. The enigmatic sexual asks to be interpreted and can then be metaphorised, and its nature is revealed through the capacity for symbolization.

- Tell me... I'm listening  
- Actually, I don't know why I come here  
- Hmm  
- It seems I'm compelled to come  
- Yes, that's right! - replied the Doctor, staring at me.  
- But who's forcing me?  
- Tell me, my dear  
- If only I knew... to want is not to be able  
- That's also true  
With that, he stood up and said, 'See you tomorrow'.  
I was preceded by the words when I said I was compelled to go, and only understood the meaning afterwards, *nachträglich*. (p. 48)

In the third period of her analysis, when the desire to be a mother is about to emerge, the narrator describes her transition from face-to-face to the couch. This transition was preceded by three dreams, the second of which centred on Pombagira, a Umbanda entity. Her nanny offered the spirit a bottle of pinga, saying: 'Drink because I wish to see'. She wanted Pombagira's erotic dance, and through her desire, the narrator's was expressed (through a slip, we have: '*Bebê* que eu quero ver'<sup>1</sup>).

Thinking that there was no point in talking to Lacan about Umbanda when she enters the consulting room after dreaming these dreams, the narrator goes - in a kind of acting - straight to the couch, contrary to her habit of sitting facing him. Lacan settles into the armchair behind the couch, saying nothing. The narrator is reluctant to talk about her dream about Pombagira, for fear of not being understood. She teases Lacan, asking if he would understand, but he doesn't take the bait.

- Instead of answering me, you say *Interesting*. I don't understand anything anymore, I'm bewildered. I honestly don't know what I'm doing here  
- Hmm  
- Maria [the nanny] I miss her... the language... the country.  
The fact is...  
- Yes, go on  
- The fact is that I'm only here for you.  
I said this and started to cry. [...]  
- There's no need to be upset. You've moved on to the couch. More than that, you've masterfully taken the couch!  
The fact that I was only in France for the Doctor, whom I only met during the sessions, was heartbreaking.' (p. 70)

1. The verb 'drink' in imperative form and the noun 'bebê' sound similar in Portuguese.

Later on, the issue of motherhood came up during the session. It wasn't something natural; it had to be conquered. The issue manifested itself in the analysis through a dream in which a pregnant friend was fleeing through narrow streets like those of medieval towns. A policeman was chasing her, without her understanding why at first. Then she discovers that her crime was being pregnant.

- We're in my country and the man in the suit and bow tie is the father... by the way he's dressed, he can only be French. Pregnancy, my country, the French father
- I would have remained silent for a long time if the Doctor hadn't spoken up.
- What else?
- I think I'd like to have a Franco-Brazilian child
- Why not? (p. 97)

One interpretation, or rather, one possible reading of these passages from her analysis could be: from the love transference, the desire to have Lacan's child arises, an unconscious desire that, after a work of mourning, can be replaced by the desire to have the child of someone other than her analyst, being able at the same time to be a mother and, through a work of identification, to become an analyst herself.

If, on the one hand, the seduction that comes from the transference-countertransference relationship can be sublimated after the analysis - through self-fictional writing, a book or a child, for example - on the other hand, it can also be disruptive, traumatic, as we see in the following extract:

- On the one hand, I had been brought up to be a freelance professional and to be independent. On the other hand, as a woman, I was not my own person. I was expected to behave like the girls of the previous generation and, as I didn't fit into this tight skirt, my relationship with my parents was conflicted, especially with my father, who was a jealous feminist. His love terrified me and left me orphaned. I couldn't have imagined that, so many years later, the fear would resurface in a session that could have been my last, if Lacan hadn't been so skillful... I lay on the couch as usual. But he didn't sit on the armchair. He approached the couch, leaned against it and stared at me.
- By what right are you standing there?
- The question was asked so abruptly that he went to sit in the armchair, resumed his position and repeated the question I had asked.
- By what right?
  - That's exactly what I said
  - 'Hmm,' said the Doctor, surely realizing that I was dealing with a threat from the past.
  - If you were seduced by me, there'd be nothing else for me to do but leave.
- With that, the session ended and I left in silence, wondering what I had said. (p. 105)

What aspect of the infantile sexual is actualized in this fragment of the session in relation to the primary object? And countertransferentially identified with it, what is Lacan acting on? What erased trace of the object suddenly lights up in the here and now of the analytic encounter?

In these fragments, collected both in *La Vie avec Lacan* and in *Lacan Encore* we can see the role that seduction can play in the relationship between analysand and analyst, and vice versa. On the one hand, it can be constituted as something fundamental in transference-countertransference relationships when it is linked to the emergence of desire, fantasies, and transference, in other words, a source of pleasure and satisfaction, which can later be destined for sublimation. On the other hand, it refers to the traumatic nature of the analytic encounter, whose pulsational charge exceeds the work of connection that the psyche can carry out. In the first case, we would be in the field of the first topic, the *agieren*, the return of the repressed, the pleasure principle, neurosis, while in the second case, we would be in the field of the second topic, the repetition compulsion, beyond the pleasure principle, the non-neurosis.

For Roussillon (2020), creativity has been the substrate of psychic functioning since the dawn of life. The psychic capacity not only serves to put into practice the metaphorizing function, and consequently the creation of symbols, but also enables creativity to participate in the assimilation of the affective and intellectual experiences we encounter throughout life. The sexual is at the foundation of creativity, and creativity is the expression of the sexual when it finds material to fulfill its goal in the service of the self.

This is precisely the role of creativity in the auto-fictional writing of these two authors. This form of writing seems to have served not only as a testimony (of a relationship? of an analysis?) but also as a metaphor for seduction (suffered or acted upon) and the integration of what until then had not been a matter of memory. If the writing of autofiction fascinates and seduces both Millot and Milan, it is because, paradoxically, its motives are not as protected as in a fictional work, and the illusions that underlie its value and essence are not sufficiently veiled. If the primal phantasies represent one of the issues masked in artistic creation, perhaps in these works, this phantasm is not sufficiently erased. On the contrary, it shines through.

'The analytic writer must become a writer of a kind of fiction' (Ogden, 2022, p.164). The patient presented in an article or psychoanalytic work is not the real person lying on the couch, but an imaginary analysand, fictional like a character in a novel, and distinct from the analysand who inspired it. Thus, the clinical vignette that served as an illustration for a concept or theory in an article is not the lived experience with the patient in the consulting room, but 'is *like* that experience, a metaphor for it, a fiction' (p. 164). The Betty who writes *is* and at the same time *is not* the Betty whose story we are reading, just as Catherine *is* and *is not* Lacan's analysand and lover.

Reading the excerpts from these two books written by Lacan's former analysands, themselves psychoanalysts and writers in the *après-coup* of their analyses, we can think that auto-fictional writing served a dual purpose. Not only does writing seem to have meant the possibility

of sublimating the drive, but the trauma could also be inscribed/written where before there was no possibility of psychic inscription. To the extent that they themselves wrote their stories, narrated their analyses, and their relationships with the object (Lacan? psychoanalysis? writing?) that seduced them and over which they exerted their power of seduction, they turned it into a (drive?) destiny or transformed the trauma of this encounter into something that could be assimilated into the self (one of the instances? the fictional?), through a work of integration, thus restoring the cohesion (of the self? of the narrative?) that had been lost.

In the very act of writing, a writer, be they a writer of essays, psychoanalysis, or fiction, is appropriating parts of him/herself that were previously unknown, becoming more fully him/herself (Ogden, 2022). As a result, he/she erases him/herself as a real person to finally gain body and form through auto/fiction and thus reveal his/her authorship. However, how far can we say that we are the authors of our destiny? The author of *Écrits* thought that, instead of saying what we want, we say ‘what others wanted, more particularly our family’ (Lacan, 1975/2005, p. 162), making use of us. By trying to capture Lacan’s being in its essence (Millot), as if she could grasp the character from within, or by trying to assimilate his way of analyzing (Milan) as if from this diversions through the other she could finally arrive at herself, both authors are also (re)writing themselves as women, writers, and analysts. First and foremost, by being spoken of (by their family? by their analyst?), Millot and Milan have made something of a plot out of the coincidences that drove them. As fate would have it, they were brought together around a name so that, instead of the possibility of alienation, subjection, or even capture, they could re-appropriate themselves. At the same time as Lacan was transformed into a character in their stories, they became authors. I wouldn’t go so far as to say that one was the other’s double, but who knows?

Writing can therefore be considered a drive destination or a modality of the *fort-da* (Freud, 1920/2010). Millot and Milan became active where before they had been passive. Both made seduction a character in their stories, the protagonists of which, however, were themselves.

Abstract

The author proposes a brief examination of the role of seduction in psychoanalytic narratives of memories or testimonies, understood from the perspective of analytic writing as a form of fiction, according to Thomas Ogden. Based on fragments taken from *La Vie avec Lacan*, by Catherine Millot, and *Lacan Ainda*, by Betty Milan, he tries to study how seduction that is actualized in the transference-countertransference relationships can be assimilated either in a register of pleasure and satisfaction, or in the register of the traumatic, as well as their possible destinations, whether through the sublimation of the drive in the first case, or through the work of bonding and psychic inscription in the second, both using auto-fictional writing for this purpose. Starting from Winnicott and Roussillon’s notions of psychic creativity and the infantile sexual as the source of the capacity for metaphorization, he attempts to circumscribe and explain the successive slippages of meaning that the infantile undergoes until it becomes a metaphor, from its original erasure to its revelation in the work of fiction. He also tries to observe how the original fantasy, in the aspect of seduction, organizes not only the phantasmatic life of the subjects but also the auto-fictional narratives under discussion. He concludes by arguing that psychoanalytic writing allows for the symbolization of the drive and the re-signification of trauma, and in doing so it enables these writers to become the authors of their own stories.

**Keywords:** *Seduction, original fantasy, Metaphorization, Autofiction.*

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Received: 30/10/2024 – Approved: 7/1/2025

## What is required to let yourself be seduced?

1. Thanks to literature we know that seduction is a fragile equilibrium between offering and discretion, urgency and postponement. Thanks to psychoanalysis we know that sometimes desire is obturated by strong resistances, turning attraction into repulsion and wrapping the loved object into fantasies or even rendering it invisible. In Western imaginary, Cupid symbolizes the swiftness and certainty of falling in love: his arrows cannot be foreseen nor reversed. The expressions ‘to fall in love’ or ‘*tomber amoureux*’ indicate the subject’s passivity before this overwhelming experience. Unfortunately, the Hispanic expression ‘to let yourself be seduced’ has received less attention. This situation is especially interesting insofar as it decenters the apparently linear link between a desiring subject and a desired object. What Žižek (1989/2008, p. 212) calls the “subject presumed to desire” points out that nobody can desire without interferences and that there is no such thing as an inherently appetizing object. The ‘to let yourself be seduced’ situation highlights, on the contrary, the intermediary aspects that shape the desiring experience and the painstaking process of turning discrepancy into convergence, strangeness into intimacy. Thus, we could define the ‘to let yourself be seduced’ as a double operation: first, the subject ought to overcome his own resistances, and then learn to properly taste an object, activity or person.

In this brief piece I will try to engage in dialogue with psychoanalysis and sociology of taste. To illustrate the liminal nature of the ‘to let yourself be seduced’ situation, I will draw from my own experience with *Fashion Neurosis*, a podcast that arose strong objections and new sensibilities in me. If the following pages strike more innermost than the usual style within Academia, this is both the result of the auto-ethnographic method and the description of seduction itself. The *podcast* in question closely addresses the listener through the guest’s confessions in a similar vein a good manuscript of auto-fiction absorbs the reader through the personification of its author. My final goal is to pay justice to those intermediate factors of desire that cannot be placed in the subject/object dichotomy. If one is interested in moving psychoanalysis beyond binary thinking (Latour, 2020), perhaps it would be convenient to let oneself be seduced by sociology of taste and the multiple artistic expressions that reveal an enriched understanding of seduction and its vicissitudes.

2. Let us commence this story with Bella, daughter of Lucien, granddaughter of Ernst and great-granddaughter of Sigmund Freud. Bella was born in London but spent part of her childhood in Morocco with her mother and her younger sister. In the semi-biographic novel *Hideous Kinky* (E. Freud, 1992), she is depicted as a studious girl reticent to the Sufi lifestyle of northern Africa. Back in England during the eighties, she started working for punk icon Vivienne West-

wood. Afterwards, Bella launched her own personal brand in 1990. Her designs have been used by notorious figures such as Kate Moss, Alexa Chung, Olivia Wilde, and Tilda Swinton. Recently, Bella began *Fashion Neurosis*, where she emulates a psychoanalytic session with guests lying on the couch and wondering about their trajectories within the entertainment industry. The main goal of this project is to challenge the prejudice that fashion is superficial. Interviewed by the BBC (Krentcil, 2024), Bella stated: “I’m really interested in getting to the bottom of how our emotional health is reflected in our clothes – there’s more to a dress than just a dress” (par. 2). Certainly, a piece of clothing can alter one’s mood, reveal or hide personality traits, and even influence our behavior. Yet, the charm of this podcast does not reside in the psychological interpretations of dressing, but in the vindication of fashion itself as a *modulation* of perception, a *modality* of embodiment, and a *means* of expression.

The *podcast* is a mimic of psychoanalysis, though without free association and catharsis in their conversations. Bella opens the episodes with questions such as: ‘why did you chose this outfit today?’, ‘do you remember the first garment that made you feel different?’, and ‘what would be your reaction if someone you fancy is wearing something unappealing?’. Responses widely vary. One guest (Trinny Woodall) explained in detail how she picks her outfit according to the weather forecast and her daily schedule. Another guest (Eric Cantona) exposed his interest in learning how to tell apart different shades of gray, blue, and black in formal locations like airplanes or office buildings. In the pilot episode, Rick Owens talked about his change of wardrobe after his body drastically changed due to a strict fitness routine. And Courteney Cox openly spoke about the emotional changes caused by mammoplasty. In a gesture that we could label as ‘anti-intellectualist’ (more below), Bella avoids extracting conceptual formulations out of those conversations. Occasionally, she adds a personal anecdote to contrast her experience with her guests’ stories. In any case, she decidedly avoids normative prescriptions, causal explanations, and critical interpretations. In other words, the episodes of *Fashion Neurosis* are *thick descriptions* of the (dis)agreements between each guest and the art of dressing.

3. I must confess it was not easy listening to this podcast. Initially, I felt curious about its premise, but I was mainly intrigued by the figure of Bella. Perhaps because I am partially identified with her, since my father is also a painter, and my mother happens to be a psychoanalyst. However, resistance emerged rather quickly. First, I am not very enthusiastic about podcasts in general, since in my clinical work I am already listening to my patients’ stories daily. Therefore, I like to spend my free time on non-auditive activities. Secondly, I am not very familiar with *haute couture*, and I find it difficult to understand how people enjoy overpriced and uncomfortable clothes. Furthermore, back in my

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**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Oceanograms, Pacific waves* (2019). Photo 1.5 m x 1.10 m. Original photogram, photosensitive paper.

teenage years I had a sort of ‘punk phase’ - that’s why my interest in Bella having worked with Westwood - filled with ragged jeans, worn sneakers, and shabby sweaters. Back then I mocked the obsession people had over color matching, until one day I went to college, inadvertently, wearing khaki pants, a gray jacket, and black socks. People reacted quite harshly, and I did not understand why. A friend explained, with great care, that my outfit was poorly chosen. Since that day I started to dress monochromatically – a practical solution that is, nonetheless, respectful of color harmonies. Soon after, another friend noticed the change and told me: ‘now you do look like a trustworthy psychologist’. Needless to say, listening to this podcast with fashion gurus made me remember that embarrassing day.

A third, quite strong, resistance was related to socioeconomic differences. There are many moments during the episodes when the dialogues strike me as banal. I have even reacted with outrage when the guests expose shamelessly their opulent adventures. “I think I missed you at Michèle’s [Lamy] birthday” says Bella, to which Rick answers, “she had many parties, each one with many people attending, so it is probable that we were not even in the same place that night”. Chatting with Courteney, they discuss packing for a two-day trip: “you must have many options available, you cannot be unprepared”. Concerts and parties every night, long hours posing in front of the mirror, illuminated catwalks, refined fabrics, press interviews, digital marketing, cosmetics, skincare, and so forth. Besides the influence of my family, I was quite close to literary critics, sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists and historians during my academic years. Humanities in Latin America, it is no secret, have a strong Marxist imprint, so I grew accustomed to the jargon of ‘class struggle’, ‘petit bourgeoisie’ and ‘alienation’. And yet I found myself at a bor-

derline, increasing the already intense ambivalence I felt on this aspect of the podcast. On the one hand, like many other left-wing intellectuals in Latin America, I belong to the upper-middle class, and I have never had to work with my bare hands to earn a living. On the other hand, as a citizen of a ‘Third World’ country, I am painfully aware of the damage caused by civil war, organized crime, state corruption, drug trafficking, and so on. Hence, albeit I have lived the trivial dramas of not being able to find a good hair stylist, I would never give that kind of issues the same relevance as those other socio-political matters.

However, my curiosity was sturdy, so I kept listening to Bella’s podcast. Once resistance was identified and encapsulated – I would not dare to say ‘overcome’ – I could familiarize myself a little bit more with the fashion world, learning to pay closer attention to texture and color in clothing. But before detailing the refinement of new sensibilities, I shall also mention that I found resistance among other people when I told them that I was listening to *Fashion Neurosis*. My cousin, sarcastically, asked if I heard those fancy conversations about dressing while using the untidy city transport system. A colleague, even more acid, shouted: “But of course! Anyone with the Freud last name can do anything and still have an audience”. My own brother, a committed left-wing activist – reproached me for having forsaking my punk and Marxist eras for

the discreet charms of the bourgeoisie. I did not take those critics personally or too seriously but tried to reply to them anyway. I told my cousin that, indeed, the podcast was an entertaining experience while I moved through the city. Facing my colleague's mockery, I observed the ironic contrast between Sigmund – explorer of psychic depths – and Bella – decorator of bodies' surfaces. And against my brother reclaim, I lightly jested: "Rich people have eloquent speeches and vast vocabulary, so it is pleasant to hear them". But why did I bother in justifying my decision to listen to *Fashion Neurosis*? Maybe the seduction process was already underway...

4. Now, let us enter into the sociology of taste. This label refers to a small group of Parisian researchers interested in overcoming some perennial barriers of social sciences that render opaque the exploration of popular culture (Gomart & Hennion, 1999; Teil & Hennion, 2004). Dichotomies such as object/subject, active/passive, micro/macro, among many others, have instituted a schism between naturalistic and sociological approaches. For instance, studies on viticulture are usually split between chemical analysis of grapes, ferments, and pesticides on the one hand, and discussions about social imaginary, wine symbolism in literature, and its associated cultural capital on the other. Another paradigmatic illustration of sociology of taste is passion for music, which has also been explored in a bicephalous manner – technical discussions vs the cultural usages of music. Even within the cutting-edge research on addiction one can find this type of hiatus between neurophysiological and psychological trends – the former being attentive to the metabolization of ingested substances, and the latter being focused on assessing prior risk factors.

Antoine Hennion has characterized sociology of taste as a form of neo-ethnomethodology and as an extension of Actor-Network Theory to the field of humanities. Ethnomethodology, devised by Harold Garfinkel, is a way of inquiring about social phenomena without imposing explanations coming from (alien) social theories. Actors themselves, immersed in highly specific socio technical niches, have developed a series of methods and concepts of their own to navigate through problematic events and constantly renovate the social fabric. Following this thread, then, sociology of taste rejects any before-hand formulation of hypotheses – especially if they are informed by binary thinking. It prefers instead an entirely descriptive approach to wine tasters, music lovers and drug addicts, who have tailored their own sociological intuitions and categories. Actor-Network Theory, the other pillar of sociology of taste, is a set of methodological principles promoted by Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, which has proven to be quite effective in analyzing scientific controversies and technological innovations. One of its core tenets is the decentralization of the notion of "agency" as it is usually attributed to predetermined human actors in the theoretical system of Durkheim or Marx. That amounts to the rejection of the idea that some actors are inherently more capable than others. By tracing the chain of associations with allies and auxiliary resources, Actor-Network Theory can describe how an operation can further prolong its effects, giving the appearance of being the outcome of a more powerful actor. Sociology of taste echoes this premise by insisting that it would be mistaken to discriminate addictive from non-addictive chemicals or fine-attuned taste buds from savor-blind tongues. Degustation is the convergence of attachment that sustain, sensation that traverse, singular requirements that increase or reduce perception, and many other intermediary factors that transform the quality of desire and pleasure.

In their inquiries on wine, music and drugs, Hennion and his collaborators have outlined the amateur – the lover, in a crude transliteration from French – as a key figure to overcome binary thinking. First, the amateur mixes cognitive and affective traits, for he does not only enjoy but also familiarizes himself with the technical milieu of his hobbies. Second, against the tradi-

tional account of love that stresses the subject's passivity – recall Cupid – amateurs deploy a degree of participation. Of course, wine, music, and drugs are responsible for altering the mood and even the states of consciousness, but still their effects may change drastically depending on how intermediate factors have been disposed. For instance, it is not the same to listen to Bach with headphones than with speakers; just as it is different to drink wine alone than alongside a glass of water or cheese; or think about how a psychedelic trance takes distinct directions if it happens out in the open or inside a building. Third, amateurs reveal remarkable processes of reflexivity and sensitivity. Unlike scientists – often captured by the professional parameters of their work – amateurs craft a keen intuition and share among themselves stories about their joyful experiences. Note that their formulations, while also containing some degree of technicality, can safely avoid the aforementioned schism between biological and sociological explanations. Degustation tales are most of the time narrated in first-person, without too much interest in attributing the source of action – i.e., agency – to a natural substance or to a cultural praxis. Instead, the attention is centered on the subtle variations in the ensemble of intermediate factors – room temperature, lighting, ambient noise, bodily hydration, time available, interference blocking, etc.

Gherardi (2009) summarizes the core ideas of Hennion and co. and puts them in a useful scheme of how to become a proper amateur. To elaborate better aesthetic judgements, one must develop a wide-ranging vocabulary that includes both the technical know-how and sharp attention to nuance. To achieve this sort of vocabulary, one must be embedded in an active community with its own means to produce and socialize knowledge from the member's tasting experiences. And, evidently, to gain access to a community like this, one must be a regular practitioner who is somewhat already familiar with the objects intrinsic to the hobby and the scenarios where those objects can be found. In sum, tasting is a sensual experience, not solely conceptual; it is collective, rather than solitary; and it is immersed in communicative feedback loops, instead of being just a transient appreciation of saviors. Now, while it is true that psychoanalysis tends to be loaded with dichotomies, sociology of taste is not necessarily incompatible with it. My invitation – pressing, yet free, like courtship itself – is to renovate our understanding about the body as a sensitive instrument inscribed in a sociotechnical niche and the discourses that surround and account for those types of ensembles. If there is someone who can teach us – psychoanalysts and sociologists equally – about the dynamics and tensions of seduction, they are those who have devoted themselves to love with passion and passion.

5. Now we can revisit *Fashion Neurosis* and examine it from the prism of sociology of taste. Being far more complex than mere entertainment, this podcast gathers the testimony of people who have learnt how to pose be-



fore a camera, how to tailor a signature style, how to synchronize their outfits with their moods, and so forth. Not only the conversations verse about the development of taste, but also the podcast itself is an instrument of refinement of sensitivities and an assembly where fashion amateurs and professionals coexist. Fashion is but one of the manifold aesthetical expressions, but what I find particularly valuable about Fashion Neurosis is that it takes its discussion of dressing far beyond boutiques and catwalks, emphasizing how clothes relate to weather, urban landscapes, flirting, health, national identities, and many other factors. There are moments of touching humanity during the episodes, when guests admit having suffered from precarious family relations or being bullied at school – and yet, those glimpses of psychological statements are swiftly recast in the heterogeneous networks that condition the apparently ordinary action of covering our naked bodies with fabric.

We can revisit my priorly identified resistances to observe how those attitudes and thoughts can be altered through sociology of taste. First, despite my reticence regarding auditive activities in my free time, I soon realized that the charm of the podcast was not to hear people talking about clothing, but rather the awakening of new manners to see and touch garments. Admittedly, radio format might not be as useful as a weaving workshop in that regard; but you must start somewhere, right? Second, I would lie if I said that I have left behind my own mismatches while choosing an outfit. However, by widening my comprehension about how each piece of clothing is an intermediary that prolongs or interrupts an ongoing sensation, I started to understand garments as enablers of operation in particular settings. In this sense, to be ‘properly’ or ‘poorly’ dressed up would not be an indicator either of the fabric nor the subject, but the conglomerate of dissonant and harmonious relationships during the performative dressing. Third, although the world of haute couture remains undeniably classist, we do not have to go as far as to employ the Marxist jargon of ‘false consciousness’ or ‘alienation’ to describe fashion. On the contrary, the guest of each episode unfolds a high level of reflexivity that many patients in psychoanalysis would be envious of. And lastly, there is the question of whether *Fashion Neurosis* is a guilty pleasure that others criticize. I hope that, by dedicating this essay to this podcast, I have shown that there is no shame in listening to it as well as thinking and writing about it.

Anyway, my intent is not just to celebrate Bella Freud’s podcast, but to employ it to enlighten the ‘to let yourself be seduced’ situation. To advance in this point, we could provocatively claim that surfaces – instead of depths – are the ones responsible for the mobilization of desire and pleasure. Fashion Neurosis would be, then, a case of the “revenge of the surface” – to borrow Harman’s (2014, p. 103) phrase. In yesteryear, surfaces were regarded as false and shallow – hence the pejorative sense of the adjective ‘superficial’ – while depths were seen as meaningful and real. But there has been a recent inversion of values. Nowadays we have realized that it is not praiseworthy seeking for deeper layers of meaning that remain ultimately beyond any possible human access. Conversely, already-at-hand surfaces have a remarkable endurance that makes them survive our prejudices. See, if you wish, the evanescent and ephemeral insight during a psychoanalytical session, in contrast with the constant hammering of symptoms and complaints. Or, going back into the world of fashion, note the difference between the brand logos tending to go to the background and the broken button or zip jumping capturing our attention as they jump into the foreground. Precisely because surfaces are deployed and disposed to coupling with other surfaces, sociotechnical niches can be built and used as spaces where amateurs train their passion. If seduction and desire relied solely on subterranean psychic drives, the experience of falling in love would be rather infrequent. Interestingly, even though Bella’s explicit goal was to dismiss the prejudice of labeling fashion as superficial, the lesson I drew from her podcast is the exact opposite: the necessity of deconstructing our usual preference for depths.

This resonates with the work of Susan Sontag, who chose as the epigraph of her book *Against Interpretation* (1966, p.3) an ironic quote made by Oscar Wilde: “It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible”. Signaling this turning point between our previous lust for depths and our current rediscovery of surfaces, the American author stated: “in our own time, art is becoming increasingly the terrain of specialists. The most interesting and creative art of our time is not open to the generally educated; it demands special effort; it speaks a specialized language” (p. 295). That is, it is not enough for a work of art to be exhibited, as if meaning were graspable by anyone passing by. And yet, the key for art appreciation – just as with wine or drugs – lies not in the dissection or exegesis of the piece in question, but in the audiences cultivating novel sensitivities. Historically, new technical procedures have extended the possibilities of bodily sensations and shared narratives within a niche. Sontag offered examples like the oversaturation of images in the press or the high speed of airplanes, nudging us towards new forms of voyeurism and adrenaline rushes. Going back to my autoethnography, I can say that distinct types of outfits elicited different social interactions. We do not need to go as far as cutting-edge technical innovation or artistic avantgarde, for clothes have been right in front of our eyes and hands all along. Alas, we have just been too busy seeking disincarnated depths instead.

I want to press further the entanglement between seduction and superficiality. The signature gesture – or shall we say, conditioned reflex? – of critical thinking is to formulate interpretations that reveal the deeper meaning of any given praxis or object. It is usually said that conventions and fetishes – in the sociological sense, unrelated to paraphilias – are the outcome of power dynamics or unconscious motivations that are hidden from plain sight. Then, to ‘really’ understand the essence of a phenomenon, superficial layers must be torn apart in order to penetrate into its deep core. But as soon as one meets amateurs working in their respective sociotechnical milieu, one finds that critical thinking is an intellectual gimmick and not a faithful depiction of reality. What kind of credibility would have a music lover that spent all his efforts explaining how popular music is a device to manufacture national identities – instead of actually listening to the songs? Would it not be bizarre to find a drug addict who, in the middle of the lift-up or down-trip, started to denounce how pharmaceutical companies profit from our need for leniency? What if Bella, taking its parody of psychoanalysis too seriously, insinuated to her guests that they chose a career in the world of fashion as a way of compensating certain deficiencies in their skin-ego or as a derivative form of satisfying their tactile fixations? Let us quote Sontag one last time: “interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value [...]. In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means of revising, of transvaluation, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling” (p. 7). I have tried to avoid

the risks of (over)interpretation through the insistence on local thick descriptions – a surprising common feature between Bella and sociology of taste. While critical interpretations dismantle the very desired object, shared and fine-tuned descriptions enhance the experience of degustation. From the prism of sociology of taste, the alleged depths of the desiring subject or the core of the desired object are of no special interest. What captures our attention is the chain of mediating factors that refine taste. And of course, this assembly is nothing more than a mere collection of superficial aspects without an obvious relation with pleasure or the aesthetics. But what would happen to us if not for them?How would we appreciate a glass of wine or a fine dress?

6. Finally, I would like to return to psychoanalysis and its possibilities to understand the ‘to let yourself be seduced’ situation. I have argued that resistance must be overcome and *ad hoc* sensibilities should be developed in order to achieve a successful seduction. In my opinion Sociology of taste should and can not replace psychoanalysis, but complement it instead. Note the difference between my appeal to complementarity and the stand of certain critics such as Baudrillard (1979/2001), who takes up the banner of gender studies to proclaim: “There is an alternative to sex and to power, one that psychoanalysis cannot know because its axiomatics are sexual. And yes, this alternative is undoubtedly of the order of the feminine, understood outside the opposition masculine/feminine [...]. This strength of the feminine is that of seduction” (p. 7). It is mistaken, in my opinion, to suggest that psychoanalysis is blind to seduction, especially since Freud paid close attention to it in his first etiology of hysteria and later in the analysis of transference. Perhaps the issue is, that later psychoanalysts have discussed this topic in an excessively abstract and conceptual manner. For instance, Laplanche (1999/2015) obsessively revisits how the father of psychoanalysis, even after abandoning his theory of seduction, never dismissed its importance to psychosexual development. Another case would be Green (1997/2018), who deeply regrets how contemporary psychoanalysis has forgotten about the pivotal role that the sex drive once had. One last example would be Pazos de Winograd (2002), who tries to disentangle seduction and hysteria and insists on the elusiveness of desires as an alternative to both sublimation and imposition of pleasures. These sort of discussions, despite their lucidity, might become ironic, since their conceptual entelechies miss the very essence of seduction: sensuality, taste and sensitivity.

The expression ‘to let yourself be seduced’ reveals a subject allowing others to lure him. What remains tacit, as in courtship, is the question about the means of seduction. A first date usually is mediated by a cozy coffee, an invigorating liquor, an elegant dinner or a warm fireplace. It would be a gross reification to picture desire exiting a subject and traversing empty space aiming to another. Could it be that we have misunderstood Fairbairn’s adagio (1963) about libido being “fundamentally object-seeking” (p. 224) due to the obnubilation of binary thinking? We could reformulate this slogan as “libido fundamentally seeks channels of degustation” to pinpoint that those ensembles result from coupling a subject aiming to maximize his pleasure and several factors – peripheral, yes, but no lesser in importance anyhow – that reshapes the quality of tasting. Bella is careful to ask about her guest’s dressing rituals, for she is aware that one simply does not fancy elegant garments, but rather one is intertwined in the successive operations that get us closer to or further away from a piece of clothing. My wee autoethnography showed how ‘to let yourself be seduced’ is a dance between resistances and tastings. If one decreases the former and enhances the latter, Cupid’s arrow shall better arrive at its goal, although that would be solely the beginning of the romance between an amateur and his hobby. Successful seduction is neither to drown pleasure nor to saturate pleasure, but to let oneself be seized by self-affirming sensations and to share our delights with other amateurs. Why should we look up to Eros as a heavenly power if down here on Earth there are manifold seductive experiences?

Abstract

This essay offers a reflection upon the situation of ‘letting yourself be seduced’, which perturbs the dichotomy object/subject so deeply embedded in psychoanalysis. Employing some thesis from the sociology of taste, the essay also examines Bella Freud’s podcast *Fashion Neurosis*. In this case, the listener could not let himself be seduced by fashion until he had overcome his own affective resistances and until he had developed the ability to better taste the objects and practices coming of the world of *haute couture*. Finally, there are also presented some remarks to enhance the dialogue between psychoanalysis and sociology of taste.

**Keywords:** *Passion, Seduction, Sensibility, Sociology.*

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Received 30/10/24 - Approved 18/12/24

## Seduction and the Metaphor of *xenos*\*\*

Όλο τον κόσμο γύρισες μα τίποτα δεν είδες  
*You have been all around the world, but you saw nothing*  
Λυχνος του Αλλαδινου, Νίκος Καββαδίας  
[Aladdin's lamp, Nikos Kavvadias], 2006

The word *Xenos*<sup>1</sup>, means not only stranger or foreigner, but simultaneously ally, lifelong friend, guest as well as host. The word is its own opposite. The uses and functions of metaphor is a critical means of carrying the weight of the unconscious in language, which can transfer, as in transference, understanding and knowledge of that part of the mind. One focus will be an examination of the flow of associations from *Xenos*-foreigner, outsider, stranger and in particular *tramotane* – a person who lives on the other side of the mountain.

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. (Benjamin 1982/2002, p. 462)

### Metaphor

St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers, was in legend a 6.3 metre giant who decided to serve 'the greatest king there was. Noticing that the king he found to serve crossed himself at the

mention of the devil, he realised that king lived in fear, and so he departed to search out the more powerful master. In time, learning that the devil feared Christ, he decided to serve Him. A hermit suggested that given his bodily strength he could serve Christ by assisting people cross a dangerous river. You probably know the story that a little child asked his help to get across; however, despite the child's size, on crossing the river he felt that his load weighed him down considerably. Reaching the far shore, he said that 'the whole world could have been as heavy as you on my shoulders'. The child Christ then revealed that indeed, Christopher had had the whole world on his shoulders as well as he who made it, revealing that Christopher was now serving Christ the King by carrying all of it. This painting is by Hieronymus Bosch ((ca. 1490-1500).

Holding that metaphor in mind, let us examine an oppositional position.

Goethe wrote the poem *The Erl-King* ['Erkönig'] (1782/2015), which Schubert then set to music – both wonderful evocations of something that is also very disturbing. The poem depicts a father riding through a forest, carrying his son held to his chest, who is crying in fear of the Erl-King, the spirit of wind and forest. The father dismisses his son's fears as mist, pressing him closer to himself as he gallops faster. Arriving home, he discovers his son dead in his arms. The exciting ride, the galloping horse, with the father tightening his grip on the boy can be read as a cipher for paedophilia. The Erl-King, like the Pied Piper or the Rat Catcher of Hamelin is the pagan lover of children (Forrester, 2017, p. 99). This subject is covered up by mist as it is invariably invisible.

I bring these two stories together as they both contain the metaphor of holding – the early holding required by the child that is the task of mother, which in time becomes the psychic frame containing/holding creative life. Its devil-opposite, as represented by the Erl-King, is the perverse erotism of holding directed to paedophilia and death. Both maternal and perverse holding are forms of seduction.

It is in Winnicott's work that analytic holding has profound resonances of carrying/supporting a child, with protectiveness, care, calm and the maternal ecstasy of the burden. The good enough mother provides and creates continuity in the baby's experience of the world. The



\* British Psychoanalytic Society.

\*\*A version of this essay was first published in *The soft power of culture: Art, Transitional Space, and play* (Karnac, 2024). It has been revised especially for *Caliban*.

1. *Xenos* is also a word that can contain the paradox of being alone in a foreign place as well as being taken inside, looked after and potentially developing relationships.



dropping of the baby is the rupturing of continuity that needs to be mended and repaired by mother or not; later it becomes re-framed in analysis. Paedophilia is at an extreme obverse of loving and is the enactment of hatred without repair. Such unconscious negative states can become available for engagement in analysis.

In the countless images that exist of the Madonna and Child, the infant Christ is held/contained.

Looking closely into the renaissance face of the maternal Madonna one often can see a wistfulness in the Madonna's expression-there is a sense that she perceives the time 33 years later when she again holds Him at His death. These images represent the journey from birth to death, re-found in the image of the Madonna in the Pieta, once again holding the body of her son, now transformed into the dead Christ. The mother who gives birth may perceive at some point of the death of her baby. 'In the beginning is my end', as T.S. Eliot wrote in *East Coker* ((1940/1974, p. 177), is a metaphor for the inevitability of death as a known fact, whilst the rest in between is the actuality of a life lived.

The analysand arrives in the psychoanalytic consulting room with some notion that he/she may just perhaps be able to find help to overcome disturbances, which invariably are connected to the complex field of love. The psychoanalyst is a place of last resort, where monsters are to be found 'in the sleep of reason' (*Los Caprichos*, plate 43, Goya, 1799). Goya does not judge monsters; rather he allows them to present the world of the night that is a characteristic of the *Los Caprichos* etchings.

These can only emerge – to be seen beyond their darkness in the unconscious – when reason sleeps. Bravery is required for such a process, certainly from the patient to dare to evoke and begin the process of taming the turbulent wildernesses of the mind. The same is required of the analyst, to allow his or her psyche-soma to be the sounding board of the patients' often-severe distresses, some of which, projected, need to be 'caught' by the analyst to allow them to come into existence somewhere in and between the clinical dyad. Sometimes it is in the analyst's dreams or somatics that the 'It' of the analysand is perceived. Perhaps in the gap between the rent and the patch in the ego, one or other will feel, know or enact the traumatic origins suffered by *the child in the analysis of the adult* (Ferenczi, 1931).



And so, St Christopher trying to help travellers cross the river, preventing their death by drowning, can but suffer the – at times – extremely heavy burden that he carries. A metaphor alongside St Christopher is Charon, the boatman carrying the souls of the dead across the River Styx to Hades. Brother of Thanatos and Hypnos, he makes possible the drift into sleep and enables the dream function. One metaphor carries another, layered beneath or alongside. This has relevance for the problem of deadness within an analysis that needs space to emerge without analysand or analyst being killed in the journey.

In the first metaphor, the Christ Child, carrying the world, is being carried by Christopher. For the patient, the analyst carries the weight of the lived life, and with some patients, the burden contains a fear of the impossibility of returning to life. Here I want to cite John Forrester's observation on the problem of holding. On one hand the Madonna holds the body of her son, the alive child and the dead, thirty-three-year-old man. And in the Erl-King myth, the negative holding, an over-exciting seduction, ends in a holding that suffocates to death – such a paedophilic direction fragments and continues to murder mental life. The Erl-King metaphor is sexual perversion at the heart of carrying across, as metaphor is contaminated when the erotic sphere is a *confusion of tongues between children and adults* (Ferenczi, 1932/1955).

Some mothers fear that their holding may be an insufficient activity to prevent the death of their baby, thus turning the alive, sleeping baby in their arms into an imaginary holding of a dead baby. This is the nightmare of the mother. Can I, with all that has happened in my life, be 'good enough' to nurture my baby into life? Some mothers, perhaps visualising their baby as representing the environmental cruelties bestowed by their own mother, or grandmother in a trans-generational maternal series cannot bear the life of their baby and return to a suffocating feminine version of the Erl-King. More often, though, it is 'the father who is aware that the baby, especially a baby son, has become his rival, as a starting point of an antagonism towards the favourite which is deeply rooted in the unconscious' (Freud, 1910/2001b, p. 59).

If insufficiently held and seen the baby tries to get mother's attention. If nothing happens, and in today's world many mothers are glued to the screen of their phone, ignoring the presence of their infant may lead to perplexity, frustration, motor movements like kicking and in time either an inward sense of collapse or an outward rage. Ignoring a baby is the start of a developing affect that may become a masochism of a continuing sense of unwantedness or become its opposite as a rage against life projected sadistically to the other-both are sado-masochistic formations in identification against or with the aggressor. As Freud showed in, *A Child Is Being Beaten*, the child begins to believe father beats me *because he loves me*. Here is the font of the erotic position of enjoying pain either towards the self or given to the other, as forms of love. All can become learnt behaviour as the mother, or father or both parents separately and together can

hurt their child often, such that it is an expectation that becomes one's lived experience. Or mother's soothing function can restore the baby/child to the recognition of love without aggression. We will return a little later to see how this plays out in Christianity as well as football violence that can disrupt society.

It is perplexing to understand where St Christopher is standing as he carries the world – outside the earth, or in space? Or is standing, as the purveyor of 'carrying over,' precisely the work of the metaphor, concealed in language and culture. How, also, does psychoanalysis manage to have a secure foundation when its foot does not rest on the world, but instead rests on this thing, the unconscious? As Forrester (2017) acutely questions:

Where does psychoanalysis' power to transform, to carry, to transfer come from? Freud's answer is not suggestion but transference. Winnicott's answer was 'holding'. Transference, *Übertragung* in German is to carry over, and is complementary to the Greek *meta-pherein* – carrying across. (p. 103.)

So, the metaphor of St Christopher, like the metaphor of psychoanalysis – metaphor, transference, holding – is but a metaphor. Perhaps we analysts have a task to restore *metaphoricity* to the metaphors so that deeply understanding the language of the patient in its transmission of the monster's release is the place where our work stands.



In Benjamin's 'Angel of History' (in his discussion of Paul Klee's 1920 *Angelus Novus*<sup>2</sup> mono print) turns his back on the crowd even as he is propelled and swept by it, so the 'Angel of History' who looks at nothing but the expanse of ruins of the past, is blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress.

In analysis, the analytic dyad refinds the present in the past and this can spark off an act of freedom. That is how the patient enters a 'New Beginning' (Balint, 1968). The medium for this may be an interpretation given by the analyst or be found by the patient.

The humble metaphor can carry a grain of a word that transfers a sensually perceived connection that reveals insight. Ar-

2. Thesis IX in his *Theses on the philosophy of history* (Benjamin, 1942/2015).

endt makes a link between metaphor and poetry, suggesting that they both re-create description and feelings. She gives a powerful and helpful quote from Kafka's *Diaries* (19 October 1921) about seeing from a different vantage point.

Anyone who cannot cope with life while he is alive needs one hand to ward off a little his despair over his fate [...] but with his other hand he can jot down what he sees among the ruins, for he sees different and more things than others; after all, he is dead in his own lifetime and the real survivor. (p196)

Often analysands complain of not remembering a dream that they know they have had. Jotting down thoughts of the dream and associations on awakening can be very helpful in grasping them before they return to the mist (in both senses).

Some patients, although they go through the motions of talking about their life, give the impression that they are living one that is dead. Such monologue can be very hard to bear, since the listener can only hear that nothing can be done. Did the parents not notice how the abandoned child was feeling? It is easy for such a child to take guilt onto itself and carry the fault as its own. Kafka's idea of making jottings amongst the ruins is a metaphor for the difficulty of analytic narratives. The analysand is surrounded by life's ruins. Nevertheless, we may get glimpses that, despite everything, they are a survivor and therefore alive. And in the surviving an unconscious shadow can attach to how and why and in what part of the body resides the unconscious erotics that develops also as character. Paula Heimann thought that an important question for the analyst observing such states and fragments was to begin to answer the question about who is doing what to whom and why. Here we might suppose that question abuts on original seductions, real and imaginary that, in time develop the balances of love and hate towards the object as well as the self.

In a metaphor, Arendt quotes Benjamin (1931, Arendt, 1968/1983): 'Like one who keeps afloat on a shipwreck by climbing to the top of a mast that is already crumbling. But from there he has a chance to give a signal leading to his rescue'<sup>3</sup>(p. 172). Experiences being viewed from the top of the mast, brought to an analysis, enable a concomitant affect of impending disaster. Many neurotic symptoms are already attached to the unconscious knowledge of the disasters of upbringing and other traumatic events in life's journey. For instance, generalised anxiety may

3. Walter Benjamin in a letter to Scholem, 17 April 1931.

be attached to the danger of holding onto the top of the mast as the ship is sinking. Now it is no longer a generalised, unattached and massive anxiety. Similar may be found in obsessional holding onto the mast, leading to being pitched into the sea unable to swim.

These metaphors, or what I can call poetics, allow the analyst to realise where the patient is speaking from, accepting this, instead of simply registering the analysand's anxiety and possible fear with their difficulties of describing where they are in themselves. In addition, the analysand is making a big effort to speak from a very unstable and dangerous place that has provided unstable fixity for a long time, thereby giving a signal that may lead to rescue. When the signal anxiety is attached to a metaphor, it can be linked to or developed into a reconstruction of personal history that has remained in the unconscious as metaphor. This, in time, can be deciphered. For the analysand, this metaphorical position, when explored, provides hope of rescue, of change and development, throughout the work of the analytic dyad. The metaphor of the collapsing boat reflects aspects of perceived and actual damage done in infancy and childhood to the sense of being held properly or not (another metaphor that can also be explored to reveal more early history). A realisation can emerge that the analysand, clutching the mast top, solitary, alone, is in a relationship with another who has seen him or her, and can provide support to move away from such a precarious mental position. The point of exposing the fuller metaphorical emotional substrate is to develop a capacity to uncover tempestuous times in words and memories, moving away from a one person state of mind and life towards a *new beginning*, as the analyst can be made use of by the analysand in becoming more free from their emotionally precarious life. There arises a sense of choice: the analysand can emerge or remain in his/her dead-alive life.

**The psyche-soma carrying the burden of the mind**

The original ego is a body ego. Early on in the development of the mind, the ego has perceptions from the body, as found in posture, hunger, pain, cold and heat. These are experiences in the body prior to and later alongside the development of a thinking-feeling mental mechanism. The mind does not exist without its body, and both structures, consciously and unconsciously, have been around for the duration of a person's life. Later, it is the analysand's body that provides the structure and motility to bring the mind to analysis. Present day analysis can often downgrade the value and importance of the body as part of the totality of analytic experience. At its most extreme, for some analysts, the mind becomes overvalued as their target organ. The analytic understanding of psyche-soma can become an ordinary, but also fundamental way of understanding and approaching the roots of an individual's character or self, as it to is an exploration of early somatic seductions.

