

the situation of psychoanalysis¹

Interview with José Zberman²

Toro de Psicanálise³:

Could you describe the Lacanian Psychoanalytic movement in Argentina, 100 years since the birth and two decades since the death of Jacques Lacan?

José Zberman:

The Lacanian Psychoanalytic movement in Argentina is fundamentally alive, it exists. There are intense debates, not just in the psychoanalytic institutes, but also in the hospital milieu and in the whole cultural sphere. It is difficult to open the Cultural Supplement of any of the major Argentinean newspapers without coming across some article referring to Freud and Lacan.

If there are debates it is because there is a diversity of approaches. Often this diversity is manifested in interchanges between institutions, at other times in interchanges within each institution and with analysts who do not belong to any institution. Psychoanalysis in Argentina has a long history. Different authors recount the history in their own way, yet another proof of the vitality of the movement.

Nevertheless, Lacan was not introduced into Argentina by analysts. The inertia and the bureaucracy that had taken hold of the didacticists of the IPA meant that Lacan made his entry through the means of those who do not practice Psychoanalysis professionally: intellectuals in whom Lacan's discourse proceeded in such a way that they could not help but transmit it to those who wanted to hear it. Dozens of analysts started to study with Oscar Masota, anxious to interrogate their practice from a perspective other than that of the IPA, which was the official discourse of the time. This task was also confronted by Raul Sciarreta and G. Maci, both philosophers, as well as other scholars. The virtue of Oscar Masota was that of founding, in 1974, with other analysts, a new institutional structure, the Freudian School of Buenos Aires, which produced a mark in the history of Psychoanalysis in our milieu. Its very name announces, prematurely, a perspective of the *passe* and cartels.

On the occasion of the celebration of 25 years since the foundation of the *Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires* (EFBA), I wrote in the journal *Imagen*, of June 1999:

However, to give a history of the 25 years of the School, I prefer to take other indicators:
1. In 1974, the dominant clinical practice in this city was that which argued that in keeping the setting like a pillar, time and money as fixed variables, a Psychoanalysis was thus sustained, a name that was given to a treatment carried out on the couch, four times a week. So then, how can we not value the Lacanian mark that the EFBA introduced into the clinical practice of our milieu, according to which what motivates an analysis is desire, and that it is the position of the analyst which defines a Psychoanalysis and that resistance is played out on the side of the analyst and is not something "bad" for which the analysand is attacked.

The clinical practice that began as a consequence of our work, widely disseminated today in Buenos Aires, is attentive to the knotting of the sinthome and not to the ideal of health and normality of the analyst, a topic that dominated the discussions of that era.

2. Although today these affirmations regarding clinical practice seem of lesser importance, at the time they signified a radical change of direction sustained by those who were the support of the transformation, whether they were from the couch, from the armchair, or from the psychoanalytic institution.

If the resistance is played out on the side of the analyst, his clinical practice is not unquestionable. If he is not the didactician who sanctions the end of the analysis by signing a certificate, then the mechanism of the *passe* can be established as a means of investigating the end of the analysis and nominating analysts.

3. The articulation intension-extension finds a place in the *passe* where “my” analysis is of interest to Psychoanalysis. The form taken by meetings of analysts also changed radically in these 25 years. The Seminar as place of the interrogation of constituted knowledge, the cartel sustaining the production of analysts, and many conferences and publications are evidence of the weight given to the idea that the analyst is not just the one who listens from the armchair, but also the one who gives testimony of his practice before other analysts. This is another good thing that was put into play, commencing with the EFBA: the analyst puts his practice to the test before those who also experience themselves as interrogated by this Real.

4. In 1974 the dominant Psychoanalysis “explained” to artistic creators the Oedipal logic of their production. It was sufficient for this Psychoanalysis to join with Medicine in order to keep its cultural world separate. The Psychoanalysis that we established allowed itself to be interrogated by the productions of our culture, an interrogation that opened the very rich debate between analysts, writers, cinematographers, painters, humorists, etc. In the EFBA it was not only disciples of Lacan who spoke. Borges, far from adulating Freud or Lacan, by entering into dialogue with psychoanalysts from the EFBA, is, perhaps, a good synthesis of the change that was effected.

These marks, which arose from the EFBA, do not lead to the ransom of exclusivity nor that of proprietorship. I understand that they lead to the recognition of the work realised and to those who realise it, and, fundamentally, to the renewal of the debt with this Psychoanalysis. There are reasons for the celebration of these 25 years of the EFBA: in order to name those, who, from the position of belonging to the institution as members, sustained these changes that made a School; in order to give homage to those, who in another way and in their own style, also are implicated in relation to that which gave rise to the marks of foundation of the 28th June of 1974.

