

lacanoamerican

Michael Plastow¹

Prior to departing Paris for Caracas, Venezuela in June 1980, Lacan declared:

Those Latin-Americans, as they are called, unlike those who are here, have neither seen me nor heard me live – well – that does not prevent them from being Lacanos.²

Upon his arrival in Caracas, in opening the *International Meeting of Caracas* on the 12th of July 1980, after having dissolved the *École Freudienne de Paris* in between, Lacan stated the following:

I don't have the travel bug, the proof of which is that I waited until my 80th year to come to Venezuela.

I came because I was told that this was a propitious place to convoke my pupils from Latin America.

Are you my pupils? I am not prejudging this because I'm used to raising my pupils myself.

That does not always lead to marvellous results.

You are not unaware of the problem that I have had with my School of Paris. I resolved it as needs be – by taking it by the root. I mean – by uprooting my pseudo-School.

All that I have obtained since confirms to me that I did the right thing. But this is already ancient history.

In Paris I am used to speaking to an audience where lots of faces are known to me since they come to visit me at my place, 5 rue de Lille, where my practice is located.

You, you are, it seems, my readers. You are all the more so since I have never seen you listen to me.

So, obviously, I am curious to know what can come from you.

That's why I say to you: Thank you, thank you for responding to my invitation.³

And then in closing this *Meeting*, Lacan said:

Well, I have to give my opinion on all of that: I am for this continuing, in other words that it starts again.

Obviously I am not going to undertake this voyage again. So I invite you. I invite you to my place, to Paris.

All that will have to be organised for me. Let's put it down for two years time, in 1982. Let's say in February.

I will be there like today to say to you: Thank you.⁴

Of course this proposed meeting did not occur, at least not with Lacan since he died in the meantime. However it was the *Lacanoamerican Reunion* that was proposed some time later to take up this invitation in a novel way, to continue the meeting by proposing a reunion of this first encounter.

Following the institution of *L'École de la Cause Freudienne* and then Lacan's death, the psychoanalytic movement was divided by a loyalty to Lacan's legacy and a fidelity to his teachings. In South America like in France, one consequence of Lacan's death was to promote *L'École de la Cause Freudienne*. According to Jean Szpirko:

Many groups split off; others were created. Certain groups became isolated, having no other recourse; yet others were isolated by the aspiration to a doctrinal purity, forgetting that purity and abjection go hand in hand. Others retained links of exchanges and work between their members and outside "guests" called upon to bear witness to their praxis. [...] certain analysts considered it necessary to constitute links between different groups which referred to texts in common. From this perspective, "a mechanism" of coming together was created which took the name of Lacano-american.⁵

The disarray that followed the dissolution was attenuated in South America, as if by anticipation, thanks to the effects of the Caracas discourse. In addressing those to whom he referred as *Lacanos*, Lacan put forward in Caracas that his "readers" might be in a relation to transmission different to that encountered by his "listeners".

The *Lacanoamerican*

Lacanos, or *Lacanoamericans*, is not a geographical term then, but rather a term designating those who studied Lacan through his texts, in transference to a text rather than to the person of Lacan himself. In South America, the *Lacanoamerican Reunion* is often referred to as the '*Lacano*', effectively dropping the geographical denomination. There have also been, throughout its history, many convoking institutions from outside of Latin America, including *The Freudian School of Melbourne*, North American groups and also French groups. In particular, *Analyse Freudienne* in Paris with which we are familiar through some of the works of Robert Lévy, is currently a convoking institution.

As Jean Szpirko⁶ says, Lacan is studied more in Spanish and Portuguese than in French. *The Freudian School of Melbourne* is part of this new geography, one that de-centres Paris and the French language in the teaching of Lacan's work, producing a sort of southern hemisphere Lacan, we could say. After all, those of us from the School cannot forget that other piece of history, that of the teachings of Lacan being brought to Melbourne by Oscar Zentner and María Inés Rotmiller de Zentner, not from Paris but from Buenos Aires. For this we incur a debt that continues to be worked through our production.

A psychoanalytic school cannot stand in isolation. It must have links to other schools, to participate in meetings and conferences in order to avoid a circular discourse. It might do this by providing openings to other analysts, to other psychoanalytic institutions, at least ones that are rigorous in their approach to psychoanalysis. The *Lacanoamerican* provides one such opening, one which promotes a production and exchange of psychoanalytic thought, outside of the aegis of a particular institution or international organisation.