The mind may need protection from the impact of massive affect: such that defensively there is a move from psyche to soma. In this case the body can take over in providing the contours of associations, although detached from a mental capacity to free associate and emotionally feel. Thus, one finds a patient who might adopt particular positions on the couch – a certain rigidity of limbs, perhaps, or never moving, as a means of concealing and revealing earlier traumatic states and keeping a distance from what threatens as some terrible knowing. Such positional structures when noticed and recognised can allow for the possibility of movement away from the somatic register and towards mental curiosity. Putting the 'it' into words moves psychic energy from the thing (body) presentation to word presentation, enabling affect to move from body attachment to potentially that of the clinical dyad. As with the rest of an analysis, doing this requires time to work through

the newfound memories in terms of past relationships. The patient in his/her psychosomatic place is alone and does not expect, nor often even wish for, the intervention of the other. The unconscious expectation is that the other is not there to help, and often there is a historical truth to this, as sometimes adults had not protected the infant from trauma and may even have caused it. Very often the traumatised analysand has not had an early history of being held, cuddled and loved by the mother, such that in adult life being touched becomes an ego-alien idea, and perceived as the harbinger of further assault. This leads to the possibility that only self-holding is possible (rocking, masturbating, disturbances of eating etc).

Sometimes, instead of feeling anxiety in the mind as a state of anxiousness, the body can take over. For instance, it is common to see children and also some young adults sitting with a leg or foot continuously tapping away, dissociated to the rest of the body sitting quietly. The leg is experiencing rapid repetitive movement containing what can be seen as excitement. It can be thought of as a manic somatic state concealing its depressive opposite – the physical equivalent of manic depression in a limb, whilst at the same time the person is talking apparently normally about something or other, split off from their rapid leg movements.

Repetitive anxiety leading to phantasies about the imminence of a heart attack are also quite common, especially if a parent died too young from a myocardial infarction (heart attack). Rather than examining the processes of mourning of the death that has already happened, the patient claims the heart condition for the self. The sense of impending doom about oneself is then a projection into the future of a past that has already happened, and like the tapping leg continues a vibration of twinges in the body that are experienced as alerts for the approaching heart attack. This can continue for years without any cognisance that these many alerts about dying are a stream of false alarms. As such, the somatic phantasy provides cover for not mourning, perhaps chiding the patient with survivor's guilt, together with an overarching expectation that one cannot, must not surpass one's parents.

When such somatic containers of anxiety, excitement and depression can be noticed, and insight allows conversation from the soma to the psyche, analysis opens up a new possibility in the telling, a possibility that the listener, who may be experienced after a while as benign, can hear and that the patient registers, perhaps for the first time, being heard. The patient may begin to know that the other is listening and can also listen to him/herself beyond the mindless vibrating body.



Metaphor in Music

No one can truly know himself  
Detach himself from his innermost being  
Yet still he must test, each day  
What he clearly sees from without  
What he is, what he was  
What he can do, and what he stands for.  
Goethe, *Zahme Xenien*

I once heard a performance of Richard Strauss’ *Metamorphosen* under the baton of Antonio Papano at Covent Garden. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1943, an Allied bombing raid destroyed the Munich National Theatre. Richard Strauss, born there, described the desecration as ‘the greatest catastrophe which has ever been brought into my life, for which there can be no consolation’ (quoted by Richard Bratby, Royal Opera House essay, 2018).

Worse, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1945, after hearing of the firebombing of Dresden he wrote, ‘I am in despair! The Goethaus, the world’s greatest sanctuary destroyed! My beautiful Dresden, Weimar, Munich – all gone’ (Bratby, *ibid.*). Ten days later, the Vienna State Opera burned to the ground. This fired him to write *Metamorphosen* as a great lament for the destruction of a civilisation. As Richard Bratby describes his final, impassioned climax totters into an equally final collapse, and the music of the opening returns, destined this time to lead only downwards into C minor darkness, where the source of the transformation becomes clear, and a fragment of the funeral march from Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony stands blackened in the basses. Strauss wrote the words ‘IN MEMORIAM’ over its broken remains. The word totters and links with the real and metaphorical forlorn pile of bricks that was all that had been left of the castle that once towered over the old square in Warsaw, destroyed in the Second World War.

Strauss was offering the world a requiem, such that the listener might feel, in the music, the devastation of the destruction of war against a centuries-old culture. He knew that beyond the burning buildings stood the Nazi persecution of the Jews, including his daughter-in-law and family. The music is themed with darkness that, despite attempting uplift, returns to a deeply sombre and terrible ending. It is too much to mourn the full enormity of what has happened. And the lines from Goethe are for all of us, as-yet untested, unknowing of how we will manage to realize that we will each decide, ‘What he can do and what he stands for’.

The attack on culture that this example represents is also metaphorical, as the usual holding capacities of concert halls, theatres, opera, ballet, jazz, poetry readings, libraries, museums – the places that are well established for how culture is perceived in society – are expected to just continue. In war, in times of Covid and of the severe disruption to Mother Earth (vast forest fires, rising waters overwhelming flood defences, dangerous winds and storms, heatwaves) we find that, suddenly, cultural activities diminish or completely close down. And we are bereft, at a loss, miserable, and feel less alive. The good enough holding of the mother’s arms, the transitional phenomena that Winnicott described from the creativity of ME-NOT- ME, is, in dealing with reality, further transformed to his third area of creativity: that of culture in society. If the infant has not achieved transitional phenomena, then the acceptance of the symbolic is deficient and cultural life is poverty stricken.

As Winnicott (1959/2016) states:

put rather crudely: we go to a concert, and I hear a late Beethoven string quartet the firebombing of great Dresden and the Goethaus (you see I am highbrow). This quartet is not just an external fact produced by Beethoven and played by the musicians; and it is not my dream, which as a matter of fact would not have been so good. The experience, coupled with my preparation of myself for it, enables me to create a glorious fact. I enjoy it because I say I created it, I hallucinated it, and it is real and would have been there even if I had been neither conceived or not conceived. This is mad. But in our cultural life we accept the madness, exactly as we accept the madness of the infant who claims (though in unutterable muttering) ‘I hallucinated that, and it is part of mother who was there before I came along’(p. 527)

In a similar way paintings on the walls of galleries at night disappear from our gaze but when we visit them, re-find the missing object, become alive because we are viewing them. Our vision of the painter’s creative life put into a painting is captured by our gaze and we muse, imagine, trace our own patterns on the thing we try and see as it momentarily is possessed by us.

And when the Culture-Breast, a profound reason to continue to be alive in the world, disappears or shuts down, or worse still, is destroyed forever, like great Dresden and its special buildings and memories through generations, we become listless, empty and depressed. It is part of Covid symptomatology that attacks our mental equilibrium and causes us great suffering, which reverts back to an unconscious questioning about whether we were really held in our mother’s arms all that time before.

Metaphor and Winnicott

Donald Winnicott (1949/2017) described the theory of the existence of a natural masochism in women as a false one, explaining the falsity as follows.

A mother has to be able to tolerate hating her baby without doing anything about it. She cannot express it to him. If, for fear of what she may do, she cannot hate appropriately when hurt by her child she must fall back on masochism, and I think it is this that gives rise to the

false theory of a natural masochism in women. The most remarkable thing about a mother is her ability to be hurt so much by her baby and to hate so much without paying the child out, and her ability to wait for rewards that may or may not come at a later date. ( p. 202)

The baby’s hatred needs to meet its match in either the mother or the father, not enacted as blows or perversity but as an unconscious counterbalancing matrix that contains that hatred. In this situation, *Rock-a-bye baby*, the rhyme that Winnicott quotes in the same work is not sentimental and is probably sung with unconsciousness about what is described within its metaphors. Yet as a response to the upturning of the mother’s life, subsequent to the birth of her baby, it gives the mother a chance to imagine the baby falling out of its cradle, the mother’s arms. In the mother’s unconscious phantasy, the baby’s crashing to the ground provides metaphorical imaginary space for a non-retaliatory acceptance of the sometimes-impossible demands of the baby. Having such a phantasy of imaginatively freeing herself of the baby allows the mother an internal mental space to contain her hatred of the baby, for a moment, without the need to retaliate. This does not inevitably lead the mother into a lifetime direction of masochism towards other objects; however, it can, subject to the mother’s own unconscious knowledge of how her own mother dealt with her baby’s demands years before, as she balances her good enough capacities to mother, or struggles, as well as the intensity of the baby’s trajectory to be more or less an ‘easy’ baby. This is a very different holding metaphor from that of the Erl-King discussed earlier.

Metaphor at the edge of impossibility

There are sometimes when some things are too painful and terrible, the impact of description too bald as the words slip away from their meanings, so that the ability of metaphor ‘to carry’ meaning fails. How is the Holocaust able to be examined? A straightforward history of the concentration camps, Wannsee, details of train schedules, the routes of the trains, composition of carriages, how the round-up of Jews occurred, the clothes, tattoos, camp buildings, lists of everything, cannot do justice to how the Jews, long dead in their millions, thought about the living-dead incarcerations. In Austerlitz W.G. Sebald evokes this impossibility of description by bypassing where his tale goes to, and instead the reader hears about the construction of train waiting rooms, the defences of impregnable castles that always fail, photographs of strange architecture, a sense of the photo as the frozen capture of a ‘then’ moment. Photos of people live in the moment of the shutter release, and as such are indicative of a deadness, the then-ness of place and person, as displaced, such that very conclusion has to suffice to discombobulate the reader within the fronds of the text and photo, all long gone and not possible to bring to life in the now. It is too monumental to describe all the complex wefts and warps of the skein that is too frail to hold together an understanding that makes no sense.

Some forms of development of aggression in Society

Paintings of the Madonna and Child at the start of the Christ story are complimented by the scenes of the flagellation and crucifixion that worshippers intimately know. Such images are replete with the erotics of humiliation, masochism and sadism that have a normality of evocation-*who is doing what to whom and why*. The millions of viewers inculcate such violence as a direction and belief of a movement towards being within God’s love and holding. Yet the Church offering such vicious commentaries invites the seductions of sado-masochism to be seen when the family is taken to the frescoed church. Such images of vicious seductions, seen by children make one understand the necessity for such religion to demand obedience, or in our times to *be born again*, in order to be allowed inside and be loved.

As childhood leans into adolescence often the boy learns to shout loudly, to push and shove, to join the throng of a primal horde of brothers in a gang that may start as playing football and in time joining a football supporters’ club. And this can be led by a pied piper who insidiously seduces them into a raging group of thugs out for the sheer pleasure of destruction of others, killing the Other who is different, the stranger that appears to be taking over their life. This is what happened in the sudden eruption of mindless joy of destruction of property, and attacks on fellow citizens without an underlying politic other than the seductive pleasure of an attacking lust. The United Kingdom witnessed such a vicious eruption in August 2024 as gangs heard the call to attack the strangers in many towns and cities in the land. The seduction of violence unbridled and vicious in young and old, and often with a history of being groomed as football hooligans, as a false flag of love of one’s football club was perversely played out against the stranger.

Conclusion

I have taken you on a walk around seemingly different themes, yet they contain a sense of alienation, necessitating special measures on the part of some individuals to manage to bear to stay alive. St Christopher has been paired with the Erl-King – the Divine and the Perverse are a pair, often each being a stranger to the other. The alienation can begin from early states of the baby/child finding itself far away from the loving, holding of a good enough mother and towards aggressive seductions.

The body bearing to carry the weight that the mind cannot bear is also a stranger to its master. Can we feel what has happened?

The self enjoying the city of today, unable to see the subtle traces of the past violence covered over in its re-construction is another form of xenos. Can we see what has happened?

Who carries the heavy load and where does it belong to through the generations?

*Metamorphosen* was Strauss’ form of metaphor as his music carries the immense loss of European culture to the ear of the listener ... can we hear what has happened when it has been lost?

I will leave the end to a poem by Margaret Atwood.

What is your wish, my child?  
From me and the magic hat,  
the magic lamp, the magic stick,  
the trick, the shoes, whatever:  
A dress? A prince? A horse?  
I want him back.  
What do you mean by him?  
Him. The one he was  
before he went away.  
How sweet he was on that day  
we drifted out in the green canoe  
and he said he'd love me forever.  
Your wish violates the borders.  
There are two kinds of wounds:  
the visible, the invisible,  
and of those, two kinds,  
wounds inflicted and wounds received.  
All are lethal. The one you loved is gone.  
Shards of him scattered here and there.  
You must love this other,  
though he's an imposter.  
This love will wear you down.  
Damaged people damage people, and  
so on.  
But can't you only - what he said?  
There's no forever,  
not on this side of the river.  
I could give you a box of  
hope, instead -  
people seem to like it -  
Or else these pictures.  
They tell what he saw:  
Many have travelled far  
to the place of fire and blackout,  
the time without words.

Some have survived,  
though not intact.  
No one comes back<sup>4</sup>.

Abstract

Contrasting the metaphors within St. Christopher and the Erl king allows an examination of maternal holding and or paternal assault and paedophilia as seductions are played out within the frame of loving and sadomasochisms for the baby and his/her unconscious development in the family.

The Greek word *xenos* contains unusually the idea of the stranger, as well as one who takes the stranger in. Arendt, Kafka, poetics, Strauss’ *Metamorphosen* and Sebald’s *Austerlitz* are examined within the framework of seduction. Freud’s *A child is being beaten* and Winnicott’s notion of *holding* are discussed as the child develops into the adult with formations of loving and hating in relation to early holding or its lack.

These ideas are seen in renaissance portraits of the Madonna and Child at the beginning of life and the maternal holding again her 33-year-old dead son. This is contrasted with frescoes of the humiliation and sadomasochism in the Stations of the Cross as a seduction of the Church inviting “choosing” a righteous life. The seduction of violence by the primal horde, now football thugs in our times engaged in the sheer pleasure of destructive violence against strangers.

**Keywords:** *Seduction, Support, Violence, Culture.*

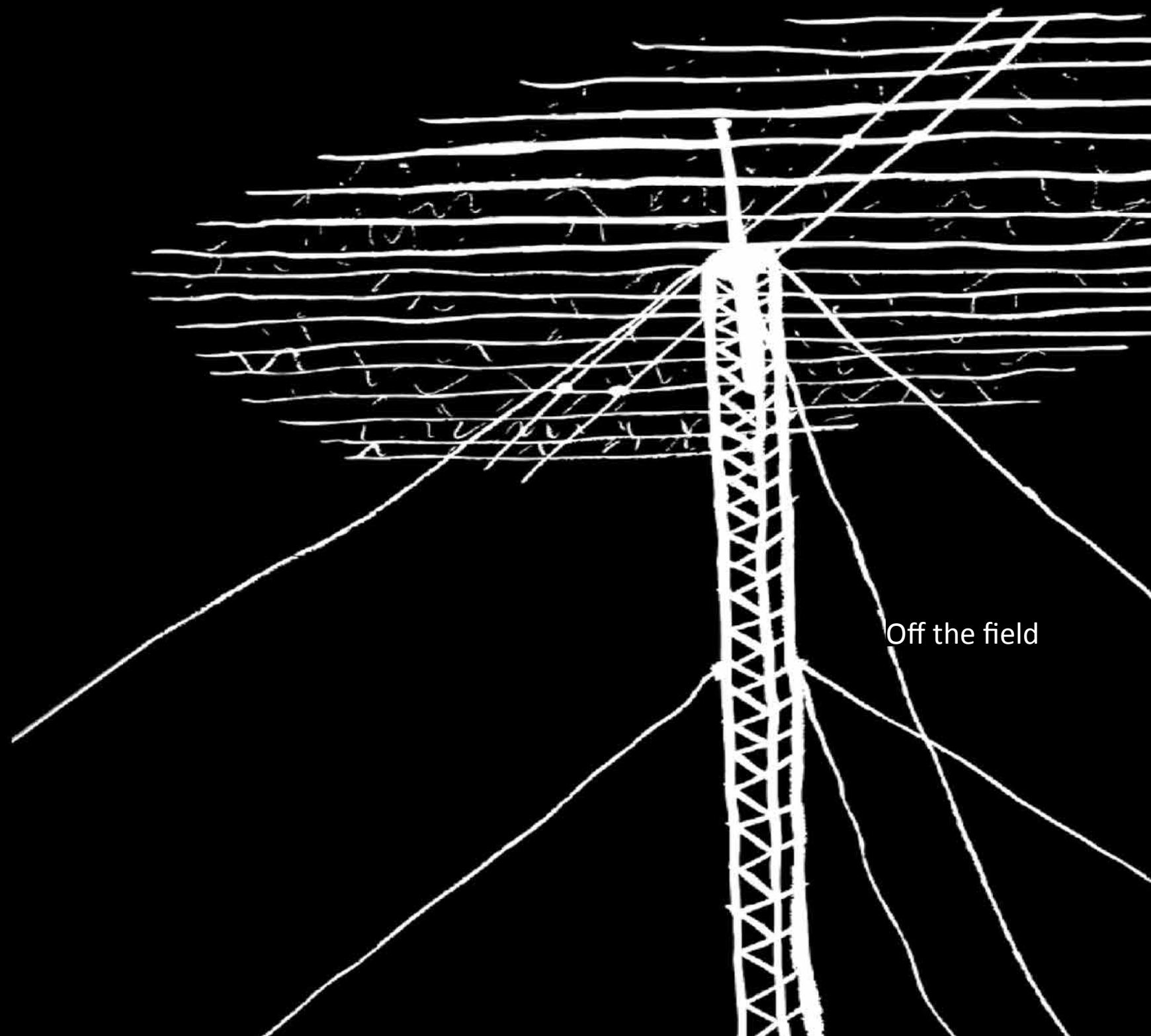
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4. ¿Cuál es tu deseo, mi niño?/ De mí y del sombrero mágico,/ la lámpara mágica, el bastón mágico,/ el truco, los zapatos, lo que sea:/ ¿Un vestido? ¿Un príncipe? ¿Un caballo?/ Quiero que él vuelva./ ¿Quién es él?/ Él. El que era/ antes de alejarse./ Qué dulce fue ese día/ en que derivamos en la canoa verde/ y me dijo que me amaría por siempre./ Tu deseo traspasa el límite./ Hay dos clases de heridas:/ las visibles, las invisibles,/ y de ellas, dos clases,/ heridas infligidas y heridas recibidas./ Todas son letales./ El que amabas se ha ido./ Sus fragmentos esparcidos aquí y allá./ Debes amar a este otro,/ aunque sea un impostor./ Este amor va a agotarte./ La gente dañada daña a la gente, sin parar./ ¿Pero no podrás... qué dijo?/ No hay siempre,/ no de este lado del río./ Podría darte una caja de esperanza, en cambio/ (parece gustarle a la gente)/ o, si no, estas fotos./ Cuentan lo que vio:/ muchos han viajado lejos/ al lugar del incendio y el apagón,/ el tiempo sin palabras./ Algunos han sobrevivido,/ aunque no intactos./ Ninguno vuelve.

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Received: 15/04/24 - Approved: 15/09/24



Off the field

## Identity/identities: Issues from a clinical case\*\*

A few years ago, a same-sex couple approached me to provide care for their sixteen-year-old adopted daughter. It was my first experience caring for a Black teenage girl and the daughter of a same-parent couple. At that time, I documented much of the care, along with my impressions and concerns. At the 2019 International Congress of Psychoanalysis in London, I presented an excerpt of the material during a panel discussion titled ‘The feminine, the maternal and the sexual body in adolescence’ [‘Lo femenino, lo maternal y el cuerpo sexual en la adolescencia’] (Mondrzak, 2019a). As the title indicates, the focus was on identifications with the feminine in the constitution of subjectivity in adolescence, in a girl with two mothers. However, the possibilities for exploring such clinical experience were not exhausted in that discussion. Using the book *The Sovereign Self: Essay on Identity Drifts* by Elisabeth Roudinesco (2021/2022) as a triggering stimulus, and following in recent years a line of studies aimed at reflecting on contemporary phenomena and their implications for our psychoanalytic work (Mondrzak, 2008, 2019b, 2020, 2021), I sought to revisit that clinical material, now focusing on the subject of identity and some intersections with psychoanalytic technique. The topic raises countless questions: What provides us with the sense of being someone unique, and at the same time, what connects us to other individuals perceived as ‘equals’—nationality, skin color, sex, gender, religion? Being analysts confers us an identity and, within the group of analysts, our predominant theoretical orientation confers us another sub-identity, in a sequence that can be endless. In addition to being analysts, we are fathers, mothers, citizens, siblings, neighbors, also a long sequence of roles that identify us. In parallel, we construct the perception of being oneself, a sense of stability that allows us to feel the same, despite all the modifications over time. In adolescence, in particular, the way we see ourselves and are identified by the group assumes a central role in the process of bodily and subjective reorganization.

Thus, my main objective in this paper is, based on this clinical material, to discuss some aspects of identity(ies) and, especially, the technical challenges they represent for a psychoanalyst, even more so in the analysis of an adolescent. How do we deal with these issues and our own preconceptions? How much has psychoanalysis opened up to this discussion? A broad review of identity and identification is beyond the scope of this paper, although we are aware of the complexity of the subject and the need to continue studying it in depth.

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\*\* Fepal 2024 Award.

### Brief notes on identity

Traditionally, the concept of identity is considered part of the field of social psychology, while psychoanalysis would focus on recovering the dimension of subjective experience, emphasizing the particular. This is because, as human heritage is assimilated, subjectivity reshapes it within the social world in a way unique to each individual. However, the dichotomy between subjective/objective and individual/collective increasingly appears to be reductive. The connection between individual processes and group functioning was already clearly indicated in Freud’s works known as ‘social’. Increasingly, however, the subjective/objective, individual/collective dichotomy is proving to be reductionist. The connection between individual processes and the functioning of groups was already clearly indicated in Freud’s works known as “social”. He never seemed concerned with defining identity as a concept within psychoanalytic theory, but in a brief speech to a society of Jewish intellectuals (Freud, 1926/1941), he used the notion of identity as something intimate, a sense of familiarity and a shared ‘psychic construction’ between himself and the Jewish people. This identity was shaped by the possibility of being accepted as an equal—an acceptance that allowed him to affirm his difference, his uniqueness. It was something recognized as ‘the same’ without being identical, while still being ‘other.’ This mechanism forms the foundation of the ability to symbolize, create analogies, and understand metaphors, establishing a bond, a sense of familiarity, and a feeling of belonging.

However, despite not having used the concept of identity itself, we can consider that Freud faced the issues proposed by the concept under another optic, mainly with the concept of identification, presenting the constitution of the subject from innumerable processes of identification. In this perspective, for example, Maffesoli (1979/1984) sees identity, for psychoanalysis, as a succession of identification processes.

Continuing this discussion on identity in psychoanalysis, we see that the definition of identity refers to an operation of recognition and singularity. Something is equal to itself and only to itself over time. One of the questions always mentioned is that this notion of unity, implicit in the term *identity*, would no longer be possible after Freud. How to think of a subject as one, integrated, starting from psychoanalysis? After Freud, we come to consider a divided subject, with varied and contradictory feelings, governed by forces he does not control and acts in which he often does not recognize himself. The Freudian decentering of the subject is often used as an argument to criticize the concept of identity as useful to psychoanalytic thought. In a counterpoint to that idea, some authors (Bulamah and Kupermann, 2020) suggest that Winnicott’s concept of true *self* could be seen as a “re-centering”, the possibility of a unique, primordial identity core, a kind of essential identity. It would be a representative of a primordial experience of indeterminacy in which the distinction between self and other would be excluded, as an instance resistant to identity determination, characteristic of the relationship with the other - and, in that sense, a mythical instance.

I highlight this issue because it exemplifies some of the complex aspects surrounding the notion of identity from a psychoanalytic perspective, particularly the interplay between a sense of constancy—related to the experience of being oneself—and the psychoanalytic notion that we are multiple. This interplay is essential, bearing in mind that



one of the functions of the self is precisely to seek a possible integration, perhaps in the unique way each individual organizes their feelings and desires, and ‘compiles’ their story into a basic pattern of being, responding, relating, and acting. From an evolutionary perspective, the image of a unified self is constructed in young children through the ‘mirror’ of another’s gaze, and the joy at perceiving a totalizing image would mark a first ‘identity’ (Lacan, 1949/1971).

In this way, from an individual perspective, identity would correspond to a phenomenon observed in psychoanalysis, where individuals seek the illusion of being unique (one). This illusion is necessary to sustain their narcissism as an imaginary construction of a representation that masks the presence of the other within themselves. One might think it arises as a defense against the anxiety of not being able to encompass all self-knowledge. A paradox: something present and essential, yet merely an illusion! At the same time, the concept refers to something related to the fact that individuals feel connected, similar, and belonging to a particular group—something directly tied to the vision established and determined by culture. The need for belonging, therefore, remains closely linked to identity. From a collective perspective, the term *identity* comes to signify more than an egoic illusion; it takes on a constitutive role in how one is perceived by the collective other, which, in turn, grants a sense of belonging. This inevitably becomes yet another element in the construction of oneself.

In this sense, Roudinesco (2021/2022) asks whether it is possible for an aspect of identity to ‘capture’ the entirety of the self. She highlights what she perceives as a feature of contemporary times, especially when the fight against discrimination emphasizes a specific characteristic and individuals come to define themselves—fully identified in their essence—based on that characteristic: Black, Jewish, homosexual, etc. The choice (or perhaps compulsion?) to articulate and define oneself through a single characteristic emerges in the struggle for acceptance and against discrimination.

Part of Roudinesco’s thesis is that what initially began as an innovative approach in sexuality studies—distinguishing gender from sex and proving pivotal for movements advocating for everyone’s rights (also applicable to racial issues)—over time, transformed in its content. This shift produced a tendency for people to display their suffering, freely expressing their emotions as identity markers, not solely in pursuit of recognition and non-discrimination. “This self-assertion, transformed into an overinflated ego, would be the distinctive sign of an era in which everyone seeks to be their own sovereign, like a king, and not as another’ (p. 10). Adopting this identity-driven mechanism leads to isolation within groups formed around a single characteristic, extending beyond the struggle for rights. This rejects the notion that identity is multifaceted and inherently includes the foreign, risking the obscuration of otherness and reducing human beings to a specific experience. It becomes a normative ideology of belonging, to the extent of dissolving organizing boundaries. According to the author, these controversial ideas serve as a warning to prevent individuals from being confined to a single identity, impoverishing their experience of the world with a singular focus on reality and others. The richness of individuality is lost, and the concept of community is diminished and restricted to groups that share only one characteristic, as if an individual and a community of ones were being created.

For Roudinesco, identity affirmation is an attempt to put an end to discrimination against minorities, but if it acts through the excess of self-claiming by a mad desire not to mix with any community other than one’s own, it ends up creating an ostracism for one-

self and for those who do not belong to the same group. Thus, in the end, the process of identity reduction reconstructs that which it seeks to undo.

We can observe this in clinical practice. A patient was adamant about being analyzed as a homosexual, as he believed that defined him. Attempts to question such a definitive self-conception or to suggest that it might be limiting—and that perhaps he could be seen as a person who is also homosexual—were not accepted. Various issues, such as having multiple partners, the ‘required’ body type, or the clothing to wear, were unquestionable topics because they determined his belonging to the group. He often reminded me of films from the 1980s, where the gay stereotype was an act of protest and a way to draw attention, to shock, as part of the fight against discrimination. The challenge was to see him as a person with multiple ‘identities,’ while still acknowledging that his homosexuality (which is not a singular category either) plays a specific role within culture and, consequently, within us as analysts. How can we listen to him as a homosexual without reducing him solely to that characteristic?

It was indeed a significant burden, but also a defensive refuge. He used this condition as the explanation for all his difficulties, leaving no way out, as he would always be homosexual. As he began to let go of some of the more stereotypical traits of the ‘homosexual group,’ he felt more relieved, yet also more estranged—without a group to call his own, displaced, not belonging, and harshly criticized by his peers.

Roudinesco’s position has critics - among them, Barros (2022) - who consider that all these movements would actually be supradidentitarian, since they presuppose that anyone can be involved in the defense of minorities. Beyond that, it is pointed out that it does not sufficiently address the differences between identity and identitarianism. The deepening of this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, but in any case it is necessary to underline the importance of continuing the debate on this topic, requiring reflection on the way in which psychoanalysis thinks about such issues and their influence on the psyche.

## Clinical case

But let’s go to the case mentioned at the beginning. Several years ago a couple of women came to me to take care of their sixteen year old daughter, who was “different”, aggressive and with insomnia. In addition to that, they suspected that she was having a relationship with another girl, which paradoxically seemed to be the fact that most distressed the mothers. It was my first situation with same-sex parents, and I couldn’t help but feel a combination of shock and curiosity. They began by telling me that they had adopted Sara from an orphanage when she was eight years old. She was a quiet, “very sad-eyed” child, and they immediately chose her. They preferred a girl because they imagined it would be easier to raise a girl than a boy: “We would be among women, a more familiar world”. Sara always called them “mother 1” and “mother 2”, and they divided the tasks and responsibilities related to the girl’s upbringing. In the mothers’ perspective, Sara never showed any problem about having two mothers, and from the beginning they explained to her that they formed a different family, but with the most important thing, a lot of love to give her. About a year before that conversation, the couple had separated, apparently amicably. Sara stayed with mother 2 because mother 1 had gone to live in a nearby city, and everything seemed to be going

well, until a month before, when Sara started refusing to be with mother 1, rejecting everything she said and calling her frivolous, “only interested in clothes and make-up”.

When I met Sara, I saw a girl with dark, unkempt curly hair, black, overweight, and, in fact, with very sad eyes. This impression contrasted with a way of speaking that was almost arrogant. I already had several ‘Saras’ circulating in my imagination: an orphaned girl, black, adopted. From the perspective of her mothers, a prominent aspect was her homosexuality. However, any definitive characterization in that regard seemed premature to me. At that point, various images were swirling in my mind, though without a defined shape—primarily the multiple ‘identities’ of Sara. I sensed that perhaps I was trying to organize the many ‘Saras’ that were presenting themselves to me into some familiar category, risking being trapped by the fixed meanings that certain words carry, representing implicit preconceptions: orphaned, black, adopted, homosexual.

Sara began by saying that she was having problems with the girl with whom she was starting a relationship. But, before continuing, she said: “I need to know your political position and about gender identity issues”. She clarified that she declared herself genderless and that she was fully engaged in alternative leftist movements. “I need to know because, if you were right-wing and thought gender should be defined, our conversation is not going to work.”

“Adolescents, always a challenge! To respond, not to respond, how to respond. My best approach was to say that I held a clear position: before any definition, I believed that people needed to get to know themselves because they were certainly much more than those classifications. And we were just beginning that process. I expected a heated discussion to unfold, but to my surprise, Sara did not pursue the matter further; the question she had asked me in an arrogant tone seemed to have been posed mainly to assert a position.

However, the explicit reason for her being there was something I could never have imagined: she and her ‘almost girlfriend’ had decided to buy a vibrator to ‘get rid of virginity.’ She believed it was an excellent idea and went on to explain the advantages of the plan: it had nothing to do with pleasure, no ‘sexual meaning,’ it was simply about being free to decide ‘what enters the body.’ She declared herself a feminist: ‘This is who I am.’

Things were becoming less and less predictable, and there was a vague sense of discomfort, of not stepping on solid ground. Among so many issues in her life, a vibrator was not exactly what I expected, but it was her only issue at the moment (with all the condensations she had to carry), along with discussions with her “friend” about it. The bidding with the “almost girlfriend” started when they decided to buy the vibrator, but Sara didn’t make that connection, which seemed very obvious. From that moment on, we started a long dialogue about vibrators in the overt sense, but it was clear that, in my mind, I was thinking at every moment of all the possible hidden and revealed meanings in that word. All in all, we followed the course she was setting.

At a certain point, I told her that I thought she was curious about her body, that she wanted to know it better. “No,” she replied, “I’ve already done a lot of research on *Google* and I know how to draw in detail the entire female body. Also, the male body, but I’m not interested in that”. Then I told her, “You know all about anatomy, but I think it’s not simple to understand how the body feels.” Apparently not hearing me, she went on to say that she had a very high tolerance for pain and that she had very strong skin, and therefore it was very difficult to feel anything. The association was clear and sad: feeling equated to pain, no satisfaction or pleasure, and a “tough skin”, a “very strong” protective shell that prevented pains, but also pleasures.

Sara never missed the sessions and seemed very interested and engaged in our conversations about vibrators, bodies, and pain—all topics seemingly mentioned in an overt sense, but with indirect signs of understanding that this wasn’t the only sense. She told me little about her mothers, school, other events in her life (I knew from her mothers, for example, that she was bullied at school), or her feelings explicitly. For a long time, I chose not to ask direct questions or more direct interpretations because I felt there was no room for them. After more than a few attempts, I was immediately interrupted by the associations and a visible change in the atmosphere of the session—a cooling-off.

Little by little I got to know Sara’s world. She and her “girlfriend” had never touched each other, and that was the main reason for their fights. Sara avoided any physical contact. At one point she noticed that she was menstruating and found it interesting that blood and urine were mixed in a single stream; how could that happen. The tone was not that of a question. It sounded more like a researcher trying to understand a phenomenon. I told her so and asked her if she touched her body, her vagina, to try to understand better. “Never,” she answered me, categorically, “it doesn’t make the least sense to do that”. And she immediately launched into the feminist discourse that appeared when she needed to put some distance: “The media trivialize and sell women’s bodies as merchandise”, etc., etc., etc. An example of how she pointed out to me that my intervention had been premature and how she felt that, in some way, I was forcing my way into her, violating her body/mind.

In a certain session, she came with the vibrator to show it to me. There it was, the object so much talked about and loaded with meanings, now fully concrete. I felt an immediate discomfort and, trying to think about that sensation, I realized that, among so many other possible unconscious meanings, the vibrator seemed to me, in the context of Sara’s life, a concrete symbol of the different “violations” of her life. As if it represented a threat of violation of feminine spaces, a violent occupation, without pleasure, of the orifices of the female body, a “defeminization”. As soon as she handed me the vibrator, Sara said to me: “Here is the problem”. I replied that we needed to address the problem. She began by showing me how it worked, only to ask me if I had ever used one before. I looked at her silently, trying to think how to answer honestly, without violating my space. I told her that I had been silent thinking about what to answer because that question related to something very private and intimate, our bodies. And I asked her if she agreed with me. “Yes,” she replied, “I don’t want anyone to touch my body without my consent. That was a very intense moment between us, the atmosphere was very intimate, although with boundaries and limits. Despite all the rational discourse, she was panicking about using the vibrator, and I told her that she was forcing herself to comply with a plan that in theory seemed advantageous, but did not correspond to her feelings, and so she was violating herself.

The work with Sara was my first experience with an adolescent daughter of a homoparental couple, and I perceived my fear of not considering that aspect, looking for other issues in her life just as a defensive move. But in that case it was inevitable to keep in mind the many other variables involved, especially in the initial conditions of her life, which related to her being adopted by a homosexual couple being just one more variable that I had to address. I was well aware that this situation required me to be attentive to my preconceptions, not in rational terms, but in all their cross-cultural aspects, since I cannot avoid the fact that I am a 20th century analyst, even assimilating the 21st century. I believe that today I would approach that situation with much greater ease. When I presented this material during a clinical discussion, a colleague asked me whether it

would be advantageous to address adoption by same-sex couples with more naturalness, given the risk of merely responding to cultural pressures. I think this is an example of the confusion that can arise between corrupting the essence of psychoanalysis just to adapt and recognizing that there are changes we need to consider. Psychoanalysis cannot be a closed, timeless body that authorizes us to think and form judgments on all matters, regardless of sociocultural contexts.

In the presentation of the case at the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) congress, I was questioned why I did not interpret the vibrator as representing the paternal penis. For me, the vibrator offered innumerable condensed meanings, including that of “paternal penis,” which could also be understood in various ways. But mainly in technical terms, such an interpretation at the time would have sounded absurd, intellectualized and out of the present emotional atmosphere to me. However, the question could be raised as to whether I would not be “desexualizing” the vibrator. I think I would indeed like to sexualize the vibrator so that the dimension of pleasure could emerge. Similarly, another colleague was adamant about the assault that bringing the vibrator into the session would represent and that *acting-out* as the most important thing. This did not seem to make sense at the time either: Sara’s mood was neither challenging nor confrontational, but much more investigative and quite intimate. One question remained, however: wouldn’t she be minimizing the question of gender identity, as a blind spot?

At times, Sara would call me “heterosexual asshole” or, worst of all, “cheap bourgeoisie,” probably in moments when I did not understand her, and the identity of analyst was lost for her, and other identities manifested themselves. Despite the inevitable transference distortions, I was interested to see how she perceived me in those moments, reflecting also some aspect of me that I did not perceive. At that time, such curiosity was still deeply intertwined with the fear of straying from the analytical stance, perhaps denying that we are multiple, even as analysts. Sara was a girl with a ‘hunger’ for objects (using them in the Winnicottian sense). This made my work easier because her attacks did not have an imminently destructive character; rather, they were directed at the object’s shortcomings—which, after all, are inevitable.

After some time, the subject of skin color subtly entered the analysis sessions, through references to hair, stemming from observations about my own hair, perhaps because it was the most concrete similarity between us. I often wondered if I could put myself in this young girl’s position, undertaking the almost automatic exercise we do as analysts. How could I truly understand her from a place of listening that seemed (or perhaps didn’t seem) so different—being part of a group or several groups so unlike hers? Could I rely on the idea that, in the end, we are all human? Or would that merely be a way to reassure myself? Several times Sara told me, ‘You have no way of understanding.’ At times, I agreed with her that I could never feel exactly as she did; I could only attempt to understand based on what she shared and conveyed. Would that be a condescending form of understanding? Reflecting on this now, I believe that recognizing our differences was essential, as it highlighted the possibility of forming a connection between people who are different, dismantling the fantasy that only those who are alike can understand one another. This, as Matte-Blanco (1975) noted, would amount to an attempt at illusory and omnipotent symmetrization. Returning to Roudinesco’s argument, isn’t there a risk of closing off differences for the other by confining them to communities identified by a single characteristic, seeking the illusion of absolute belonging, attempting to create unity and banish

paradoxes and contradictions? At the same time, how could I understand her when we were, in fact, separated by decisive differences?”

### And what about the analyst in the face of these issues?

When I write about the ‘identity of the analyst,’ what am I referring to? We are well aware of the countless differences among ourselves, and it is not always easy to identify what actually connects us. The need for belonging may even involve the relinquishment of certain specificities, a process which, beyond a certain point, can become impoverishing.

Perhaps, when I thought about studying ‘identity,’ my aim was to confront a concept that encompasses the need to feel whole and to belong to a specific group, based on culturally established criteria, without losing the richness of the psychoanalytic notion of our multiplicity.

With Sara, I was confronted with several prominent identities, wrapped in suffering and prejudice. It is evident that, in an adolescent, intellectualization and the need for belonging are even more pronounced. The ‘radical left-wing feminist’ identity had an organizing and defensive effect, but it couldn’t simply be reduced to that. At the same time, other identities were still being denied: being Black, adopted, the daughter of two mothers—each of these elements contained ways in which the surrounding environment perceived and categorized her

We can consider that each ‘identity’ corresponds to certain criteria and objective characteristics, organized into an apparent whole that certainly does not account for the complex network of identities involved. What does it mean to be Black, beyond skin color (without in any way diminishing the weight this carries)? How do identifications persist in cases of adoption, particularly at a later age? Can we imagine that homosexual experiences reflect an attempt to identify with adoptive mothers, as an effort to feel a sense of belonging to that family? A great deal of analytical work is necessary to delve further into these questions, which was not possible in this case, as the family moved to another city, and at that time online analysis had not yet become part of our practice. In any case, it is important to keep in mind the relationships between identifications—a process highly valued and extensively studied by us as psychoanalysts—and identities. This is one of the areas where the constitution of our subjectivity is deeply intertwined with the cultural/social, mediated from the very beginning of life by caregivers.

It is a challenge not to lose sight of the fact that we are also shaped by the ways in which culture establishes patterns and values—including, of course, the psychoanalytic culture of each era and place—so that we are not labeled by a single characteristic. We long ago abandoned the illusion of our neutrality and the idea that our subjectivity could remain outside the analytical process.

The French psychoanalyst Thamy Ayouch, in his book *Psychoanalysis and Hybridity* (2019), questions whether it is possible to speak of an identity for psychoanalysis, as nothing can be considered ahistorical or transcendental. For him, if we can speak of a psychoanalytic identity, it should be thought of in terms of hybridity, which would be inherent to psychoanalytic thought—its ability to merge with other discourses without losing its specificities. Recalling Winnicott, Ayouch suggests that the idea of relationship and paradox aligns with the notion of hybridity as a deconstruction of binary and categor-

ical oppositions of so-called universal positions, which are often present in psychoanalytic discourse. The phenomenon of transference would be characterized by this hybridity, in which both parties are transformed, opening a process that emerges from confronting and recognizing, as well as coexisting with, what is different—even when contradictions are present. This would amount to a recognition of difference, without suppressing diversity or attempting to resolve the paradox between opposites. Ayouch considers hybridity essential for the development of the entire psyche, but he suggests that it poses a particular challenge in encounters with minority groups (based on race, gender, and class). This challenge arises as it requires us to question whether we can truly listen to these categories if we do not first acknowledge that this listening occurs from the position of our own theory and ourselves as analysts—a position shaped by all our other identities (race, gender, class, age, etc.).

Many of these issues are currently being debated within psychoanalytic circles, accompanied by numerous controversies and fears of losing the essence of psychoanalysis. Ayouch, along with several other authors I will not delve into here, argues that understanding the position from which we situate ourselves and produce our knowledge is what brings us closer to true objectivity. Viewing psychoanalysis as situated knowledge prevents its ideas from being perceived as dogmas. A psychoanalysis solely focused on itself would be anti-psychoanalytic; it would assume a defined identity, detached from the ethics of encounter and transformation. The theme of identity allows us to reflect on psychoanalysis itself and our work with what is different from us and from our own parameters. Working with adolescents makes all these questions even more evident. In the case I described, the various categories of ‘difference’ surfaced and demanded attention in each session, where generational differences became an additional key element.

As analysts, we face countless challenges, among them the task of maintaining an open perspective on how the characteristics of our time impact the psyche, while being aware that we are neither neutral nor immune observers. Therefore, everything we observe, think, and feel carries a bias that can blind us—and, indeed, it does so, at least to some extent. This makes it essential to practice what we already know, though we do not always achieve it: to pay close attention to what we feel and think, and to be honest in recognizing when we become attached to any particular idea or position, without losing sight of the importance of boundaries—a concept we cannot disregard.

“Many of the criticisms of psychoanalysis—and here I highlight just one author who examines and unpacks these critiques (Ayouch, 2016, 2019)—primarily address issues of gender identity. These criticisms point to a lack of ethics and an arrogant stance in imposing a vision of normality and abnormality, with little questioning of the powerful countertransference involved. From this perspective, the goal would not be to establish new psychoanalytic knowledge about the origin of sexual diversities, but rather to remain alert to the potential theoretical and clinical hostility provoked by these identifications, which can reduce the vast complexity of human sexuality. Beyond gender-related issues, I believe the alert for us psychoanalysts also involves reflecting on how psychoanalysis, as both a theory and technique, can absorb new perspectives and undergo modification. Moreover, this process must continue happening within ourselves as analysts, which entails the constant recognition of our biases and preconceptions

## Summary

The author discusses challenges for psychoanalysis in issues that encompass the theme of identity, so present in today’s world in its various aspects. To do so, she starts from the clinical material of a black adolescent girl, adopted at the age of eight by a white female couple, who presents herself as “without defined sex, although being with a girl”. Based on this case, she deals with some aspects of the identity theme in psychoanalytic theory, addressing questions presented by Elisabeth Roudinesco and discussions based on her criticisms of egalitarian movements. Ideas of authors such as Thamy Ayouch, who proposes a hybrid psychoanalysis as a privileged space for the encounter of differences, are briefly addressed as a stimulus for future discussions. It also considers technical issues raised by the attention of the adolescent, but which have a much broader scope in the psychoanalytic clinic, mainly countertransferential aspects involved in a couple in which the characteristics of the analyst (white, born in the last century, heterosexual, etc.) are at all times present in the field. It highlights the ethical dimension of knowing the position from which each of us, analysts, immersed in a spatio-temporal context, with its preconceptions, perceives or understands (or not) his patient.

**Descriptors:** *Identity, Adolescence, Clinical case, Neutrality.* **Descriptor candidate:** *Preconcept.*

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The Foreigner

## How Does Don Giovanni Seduce?

Don Giovanni is the archetype of the great seducer: an irresistible aristocrat who ends up seducing almost all the characters in the opera: Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Zerlina, but also, in a more platonic way, Leporello - he manages to convince him not to abandon him - and even the statue of the Commendatore, whom he invites to dinner...

But what does Don Giovanni's seduction consist of? And what is he seeking in the women he courts? The most logical assumption would be that his goal is sex - to enjoy the bodies of the women he courts. In recent years, several stagings of the opera have proposed this reading: Don Giovanni deceives women to sleep with them and is, ultimately, a rapist (Cormier, 2024).

The libretto by Da Ponte (1787/1982), however, is more ambiguous, and the opera begins under the sign of confusion and equivocation: in the first act, Donna Anna enters the stage screaming, but we do not know what has happened just before:

Donna Anna: Do not hope, if you don't kill me that I should let you escape ever.

Don Giovanni (always trying to conceal himself): Woman foolish, in vain you scream; who am I you won't learn.

[...]

Donna Anna: People!... Servants! At the traitor!...

(act 1, scene 1)

Something has happened offstage between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni that has left her upset: she does not want Don Giovanni to escape, and she cries out for help to stop him.

In recent years several productions have interpreted this first scene as the sequel of a rape. As Margaret Cormier (2024) explains:

Costuming and staging of this scene typically makes it immediately clear that Don Giovanni's villainy offstage had to do with an unwanted sexual advance. In nearly all these productions, Donna Anna appears in sleepwear or underclothes with her hair loose, indicating that Giovanni, who is masked, has interrupted her in a vulnerable, private moment. Of the five productions that stage this fight between Anna and Giovanni, four depict Giovanni kissing or groping Anna throughout the encounter so that we see at least some of the sexual violence we imagine happened offstage. (p. 19)

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But Da Ponte's libretto is much more ambiguous: Donna Anna does not speak of her body or Don Giovanni's, and her only concern is to prevent him from leaving her. We could read her words as proof that she has fallen in love and cannot bear the thought of him abandoning her. As with lovers, she prefers death to life without him: "Do not hope, if you do not kill me, that I will let you to escape" (Da Ponte, 1787/1982, act 1, scene 1). It is true that later, when she tells what happened to her fiancé Don Octavio, Anna describes what happened as an unwanted physical encounter, but we must keep in mind that this is an account given days later and should not necessarily be taken as a reliable testimony of what happened: the opera -like all baroque works- is full of deceptions, dissimulations, disguises and usurpations of identity. It would be possible to imagine that Donna Anna, who had fallen in love with Don Giovanni, was furious when he announced he was leaving, and upon being discovered, decides to tell her fiancé a story that does not compromise her in order to save their relationship.

The whole plot of the opera starts from that initial scene: we could deduce that what happened between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni was not necessarily a sexual (or "genital", as Freud would say) encounter. This reading leads us to a deeper interpretation: if Don Giovanni's goal is not sex, what is the goal of that uncontrollable urge to seduce that drives all his actions?