In the last paragraph I spoke of the later splits and of the diversity of affiliations that, nonetheless, were not able to erase those marks.

In order to describe the current situation of institutions, one could draw a political map. Figured in this would be:

- a) The institutions affiliated with the IPA, struggling within the fabric of its bureaucratic organisation that has been well described by Lacan.
- b) The institutions, whose extreme authoritarianism is inversely proportional to their creativity, are those that answer to Millerism.

c) The institutions which, seeking a grouping of analysts that is neither authoritarian nor bureaucratic, associate around the *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis* and the Lacanian Convergence for Freudian Psychoanalysis, maintaining their diversity.

d) A large number of analysts who, without belonging to institutions, move around “between” them in small groupings, publications, hospital institutions, etc. Such a map, however, whether it be political or sociological, would not be sufficient to describe the moment. As analysts are not counted in the singular, perhaps the question is better addressed in the answers that are lacking.

Toro de Psicanálise:

How do interchanges usually occur between the analysts and the institutions of Argentianian Psychoanalysis with other fields of knowledge and art?

José Zberman:

It is an important question, because, starting from the certain fact that the analyst is not formed in a university, the idea of a certain extraterritoriality from Psychoanalysis has been extrapolated. That is a gross error. Psychoanalysis takes part in the culture of our times and does not enjoy any extraterritoriality.

As I noted previously, when analysts stop explaining to artists the reasons for their productions and are able to interrogate their own production, then interchanges can commence. Thus, the dialogue with writers of the importance of Borges, painters, sculptors, cinema and theatre directors, has become something habitual in our institutions in the form of the Centre of Psychoanalytic Extension.

It is in this moment of dialogue with creative artists that Psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires leaves behind that fondness for medicine, in which the IPA had been detained, in order to remain implanted within national culture, in constant dialogue from the position of its own specific place.

With some investigators this interchange has been particularly propitious, especially with linguists, philosophers, epistemologists and mathematicians.

There is a great variety in the dialogue with health professionals, which prevents me from answering with a generalisation. There are hospital institutions where analysts, being able to clearly differentiate their ethics, and being able to situate that of other professionals, are then able to sustain a respectful and sometimes creative interchange. In others, lamentably, competitiveness, which is linked to the illusion that “we analysts will win against the psychiatrists or other doctors”, becomes established. This is a false option since there is no competition between such different fields. In these cases it is the competence of the analyst to interrogate the knowledge of the discourse of the other that fails and which leads the analyst to fall into an unproductive specularity. The dominant movement in these years in which the discourse of Lacan has been disseminated

has been the opening of a dialogue, an interrogation, and allowing oneself to be interrogated by the most diverse artistic and scientific productions.

Toro de Psicanálise:

In what way does the publication of the psychoanalytic text occur, and how does it circulate?

José Zberman:

I am not sure what is referred to by “psychoanalytic text” but, yes, I can say that there are many psychoanalytic publications, impossible to count I would say. This diversity has a negative side in that there is a lot of good material that one cannot manage to read. As a positive side, one can recognise the fact that there is a real diversity that is not organised hierarchically.

The Seminar of Lacan circulates in the official legal version and in many other versions printed as books, as bound photocopies, as discs, etc, that allow “the reading” to not be standardised but opens it to the possible readings of each practitioner.

Amongst the publications, various collections of Lacanian Psychoanalysis by different publishers can be found, with titles by Argentineans and foreigners - Americans and Europeans - especially in Buenos Aires, Rosario and La Plata. The diversity of titles and topics are evidence of the vitality of the Lacanian movement of which I spoke in response to the first question.

The periodical publications of the psychoanalytic institutions play an important role since it is through them that a great deal of the debate, regarding nodal themes of our practice, is propagated.

There are also Lacanian publications of hospital departments in which seminars of analysts who are invited to discuss a particular topic during the course of a year are transcribed. These are of great value in reading the differences linked to clinical practice. Other hospital departments and also some university faculties present books in which the papers of annual conferences are published. These, as well as journals, give evidence of the analytic production in that sphere.

Some provincial psychology colleges have publications of internal Lacanian groups that circulate, coexisting with journals of Lacanian institutions in those same provinces, outside of the three cities mentioned.

Such diversity can be found in bookstores or in the Cultural Supplement of the major Argentinean newspapers.

Finally, in relation to the quality of those publications, let us allow the reader to speak. It is the *h2e*, no doubt, who has to choose.

Toro de Psicanálise:

Paraphrasing Lacan, how could you describe “The Situation of Psychoanalysis in 2001”?

José Züberman:

With this answer I am not endeavouring to give as accomplished an answer regarding the situation as in the paper by Lacan. Nevertheless I do not want to obstruct your purpose by paraphrasing him.