The first *Lacanoamerican Reunion* was held in Punta del Este in Uruguay in 1986. Convoking institutions included *The Freudian School of Melbourne*, *VEL Grupo Freudiano da Bahia*, *La Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires*, and many others. *The Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne 1987* contains details of this. The 1987 volume is in fact mostly taken up with papers from that *Reunion*; it includes papers by Alan Large and Rob Gordon, both of whom were members of *The Freudian School of Melbourne* at the time, Linda Clifton, Oscar Zentner, Gustavo Etkin, José Zuberman and many others whose papers have been a significant part of publications of the *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne* over the years and many of whom are still participating in the *Lacanoamerican*.

Since then the *Lacanoamerican* has been held every two years and *The Freudian School of Melbourne* has continued to be a convoking institution. I have now attended four *Lacanoamericans*: in Bahia, Brazil in 1997, in Rosario, Argentina in 1999, in Recife, Brazil in 2001 and in Bahía Blanca, Argentina in 2009. I have presented a paper, in English, each time, and have been involved in the discussions at the General Assemblies of each *Lacanoamerican Reunion* regarding the place of the School in the *Lacanoamerican* and the question of simultaneous translation into English.

The structure or ‘device’ of the *Lacanoamerican*

The *Lacanoamerican* is different to any other conference I have been to. It has no ongoing institutional structure in a deliberate attempt to avoid group effects. It does not presume that knowledge will come from any pre-established place. It avoids hierarchical distinctions and the usual trappings of conferences that attempt to direct the content in specific directions. Each *Lacanoamerican* is organised by a committee which is voted in at the previous *Lacanoamerican*, usually after vigorous discussion of the candidates.

There is never a guarantee that a subsequent *Lacanoamerican* will take place and thus the possibility of another *Lacanoamerican* must be voted upon on each occasion. The committee also takes responsibility to publish the papers presented following the conference, either in book or electronic format, prior to dissolving itself. Here I will cite at length from Jean Szpirko⁷ regarding the structure of the *Lacanoamerican*:

For the Lacano, the mechanism [*dispositif*] institutes a pacifying law that moderates the compulsions towards violence whilst allowing exchanges that are at times lively.

Up until the present – no-one can predict the future – the mechanism has had a symbolising function: it has constituted a place where theses have been able to be formulated and which find an echo with people who had not known each other up to that point.

The mechanism offers each association an equal non-normative responsibility for a common project:

- the Lacano has as its patron the ‘convoking assembly’ constituted by the representatives of each association that commits itself financially with [...] five registrations at each Lacano. At the moment of voting, each association which is a member of the convoking assembly counts for one voice.

- the convoking assembly designates a committee. This committee, which prepares and runs the infrastructure of a Lacano, is dissolved after the event and the settling of accounts.

- the convoking assembly is itself dissolved after each Lacano. Another will be specifically constituted for the next Lacano.

- the convoking assembly of the Lacano, at the moment of its conclusion, puts to the vote the propositions for the choice of the place where the next Lacano will take place, as well as for the name of the association or associations which, in that place, will be in charge of coordinating and managing the event.

- no general theme is proposed. The Lacano is an opportunity of a time and a place where people, whether members of associations or not, are able to give witness, one by one, to their work without any demand for accreditation, without any selection of titles, papers or people.

- for each paper the room and time are drawn by lot: no account is taken of the prestige or the reputation of the speaker. The only factors that have an influence on the organisation and the distribution of the papers are the number of registered speakers and the number of available rooms.

- there is no chairperson for the session. Two people are on the rostrum: the previous speaker who is responsible for the timetable and to introduce his or her successor as well as the title of the paper, and the speaker who presents his or her work for a duration which is strictly limited to 30 minutes. We insist: there is no extension of time, even negotiated place by place. The speaker determines the length of the debate he wishes to have with the floor by the duration of the paper.

- preserving the relation of Otherness is an essential function of the mechanism of the Lacano, which imposes limits on those who have difficulty conceiving that the function of the – at least one – is a symbolic function that does not require someone to incarnate it, or to feel a mission for incarnating it. This mechanism is not fixed: it is re-evaluated at the closure of a Lacano by the convoking assembly which questions the interest of its continuation or its modification.