The clearest example that Don Giovanni's seduction is not necessarily sexual is in the character of Donna Elvira. Of all the women who fall in love with him in the opera, Elvira is the most affected: she wanders through the opera like a soul in pain, out of her mind, and cannot bring herself to talk about anything other than Don Giovanni. When she enters the stage for the first time, we see her torn by feelings of pain and fury:

Ah! Who will tell me (ever)

that barbarous man where is he,

who to my shame I loved,

who betrayed me of faith?

Ah! if I find again that impious man,

and if to me he doesn't return still,

I'd like to make of him horrible slaughter,

to him I'd like to tear out the heart.

(act 1, scene 5)

Donna Anna was only asking for her Don Juan to be arrested to prevent him from leaving her; Elvira, on the other hand, wants to find him and have him return to her, and for this she is ready to resort to violence: if he refuses, she "will tear out his heart".

But what happened between Elvira and Don Giovanni? What provoked his homicidal rage? Later, when she runs into her lover, Elvira tells him the story they lived together in Burgos:

In house mine you enter furtively.

By dint of cunning, of oaths and of flattery,

you manage to seduce the heart mine:

You make me fall in love

(act 1, scene 5)

Elvira explains how Don Giovanni's strategy of seduction depends on language: by speaking, he fills her with flattery, makes promises and oaths, and ends up "seducing [her] heart." What is interesting about this evocation is that the body is conspicuous by its absence: it is not a physical or sexual advance, but a torrent of words.

After those three days together -three days of fullness and happiness, we can deduce-, Don Giovanni suddenly leaves, resumes his life and seems to forget his lover. Elvira, on the other hand, remains obsessed with the gentleman. He stops thinking about her, while she can only think of him. He goes on with his usual life - hunting women, seducing, organizing parties, drinking and eating, and talking - but she abandons her former life to devote herself body and soul to finding him. In the meantime, she uses language to remember him and to be with him again through fantasy: a hallucinatory evocation of the absent lover.

Kierkegaard (1843/1992) recalls that, in Tirso de Molina's play, Donna Elvira is a nun who leaves the convent to be with Don Giovanni, and this explains the intensity of her feelings:

Elvira, on the other hand, has been brought up in the discipline of the convent, yet this has not been able to root out passion, though it has indeed taught her to suppress it and so made it even more violent once it is allowed to emerge. She is a sure prey for a Don Giovanni; he will know how to coax out her passion, wild, ungovernable, insatiable, to be satisfied only in his love. In him she has everything and the past is nothing; if she leaves him she loses everything, including the past. After she had renounced the world, there appeared a figure she could not renounce, and that is Don Giovanni (...) nothing in heaven or on earth means anything to her except Don Giovanni. (p. 188)

Kierkegaard's interpretation explains why, among the three women seduced by Don Giovanni in the opera - Donna Anna, Zerlina and Elvira - the latter is the most affected: Anna and Zelina lived less repressed lives, and therefore the passion aroused in them by Don Giovanni is less intense. Elvira, on the other hand, experiences an explosive return of the repressed.

Elvira believes that Don Giovanni has cheated on her-that all the words he used to seduce her were false-, but in a dialogue with Leporello, the gentleman explains that he never lies: "he is all love," he tells his servant.

Whoever to one woman alone is faithful,  
to the other woman is cruel.  
I, who in myself feel such expansive feeling,  
love all of them.  
The women therefore who reason cannot,  
my goodness natural call deceit.  
(Da Ponte, 1787/1982, act 2, scene 1)

His sentiment is sincere, but it is so "vast" that it leads him to love "them all." From his point of view, the problem lies with the women, who demand an exclusivity that he

is not willing to give. Hence the misunderstanding: his "natural good nature" comes to be interpreted as a "deception".

The third example of seduction in the opera is Zerlina, a peasant woman who is about to celebrate her marriage to Masetto. Don Giovanni interrupts the party, drives the fiancé away and stays alone with her. He tells her that she deserves much more than Masetto can offer; he promises to marry her and describes the new life she will have with him: she will no longer be a peasant and will become a great lady. Zerlina is astonished by these promises, and we see her leaving the stage, dancing with Don Giovanni. At that moment Masetto's entrance interrupts the game of seduction, and the peasant girl exclaims "Oh gods! I am lost" (act 2, scene 22), before crying out and asking for help, as Donna Anna had done at the beginning of the opera.

Here too, Don Giovanni uses words as an instrument of seduction: he flatters Zerlina and describes a rosy future to her in another world, in another social class. This strategy would not have worked with Donna Anna, the commendatore's daughter, nor with Donna Elvira, who belongs to a higher social class. Don Giovanni understands Zerlina's reality perfectly, her frustrations and desires, and what he promises is a world where her illusions will be transformed into reality. Don Giovanni behaves like a psychoanalyst: he must understand the person in front of him and listen not only to his speech, but also to the manifestations of the unconscious. With this deep knowledge, the gentleman promises the impossible: to satisfy all desires and make fears disappear.

Don Giovanni offers the women of the opera two things that no other character can give them: first, an almost psychoanalytic understanding of their unconscious; and second, an illusion. But what does this illusion consist of?

Years ago, on a trip to Cuba -the island that is the homeland of seduction-, a friend explained to me the phenomenon of *jineterismo*: the *jinetero* has a great talent to understand and turn into reality what a foreigner wants to find on the island. For a leftist Latin American, the *jinetero* will present himself as a revolutionary and follower of Fidel; for someone in need of affection, he will be a passionate and attentive lover; for a libidinous person, a sex bomb; for a religious person, a victim of the system awaiting salvation. Thus, the *jinetero* can be whatever the foreigner wants him to be.

Does this Cuban anecdote explain Don Giovanni's success as a seducer? Can we imagine Don Giovanni as a Cuban *jinetero*? With Zerlina, yes: with her he behaves like the aristocrat ready to offer her marriage and wealth, like the Prince Charming every peasant girl dreams of. With Donna Anna and Donna Elvira, we do not know: the seduction happened offstage and we could not witness the words the gentleman uttered to make them fall..., although we know from their testimonies that they were words, not physical actions.

But we can interpret the illusion offered by the seducer in another way. Don Juan offers his women an ideal: not the ideal man, but the ideal image of what they dream of being. In the case of Zerlina, he offers to turn her into a rich and privileged lady, which is the impossible dream of every peasant woman. To Donna Anna, who lives under the authoritarian surveillance of her father, the commendatore, and who has pawned her future by committing herself to Don Octavio - "a prudish lover", as George Bernard Shaw calls him (1903/1989, p. X)-, he gives her a few moments of freedom, during which she can give free rein to her desires and free herself from the two men who rule her past and her future. And to Donna Elvira, the cloistered nun who has renounced to the world, the



flesh and the senses, he offers the existential fulfillment that she was unable to find in the convent: the passion that she was unable to live with God.

The intensity of the passion experienced by the seduced women is proportional to the distance between the reality they live and the ideal they dream of. That is why of the three, Donna Elvira is the only one who loses her mind - "that madwoman" (act 1, scene 12), Don Giovanni calls her with analytical precision -: there is an abyss between her life as a cloistered nun and the desirous and desired woman she managed to be for three days.

But what motivates Don Giovanni to multiply seductions? Why is it not enough for him to achieve that only one of his conquests manages to become his ideal? There is something inexplicable in this insatiability, which is of the order of compulsion. To feel alive, he needs to multiply the conquests, one after the other, until he reaches the astronomical figures detailed by Leporello in his famous list: "one hundred in France, in Turkey ninety-one, but in Spain it is already one thousand and three!" (act 1, scene 5). One must imagine the investment of time, energy and language involved in these thousands of seductions, each of them customized to enhance the ideal of the woman in question. As Don Giovanni explains to Leporello: "they are more necessary to me than the bread I eat and the air I breathe" (act 2, scene 1): it is a physical need, almost biological.

In the 1990s, Edward Said (2008) attended a performance of Don Giovanni outside New York that presented the gentleman as an addict: the opera was set under a bridge and the characters were drug addicts. Said applauds this reading:

Don Giovanni's love life is as romantic as a dingy subway platform inhabited by outcasts and misfits who lie in wait for the occasional trick; the attitude of the confirmed junkie shooting up every time he gets a chance is perfectly comparable to the driven rake in his view of women. (p. 66)

It seems to me that Don Giovanni's psychology is more complex: what makes him feel alive is the game of seduction: understanding the psychology of the woman in front of him, her unconscious, her desires, and elaborating a speech adapted to that situation. The words are never the same because the psyche of each one is different. It is this exercise of interpretation and creation that animates him. Once Donna Anna, Zerlina or Donna Elvira give up, there is no more game, and that is why he needs to look for another one in order to start again. The only thing that would manage to stop this infinite cycle would be the appearance of a Scheherazade who would prolong the game, the words, the exchanges, the courtships, night after night, to infinity: only then would Don Giovanni be left with only one woman and the seduction would become interminable (or perhaps terminable and interminable, like the analysis). "Desire," Julia Kristeva (1983) explains, "is nourished by the change of object" (p. 191).

The women in the opera, on the other hand, desire a single man, who is the same for all of them. But in reality they also desire a multiplication *ad infinitum* -of the words, of the courtship, of the gallant gestures of that don Juan-. If they were able to make Don Giovanni stay with them, the love story would end in disillusionment: the language and codes of seduction are not compatible with marriage, with everyday life, with life as a couple. This is what Rainer Werner Fassbinder demonstrates in almost all his films: everyday routine puts an end to fantasies, illusions and seduction. A husband cannot be a seducer: only

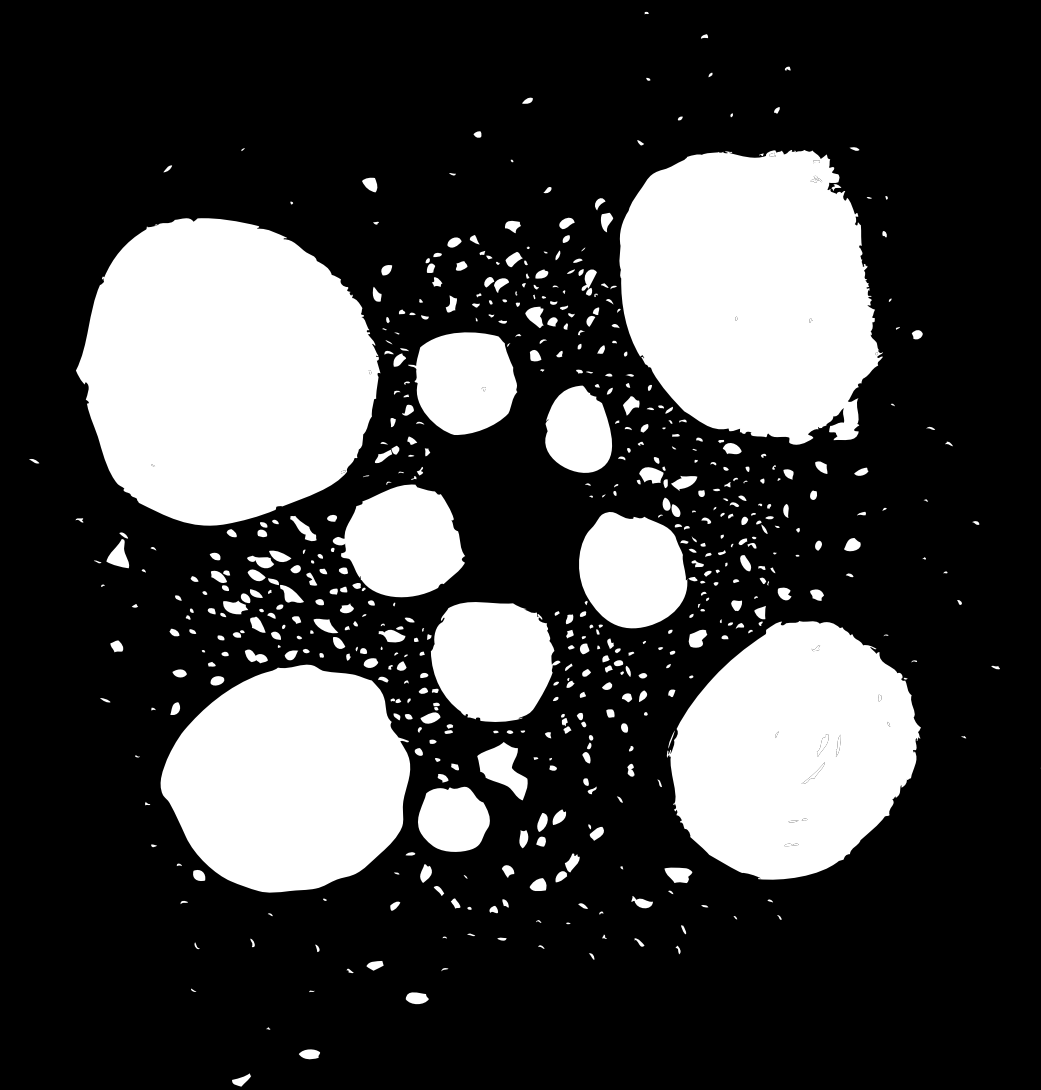
lovers can play that role. If Donna Elvira had succeeded in getting Don Giovanni to stay with her, she would have eventually found herself living with a man with no spark, who no longer offered her words or promises of love: a man as gray as Don Octavio. Perhaps the result would have been the same: she would have gone mad and wandered the world looking for the one, who would no longer be her Don Giovanni, who could speak to her and promise her so many things.

We can conclude, then, that the behavior of Mozart and Da Ponte's Don Giovanni is the opposite of the sexual violence that some directors have wanted to read into the libretto. As Kristeva reminds us, following the reflections of other psychoanalysts, it is possible that Don Giovanni is impotent and that his conquests do not pass through the genital (p. 195). His thing is language: the art of using words to make his conquests feel what they have never felt... or perhaps for a long time. In Don Giovanni the women of the opera find not only the ideal man, but also a man who makes them feel like the ideal woman they would like to be. But that infatuation is not sustainable for either Don Giovanni or his conquests because seduction cannot be installed in everyday life.

Could Don Giovanni go from seducer to seduced? None of the women in the opera succeeds in doing with him what he does with them. But the opera ends with a scene of seduction very different from all the others: the statue of the commendatore does with Don Giovanni what the aristocrat had done with his conquests: using words, compliments, eloquence and good reasons, she succeeds in convincing him that the two bodies should touch. "Give me your hand in pledge!" (act 2, scene 19), asks the statue, and Don Giovanni, for the first time, falls into the trap set for him by language. But this seduction also fails to last forever: the cold of death invades his body and the earth swallows him up. "What a hell, what a terror!" (Act 2, scene 19), are his last words

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Vórtex:  
Stolen Childhoods

## What cannot be talked about

“To stop, to look, to listen, to want to see. We don’t always do it. Sometimes, it’s uncomfortable. There are people who dare” (Polanco, 2018, para. 1). These are the first words of a literary review entitled the same as this Vortex, *Stolen Childhoods*. There, the author discusses some books that aim to narrate stories of children in street situations. Without knowing we chose the same metaphorical expression for this section in order to address a very hard and complex subject such as child abuse. Several articles in this section insist on the terrible silence, on the silent gaze that is set around abused children. “To stop, to look, to listen, to want to see”, to be able to talk about the seduction that violates childhoods, that overflows the limits, undoubtedly is uncomfortable, frightening, disturbing, but we consider it is fundamental not to remain silent and to dare to relaunch this debate within the psychoanalytic community.

Currently, the conditions of vulnerability of the most fragile sectors in general, and of children in particular, have increased as a result of the disintegration of ties in the social fabric. This is revealed, for example, by the alarming figures in *Stolen Childhoods: End of Childhood Report 2017* (Save the Children, 2017). We are immersed in a culture in whose margins and folds, children and adolescents can become objects of consumption, in the form of child pornography (Toporosi, 2022), “mules” used by drug trafficking networks to transport narcotic drugs (Chávez, November 10, 2022), hitmen for organised crime, “cannon fodder” for armed groups that recruit

minors in the face of the outbreak of armed conflicts (Español, December 18, 2023), or can become slave labour. This atrocious list highlights the unsuspected frequency of abuse by adults of the body and, therefore, of the affectivity of those who are in the early stages of their development, through multiple acts of violence, physical and psychological mistreatment (Rodulfo, June 4, 2019).

Subjectivities during childhood are built in the exchange between psychic processes and the stimuli of external reality, that is, in the way of contact and experience of the world, as well as in the encounter with others (Giberti, 2017). For this reason, when a disruptive and destabilising situation occurs, it can provoke a traumatic effect, depending on the impact on the psyche and the unique process of each subject (Benyakar & Lezica, 2005).

But beyond the possibilities of elaboration and transformation of the traumatic experiences of each person, we cannot fail to notice that abuse during childhood is a “de-subjectivising” operation, the effect of which is impossible to calculate – an operation sometimes carried out in a brutal way, but on many occasions under the subtle but powerful force of seduction. It is a kind of domination that in most cases does not leave in evidence the violence with which it manoeuvres. Children, who crave affection and attention, are captivated by the gaze of adults who deceive them by giving them a place of recognition. However, those who take advantage of the situation of helplessness and dependence, typical of this early stage of life, undermine subjectivities. “They appropriate the drives of girls or boys, making them feel that they are participants in what they do” (Toporosi, 2022, p. 34), as if the drive itself were

expropriated and used for the satisfaction and convenience of those who abuse.

One of the most burning current issues related to the mistreatment of children and adolescents is sexual abuse, which bursts into classrooms, in the media, in the courts of justice, within families, and of course, into the consulting rooms. We proposed writing about the clinic of child abuse in order to circulate experiences that allow us to think about ways of approaching and to elaborate the residual effects of a difficult practice.

It is also important to emphasize that these issues do not concern only child psychoanalysts, since in the psychoanalytic clinic we all work with the modes of registration, inscription, metabolization and symbolisation possible or not, of what Freud called infantile sexual experiences (Tanis, 2021). In his early writings he mentioned the role that these have in the aetiology of various psychopathologies (Freud, 1896/1997), and although he later partly replaced the theory of seduction with that of fantasy, he did not completely abandon his theorisation about the impact of sexual abuse on the development of children. Thus, in *Female Sexuality* (1931), he wrote:

Actual seduction, too, is common enough; it is initiated either by other children or by someone in charge of the child [...] Where seduction intervenes it invariably disturbs the natural course of the developmental processes, and it often leaves behind extensive and lasting consequences. (p. 232)

In *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, written in 1938 and published posthumously in 1940, Freud took up to this theme and argued as follows:

Our attention is first attracted by the effects of certain influences which do not apply to



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*Unveiled Bodies* (2017 - ongoing). Series of portraits featuring photographers, curators, collectors, who have contributed to the visibility of visual production in Latin America. These portraits explore the subject's identity through the shadow cast in their gestures and body posture. Approximately 2.20m x 1.10m frames, the individuals portrayed directly reclined on photosensitive paper. The series currently includes nearly 100 subjects. Each file bears the name of the portrayed individual: "Guadalupe Miles".

\* Asociacion Psicoanalitica de Córdoba  
\*\* Asociación Psicoanalitica del Uruguay.

all children, though they are common enough - such as the sexual abuse of children by adults, their seduction by other children (brothers or sisters) slightly their seniors. [...] It is easy to confirm the extent to which such experiences arouse a child's susceptibility. (p. 187)

Therefore, psychoanalysts face multiple challenges when dealing with situations of sexual abuse. One of them is the construction of trust – from which a transferential bond can be woven –, since many times the belief in those who should have fulfilled the functions of caring, sheltering and installing limits and legalities is often fractured. Often what comes to the consultation are not the stories, but the impossibility of narrating. When the experiences could not be inscribed in the psyche, they remain disarticulated from the symbolic plot, and without elaboration, the raw pieces of the real come back in an untimely manner and invade the psyche as something strange (Eiberman & Etcheverry, 2024). The appearance of a permanent eroticization is evidence of a drive overflow that cannot be bound, but can be evacuated through the compulsion to repetition or avoided through different defensive mechanisms.

The clinic of child sexual abuse proposes an approach to traumatic experiences through play, drawing and words. These modes of fictionalising enable the narration and circulation of *what cannot be talked about*, thus limiting terrifying images and connecting representations with intolerable affects (Eiberman & Etcheverry, 2024).

We open this edition of **Vortex**, *Stolen Childhoods*, with the moving text “When I Look You in the Eyes, I Will See Your Silent Cry”, by Cassandra Pereira França. With a sharp style and great sensitivity, the author takes us into this difficult subject of child abuse by showing how, very often, the psyche resorts to the splitting of the self to deal with

the inadmissibility of these terrible traumatic experiences. She also highlights that these children lose the possibility of narrating what they are experiencing, so they are subjected to an atrocious silence, waiting for someone to read the silent pain in their eyes.

In relation to what is silenced, *to what cannot be talked about*, Mónica Santolalla, in her article “Overwhelmed subjectivity: Beginning to unveil a veil”, warns that “in the very name of child sexual abuse, the adult who engages in genitalized practices with children or adolescents is hidden, veiled”, so that for cases of intrafamilial child rape she suggests to call them straightforwardly “incest”. Santolalla also contributes an important discussion on the analyst's position and listening when abuse is presentified in the clinic.

In this line, also referring to the challenges in clinical listening to patients who have suffered sexual abuse, Adela Escardó, in her work “The Abused Mind”, brings the countertransference dimension in the clinic with patients victims of incest, highlighting the challenges that the analyst will have to face in these cases, having to use his mind beyond what he imagines he can handle.

From the dual perspective of psychoanalyst and forensic expert, Constance Keuroglián Gómez, in her text “Some contributions on abusive dynamics in forensic settings”, comments on the need and complexity of creating bridges between the legal system (where clear, rapid, synthetic answers are expected) and a listening that opens up to the singular narrative, with its silenced, uncertain and ambiguous histories.

We continue the tour of this Vortex with the moving and shocking text “The nightmare of military violence experienced by the children in Mozambique”, by Boia Efraime Júnior. The author begins his work with a reference to the 6th Congress of Psychoanalysis in the Portuguese Language, which should have taken place in the city of Maputo, in December 2024, but had to be postponed due to a new

episode of political instability and violence in Mozambique. Boia Efraime Júnior deals precisely with this long-standing history of extreme violence in the country and the impact of this on children through the horrific cases of child soldier recruitment and the sexual exploitation or slave labour of girls.

We close this Vortex with two texts that present us with a wave of hope in the face of this difficult issue of *stolen childhoods*. Thus, Adriana Villarreal, in “Reflections on the experience of rebirth in children with stolen childhoods”, advocates the importance of the inclusion of the analyst in the psycho-social edges and tells us about the project – conceived by her – “Play and raise”, which seeks to promote the healthy development of children who live with their mothers in penitentiaries in Mexico City.

Finally, María Alejandra Arango, in her work “*Kiwethesagwex Luuq̓s*: Learning to care for the seed of life. From stolen childhoods to nurtured childhoods”, introduces us to the rural territory of Cauca in Colombia, where the native Nasa people live. In this isolated and forgotten region, historical scenario of armed conflict violence resulting from guerrillas, drug trafficking and illegal mining, a group of resistance and recovery of its territory, conceived in terms of both geographical and psychic space, emerges.

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## When I Look You in the Eyes, I Will See Your Silent Cry

I am not sure when exactly we woke up or whether we are still trapped in the agony of a nightmare in which we cannot scream. Thousands of small bodies wander the world, carrying “in their gaze a silence of the earth and in their voice a gentleness of fountains” (Barros, 2010/2015, p. 13). Nothing invites them to fantasise anymore, to take an interest in speaking to a stone or a bird – let alone assimilate the contents of a culture that, by failing to listen to their silence, makes them feel like abject beings. They have been swallowed by the barbarity of ultimate objectification: their bodies have been treated as waste, reduced solely to providing carnal pleasure to deranged adults who observe their vulnerability and lurk, waiting for the moment when the human child’s helplessness allows for a heinous ambush, leading to the tragic snare of sexual violence.

While immersed in the omnipotence necessary for the early formation of subjectivity in childhood, they barely notice the libidinal rupture that will rob them of their “status as children.” Thus, they fail to perceive that an erotic seduction game is weaving a web that intertwines threads of childhood playfulness with the threads of an adult’s perversity. They are more preoccupied with discovering the contours of their own bodies and the mysteries of their cavities and protrusions – trying to find connections between them and the bodily sensations they experience. Absorbed in these



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discoveries and in every new perception of the reality around them, they continuously reshape the metaphysical questions that seek answers about the continuity of people and animals in time and space.

They need affectionate companionship in this exploration of the complexities of human existence. However, the less attention they receive from their primary attachment figures, the more exposed they will be to finding “someone” who will give them the attention they seek. When that moment arrives, they will feel as though someone has finally noticed their struggle to claim their place in the world. That was the gaze they needed. Yet, over time, they realise that there is something else in that gaze; something slightly askew, somewhat mischievous... resembling the eyes of someone tempted to do what must not be done.

Suddenly, without any warning signs, amid the delights of shared small pleasures, innocence is assaulted: the transition from the language of tenderness to the language of passion. If this occurs too early in life, they may not even be able to distinguish which linguistic register they are being immersed in within this world. This is yet another tragic trap awaiting children in need of new homes, as it is precisely the loving environment that facilitates the traumatic excess. I have never been able to forget the simple question of a little girl who, at the age of three, was adopted. During her first nights in her new home, as she was lovingly put to bed, she asked her adoptive father in surprise: “Aren’t you going to put your ‘pee-pee’ in my mouth so I can sleep?” Thrown into the sinister abyss of that child’s past, still reeling, the father managed to recover and respond to his daughter’s yearning for tenderness: “This daddy here prefers to help you sleep in another way; I will gently run my fingers through your hair and tell you stories until you fall asleep!” A surprising and moving reaction, because, in general, when such mnemonic traces emerge, horror

takes over the scene and deters prospective adoptive parents. After all, no one wants to confront trauma of such a vital order.

When childhood violation occurs later in life, and the ego is more defined, the child can already perceive the language of passion to which they are being subjected. At that point, their psychic apparatus, impacted by trauma, will be able to resort to one of the most advantageous mechanisms for coping with the unbearable aspects of human experience: “Ego splitting” – a highly effective process in creating barriers to segregate aspects of reality (both objective and subjective), keeping them side by side: one part that feels everything but knows nothing, and another that knows everything but feels nothing (Ferenczi, 1931/1992, p. 78). In this way, “Ego splitting” (with varying degrees of depth and extension) ensures that the unbearable parts of the traumatic experience do not gain access to the psyche. From that moment on, they will remain separated, encapsulated, unable to flow through the pathways of repressed memories between psychic systems.

However, to prevent the psychic apparatus from confronting two realities that cannot coexist, a powerful defence mechanism must ensure the intra-systemic splitting of the Ego. This defence is known as *Verleugnung* – a German word best translated as “disavowal” (Figueiredo, 2003, p. 59), as it suppresses what might follow: a memory, a logical conclusion, a possibility of symbolisation. “It cannot be possible that the very person who is my reference for protection in this world is subjecting me to such discomfort, disgust, and sometimes even pain,” would be the thought of a child, if only there were any way to represent sexual trauma in words.

We know that the closer and more beloved the abuser is (which happens in about 70% of cases), the fewer linguistic resources the child will have to narrate what is happening. We cannot ignore that, to alleviate their mental suffering, a certain psychic arrangement

is imposed: the Ego splits, separating knowledge from feeling; *Verleugnung* ensures one of these aspects is obliterated; and the traumatic content is encapsulated, becoming almost inaccessible.

On the other hand, this same psychic arrangement will trigger dire consequences, as it may render the child's narrative surreal, giving the impression that it consists of fantasies – a perception that occurs mainly when the abuse is intrafamilial. The first and most significant consequence is the reinforcement of the Ferenczian “disavowal,” whether on a more limited level (the discrediting of the child's primary caregiver), which is the most devastating of all, or on a broader social level, through the legal system's handling of the complaint. The fact that trauma is not always narratable and that its mnemonic traces emerge mainly through sensory fragments (sounds, images, smells, and tactile sensations) significantly complicates judicial investigations. A second direct consequence of this psychic arrangement is that, by avoiding the establishment of conflict and its potential elaboration, the traumatic episode is barred from becoming a subjective experience, capable of being metabolised and eventually integrated into the rest of the individual's psychic life.

In light of these fateful circumstances, what will remain for the child? I believe it is only the hope that adults will be able to read in their eyes the silent pain and the assimilation of a guilt that is not theirs – perhaps this alone might be enough to sensitise them to fight for the settlement of society's debt to those who have been violated and prevented from developing the natural sustenance of their affective-desiring imagination throughout their lives.

Without a doubt, this may be yet another proof of the effectiveness of *Verleugnung*: continuing to defend the crypt that shelters the sexual trauma of some mothers and, by extension, the new instances of sexual violence

against their children – a psychic process that will obstruct any and all affective reactions.

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# Overwhelmed subjectivity: Beginning to unveil a veil

There are texts that are much harder to write than others. Writing about sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult against children or adolescents is, at the very least, shocking. Without a doubt, it is a seismic clinic, with heart-wrenching testimonies, in a geography defined by dependency and vulnerability in childhood.

When child sexual abuse (referred to as CSA) is intrafamilial, it is necessary to call it plainly incest. Eva Giberti (1998) very cleverly warned us that in the very name of child sexual abuse, the adult who engages in genitalized practices with children or adolescents is hidden, veiled.

Many years ago, Isidoro Berenstein (1995) took a position on child sexual abuse, a position I adopt: “What seems impossible becomes possible. It is not a relationship with another. Subjectivity is lost, there is no relationship, there is no other. Any relational explanation of these kinds of relationships is concealing and calms the guilty conscience” (p 22).

Overwhelmed subjectivity presents itself as a signifier that allows us to approach incest, that which occurs when a significant other, who should have cared for, invested in, and shown the world, becomes the source of suffering and reduces the child's subjectivity to a handful of fragmented, disconnected

remnants. Freud (1893-1895/1997) called this determining suitability and traumatic force, because what characterizes incest is the conscious behavior of the one who appropriates the child's body as a place for pleasure and a de-subjectivizing proposal.

Incest is one form of child abuse, not the only one, and in childhood, it has extremely complex effects. So naturalized, denied as much as it is denounced, incest is also used as a ghost of persecution, which is why it is important to remain alert and listen (this function that defines us as psychoanalysts) to what children have to say through their games, drawings, actions, and silences. Careful clinical exploration, fine listening, and the ethical position of the analyst become fundamentally important.

The concept of intrusion, developed by Laplanche (1992/1996) and taken up by Silvia Bleichmar (2016), is a helpful companion during the analyst's moments of solitude when faced with this clinic. Intrusion refers to the ways in which adult sexuality is expressed, its actions as sexualizing forms, exhibitionism, or what a child might see on the Internet; in short, everything that enters the psyche, creating a short circuit. Incestuous abuse has the effect of intrusion, but not all intrusion is sexual abuse in the strict sense. It is essential, and also requires much clinical work, to establish

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the always singular differences between implantation, what has not yet been translated, and intrusion, which follows the path of what is disruptive and catastrophic for the psyche.

### The position of the analyst

Psychoanalytic work with children is complex, and it becomes even more so when dealing with sexual abuse. When abuse is present in the clinic, it represents an excruciating scream in the listening.

However, as psychoanalysts, I believe it is essential to refrain from falling into the temptation of becoming detectives searching for indicators, or behavioral therapists correcting anomalies, or substitutes for the caregiver. One of the common risks is that we may become attached to horror and curiosity, or focused on discovering truths, while the child or adolescent is once again reduced to the place of an object in an abusive treatment

The concept of intrusion takes on significant relevance in psychoanalytic practice, especially when working with a subjectivity that has been overwhelmed and, therefore, impoverished. I understand that it is about psychoanalyzing with courage, through play, drawing, and words, what the patient can begin to build in the analytical space. At least in my clinical experience, I did not have any other paths available. From small fragments, loose pieces, an analysis that breaks the encapsulation of silence begins to take shape.

### Collecting some of the scattered remnants

Indicative remnants are not the same as indicators. They are almost invisible particles, at the footnotes of life, materials with which we analysts work. Never protagonists, remnants, however, produce effects and are, in Bionian terms, the undigested.

We can find these remnants, always singular, in a variety of drifts. The absence of certain subjective and subjectivizing barriers

– for example, shame and shyness – requires careful observation. Manifestations of this include compulsive masturbation (either alone or involving other children), advanced sexual knowledge, and the content of fantasies, which are out of place, dissonant, and with exciting effects. The place of fantasies is a very important dimension in any narrative; however, when children or adolescents are confronted with giving testimony of what they have experienced – especially in judicial settings (though not only there) – the presence of fantasies casts doubt on the narrative, as if there could be accounts devoid of the ghostly contribution. Luis Hornstein (2013) poses this unbreakable relationship: “Neither is fantasy a psychic production independent of any trace of events, nor is there a trauma in which the pure event is inscribed, indifferent to the fantastic world” (p 35).

Another phenomenon to consider is the perceptual remnants that appear in the narrative, when, in truth, the sensory aspect of the story is not commonly present in children’s sexual play. The previously mentioned elements, and following Bion (1963/2000), in psychoanalysis each one functions as part of something else and has, in a particularized way, a function in itself.

The mentioned elements do not necessarily imply sexual abuse, they are not indicators by themselves, even though, in my clinical experience, I have always found them present in sexually abused children, and more ostentatiously and frantically when they come from incest, since it is one of the sufferings that most deconstructs the child’s psyche, as it originates in the betrayal of trust from a significant other with whom there is a relationship of affection and dependence. It is there that we psychoanalysts face one of the most difficult and important aspects of our work in abuse situations: the body is summoned by bodily excitations (Bleichmar, 2016) that the child not only does not understand but is also not prepared to receive, all of this juxtaposed



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with the phantasmatic unfolding triggered by erotic and genital actions imposed by another significant adult.

### Drawings and words in analysis

Our discipline mainly relies on words, but the problem arises when it is really a word-thing, words invested with excitement, activating representations but unable to form connections.

In the transference, these appear as an excess of representations for the analyst and a great representational deficit for the patient (Bleichmar, 2016). Here, the display of drawings becomes especially valuable, as they overlap in such a way that each one finds a retouching in the next, and in those displacements, the signifier word, instead of remaining buried under the ground, takes flight.

### To conclude

I decided not to transcribe fragments from a clinical case that I am authorized to share, even though the entire paper was guided by it. However, at the request of the youngster who authorized me to share his story, I will take a small vignette from the analysis when he was eight years old:

My grandfather apologized to me, and I didn’t want him to help me get dressed because my bottom hurt. I will never forgive either him or my grandmother. They were all gathered in the yard, and he would grab me and take me to the workshop, and it seemed like they were pretending not to notice...

Incest leaves indelible marks.



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## The Abused Mind

Humans are fragile creatures. Sexual abuse, which occurs very frequently, deeply damages the mind of the child. One could say that they suffer from the trauma perpetually unless an analysis frees them. My experience reminds me of the girls who are frequently harmed, although boys also suffer this trauma. One patient comes to mind who, at the age of eight, caught a certain seductive look from an uncle, as if he were undressing her. The episode did not go any further, but it pierced her with lascivious violence, which she would remember with fear and shame, leaving her with a mark of hiding her adolescent sexuality. A second patient told me that a relative had abused her when she was a child; as an adult, she could only endure anal penetration. The stories do not end.

Abuse disrupts the ability to use attachments. Object relations are damaged, as is the sense of reality. The boundaries between parents and children are confused, as are loving and caring. The abused girl will implement survival techniques, including a rigid defensive emotional structure, although to achieve this, part of her must “die” (Ferenczi, 1932/1984).

The abuser is usually an adult, possessing authority, over a girl, who expects tenderness, but receives sexual passion from this adult (Ferenczi, 1932/1984). In the case of incest, the father would have annihilated his paternal

function. The helpless girl could experience her puberty and adolescence severely affected by symptoms as a result of the abuse endured. This experience may be denied by the girl due to fear of the aggressor, shame, or worse, identification with the aggressor. Or she may reveal it, although sometimes it could be ignored by the adult. Classical psychoanalysis, which seeks recollection, would not work with such patients, as in many cases, the trauma cannot be remembered. The patients might not have memories, might not be able to represent-present their mental contents, as they live – according to Martín Cabré (2018) – in a time that is diabolically present: the no-time of trauma. Countertransference will be key to access the traumatic impossible to be symbolized. Dreams, with their oneiric representations, will be fundamental.

As I write these lines, I recall a particular patient, a victim of incest during her childhood. As often happens, she had built a wall and would not allow me to get close to her—that is, to touch her emotionally. I represented her father; therefore, I was dangerous. I felt a sense of helplessness that led me to question whether the work was worth continuing. Would I be able to overcome this seemingly insurmountable wall of distrust? The question wouldn’t stop in my head. Inside, I felt incapable, bad—I wanted to run away from her. Until, after a time in which I believed myself to be psychoanalytically dead, she opened up and allowed me into her intimacy, only to im-

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mediately retreat behind her protective wall once again. These brief truces in her defensive attitude gave way to an intense pain within me, difficult to bear because of what I understood to be her defense. For her, there was no trustworthy person. She tended to dissociate parts of her own experience, turning into an automaton. She felt guilty and innocent at the same time. I wondered if she distrusted her own senses.

### Analysis as abuse

Ferenczi (1932/1984) highlighted the parallels between sexual abuse and the analytic relationship when, on certain occasions, the analyst subjects the patient to an analysis that itself becomes a source of trauma.

Analyses with patients carrying these traumas will be long and tortuous (Levine, 1990), filled with distrust, intense negative and erotic transference, enactments and impulsive actions, dissociative reactions, and blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy. The patient will equate the abuse suffered with the analytic process. She will need to test the analyst's patience and perseverance, as was the case with the patient I mentioned. Eventually, she may dare to feel, and an intense rage and hatred will arise within her. Bollas (1993) emphasizes the confusion a girl will feel when she has an abusive father, which will affect her sense of self-worth. She will carry this into analysis by devaluing the analyst. She will erect a superego barrier to protect her intimacy. If the analysis represents her mind, exploring it with the analyst will be difficult for her. She will hate the analysis, just as she will resist receiving anything from the psychoanalyst. An analysis with someone like this, as happened to me, would consist of countless attempts to test whether I am trustworthy, whether I will have patience with her, whether I will be abusive, whether I will be solid, or what boundaries I might be capable of transgressing.

She will associate the silence of analysis with a fear of reliving sexual feelings directed toward the analyst-father.

Messler Davies and Frawley (1994) observed common elements in such analytic processes, all of which highlight the immense difficulty of working with abused patients. The analyst must be consistent, available, think and feel on behalf of the abused child, and use their mind when the patient is not yet able to do so. The analyst will be attacked by the patient, surrounded by fear, helplessness, projective identifications, and incomprehensible bodily sensations. They will feel tempted to flee—something rarely acknowledged, perhaps due to the analyst's need to prove to themselves that they have infinite patience. Cases like these penetrate the deepest layers of the analyst's mind, beyond what they imagine they can endure. They demand an extremely high level of commitment, for which one does not always feel prepared, as they push the analyst to the very limits of their capacities.

The patient will need the analyst as she needs life itself, while simultaneously distrusting them. She will see them either as a sadistic abuser or as a fool who fails to notice and lets her down by not rescuing her. The analyst will feel abused, ineffective, and driven by a desire to be rescued in order to rescue the patient. And, as I have noted, the analyst will also have fantasies of escaping the analysis. However, all these powerful sensations of vanishing and not truly being there may well be projections implanted by the patient into the analyst—unconscious ways of making them feel what she still experiences without fully realizing it.

Nonetheless, if one manages to endure—not only at the end of the analytic journey but at every step of the process—it could bring hope and even save the patient's life, while also feeling, in a way, as if saving one's own.



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## Some contributions on abusive dynamics in forensic settings

With all its polysemy, the word *abuse* is one of those that runs the risk of becoming saturated, due to being repeated or misused. However, far from that fate, in forensic work, when this word is embodied, verbalized, takes shape, we come across scenes of such crudeness and terrifying aspects of the human being, that we are forced to continue looking for ways to problematize.

The field of forensics science is one in which abuse, as a concept, particularly loses the recognizable coordinates and overall structure, with which we use it colloquially. Thus, the concept is personified in a singular narrative, in which a unique depth of meaning is displayed, often secret and almost always ambiguous.

### Forensic listening to abusive dynamics

The complexity of this scenario calls us to try to refine our listening to the maximum, to review our positioning, our conceptual affiliations and our most intimate involvement.

Despite a common language, there are differences between conceptualizations and interventions. In the role of the forensic expert, these are crossed, on the one hand, by the existing legal system (in this topic, specifically, what we could call the conception of the excess of the body as a crime (decline of the law) that frames and situates our practice. Ordering principles that bias what we hear and

say, since, although not in a binding way, our reports condition the future of the accused people. It is a specific perspective but inserted in a system that transcends it, made up of other professionals whose highest link is the law.

On the other hand, as a guide and beacon, we have our involvement as subjects and the theoretical conceptualizations that format our work.

The author Caulborn Faller (1988) alerts us about possible positions: one more inclined to consider the possibility that the abuse has occurred, versus an attitude that starts *a priori* from the possibility that the abuse has not occurred, thus placing us in the controversial nature of our task.

Aspects that stand out for me personally from the multiple definitions of abuse are: first of all, that it is a form of violence. From psychoanalysis, we know of the always asymmetrical and traumatic nature of the child's encounter with adult sexuality. However, after many years of what has been called the "denialist current of child sexual abuse", today it is undisputable that when seduction is real, and no longer a privatized object of fantasy, the intrusion, as Laplanche says (1992), instead of implanting enigmatic messages to be translated, will forever leave an impossibility of translation. The razing of differences, the invasion and erasure of the other's body, which is placed as spoil, with the effects of de-subjection that this can generate.

### The forms of abuse

However, we must be aware that there is no *one single* form of child sexual abuse. Although we find many similarities, when we listen carefully to the narratives, we find that the abuse is not a homogeneous whole, nor is single model of "victim" or "perpetrator." For example, a situation of abuse in a family context of overcrowding and economic dependence on the accused is not the same as one in which the social setting allows for various protective resources.

In this sense, we can say that these are "minimal stories" that must be unfolded and that it is precisely in this singularity, *when childhoods speak*, that we come face to face with the subjective truth of the other. Although perhaps somewhat obvious, I consider this point central and at the same time I ask myself: How can this task, which implies a clearly predetermined course, be carried out without our listening being captured by the judicial machinery? Is it possible to achieve a listening that integrates these different dimensions, that -while rigorously analyzing cases in legal and right terms- can also listen to other intimate dimensions that need to be approached? How can we manage to maintain a dual gaze, a bridge between silenced, uncertain, ambiguous stories and the legal requirements from which clear, quick, synthetic and forceful responses are expected? Balancing this commitment, between two shores, is, in my view, a permanent challenge.

Personally, I believe that we can only approach this aspiration through continuous and specialized training in the subject matter, which in parallel requires work on our position, because we are warned: this is not passive or naive listening.

Some (fictional) stories resonate with me:

what he did to us was like a horror movie, I have two more sisters. Sometimes he did it

to the three of us together... at night he would sneak into our room. Afterwards, I would dream that I was throwing little bones into a river, I don't know, I don't like to talk about it... sometimes I scare myself.

And when children speak up, you have to be prepared because the anguish of the proximity of this subject is activated.

These are boys, girls and adolescents who unexpectedly come to embody unknown bodily sensations, experienced as true atrocities that bring shame, that awaken feelings of guilt and fears about themselves. Fantasies of transformation into monstrosities that can destroy, with oddities, are common. One of the elements that brutally complicates these situations is, as we have said, this drive excess in the concrete dimension of the act that subdue with violence, a true dictatorship of the other. Scenarios where the law has been transgressed, disruptive situations of an illegality that overwhelms, that steals, that scams, that traumatizes. Sinister enactment in which the other invades an intimate terrain, without permission and without law. The desire from the territories of childhood fantasy meets the forcefulness of the "real" act and the power of the traumatic, blocking the entire phantasmatic display of a sexuality that could be lived as desiring and enjoyable.

My mother had a girlfriend and sometimes she asked my brother to undress her, it was strange, I didn't really understand.

To conclude, I would like to highlight again the need to recognize and work on the ideological currents that permeate the forensic task, both in social and intimate di-

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mensions. This is a function that, like other interventions in the *psy world*, puts tension and implies human and ethical responsibility. It requires continuous work on training, revision and deconstruction of our concepts and preconceptions, to problematize the places from which we think about issues such as violence, childhood, child sexuality, constitutive paradoxes of the human that ride between (drive) excess and the limit, an unavoidable edge. An effort to sustain a state of tension, a structure of delay, a distance of rescue in order to work on our own limits and excesses, our blind spots, our myths and from there to try to minimize the always fragmented possible perspective, between what is shown and what we seem to understand, and what remains veiled and is untranslatable.

I understand that it is the responsibility of forensic operators to emphasize these aspects, since it is often in us that kind of “social care or neglect” materializes in its function of protecting or revictimizing the childhood that begins a process of reporting abuse.

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*Calibán - RLP*, 23(1), 137-139  
2025

Boia Efraime Júnior\*

# The nightmare of military violence experienced by children in Mozambique

*Of hatred and war  
the sunflower of hope grows in the world...*<sup>1</sup>

José Craveirinha, “Poema do homem e da esperança”.

On the poster advertising the 6th Congress of Psychoanalysis in the Portuguese Language, to be held in Mozambique, one reads Freud's famous phrase: “We spring from an endless series of generations of murderers, who had the lust for killing in their blood” (1915/1996, p. 296). The choice of this quote seems apt when looking at the history of Mozambique and the way in which human violence and cruelty have inflicted immeasurable suffering on children and adolescents. From the 16th century, with the beginning of Portuguese colonization in the area known today as Mozambique, a new wave of violence, brutality and unimaginable cruelty fell upon the populations of the region, now perpetrated by the colonialists, who claimed to come from a more developed civilization. Massacres, deportations, forced displacements, slave labor, sale of slaves were the mark of colonization in proportions incomparable to those of previous conflicts between the different groups that inhabited those lands. Such violence was perpetrated with the complicity of local elites. Colonization also meant collec-

tive traumatization, resulting from the brutal attempt to destroy cultures, languages, identities local and cultural references in order to impose the values and language of the colonizers, as well as the exploitation of land and natural resources to enrich the colonial metropolis. The black bodies of adults and children were subalternized, racialized, and their libidinal reserves kidnapped.