Lacan's discourse renewed and recreated Psychoanalysis, which had lain inert in the hands of the armchained didacticians of the IPA.

The transmission of the Psychoanalysis of Lacan had and continues to have avatars that interrogate us. Enormous erudition makes the study of his work, as well as the authors he cites, a difficult task that consumes much time and effort. The difficulties in the reading have led, in the Lacanian sphere, to knowledge, reading and erudition being valued, rather than the experience of Psychoanalysis, which encounters so much resistance. This explains the difficulties for the institution of the *passe* in Lacanian institutions, in which it is always very difficult for the analyst to pass something of his experience to psychoanalysis in extension, constituting the Real module of the School.

Now that the number of analysts who have read the Seminars is so much greater, a demand is imposed. It is a question for each analyst, from his practice, rather than repeating the discourse of Lacan, of being able to say in what way it is useful. Nevertheless it is still what keeps happening, one still hears a religious repetition of affirmations that make out of an aphorism, an empty slogan from the superego. Or one hears erudite discourses that do not allow the singular mark of the author, or the question regarding his practice, to be encountered.

What we must do, from the problems that our practice invokes for us, is to interrogate Freud, to interrogate Lacan, in order to re-create, to re-invent, to re-launch the Psychoanalysis that was bequeathed to us and discharge the debt that each analyst has singularly contracted.

This supposes that we work increasingly to interrogate the phenomena of our times that come into our consulting rooms with new questions and in new forms.

These days, the effect of the predominance of the capitalist discourse, as Lacan writes it, is that the word is more and more devalued and the substitution of the object of consumption or comfort for the object of desire, is offered publicly. Previously it was considered roguery to say one thing during an electoral campaign, knowing it was another thing that would be done in government. The bouncing cheque is something that was never tolerated. Who would have imagined that no more than 30 years ago the Pope requested, in Saint Peter's Square, that the day of the Lord be respected, and now Catholics open their Shopping Centres every Sunday without feeling that they are questioning their obedience to the Pope. This devaluation of the word of the subject driven by the capitalist discourse obliges those who sustain their practice as practice of a reading of the letter, of the word, to redouble their creative efforts.

What presents in the consultations predominantly, are not neurotic symptoms in which the repressed phrase interrogates the subject and solicits interpretation, but rather effects, in their singularity, of the current devaluation of the word: addictions, eating disorders, etc, which did not interrogate the analysts of Freud or Lacan's generation because they did not encounter this

Real in the consultation. These phenomena of our times challenge us to recreate Psychoanalysis and to keep it alive.

This clinical investigation and the recognition of the analyst based on the testimony of his analysis, the *passe*, are tasks that are extricated from this analysis of the situation for the current generation.

Toro de Psicanálise:

In Argentina, is there, in effect, participation of the psychoanalytic discourse in questions concerning the social bond?

José Zberman:

Psychoanalysis, as practice of the reading of the letter, goes against the dominant capitalist discourse and the globalisation that tends to erase singularities. This does not cause Lacanian Psychoanalysis to be seen as “popular” or “successful” or of “mass-appeal”. Nor is it isolated. The psychoanalytic dialogue, along with everything concerned with the dimension of the subject and of speech, marks its insertion in the working of questions of the social bond. It is discourse that makes the social bond. Psychoanalysis, a new discourse in the evolution of culture, is what creates the social bond. Thus there are thousands of analysts in Argentina and innumerable analysands. The psychoanalytic discourse is undoubtedly present in the social bond: the slip of the tongue of a politician is analysed on TV by any journalist. The risk of this dissemination is not just its devaluation, but that in this dissemination it is the aphorisms that are spread, denying the relation of this knowledge with truth.

We already have the experience of what happened in the United States with Freud's discourse. Freud took the “plague”, without knowing that it would be disseminated there in denying its nucleus of truth, medicalising it, enclosing it in the limits of the ego. Not all dissemination is suitable for analytic discourse. The responsibility of the analyst is also to read the letter that the dissemination of Psychoanalysis engenders. Here we must break away from the illusion that Psychoanalysis, in order to be preserved from these effects, must be kept within small circles of experts. Psychoanalysis cannot be guaranteed by ‘someone’ or by ‘some’. “I expect more from a functioning than from people”, said Lacan in founding his School.

Thus, as with Psychoanalysis in intension, it all depends on the work, on the putting to work of the mechanism of free association and suspended attention. The only guarantee is the reading of the letter of that which is said. The condition of Psychoanalysis in extension is the putting to work of the mechanisms and the reading of the letter of that which is said, here and there, and the confrontation of these readings.