Thus the discussions at the assembly of each *Lacanoamerican* put its structure into question. Since there is no pre-selection of papers anyone who wishes to present can do so. There are no keynote speakers or plenary addresses. Furthermore, each speaker speaks only in his or her own name, not in the name of his or her organisation.

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the quality of the presentations is very high. Many of the papers presented there over the years have found their way into the *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne* although we not necessarily aware of this origin.

The three languages of the *Lacanoamerican* are Spanish, Portuguese and French. Within these languages there is simultaneous translation in each room. This simultaneous translation is by far the most expensive part of the *Lacanoamerican*. Nonetheless translation has been made available when I have presented in English.

I speak here of the cost of the *Lacanoamerican Reunion* as it is also an important part of its structure and one which has been debated over the years. The cost to a psychoanalytic institution of convoking the *Lacanoamerican* is five registrations, which is currently held constant at US\$1,000. This of course covers the actual registration of five members of the convoking institution. These registrations are the only source of money for the hosting committee of the *Lacanoamerican* to work with in the organising of the conference apart from some sponsorship from local government and other sponsors. A number of years ago it was decided that there would be a reduced rate for students and those not earning a full salary as it was considered that the US\$200 for a registration prevented many from attending.

Effects of the *Lacanoamerican*

The Freudian School of Melbourne has gained from its convocation of the *Lacanoamerican* in many ways. We have earned a place amongst fellow psychoanalytic institutions. When José Zuberman was in Melbourne as a guest of the School he spoke of Linda Clifton's paper from the first *Lacanoamerican Reunion*. In this way something returned to the School after many years. Many other papers in the *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne* have been papers presented at various *Lacanoamerican Reunions*, papers that we have worked and continue to work; of authors such as Benjamin Domb, Isidoro Vegh and others, authors we may not know personally but whose names function as signifiers in the School.

The *Lacanoamerican* is a space that the *Freudian School of Melbourne* has supported since its inception. It is a space where psychoanalytic thought is possible and which has generated many excellent papers and a rich exchange. It has also been a place of interchange through those who have sent papers or presented there, and through our contact with colleagues from others schools, in particular the *Escola Lacaniana da Bahia*, *La Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires* and the *Intersecção Psicanalítica do Brasil*. The latter two of these together with *Espace Analytique* and the Irish group were the convoking institutions for the Dublin *Joyce Lacan Symposium* in 2005 which was attended by a number of members of the School.

The value of exchanges with intellectual and cultural movements here in Australia, as well as links with psychoanalytic groups that are close to us geographically and linguistically, is undeniable. However psychoanalysis, and in particular the *Lacanoamerican Reunion*, describes a new geography, one defined by a transference to the writings of Lacan, rather than to the presence of his person. It is also marked by the history of the fragmentation of the psychoanalytic movement since Lacan's death, with a re-birth, we could say, in places which are former colonies and which resist a new colonisation of Lacan's teachings. *The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* is a part of such a "new history and geography".⁸

The *Lacanoamerican* Reunion was held in Bahía Blanca in Argentina from 4th to the 7th November 2009. The next *Lacanoamerican* Reunion will take place in 2011 in Brasilia, Brazil.

References

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- ² Lacan, Jacques. “The seminar, Paris, June 10th 1980”. *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, 1981. 97.
- ³ The intervention of Lacan from which this citation is taken, was published in *L’Âne*, No. 1, a magazine that stemmed from the dissolution, in March-April 1981. In 1986 it was republished in *L’Almanach de la dissolution*. Paris: Navarin éditeur, 1986, under the title “The Caracas Seminar”. Here I have translated it myself from: <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/bibliotheque.php?id=10>
- ⁴ 15th July 1980. <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/bibliotheque.php?id=10>
- ⁵ “Convergencia: Mouvement lacanien pour la psychanalyse freudienne”. http://lutecium.org/convergencia/histo_f.htm
- ⁶ “Convergencia : Mouvement lacanien pour la psychanalyse freudienne”. http://lutecium.org/convergencia/histo_f.htm
- ⁷ “Convergencia : Mouvement lacanien pour la psychanalyse freudienne”. http://lutecium.org/convergencia/histo_f.htm
- ⁸ “Aquí me quedo”. Poem of Pablo Neruda, adapted by Victor Jara, 1973.