*Calves die because of lack of  
milk [...]  
and they are not hatchlings or  
worms  
are children of men, Mary.*<sup>2</sup>  
(Craveirinha, 2014, p. 88)

Portuguese colonization ended in 1975, following an armed struggle carried out by the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo). From that struggle, there are few accounts of children's participation in Frelimo or in the Portuguese army, although on both sides children have been educated to worship war and violence. During the school holidays, students of Mozambican Institute Frelimoduring would visit war zones where the Portuguese military presence was reduced to participate in the liberation of the country or undergo

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1. N. of the T.: *Do ódio e da guerra/ Cresce no mundo o girassol da esperança....*

2. N. of the T.: *Crias morrem à mingua de leite [...]/ E não são crias nem vermes/ São filhos de homens, Maria.*

military training in military instruction centers Frelimo(Laweke, November 2, 2011). This so-called “revolutionary” violence, was enshrined as a high patriotic value. On the side of the Portuguese government, the children were integrated into the Portuguese Youth, an organization with fascist ideas, as stated in colonial decree no. 29.453 (February 17, 1939) which created it: a “pre-military” organization, which would stimulate “devotion to the Portuguese Homeland [...], the formation of character, and which, by instilling in them a sense of order, a taste for discipline and the cult of military duty, would put them in a position to contribute effectively to the defense of the Nation” (p. 120).

In an article with the suggestive title “History always repeats itself twice”, Feijó (August 20, 2024) writes about what can be called the compulsion to violence in Mozambique, highlighting that the rejection and removal of the colonial regime in 1975, with Mozambique’s independence, did not interrupt a set of structural factors that generate conflict, particularly the excessive centralization of State power, as well as the violence of the State and economic exploitation, particularly of the extractive industry and forestry, which forced the resettlement of the population, exacerbated social tensions and contributed to the persistence of poverty phenomena and the non-existence of spaces for participation, emerging “violence as the only effectively effective space for pressure and social transformation” (p. 5). However, it is important to add intrapsychic mechanisms resulting from collective trauma to these structural factors, especially the impotence experienced in the exposure to the external factors of the devastating violence suffered, which found no internal protection, the terror and anguish, which, not being metabolized, are expressed in a compulsion to repeat, in a dehumanization of the Other who thinks differently and of the subject himself. Mechanisms such as the control, the postponement and the sublimation of the instinctual and animal

forces of man, both aggressive and sexual, are postponed in these contexts of violence. The factors pointed out by Feijó, associated with the aforementioned intrapsychic phenomena, imposed the repetition of violence a year after the proclamation of independence. A new armed conflict began in 1976, opposing the government Frelimo to the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo). A peace agreement signed in 1992 would often be violated, as happened between 2013 and 2016, when Renamo, considering the space for political dialogue exhausted, resorted again to the use of military violence.

The vast majority of children used in Renamo’s ranks were abducted between the ages of six and fourteen. At Renamo military bases, boys were separated from girls. The children’s training began with political indoctrination and initial civilian tasks, as illustrated by the case of Silvestre, recruited at the age of nine:

I was kidnapped with my mother in the [village of] Manhica and I was still a little boy. And then there in the jungle I saw my mother killed like a chicken. I don’t remember if I had the courage to cry, because there, whoever cried for something like that was also killed. [I saw people killed because they could not stand the training. My greatest suffering was to go without food many times, because they said I was a baby and since I didn’t do anything I had no right to eat. But just look at that, what was my fault for being a baby and not being able to go to the attacks [...] One day they forced me to smoke marijuana with gunpowder, I was drugged, and they gave me a gun to shoot.

Since I had already seen other older guys do it in training, I didn’t have much difficulty in pulling the trigger and there I started making the gun sing. They liked it and then they taught me how to attack and other defensive and offensive moves. And I did well because I was a kid and I had agility and curiosity at the same time. From there, I started to participate in raids on villages, on canteens, and I didn’t catch anybody. I knew what I had to do and I did it with expertise. I was a real soldier, perhaps better than many adults (Castanheira, 1999, p. 26).

The girls were used as slave labor and sexually exploited, as Aida reports:

They took me along with my mother and my four siblings. [...] The first days we only went to fetch water from the river and to gather cashew to prepare drinks for the chiefs. [...] I also had a chief husband, who already had five wives. Each soldier had at least one woman, from among the girls and young women taken. (pp. 23-24)

Referring to these experiences, one girl told me in a therapy session that her life in the military base had been worse than any nightmare she had already lived through.

The government Frelimo also incorporated children and adolescents into its armed forces, particularly into the paramilitary forces.

Since 2017, a group of mostly youth people calling themselves Al-Shabaab, allegedly Islamic extremist militants, once again turned

to arms as a means of pressure and social transformation, once again trivializing their own lives and those of hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans.

Civilization and culture, religious, state and social order, considerable efforts to contain and control violence in coexistence according to criteria of rationality have so far failed to interrupt the cycles of conflict and the perverse use of children in the wars in Mozambique. Structural factors at the political, economic and social levels, as well as the collective trauma, need to be addressed and elaborated to avoid a repetition.

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## Reflections on the experience of rebirth in children with stolen childhoods

I thank the colleagues at *Calibán* for the invitation to think about a topic as complex and necessary as the issue of *stolen childhoods*. When I was invited to participate in this important project, numerous faces of Mexican children we have cared for in various penitentiaries throughout my country came instantly to my mind. These are faces that transmit profound suffering and a lamentable lack of protection of the social and legal fabric in all its dimensions. These little ones must share spaces with their mothers, grow up confined with no exposure to the world outside the prison (98% do not know what the Moon is), and are exposed to multiple situations of violence<sup>1</sup>.

I will start by mentioning Reinserta, a non-profit civil association in Mexico City, which has developed several programs aimed at breaking crime circles by implementing play spaces for children in Mexican penitentiaries. My experience with this association since 2015 allowed me to develop the project I named "Psychoanalytic Clinic with Mothers and Sons/Daughters in Prison: Gestures Towards the Construction of Being" (Villarreal, A., 2024). This project works with mothers and children in prison through the

groundbreaking 'Play and Raise'<sup>2</sup> program, which aims to promote the healthy development of children under three years of age living in prison while strengthening the social and parenting skills of their mothers. In 2023, I presented this program in the Senate of the Republic of Mexico to advocate for the creation of a General Law of Shared Maternity and legislation that envisions.

Expanding my field of work beyond the consulting room has allowed me to observe firsthand the pain of childhood in situations of marked social injustice. Galeano (2020) and Rodríguez C. (2020) point out that the psychic effects of sexual abuse and violence on children encompass a wide range of psychic suffering and deep fears.

For reasons of space, I will not mention the importance of including the analyst at the psychosocial borders; instead, I refer to the valuable contributions made in the Direction of Community and Culture as well as in Childhood and Adolescence by FEPAL, Fe-

BRAPsi, and IPA<sup>3</sup>. The work of D. Winnicott (1991) also contributes to the treatment and understanding of wounded childhoods, demonstrating the multiple ruptures in the existential continuity of these children. I highlight Cimenti's contribution (2020) in "Marked Lives", a Manifesto published by FEPAL, who expressed: "The historical truth of children and adolescents who, from birth, endure mistreatment such as hunger, misery, or serious social wounds, must emerge from invisibility" (p. 1841).

The encounter with these little ones and their mothers in prison has transformed my view of the human being y and of the world. It is also this enriching experience that allows me to share some reflections on the topic that brings us together: stolen childhoods. Childhood should be a stage of life in which children can grow, learn, and play in a safe environment. However, what can we say about the 700 million children in the world—and probably hundreds of millions more—whose childhood have been *stolen* before their time?

Rascovsky A. has denounced this tragic reality since 1976 in the following manner:

The slaughter, mortification, denigration, and abandonment of children has become so evident that the scientific approach to the problem must begin with the discovery of the universal denial that weighs upon such widespread phenomena in which we are all passive or active actors (p. 105).



**Roberto Huarcaya**

*Unveiled Bodies* (2017 - ongoing). Series of portraits featuring photographers, curators, collectors, who have contributed to the visibility of visual production in Latin America. These portraits explore the subject's identity through the shadow cast in their gestures and body posture. Approximately 2.20m x 1.10m frames, the individuals portrayed directly reclined on photosensitive paper. The series currently includes nearly 100 subjects. Each file bears the name of the portrayed individual: "Juan Travnik".

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1. In Mexico, women who become pregnant during their imposed sentence have the right to live with their children until they reach three years of age (Leyva, 2017).

2. The "Play and Raise" program offers specialized areas of work designed to facilitate gestures that promote the construction of *being* within the caregiving couple.

3. FEPAL has had a Community and Culture Committee for decades, known as the Directorate of Community and Culture. The Brazilian Federation of Psychoanalysis (FEBRAPSI) created a device called Psychoanalytic Observation (PO), through which psychoanalysts write essays on socio-political and cultural events that demand and deserve a psychoanalytic perspective (Villarreal A., 2024).



Aray J. (1992), for instance, described seven varieties of child abuse and destruction of children, among which are: the exploited child, the abandoned child, and the seduced child. Following this proposal, it might be advisable to consider as synonyms: *stolen childhoods*, *lost childhoods*, *forgotten childhoods*, if we agree that the common point among these terms is the reference to the fact that the children belonging to this population have been deprived of a possibility—the possibility of being children and of living a dignified life.

Freud's early contributions (1895) regarding maltreatment precisely stemmed from the effects of abuse (particularly sexual abuse) on individual development. The Viennese author addressed difficult realities such as childhood sexuality and the power of our impulses, and was able to recognize these experiences of inappropriate sexualization of children. Psychoanalysis also allows us to distinguish the notions of infancy, childhood, and the infantile as intimately related entities that are often used interchangeably. In 2021, the Latin American journal *Calibán* dedicated two issues to the theme that inspired the 2021 IPA Congress: *The Infantile*. As Raya Zonana (2021) rightly points out, the infantile does not belong to any specific age; it is present at every moment of life but is structured within a time we call childhood<sup>4</sup>.

What is relevant in relation to the topic at hand is that all these contributions highlight the importance of remembering the meaning of the term *childhood*. It is not a coincidence that in Latin, the term *infantia* means “the one who does not speak” (the inability to speak). I emphasize Viñar's definition of childhood as a continuous construction of the human being

(2020), as I believe it illustrates an important position to consider when working with vulnerable populations. Although stolen childhoods are regarded as a type of maltreatment and a problem that remains invisible in society, carrying severe short- and long-term consequences for all its victims, the commitment to think about and investigate issues related to various forms of human suffering opens gaps and offers hope. Viñar (2010) opens a door to hope when he asserts:

We are not constructed or inhabited by a single childhood, the one we lived or believe we lived, but by multiple childhoods; we are inhabited by that childhood we longed for but could not build, and by the childhood we feared and could not inhabit. The childhoods that inhabit or assail us are many” (p. 40).

Accordingly, we can affirm that if childhood is that silent aspect that endures in the individual, it is also that which does not leave when childhood comes to an end; it endures as a living sediment. Everything that does not go away and that under the forms of living and collective sediments marks the texture of our therapeutic interventions participates in the gestation of the psychic matrix of the breeding couple that accounts for a rebirth. Consequently, Viñar (2020) states, “We are born twice: once biologically (date and time) and another birth that is gradual and germinates progressively” (p. 40). Thus, maintaining the singular perspective offered by psychoanalysis regarding experiences such as stolen childhoods makes it an invaluable therapeutic tool in any context.

I conclude with a reflection from Eizirik (1997) that demonstrates how essential our commitment is to the issue at hand, which

also raises new questions and promotes future research on the subject. I concur with the author, who wrote: “We can conclude at least with a shared conviction: our key (psychoanalysis) has already been used to open many doors, but more than a thousand others are waiting for us” (p. 181).

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4. According to Tanis B. (2021), the Infantile serves as an identifying marker of the human condition; all psychoanalysts engage with and confront this psychic dimension. The infantile does not only pertain to children's analysts; it is not merely synonymous with childhood or developmental stages (p. 9).

## *Kiwethesagwex Luuḥ*: Learning to Care for the Seed of Life. From Stolen Childhoods to Nurtured Childhoods\*\*

*Ewcha namicu!* Greetings in Nasayuwe to the friends of *Caliban*. In this text you will find the story of a true process of social regeneration (Volkan, 2014/2018) taking place in a place called Tierra Adentro. Located in the department of Cauca, at the junction of the mountain ranges of the Colombian massif, it was named thus by the Spanish colonizers due to its difficult access; originally it is Inzá for the indigenous people. There we are welcomed by our connection to the Nasa community (which means “people”), also known as the Páez culture.

The rural territory of Cauca, inhabited by peasant, Afro-Colombian, and Indigenous communities, is one of the most stigmatized regions due to its long history of being devastated by armed conflict. The general public knows little about the diversity of traditions of the peoples who inhabit Cauca, about its impressive archaeological sites dating back to 900 BCE, and about its cultural and spiritual roots that are closely linked to nature and biodiversity. Instead, public perception has been fossilized by media headlines about guerrilla takeovers, murdered social leaders,

kidnappings, threats, persecution, and forced displacement caused by wars fought between drug trafficking economies and illegal mining. The conflict resurfaces time and again, dating back to colonial times, over territorial control.

All this represents a historical tension that Colombians are still struggling to heal—a wound that has yet to stop bleeding. Some people view the wars in Cauca as mere evidence of the region’s impenetrability. They see violence spreading like a virus and conclude that the inhabitants must be naturally savage. Given the magnitude of the historical, collective, and massive trauma, the overarching solution has been to keep Cauca isolated and forgotten, to see if not only the guerrillas but also the indigenous people (ignorantly taken equally) disappear from the national identity and cultural memory.

The Colombian public in general is unaware that one of the first feminists in the country’s history was born in Cauca: the cacica (chieftainess) Gaitana, who fought against the Spanish by uniting various Indigenous groups against the Spanish colonizers. She did so in retaliation for the cruel murder of her son, avenging him by sowing the seed of an alliance among Indigenous peoples—a union that still exists today among the Nasa and their Indigenous brothers and sisters in Cauca, now joined by some Indigenous groups from Ecuador.

\* Sociedad Colombiana de Psicoanálisis.

\*\* I extend my warmest thanks to the Hio family (Luz Hio, Flor Hio, José Hio, Angélica Hio de Ecue, and the twenty-four children involved in the process) for their hospitality, emotional generosity and openness to my presence and that of the teacher Juan Diego Casallas.



**Roberto Huarcaya**

*Unveiled Bodies* (2017 - ongoing). Series of portraits featuring photographers, curators, collectors, who have contributed to the visibility of visual production in Latin America. These portraits explore the subject’s identity through the shadow cast in their gestures and body posture. Approximately 2.20m x 1.10m frames, the individuals portrayed directly reclined on photosensitive paper. The series currently includes nearly 100 subjects. Each file bears the name of the portrayed individual: “Luis Camnitzer”.

The absence of state presence in the department of Cauca is taken for granted, but it became even more evident after the 2016 peace agreements. In many municipalities, neither family welfare nor the Ministry of Education and other entities necessary for the expected social transformation did not arrive. Instead, the “pedagogy of terror” returned—the way armed groups intimidate civilians, extorting them with protection fees, and filling them with fear and hopelessness (Sánchez, 2020). In the personal and family histories of the people here, we can see a true clinic of cruelty (Fernández, 2013). A reality where the lack of basic guarantees (food, security, education) mixes with intense gender-based violence, domestic abuse, alcoholism—especially among men—violence against ecosystems and native species, and one of the most alarming realities: the recruitment of minors.

Children are kidnapped by armed forces, taken away from their families, and indoctrinated as part of the war machinery. In other cases, children themselves, facing extreme family violence or poverty, voluntarily join armed groups, seeing them as a way out of the Indigenous and peasant life that, tragically, remains at the mercy of Cauca’s multidimensional crisis.

Faced with this hostile reality, the Nasa people, in their gathering of allied Indigenous groups, continue to nurture the seed planted by Cacica Gaitana. They have established their own ancestral organization called La Guardia Indígena (The Indigenous Guard), welcoming the diverse peoples of the region and addressing their needs. It is a large movement of resistance, unity, and autonomy in defense of their territory, including a life plan for Indigenous communities. They do not consider themselves a police force but rather a humanitarian and civil resistance group (CRIC, November 20, 2024). Among their many responsibilities, La Guardia Indígena is committed to protecting the *seeds of life*—their term for children. To this end, they promote alternative peda-

gological processes, one of which is *Kiwethesagwex Luuḥ* (meaning “children guardians of the seed, the territory, life, and culture”).

This initiative, born within La Guardia Indígena, has been embraced by thousands of people who are trained as “territorial facilitators.” It represents the transformational desire of those who have suffered violence firsthand and of their descendants who identify with the struggle. Together, they bring vital energy to hundreds of projects that instill in children the rich cultural identity of the Nasa people—a community whose strong collective ties are essential to their survival as an indigenous people and to the recovery of their territory, both concrete and psychic.

*Kiwethesagwex Luuḥ* is a project that is now 34 months old. The facilitators are specifically members of the same family—three siblings who come together to care for their own children as well as those from nearby villages. Their methodology is itinerant: children gather on Saturdays to engage in five different learning areas (out of ten recommended by the Regional Council of Cauca), including traditional food preparation, dance, music, language learning (Nasayuwe), and territorial exploration. Described by the facilitators as a “pedagogy of hope,” learning takes place outdoors in the villages, resisting the confinement of classrooms—a monodisciplinary and hierarchical approach they associate with colonization and Catholic evangelization.

In the open spaces of the mountains, children learn new ways of relating to life. In the *tul nasa* (meaning “community garden”), they learn to identify plants and their uses, and they watch their own food grow (called “own food” not only because it is endemic but also because it exists outside of mass production and distribution chains). They also learn to care for animals, creating interspecies kinships (Haraway, 2019). Plastic toys—so indispensable for urban children—are unnecessary here; imagination still unfolds among the trees. This is their

spontaneous rebellion against the Capitalocene (Haraway, 2019).

The facilitators’ goal for these seeds of life is to “make their lives more livable.” To achieve this, they believe learning must be experiential, relational, and connected to nature’s wisdom. Each child’s abilities develop through personal integrity; progress is measured by their growing freedom of expression and capacity for play in self-chosen areas. Some dream of becoming teachers, reflecting a powerful emotional exchange that fosters mutual identification beneficial to the community. The child identifies with the teacher, stimulating their epistemic instinct and recognizing themselves as a transmitter of knowledge (which we know is crucial for intergenerational health). Meanwhile, the facilitator identifies with the child’s innate desire to play and explore, allowing them to heal aspects of their own childhood. This process supports the regeneration of the empathetic self-object (Kohut, 1977/1980) as well as the internal group structure (Pichon-Rivière, 1971).

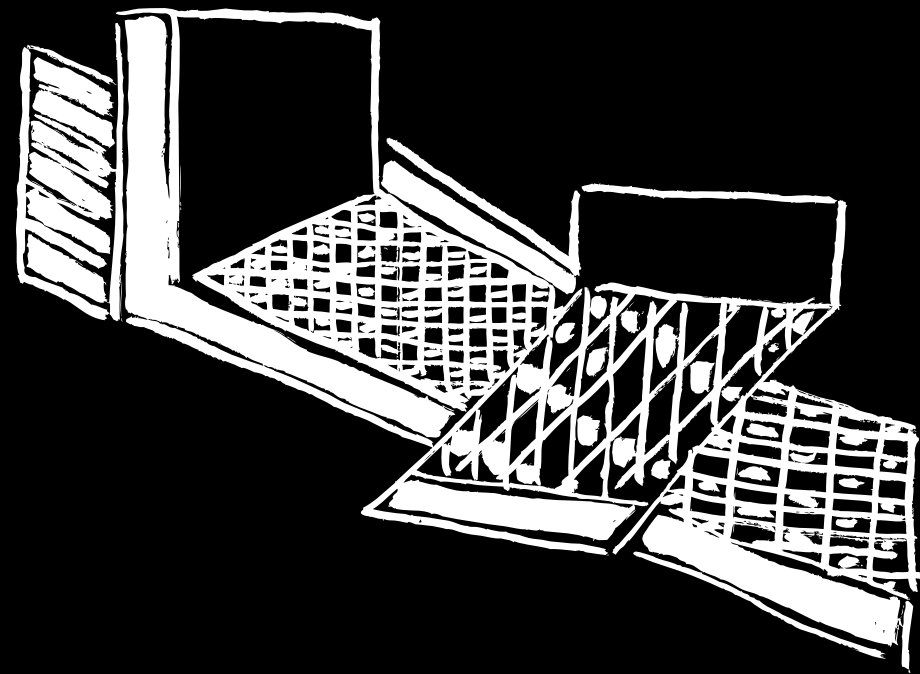
This profound awareness among parents and caregivers about the importance of intergenerational transmission enables collective trauma—such as the ongoing assassinations of social leaders—to be processed even by children. In their songs, they remember murdered comrades, honoring them as part of their memory and drawing strength to love life and the peace it embodies. This redirection of trauma and violent impulses into art serves as a symbolic function that seems to have been absent for centuries. Without it, the people of this territory have been trapped in an alienating transmission in which violence and madness seemed to be the only options (Ciccone, 1998).

At least fourteen families in the village have rekindled their connection to Nasa artistic expressions through their children’s participation in this alternative education process. The mourning process, the struggle against psychotic potential, and the healthy

transpsychic transmission (Kaës, 1996) radiate from the expressive and playful faces of these children, nurtured by their heritage and their true selves. The adults shout, “Guardia, guardia!” and the children respond, “Strength! Strength!”

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Incident



**Roberto Huarcaya**

*Living Nature* (1997). Series that arose intuitively after working for a little over a year in the psychiatric hospital and a month in the morgue. Photo 4, 1.00 m x 1.40 m, Cibachrome.

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2025

Abigail Betbedé\* and José Galeano\*\*

## The power of seduction

**Incident** brings something that insists on being heard, something that lingers at the bottom of the inkwell waiting to be written or to slip through the cracks of conversations. An incident, by definition, is not sought: it reveals itself to us. And once it erupts and we pronounce it, it affects us, modifying our course.

In “*The Theory of the Seducer*”, as Freud once did, Laurent de Sutter leads the reader through a plot where he subtly builds a noble concept only to, in a second moment, introduce a twist that calls it into question, thus opening up new perspectives and lines of thought. Paradoxically, in the end, the seducer would be nothing more and nothing less than a necessary antihero to prevent seduction.

With insight, it is suggested that, prior to the pursuit of pleasure, what seduces us most is the avoidance of displeasure—a return to the inorganic that is embodied in order. In this version, Don Juan would be, on the one hand, the guardian of the *status quo*, since by condemning him, we avoid seduction/chaos, preserving order. But at the same time, he could also be the architect of a disorder/seduction that is essential for life.

Jorge Reitter, in “*The Seduction of Knowledge and the Desire of the Psychoanalyst*”, when addressing a pressing topic such as sexual difference today, makes a strong case for not being seduced by the power of transference, by the “power of knowledge,” which is invariably used in favor of normalization—even within psychoanalysis itself.

**Incident** deals with the seduction inherent in power. In this case, a normative seduction that operates to the detriment of the experience of the unconscious and desire, stripping sexuality of all its seductive and subversive aspects. We believe there is a seduction in normativity—one that is lethal—and a necessary seduction as disorder within order, that untamed place where the true power of seduction resides.

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## Seducer Theory

A. What is a seducer? Nobody knows. No one knows because no one has ever taken the trouble to study how the figure of the seducer is created: to observe its appearance, its crystallization, and its transformation<sup>1</sup>. The seducer, like so many other figures in the world of culture, belongs to the domain of archetypes: he is the embodiment of a generalization without effect. From this generalization, the history of literature has provided the greatest figures: Don Juan, Casanova, Valmont, James Bond; so many names that resonate today with a certain harmonic *cringe*. And yet, history has never been concerned with the way in which it has chosen these figures; or rather, with the way in which it has inherited them beyond itself. When the seducer performs his entrance on the scene of letters, it is as the representative of a way of conceiving a certain state of the world that is anything but literary: anything but artistic. The seducer embodies a *danger*, and this *danger* always has to pay a price: hell, decadence, ridicule, or old age. Far from being a kind of fascinating human hapax that jumps from bed to bed, the seducer offers himself first as an *infringement*: as a crime that requires a sanction for the one who has committed it. That is to say, the seducer is first of all a *criminal*: it is he who, by his behavior, violates the rules that can govern the domain of the relations of desire between human beings. He is not an allegory, an image, a symbol or a symptom, he is the very concrete object of a set of juridical devices intended to make possible the *order of families* to be maintained (Donzelot, 1979). For there to be a seducer, there must be seduction, and seduction, at least in European history, has been one of the main concerns of all those for whom the promulgation of rules of *good relations* had to be a priority. Before literature began singing the merits (or demerits) of seducers, jurists had made them real in the form of a set of specific characteristics of the one who comes to *hinder the family*. In fact, this is the accusation that has always been made against the seducer: to intervene from an unwanted outside in order to disrupt the normal mechanism of the transmission of lineage and patrimony: that is, marriage. There is no other definition of the seducer: he is the one who breaks the marriage<sup>2</sup>.

B. To tell the truth, for a long time it was not so much seduction as such that interested the jurists, but rather the violence with which one individual (hypothetically male) sought to take possession of another (hypothetically female) in order to make her his or her spouse. In particular, Roman jurists devoted considerable effort to defining the limits of what they called *raptus*: that is, rape for the purpose of forcing a nubile girl into marriage (Papakonstantinou, 2020)<sup>3</sup>. Even if they held an ambivalent relationship to rape (Rome was founded on the rape of Rhea Silvia by Mars), the Romans also nurtured an incessant preoccupation with the question of *continuity* (de Sutter, 2023). What was important to them was the possibility that that which was the support of the structure of Roman society (i.e., the patriarchal family) would be eternalized both materially and genealogically. The solution of continuity that Roman law organized was then a solution based on the return of the name through filiation and the return of the patrimony through the relay of the *patria potestas* (Thomas, 1986/2005)<sup>4</sup>. In such a context, anything that might interrupt the normal course of the transmission of name and patrimony was considered undesirable. *Raptus* was one of these causes of interruption that Roman law pursued with virulence; it opened a bifurcation in the logic of family continuity that it instituted. Whoever raped a girl in order to marry her off affected not only the body of the family, of which the girl was a kind of member, but also the order of continuity. For the Romans, however, seduction as such (*se-ducere*, in Latin) was not considered-at least seduction as an attempt to make oneself loved or desired by someone with the goal of persuading him or her to marry (*ducere*, in Latin, means “marry” or “betroth”). There were enough legal levers to remove an undesirable if he or she tried to impose himself or herself, since the marriage of a child in *patria potestate* at that time required parental consent to be considered valid (Girard, 1906/2003)<sup>5</sup>. As long as it did not involve violence, “simple” seduction could be ignored: it did not challenge the Roman order of family continuity.

C. This was *a fortiori* the case for Christian theologians, who understood as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century that marriage, as a sacrament involving only the spouses uniting before God, does not even require parental consent to be considered valid. Seduction is absent from the canonical doctrine of marriage for the simple reason that, as long as there is no violence, the feelings and vows that two Christians can exchange belong to the reserved domain of divine grace (Melchior-Bonnet and Salles, 2009)<sup>6</sup>. However, this was not to everyone’s liking. First of all, the Protestants did not like it because it was absurd to consider marriage a sacrament when God himself was only a witness - and not the decisive actor (Weis, 2019). It was then the monarchical power, first in France, that decided to respond to a series of demands that had emerged in society - demands that, moreover, satisfied the royal will to intervene more and more in the lives of the subjects (Vickermann-Ribémont and

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1. See the studies collected in *Séduction et sociétés. Approches historiques*, under the direction of Cécile Dauphin and Arlette Farge (2001). A general attempt has already been undertaken by Robert Muchembled in *La séduction: Une passion française* (2023).

2. For a canonical formulation of this definition, see: Fournel (1781) and Hoarau (2021).

3. See also: Papakonstantinou (2024).

4. See also: Thomas (2017).

5. On this point, see also: Rey (2024).

6. See also: Gaudemet (1987) and Bologne (1995).



White-Le Goff, 2014). When Henry II issued his edict on “clandestine marriages” in 1559, he was the first monarch to intervene in an institution that had hitherto been reserved for the Church, and to do so against Church doctrine. The ensuing conflicts between the monarchy and the papacy lasted until the Council of Trent, which respected the official doctrine of the Church, and led French jurists to propose a compromise that resulted in the Ordinance of Blois in 1579. According to this ordinance, the conciliar doctrine had to be respected (marriage is a sacrament not susceptible to annulment for lack of parental consent), but this opened the way to a new cause of nullity: seductive abduction (Duguit, 1886)<sup>7</sup>. Instead of attributing the invalidity of a marriage to the lack of parental consent, it was attributed to a *presumption*: if there had been no consent, it had to be presumed that there had been seduction (p. 616). This could only exist on the basis of fallacious promises that such a marriage could take place - which assimilated these promises to abduction, even if it was carried out without violence. Seduction ultimately took on a definitive form within the legal universe: it was the structural legal equivalent of force in that it led to abduction - but it differed in that the force in question was neither physically nor symbolically proven.

**D.** The idea of an abduction of seduction, which would duplicate the abduction of violence known since the Romans, was an idea as brilliant as it was contradictory; above all, it was an idea that reintegrated seduction into the order of the family - as it had been from the monarchical will to supervise it. The seducer is no longer the one who comes to disturb an order that cannot be touched, but the one whose every word and action is presumed to be directed against that order - and thus against the monarchical power that seeks to guarantee it (Baudrillard, 1979; Olender and Sojcher, 1980)<sup>8</sup>. *Seduction is disorder*, a disorder without brutality or violence, but a disorder nonetheless, insofar as it implies a relaxation, a distension within the system of decisions and norms that define what a family is within the monarchical space. *But it is the disorder that this order needs*, the disorder that the order presupposes in order to be able to rebuild itself around what shapes its priorities: linear descent, vertical authority, submission to power, the primacy of the rule over the will. By presuming seduction, the Blois ordinance also *presumed* that whoever acted in the opposite direction was not acting at all - and that any action framed within this presumption was an action that could be suppressed. *Those who have been seduced are no longer themselves* - so it is necessary to restore them to themselves, to put them back *in their place* within the family as well as the national space. But this presumption, like all similar ones, was a mechanism of fiction: by presuming, one affirmed the reality of something that one knew had not taken place - in the name of something else, more important (Thomas, 2011). To presume seduction was, in a sense, to *fantasize* the promises that made it possible, in turn, to rebuild a wall around family morality - a wall around the order of things, that is, the legitimate logic of the distribution of power. Therefore, when Jacques

7. Léon Duguit, *loc. cit.* p. 611 et seq.

8. This idea is part of what could be called the “boomer theory of seduction”, the popularity of which is still intact.



**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Living Nature* (1997). Series that arose intuitively after working for a little over a year in the psychiatric hospital and a month in the morgue. Photo 3, 1.00 m x 1.40 m, Cibachrome.

Lacan (1962-1963/2004) described the figure of Don Juan as “a feminine fantasy”, he wasn’t mistaken: the seducer is indeed a fantasy - in the sense of what belongs to the imaginary without the real, saving the symbolic (Lacan, 2004). *The seducer is the alibi for order*; he is its flip side - in the same way that, in Molière’s play, the Commander is none other than the inverted image of Don Juan himself (and vice versa). The seducer is what prevents all seduction.

**E.** It is necessary to conclude that only order is seductive.

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The Seduction of Knowledge  
and the Psychoanalyst’s Desire\*\*

Within the limited space available, I want to focus on what I believe is the stance we must uphold as psychoanalysts when faced with the many contemporary transformations in how genders and eroticisms are perceived, lived, and experienced today. I will further consider what I see as the temptation we must resist if we want to remain psychoanalysts. This is a relatively simple yet fundamental issue, as I believe this is precisely where the greatest obstacles arise. It is simple but not easy, as evidenced by the fact that highly diverse psychoanalytic currents have historically found it difficult—and still do—to sustain themselves as analysts when confronted with non-normative sexualities or with genders that fall outside the male/female binary. It is no coincidence, in this regard, that what Joyce McDougall calls *The Many Faces of Eros* entered psychoanalytic theory under the category of ‘sexual aberrations’, a characterization that already carried within it an implicit biological (and thus non-psychoanalytic) reading of sexual difference.

The way sexual difference is read is in constant transformation. In recent decades, and not without struggle, a playful and experimental space has opened up, making room for identities that are not confined to just two boxes—male or female—nor to relationships strictly ‘between the sexes’. Of course, it is not the role of psychoanalysis to propose or promote these new possibilities, but neither should it hinder, censor, or pathologize them. The seduction we must resist, I believe, is that of positioning ourselves as specialists in sexuality, which all too easily leads to becoming regulators of ‘proper’ sexuality. Fortunately, no one seeks permission from psychoanalysts to decide how to name themselves in terms of what we call gender, or how to enjoy their own body and the body of others. The movements and activist struggles that have reshaped how sexual difference, genders, and eroticisms are understood do not require either psychoanalytic theory or practice—although some may have drawn inspiration from the queerer aspects of psychoanalytic theory, just as others have sought to challenge its more conservative and normative dimensions, both in theory and practice.

As psychoanalysts, we bear a great responsibility toward those who turn to us in search of an answer to their anxieties, fears, limitations, feelings of guilt, and so on. If we are to offer psychoanalysis, we have the responsibility to step away

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\*\* This paper is an elaboration of the presentation I was invited to give at the 35th FEPAL Congress, as part of the panel titled *Sexual Difference Today*.



**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Living Nature* (1997). Series that arose intuitively after working for a little over a year in the psychiatric hospital and a month in the morgue. Photo 5, 1.00 m x 1.40 m, Cibachrome.

from any position of knowledge about what is good for the analysand. The power granted by transference can lead those who seek our help to place us in the role of experts on sex. And it is precisely when psychoanalysts accept that role that psychoanalysis has often operated—against its very essence—in a conservative and normative way. This is truly regrettable, because what is most intrinsic to psychoanalysis, what established it as an entirely new discourse and praxis, is precisely the opposite: being the praxis that, by refusing to propose any ideal, opened up a space for desire—the most open, the most indeterminate. It is worth remembering that psychoanalysis emerged from hypnosis and that the temptation to fall back into it is always present.

I have always been struck by the fact that Freud, in the context of his theorization on sexual diversity, returned to the notion of suggestion.” In footnote 5 of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud states: “The fact of a person struggling in this way against a compulsion towards inversion may perhaps determine the possibility of his being influenced by suggestion” (Freud, 1953 (1905)). Beyond the absence of any inquiry in the text into the origin of this struggle “against the compulsion towards inversion” - and setting aside the fact that no one would speak of a “compulsion towards heterosexuality” - , it is noteworthy that the very founder of psychoanalysis, while theorizing about “inversion” within a psychiatric (rather than a psychoanalytic) discourse, would regress to his hypnotic period and invoke suggestion. To influence the “compulsion towards inversion” through suggestion is already an attempt to normalize - a kind of subtle *conversion therapy* - precisely the opposite of the analytic path.

Similarly, in the case history Freud published under the title *The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman* (1920/1976)<sup>1</sup>, we read: “As a rule the homosexual is not able to give up the object which provides him with pleasure, and one cannot convince him that if he made the change he would rediscover in the other object the pleasure that he has renounced” (p. 145). But if someone is in the position of analyst, they are not supposed to convince anyone of anything. Beyond the absurdity of a psychoanalyst imagining that the object of one’s original investments could be replaced by another, more suitable to social norms. My aim in pointing out these Freudian regressions to suggestion is not to criticize Freud—he did more than enough. That would be too short-sighted. What I seek to show is that failing to recognize the effects of the *scientia sexualis* device that took hold in psychoanalysis (and from which we have yet to free ourselves) leads us—despite our best intentions—to reinstating normative frameworks, even if we dress them up in psychoanalytic vocabulary and theorization.

I find it crucial that, as psychoanalysts, we do not allow ourselves to be seduced by the temptation to assume the position of experts applying a referential knowledge<sup>2</sup> about what would be, in any sense, good or healthy for those who consult us. This is particularly important since, for highly complex reasons that I will not develop here<sup>3</sup>, psychoanalysis has made a very conservative and normative use of the place that *anatomical sexual difference* (for which it establishes a referential knowledge that functions as a universal interpretative grid) would occupy in the way each subject subjectivizes themselves. This led to the idea that the way one reaches orgasm holds significant relevance for how the subject is structured and how an analysis unfolds. Genital heterosexuality became the only unequivocal sign of the “acceptance” of anatomical sexual difference and, consequently, of “castration” as the fundamental operation of the subject in relation to lack. Within this logic, only heterosexuals would have achieved a relationship with the world, with others, and with sexuality that is not affected by a disavowal.

The heteronormativity of psychoanalysis is thus linked to the persistence, within the field of psychoanalysis, of a concept whose psychoanalytic coherence is highly dubious: “perversion.” In a very interesting article on the subject, Tim Dean asks where all the perverts who proliferated in the 19th century have gone, given that they have virtually disappeared in the 21st century. He answers:

it would be plausible to regard the late twentieth century as the era of the pervert’s virtual extinction—were it not for its longevity in French psy-

1. This, the only case history of an LGBTQ+ patient by Freud (except if we consider Leonardo, like Lionel Le Corre, as another Freudian case), is a completely anti-psychoanalytic case history.

2. Lacan distinguishes between **textual knowledge** and **referential knowledge** to problematize psychoanalysis’ relationship with knowledge. Referential knowledge assumes that discourse relies on an external reality that provides it with a foundation, as if there were a pre-existing knowledge independent of language to which the analyst could have access. In this model, the analyst would assume the position of an expert applying knowledge about what is good or appropriate for the subject, based on references external to their own speech. Lacan challenges this perspective, arguing that psychoanalysis, in working with the unconscious, cannot operate based on pre-established truths but must instead recognize that knowledge is constructed within the subject’s own enunciation.

3. For further discussion, see my book *Heteronormativity and Psychoanalysis: Oedipus Gay*, Routledge, 2023.

choanalytic discourse. If today one wishes to see creatures such as the buffalo that were amazingly populous during the nineteenth century, one must go to the zoo; likewise if one wishes to observe perverts in the twenty-first century, one must turn to the place where they have been corralled: the pages of the *Ecole de la Cause Freudienne*. (Dean, 2008)

We should strongly challenge the persistence of a category that has undoubtedly been deeply harmful to many people—provided we do not allow ourselves to be seduced by the supposed infallibility of a master's word. Today, there is an extensive body of literature, both within and beyond psychoanalysis, that allows us to rethink these categories.

What we, as analysts, may think about our analysands' decisions—the ways in which they name themselves, experience pleasure, or reach orgasm—is of no importance whatsoever in the way an analysis is conducted. Our task is solely to accompany them—guided by the compass of symptom-desire—along the path that each analysand wishes (and is able) to take. The analytic path differs from any other form of psychotherapy in that it preserves a central space of not-knowing, which is precisely where the subject-to-come can emerge. It is within this void of knowledge that the analyst's desire is most at stake. Ricardo Estacolchic<sup>1</sup>, in a text published in *the journal Topía*, imagined that this space of not-knowing would safeguard psychoanalysis in the face of the exuberant proliferation of *psy* knowledge. In his text, a psychoanalyst in the year 2050 wonders about the persistence of psychoanalysis and answers:

If I allow myself a bit of naïveté, I'd say: what an enormous relief, what a freedom, to have found someone—at least one person—who knows nothing about me, since everyone else believes they know everything! Perhaps that ignorant one, the psychoanalyst, may help me recover the dignity lost amid the omniscient screens and the dazzling flashes of so many wise minds... Who am I? What do I want?(p16)

In an article addressing the many current changes regarding sexualities, genders, sexuation, and erotic practices, Facundo Blestcher states: “*In the face of these transmutations, many psychoanalysts are torn between disdain and indignation.*” (Blestcher, 2023) Of course, everyone is entitled to their own opinions about changes in sexualities and genders, shaped by their sensibilities, tastes, desires, fears, ideals, morals, and so on. As citizens, we may feel indignant or disdainful; we may even dislike these changes. But we can only be psychoanalysts if we completely set aside our personal preferences, opinions, prejudices, ideals, and preconceptions, and instead allow ourselves to be guided by the only thing that truly orients us as psychoanalysts: what emerges as a symptom in the analysand and what they wish (and are able) to do with it. The analysand's *savoir-faire*, not the psychoanalyst's supposed knowledge.

1. Ricardo Estacolchic (1943-2001) was an Argentine psychoanalyst and member of the Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires (EFBA). He was known for his work at the intersection of psychoanalysis and social critique. His works include *Apuntes de un psicoanalista* and *Pollerudos: destinos de la sexualidad masculina* (co-authored with Sergio Rodríguez).

Two anecdotes come to mind that seem significant in this regard. A gay supervisee (as we will see, this detail is relevant) who is training in France tells me that his tutor consults him about an analysand who has decided to engage in polyamorous relationships. I find it interesting that this tutor, in France—where the figure of the professor holds considerable authority—reverses the power dynamic by seeking the opinion or advice of a student. And I find it even more significant that he turns specifically to the gay student, as if assuming that gay people have a better understanding of the matter (and perhaps he is right, not because gay people are more intelligent, but because they are not positioned at the center of power and the norm). In fact, this instructor asks whether engaging in such polyamorous relationships is right or wrong, adding that, as a heterosexual, he finds them difficult to understand. The moment he poses this question, the analyst falls from his position. This reveals the analyst's resistances—prejudices that have nothing to do with psychoanalytic listening. Yet these prejudices are deeply embedded in the way psychoanalytic discourse on sexuality has been woven over time.

The second anecdote points in the same direction. At a conference in Montevideo, in reference to the new ways of thinking about subjectivities and relationships brought by trans experiences, an analyst mentions the difficulty posed by changes that psychoanalysts “struggle to accept.” I appreciate intellectual honesty, and I certainly believe it is far better to acknowledge that some things are difficult for us to accept rather than deny them—denying them is the surest way to preserve them. But I would also say that the very moment we place ourselves as having to accept or not an analysand's modes of subjectivation and self-naming, we cease to be in the position of analysts. We become guardians of proper sex—the kind of sex that supposedly (following the quintessential psychoanalytic argument) accepts, processes, subjectivizes, and does not disavow anatomical sexual difference.

The ways of reading and living with sexual difference shift without our permission—and rightly so. We accompany our analysands in their questioning; we do not impose our sympathies or rejections upon them. Our task, I believe, is to stand on the side of life and movement, not of the rigid and the established order.

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**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Desires, Fears, and Divans* (1990). Series, Photo 6, 40 cm x 30 cm. Analogue print.

*Dossier:*  
The Word



## The word

*I wanted to be read by the stones.  
Words hide me carelessly.  
Where I'm not, words find me.<sup>1</sup>*  
Manoel de Barros

When he wrote *The Island of the Day Before* (1994/2010), Umberto Eco visited the South Seas, in the exact geographical location where the book takes place. He observed the colors of the water at different times of the day and spent three years studying drawings and models of vessels. However, he says in *Confessions of a Young Novelist* (2011/2018) that in that region he had the impression that no human language could describe the abundance and variety of colors and shapes of corals and fish. The question then arises: how can one represent them with words? How to narrate the experience of his protagonist Roberto, a 17th century shipwreck, faced with a landscape he sees for the first time, without having any image in his memory? Roberto felt “like someone who must describe a square circle, a flat coast, a noisy silence, a nocturnal rainbow” (Eco, 1994/2010, p. 131). Therefore, Eco constructed the observations of this brief dive over three pages, presenting a metaphor for the writing process itself and his writing process.

Freud was also a tireless writer and inaugurated a literary genre: the clinical case. Oscillating between the literary and scientific models, he created the so-called psychoanalytic writing. But we cannot forget that,

in the initial path of psychoanalysis, it was Anna O. who coined the expression “talking cure” to refer to the process she carried out with Freud through words (Breuer & Freud, 1895/2016). And it was during a session that Emmy von N. suggested that he let her speak freely, without interrupting her with questions. Therefore, it was through those patient pioneers that it became clear that it is the word that defines our profession, and it is through it that the analytic encounter of the pair takes place; it is the word that demands the analyst’s listening. Or, as Manoel de Barros (1996) poetically says, “literary therapy consists of messing up language to the point that it expresses our deepest desires” (p. 70).

A century later, Anzieu (1987/2000) asserts that, in psychoanalytic healing, as in friendship and literature, both the spoken and written word hold a ‘skin power’. “Listening to the ‘skin’ of words reveals narcissistic flaws. In return, the other’s words enable the reconstruction of the containing psychic envelope, weaving a symbolic skin equivalent to the original exchanges of tactile contacts between the baby and the maternal environment.

In turn, the writer, poet and painter Henri Michaux (1972) begins his book *Emergences-Résurgences* with this epigraph: “Born, educated, instructed in an environment and in a culture solely of the ‘verbal’; I paint to decondition myself” (p. 7). In painting, he says, the primitive, the primordial is best found, since it is not part of an organized, codified, hierarchical language. In this Dossier, the artist Elida Tessler, using other references, tells us about the poetic journey through the world that makes her weave the threads of image, object and word in her work.

Words express, indicate. They construct narratives that support conceptions of subjects, social practices, and ideologies. As Manguel (2007) says, through words language is not limited to naming; it also gives existence to reality. In his article, Bruno Paes Manso shows how words support speeches and purposes in crime and religion, portraying violence in the Brazilian city of São Paulo.

However, if each subject always speaks from a place already given, the word, in turn, has its gaps, through which the polysemy of meanings can occur, making metaphors and displacing meanings. It is the subject of psychoanalytic work. And it is precisely because there is no exact coincidence between the word and the thing, because there are gaps between the word and itself, between the sender and the receiver, that Alma Bolón discusses the so-called realism in literature.

In addition to the polysemy of meanings, we must consider the accuracy, the pairing of the translated word and its reliable representation. This is Socorro Soberón’s path, who presents the translator’s work as the result of different conceptions of what translation is and of different interpretations of the original, making translation a problem as old as the issue of the diversity of languages

Well, the diversity of languages is a condemnation of the ambition of the builders of the Tower of Babel, who went from the common language to language as a factor of division and segregation. This alerts us to the importance of finding a common means of communication, of understanding what the other says and of making ourselves understood – that is, an awareness of the value of translating experiences into words (Manguel, 2007).

What is the strength, what are the uses of the word? It may have the power of seduction, evoking the original meaning of seduce (*seducere*), such as “to push away” or “to entertain”. Scheherazade’s words prevented her death by enchanting Sultan Shariar, and Cyrano de Bergerac’s poetry made the maiden Rox-

ane fall in love with him despite his ugliness, passing over the beautiful Christian. But they can also be empty of content, as Franco Berardi argues in his work on the phenomenology of the act, which, without the mediation of ideation or words, nullifies the perception of its consequences. They can be hateful, deadly. They can be denied. Restricted, as in colonial practices, which prevented the use of the native language. Its libertarian strength can be a reason for censorship in dictatorships, an odious strategy that Gabriela Pesclevi presents to us based on the Argentine experience. Finally, the exchange of words between the authors of the Latin American Boom of the 1960s is the theme of Augusto Wong Campos, which deals with their different writing exercises and the feat of having simultaneously built prestigious literature and a wide audience.

Therefore, dear reader, the words in this Dossier are yours.