It is here that the responsibility of the analyst cannot be evaded: he offers his reading, knowing that he cannot calculate the “success” of his proposition.

The desire of the analyst makes the analytical mechanisms in intension and in extension function. Because of this the cartel, the seminar, the *passe* - mechanisms of the school - are, together with publications, what instates the analytic discourse, effecting the social bond.

Toro de Psicanálise:

Two thousand and one was the year of the *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis* of Recife. What is the importance of this event at this juncture?

José Zberman:

The *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis* is living proof that a bond between analysts, that is neither authoritarian nor bureaucratic, is possible. Without a permanent organising committee, without established hierarchies, it was able to open enthusiastic debate between analysts fifteen years ago and to demonstrate that we do not need a Leader in order to meet. During those fifteen years, the analysts who have been convoked, have demonstrated that their narcissism can tolerate places being drawn by lot, that the differences are differences of discourse and not of hierarchies when this loss of enjoyment produces gains in production.

As I was involved in drafting the mechanism that allows the *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis* to function, and organised, with others, the first few rounds, I feel especially fond of it. I renew this fondness each time I attend another *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis* and my desire as an analyst is rekindled each time.

Once again, I returned from Recife enthusiastic and with a great will to work. It was an excellent Reunion thanks to the warm reception that we received, the quality of the papers and the dialogues, as well as open exchanges. It taught us that a high quality of psychoanalytic work can co-exist with amiable and friendly contact between colleagues, and with the shared happiness of the closing party.

That the teaching through a meeting that is not sustained by a leader, nor by an organisation, nor by pre-established bureaucratic hierarchies, and which is creative and pleasant, is possible at this juncture, is no small thing.

The account of what occurred in Recife spread rapidly in my city where so many colleagues lamented that the economic crisis had prevented them from attending. In all the places from which I received some news, the *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis of Recife* has rekindled Lacanian Psychoanalysis. I know that in Tucumán, seat of the next *Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis*, a workshop has already taken place in which the papers that the analysts from Tucumán took to Recife were discussed with a large attendance and with enthusiasm. I also noted in my working visit to Viña del Mar how the experience of the Chilean analysts who were in Recife, precipitated a rekindling of the task.

Recife was one setting in the history that we are writing and we have many reasons to be thankful to the organisers and to warmly congratulate them once more.

Toro de Psicanálise:

In light of these elements, what can you say regarding the future of Psychoanalysis?

José Züberman:

“It has fallen to us to live in difficult times, like all men at all times,” said Borges (I cannot find the text of the citation, I say it from memory).

It falls to each generation of analysts to struggle with a real that continues to change.

It was not easy for Freud to sustain his work, overcoming the hostility of those by whom he hoped to be heard. It was not easy for Lacan to endure being excluded from the IPA. They, and the generation of analysts that accompanied them from the couch, from the [psychoanalytic] institutions, from the different forms of analytic dialogue, made a creative work out from each obstacle.

The future of Psychoanalysis has never been facilitated by the dominant discourse. Today is no exception. Capitalist discourse, the effects of globalisation, the worsening conditions of a population that cannot enjoy the great technological advances and the devaluation of the word that this imposes, is not the desired scenario.

Nor did Freud desire the scenario of the Nazi advance, an advance that obliged him to leave Vienna as an old and sick man, with sisters already murdered in the extermination camps. Neither old age, nor illness, nor the Nazis prevented him from writing his *Moses*, in which he says to all of his people that his father, Moses, was ... Egyptian, coming from an Other-side, a construction consisting of two moments through the subjectivity of his ancestors. Freud persisted with his interrogations during those very dramatic moments: rather than putting out an anti-Nazi pamphlet, he writes a nodal text for Psychoanalysis.

The future of Psychoanalysis depends on the responsibility of analysts. Responsibility in the strong sense of the word, which is that of giving a response, of responding to the interrogations of our times. It is not a question of sustaining the legacy and transmitting it as it was given; this occurs in religions with the Bible. The responsibility of the analyst is to re-create, to re-invent, starting from the pleasure with which he sustains his practice.

This affirms the analysis of the analyst as that which sustains his desire, a desire we might continue to sustain through the mechanisms we invent in order to write the future of Psychoanalysis. We continue to write it, day by day.

(Translated from Portuguese by Michael Plastow)

References

¹ This interview first appeared in the journal *Antígona*, No. 4, October 2001, 113-123 under the title “A Situação da Psicanálise em 2001”. It is translated and reproduced here with the permission of the editor and of José Züberman.

² Psychoanalyst, *Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires*

³ *Antígona* is a journal of *Toro de Psicanálise* (Torus of Psychoanalysis). Here *Toro de Psicanálise* is the editorial committee that formulated the interview.