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1. *Eu queria ser lido pelas pedras. As palavras me escondem sem cuidado. Aonde eu não estou as palavras me acham.*



## New discourses and purposes in crime and religion

I began researching violence in 1999, when São Paulo had one of the cities with the highest homicide rates in the country and the world. I had the rare opportunity to interview confessed murderers. They were introduced to me by their lawyer, who was the main criminalist in São Paulo defending of murderers who worked in the outskirts of São Paulo. Everyone was free. At first, I spoke with twelve men to write an article about massacres (homicides with three or more victims), crimes that were so common and already seemed to be part of the landscape of the São Paulo metropolis.

My questions focused on why and who was being killed. São Paulo there were nearly a hundred massacres a year and almost sixty homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants. Despite this high number, which placed us at the top of national and global homicide rankings, it was difficult to understand the motivations for so many deaths. There were no religious conflicts, civil wars, ethnic or political conflicts in Brazil. Why then did people killing themselves so often?

To my surprise, during the interviews, one answer tended to be repeated among the murderers. They all said that they did not kill innocent people, but only those who “deserved to die”. The victims were the “*vacilões*” (people who waver), the “late ones”, the “noias”, the “snitches”, the “mudbloods”, those who dis-

credited and disrespected the honor of others, among other categories. They acted according to a supposed local morality. They traveled like righteous people, despite the many deaths on their backs.

Those were different times. The killers lived in the city's most violent neighborhoods, where bodies lying in the streets were part of the routine. Gunshots could be heard during the day. Children could identify the caliber of the gun by the sound of the shot. It was common for young men to lose friends to murder as they grew older. If they were over the age of 25, they considered themselves survivors.

Potential predators roamed everywhere like ghosts. To survive, many formed alliances – called gangs, families or *bancas* –, seeking to defend themselves and/or attack rivals. In this context of tension, the world ended up being divided between allies and enemies, as if life were a daily war. This feeling was reproduced in the words and speeches that justified the inevitability of conflicts and homicides among young people from neighboring stalls. The conversation with the killers introduced me to this universe.

This was a great discovery, that would guide my research on violence. Those brutal acts were not the result of madness, irrationality, low individual self-control, excessive alcohol or drugs, as common sense would suggest. The killers articulated words in sentences that sought to give an ethical meaning to their crimes. They separated fair murders from unjust ones, they killed only

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*Desires, Fears, and Divans* (1990). Series, Photo 14, 40 cm x 30 cm. Analogue print.

those who deserved it and were at peace with their consciences. They could explain to me the reasons that guided their decisions to other people who shared their daily lives. These statements led me to other questions, that I am still trying to answer: Why and how do these statements and beliefs form? In what kind of society do these beliefs spread? Why did they spread among young men who lived in the same town as me, just a few kilometers from my house? And why didn't they spread among young people in my neighborhood? And why didn't it spread among young people in my neighborhood? I felt that we lived in distant countries and spoke different languages. They spoke the language of war. I thought the situation would only get worse, because each homicide, as they explained to me, tended to motivate reaction and revenge from the victim's allies, creating a vicious circle that could last for years. The speech

that justified this self-destructive war would remain in place. How we can teach men who have been involved in these conflicts for years to think and act differently? In the decades that followed, however, contrary to my expectations, homicide rates in the city fell by more than 80%. The reduction began in 2000 and has continued to this day, almost continuously.

Such phenomena are multicausal. In the human sciences, econometric models have sought to highlight the weight of variables such as the aging of the population, the increase in education, the reduction of poverty, the growth of imprisonment, among others. In my research, in order to understand this decline, I needed to understand how the idea of war collapsed, how the criminal career reinvented itself, producing new beliefs, speeches, rhetoric and purposes, that changed behaviors and reduced the intensity of the self-destructive

conflicts that killed thousands of young people in the 80s and 90s (Manso, 2020).

This construction did not appear out of nowhere. It was consolidated over time, in response to the harsh urban reality that was imposed on young people from the outskirts. It was forged through words and reflections created of those who lived the drama of violence from the inside, as victims and protagonists. The hip-hop movement, led by *Racionais* MC's since the end of the 80s, played a central role in this new mental construction. It accused the self-extermination of young people on the outskirts: that was all the system wanted. Their long lyrics were reproduced on cassette tapes that were passed from hand to hand, memorized and quoted as if they were biblical psalms. As they taught in their songs, brothers needed to stop killing brothers in order to unite and fight the system.

There are two São Paulos: one before and one after the *Racionais*, who helped create a self-image capable of dealing with the prejudice that weighed on that segment of the population. The city has always viewed at the residents of these neighborhoods with suspicion. The migrants, however, who moved there especially after the 1950s, came from a sedimented rural society, marked by centuries of slavery, latifundia and colonialism. They believed in the promises and opportunities of urban upward mobility, which offered chances of advancement through the market, through employment in industry. They were entrepreneurs, bought small lots, created their neighborhoods, built their houses acting collectively in self-construction efforts, joining forces in social movements, union and political struggles.

Those were different times. There was hope in the political struggle, in everything that could come after the dictatorship, with popular participation. These ideas helped to form the progressive parties of the 1980s, which would form the basis of the New Republic, along with an intellectual elite coming from

universities to create a more rational and fair State. Democracy was returning, after a long and brutal military dictatorship. There was reason to believe in politics.

Many young people from the outskirts, however, descendants of these migrants, already born in the urban context, were more skeptical about the future because they lived reality without sharing the same hopes as their ancestors. They witnessed daily the challenges of thriving in an unequal, unjust and violent society, carrying on their shoulders the stigma of being illiterate and dangerous. They saw that their parents' hard work did not rescue them out of poverty, nor did it prevent them from being humiliated and violated. The economic and political crisis of the 1980s contributed to the increasing pessimism.

For the most cynical of this new generation, the path of crime ended up being a possibility, valuing the warrior spirit of those who did not bow their heads to the system and refused to accept the miserable fate that the city had reserved for them. The chaos and conflicts that occurred during the 80s and 90s were a result of these choices, which mixed revolt and cynicism.

After years of fighting, however, it was urgent to think, to organize the disorder, to act consciously, so that they would not continue to make their own mothers, relatives and friends cry at countless wakes and funerals. The challenge was to create and apply a new contract, that would commit these young people commit to "walk on the right side, even in a wrong life"; to be a "good-blooded criminal" who respects the community; "to have conduct", humility; to be loyal, to respect equals, to avoid conflicts.

In this context, the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) emerged in 1993, from inside the prisons, with a union discourse, willing to put an end to the oppression and cowardice in the world of crime. There was already a favorable environment for the spread of these new ideas. The war between the "thieves'

class" was fratricidal and suicidal. Over time, the faction would establish itself as the criminal institution capable of defining rules and mediating conflicts in this universe. It seemed impossible, but everyone longed for a new order to remedy the chaos. It would be good not only for the leaders of the faction or for crime, but for everyone who lived through the drama of the murders. "Crime feeds crime" was the group's motto. The revenge had to stop because the real enemies were the police and the system. When the results appeared and the PCC showed its strength, the idea was consolidated and the rules were legitimized (Manso, 2018).

Control of rules and morals was and still is carried out from within an overcrowded penitentiary system, which has expanded rapidly in São Paulo and Brazil since the 1990s. These units never received enough money from the State for food, clothing, transportation, etc. As a consequence, prisoners began manage the prison themselves, strengthening the leadership of prison gangs. In São Paulo, according to estimates by the Public Ministry, nine out of ten prisons are informally managed by the PCC.

The control mechanism from the prison began to work precisely. Anyone who pursues a criminal career, even outside prison, knows that, along the way, they have a great chance of spending time in the penitentiary system. Prisons are ironically nicknamed "colleges" by the criminals themselves, because they expand their contact networks, their experience and fame. To do well inside, all you must do is obey the faction's rules. The disobedient serve time in the insurance, units of those who are morally considered excluded and unworthy.

In addition to this mechanism for controlling dissenters, the new order was accepted because the rules established by crime improved career opportunities and profits. Words became rules and principles. Some were inspired by biblical commandments. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in

vain" served as inspiration for the sixth item of the statute, in which the PCC prohibited the use of the party's name for personal purposes. The second and fifth points of the statute, "Loyalty, respect and solidarity above all with the party [...]" so that there are no internal conflicts", referred to the first commandment: "Love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself" (Manso, 2018)<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, the new rules, were not empty words, but worked by mediating relationships and building a less chaotic criminal life, as far as possible. Decreasing conflicts reduced activity costs, as well as increasing profits and the possibility of long-term planning. Illegal activities, which are inherently dangerous and risky, became more predictable. This allowed crime in São Paulo to prosper.

Revenge and omnipotent decisions to kill became a thing of the past, deconstructed by the commandments of crime and embraced by "conscious" criminals. Murders depended on collective approval, based on debates that included the accusation and defense on the part of the victim, whose punishment would follow what was written in the statute. Rules were created to establish prices for drugs sold, payment terms, money loans, weapons rental, etc. In this regulated environment, everyone could win, even those who were not affiliated with the group. All you had to do was not disrespect the criminal laws.

The construction of this more professional and rational market allowed the transformation of the criminal scene in Brazil. The PCC took new steps towards wholesale drug trafficking, which made it possible to multiply profits. Partnerships were made with marijuana and cocaine producers in South America, in Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, which allowed the PCC to

1. Researcher Karina Biondi cites some parallels between criminal laws and sacred laws in "Weaving the branches of meaning: prison factions as founding organizations of social standards" (2006).

sell to drug retail groups in several Brazilian states. Due to the success of this new form of management, the organizational model based on prison-based gangs has spread throughout the country. Currently, the Ministry of Justice estimates that there are at least 88 gangs in Brazil. The PCC and *Comando Vermelho*, from Rio de Janeiro, are the two largest, and are present in almost all states.

The solution came from the bottom up, among those who suffered the drama of poverty and violence in the cities and prisons, where survival was increasingly depended on having money or not. A new mentality of crime was shaped based on beliefs that were founded on normative, realistic sentences, which offered a different path to be followed, with the right direction, focused on entrepreneurship and the obstinate search for wealth, even if achieved illegally. The multibillion-dollar global drug market eventually offered opportunities that combined different interests. In just over thirty years of existence, the transformations led by the PCC, despite the increase in spending on public security and justice in São Paulo and Brazil, have made the factions more powerful than ever, receiving in dollars, laundering money, investing in the formal economy and financing candidates to defend their interests in parliaments, executives and the judiciary.

In many ways, this change that came from below was similar to that of the Pentecostal churches that spread throughout Brazilian urban outskirts mainly from the 1980s onwards. They emerged in the same context as crime, carried out by the poor and for the poor, although they created different and even opposing worlds. The thieves, after all, were slaves to their desires, everything a believer should not be. Like the factions, however, Pentecostals also promoted beliefs and discourses that transformed behaviors, increased self-esteem, created meaning in life and helped to create support networks to escape poverty (Manso, 2023).

It was an unexpected and despised transformation by the political and economic elite, who imagined they were able to transform Brazil from top to bottom, through the redemocratization of the country. The people would participate by voting, and electing leaders who represented their interests. The people's demands would be mediated by political institutions, which would define public policies capable of resolving them. The challenge was to raise awareness and educate voters so that they would not be manipulated and would elect politicians who would actually represent their interests.

Over the years, however, this optimism regarding politics cooled. The social crisis remained acute. Public services, such as education, health, sport, art and culture, could alleviate inequality, but they could not prevent the hardships of poverty. It became more evident that in the cities, more than in the struggle for the guarantee of rights, it was necessary to have money above all.

Those who don't have money can live on the streets, go hungry, be murdered by the police, be disrespected and dishonored. Money can be the difference between life and death in the urban environment – very different from the rural environment, where family and community ties served as a safety net. Modernity has left a feeling that there was no support for the individuals free fall.

The strength of Pentecostals grew because they provided answers to this feeling of vulnerability, loneliness and emptiness. They produced physical effects; they affected the body and mind of those who believed in what they said. Beginning with the role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal churches, a kind of superpower that descends into believers and that can manifest itself among those who accept Jesus. The presence of the Holy Spirit can lead the believer to speak the language of angels, known as glossolalia, in addition to giving the power of healing and making predictions.

As the sinner begins to believe, he/she goes through a process that Pentecostals call *metanoia*, which means change of consciousness. It feels like mental reprogramming. The believer needs to repent of mistakes and sins committed in his previous life. Ask for forgiveness in order to be reborn in a new identity. Format the new mental belief and begin to behave following this reprogramming. No one is essentially bad, but they have sinned because they lived far from Christ. If before he was guided by revolt and desires, he now has a moral compass and begins to walk alongside the good, which must be proven daily, by behaving as expected. Exorcism, in this sense, also plays an important role in this process. It shows that evil can be removed from the body so that another person is born, with a pure, re-configured soul.

The Bible offers the direction, the rules, as if it were the great manual of life. Despite the diversity of possible interpretations, characteristic of the horizontality of the Protestant movement, most denominations end up converging on this common point: the commitment to submit to divine authority.

In this way, the evangelical movement, strengthens bonds of trust, which favors the creation of alliances and support networks. It also creates collective purposes for aimless lives.

Faith also empowers. Loving God and being loved by the most powerful being in the universe can increase self-love and self-esteem, a fundamental feeling in a society known for humiliating the poor. This individual power, however, is not the same as that of the murderer, who feels like he owns life and death. It obliges the believer to use it for the benefit of the values of the Bible, in favor of the meaning indicated by Scriptures. And if you obey, you can have eternal salvation and the support of those who share the same belief (faith?). The most popular theologies, such as prosperity, define the pursuit for material

gains as a transcendental focus, since money is synonymous with divine blessing. The more faith you have, the faster you can get rich. This mix of faith and entrepreneurship became stronger and helped to create a vast network, made up of religious people who associated with those who shared same values as theirs.

Pentecostal ideas spread vertically and horizontally. It came from pastor-communicators who, since the 1960s, began to invest in radio and TV to evangelize a wide audience, creating the most popular theological guidelines, aimed at the material challenges of everyday life in cities. These ideas spread to small churches in poor neighborhoods, which were relatively easy to open and had a profound impact in these places.

The great advantage of Protestantism over Catholicism is the freedom it offers in the interpretation of biblical texts. Each pastor can read according to his and his family's reality, which favors the opening of churches focused on the interests and issues of their groups. Furthermore, a church can easily become a small business, which encourages religious entrepreneurship. The pastor must have a CNPJ, a small space and charisma to start. As tithes are paid, if the words and the message are powerful, the church can grow gradually. Something very different from Catholicism, which defines from top to bottom from the interpretation of sacred texts to the opening of its churches, in much slower and more rigid processes.

Pentecostal faith, as it spread, formed a new type of religiosity, with more moralizing speeches and habits. Light Catholicism, full of parties, open to syncretism with religions of African origin, which characterized Brazilian religiosity, was losing ground. The new faith of urban Brazil had, above all, an instrumental character, because it provided the creation of a new mental order that helped to survive the challenges of the world guided by the laws of the market. It produced new feelings and support networks,





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*Desires, Fears, and Divans* (1990). Series, Photo 3, 40 cm x 30 cm. Analogue print.

showing clear paths to ways out of poverty. It is popular in the belief market because it allows the reprogramming of individuals' hearts and minds according to the practical needs of the world.

The speed of these conversions, which were concentrated in a short period of forty years, was even more frightening when the fundamentalist tone of religious discourse began to haunt the public space and influence politics, mainly with the popularization of social networks. Theologies such as spiritual warfare, dominion and the seven mountains gained enthusiastic followers. In Brazil and around the world, the effects of these preachings became more evident from 2014 onwards. A war between good and evil was underway and proving purpose and reasons for believers to fight. For Jesus to defeat the Devil, it was necessary to occupy strategic positions

in politics, culture, economics, education, communication, etc., with people who acted according to Christian values.

This holy war gained followers among representatives of other bubbles, selected by algorithms that placed defenders of entrepreneurship, defenders of individual freedom, traditionalists on the same side, frightened by the mind-boggling (bewildering?) transformations of a society in which employment was in crisis, women were becoming more and more prominent and debates around new sexual and gender orientations were growing. Would this be the end of the traditional patriarchal model of society and the idea of the traditional family? Is capitalism threatened?

The insecurity in the face of an unknown world ended up strengthening the speeches and speeches that proposed a return to the

values of the past, when the world still seemed to be understandable and therefore safer. New enemies were being formed: communists, feminists, defenders of gender ideology, etc. This war in defense of tradition and the known filled the existential void of many people. The camps in front of the barracks in 2022 and the violent and coup attacks on January 8, 2023, revealed the disposition of the followers of these new beliefs.

Crime, although still considered an enemy of tradition, has come closer to the values of the world of this reactionary power. Both celebrate entrepreneurship, the market and prosperity, to the detriment of the technical and collectivist interventionism of the State. The two worlds began to meet when criminal money, increasingly voluminous, began to disguise itself as legal money. Drug dollars, weapons and militias, paramilitary groups with strong influence on public authorities, found work specialized in laundering and heating illegal money. This money went on to finance other crimes, such as mining and land grabbing. Even churches began to be used to launder large sums. This capital, which was dirty and became clean, began to increasingly influence political and economic decisions. The ability to earn money and gain power, in the end, ended up being the determining factor in the formation of alliances to defend of the business and financial interests of these groups.

In this sense, the new orders created by factions and Pentecostal churches are strong and interact because they propose ways to survive in a world in which money and the market have an increasing weight. Their speeches and meanings are aimed at justifying entrepreneurs who believe they can benefit from weaker states and less regulation. The idea of the welfare state, creating rational public policies aimed at reducing inequalities and guaranteeing rights, seems obsolete. As if the collective struggle for rights, which was part of the social grammar of the 70s and 80s,

was not in dialogue with current challenges, because salvation lies in the market, and not in state policies. Perhaps it will just be a passing cycle, and humanity will once again become concerned and engaged in the medium and long term with major collective issues, such as the destruction of the planet, forest fires, major floods and global warming. Maybe there isn't time, and we continue to live as if salvation and respect depend on how much money each one of us makes. This seems to be the spirit of the times, which is taking us towards the abyss at an accelerated pace.

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## The inexplicable: limits of psychological explanation, mutation of the techno-communicative environment

*Nous demandons seulement un peu d'ordre pour nous protéger du chaos. Rien n'est plus douloureux, plus angoissant qu'une pensée qui s'échappe à elle-même[...]. Nous perdons sans cesse nos idées.... Nous demandons seulement que nos idées s'enchaînent suivant un minimum de règles constantes*

Deleuze y Guattari, "Chaos et cerveau"<sup>1</sup>

Speaking with a German journalist, in 1919, Sandor Ferenczi said that psychoanalysis did not possess the tools to understand and cure mass psychosis. Not even politics had those tools, and we can repeat those words today, one hundred years later.

What does "mass psychosis" mean? The above quote from Deleuze and Guattari (2019) brings us closer to understanding the meaning of the word psychosis: when thought escapes from itself, when action can no longer be traced back to coherent mental processing. When everything starts going too fast for us to understand and guide action coherently.

Deleuze and Guattari connect this condition to old age, a condition in which we lose

the ability to process neuro-informative stimuli over time, because those stimuli go too fast for our slowed down senescent brain.

In a certain sense, the contemporary electronic acceleration of info-neural stimuli produces a generalized senescence-effect on the social mind. The generation that grew up in an environment in which info-neural stimulation is hyper-fast, certainly develops the ability to process faster the stimulus that comes from the connective electronic environment. But a rapid processing method is precisely based on the elimination of those mental activities that slow down our ability to respond and to act: emotion and rationalization. Consequently, the act tends to become devoid of emotional profundity and devoid of rational motivation.

In our time these two phenomena converge: the aging of the population (with the effect of mental confusion of which Alzheimer's is merely the extreme manifestation) is accompanied by the emergence of a young population which has been deprived of the possibility of developing over time the emotion and consequences of the action.

We know that more and more often the political behavior of the majority is inexplicable with the categories of political rationality: think of a phenomenon like Trumpism, the enthusiastic support of a population for an aggressive individual who is incapable of connecting sensible reasoning but perfectly capa-

ble to excite feelings of frustration by directing them towards imaginary goals.

Psychology too seems unsuited to explaining what happens to the contemporary mind and behavior. There are more and more episodes that psychological science cannot explain with the diagnostic tools at its disposal – episodes that signal a profound mutation in behavior, a mutation that not only concerns psychic dynamics, but also, probably, cognitive processing methods.

Let us think about (increasingly frequent) acts of destructive violence committed by young people. Paderno Dugnano is a town on the outskirts of Milan, houses inhabited by the middle class. In early September 2024, in one of these houses, a seventeen-year-old boy killed his younger brother with a kitchen knife, then his father and, finally, his mother. The triple homicide carried out in a few minutes by the boy, described as normal, on a night like so many others, seems enigmatic. He gave no explanation for the act, said he could not understand why he had done it, and stated that he had no motivation.

There are no motivations. This is important.

It seems that the very notion of motivation has lost its relevance. In this case, there is a lack of a reason that precedes the act, a reason elaborated by the mind in particular conditions, before carrying out an action so complex, so extreme, so loaded with consequences.

Motivation, consequences. Are there still motivations in the acts carried out by contemporary subjects? Is there still a perception of the relationship between the act and its consequences, in the actions of the contemporary subject? And above all: who is the contemporary subject? What differentiates him from the subject studied by psychology or psychoanalysis with the tools of anamnesis and interpretation? Can we still distinguish between the behavioral level and the deep dimension of psychic elaboration?

We can say that Paderno Dugnano's boy carried out that act because he was subject to

an action that did not correspond to an ideation. A type of homicidal behavior comes to mind that, in southwest Asia, particularly in Malaysia, is called *amok*, described by ethnopsychiatrist Georges Devereux (1980). The subject falls prey to a temporary condition of violent and homicidal rage for a more or less significant reason, or even due to the accumulation of inexplicable nervous tension. He withdraws himself, isolates himself and suddenly attacks anyone he encounters, first family members, then strangers, in an uncontrollable crescendo of homicidal fury. What seems characteristic of *amok* is the fact that, during the explosion of violence, the subject runs at speed through the streets and fields, until he finally passes out. In the end, after the homicidal action, he does not remember or has a confused memory of what happened, without being able to describe his motivations and the psychic experience that led him to the act. We would say that it is not the subject that leads the action, but the action that leads the subject.

Can I say this? Can I dare to make a kind of inversion of the usual chronological sequence – first the mental elaboration, then the execution of the act?

Let's be clear: Paderno Dugnano's case is not isolated or unique. In the United States, cases of killing spree or mass murder are the order of the day. Let us consider the fact that in 2023 there were 81 armed actions in schools in that sad country. The most recent took place at a school in Winder, Georgia, where a fourteen-year-old teenager killed two teachers, two students and injured nine people. Why did he do this? Well, we can say that he suffered from loneliness, that he was a victim of bullying, etc. etc. But loneliness is a widespread phenomenon in the generation that has spent most of its conscious time in front of a screen. And bullying is omnipresent in a society that considers violence to be a positive value.

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1- We only ask for a little order to protect us from chaos. Nothing is more painful, more distressing than a thought that escapes itself [...]. We keep losing our ideas.... We only ask that our ideas be linked together according to a minimum of constant rules (Deleuze and Guattari: Chaos and the Brain, in Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?)

We continue to look for psychological explanations, but in this case, it seems to me that the problem is more cognitive than psychological. We are increasingly witnessing acts that cannot be explained by the categories we have available. We continue to look for motivation, but the motivations are obvious and inconsistent at the same time: isolation, loneliness, competitiveness, diffuse violence in the environment, in the media, everywhere.

The point I am interested in highlighting is that the psychological categories with which we explain the functioning of the mind no longer correspond to the reality of the mind formed in a technologically changed modified environment. The cognitive modalities (perception, verbalization, ideation, action, distinct steps that develop in sequence) have undergone a sudden mutation, and the chronological sequence tends to become disturbed, confused. It is this mutation that needs to be analyzed.

Psychology in general and psychoanalysis in particular refer to the cognitive framework in which ideation precedes the act and, in some way, motivates it. Therefore, to explain behavior, we are used to interpreting conscious and unconscious motivations, reason and emotions. But this explanation no longer works: the act is no longer necessarily preceded by ideation, and probably the concepts of ideation and motivation no longer correspond to anything.

The cognitive model that was formed in the interaction with a sequential technosemiotic environment has been replaced, in recent generations, by an instantaneous, simultaneous technosemiotic environment. According to McLuhan, in *Understanding media* (1964/1994), when the mind is formed in an electronic environment, and not in an alphabetic environment, the sequential is followed by the simultaneous, and the rational

modalities of cognitive action are replaced by mythological modalities.

In my opinion, we must start from this point to radically rethink the behavior of the contemporary subject. It is not about examining psychological motivations, psychic traumas, etc. It is about going deeper, getting closer to the neurological hardware and recognizing that mutation involves cognitive modalities: imagination, language, memorization, ideation, transition to action.

In the alphabetic communicative environment, within the traditional family, village life or socialized city life, the child learned language through the voice of the mother or a human speaker. Therefore, the cognitive disposition manifested itself through a succession of stimuli and responses, of ideation and action. But when the alphabetical sequential is succeeded by the electronic simultaneous, the speed of the inphoneural stimulus shortens the time for the ideational elaboration of the act. In a video game, there is no time to think, only to react instantly to the stimulus.

Furthermore, when the learning of the mother tongue is followed by the learning of a derealizing technolinguistic device, the language no longer has the character of affective singularity, and the author of the act tends to lose awareness of its physical consequences: in a video game, the green men eliminated when a button is pressed are an incorporeal entity, they never die, or if they die, they get up immediately.

Instantaneity and virtuality: these two reconfigurations of the relationship between ideation and execution have so radically modified cognitive functioning that the behaviors of our peers (like a certain extent) tend to seem increasingly inexplicable to us. We need an understanding of the cognitive mutation that ended up structuring a psychocognitive model that is incompatible

with the models available to psychological science.

Naturally, I start from a theoretical-methodological premise that is very different from the Chomskian one, which for a long time dominated the field of cognitive psychology and linguistics. I don't believe there is an innate structure of the mind, I don't believe there is a natural modality of cognition. This is not the place to delve deeper into this reasoning. I limit myself to observing that structuralist cognitivism ignores the relationship between the techno-communicative environment and the formation of cognitive structures, but this relationship emerges today with unprecedented strength.

Technological transformation has modified the communicative environment to the point of altering the fundamental modalities of psychogenesis. A generation emerged that acquired more words from a machine than from the voice of a human being, and that achieved its cognitive competence in an environment in which action has no physical consequences.

We must hypothesize that this generation has lost the ability to deeply perceive the physical effect of an action that does not take place on a screen, but in the kitchen, in the bedroom, or even at school, or in any other physical place.

There is a new phenomenology of the psychologically inexplicable act. I would say that we are witnessing the effects of the contraction of mental elaboration time (stimulus-response instantaneity) and the effects of desensitization to physical consequences (virtuality of the perceived experience). These two reconfigurations of the perception-projection of reality reconfigure the mental projection of the act itself.

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## Words, this incredible invention: A short review on word censorship, oscillations, earthquakes, disputes, resignifications and refuges

Words are a delicate matter, both in the present and at every moment in history. They are so fragile and so powerful, like the body of each speaker. There is a shining force in each word, in its sound, in its genesis, in its existence. The enunciation of each one is part of a context, and mainly of the production of meanings given to it in that context. The becoming of words is subject to a territory that pronounces them. This territory could be the book, a conversation in the middle of the street in a neighborhood close to the River Plate, a presidential speech, a demonstration.

A territory that contains, inhabits, treats and destroys, stimulates, omits words, who uses words as he inherited them, transforming them, enclosing them.

During the last Argentine dictatorship, there was systematic, organic and excessive censorship by the State. Censorship offices and committees were created in order to ban books, magazines, documents and, of course, other cultural goods.

As for the administrative procedure, the censorship of books was the responsibility of the General Directorate of Publications of the Ministry of Culture and Education, whose person in charge, during almost the entire dictatorial period, was the retired colonel Jorge Méndez. In the absence of a standardized protocol for prior censorship, the process against a publication could begin in several ways, by a private complaint from a citizen, by an official complaint (by the Army, the State Intelligence Secretariat or a Ministry), by media campaigns, by the Publications Department itself or by notification from the Customs in relation to books whose entry into the country was requested. There were police officers dedicated exclusively to searching bookstores looking for dangerous and subversive books. (Cerillo & Sotomayor, 2016, p. 281)

This practice was carried out through the adoption of an authoritarian government model, which took de facto power and created a country project based on violence, forced disappearance and the murder of political dissidents; forging one glossary and eliminating another.

On August 26, 1978, through Decree no. 1,937 of the National Executive Branch (Invernizzi & Gociol, 2007), signed by Albano Harguindeguy – Minister of the Interior of Argentina during the self-proclaimed dictatorship National Reorganization Process (1976-1983) – and Ricardo Ceno – head of department of the General Secretariat of the Ministry of the Interior –, the distribution, sale and circulation of the book *Niños de hoy* (1974), by Álvaro, was prohibited. Yunque (1889-1982), throughout Argentine territory (art. 1 of Decree no. 1,937). We are talking about a great and beloved Argentine writer, part of a recognized literary tradition, who had very different readers throughout his prolific written production. The text of the decree argued that the attitudes defended by the author promote “an attitude that harms the family institution”, and “that attitudes like these constitute a direct aggression against Argentine society” (Avellaneda, 1986, pp. 172-173). What stories were and are contained in this anthology? What words? What reasons could lead to a ban on a work like this? Why did they want to remove this book and so many others from the shelves? What happened to them during that time? And with the words that these tales carried? What happened afterwards? And what do we experience now in relation to the words we seem unable to speak?

The words can be understood as a portrait of an era, with its limitations and excesses, its bets and misadventures; within a time in which there is a multiplicity of coexistence between them – the words and differences of those who govern them, of those who pronounce them. They are expressed in certain

discourses of everyday life that seem brutal to us. Parliaments guided by the language of capital, by the rules of capital and the relationships that capitalism establishes and favors. Let us consider the following: the president of the Argentineans, Javier Milei, with his gestures, his violent character and the set of words he brings together, reduces the educational debate to something of unprecedented precariousness: he does not believe in institutions, and yet..., although it is inadmissible for the position he occupies, his speech partly portrays – let’s return to that word – the symptom of an era and a considerable portion of the society that he represents; disappointed individuals, resentments of all kinds and classes, subjects who stigmatize the search for different forms of popular organization, owners who are not willing to socialize their assets, political illiteracy, groups of beings governed by different corporations, not only economic but also religious, among others.

*University* – from the Latin *universus* – concerns a universal whole or a set of things. For many, many of us, it represents a community. An institution with a long and proven critical tradition and production of knowledge, of higher studies in various areas of knowledge, which promotes research, learning, knowledge and the return of this knowledge to countless spaces in the community where it is needed.

The university has remained firm as a space for reflection in the face of the advancement of dehumanization on a global scale. A place to strengthen bonds, to reserve autonomy; a place of agreements and also of plural and democratic participation, in which the notion of rights is still relevant – rights in relation to access, unrestricted entry, co-government, the construction of knowledge that can change fundamental aspects of the lives of others. The subject is seen as a subject of rights, and not as an “individual” who has privileges. Free tuition and academic quality

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meant the admission of students from working families with a modest economy and from medium sectors who yearn and wish to be part of it.

We remember with regret the events of the Night of the Long Sticks (1966, Buenos Aires, Argentina); the closure process was a consequence of what followed the repression unleashed by another dictator, Juan Carlos Onganía. Many professors with recognized academic careers and a considerable number of graduates were forced to emigrate from Argentina, expelled from the university.

A few years ago, in the context of a collection that we published on our own with colleagues from the Biblioteca Popular La Chicharra <sup>1</sup>– Enriqueta Muñiz collection, “Libros que muerden”, notebook n. 1 –, at the moment of closing the copy, we all entered into a discussion about words and memories. Memories in the plural, collective memory within the scope of collective processes, and here we evoke Martín Kohan (2022), according to whom there are memories in societies that are, at the same time, shared acts, objects of disputes, alliances and even controversies. This is what he calls collective memory and memories in struggle, an issue related to the recent Argentine past. There are conflicts around what is remembered and how it is remembered, a movement to interpret the past with new meanings, in such a way that memory seems inconsistent and prevented from producing a totalization.

In this notebook, we also refer to a practice that we carried out for many years and

that we still carry out whenever we deal with the issue of banned books in Argentina. In general, we approach the topic by presenting a gallery of books that have been censored, starting with each word that was cut, eliminated, suppressed. In fact, we transform these words into portable objects that we keep in suitcases to rethink them, put them into a new narrative, revise the text from which they came. On one occasion, faced with the invitation to participate in an activity at the La Plata Natural Sciences Museum (2015), we hung on a huge wall several tens of thousands and thousands of words that at some point were eliminated, that at some point were erased; we put them on a wall, although in other circumstances we use a blackboard or a shop window, or even rewrite them on the street: *espadrille, belly, moon guard [paralunas]* (a word highlighted in *Un libro Juntos*, from 1976, by the captivating writer Beatriz Ferro), *Cuba, cubism, erogenous, abyss, vagina, assembly, companions, sex, repression, beard, rock, politics, Marxism, Peronism, Soviet, militancy, discussion*, etc. Gathering them and placing them in a great miscellany presupposes that we get involved with them, with each one of them, from the place that each one wants, that each one can. Gathering them and placing them in a great miscellany presupposes that we get involved with them, with each one of them, from the place that each one wants, that each one can. The word *exile* does not mean the same thing for those who lived this experience directly, for those who hear it for the first time or for those who recognize it as part of a period in our history, and this happens to everyone; We can continue listing these words that at some point were banned until dawn: *nomads, disarrangement, Nicaragua, pencil, carnival, retained, hymen, dawn, Mascaro, Latin America, elephant, strike*.

Words, basic units of linguistic communication, are written and inscribed, incorporated, defined and redefined; when

used, they become dangerous, they become necessary to process losses and emptiness, to touch the untranslatable, the inexplicable. They are crack and bridge, river and onslaught, balm, medicine, conversation. If we say certain words that we need at certain times, can we repair anything? Can we bring them together in prayers so that they acquire meaning in the meaningless? Can we understand what is unique about the use we make of them, but also what they imply in a common story? What are the responsibilities of those who eliminated words, projects, people? What tensions are present in the dispute over the meaning of words? In the book I mentioned before, *Niños de hoy* (Yunque, 1974), in the story “Insuficiente”, a student manages to share with a teacher what is happening, and the teacher, with her dedication, interest and confidence, listens to what is making her so distressed. The teacher not only listens to her, but makes decisions so as not to harm her, to contribute to the student’s care in the face of the moment of rupture she is experiencing.

It is not me that I would like to talk about in this true story, but Edgarda Gómez – or, to be more precise, an episode that she told me and I listened with the eyes of imagination and the ears of thought very alert. Because Edgarda Gómez, poet and teacher, my friend, is one of those people I know I should listen to.

A few phrases before, the writer says:

Despite my parsimony in words, she considered me a good conversationalist, so... I know how to listen, although I already warn that I also know who I should listen to, as one listens to the flow of a mountain stream that goes down between the rocks, looking at it without seeing it and listening to it without listening to it,

with thoughts and imagination far from what it says and close to its words. (p. 21-22)

Finally – to present and share a recent and sensitive quote from the illustrated book *Palabras* (Guridi, 2021) –, we can move towards the intimacy of words, especially when placed in relation to another. Each reader can project whatever they want, remember and imagine onto it. The words are evoked in this way: what I tried to tell you, what I didn’t know how to tell you, what I never told you, what I should never have said, what I needed to say, what the wind took, what I kept – he concludes –, I offer you now.

The words, therefore; including those that have been prohibited for a long time or those that have been mistreated and are inconvenient, such as an offering to another whom one would like to reach for the first time or again.

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1. La Chicharra Popular Library: space linked to arts and literature, located in Galpón de Encomiendas y Equipajes, Meridiano V neighborhood, La Plata, 18th and 71st streets. Instagram: La Chicharra Library. Peculiar collections are kept in this building; among them, “Libros que muerden: infantile and juvenile literature censored during the last military civic dictatorship 1976-1983”, formally collected in the library since March 24, 2006, the date on which the civil-military coup in Argentina completed thirty years.

# In the longing for the right word: Notes on the name realism in Stendhal· Balzac· Baudelaire· Flaubert· Proust\*\*

The paradox thrives. On the one hand, Artificial Intelligence (AI), beyond its stock market fluctuations, has spread throughout our daily lives, relaunching the game with the shadow of the invisible, reigniting the baroque confusion between life and dream, beast and man, word and thing, falsehood and truth, magic and reason, virtual and real. Dematerialized, the world becomes present in the play of lights on the screen, as Google's oceanic cables traverse and anchor it. On the other hand, opposite and in solidarity, forming an indestructible oxymoron, the cult of "reality" grows, with its material evidence and unequivocal obviousness. In the realm of literature, "realist" genres are spreading, now understood as genres in which the referential—the supposedly "non-literary" world—can attest to the value they present or, at least, promise: biographies, autobiographies, testimonies, correspondence, life stories, memoirs, diaries. This triumph of referentiality tends to inhibit the metaphorical and metalinguistic dimensions, fostering interpretations that are simply redundant or prefabricated with prior sociological and psychological ("ecological," lately...)

materials. As if only the *reality show* were available.

A double aspect in which the world imposes itself—in the intermittence of the screen that lights up and fades away—as virtuality/immateriality/fiction/falsehood, and as positivity that literature registers.

Admitting a reality of *non-coincidence* between the word and the thing (because language is not nomenclature, but a system of differences from which "the thing" escapes), of the word with itself (because general homonymy governs language), of the sender and the recipient (because the unconscious operates by splitting each speaker), and of discourse with itself (because there is no Adamic speaker who speaks for the first time in a world untouched by sayings), given, then, this impossible coincidence, what happens to the desire to add truth to the world? What becomes of the longing for a word capable of naming things with certainty, calling "bread, bread; wine, wine"? The linguist Jacqueline Authier-Revuz (1995/2012, 2020) devoted two monumental works to the study of enunciative marks that point out the constant "negotiation" that we speakers carry out with that real of *non-coincidence*, with that impossible.

In a necessarily restricted and partial way, I will focus on two or three metaphors—"mirror on a road," "secretary of society," "observer"—

that, also paradoxically, aim to name a style (or genre, or current, or movement), the so-called "realism," imagined as a direct, unequivocal statement, in a biunivocal relationship with the things named. Like a word uttered by things, emanating from things, and captured in things.

1. The term *realism* spread to the arts in the 19th century through philosophy, particularly in literature and the visual arts. Since then, and under the influence of evidence, it has spawned a large family: *surrealism*, *socialist realism*, *nouveau réalisme*, *neorealism*, *poetic realism*, *marvelous realism*, *dirty realism*, *magical realism*, *hyperrealism*, *realisms*, *non-realisms*, etc. Similarly, it spawned all its supposed opposites: *romanticism*, *the romantic novel*, *the psychological novel*, *science fiction*, *weird literature*, *fantasy literature*, etc. It is clear that literature, considered and taught as the history of literature (as a series of eras, movements, schools, or styles that react to the previous one), made realism the purgative reaction to *romanticism*, which it supposedly succeeds. This construction dates back to the 19th century and remains in place today.

However, the 1960s, attentive to the linguistic and discursive dimension of literature, sought to dismantle and highlight the so-called *effet de réel* [*effect of real*] (Barthes, 1982), the so-called *illusion référentielle* [*referential illusion*] (Riffaterre, 1982) or the system of constrictions constitutive of the genre (Hamon, 1982). From another perspective, Jorge Luis Borges (1940) emphasized the implausibility and the crude trickery that sustains *realism*.

The unfortunate good fortune that the metaphor of reflection has had and continues to have in literary criticism is well known, that is, of art as a reflection of something that is not art and that, for lack of a better term, is usually called "reality." According to this metaphor, art, like positive science, proposes a representation of reality; consequently, art is liable to be judged and categorized according to the relationship it establishes with that which is not itself: a rela-

tionship of adequacy, of truthful representation, of faithful or unpredictable reflection.

2. A notable precedent of this specular metaphor appears in *Le rouge et le noir*, a novel in which Stendhal (1830/192) heads each chapter with a memorable epigraph.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the sentence "a novel is a mirror held up along a path" is attributed to Saint-Réal, a 17th-century man of letters. This metaphor was read as the true reflection of realist poetics, as its guiding precept.<sup>2</sup> For example, the online encyclopedia *Universalis* states: "From Balzac to Zola, and whatever differences it may entail, the novel is intended as the mirror of the nineteenth century" (Raymond, n. d., para. 2). However, this is an apocryphal quotation; its attributed author, Saint-Réal, never claimed such a thing, and probably his name - Saint-Réal - only served Stendhal to round off his joke. Something similar happens with the harsh epigraph that opens the novel: "The truth, the harsh truth"<sup>3</sup>, attributed to Danton, who never claimed such a thing either. In other words, *Le rouge et le noir*, a novel whose subtitle *Chroniques of 1830* announces the story of an epoch, contains within it two epigraphs that, apocryphal, destroy the representational truth they postulate. By the way, critics never found it easy to label Stendhal, giving rise to multiple inconsistencies ("cult of passion, of energy, of the Mediterranean countries, of the Renaissance, limpid language, lucid analytical spirit, even ironic, the precise realism of his vision of things announces the later novelistic schools").

The critic's discomfort with Stendhal's labeling is understandable: the metaphor of the mirror, so obvious and limpid - the novel re-

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\*\* This paper develops and modifies a first version, read as a lecture in November 2023 (Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de la República).

1. «Un roman : c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long d'un chemin». All translations are by the author. The pages referred to correspond to the French editions.

2. «De Balzac à Zola, et quelles que soient les différences qu'il comporte, le roman se propose d'être comme le miroir du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle».

3. «La vérité, l'âpre vérité».

flects the world - manages to hide what anyone knows: a mirror can reflect everything except words, which is precisely what makes a novel.

3. Comparable to the Stendhalian “mirror”, the metaphor of Balzac, “secretary” of society, is maintained, as it appears, in 1842, in the *Human Comedy*:

French Society would be the historian, I would only be the secretary. By establishing the inventory of the vices and virtues, compiling the main facts of passions, painting characters, selecting the main events of society, composing types by combining the traits of several homogeneous characters, I would perhaps be able to write the history forgotten by so many historians: that of morals. (p. 21)<sup>4</sup>

It's worth, I think, paying attention to the ancillary function Balzac attributes to himself: as society's secretary, his role is restricted to taking notes, to recording what society utters. Through this service—almost as a medium—we hear society speak. However, Balzac's detailed description of secretarial duties shows him, the “subaltern,” ordering the world: stating what vice and virtue are, taking his inventory; stating what passion is, describing the main events in society, etc. He thus goes from imaginary secretary or spokesperson for society to demiurge, to the effective creator of its characters and myths.

The formula of the novelist as “society's secretary” was successful, revived, and am-

plified. For example, Alexandre Dumas wrote in 1849 in *Le Mois*: “we will be the shorthand writers of the universe” (as it appears in Mombert, 2011, p. 1126), a formula that he had already taken up and amplified in the advertising poster for the launch of that newspaper, a year earlier: “God dictates, and we write” (p. 1126).<sup>5</sup>

For example, Alexandre Dumas writes in 1849 in *Le Mois*: “We will be the stenographers of the universe” (as it appears in Mombert, 2011, p. 1126)<sup>6</sup>, a formula he had already taken up and amplified in the advertising poster for the launch of that newspaper, a year earlier: God dictates, and we write “ (p. 1126).<sup>7</sup>

The Balzacian metaphor, secretarial, secular and realistic, and the Dumasian metaphor, exalted, divine and romantic, declare the continuity, the shared and indivisible ground of *romanticism* and *realism*: in both cases, the writer is postulated as subordinate, obedient to an alien instance -society/universe/God-, provided with a voice that gives lyrics to him, the writer. Modest secretary or euphoric typist of the universe, both writers will act as ventriloquists, as performers of prosopopoeia.

It is not this faculty, that of inventing a master - “society/universe/God”- of whom they claim to be servants, that is usually highlighted in, for example, Balzac, to whom rather attributes talents typical of a nineteenth-century scientist: observation and description.

Fortunately, there were those who avoided the stratagem of prosopopoeia and, rather than a distanced observer, saw in his heroes greater grandeur than in the Homeric heroes, and in Balzac a “romantic” and a “poetic”, similar to his work and his characters. This is how Baudelaire (1846/2011a) sees it:

4. «La Société française allait être l'historien, je ne devais être que le secrétaire. . En dressant l'inventaire des vices et des vertus, en rassemblant les principaux faits des passions, en peignant les caractères, en choisissant les événements principaux de la Société, en composant des types par la réunion de traits de plusieurs caractères homogènes, peut-être pouvais-je arriver à écrire l'histoire oubliée par tant d'historiens, celle des mœurs”.

5. «nous serons les sténographes de l'univers».

6. «nous serons les sténographes de l'univers».

7. «Dieu dicte, et nous écrivons».



Roberto Huaraya

*Desires, Fears, and Divans* (1990). Series, Photo 1, 40 cm x 30 cm. Analogue print.

Because the heroes of the *Iliad* do not even reach your ankles, oh Vautrin, oh Rastignac, oh Birotteau - and you, oh Fontanarès, who did not dare to tell the public your sorrows under the funereal and convulsed tailcoat that we all wear -; and you, Honoré de Balzac, the most heroic, the most singular, the most romantic, the most poetic among all the characters you drew from your bosom ! (p. 689)<sup>8</sup>

In other words, for Baudelaire it is not that Balzac poured his life into his work, but rather that, much more radically, like Don Quixote,

like Madame Bovary, his life is a creation of literature, in his case, his own. Baudelaire was extraordinary, capable of reversing at a stroke the commonplaces that positivism imposed and imposes. Similarly, in this eulogy that closes the Salon of 1846, Baudelaire finds in Balzac the author capable of creating—of extracting from his bosom—a “new element” that is Parisian “modern beauty”: “Parisian life is fertile in poetic and marvelous matters. The marvelous envelops us and nourishes us like the atmosphere, but we do not see it” (p. 687).<sup>9</sup>

Baudelaire is recurrent in his admiring understanding of Balzac, defined as “novelist and sage”, “inventor and observer”, “naturalist” who knows “the law of generation of ideas and visible beings”:

Indeed, Balzac is a novelist and a savant, an inventor and an observer; a naturalist who also knows the

8. «Car les héros de l'*Iliade* ne vont qu'à votre cheville, ô Vautrin, ô Rastignac, ô Birotteau, - et vous, ô Fontanarès, qui n'avez pas osé raconter au public vos douleurs sous le frac funèbre et convulsionné que nous endossons tous ; - et vous, Honoré de Balzac, vous le plus héroïque, le plus singulier, le plus romantique et le plus poétique parmi tous les personnages que vous avez tirés de votre sein !».

9. « La vie parisienne est féconde en sujets poétiques et merveilleux. Le merveilleux nous enveloppe et nous abreuve comme l'atmosphère ; mais nous ne le voyons pas»

law of generation of ideas and visible beings. He is a great man, to use the full force of this expression; he is a creator of method and the only one whose method is worth studying . (p. 447)<sup>10</sup>

Let us consider a final statement, in which Baudelaire returns to Balzac’s “inventor” character, explicitly dissociating it from the mirror novel of society:

Since Paris likes above all to hear about Paris, the crowd is pleased with the mirrors in which it sees itself. But when the novel of manners is not seasoned by the intense natural taste of the author, it runs the risk of the bland and even, as in art, usefulness can be measured in the degree of nobility, of the completely useless. If Balzac made of this plebeian genre something admirable, always curious and often sublime, it is because he gave it his whole being. I was very often surprised that Balzac’s great glory was to pass for an observer; it had always seemed to me that his main merit was to be a visionary, and a passionate visionary at that. All his characters are endowed with the vital ardor that animated him. All his fictions are as deeply colored as dreams. From the summits of the aristocracy to the lowest depths of the plebs, all the actors of his *Comedy* are more acerbic for life, more active and astute in the struggle, more patient in misfortune, more gour-

mand in enjoyment, more angelic in surrender, than the comedy of the real world shows them to us. In short, everyone, in Balzac, even the concierges, has genius. All souls are weapons loaded with willpower up to the caracu. This is Balzac himself. And as all the beings of the outside world offered themselves to the naked gaze of his spirit with a powerful relief and a fascinating grimace, Balzac made these figures convulse; he blackened their shadows and illuminated their lights. His prodigious taste for detail, which comes from an immoderate ambition to see everything, to guess everything, to make everything be guessed, also forced him to emphasize the main lines more strongly, in order to save the perspective of the whole . (p. 502)<sup>11</sup>

11. “Comme Paris aime surtout à entendre parler de Paris, la foule se complait dans les miroirs où elle se voit. Mais quand le roman de mœurs n’est pas relevé par le haut goût naturel de l’auteur, il risque fort d’être plat, et même, comme en matière d’art l’utilité peut se mesurer au degré de noblesse, tout à fait inutile. Si Balzac a fait de ce genre roturier [le roman de mœurs] une chose admirable, toujours curieuse et souvent sublime, c’est parce qu’il a jeté tout son être. J’ai maintes fois été étonné que la grande gloire de Balzac fût de passer pour un observateur ; il m’avait toujours semblé que son principal mérite était d’être visionnaire, et visionnaire passionné. Tous ses personnages sont doués de l’ardeur vitale dont il était animé lui-même. Toutes ses fictions sont aussi profondément colorées que les rêves. Depuis les sommets de l’aristocratie jusqu’aux bas-fonds de la plèbe, tous les acteurs de sa *Comédie* sont plus âpres à la vie, plus actifs et rusés dans la lutte, plus patients dans le malheur, plus goulus dans la jouissance, plus angéliques dans le dévouement, que la comédie du vrai monde ne nous les montre. Bref, chacun, chez Balzac, même les portières, a du génie. Toutes les âmes sont des armes chargées de volonté jusqu’à la gueule. C’est bien Balzac lui-même. Et comme tous les êtres du monde extérieur souffraient à l’œil nu de son esprit avec un relief puissant et une grimace saisissante, il a fait se convulser ses figures ; il a noirci leurs ombres et illuminé leurs lumières. Son goût prodigieux du détail, qui tient à une ambition immodérée de tout voir, de tout faire voir, de tout deviner, de tout faire deviner, l’obligeait d’ailleurs à marquer avec plus de force les lignes principales, pour sauver la perspective de l’ensemble”.

10. Balzac est en effet un romancier et un savant, un inventeur et un observateur ; un naturaliste qui connaît également la loi de génération des idées et des êtres visibles. C’est un grand homme dans toute la force du terme ; c’est un créateur de méthode et le seul dont la méthode vaille la peine d’être étudiée”.

In this portrait that Baudelaire paints of Balzatian writing, if there is a “mirror” it is not to be found in Balzac, but in other works with which “the crowd is pleased”, because Balzatian exacerbation and “convulsion” do not “show themselves” in “the comedy of the real world”. Likewise, this writing is far removed from the ancillary figure of the secretary, obedient to the dictates of others. There is no distanced “observation”, but “passionate vision”; there is no restraint and accommodation to the proportions of the world, but there is “immoderate ambition”, there is disproportionate ambition for “everything”.

Indeed, in this writing and in this character who is its author, Baudelaire is recognizing the thirst for the absolute, the complete rejection of bourgeois calculation, which sustains and encourages romantic desire.

4. Some time later, in his extraordinary review of *Madame Bovary*, Baudelaire (1857/2011b) also evokes Balzac whom he calls “that prodigious meteor that will cover our country with a cloud of glory, like a rare and exceptional Orient, like a polar aurora that floods the frozen desert with its fairy lights” (p. 478), and adds that, since his death, any curiosity about the novel had been appeased and slumbered.

Baudelaire’s portrait of Balzac—“prodigious meteor,” “cloud of glory,” “rare and exceptional Orient,” “polar aurora,” “frozen desert,” “fairy lights”—departs from a realist Balzac, “secretary of society.” Something similar happens with Baudelaire’s analysis of *Madame Bovary*, an opportunity for the poet to dismantle the mechanism, the artifice, of “the literary process called realism”:

And also, as in recent times our ears have been exhausted by puerile school chatter, as we have heard about a certain literary procedure called realism -a disgusting insult thrown in the face of all analysts, an imprecise and elastic word that

means, for the vulgar, not a new method of creation, but a meticulous description of the accessories-, we will take advantage of the confusion of the spirits and the universal ignorance. We will extend a nervous, picturesque, subtle, exact style over a trivial warp. We will enclose the hottest and most lively feelings in the most banal adventure. The most solemn words, the most decisive, will escape from the most foolish mouths. Which is the land of foolishness, the most stupid environment, the most productive in absurdities, the most abundant in intolerant imbeciles? p. 479)<sup>12</sup>

And, somewhat in the manner Poe proceeded with the writing of “The Raven,” Baudelaire mimics the reasoning supposedly followed by Flaubert in selecting the theme and treatment of *Madame Bovary*. Beyond the accuracy of this imitation, I will emphasize that, for Baudelaire, *realism*, the object of “puerile chapel talk,” is an “imprecise and elastic word,” a “literary procedure” that he, Baudelaire, finds active, in work, in *Madame Bovary*.

In this way, Baudelaire frees *realism* from the domination of “reality” to place it under the control of procedure, artifice, and style.

12. “Et aussi, comme nos oreilles ont été harassées dans ces derniers temps par des bavardages d’école puérils, comme nous avons entendu parler d’un certain procédé littéraire appelé réalisme, -injure dégoûtante jetée à la face de tous les analystes, mot vague et élastique qui signifie pour le vulgaire, non pas une méthode nouvelle de création, mais une description minutieuse des accessoires, -nous profiterons de la confusion des esprits et l’ignorance universelle. Nous étendrons un style nerveux, pittoresque, subtil, exact, sur un canevas banal. Nous enfermerons les sentiments les plus chauds et les plus bouillants dans l’aventure la plus triviale. Les paroles les plus solennelles, les plus décisives, s’échapperont des bouches les plus sottes. Quel est le terrain de sottise, le milieu le plus stupide, le plus productif en absurdité, les plus abondant en imbéciles intolérants?”.

The acuity of Baudelaire's analysis, his intelligence in discerning the mechanisms at play, did not prevent Flaubert from being credited by later critics with two quite incompatible attributes: subordination to "reality," that is, referential subordination, and at the same time, subordination to style, the relentless search for the word that sounds good.

In a letter to his friend Edma Roger des Genettes, Flaubert (1856/1998) had written:

I am eager to have a long conversation with you (but when and where) about the *theory* of the thing. You think I am enamored with the real, when I detest it. And it is out of hatred of realism that I undertook this novel [M<sup>me</sup>Bovary]. But I detest no less the false ideality that has us beguiled in these times. (p. 310)<sup>13</sup>

Flaubert thus makes explicit two major misunderstandings. If, for some, Flaubert is "in love with the real," he declares that he "hates it," to the point that it was not the desire to give an account of this "real" that moved him to write *Madame Bovary*, but "the hatred" that "realism" arouses in him. On the other hand, Flaubert rejoices in considering the possibility of being awarded the Montyon Prize, intended for works "most useful to morality and good morals." That would be, Flaubert writes, "the most terrible farce that could be played on me" (p. 310), and adds "when you have read the end you will see that I deserve that prize" (p. 310).

Flaubert is thus foreseeing that the end of

his novel can be understood as a message full of morality (Emma Bovary dies in excruciating agony, her husband Charles does not survive her, the little daughter Berthe, an orphan, must go to work in a factory: the punishment for the crime of adultery falls on the culprit and her family) or full of desolate sarcasm: the French State ends up decorating with the Iron Cross the pharmacist Homais, one of the most vile characters of the nineteenth century.

This ending, replete with the triumphant morality of the bourgeois order, or replete with the corrupt baseness that the State celebrates in Homais, distances us from a "realistic" reading, insofar as "reality" is transferred and subjected to the plane of interpretation.

5. Proust, an admired reader of Balzac, Baudelaire and Flaubert, to whom he dedicated luminous analyses, was also, like Flaubert, Ducasse, Rimbaud, Verlaine, a consistent admirer of parody and pastiche.

To the scholarly reasons given by Proust for cultivating pastiche - an exercise that allows us to avoid, by dint of voluntarily and consciously imitating, involuntary imitation - we can add a reason that involves Proustian poetics, his own literary conviction. Present throughout the seven volumes of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, this conviction is exposed, against the light -ironically- in *Le temps retrouvé* Proust, 1927/1999), when the narrator, after reading some unpublished pages of the *Journal* des Goncourt, in "reality" pastiched by Proust, comes to the conclusion that he does indeed have a literary conviction, comes to the conclusion that he could not write, since, not knowing how to listen or look, he was incapable of recounting, in detail, an evening at the Verdurins' house, as the Goncourts had supposedly recounted in the pages just read by the narrator.

The matter is ironic, since the narrator claims not to be able to recount a mundane evening, which the Goncourts know how to do, only that those *Journal* pages proving the

Goncourts' talent, being apocryphal, being pastiched by Proust, prove that the narrator can write like the Goncourts.

Likewise, the narrator claims to have a "geometer's" gaze, a gaze that strips things of their sensible qualities, and sees only their linear substratum, so that, when he thought he was looking at the diners, he was "X-raying" them.

Finally, the narrator gives a definitive reason, declaring himself incapable of seeing anything whose desire had not been previously awakened by some reading. Literature, by lending its "illusory magic" to things, made them desirable, so much so that we could ask ourselves if all those people we regretted not having known -given how Balzac painted them in his books or given the verses Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire dedicated to them- would not, had we known them, have seemed like insignificant people to us (pp. 2146-2151).

At this point, if Baudelaire and Balzac remain radiant in the reflection of the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time*, nothing survives of the secretary of society or of the mirror that reflects the road if not, perhaps, in the Goncourts, disciplined diarists who do know how to listen and observe, although that, precisely, has nothing to do with literature and the desire that produces its illusory magic, that is to say, with Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Baudelaire.

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13. «J'ai bien envie de causer longuement avec vous (mais quand et -où) sur la *théorie* de la chose. I believe myself to be a realist, while I believe it to be true. Car c'est en haine du réalisme que j'ai entrepris ce roman [M<sup>me</sup>Bovary]. Mais je n'en déteste pas moins la fausse idéalité dont nous sommes bernés par le temps qui court».

## The precise word

One word, eight young students from a poetry translation workshop sitting on the damp lawn of the botanical garden outside with their two teachers. The word is insight; the context, the last lines of “Autumn”, a poem by Louise Glück (2017):

*Insight, my sister said.  
Now it is here.  
But hard to see in the darkness.*

*You must find your footing  
before you put your weight on it.  
(vv. 36-40)*

The sister appears earlier, in the third stanza:

*Life, my sister said,  
is like a torch passed now  
from the body to the mind.  
Sadly, she went on, the mind is  
not  
there to receive it.  
(vv. 9-13)*

Someone opts for “knowledge”; someone else for “intuition”. They also propose “understanding”, “insight”, “perspective”. “We have to be smart” is another proposal. It’s not a discussion; each student gives their reasons for choosing one word or another, and everyone, students and teachers, listens with interest.

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The translation of this word creates a unique poem. The teachers want the students to be aware of the effect of their choice on the poem. For a student, the sister is wise because she is intuitive; for another, she is wise because she has knowledge. There are those for whom the sister understands and there are those for whom she observes with insight how life unfolds. The poem opens up the possibility of a variety of sisters, and each one corresponds to an experience or a dream.

Glück wrote “Autumn” before losing her younger sister, Tereze; before she had another, or she had nothing more than a feeling of emptiness and absence; her older sister died before she was born. When this group of students read “Autumn”, Glück had already experienced two losses; one of them, for life. Perhaps young women read and write with this void in mind. Teachers understand their role as guides and do not censor any version, or try not to do so: it is possible that someone will notice a slight smile, an almost imperceptible movement or a sparkle in the eyes, a way of looking or turning the head or tilting it. Sometimes they are in the words of young people.

Philosophers reflected and wrote about this phenomenon, which Willard van Quine (1960/2013) called *translation indeterminacy*: a statement can have several translations, distinct from each other, in such a way that they are all correct, but the differences between them are not just stylistic (Hylton & Kemp, 2023). It is then worth asking whether the “correct” translation is impossible. Not only that: an utterance admits different translations in both style and message only if there

is an ambiguity, so that the indeterminacy of the translation involves the indeterminacy of the language; So the question is whether we understand each other. The idea that communication consists of transmitting a specific (determined) message through an utterance, added to the indeterminacy of translation, seems in fact to lead to the conclusion that communication between two different linguistic communities is impossible and, taking the argument further, that communication is not possible.

The “correct” (unique) translation could only exist if there was synonymy, that is, only if it were possible to find words whose meaning was exactly the same in one language as in the other: if there was a precise word. However, no translator knows that this does not exist. Not even in the language of science. In fact, as Tomás Segovia (2011) explains, scientific language is constructed with natural language; There is a terminology, but the terms are only part of the sequence of words that constitute an utterance, and this is without considering differences in morphosyntax. If we think that a correct scientific translation is a translation that correctly conveys the scientific fact in question, in this context there are correct and incorrect translations, but not a single correct translation. Although the message is transmitted correctly, two translators will always produce different results; the indeterminacy of the translation leads us to think that among these results it is not possible to decide whether one is “more correct” than the other.

The question, in the case of literary translation, is what it means for a translation to be “correct”. This question is as old as the translation itself. It has also been said about the impossibility of literary translation; Gérard Genette (1989), for example, proposes that literary language is, by definition, untranslatable. This is due to the fact that in a literary text the meaning depends not only on the words that constitute it, but also, and much more importantly, on how they are concatenated.

The associations and relationships produced by this concatenation of words and sounds contribute to the construction of meaning, and the different meanings of each word reverberate in it: each reader constructs these associations in a unique way. According to Genette, translating this into another language is impossible. However, we translate literature and have been doing so for hundreds of years. Since Babel.

The fact is that, although the interpretation of a literary text requires rigorous critical analysis and not every interpretation is admissible, there can be different readings. This is the magic of literature: we will all find ourselves, at some point, in some poem or in some character. The critic’s job is to decipher how this happens. The indeterminacy of language, the inevitable ambiguity, is what produces this diversity of meanings that encompasses us all. This is the main difference between specialized language and literary language: what can be a source of problems in one is the richness of the other.

Just as the diversity of meanings enriches literature, the indeterminacy of translation enriches translation. Jorge Luis Borges already said, in “The Homeric Versions” (1932/1980):

The *Quixote*, thanks to my congenital knowledge of Spanish, is a uniform monument, with no other variations than those found by the editor, the book-binder and the typographer; The *Odyssey*, thanks to my opportune ignorance of Greek, is an international library of works in prose and verse, from Chapman’s paired rhyming verses to Andrew Lang’s *Authorized Version* or Bérard’s classical French drama or Morris’s vigorous saga or Samuel Butler’s ironic bourgeois romance. (p. 88)



In the same way that Borges had multiple *Odysseys* at his disposal, there are now eight versions of “Autumn” in Spanish: eight autumns with eight sisters. Borges cites the versions of a specific fragment and asks himself which one will be the most faithful, and then answers that none, or all.

And it’s like this: before responding, you need to define what you want to be faithful to. The teachers propose to the young translators of “Autumn” that it is their critique of the text that answers Borges’ question. Before opting for one word or another, they have to study Glück’s poem and offer an interpretation: the precision of the word is not absolute, but relative to this interpretation. They must not forget that the sister and the relationship between them, as well as what the autumns of their past offered and left them, depend on their choice.

An example of how the choice of a word can change the conformation of a character in translation appears in *Hopscotch* (Cortázar, 1963/1966), Gregory Rabassa’s translation of *Rayuela* [The Hopscotch Game], a novel by Julio Cortázar (1963/2022). Rabassa began working on this translation – published in 1966 – in 1964, a year after the book was published. Throughout the translation process, the author and translator maintained constant communication; Cortázar was aware and approved all the translator’s decisions.

When comparing *Hopscotch* with *Rayuela*, we see some small (but perhaps large) differences in the formation of a crucial character. The first chapters of the novel are narrated in the first person by Horacio Oliveira, the main character; in these, he describes the Maga and the relationship they had. In chapter 1, Oliveira describes the moment he met Maga: “Ya para entonces me había dados cuenta de que

Busca era mi signo” [At that point I had already realized that searching was my fate] (Cortázar, 1963/2022, position 1069). In *Hopscotch*, Oliveira says: “*It was about that time that I realized that searching was my symbol*” (Cortázar, 1963/1966, p. 7). Thus, in Cortázar’s text, upon meeting the Maga, Oliveira already knew that for him life was about seeking, while in Rabassa’s version it was only then that he realized this. The difference between “para entonces” [at that time] and “entonces” [then] makes the appearance of the Maga de Rabassa crucial in Oliveira’s life.

Later, in chapter 4, already narrated in third person, there is another difference. The fragment tells how Oliveira was happy, although the way the Maga did things exasperated him. Among the examples he presents is the following:

o parada en medio de la calle (el Renault negro frenaba a dos metros y el conductor sacaba la cabeza y puteaba con el acento de Picardía), parada como si tal cosa para mirar desde el medio de la calle una vista del Panteón a lo lejos, siempre mucho mejor que la vista que se tenía desde la vereda. (Cortázar, 1963/2022, posição 1302)

Rabassa translates:

or would stop in the middle of the street (a black Renault came to a halt about five feet away and the driver stuck his head out and used his Picardy accent to call her a whore). She would stop as if there was a real view to be seen from the middle of the street, as if the sight of the distant Panthéon was much better from there than from the sidewalk. (Cortázar, 1963/1966, p. 22)

By changing “parada para mirar una vista” [stopping to look at a view] to “se pararía como si hubiera una vista” [she would stop as if there were a view], in *Hopscotch*, the Maga changes. In Rabassa’s text, the Maga stops in the middle of the street as if she could see the Panthéon from there: she can only imagine what that view would be like. In the source text, she sees him, and when she sees him, she forgets everything, where she is and her public and social commitment to crossing the streets carefully and without stopping, at the risk of losing her life. In *Hopscotch*, your commitment is to your imagination, and you observe things as if they fit it.

These changes may seem trivial, but they are not so. When the Maga disappears from his life, Oliveira’s search becomes the search for the Magician, or for what the Magician had and that made him happy, although it exasperated him. It seems that this is not quite the same in *Hopscotch* and *Rayuela*.

This should not lead one to think that Gregory Rabassa’s translation is not “correct”. It is not just the result of a common work between author and translator: *Hopscotch* is a novel that stands on its own as a literary text in Anglo-Saxon culture and was of great importance in the formation of a new type of reader in that culture. Putting aside the idea of qualifying these changes as errors produced a new discipline, translation studies or translatology.

Translation studies began to emerge as an independent discipline after the Second World War. The fundamental change in the way of studying or analyzing translations consisted of stopping prescribing and starting to describe. As for the literary text, the idea of what is a good translation (or a correct translation) is not the same in different societies or at different times. Every translation, literary or not, is part of the discourse of the culture it receives, which changes over time. Furthermore, the literary text is a special case: on the one hand, it is subject to literary criticism, also inserted in the social moment of the two cultures, the one

of origin and the one that receives it; on the other hand, one should not forget that what a society perceives (and accepts) as literary language is also not constant either historically or geographically. This is why translation criticism and comparison with the source text bear fruit when they do not look for what is perceived as an error, but instead dedicate themselves to studying, for example, how the translator’s decisions reverberate in the translated text, how a translation or a set of translations are received in a society, the reasons why one chooses to translate a type of text or an author. According to Patricia Willson (2010), “the comparison should be a critical and not a prescriptive tool; it should serve to see, in the omissions, additions and paraphrases, among other elements, conceptions of translation, literature, the reader, the language of translation” (p. 8).

Whenever two distinct linguistic communities met, there was mediation through translation. Studying who translates, what is translated, how it is translated and how it is received can show how societies and the people that constitute them relate to each other. The translator’s function is to make a text intelligible to a social group different from that to which it was originally addressed and affects not only the fact that it is possible to read it, but also how it will be read. Lawrence Venuti (1998) explains that the translator inscribes the text with intelligible values for a given community, and thus a translation identifies itself, and its author, with a discursive community – not only literary, but also ideological, social or political – in the culture it receives. Translation comparison is the tool to study how these identities are formed.

The translation that the Spanish poet Luis Cernuda (1938/1993) made of the sonnet “Indignation of a high-minded Spaniard” (1810/1995), by William Wordsworth, shows that adding a word – in this case, a letter – can identify the translator with a community by inscribing their values or ideologies in it



(Soberón, 2018). Invited by the poet Stanley Richardson, Cernuda arrived in London in February 1938, without knowing the language and without knowing that an exile that would last a lifetime was beginning. In April of the same year, “Cólera de un español altanero” [Cólera de un español altanero] and “El roble de Guernica” [The oak of Guernica], also a translation of a sonnet by Wordsworth, appeared in Barcelona in the magazine *Hora de España*, number 16, under the title “Dos sonetos de William Wordsworth” [Two sonnets by William Wordsworth]. Cernuda’s limited knowledge of English suggests that Richardson collaborated. Wordsworth wrote these sonnets, which speak of tyranny and lost freedoms, during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain. Cernuda translated them about two years after Francisco Franco’s uprising, when the Spanish Republic was still resisting, but it was already clear that the end was near and that it would not be favorable. The choice of these sonnets is in itself enough to identify the Spanish poet with the anti-Franco struggle. The translation of the first of them shows how the choice of one word, perhaps two, can inscribe easily recognizable values for a given community.

**Indignation of a high minded Spaniard**

*We can endure that He should waste our lands,  
Despoil our temples, and by sword and flame  
Return us to the dust from which we came;  
Such food a Tyrant’s appetite demands;  
And we can brook the thought that by his hands  
Spain may be overpowered, and he possess,  
For is delight, a solemn wilderness  
Where all the brave lie dead. But when of bands  
That he will break for us he dares to speak,  
Of benefits, and of a future day  
When our enlightened minds shall bless his sway;  
Then, the strained heart of fortitude proves weak;  
Our groans, our blushes, our pale cheeks declare  
That he has power to inflict us what we lack strength  
to bear.*

(Wordsworth, 1810/1995, p. 381)

The translator’s most visible decision is the adoption of the Spanish sonnet form, which, unlike the English sonnet, separates the poem into stanzas. It is also easy to notice that, in Wordsworth’s sonnet, shame does not appear, but is implicit, while Cernuda makes it explicit. The most significant change, however, occurs at the beginning of the second stanza of Cernuda’s version.

“*And we can brook the thought that by his hands/ Spain may be overpowered...*”, says Wordsworth’s poem. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, n.d.), the term brook means “*put up with, bear with, harden, tolerate*”, and is used in negative or exclusionary constructions. Cernuda chooses to translate this verb as “resist”, but writes “al Pense” [when thinking], and not “el Pense” [o think] or “el pensamiento” [o Thought], to translate “*the thought*”: “Podemos resistir al pensar ya vencida / España” [We can resist thinking already defeated/ Spain]. The introduction of the preposition “a” makes the meaning of “resist” intransitive, which according to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (n.d.), is “oponerse a” [to oppose]. So, therefore, this preposition, this single word, introduces resistance to the idea of Spain defeated by the tyrant and strewn with corpses. The poem changes: now it is shameful not to offer resistance before the tyrant. The poet inscribed this value in his translation, intelligible to the community of those who still resisted and shared with it. Cernuda identifies with resistance through this translation.

These examples show how a word can change the meaning of a text. Languages, even the closest ones, are not identical; There is no synonymy or absolute equivalence in grammar. The indeterminacy of translation is, as Borges wrote, a source of richness. It is also a responsibility: the power of a word to define a character or convey a message loaded with the authority of a respected name is great. This

is what every translator needs to take into account, the most important lesson for anyone learning the craft.

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## Word Work

*Given that life is not shown beyond the word,  
the verbal body itself is alive, circulating as  
a subject between subjects, subject to nothing.*

*Writing is not remembering, it is not storing,  
writing is living. Living is projecting, throwing  
oneself into the dark game of life, balancing  
on the edge of the abyss.*

Donaldo Schüler

Words labor. Words work. Words move worlds beyond mountains. Words, what are words? Words orbit.

Since I started asking “Do you give me your word?” to different people, in different places and in the most unexpected contexts, I realized that an organic movement was being triggered. The cliché gave way to the authentic. Curiosity took shape. The handwriting seemed to coin a signature. A simple brooch for hanging clothes, chosen as a support for the written word because of its significant value as a pin, that is to say, something capable of retaining and sustaining a moment of choice, was transformed into a kind of papyrus. A great rhizome was being traced - and braided - by the act of inscribing a narrative of its own. Papyrus leaves were used in ancient times to record scientific texts, government documents, poems, letters, religious texts, hymns, literature and other archival writings. With the passage of time, papyrus was replaced by parchment, a durable material produced from animal hide. Today, the wooden surface of the brooch takes on that function of recording, aspiring perhaps to become an immense *palimpsest* for a gesture of the future.

A simple clothespin, chosen as a support for the written word because of its significant value as a pin, that is to say, something capable

of retaining and sustaining an instant of choice, was transformed into a kind of papyrus. A large rhizome was being traced- and braided - by the act of inscribing one’s own narrative. Papyrus sheets were used in antiquity to record scientific texts, government documents, poems, letters, religious texts, hymns, literature or other archival writings. Over time, the papyrus lost space to parchment, long-lasting leaves produced from animal skin. Today, the wooden surface of the clothespin takes on for me this registration function, aspiring to become, who knows, an immense palimpsest in a nod to the future.

A word as a starting point marks the beginning of a long story that does not intend to find its end point. What text would be written, if not that of life itself made literature in its infinite dimension?

*Do you give me your word?* It’s the title of a long-term job. It began in Macapá, capital of Amapá, as a kind of response to what is not immediately understood. The mayor of the city was arrested. Without wanting to go into all the political details of the problem, the reason of the detention is already anticipated: the municipal manager had broken his word. That is what a taxi driver told me as he drove me back to the hotel, after we had found the doors of the cultural center where I was supposed to present myself closed. The next day I read about it in the newspaper, which reported on an alleged embezzlement of funds. So I called the same driver from the day before and, instead of giving him directions, I asked him, “Can I have your word?”



*Você me dá a sua palavra?* (2004)

Foto: Filipe Conde

Breaking one’s word is a serious thing. Having a word to give is something that dignifies one person, consoles another, anticipates an ethics of life and embraces the poetry of everyday life. It is better to make a deviation of verbs and find a place where art can effectively inhabit a probable horizon (Campos, 1969/2020)<sup>1</sup>.

Instead of clinging to it, let go of the word. Do something that puts the word in process and in direct contact with the world. No longer a *work in progress*, as a work that is indefinitely in progress is called, but a *word work world*, a formulation that I then took as the title of an exhibition, announcing a network formed by a *www* that does not come from a computer logic (*World Wide Web*), but from the search for a fictional and totally intuitive condition, as in the grammar that I have been practicing for a long time now. One language brushes against another language, and that friction, which can also be a caress, scratches (risks)<sup>2</sup> the approximation between art and literature. I ask for the word in my mother tongue, which always promotes a return to the origins or the possibility of redesigning affective maps on a canvas the size of the world. Today, a single two-hundred-meter-long thread lines the exhibition space and supports 7,900 clothes pegs with words written in different languages and spellings, thus offering another horizon to language.

1. Reference to the book *A arte no horizonte do provável e outros ensaios* by Haroldo de Campos, a collection of essays published in 1969. After reading this book, I conceived a work entitled *Horizonte provável* with the 581 verbs in the infinitive present in the text, which were printed using the silkscreen method with black ink on white porcelain plates. This work was first exhibited in 2004 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Niterói, combining the interior space of the museum with the infinity of the horizon of Guanabara Bay. Today this work is being presented in the exhibition *Palavrar* at the Cultural Center of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

2. Translator’s note: The play on words in Portuguese between *risca* (“line”, “scratch”) and *arrisca* (“risk”) is lost in translation.



*Uma pá lavra* (2004). Foto: Vilma Sonaglio

Another work from 2004 has coexisted with the universe of clothes pegs for the past twenty years. The sound rhyme between Amapá, map and shovel gave rise to the work *Uma pá lavra* (A word), consisting of two shovels purchased at a hardware store in Porto Alegre before heading to the north of Brazil. In my mind, I drew a vertical horizon: a line capable of connecting Porto Alegre and Macapá while also inverting the jargon “Brazil: from Oiapoque to Chuí”. Determined to draw this line, I anticipated a first detour. Armed with my tools, I moved to Chuí, the most extreme point in the South, almost in the Atlantic Ocean, a point of land from which Uruguay could be seen on one side and Brazil on the other. On one of the shafts, I wrote “PA”. On the other, “LAVRA”. Two shovels forming a single word. Is digging writing? Can we plow the land with an air of words? Yes, we can and should oxygenate language. I call this: *Palavrar* (Wording).

CRACKS  
MIX  
WORLDS

82 en palabras triplets, like the one reproduced above, make up *Grafar o buraco*, a work created in partnership with Donaldo Schüler in 2013. To design this work, all the words and graphic symbols present in a text, specially written by Donaldo Schüler, were separately

\* Visual artist.

engraved on approximately 2,500 microscopy slides using the sandblasting method. I have always liked to refer to this project as a “glass book”, following an inspiration from Jorge Luis Borges’s *The Book of Sand* (1975/2009). In its complete transparency and fragility, this set was laid out on a rectangular table and offered to the stumbling gaze, since it is a fall that the essay deals with. Here is the beginning of the plot: Thales of Miletus, astonished while admiring the starry sky, comes across a hole and falls. A woman laughs. In the constellations of words, a world enters into orbit. More recently, we published a book whose cover had a slit in which a glass slide with a word engraved on its surface fits. In this way, each of the fifty copies of *Grafar o buraco* is unique in its abyss (Schüler and Tessler, 2013/2022).

A shovel (pá), like a word (palavra), digs holes. This is the work of art: to open cracks, to find spaces, to create worlds and to believe in emptiness as a power to invent new horizons for thought.

Or as Donaldo Schüler tells us, in one of the pages of our *Grafar o buraco* (Schüler and Tessler, 2013/2022):

Don’t let the hole scare us  
get out of the hole  
renewed language  
bastion of renewed worlds

STEP  
BY STEP  
BY STEP  
BACKHOE

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Calibán -  
RLP, 23(1),  
199-203  
2025

Augusto Wong Campos\*

Two paths, one craft

Until just a few decades ago, literature in Latin America was understood as a schoolish, academic chore, an accumulation of encyclopaedic data of books and authors with occasional reading of anthologies. Authors themselves were distant characters, possessors of an incomprehensible profession, who happened to receive, after death, the honour of naming a bust or statue in a public park, or even a street (but never going as far as an avenue). Words, which had been the author’s tool, had –and often continue having– only one purpose for the community to which this writer belonged: they were used merely to communicate others, distract others, convince others, and the fact that they could also be used to create meaningful experiences through literature was rather an accidental occurrence. Literature was not a “serious” craft.

In Latin America, professionalization of literature has not yet fully taken hold. There is no such thing as an industry *per se*, but rather lone wolves who have friendships and relationships with other lone wolves who, in a tremendous effort, and with varying results depending on the country, try to promote the *idea* of a publishing industry, always incipient. On a larger scale, these unsung heroes pursue the mirage of a living literary culture. Literature in the region, as anywhere, depends enormously on a public that one would assume should be first of popular origin, but, in the absence of such a public or its preference for more accessible books of non-literary

nature, the task of pointing out what deserves to be known or what is relevant to culture as opposed to fleeting entertainments has fallen to the publishers themselves and a few authorities from academia. They resemble more a brotherhood than a community. Today there is a gap between a small public that reads in a demanding way (looking for quality) and the public that –because of its desire to read– reads anything that comes across their eyes (more often than not confusing quality with quantity, which is summed up in the frequent question of how many books to read a year). This gap is illustrated perhaps by two of the most important writers of Chile and Latin America, Isabel Allende and Roberto Bolaño. Both writers devoted themselves to literature with the same discipline and success, Both writers devoted themselves to literature with the same discipline and success, but their fortunes have been distributed differently: Allende is read by the masses and Bolaño by those considered cultured; one is read in life and the other was discovered above all posthumously.

It is likely that none of them were too happy with that fate, but it is symptomatic of the sectarianism and the many divisions and subdivisions between readers and promoters of reading. The asymmetrical favor that Allende has received –since her very first novel she has always had trouble convincing critics of her qualities– and the belated favor that Bolaño has received –only from Beyond could he enjoy the worldwide reception he has had– should not hide from us what they have in common: that like it or not, both belong to the

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History of Literature, so despised by hedonists and casual readers and, nevertheless, when it comes to our intellectual and emotional past, so indispensable to understanding ourselves. There is no doubt that all of Isabel Allende's work does not deserve equal consideration, but neither does Bolaño's: discerning which books do and which do not is a task that has been deserted by critics and by the readers' own criteria, more interested in the advertisement of "the latest", of "the new" coming from authors. This desertion, or vacuum, is especially intriguing when the author's work has been on demand for at least forty years, in the case of Allende, and thirty in the case of Bolaño.

But we will leave aside questions of reader reception for the moment in order to delve into what may be another side of that coin: it is evident that Allende's and Bolaño's identical writing method were not crucial to obtain the same reception. For that very reason, perhaps dealing with such method is a superficial task. But I believe that it is not. If we take a less controversial example, one with resounding unanimity, that of the Latin American Boom, we could arrive to an inversion of terms, one in which two different writing methods had one same successful and influential result to this day. We will speak about two different paths for spelling the same words (and world).

During the Latin American Boom of the 1960s, a coincidence between a prestigious literature and a wide audience went hand in hand. At first, it was the novels that were successful with the public and critics; soon, that genre would prompt interest in other literary genres which had excelled in Latin American, such as the short story, poetry, essays and theatre. However, it would be the novel and the novelists that would fully represent what is known today as the professionalization of the Latin American writer, which can be dated to that decade. By definition, the novel is a genre that requires amount and consistency. What is less clear is what this professionalization would consist of, so we will try to summarize

and contrast it by identifying two methods: one timetabled and one seasonal.

The Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa was one of the first to reveal his maniacal writing schedule: no less than six hours straight, every day. Not hours stolen from the day job that put food on his table but running in parallel with it: writing was the center of his life and the day job was just a way to make a living. It was a discipline he began upon arriving in Madrid in 1958 and consolidated afterwards during his seven years of residence in Paris (1959-1966). The result was a series of novels that appeared by the clock: *The Time of the Hero* (1963), *The Green House* (1966), *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969), etc. Mexican Carlos Fuentes also made of working on a schedule the law in his fiction writing, at least in when he started: the result was *Where the Air is Clear* (1958), *The Good Conscience* (1959), *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962) and *Aura* (1962). It should not be forgotten that both in his case and in that of Vargas Llosa, these years were the ones in which they wrote what are considered today their "classics". Later on, there would come the uneasy challenge of staying on the crest of the wave as creators. Awareness of this came to Carlos Fuentes quite early, as revealed in a letter to colleague José Donoso:

I'm frightened at the thought that I have run dry of a set of themes, the ones that served as my starting point, and that I must find a new direction. I'm prostrated by how clear I see now my own limitations; also distraught since I know the youthful élan, the original ease has ended and now I must suffer more, wait more, impose patience on myself and accept the distance. (Fuentes, March 31, 1964, quoted from Fuentes and Donoso, 2024, p. 66)

Fuentes and Vargas Llosa worked out these impasses with the discipline of an office worker, and even though the results were sometimes uneven –such as *A Change of Skin* (Fuentes, 1967) or *Pantaleon and the Special Service* (Vargas Llosa, 1973)–, their consistency would also lead them to write important novels such as *The Eagle's Throne* (Fuentes, 2003) or *The War of the End of the World* (Vargas Llosa, 1981). The success they achieved promoted the belief that this was the only way to produce novels, and although, as we will see, it was not the only way, it should not be discarded either.

It is important to remember that the first novels of the Boom, those from 1955 to 1963, were not written with the aim of making money. That would have been wishful thinking. It was a pure vocation, one might say, of self-realization, and undoubtedly also a way of seeking to identify with a few Latin American writers who were already succeeding internationally such as Miguel Ángel Asturias, Borges and Carpentier. These immediate examples were joined by examples from other regions that they undoubtedly considered on a higher scale: ultimately what they looked up to was to write novels like those of the Anglo-Saxons and Europeans of universal contemporary literature. If writing was not a means of subsistence, life therefore often required them to postpone a scheduled rhythm in favor of doing it in certain seasons. Good examples of this are the Argentine Julio Cortázar and the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez: both achieved economic independence thanks to their books (Cortázar, in his sixties; García Márquez, in his forties), but achieving the privilege of being self-reliant did not alter their writing times, at least as far as work on novels, the literary genre on which they founded their prestige (pointing this out is not intended to underestimate in any way the capital importance of their stories and essays, sometimes written in a hurry and in time stolen from other duties). Cortázar and Gabo could go

months and sometimes years without writing a line of a novel, barely conceiving it slowly in the confines of their imagination. For them, writing novels was not a job imposed by daily accumulation, but a slow maturation that became an imperative during a certain season, under certain conditions of time and space: thus it is understandable that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez, 1967) was written at an exclusive rhythm of twelve consecutive months, and *Hopscotch* (Cortázar, 1963) was the result of texts compiled over a series of years.

Cortázar did not write a novel after *A Manual for Manuel* (1973), although he died eleven years later wanting to start one; García Márquez made extensive novels like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Times of Cholera* (1985) an exception in his body of work, which is sometimes closer to poetry than prose in its brevity and rotundity. Both authors, in their own way, were a "disappointment" to the market with their inconsistency, so different from Fuentes and Vargas Llosa. But there were other authors of office discipline in the Boom and they were enough in number to create the idea of a literature in motion, for example, Jorge Amado, David Viñas, Mario Benedetti and José Donoso. The body of work that each of them built is so vast that there is no doubt that, as in the aforementioned Isabel Allende and Roberto Bolaño, these authors are in need of cicerones, critics or discerners to tell casual readers where to begin reading and where not to.

And of course, in Latin American literature there are novelists who followed the path of Cortázar and Gabo: João Guimarães Rosa, Elena Garro, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Jorge Edwards, Albalucía Ángel, Marvel Moreno. All of them classics with a more limited work but in no way inferior to that of those who represent the maximum professionalization of the writing craft. Pointing this out may be useless: the legend of the professional writer has been enthroned in such a way that only the first, the



cases of systematic success and regular presence in bookstores, are shown as examples to follow. They are those who fulfill the market as well as readers eager to receive every few years a new installment of anything they come up with.

Often a cursory review of each author's bibliography will show what kind of writer he or she chose to be. The classic European extremes would be the copious Balzac, with ten novels, and the strict Flaubert, with three published during his lifetime. To name Spartan contemporaries, Kazuo Ishiguro has to date published only seven novels, different in intent and form from one another, which were enough to earn him prestige and the consideration of the Swedish Academy in 2017. He is a novelist who takes his time. (There are those who run after time, like José Saramago, who imposed on himself an industrial pace which he had not in his first fifty years and did not slow down until twenty years before he died.) And among recent and omnipresent cases, whose disciplined constancy triggers recurring desires in their readers that they be awarded the Nobel Prize soon, we could name authors as diverse as César Aira, Stephen King, Joyce Carol Oates and Haruki Murakami.

But let us return to the Latin American tradition and its methods when writing, not only novels, but also explaining them as intellectual works. The important role that these creators also had as literary critics in explaining both their own and others' books is often overlooked or underestimated. Their impact seems to have been defined by embarking on confrontation, with an eminently bellicose lexicon, explicit in the very title of some of their literary critiques: in 1960, García Márquez signed a manifesto entitled "Colombian Literature, A Fraud to the Nation" (1997) in the press of his country, in 1967 Vargas Llosa read the speech "Literature is Fire" (1983) when receiving the Rómulo Gallegos Prize and in 1969 Carlos Fuentes concluded an essay on the novel of the region with a chapter entitled "The Enemy Word" (1969). Among them, Vargas Llosa (1983) seemed the most enthusiastic of the idea of destroying in

order to build anew when, in that speech, he launched slogans that assured that "in the field of literature, violence is a proof of love" (p. 135). There was a double intention in these phrases: parricidal in regard to some of his literary ancestors, and "apocalyptic" (Vargas Llosa dixit) in regard to the political situation of their countries. What should not be forgotten is that this need to stand out from the literary past claimed many victims in a clearly unjust manner, given those before them still hold relevance not only historical but literary. It would be dangerous to accept opinions of the authors of the Boom as statements to be repeated as facts. No: they are invitations to read, to check for oneself how true or false they are. García Márquez (24 August 1966, as it appears in Cortázar et al., 2023) told Vargas Llosa "not to abandon the old kingdoms of Gallegos and Rivera because they were overused, but on the contrary [...] to go through them again from the beginning in order to cross them on the right path" (p. 157). Fuentes (22 July 1967, as it appears in Cortázar et al., 2023) told Gabo that "Gallegos and Alegría and Icaza had divorced us from half of America" (p. 234). Do these diatribes coincide with the reality of the work of Rómulo Gallegos, José Eustasio Rivera, Ciro Alegría and Jorge Icaza? Are these names comparable or are there differences between them? Those who read them may agree with the opinions of the authors of the Boom, but may also find great discrepancies. Here we can only mention that, in terms of their working methods, the Venezuelan Gallegos and the Ecuadorian Icaza managed to publish novels at a regular pace –and both with more than one classic to their credit–, while the Colombian Rivera only managed to publish one, *The Vortex* (1924) –one of the greatest of the continent; a second novel of his was lost– and Ciro Alegría's drive as a novelist was enough to produce three, still praised –he lived twenty-five more years after *Broad and Alien is the World* (1941), the last one he published–.

It would never be all harmony among the authors of the Boom themselves, of course,



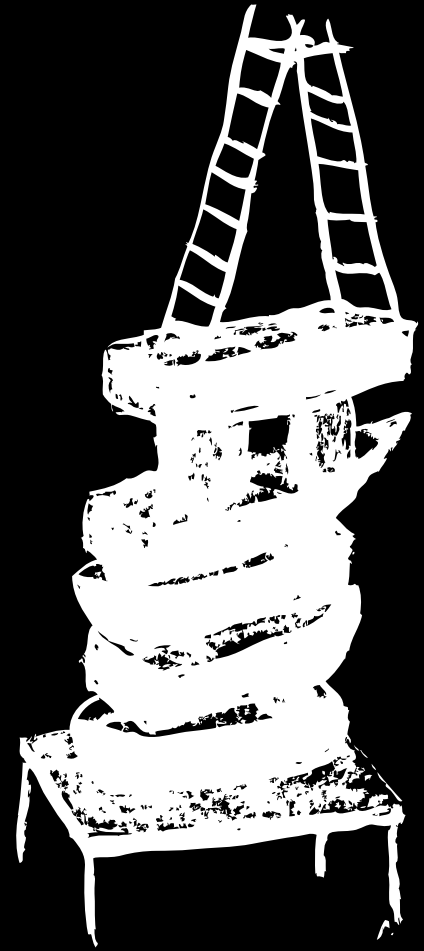
Roberto Huarcaya  
*Desires, Fears, and Divans* (1990). Series, Photo 20, 40 cm x 30 cm. Analogue print.

once the years of their peak were finished. To return to the examples of the beginning, Fuentes celebrated Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel in *The Great Latin American Novel* (2011, p. 296), a book with a historical and comprehensive perspective, while José Donoso would do the opposite in interviews. Bolaño would write a furious obituary of Donoso as soon as he died, and Fuentes would pay Bolaño back accordingly, erasing him from the aforementioned book. But, differences aside, often the belligerent phrases of their beginnings turned into reconciliations in later life, and a desire for understanding that crystallized, for example, in the case of Fuentes' long essays on Gallegos and Vargas Llosa on Arguedas. The young Latin Americans of yesteryear did not dare to admit then nor never what was evident in reality: that each of them had come to write important novels by different paths and that the (permanent) reunion and (temporary) ruptures formed what we understand as tradition, both literary and linguistic. Literature as a genealogy of the spirit.

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Outside the Walls

## The spectral paradoxes of enforced disappearance: Resentment as creative *haunting*\*\*

*Angel full of joy, Do you know the anguish,  
sobs, shame, disgust and remorse,  
and the weeping and the terrors of those horrible nights  
that the heart compresses like crumpled paper?  
angel full of joy, Do you know the anguish?  
Angel of full kindness and fists clenched,  
the tears of gall and hatred, when it beats  
revenge its touch of infernal call  
and becomes captain of our faculties?  
Angel full of kindness filled and fists clenched?  
Charles Baudelaire*

### Colombia: the happy fritanga<sup>1</sup>

I would like to start by presenting a mosaic of two tiles of happiness. The first one shows the image of the Buddhist teacher Phakyab Rinpoche during his visit to the Universidad Externado de Colombia on September 25, 2019<sup>2</sup>. From his experience as a victim of torture by the Chinese regime, he referred to some meditation techniques to experience ‘true peace’ in detachment from the world of the senses and thus strengthen reconciliation in a country in armed conflict. Specifically, for the Colombian case, he suggested the practice of “give and take” meditation for victims to leave the path of resentment and be able to establish “genuine dialogues” in the compassionate connection with their victimizers (Rinpoche, 2019). This was complemented by the teaching of the ‘nine breaths’ meditation, which consisted of inhaling “white light and positive energy” through the left nostril and then exhaling illnesses, sufferings and resentments through the right nostril. All this had to come out of the attendees’ bodies in the form of “black smoke, dirt, and stains that dissolve in the space” (Rinponche, 2019).

\* Sociedad Colombiana de Psicoanálisis.

\*\* Psychoanalysis and Freedom Award 2024

1. Fritanga is a typical Colombian dish, from the región of Cundinamarca and Boyacá. It is a tray composed of native potato, sausage, *morcilla*, plantain, pork and pork rinds.

2. The full video can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQmPhzDMRqM&t=2544s>



**Roberto Huarcaya**  
*Objects Paris* (1997). Series 8 photos "Chair". Cibachrome print 1.00 m x 1.40 m.

The second tile appears in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, just when Fernanda returns to Macondo to find that José Arcadio Segundo has recently become a union leader. The town was the scene of political revolts in which the workers of the banana company demanded an end to the precariousness to which they were subjected. When a state of social unrest was declared in Macondo, the army was in charge of restoring public order and summoned the workers to a festive rally at the local train station. A fair was set up with music, fritangas, drinks... and a fence of hidden machine guns. With the crowd gathered, the army captain gave the order to shoot and kill them all. After this massacre, a systematic and silent practice of extermination of union leaders was installed in Macondo. When people wondered about the whereabouts of the disappeared, when they tried to remember the confusing events of the *fritanguera* slaughter fair, the following version was kindly imposed from the high command of the army: “Seguro que fue un sueño. En Macondo no ha pasado nada, ni está pasando ni pasará nunca. Este es un pueblo feliz”. [Surely it was a dream. Nothing has happened in Macondo, nor is it happening and never will. This is a happy town] (García Márquez, 1997, p. 320).

The union of the mosaic shows us a phenomenon that could operate in obscene ways in the aftermath of certain social catastrophes. Happiness shows itself to be the only possible alternative to other ‘dirty’ affects that, it is assumed, are called to infinitely replicate the circle of destructi-



veness and revenge. Under a unifying narrative and turned towards the ‘interior’ of the subjects, happiness tends to the overcoming of pain, the suppression of the contradictions of the past and the obliteration of social conflict. However, is there an intrinsic relationship between peace and happiness? Is intrapsychic peace sufficient in contexts of political violence marked by impunity and denial? Should the victims of social violence meditate more and fight less in a political way?

The Angel of joy and kindness does not want to know about clenched fists and makes happiness his instrument of domination. *But we should be wary of such enthusiasm.* Given the transitional context that Colombia has been experiencing since the beginning of the peace talks, it is common to find political and scientific discourses that think of hatred, anger, indignation and resentment as important obstacles to national reconciliation. Thus, the ideal of a ‘good victim’ is latently established as a fundamental element of the transitional scenario: that *resilient* victim who is expected to be able to forgive, who does not look back and who ‘moves on’ with compassion for their victimizers. As expected, with the production of the ‘good victim’ also comes the production of its opposite; the ‘bad victim’: angry, spiteful, resentful and irrational. This character will be asked for restraint in their discourse, will be required not to burst into the peace scenarios with indecent claims and will be asked to modulate their affective expression in public.

In this scenario, the ‘soft police’ of the system are deployed against ‘the evil’ that incubates within the victims: religious leaders, psychologists, coaching professionals, experts in ‘trauma-sensitive’ yoga and artists explain to them how they can transform their affective response in order to forgive the perpetrator – and incidentally themselves. The discursive turn is perverse and typical of abusive power relations: the victimizer expels their guilt and holds the victim responsible for their own suffering. What is beginning to be expected, then, is that the ‘good victim’ will overcome their intrapsychic conflicts in therapies and workshops, not that they will settle their rage at a public-political level against impunity, to which they are increasingly *happily subjected*. The transitional scenario has thus generated a type of harassment in which victims are pressured to forgive so that the long-awaited step towards peace can be taken. Thus, for example, in 2018 General Alberto José Mejía (24 de abril de 2018) addressed the victims’ collective ‘Madres de Falsos Positivos Soacha-Bogotá’ in a personal way through a video published on Facebook<sup>3</sup> in which he suggested the following:

A las Madres de Soacha les envió un mensaje de solidaridad, de reconocimiento. Entiendo su dolor, trato de entender lo que puede significar perder un hijo. Yo como papá creo que es para morir. Entonces yo las entiendo y las comprendo. Pero al mismo tiempo quiero pedirles que piensen un poco en el futuro de esta patria, en el futuro de Colombia. ¿Qué pasa en este país si los colombianos no se perdonan y no se reconcilian? Pues quiere decir que no habrá paz, que seguirá la espiral de violencia y que más mamás a futuro van a perder a sus hijos. Esa es una realidad.

[To the Mothers of Soacha, I send a message of solidarity, of recognition. I understand their pain, I try to understand what it can mean to lose a child. As a father I think it’s to die for. So I understand them. But at the same time I want to ask you to think a little about the future of this country, about the future of Colombia. What happens in this country if Colombians do not forgive each other and do not reconcile? Well, it means that there will be no peace, that the spiral of violence will continue and that more mothers in the future will lose their children. That is a reality]

3. <https://www.facebook.com/FundacionMafapo/videos/1831184283856343/>

In this context, in which the affects of the victims of state crimes have taken on greater importance for national reconciliation, I investigated the experiences of resentment in victims of enforced disappearance. Specifically, I focused on the emotional experience of the Mothers of Soacha, a group of victims whose children were kidnapped, disappeared, and killed by the Colombian military during the government of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010). I seek to provide with this a more contextualized understanding of resentment: the desires it inspires, the behaviors it activates, the claims in which it is justified. From an ethical-political point of view, I intend to challenge the reader to think about a more complex reconciliation where public spaces for the emergence of anger and resentment are possible. Reconciliation must be complex, contradictory and dynamic... otherwise it will not be.

Indeed, in ‘psy’ research, few have dared to explore the muddy swamps of resentment and, if they have ever been interested in these ‘bad emotions’, they have done so with the aim of understanding the conditions of possibility of forgiveness and generating strategies in the fight against the rabid and the resentful. The growing interest in forgiveness as a ‘form of healing’ is further proof that science has not been completely secularized and that the critical force of psychoanalysis – under its political, clinical and epistemological vertices – is fundamental.

In this way, I will explore some ideas about the complexity of the affective world of the relatives of victims of a state crime especially engendered in Colombia: ‘false positives’. In this world that I propose, the most diverse resentments dwell... and also some *ghosts*. Thus, I seek to relate, in an exploratory and experimental way, these two figures whose horizons touch each other and run through the mourning that must be managed in the midst of impunity. I am referring then to ghosts in their culturally common meaning, that which designates paranormal beings, liminal characters who struggle in the intermediate space between life and death. In this research journey, I have called my approach a *supernatural hermeneutic* (Cardona, 2020), that is, a methodology of social analysis that is concerned with an epistemological and aesthetic militancy that seeks to overcome the restrictions of positivism and of an ontology that establishes the primacy of the visible and the concrete as the only real thing.

In detail, *supernatural hermeneutics* consists of thinking against the grain of what is taken as a given fact and represents an attempt to think that which traditionally escapes the senses and the narrowest definitions of sensible matter. With this, I have taken as an object of analysis the everyday ways in which the senses of perception and bonds are re-articulated in unprecedented ways and, together with other researchers, we have postulated *spectral materialities* as a sensible possibility of micropolitical resistance to violence (Agudelo et al, 2020). I suggest that *supernatural hermeneutics* could be defined as an epistemological renunciation of the integration of the paradoxes of experience (e.g., reality-fantasy, dream-wakefulness, life-death, sameness-otherness, mystical-scientific) in order to make them habitable. In this context I have introduced the category of *haunting* as an affective and political phenomenon that describes the dynamic according to which *the one who is besieged by ghosts also becomes a besieging ghost*.

*Haunting* is then the way in which the affects insist on recovering the memory of a crime split and thrown into the socio-psychic zones of the unrepresentable. In this way, denial operates as one of the thanatic instruments of domination (Genovés, 2024) that makes it necessary the critical siege to the harassment produced by the mandate of happiness and political correctness in times of reconciliation. These mandates, as I suggested earlier, attempt to inscribe the effects of violence and injustice on an intrapsychic plane, covering up their social effects and the political claims that are conveyed in the experiences of resentment.

## 2.The white violence of enforced disappearance

In the history of the Colombian armed conflict, there have been many strategies of violence used by the different actors involved. The terrifying catalogue shows a display of torture, massacres, homicides, sexual violence, kidnapping and mutilation throughout the national territory. More detailed analyses show how the repertoires of violence obey the specific tactics and objectives of each armed agent (National Center for Historical Memory [CNMH], 2013). In this section, I will propose a brief history for the understanding of enforced disappearance, its objectives, scope and functioning in the collective psyche as *white violence* in order to understand, subsequently, what are the modes of agency of the victims in this context.

*White violence* is a term that I propose to understand forced disappearance based on the psychic mechanisms described in André Green's work (2012). Green unveils the structure of the dead mother complex by a fundamental differentiation between the *red anguish* and the *white anguish*. The first type of anguish refers to everything related to the detachment of 'small things' from one's own body that, as such, are experienced as castrations that are registered as bleeding bodily wounds. This type of loss is inscribed in the plane of an erogenous, symbolic and symbolizable body, which allows the subject to resort to his representational resources to elaborate the loss.

But the *white anguish* is different. In this, the subject is prey of "a massive, radical and temporary disinvestment that leaves traces in the unconscious in the form of 'psychic holes' that will be filled by reinvestments" (Green, 2012, p. 254). The model for white anguish is then not recorded loss, but unrepresentable absence. In this way, the ontogenesis of the void is situated in the dynamics of the complex of *the dead mother*, who disinvests her child, producing a radical absence of meaning. The subject will be left empty and unable to articulate new representations. What Green (1993/2006) is bringing to the table is his conception of the death drive as *deobjectalizing function*, that is, the extreme loss of all significant investiture in which the relation to the object, the self and the investment itself are attacked:

However destructive its action may be, its intrinsically deobjectifying purpose manifests itself above all as an attack on bonds. The success of deobjectifying disinvestment is manifested in the extinction of projective activity, which is fundamentally translated by the feeling of psychic death (p. 125).

With this in mind, I seek to include certain types of violences and their effects within Green's (1983/2012) 'white series': negative hallucination, white psychosis, white grief. In detail, I propose that *the social mechanism through which enforced disappearance becomes operative is the deobjectifying function of white violence*. Here, a precaritized social group is the victim of a first mass disinvestment—a social disappearance—that makes possible a subsequent enforced disappearance (Aranguren et al, 2020). Under this idea we have understood white violence as a *percepticide*, that is, an attack on the senses that makes the other a social victim of the negative hallucination and, therefore, a loss that does not deserve to be mourned, grieved... resented (Agudelo et al, 2020):

The 'false positives' became a producer of deaths that no one would mourn, that would not represent a loss to the social landscape. They targeted the lives of marginal people,

on the assumption that – as with the guerrilla fighters – because of their circumstances they barely merited dignity. To some degree, they targeted a population that already inhabited the *terrain of social disappearance*, or landscape of social disappearance (Gatti, 2017), and turned them into victims of a second disappearance: a body with no name, an identity without a body (Aranguren et al, 2020, p. 8).

In forced disappearance there is no bleeding body, because there is no body: the refinement of the technologies of political violence has the purpose of producing several disappearances with the disappearance. The history of this refinement takes us to the rationalized system of disappearance under Nazism with the *Night and Fog Decree* of 1941, where a new practice would be introduced according to which "opponents were to be arrested during 'night and fog' and taken clandestinely to another place without giving any information of their whereabouts or fate, without leaving a trace" (Porcel, 2014, p. 21). It was a tactic of domination that sought specific effects on French, Belgian, and Norwegian resistance movements: "[instead of] officially using the death penalty—and thus producing potential martyrs—members of the resistance had to be secretly transported to Germany and killed at a time and place to be kept secret" (Mahlke, 2017, p. 79). In this way, the concealment of the victim was intended to put into circulation a violence that, at the same time, was impossible to perceive.

However, although we usually associate the word *disappearance* to the missing victim, the dark pleonasm 'Night and Fog' contains in itself the duplication of darkness. Kirsten Mahlke (2017) recounts that Hitler was inspired, to baptize the decree, by Richard Wagner. In Wagner's opera, *Das Rheingold* (Wagner, 1869/s. f.), Alberich has a helmet made to make himself invisible; with this invisibility he gains power over the Nibelungs and, from anonymity, from the omnipresent disappearance, he forces them to exploit the gold mines of the Rhine:

[...] Look, you rascal, everything is forged and prepared just as I ordered. My head fits the helmet. Will the spell work? "The night and the fog don't look like anything" Can you see me, brother? Hoho, hoho! You, all the Nibelungs, will now bow down to Alberich. He is present everywhere, and he is watching you. You have rested enough. Now, you must work for him, when you cannot see him; When you least expect him, be alert in case he appears. You will forever be his subjects. Listen to how the Lord of the Nibelungs is approaching.

This is how Alberich's magic words show that in forced disappearance not only the victim is missing, but it is also presented as an act of domination where the victimizer disappears: "[the meaning that extends the night and the fog [...] aims to shroud all parties in fog: to cover them up as victimizers, to hide its victims and its crimes and subscribe to the impunity of the criminal method" (Mahlke, 2017, p. 81).

The double envelopment in fog has been one of the reasons why forced disappearance has been established as a technology of political violence in Latin America, above all, it has been a modality of violence derived from the massive and arbitrary detentions carried out in the dictatorships of the Southern Cone:

The legitimacy of the military regime could not be sustained in the short and medium term if expressions of open violence such as torture and murder were generalized, which

in the long run would end up generating a perception of insecurity and uncertainty among public opinion, which is why it would be necessary to ensure the concealment of the means while at the same time exalting the ends (CNMH, 2016, p. 99).

In Colombia, for example, it has only been possible to establish who were the perpetrators in 48.6% of cases. According to the CNMH's report *Hasta encontrarlos. El drama de la desaparición forzada en Colombia* (2016),<sup>4</sup> there have been documented 60,630 missing persons in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia between 1970 and 2015. For its part, in the documentary integration brought about by the Comisión de la Verdad (Truth Commission), around 121,768 forcibly disappeared persons have been recorded between 1985 and 2016, estimating a total of 210,000 victims according to statistical analyses of potential underreporting.

Although forced disappearance has been especially used by the dictatorships of the Southern Cone in order to eliminate, without traces, the internal enemy (communists, insurgents, trade unionists, social leaders, etc.), in Colombia the situation takes on a horrifying specificity: the predominant profile of the victims is associated with situations of vulnerability and social precariousness, *people in a state of massive social disinvestment*. Thus, the 'deaths illegitimately presented as combat casualties by state agents', as the 'false positives' have been renamed in the Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (Special Jurisdiction for Peace -JEP), occurred between 2002 and 2010 in Colombia, claiming at least 10,000 civilian victims (Rojas and Benavides, 2017). We have already drawn attention to the uncertain origin of the term 'false positives', as its use has not been recorded in other parts of the world (Aranguren et al, 2020). The Colombian Armed Forces, however, introduced it to refer to civilian casualties in combat who were presented, 'by mistake', as guerrilla combatants. The denial becomes operative once a term borrowed from computing and medicine begins to circulate – in both cases referring to the false identification of a virus – to cover up the immune elimination of the civilian population.

Thus, this crime was a systematic practice by the Colombian Armed Forces in which a 'recruiter' – that is, a retired military officer, a civilian or a combatant of illegal armed groups – deceived his victims – young people with limited resources, street dwellers, people from marginal sectors of society – offering them jobs in which they would earn easy money. The civilians were taken to remote areas of the country where they were murdered, disguised as members of illegal armed groups and presented as guerrilla's combatants killed in combat. The bodies were finally buried in mass graves, making it difficult to identify the victims. The disappearance and murder of these civilians was the effect of a security policy that sought to show, with figures, the military effectiveness of the fight against 'terrorism' (Aranguren et al, 2020).

### 3. Methodology

To explore the problem raised, I carried out a qualitative research that examines the experience of resentment in four relatives of people who have disappeared under the modality of 'false positives'. The initial contact with the participants was made through Doris, whom I will refer to later. From there, bridges of contact were created with the other participants. They were informed of the objective of the research, as well as all the necessary information and confidentiality guarantees so that they could freely decide to participate. In this process, the participants asked me to keep all the real

4. The CNMH systematized the information from 102 sources: 56 institutional and 46 belonging to diverse social groups.

names as a form of political manifestation to make visible the crimes committed by the Colombian State. The women who participated in the research are part of the Madres de Falsos Positivos Soacha-Bogotá (Mothers of False Positives Soacha-Bogotá -MAFAPO) foundation: Soraida, Beatriz and Doris are victims of the disappearance and murder of their children; Jacqueline, current director of the foundation, is a victim of the disappearance and murder of her brother.

Doris Tejada is the mother of Oscar Morales<sup>5</sup>, who disappeared in Cúcuta in December 2007 and was reported killed in combat by troops of the Artillery Battalion 'La Popa' in Copey, Cesar. His body has not been recovered. Beatriz Méndez is the mother of Weimar Castro and aunt of Edward Rincón, both disappeared and murdered in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, in July 2004. Jacqueline Castillo is the sister of Jaime Castillo, who disappeared in 2008. His body was found in a mass grave in Ocaña, Norte de Santander. Soraida Muñoz is the mother of Matías Soto, disappeared in Bogotá in 2008 and reported as a guerrilla killed in combat in Ocaña.

I conducted several interviews between 2017 and 2022, in the midst of a daily space that we built together with the participants. During this time, and for a period of one year, I underwent psychoanalysis with a member of MAFAPO, with whom I had no previous ties.. The process came to an end once she was granted political asylum in another country. With the other members we shared political spaces for demonstrations, search activities in the territory and meetings in our daily lives. Thus, our conversations, in addition to the formal spaces for interviews, took place in the midst of political and artistic spaces of memory and the fight against impunity. We talked in the central cemetery of Bogotá, in the midst of the hostilities of the mass graves of Las Liscas and in the central square of Soacha. I accompanied them as they adopted the unidentified bodies from the central cemetery of Ocaña and visited, together with an international research group, the crematoria of Juan Frío, in Norte de Santander.

Within the framework that I propose, the interviews were conceived as an open space for free association of ideas framed by the research problem. I brought to the encounter a psychoanalytic attitude based on neutrality and abstinence (Freud, 1912), as well as on non-memory and non-desire (Bion, 1967), which allowed the exploration of the unknown, unexpected and enigmatic contents of the participants' emotional experience. From a *widespread conception* of transference-countertransference, the affective bond built with the participants was traversed by agreements, disagreements, conflicts and unconscious identifications. However, these transferential-countertransferential manifestations, although they constantly informed me about the bond I built with the participants, they also met great limitations when trying to understand them, interpret them and give them meaning, since the research relationship is not properly a clinical relationship that allows establishing a *psychoanalytic field*.

The open dialogue allowed the emergence of multiple topics that were not initially proposed in the research framework. The participants constantly proposed a different interview agenda, focused not only on the aforementioned affects, but also on the different forms of appearance of their missing children. Unexpectedly, this led to the interviews being set in a paranormal atmosphere in which stories of ghosts and wandering souls were presented.

### 4. Spectral paradoxes

On April 27, 2018, I visited Jacqueline at her home for an interview. That day, the mothers were gathered on a 'Frijolada Friday'. Soraida was there as head chef. Beatriz also joined us for a moment. During lunch, some stories emerged about how mothers were becoming involved in the process of searching for their children:

5. As I was writing this article, Oscar's body was found on May 6, 2024. The struggle of Doris and her husband led to the discovery of 62 more disappeared in the alternate cemetery of Copey, Cesar.

[*Soraida*: Regarding the search, I started looking for my son when I was told that he had died. About a year and two months later. Not otherwise, because I don't know if that... that program of *Ellos están aquí*<sup>6</sup> kind of coincides with me. Because my son, when they disappeared him, he was seen around the neighborhood. And that's why I didn't look for him, because they saw him around here. So I used to say: 'why doesn't Matías come home?' And we went out to look for him, running around the neighborhood looking for him. And the neighbors would said to me: 'Soraida, look, we can see Matías over there' and I would run out with the brothers to look for him and it was never him. Well, I don't know if that's also linked to that thing, to that program of *Ellos están aquí*, but they saw my son in the neighborhood.

*Jacqueline*: That TV show, *Ellos están aquí*, where there are presences! I think we all have experienced something similar].

When I left the interview I called Beatriz, because she had to leave earlier. 'It went very well,' I told her, to which she replied happily: 'Do you see? All of us mommies see our little angels.' Beatriz expected me to believe her. She waited anxiously for me to confirm that mothers had learned to live with the ghosts of their relatives. It was she who introduced me, through her stories, to the world of the paranormal; Without realizing it, I became a chronicler of her ghosts.

The first story she told me was the one in which Weimar and Edward went missing. That night the family gathered expectantly at the news that the two young men were not answering their phones. Hours passed and they did not arrive home. What had happened to them? While the concern grew, Beatriz's niece decided to go up to the terrace like a sentinel who illuminates the darkness with her gaze; there she remained waiting. After a while, two playful figures were drawn on the horizon: "Look, mommy, here they come, here they come!, look at them, they come playing. They come pushing each other, they come laughing and playing!" The family, excited, runs to the front door: "the shadows came at the door and nothing... and nothing... nothing.... We open the door: nothing. What did they do?, they were coming here, what happened?" (Beatriz in an interview). The presences arrived to announce their disappearance.

Jacqueline had similar experiences at home, where she would see shadows passing by or hear whistles outside her house. It turns out that Jaime, her brother, used to announce himself like this when he went to visit her. Then, during the period in which she was involved in the investigation of her brother's disappearance, his presence wandered through her daily life: she saw him at home, she heard him on the street, she felt him on the bus, she dreamed of him as a night visit.

Jacqueline's extensive research led her to find one of the most important mass graves for cases of 'false positives' in Ocaña. There, in addition to Jaime's body, Matías was found. After having identified the bodies and, with this, opening new paths of investigation, they returned to Bogotá. On Las Liscas' rural road, Jacqueline felt how a shadow tried to hold on tightly to the cart three times. Frightened, she looked in the rearview mirror: on the third time, she noticed how the shadow managed to reach them. Fear paralyzed her, but something told her she was safe. On second thought, he made me understand, the presence of the shadow was not so threatening, it felt like warm company. She calmly told me that this is how Jaime traveled all the time with them, happy to have been found. In fact, his exhumation allowed the family to carry out the pertinent funeral honors and the spectral encounters were less and less frequent:

6. *Ellos están aquí [They Are Here]* is a national television program, broadcast by the RCN Channel, in which a group of celebrities investigate paranormal phenomena.

En los días siguientes, una noche soñé con él. Yo estaba allá arriba en mi casa paterna y golpearon la puerta. Entonces bajé las escaleras y cuando abrí la puerta estaba él, muerto de risa. Y en el sueño me dice: '¿los hice llorar mucho con esas fotos, no?'. Eso fue todo. Nunca más he vuelto a soñar con él.

[In the following days, one night I dreamed of him. I was up there in my father's house and there was a knock on the door. Then I went downstairs and when I opened the door he was there, laughing to death. And in the dream he says to me: 'I made you cry a lot with those photos, didn't I?'. That was it. I have never dreamed of him again] (Jacqueline, in an interview).

As in the case of Jacqueline, it is common for victims to conceive of dreams with the disappeared as an intersubjective space for communication with the specters (Cardona, 2020; Agudelo et al, 2020). These dreams are characterized by the feeling that the experience is not of the order of fantasy, but of the paranormal. Forensic anthropologists and investigators from the search groups for missing persons in Colombia do not completely dismiss the dream information that the victims provide (Quintero, 2019). For example, Beatriz contributed to one of the most important outcomes of her case when she communicated with Weimar in her dreams, a fact that we documented in detail elsewhere (Aranguren et al, 2020).

Forced disappearance organizes reality from paradox and fiction, in such a way that the usual forms of representation enter into crisis when dealing with a being who is, at the same time, "[a] non-living-undead, an absent-present. An absurdity" (Gatti, 2017, p. 16). The missing person thus establishes a spectral state of affairs for which dichotomies cease to be operative and requires the subject to re-articulate their perception and their daily life in order to give them a paradoxical place in which to inhabit. In this order of ideas, subjects inhabit a *mystical zone of experience*<sup>8</sup> where ghosts "are as convincing as any direct experience of the senses can be, and, in general, they are much more persuasive than the results established by logic ever are" (James, 2012, p.83).

I consider these ghostly presences as a type of subjective object with which the person communicates silently (Winnicott, 1965; Winnicott, 1971). In the study of the early phases of emotional development, Winnicott argues that subjective objects – those objects that, *already there*, are at the same time *created* by the infant – are the fundamental bases of creativity in their relationship with the *sensation of living a real and meaningful life*. These would be the foundations of a primary creativity (creative apperception) that accounts for its indestructibility, even in extreme states of compliance such as family domination, concentration camps and political persecution (Winnicott, 1971). Wouldn't this spectral re-articulation of the everyday be a creative vitality in the midst of the destruction of white violence? The ghost operates here as a subjective object that makes the lives of the victims worth living:

7. He was referring to the photos that Jacqueline had to investigate to account for the brutality with which her brother was tortured.

8. I have suggested this concept following some ideas from William James and Donald Winnicott (Cardona, 2020). The latter suggests that, "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 to 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" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 185).

Yo lo recalco y lo digo donde sea: *que es verdad, es verdad, ellos siguen con uno*. [...] Cuando hay tanto amor, cuando uno los tiene ahí presentes... ellos están ahí. Yo no lo dejo ir todavía... hasta... cuando haya justicia. Ahí sí le diré: ‘bueno, ya, te voy a dejar... *te voy a dejar partir*’.

[I emphasize it and say it everywhere: *that it is true, it is true, they continue with you*. [...] When there is so much love, when you have them there present... they are there. I don’t let him go yet... until... when there is justice. Then I will tell him: ‘well, now, I’m going to leave you... *I’m going to let you go*’] (Doris, in an interview).

We argue that the spectral nature of the disappeared puts the traditional model of mourning in trouble (Aranguren & Cardona, 2022). In it, Freud (1915) conceptualized the *work* that the subject must do in the face of the loss of a loved object, whose ‘deviating’ effects pass over time and whose process was imagined as follows:

The examination of reality has shown that the beloved object no longer exists, and from it now emanates the exhortation to remove all libido from its links with that object. This is opposed by an understandable reluctance; It is universally observed that man does not willingly abandon a libidinal position, nor even when his substitute is already appearing. This reluctance can reach such an intensity that it produces an estrangement from reality and a retention of the object by way of a hallucinatory psychosis of desire. *Normally, compliance with reality prevails*. But the order it gives cannot be carried out immediately. It is performed piece by piece with a great expenditure of time and investment energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object continues in the psychic. Each of the memories and each of the expectations in which the libido was tied to the object are closed, overinvested, and in this the detachment of the libido is consummated” (p. 2092. Emphasis mine).

But then, what is the reality that the family member of a missing person must abide by? Is there a libidinal substitute for the loss of a loved object? In short, the spectral character of the disappeared prevents his or her figure from being subjected to a ‘reality test’ that confirms that *the beloved object no longer exists*, precisely because the disappearance remains an ambiguity that cannot be resolved in any of the dimensions affected by the fog. It is important to note, however, that the priority that Freud has given to compliance with reality has had problematic clinical interpretations when addressing mourning for a disappeared person. There are those who go so far as to propose that, in order to ‘mobilize’ a ‘frozen mourning’, the psychoanalytic process must change the status of the ‘disappeared’ to that of the ‘murdered’:

The particularity of the rite for disappearance is that when a subject decides to perform a ceremony of this type, it is because there has already been an internal modification from which they choose to *stop waiting* and assume a new position in the face of loss. The ritual here acquires the dimension of that which mobilizes the mourner to affirm themselves in the ‘no more’ of hope and to resign themselves to disappearance. From this point on, *the subject resignifies the object and psychically changes its status from disappeared – susceptible to reappearance – to dead – radically lost*. We propose that what happens in this movement is a step from permanent pain to the beginning of mourning” (Díaz, 2008, p. 12. Emphasis mine).

Why do we insist on seeing a frozen mourning where there seems to be so much movement? As I have argued, the victim re-articulates their daily life, creates new bonds and mobilizes politically. Dichotomous thinking based on an erroneous understanding of the ‘reality test’ conceals a total ignorance of what is at stake: that the reality test consists of *assuming the spectral paradox of the disappeared without solving it* (Winnicott, 1971).

## 5. Resentment Beyond the Death Drive: Undoing Terror

The problem of resentment that I want to raise is represented in Hamlet. This work shows, in my opinion, the complex relationship that exists between resentment and the impossibility of mourning when impunity takes center stage. The story takes place in Denmark and narrates the events following the murder of King Hamlet at the hands of his brother Claudius. Soon the grim prince appears, who will be constantly portrayed as a ‘madman’. A ‘natural law’ is imposed on Hamlet, that he will not be able to follow: that people die and mourning must be closed. “Thou know’st ‘tis common; all that lives must die” Gertrude tells him (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 13). Claudio is more explicit:

To do obsequious sorrow: but to persevere / In obstinate condolence is a course / Of impious stubbornness; ‘tis unmanly grief; / It shows a will most incorrect to heaven, / A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, / An understanding simple and unschool’d [...] Fie! ‘tis a fault to heaven, / A fault against the dead, a fault to nature, / To reason most absurd (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 14).

Although this order is suggested from the ‘neutrality’ of an uncle who wants the well-being of his new son, as the narrative progresses we see how Hamlet’s impossible mourning becomes a politically dangerous storm for the King. This is how Claudius “does not like” Hamlet’s melancholy nor does he think it “convenient for his safety”, so he summons the prince’s best friends to calm his spirits and “to protect the countless subjects who live and are nourished by him”. Suddenly, Hamlet’s affective life ceases to be a private matter and becomes a national concern: the future of Denmark will depend on the prince giving a correct and natural closure to his mourning.

We know, however, that the prince’s situation is complicated. From the revelations of his father’s ghost, we realize that his death is not sufficient itself to produce resentment, and the *modus operandi* of crime, based on the establishment of an institutional lie, takes on great importance: “... ‘Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, / A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forged process of my death / Rankly abused” (Shakespeare, 1992, p. 29). This is how the Ghost communicates the truth of his murder to Hamlet, conveying to him the need for a tireless pursuit of justice that only he can embody.

Hamlet has commonly been portrayed as a vengeful and resentful being, and several analyses take him as an example to demonstrate the sadism of melancholy. But this would lose sight of the complexity of the matter. Here, the murder is as important as its denial and Hamlet’s resentment could not be understood without reference to Claudius’s filicidal attempts and the prince’s unsuccessful struggle to reveal the truth of the crime. In what follows, rather than a staging of revenge, we see a staging of the hope of countering lies and finding justice. Violence appears as an act only when stifled hope inexorably settles in as despair.

In this way, we cannot overlook the fact that one of Hamlet’s first resources was the theatre which, according to him, is a ‘mirror to life’. The prince then hires an itinerant troupe of actors in

Elsinore to perform his father's death before the kings. Thus, after listening to a moving fragment of the main actor, Hamlet wonders: if someone had to act out their own feelings, what would they do? The actor would have no alternative but:

He would drown the stage with tears / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech, /  
Make mad the guilty and appall the free, / Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed /  
The very faculties of eyes and ears. [...] I have Heard / That guilty creatures sitting at a  
play / Have by the very cunning of the scene / Been struck so to the soul that presently  
/ They have proclaim'd their malefactions; / For murder, though it have no tongue, will  
speak / With most miraculous organ. ( p. 121-122).

As we can see, the work of art seeks to generate an effect on the public to reveal a terrifying truth buried by denial. *Make mad the guilty and appall the free*, says Hamlet, who does not seek the murder of Claudius, but his public confession. But it is precisely in the suffocation of any attempt to reveal the truth that the famous dilemma arises: to be or not to be. The prince must act nobly and *endure* all arrows, risking death in life, or arm himself against adversity and face it. "To die, to sleep, nothing more"; his dilemma is the one that Winnicott (1971) already posed to us: to live in a creative way or for compliance to be the unhealthy basis for life. *To endure, to die, to sleep, nothing else*:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, / The oppressor's wrong, the proud  
man's contumely, / The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, / The insolence of office  
and the spurns / That patient merit of the unworthy takes, / When he himself might his  
quietus make / With a bare bodkin? (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 125).

Why should one who denounces a denied injustice be taken for a madman? The analysis requires special attention to power relations, so that the emphasis I would like to propose as a reading key is on the second moment of the trauma: denial. I take this model from Sándor Ferenczi ([1933] 2002), who in *Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child* formulates a relational turn in the pathogenic understanding of trauma. In this text, the author denounces the generalized neglect by psychoanalysis of exogenous traumatogenic factors, which tends to produce simplistic explanations sustained in the postulation of constitutional predispositions of the individual to psychic pathology. José Jiménez Avello (2024) has been able to argue how the innatist conception of the death drive conceals, in terms of a complex relational analysis, the aggressor.

In this order of ideas, Ferenczi notes in his clinic that more children than he was willing to admit were real victims of sexual assault. Taking these cases as a starting point, he outlines a relational dynamic in which there is a first moment of psychic shock produced by an excess that the subject is not able to assimilate or metabolize. The subject is then submerged in a state of physical-psychic despair in which he experiences the destruction of his capacities to think, feel and resist violence. But Ferenczi goes further: this destruction is not only due to the excessive experience, but to the *overwhelming force of authority* of the adult over the child, that by robbing the child of their senses, deprives them of meaning.

In a second moment, the child turns to another adult to try to understand what happened, but finds that the trauma goes unnoticed and his experience is treated as a *nonsense*. Thus, with

the denial of the damage, the child loses confidence in the testimony of their senses and, with this, a paralysis is produced expressed in the automatic subordination to the other (Ferenczi, [1933] 2002). Although Ferenczi begins with the model of the abused child, he is well aware that he is proposing a general theoretical assumption, operative to think about the power relations in which a person in a state of defenselessness and an aggressor are involved, thus inscribing trauma in the relational, political and social order.

In this line of ideas, Jô Gondar (2021) explains social trauma based on its relationship with terror as a form of psychic paralysis caused by a danger for which the subject was not prepared. The shock generated by terror threatens *the art of living together*, fragmenting the possibilities of self-determination of a political subject and producing the loss of authorship over one's own life. In this way, Gondar's (2021) description of terror is congruent with the proposal I outlined above about the *white violence*, since, as the author suggests, "the state of paralysis and confusion in which the abused child is immersed can be replaced, on the political level, by a feeling of generalized fog. Terror prevents traumatic events from being inscribed in the memory of a country" (p. 84). The fog then operates in the manner of a psychic void, like an absence of inscription that does not allow the clear perception of submission and paralysis. The social denial is then revealed as a *thanatic instrument of domination* by means of which subjects are forced to adapt to a lie in order to survive, "which would institute a perverse mode of relationship with reality" (Genovés, 2024, p. 13).

In my research I have been able to confirm how terror is consolidated as a structural moment of trauma. In the deployment of thanatic instruments of domination, terror plays a fundamental role: that of guaranteeing that subjects withdraw into themselves in private life so as not to allow any kind of collective public claim. By exploring Beatriz's story, we evoke those moments when she did not yet belong to any victims' collective. She remembers those times with deep terror, a paralyzing feeling that did not allow her to seek justice for her relatives:

Fue difícil. ¡Uy! Yo lloraba mucho. Estaba en una pelea conmigo misma, porque yo vivía con mi mamita que estaba enferma. Mi mamá no quería que viniera a Bogotá: 'mijita no salga a votar que mire que van a acabar hasta con el nido de la perra', ella me decía. Donde nos encontraran nos iban a matar a todos. Y yo le decía: 'mamá yo tengo que salir para allá. Ella me decía: '¡no vaya por allá! ¡Ya qué! A los muertos déjeles en paz. Ya se tragarón a su chinito, ¡ya qué!'

[It was difficult. Oh! I cried a lot. I was in a fight with myself, because I lived with my mom who was sick. My mom didn't want me to come to Bogotá: 'mijita don't go out to vote, look that they're going to end up with the dog's nest', she told me. Wherever they found us, they were going to kill us all. And I told her: 'mom, I have to go there.' She told me: 'don't go over there! That's it! Leave the dead alone. They already swallowed your chinito, it's too late!'] (Beatriz, in an interview).

However, it is important to note that terror is not so much a psychological *sequel* to violence as it is a systematic relational mode. Victims in Colombia face a whole machinery that acts through constant and silent intimidation. For this reason, in 2005, after receiving death threats, Beatriz moved from Bogotá to a small town in Boyacá. Stories of threats, intimidation, displacement, and self-exile are recurrent among the victims. All the women I spoke with have been gripped by terror, a terror that spreads through the different layers of society: it goes from the depths of the subject, to the most subtle social structure. In this way, domi-



nation becomes flesh, is internalized, becomes affect and acts within the subject. “The first fight is against oneself,” says Beatriz.

Terror isolates the subjects and forces them to withdraw into solitude. This is why mothers, at first, fight alone. They prefer to protect what they have left, to protect the living at the risk of obliterating the absent:

Están mis hermanos que... yo a ellos no los involucro en esto. *Es que siempre está el miedo*. Yo digo: listo, si yo caigo, caigo sola, como dicen. Que si me pasa algo ellos sigan... que ellos sigan con su vida.

[There are my brothers who... I do not involve them in this. *It's just that there's always fear*. I say: that's it, if I fall, I fall alone, as they say. That if something happens to me they continue... that they continue with their lives] (Beatriz, in an interview).

Society is also unable to respond to the call of the mother who is looking for answers. It does not do so because enforced disappearance becomes a system of production of terrors:

Entonces yo fui a ese sitio a averiguar, a ver si alguien ya después de tanto tiempo habla. Pero no hablan, tienen miedo, porque lo único que tienen es su casita y si ellos dicen la verdad van a acabar con ellos. ¿Para dónde van? Serían otros desplazados más.

[So I went to that place to find out, to see if anyone talks after so long. But they don't talk, they are afraid, because the only thing they have is their little house and if they tell the truth they will finish them off. Where can they go? They would be just another displaced person more] (Beatriz, in an interview).

Thus, white violence structures an entire atmosphere of impunity where the subjects survive, rather than live. It is not possible to demand justice for the crime suffered because to do so means exposing oneself to annihilation. In this way, since terror tends to paralysis, the victims will have to fight against such immobilization and one of their tools is resentment.

Resentment has a long conceptual history that has been discussed from different angles. Luis Kancyer (2010; 2001), for example, places resentment as one of the possible decantations of grudge. This affect had already been investigated by Agamben (2006) within the constellation of medieval *acidia* that designates “the revolting of the evil conscience against those who exhort to good” (p. 27). Based on this tradition, Kancyer will conceive of the *resentful* as a bloody, fetishistic, arrogant, evil and psychotic being. For the psychoanalyst, the resentful person is an implacable mnemonist who cannot forgive or forget: their memory is rooted in a particular injury whose reparation they vindictively desire. In this way, by means of an eternally re-sensing the harm, the future of the resentful person is consolidated as the possibility of an impossible punishment. For this reason, for Kancyer (2010), resentment is the expression of a failed mourning:

The experience of time sustained by the power of resentment and remorse is the permanence of an indigestible rumination of an affront that does not cease, the expression of a mourning that cannot be processed, not only in the subject himself and in the intersubjective dynamics, but this thirst for talionic revenge can be perpetuated through the transmission of generations, sealing an inexorable destiny in the collective memory (p. 14).

The resentful, *slave of the death drive* and compulsive guardian of memory, cannot carry out the work of mourning because, seeking to martyr the offender with the promise of their revenge, they create a substitute reality as a result of the negation of the principle of reality. From this perspective, resentment is a dark affect whose main objective is the destruction of the other.

But this is only telling half the story. Although for Kancyer (2010) the two antagonistic dimensions of corrosive passivity and creative activity coexist in resentment, his analysis focuses predominantly on the subject who seems to be a hostage addicted to the memory of grudge. However, according to the framework of understanding that I have proposed, we can turn the argument around to think beyond the death drive and inscribe resentment in a complex relational plot in which the abuse of power reigns. The participants express their affective experience as follows:

Resentimiento es algo que tiene uno por un daño causado. Ese daño que nos causaron, para mí eso es resentimiento.

[Resentment is something that one has for a harm caused. That harm they caused us, for me that is resentment] (Jacqueline in an interview).

Resentimiento... es como que se guarda siempre ese dolor ahí. [...] Resentimiento es... estar muy resentido de lo que hicieron. El resentimiento es eso, como la frustración, como la impotencia. Cuando uno de pronto está peleado con... el mundo, con la sociedad. Yo me pregunto: ¿eso me va a devolver a mi hijo?, ¿eso me va a devolver la vida que he perdido luchando? Porque cada día que va uno a una marcha, o un plantón, o a gritar en la calle en la Plaza de Bolívar... eso lo va acabando a uno.

[Resentment... It's like that pain is always kept there. [...] Resentment is... to be very resentful of what they did. Resentment is that, like frustration, like impotence. When you're suddenly at odds with... the world, with society. I ask myself: is that going to give me back my son, is that going to give me back the life I have lost fighting? Because every day you go to a march, or a sit-in, or to shout out in the Plaza de Bolívar... that is finishing you off] (Beatriz, in an interview).

For Beatriz and Jacqueline, resentment is a *pain stored* in the face of the harm perpetrated by state agents. This seems to agree with Kancyer's definition of resentment as the affect resulting from the rooted memory of a particular injury. Unlike mourning for a lost loved object, resentment expresses unelaborated mourning *for harm* that occurs after multiple humiliations in which rebellious responses have been systematically stifled (Kancyer, 2006). Faced with this, the subject accumulates a settling of scores that, due to the abstract nature of state violence, they cannot resolve clearly:

Es una impotencia ver la realidad y no poder hacer algo. En un comienzo, cuando yo veía a estos militares, tenía esta rabia y esa impotencia de tenerlos ahí y no poder cogerlos y torcerlos. Yo quisiera tener un garrote y darles garrote: que sientan el dolor que nosotras hemos sentido para sacar toda esa rabia que tenemos ahí acumulada.

[It is powerless to see reality and not be able to do something. At first, when I saw these soldiers, I had this rage and that impotence of having them there and not being able to pick them up and twist them. I would like to have a club and hit them with it: I would like them to feel the pain that we have felt to get out all that accumulated anger] (Jacqueline in an interview).

Resentment is one of the forms in which the fixation of the libido is manifested, since the subject finds reasons to maintain a strict fidelity to the object's investment, sustained at the same

time by the commitment to the memory of the disappeared and by the socio-political impossibility of responding to the harm suffered. The libido then refuses to abandon its offending objects and keeps for itself a mobilization that is channeled in the constant attempt to restore the past:

El resentimiento lo tengo ahí guardado. Está ahí quietito, para sacarlo en una manifestación política que va a haber. Y es ahí donde lo necesito, de verdad, para poder sacar ese resentimiento que tengo y transformarlo mejor.  
[I have the resentment stored there. It is there quietly, to take it out in a political demonstration that is going to take place. And that's where I really need it, to be able to get rid of that resentment I have and transform it better] (Doris in interview).

In this line of ideas, Doris shows us that resentment, although it presents the logic of a stored-up affect, is also capable of being a source of creative movement, especially in the public sphere when truth and justice must be demanded. The viscosity of the libido in resentment, its reluctance to divest itself from the object, accounts for a political need to make resentment a space of affective insistence against impunity. In Kancyper's words:

The power of resentment not only promotes destructive fantasies and ideals, but can also lead to trophic fantasies and ideals, favoring the emergence of a necessary rebellion and a sublimatory, creative power, tending to heal the wounds from the unjust abusive powers originated from certain traumatic situations (2010, p. 15).

Now, how is resentment articulated with the repertoires of political resistance to state violence? In the conversation that Hamlet has with his father's ghost, Derrida reads the establishment of *a state of debt* that the prince has to accept in an act of commitment to the ghost. Debt, the author explains, reveals itself as an enigmatic ethical commitment to the situation of injustice that guides the lives of the living in a practical and performative way. For this reason, ghosts *unhinge* the present of the living with their mandates, as they invoke the crime that has already been and the future that will come (Derrida, 2012). The human possibility of inhabiting a space full of spectral presences required Derrida to rethink the work of mourning as an endless ethical phenomenon, without reliable limits, which responds to a call for justice that the living welcome for their dead in conversations in which "the living entertain the dead, play the dead, they take care of the dead, they allow themselves to be entertained and occupied and deceived by the dead, they talk about them and speak to them, they bear their name and use their language" (Derrida, 2012, p. 131).

In these endless dialogues with the absent, the resentful subject lives a temporal experience governed by the *principle of torment* (Kancyper, 2010), that is, a memory that not only haunts the resentful with its pain, but also seeks to torment the offender with the promise of punishment. But, like Hamlet, the victims of political violence do not seek a bloody revenge, but to *make mad the guilty and appall the free [...] with most miraculous organ*.

This is the meaning that I want to bring to the understanding of resentment as creative haunting: *the affect by which the one who is haunted by ghosts also becomes a haunting ghost*. It is the persecutory experience of an unpaid debt and the ethical commitment to the absent that emanates from it. The subject's present is inhabited by a past that comes back, a *living memory* that returns unexpectedly to demand something to be done with its presence, demonstrating that the

memory of resentment has the absent other as its relational horizon and is cultivated as a search for justice in the political project for the non-repetition of forced disappearance:

[My son is in everything. I say that he is present in everything, in everything, in everything. How? As justice, we all demand that: justice! No repetition of these cases! In the name of the boys, of all the victims, not only of the 'false positives' but of all the victims. I don't know how many there are in this country [...]. All the victims, from the Guajira to the Amazon, from Chocó to the Orinoquía... All the victims! And even outside Colombia! [...] Everyone, everyone!] (Beatriz in an interview).

Within the framework of the denial of white violence, resentment operates as a vital strategy to creatively reinvest the memories of the disappeared. The victims hold the wounds of the trauma open so that the crime remains valid waiting to be recognized and perceived by society.

## 6. Conclusions

Resentment and its forms of memory cultivation point to the possibility of *unhingedly* inhabiting one's own historical time in the relationship with ghosts and their demands for justice. For this reason, the work of memory becomes a fundamental exercise of resentment mobilization where there is a display of aggression against the offending object in the public sphere of struggle and social denunciation of white violence. The victims, then, are affectively called to speak publicly about their absentees, to remember them in order to break the social stigma that has been imposed on them:

¡Claro que hay una conexión entre el resentimiento y la búsqueda de justicia! ¡Todo llega a juntarse! Y todo hace que salgan cosas y se active lo que uno tiene. ¡Es que uno lo tiene todo! Uno tiene la verdad. Uno puede seguir trabajando en eso y tenemos que trabajarlo, porque es muy importante que la memoria no muera. Nosotros tenemos la memoria. Mientras nosotros tengamos la memoria y estemos hablando de mi hijo, estaré en esta lucha y voy a traerlo. Él está conmigo. Él está vivo conmigo. Él vive conmigo.  
[Of course, there is a connection between resentment and the pursuit of justice! It all comes together! And everything makes things come out and activates you. We have it all! One has the truth. One can continue working on that and we have to work on it, because it is very important that memory does not die. We have memory. As long as we have the memory and as long as we are talking about my son, I will be in this fight and I will bring him. He is with me. He is alive with me. He lives with me] (Doris in an interview).

In Colombia, where the 'official narratives' have placed the 'false positives' in a place unworthy of mourning, resentment expresses the socio-psychic impossibility of closing grief that must be managed in the midst of impunity. Creative *haunting*, under this proposal, expresses an important *drive-related commitment* (Marucco, 2008) that counteracts the de-objectifying function of the double disappearance. In this way, 'the resentful' are presented as the *tormenting* memory of a society: they are always ready to remind us of the cracks of what we are forgetting; they point

with surgical precision where danger is lurking and they fight against the cheerful disciplining of memories that try to tell us, as in Macondo, ‘nothing happened here, nor is happening or will never happen. Colombia is a happy country’.

Abstract

This paper discusses the results of a qualitative research that explores some aspects of the emotional life of victims of political violence in Colombia. In detail, I start from the affective experience of mothers of victims of a particular modality of forced disappearance in Colombia – “false positives” – to analyze the place of resentment in their daily lives. I consider “false positives” as the product of white political violence that tends to massively disinvest marginalized populations of society in order to dispose of their lives with impunity. In this context I suggest that resentment is an affect that tends to undo political terror through a functioning that produces creative haunting. I conclude that haunting is a modality of the subject’s relationship with the memory of the crime that allows him/her to keep the wounds of trauma open in order to actively and creatively oppose social denial.

**Keywords:** *Political repression, Trauma, Emotional experience.*

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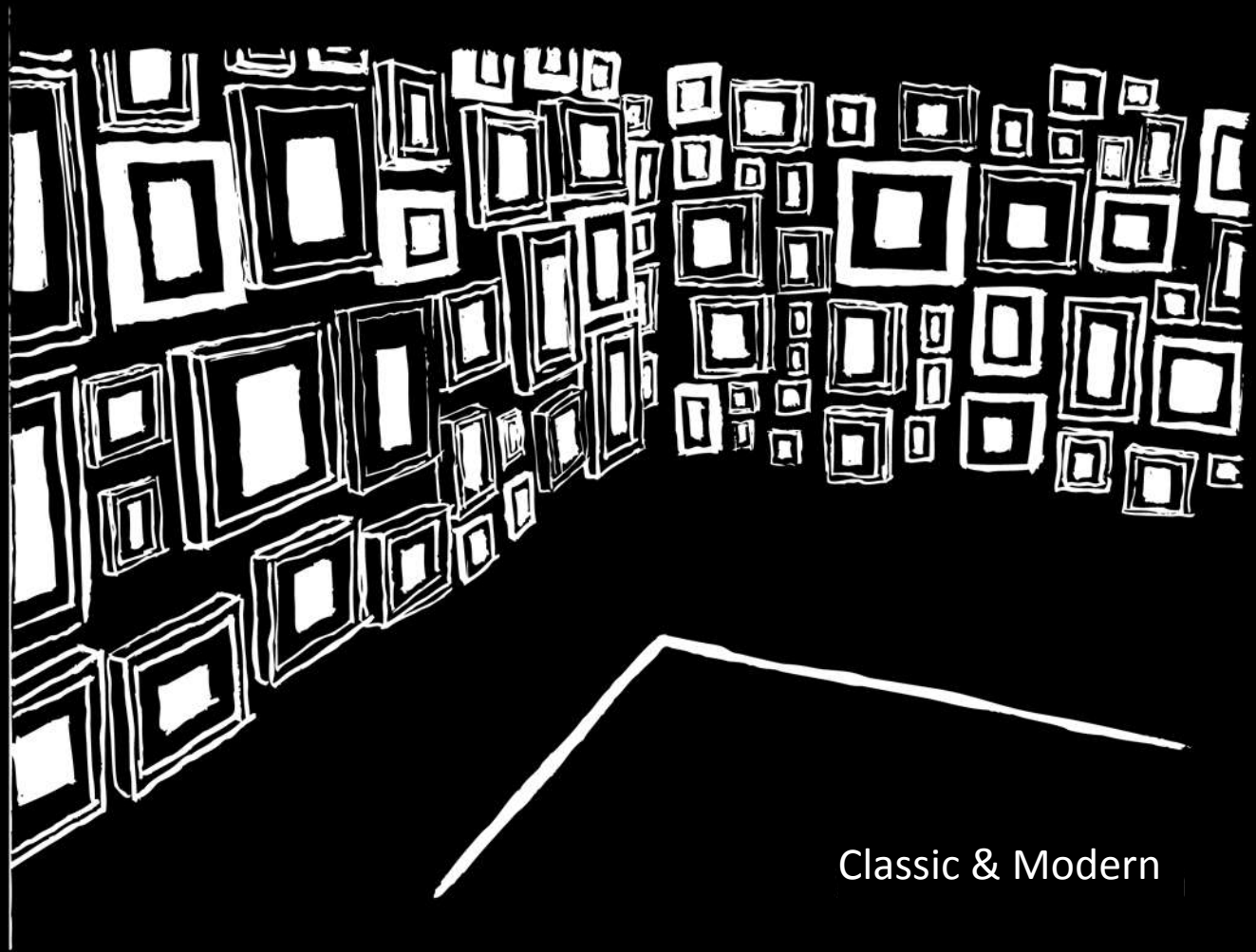
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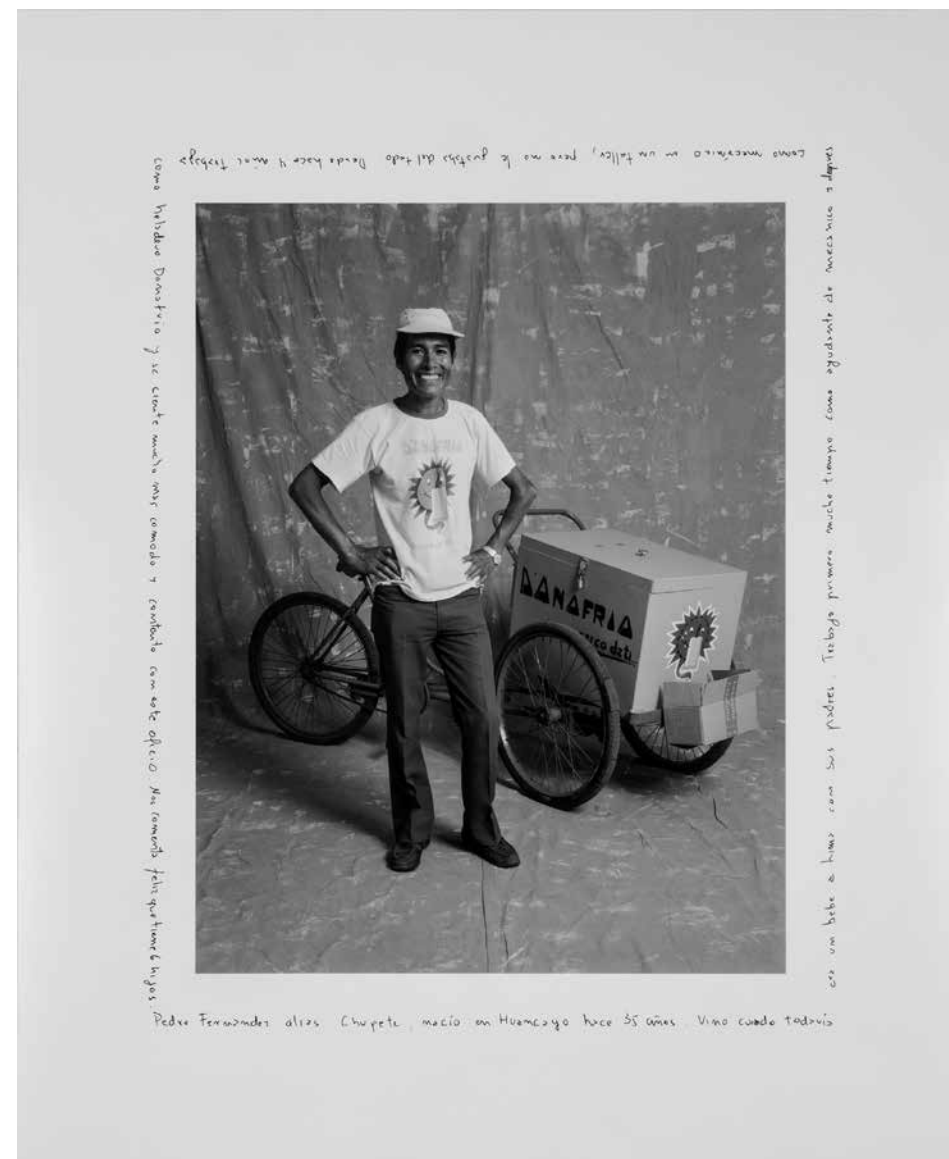
## Validity and Challenges of Laplanche's Generalized Seduction Theory Today

Seduction occupied a prominent place in the early days of psychoanalysis, only to see its theoretical and clinical significance diminish over time until Jean Laplanche revived it in the final decades of the last century. This return of seduction to the psychoanalytic scene not only drew renewed attention to the phenomenon but also prompted a fundamental reassessment of the very foundations of psychoanalysis. Indeed, it is necessary to take into account the permanent need to resume the project of decentralization of the human being initiated by Freud in order to evaluate the scope and importance of the generalized seduction theory (GST). For Laplanche (1992, p. XIII), the true Copernican revolution of psychoanalysis was not so much the discovery of the unconscious itself but rather its complete dependence on the other and drive dynamics. The necessary association of the unconscious and drives with interhuman communication—inevitably permeated by unconscious sexual elements—renders seduction theory a cornerstone of both metapsychology and psychoanalytic practice.

### Some foundations of GST

From Laplanche's perspective, the Copernican revolution of psychoanalysis rests on a universal anthropological condition, characterized by an asymmetry between the adult and the infant that goes beyond the simple state of absolute vital dependence of the latter on the former. This asymmetry manifests itself primarily in the field of communication, in which the adult's unconscious sexuality compromises interactions with the infant, confronting it with enigmas. The enigmatic message, the vehicle *par excellence* of generalized seduction, is a concept that seeks to account for the adult's susceptibility to their own unconscious sexuality. The adult unintentionally transmits messages whose sexual content they are unaware of, just as they are unaware of the enigmatic and potentially traumatic effect that

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*Lima of today, Lima of tomorrow* (1991). Series of 36 portraits of people who work in the street, ambulant, as they are known in my country. Photo: Pedro Fernández, ice-cream man. Analogue copy 40 cm x 50 cm.

these messages have on the infant to whom they are addressed. Thus, the infant's seduction by the adult becomes inevitable, leading to the widespread inoculation of these fragments of otherness, whose enigmatic nature demands a process of interpretation akin to translation, as conceptualized by Laplanche.

The translational theory of repression, inspired by Freud's Letter 52 to Fliess, serves as one of the pillars of GST. It is based on the idea that enigmatic messages compel the infant to search for meanings that might alleviate their disturbing effects. However, the attempt to integrate these elements of otherness into the subjective domain proves to be an impossible task. The translation process is always partial, invariably leaving untranslated residues that function as foreign bodies



Roberto Huarcaya

*Lima of today, Lima of tomorrow* (1991). Series of 36 portraits of people who work in the street, ambulant, as they are known in my country. Photo: Susana Sánchez, street sweeper Analogue copy 40 cm x 50 cm.

within the psyche. Laplanche describes these residues as “de-signified signifiers” (1999 [1993], p.87) or “thing-representations” (1999 [1993], p.76), which serve as source-objects of the drive (1992 [1984], p.239).

Two decisive aspects of the translational theory of repression deserve emphasis. First, the peculiar temporality involved in the formation of the unconscious: the disturbing power of the message only fully materializes through the translation effort, meaning that the drive source only comes into being and acquires efficacy *après-coup* (deferred action), an excellent French rendering of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*. This implies that there is an inherent trap in the other’s sexual

enigma: it only becomes a traumatic element once internalized through the act of translation—almost as if the effort to integrate it into a subjective history refines its traumatic potential.

The second aspect relates to the realism of the unconscious and Laplanche’s proposal of a third domain of reality (1992 [1993], p.77), distinct from both material and psychological reality. This third domain consists of the reality of the message itself. By asserting the existence of contents in the unconscious and defining them as untranslated residues of sexual fantasies implanted by the adult in the infant, this proposition delineates psychoanalysis more precisely within the scientific domain—a permanent concern for Laplanche.

For him, the message is not necessarily verbal, nor does it have to be integrated into a semiotic system, though it must possess a certain materiality that aligns it with the signifier and ensures its polysemic potential. However, its interpellative power and addressing characteristic are more significant than its capacity to signify anything in particular. More than representing something, the message represents the other for someone. This is crucial for understanding its enigmatic power: before the infant can grasp the message’s meaning, the mere fact of being its recipient already constitutes part of the enigma, already placing in play the existence of an other who intends to communicate something.

Laplanche illustrates this effect with a metaphor that refers to the infant’s implicit question during breastfeeding: “What does this breast want from me?” (1992 [1984], p.238). The property of “signifying to” before signifying something ultimately relates to the presence of unconscious sexuality in the adult and its initial absence in the infant. This excess of signification—which infiltrates the adult’s message and against which the infant has no defenses—triggers the interpretative and symbolic resources in the recipient. Following the partial translation of the message, the permanent demand for work imposed by the untranslated residues justifies their designation as source-objects of the drive and defines them as “the measure of the difference or imbalance between what is symbolizable and what is not in the enigmatic messages received by the infant.” In summary, these objects can be regarded as “the measure of the quantity of trauma” (Laplanche, 1992 [1984], p.240, my translation).

## Principles of psychoanalytic practice in GST

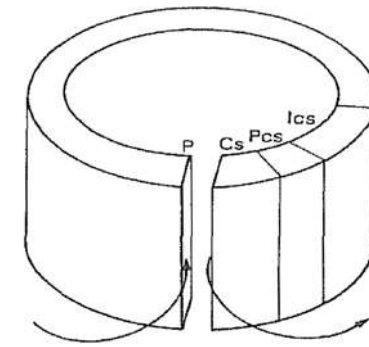
Based on this realistic conception of the unconscious, in which the drive is linked to the limits of symbolization/translation, Laplanche develops a clinical theory based on the search for the reestablishment of the initial situation of the infant’s exposure to the enigma of the other. Seen from this angle, the analysis must come as close as possible to the original seduction, creating a situation in which the analyst, when seen by the analysand in the position of the seductive other (what does this analyst want from me?), reactivates the confrontation with the original enigmas and, at the same time, stands for the guardian of the enigma. Maintaining this place and function requires the psychoanalyst to systematically refuse to accept or offer the analysand pre-established translation



schemes, both those constructed by the analysand themselves and those that are part of the psychoanalytic theoretical field. Oedipus and castration, for example, are not seen as manifestations of the unconscious, but as myth/symbolic schemes that seek to provide rationality and thus contain the traumatic effects of the internal foreign bodies resulting from the original seduction. In this sense, analysis can be considered an anti-hermeneutics (1999 [1994]), that is, a process of disarticulation of the translations that always present themselves as “mise en histoire” and with which each person tries to defend themselves from the effects of otherness.

These general principles of psychoanalytic practice unfold in important reflections on transference and the conduct of analysis. The Laplanchean approach to transference fully respects the principle of permanent vigilance against defensive maneuvers that always work in favor of connections, of the establishment of ties, thus bearing the mark of narcissism and its main representative, the Ego. Considering that the movement of detachment promoted by the analyst cannot be maintained constantly due to narcissistic resistance, Laplanche (1987b) describes two types of transference, filled in (*en plein*) and hollowed-out (*en creux*), which refer, respectively, to the search for filling in the gaps in meaning and to the preservation of the enigma in conducting the analysis. If on the analysand's side the use of hermeneutic resources that are almost always partners of the symptoms prevails, on the analyst's side the refusal of any translation scheme, of any theory, myth or ideology must prevail. The hollowed-out transference is supposed to reinstate the original transference that Laplanche conceives in the following terms: “If, in fact, the transference is characterized by a duplication (*dédoublement*) of the other and, so to speak, by the presence of otherness in the other, the original infant-adult situation can already be said, in this sense, to be transferential.” (1999 [1996], p.237) In this way, the analytical method can be seen as a method of “free dissociation” (1999 [1996], p.237) in which the transference occurs with the analyst's refusal to know, which can be compared to the deconstruction/detranslation of the narratives forged by the Ego. Consequently, constructions in analysis, as described by Freud, are seen by Laplanche as reconstructions – possibly more permeable to the unconscious – of defensive constructions made and maintained by the patient's narcissistic interests.

Another clinical aspect addressed by Laplanche within the scope of GST concerns the environment in which the analysis takes place. The idea of a psychoanalytic tub (*baquet*) (Laplanche 1987b) aims to define the conditions for establishing the space where the approximate reestablishment of the original seduction situation can occur. Taking as reference the spatial scheme that represents the psychic apparatus, proposed in chapter 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), Laplanche associates the psychoanalytic framework with the circle that results from the approximation of the poles of perception and consciousness in the aforementioned scheme.



In the same way as the closed circuit of representations where the dream unfolds, the tub delimits the space in which the circulation of the phantasmatic sexuality is sheltered from the interference and inhibitions of the self-preservative field. Compliance with the contractual and material aspects of the psychoanalytic setting, such as the constancy of the place of the consultation, the observance of the stipulated times, the guarantee of confidentiality and the judicious management of the payment are parameters that must be strictly respected so that maximum freedom occurs where it is essential, namely, in the associations, thoughts and affections related to fantasies, dreams, desires, fears, conflicts and other derivatives of the internal foreign objects that remain untranslated.

These brief considerations about the psychoanalytic clinic in the context of the GST suffice to confirm the primacy of infantile sexuality, characterized mainly by forces of disconnection that prevail over forces of connection. In this way, the moments of analysis in which autoerotic elements manifest themselves become more valuable than the moments in which narcissistic interests prevail. This means that, from the GST's point of view, the destabilizations produced by the analysis count more than the moments of holding and containment experienced in the transference. When we compare this clinical proposal of the GST with several other psychoanalytic currents, especially those that have as their central reference the works of Melanie Klein, Bion and Winnicott, we quickly notice a great contrast between the GST's evident interest in contents, such as unconscious fantasies, de-signified signifiers or thing-representations and the source-objects of the drive; While in these other currents the interest in the continent and the concepts more directly related to it prevail, such as psychic envelope, continent function, symbolizing function, auxiliary ego, among others.

In parallel with the emphasis given by these currents to the continent rather than the content, there is also an undeniable desexualization of both the object and the objectives of psychoanalysis, and a clear loss of importance of concepts such as repression and the repressed unconscious. In view of these facts, it is necessary to point out that the GST also presents itself as the guardian of the primacy of the repressed infantile sexuality in psychoanalysis. However, this is not to deny the importance of the continent function, but to affirm that it does not exist without the libidinal investment of the infant without the sexualizing function and the seductive action of the adult upon the infant. (cf. André, 1999, p.15)



to the active form of “identification with”) whose incidence on the infant has an enigmatic effect, since it conveys traces of the unconscious sexuality of the members of this small *socius*. By considering the adults’ assignment of gender as an enigmatic message capable of producing untranslated remnants, Laplanche clearly moves towards the recognition of the alterity content of the narcissistic contributions through which the social environment participates in the psychic



constitution of the infant. However, this movement of the theory implies, above all, a belated attention to the importance of the adult in the processes that, according to Laplanche’s conception of the original repression, are equivalent to the translation responsible for the formation of the ego and the unconscious in the infant.

Finding a point of equilibrium in the participation of the infant and the adult in these processes which culminate in the unification of the body and the acquisition of self-consciousness is a decisive step that allows the GST to face the major issues in contemporary psychoanalytic practice. Indeed, on the one hand Laplanche’s theory of repression, based on the infant’s capacity for translation, can work very well when it comes to considering the secondary repression and its role in classic cases of neurosis; On the other hand, the entire field of non-neurotic pathologies, notably the field of psychoses, requires reflection on the failure of repression, on the relationship of this failure with the particularities of the messages of adults and with the inexistence or deficiency of translation resources for both infants and adults.

In the last years of his life, as the discussion about psychoses and narcissistic disorders gained strength among his interlocutors, Laplanche proposed the concept of the enclaved unconscious and a new topic in which the cleavage of the psyche came to occupy the foreground. Called by him the “unified model of the apparatus of the soul”, this new theoretical inflection of the GST had as precursors the works of Marta Rezende Cardoso (2002) and Luís Carlos Tarelho (1999), who had explored in their respective doctoral theses the ideas of psychotic enclaves and untranslatable messages. To these precursor works of the enclaved unconscious was added the contribution of Christophe Dejours (2001) on the psychic cleavage and the mechanisms related to extreme states of psychic suffering in which an absence of mentalization is observed. Dissatisfied with the designation of « amencial unconscious » proposed by Dejours, Laplanche insisted on keeping the expression “enclaved unconscious” to designate the psychic topos where messages refractory to translation are stored. To answer the inevitable question about the origin of untranslatable messages, a first formulation had already been made in an article entitled “Implantation, intromission” (1990) when two categories of enigmatic messages were distinguished: those that are implanted in the infant’s “psychophysiological dermis” and those that are intrusive in the infant’s psyche. While the former activate the translation resources, the latter interfere with translation insofar as they are associated with cleaved parts in the adult themselves. These are messages that, because they have not been translated, cannot be considered unconscious strictly speaking and therefore depend on “operative defenses”, such as refusal (*Verleugnung*), to remain « on the brim of consciousness » (« à fleur de conscience ») (2007 [2003b], p.202).

Returning to what was previously mentioned about the challenge of finding a balance in the participation of infants and adults in the work of translating the enigmatic sexuality, it becomes clear that Laplanche tends to give more weight to the characteristics of the message than to the translation resources when it comes to dealing with the untranslatable. It is on this precise point that

it seems crucial to me to insist on the idea that greater attention directed to the role of the adult as original translator may prove decisive for the future of the GST. In order to respond to the challenges posed by the most severe psychic illnesses, namely, those in which agony, passivation, and emptiness nullify or at least prevail over the capacity to produce conflict, anxiety, and classic neurotic symptoms (cf. Figueiredo & Coelho Jr, 2018), the hypothesis of the enclaved unconscious and the new topic that results from it can only be useful to the extent that they consider the need to reformulate the roles of the infant and the adult in the origins of the psychic subject. Resuming, from a critical point of view, the role of the original translator granted to the infant in the translation-al theory of repression is, in my view, the starting point not only for the GST to make a solid contribution to the advances of the psychoanalytic clinic, but also for the unfinished Copernican revolution to progress on the endless task of decentralizing the human being.

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From Memory



Calibán -  
RLP, 23(1),  
242-245  
2025

Wania Maria Coelho Ferreira Cidade\*

## On Joyce Goldstein

*I know that certain streets I've once walked  
will no longer hear the sound of my footsteps.  
There's a magazine I've kept for many years  
and will never open again.  
Each time I bid someone farewell,  
it may be the last time they see me.  
Death, deaf, walks beside me,  
and I don't know on which corner she'll kiss me.  
What face will she wear?  
Will she let me finish what I have to do?''<sup>1</sup>  
Raul Seixas, "Song to My Death"*

As soon as I think about what I'm going to write, I can hear the smile in her vigorous voice. I can imagine so many things we still had to talk about when a sharp silence

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1. Translator's Note: *Eu sei que determinada rua que eu já passei/ Não tornará a ouvir o som dos meus passos/ Tem uma revista que eu guardo há muitos anos/ E que nunca mais eu vou abrir/ Cada vez que eu me despeço de uma pessoa/Pode ser que essa pessoa esteja me vendo pela última vez/ A morte, surda, caminha ao meu lado/ E eu não sei em que esquina ela vai me beijar/ Com que rosto ela virá?/ Será que ela vai deixar eu acabar o que eu tenho que fazer?*

smothered the air. We said a warm goodbye over the phone. Later, we would talk again so she could tell me how her presentation went. There was no "later." Alive, lucid, brave, and kind—that's how she departed.

It is well known that existence presupposes its end. Life and death are natural consequences, and all cultures have rituals to deal with the inevitability of death. Each one finds a way to face loss or emphasizes its religious rituals in an attempt to process this unrepresentable phenomenon. From what I know and where I have been shaped, the process of symbolization traverses (or doesn't) a terrain of pain and suffering, with arduous, heavy, and laborious gradations and colors. In reality, a bond is broken, causing an exhausting psychic investment to integrate the lost object into the self. Throughout this work—memories, crying fits, and immense sorrow for what we have lost—a surinvestment occurs in what was so good and is now gone. It is at this point where we are. It is at this point where I am.

Joyce's death is still very recent. Today, I've just realized that three months have passed since her departure on September 16, 2024. It was an afternoon like any other, and then, with a muffled scream in my chest, I realized it had been the last time—without warning, without farewell—deaf, as poet Raul Seixas envisioned.

She left a to-do list, not because she was behind, but because she loved life and had plans, because she was tenacious, dedicated, and never left anything unfinished... She understood that "transience value is scarcity value in time. Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment" (Freud, 1916/1957, p.305). Therefore, she took seriously the idea that the beauty of life is *fated to extinction* and lived intensely—until she was kissed and fell into a deep, peaceful sleep.

She was cheerful, intelligent, possessed a sharp sensitivity, and had a keen ability to listen. She was feminine and vain, deeply connected to her family—her husband, Renato Goldstein, and her children, Júlia and Pedro Goldstein. She had a remarkable trait: she was truthful and frank, and skillfully found ways to express what she thought. In her, aggressiveness and kindness blended in a balanced and sufficient way, while she knew how to be tough and stubborn when the matter at hand had worn her out.

Joyce did not go unnoticed, whether due to her presence and beauty, her stances, or her active participation in the institutional psychoanalytic movement in Brazil and Latin America. She was a very active psychoanalyst. She worked for many years at the *Centro de Estudos, Atendimento e Pesquisa da Infância e da Adolescência* (Ceapia). In that institution, which includes many psychoanalysts from the societies of Rio Grande do Sul, she received her training in child and adolescent psychotherapy. She held positions such as scientific director, supervisor, seminar coordinator, and, most recently, coordinator of the *Projeto Bantu*, which aims to study racial relations and implement affirmative actions (policies aimed at inclusion and combating discrimination against socially and economically excluded groups) for the Black population.

She not only implemented the quota program for Black men and women at Ceapia, which is now launching its second group, but her final act was the presentation of the program at the institution with the text "*It is necessary for white people to break the pact: Recognizing whiteness and broadening perspectives*" (Goldstein, September 13, 2024). After the introduction, she said:



Being an anti-racist white subject means being willing to recognise and construct one-self in this interdependence, that is, to confront the discomfort of over-racist conversations and to critically reflect on how whiteness is constructed in our life history, in our relationships, in our social practices and in our institutions. To recognise that we were raised not to recognise ourselves as white people, but as human beings who represent universality, the standard and the norm as the locus of power.

Further reading will tell you more about this subject. I would like to continue talking about her trajectory in psychoanalysis. Joyce joined the theoretical seminars of the Sociedade Psicanalítica de Porto Alegre (SPPA) in 1997, graduated in 2003 and became a psychoanalyst and associate member in 2007.

Between 2018 and 2020, Joyce was a member of the Coordination Working Committee on Childhood and Adolescence of the Federación Psicoanalítica de América Latina (Fepal), which inspired her to establish an equivalent committee within Febrapsi. During the same period, she joined the study group *Psychoanalysts in the Community* and, as a psychoanalyst, the SOS Brazil (2020).

As can be seen, she was a psychoanalyst deeply concerned and committed to the causes and various challenges facing Latin America, particularly regarding violence, racism, and poverty.

It was due to her passion for psychoanalysis and her capacity for work and psychoanalytic reflection that I invited her to serve as the Secretary General of Fepal, the last position she held (2022–2024), in addition to her activities in the study group *Psychoanalysts in the Community* and in SOS Brazil. Through it all, her actions were filled with humor, curiosity, and cheerfulness. Her work reflected her sharp and critical perspective on the steps and execution of tasks (which she carried out impeccably), as well as her commitment to the transmission of the ideas we chose to guide our administration. Detail-oriented, competent, and a loyal friend, she made fundamental contributions to the administration of Fepal and to the realization of the 35th Latin American Psychoanalysis Congress.

Brave, she wrote a text on whiteness in which she exposed her prejudices and racist ideas, in an impressive effort to work through these issues within herself. You will have the opportunity to delve into that literary essay. I strongly recommend reading it.

With the silence of her smile, her voice, and her presence, an important light was extinguished—but not the strength of her existence in the lives of others.

“All this loveliness of nature and art [...] somehow or other must be able to persist and to escape all the powers of destruction” (Freud, 1916/1957 p. 305).

Her life and courage can serve as an inspiration and lovingly sustain the longing.

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## Stealing the Humanity of the Other: Whiteness and Psychoanalysis\*\*

After receiving the invitation to speak about *Whiteness and Psychoanalysis*, I thought about many contents and ways to convey what whiteness is. It is, for example, a position of power of the white man, a position of material and symbolic privileges, a stance of dispossession and suppression of the other, maintaining the idea that the white man is conceived as a universal category of the human being, while non-whites are seen as racialized and inferior beings. Most of the content of my studies is based on Lia's books<sup>1</sup>. While rereading some texts, the range of options began to open up, and I thought of starting by recounting a personal experience, which I titled "My Whiteness: Racism and Shame".

### My Whiteness: Racism and Shame

I present part of a dialogue-work, written by me and my friend Wania Cidade, titled "Between Us: Whiteness and Blackness." At a certain point in the text, Wania asks me the following question: "When did you become aware of your whiteness?" In trying to answer her, I told a story that I will retell for you.

In 2019, a group of colleagues and I received the invitation to participate in the panel titled "Psychoanalysis and Community: The Analyst Away from Home," at the 27th Brazilian Congress of Psychoanalysis. From there, we began to think about what lies ahead for the psychoanalyst when they "leave home."

Among so many ideas we came up with, we came across that racism of Brazilian society in relation to black people, which "at home" had been denied, since at that time, as well as in current times, this topic was hardly or not at all debated in psychoanalytic institutions. So, we set out to organize ourselves to study racism and write about black people. Coincidentally, that same week, we saw in the newspaper that in Cidade Baixa (a neighborhood with more alternative bars in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil) there would be a gathering of black women from the Black Movement of Porto Alegre. The event in-

cluded music, poetry, art, and dramatization. The event aimed to bring together artists of African diaspora descent to discuss, through art, the minority presence of black women in intellectual production and consumption. We organized ourselves, and there we went, four white women.

It is important to highlight that this meeting happened, coincidentally, on April 8, 2019, a day after the death of Evaldo dos Santos Rosa, a 51-year-old musician who had left his house with his family to go to a *chá de bebê* (baby shower) and was killed with eighty shots fired "by mistake." I repeat: eighty shots fired by Brazilian army soldiers. Evaldo was mentioned and honored, and it was emphasized that he had committed no transgression, except that of "being black" – and, therefore, a potential suspect.

My attendance at the meeting was what I would call an emotional experience. They were ambiguous feelings, like that of feeling misplaced, out of place. I was delighted to see and know the strength of the words of many black women I didn't know. I found them beautiful (I racialized them), I was surprised by their intelligence (my racism surfacing), I saw myself wanting to appear natural, normal in that environment where I had never been before, that is, a universe in which black people predominated. I sang with everyone, but I confess that I had an extremely restless night of sleep. Something was out of place. However, I was very motivated to write about the strength of black women and to study racism.

At the event, the name of Sandrali de Campos Bueno, a black woman with a vast and important history in favor of the Black Movement, was mentioned. Coincidentally, one of our colleagues at the event said she knew her, that they had been classmates. What came to my mind? Sandrali is a psychologist like us! Well, we decided to reach out to Sandrali. We sent her a message on WhatsApp, explaining our desire to address the issue of racism in a panel at a congress and telling her that we would like to talk to her about it. She responded promptly. I reproduce exactly what she wrote:

I consider it important for whiteness to address the issue of racism, as long as they address the privileges of being white. I believe in the work in which Lia Vainer Schucman addresses whiteness. Beyond that, I think we, Black people, will always be treated as the population to be studied. My suggestion is to study whiteness. We, Black people, are tired of being the object of study. Studying whiteness is something few do.

I confess that I was surprised and irritated by the response. What was she trying to tell us? What was whiteness? I thought, "She surely did not understand what we wrote to her." I considered her response somewhat petulant... and tried to keep that feeling secret. The group decided to invite Sandrali to a meeting at one of the colleagues' house, and by listening to her, by feeling her more closely, I began to come into contact with my emotions, with my racism, and from there I can say that little by little I started to become aware of my whiteness.

With a certain strangeness, a certain discomfort, I approached a pattern of my own that I am ashamed of, a racism that I structured throughout my life. I still oscillate between knowing and not knowing, between approaching and distancing myself, between speaking and silencing.

So, we started studying whiteness and writing "Inside and Outside the House: The Analyst's Whiteness" for subsequent debate. I thought it would be important to ask: Who is aware of their whiteness to tell us about it?

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\*\* This work was presented at a panel discussion on Whiteness at the Sociedade Psicanalítica de Porto Alegre, by invitation of Luciana Secco, Director of Community Actions. Joyce Goldstein, a psychoanalyst member of the institution, and Lia Vainer Schucman, a social psychologist, professor, and researcher in social relations, participated in the same panel. Goldstein enthusiastically thanked for the invitation and spoke about her admiration for Schucman and her joy in sharing the panel with her, an intellectual whose studies on whiteness have inspired her. In the debate, Schucman gave a historical and conceptual presentation, and Goldstein, with courage, presented a personal experience of whiteness and racism, with the intention of promoting the debate on the issue.

1. Note from the Editor: Lia Vainer Schucman

Along the same line as Sandrali's discourse, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1957/1995) was the first Brazilian sociologist to observe that only the black person has become a topic and object of research. He says: "But one thing is the black-topic; another, the black-life" (p. 215). Guerreiro Ramos was a precursor in talking about whiteness and Brazilian whites as objects of study to understand racism. Following his premise, I offer the experience I previously recounted as an object of study and debate.

Sandrali put me to the test. She pointed out, questioned, and denounced my position of power as a white person. For example, I considered her petulant, daring, for telling me what I had to study. And that is precisely the place of power that the white person exercises and wants to maintain. We do not admit that this other (black person) questions us. Internally, I did not admit that she questioned me, challenging my position and my demand. I thought: "Who is she to tell me what I have to study and write?"

Another issue that occurred to me was that, to me, she hadn't understood anything we had written to her, that is, I didn't allow myself to be displaced from my position of superiority, power, intelligence, capability, and privileges, and I dehumanized her through a negative attribution. Here, the superior/inferior issue constructed by whites was installed, that is, stripping blacks of their capacity and placing them in a position of subalternity.

Coexistence with blacks and inclusion caused tension. It was a challenging experience, felt as a threat to my life, insofar as she was claiming a place, a right, a position, and that is almost impossible to tolerate.

That is whiteness!

It is worth noting that when we talk about whiteness, it is to promote three important mechanisms: *awareness, tension, and change*. The decolonization of thought depends on these three mechanisms.

The matter is difficult, provocative, and requires us to try to know, question, understand, and approach the other (the black population), opening up space for an action that promotes coexistence and change.

### What does psychoanalysis have to do with whiteness?

Psychoanalysis aims to investigate unconscious ideas and feelings. The psychoanalytic process leads us to recognize unknown areas within ourselves. On the other hand, we develop self-observation skills, giving us access to our internal world. In everyday life, we try to deal with our racism. However, we are unaware of its extent and how we contribute to its maintenance. Our whiteness supports and sustains it.

The psychoanalytic tool can listen to and name the silences, subordinations, and desubjectifications experienced by non-whites. We know that invisibility and silencing can be the worst outcomes in the structuring of subjectivity.

A few questions to think about together:

To what extent are we willing to revise our personal values, prejudices, privileges, and undergo real internal transformations linked to whiteness - that is, to see the different in oneself, and not in the other?

To what extent do our personal values influence the *modus operandi* of our institutions?

Extracting, displacing, stealing, making invisible the humanity of the other at such deep levels is a perverse project of naturalizing a pattern, disregarding lives and stealing the human dignity of the other.

Black Lives Matter!

### Rebecas, Beatrices, Anas, Dudas, and whoever else matter

To take advantage of the Olympic atmosphere, and remembering that tomorrow, August 28, 2024, the Paralympic Games begin, I pay tribute to the young Brazilian Olympic athlete Rebeca Andrade, a black woman who enchanted Brazil - blacks, whites, adults, children - and conveyed an important message about what matters in her achievements and those of her other black colleagues:

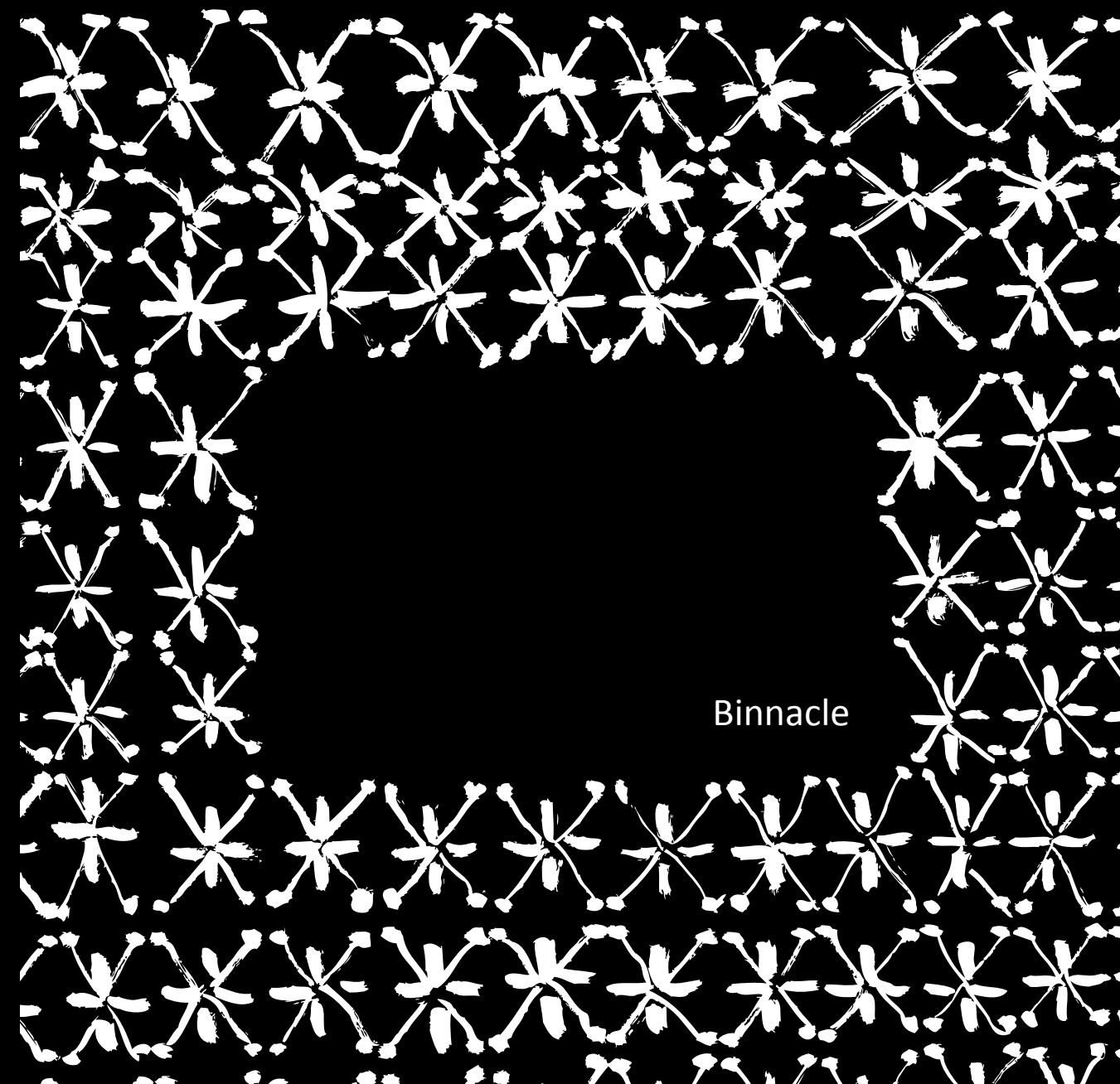
- The greatest Brazilian Olympic athlete is black, and *that matters*.
- Representation *matters*.
- *It matters* that Rebeca surpassed two white men.
- *It matters* that she is from the periphery.
- *It matters* because it tells people that, with investment, the universe can be conquered. Imagine with a huge amount of investment!
- The *Bolsa Atletas*<sup>2</sup> *matters*.
- *It matters* that the state provides sports as a basic universal right. And not just sports.
- *It matters* to see our flag above two flags of an imperialist country like the United States.
- *It matters* that Rebeca sang the anthem with pride, even though it is the anthem of a country that kills black people daily, to the rhythm of wars, an anthem that includes in itself denial: "Of the children of this soil, you are the gentle mother, beloved homeland, Brazil."
- *It matters* that her talent stood out despite all the difficulties she went through.
- *All of this matters* for people to constitute themselves as a nation.
- Black mothers *matter*, because without them there would be no Rebeca and there would be no Brazil.
- The culture of the rift *matters*.
- *It matters* that we thoughtfully address these serious phenomena in institutions and in Brazil.

Thank you!

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2. The *Bolsa Atletas* is a National Program that supports high performance athletes.



Binnacle



Calibán -  
RLP, 23(1),  
252-254  
2025

Mariana Mantiñán\*

## The shadow of objects

Roberto Huarcaya (Peru, 1959) manages a narrative that expands beyond photography. The gaze and listening skills he has developed, also through his training as a therapist, are brought into play in his work as a photographer and experimenter. The shifts in perspective and the different interplays in Huarcaya's observations of his surroundings are reflected in his work and in the journey that can be perceived in it. A point of view that surprises by changing perspectives.

Perhaps a break in the work is given by the moment in which he is seduced by the ungraspable and makes an alliance with the photograms, a photo without a camera, on a photosensitive paper on which to print the shadow of the objects.

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From a particularly analytical position of openness to incident and surprise, taking a position of fostering and inhabiting the unexpected, the intersection of these disciplines materializes in Roberto Huarcaya. It involves questioning the established in order to place himself in a place of not knowing and keeping alive the exercise of freedom and art.

It seems to be a game with another way of *capturing and developing* objects. It is the capture of the image in a kind of unstructured camera exploring, in turn, the analog photography laboratory. A blank sheet of paper, liquids, sequences and especially a light to make this transfer. Huarcaya took this beautiful logic to another plane, immersed himself in nature, and invited it to play its part with

Roberto Huarcaya

*Oceanograms, Pacific waves* (2019). Photo 3, 5 m x 1.10 m. Original photogram, color photosensitive paper.

him. The portrait *with* nature, distancing himself from the fact that "the principal task of Civilization, its actual *raison d'être*, is to protect us against nature". (Freud, 1927/1955, p. 15) and approaching the thoughts of Brazilian philosopher Ailton Krenak (2020): "I cannot imagine us separated from nature. We could distinguish ourselves from it in the head, but not as organisms" (p. 58).

Ailton Krenak (2020): "I cannot imagine ourselves separate from nature. We could distinguish ourselves from it in our minds, but not as organisms" (p. 58).

Huarcaya challenges the idea of authorship, abandoning that attempt to recognize the author of the work; Thus, the need for systematized order is relegated to the immensity of the whole in movement and collaboration. In a game of co-creation, uncertainty is revealed; while everything revealed has a surprising quality, here the unexpected takes center stage and takes on a structural character.

Huarcaya defies the idea of authorship, dropping the attempt to recognize the author of

the work; thus, the need for systematization of order is relegated in front of the immensity of the whole in movement and collaboration. In a game of co-creation, the uncertain is revealed; although everything revealed has that character of surprise, here the unexpected is the protagonist and takes on a structural character.

Contrary to the *trompe-l'œil* figure<sup>1</sup>, here there is no exact point in which to inhabit the game of the hidden to be discovered; everything is discovery. The photogram seems to have something of the discovery of the experience at every angle.

He moves away from the immediate to invite us to give place to the sensitive. The link established with the piece is what makes up the piece, what turns the work into a kind of *performance*. Movement seems to be a guiding thread

1. Artistic technique that seeks deception by means of optical effects such as perspective, especially popular in the painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that Lacan (1964/1993) took from the painting *The Ambassadors*, by Hans Holbein.

throughout the creative process, in the result, in the assembly and in the wager of the encounter of the material with the other who walks through it. It is an invitation to make contact with the movement as a position inherent to the being, since the static no longer has a place, nor as a research tool. It is a kind of dance between the blow of light and movement.

The shadows of the objects become objects. The photogram is presented, as an object in itself, in an exhibition room. The body becomes part of it, the perspective ceases to be one and the object is inhabited at the same time as one is inhabited by it.

The tour proposed by *Caliban* through Roberto Huarcaya's work attempts to show the artist's work throughout his creative process, showing his different moments and interests, while dialoguing with the texts in *Seduction*.

In this issue, the exquisite cover work of *Objetos París*<sup>2</sup> (Huarcaya, 1997) captures the essence of those objects abandoned by the city, which Huarcaya links to the conflicts surrounding mental health and those abandoned beings that fail to fulfill the current utility demanded of us. He plays with contrasts by applying the logics of commercial photography, giving them the treatment of those objects that begin their journey, but highlighting the stories of what they went through.

*Lima la de ayer, la de mañana*<sup>3</sup> (Huarcaya, 1991), where the link with those who will be portrayed takes center stage, betting on listening as a tool, the presence of the protagonist gains weight in his gaze, showing people in their jobs and playing with his handwriting, he tells a fragment of each of these stories.

The possibility of appearing/being in other dimensions is seen in a later series, in which Huarcaya uses the technique of photograms with references to Latin American photography. Photographers leave traces, they are

another mark on the photosensitive paper. In *Cuerpos Desvelados*<sup>4</sup> (Huarcaya, 2017-2021) works in a darkroom, emitting three strokes of light to create a single shadow with diffuse limits, taking *body* in the plane.

In *Deseos, Temores y divanes*<sup>5</sup> (Huarcaya, 1990), the analytical space is invaded, the analyst/analyzing limit is blurred, and the repetition is posed in the framing used in the photographs, where what changes are the characters, the desires and fears. Perhaps the trap now lies in tempting us to believe that the couch is always the same, although the repetition is not identical and the shadows left by our objects stain it each time, whatever the place we happen to inhabit.

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2. Objects Paris

3. Yesterday's Lima, Tomorrow's Lima

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# Thanks

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