

## Editorial

# THE PLAGUE: thoughts on psychoanalysis, art and culture\*<sup>1</sup>

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In December 1908, Freud received an invitation for the first time to present his findings at Clark University, but only the following autumn was the invitation, made by Stanley Hall, comes to fruition, when he then delivered the Five Conferences on Psychoanalysis, which inaugurated the first systematic exposition of his theory. A fundamental historical moment considered a landmark recognition of Freud's discoveries.

Lacan (1955/1998), forty-six years after the fact, at a conference in Vienna, reports that in an encounter with Jung he confessed to having heard a *saying* of Freud when traveling together to the same Conference' series at Clark University. The moment they spotted New York's port and the famous Statue of Liberty, Freud would have suddenly said: *They don't know we're bringing them the plague!*

Lacan says he's not sure if anything of that order has happened. Anyway, he draws attention to the author's deception, who would've believed that psychoanalysis would be a kind of

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*revolution* for America, although in reality America is the one that ended up devouring its doctrine, metamorphosing it into the *American way of life*. A way of life marked by consumerism, social standardization and libertarian beliefs based on liberal values that have been increasingly becoming radicalized over the last decades. It can even be affirmed that psychoanalysis, especially in this territory has expanded *pandemically* as a social adaptation and normalization practice.

He highlights, at that point, the misleading paths, or as he indicates, the primal repression, the forgetfulness of a teaching, and an experience, which in its origins introduced the marks of a true curse to the *status quo*.

The fact is that the *said*, even if it *has not been said*, is the mark that characterizes psychoanalysis since its origins. Mark, subversive trait [...] or, as Freud (1932/1996d) states, a *poison* that introduces changes in the subjective position of those who inoculate it, transforming the way of living reality in common.

Lacan, in his *return to Freud*, restlessly warned psychoanalysts about the importance of Freudian convocation in favour of sustaining the ethics of psychoanalysis, in the clinic and *the polis* in general, highlighting each one's responsibilities in the endeavor. It is about betting on psychoanalysis even in the most adverse conditions, not retreating, therefore, in the face of deadlocks, glimpses of the real, which call for symbolization (Lacan, 1972-73/1985). In other words, deadlocks demand the new, a creation of passages that reaffirms what's essential in the field.

In a sense, Lacan's entire work and legacy are based on the insistence towards the rescue and maintenance of the disruptive trait present since the psychoanalytic movement's origins (Freud, 1914/1996b). That insistence begins as a *return to Freud* and expands in theoretical advances which renewed Freudian legacy, enabling current acceptances of emerging clinical impasses in contemporary culture.

The *psychoanalysis plague* metaphor, as that which subverts the *same* leading to subjective twists and, consequently to current transformations in ways of being in the world, came to me at this moment of coronavirus pandemic, which radically changed the daily lives of us all. The *plague* in its significant duplicity allows at this current moment in collective life to expand certain predominant meanings, which in isolation, in losses, in the idea of fateful, finds its main meaning.

Freud (1915/1996c), in an important article written six months after World War I's upheaval, makes some reflections upon times of war and death,

which can be useful in this current moment for us. He affirms it's not unusual during major disaster' situations, involving a high level of mortality , to be taken by a kind of alienation that he relates to a couple of main issues: our disillusion and attitude towards death. In regards to the first issue, he would only consider it when we are directly affected by situations, which includes our family and friends' circles, that we are in fact faced by tragic reality, because we often try to maintain the illusion that we will be protected. In regards to the second issue, as psychoanalysis has been teaching, due to the unconscious determination of operation, we do not believe in our own death. We avoid thinking about death, trying to eliminate it from life, avoiding to talk about it in everyday situations. He emphasizes, however, that such attitude produces a life impoverishment that prevents us from living it fully. When great disasters and wars go cross our lives, it restricts the ways of dealing with death, *conventional ways* as referred by him, forcing us to deal with it effectively, face to face.

170 Freud concludes the text indicating a radical need to give a suitable place for death in life, rather than just trying to suppress it. We could say great social disasters, however painful they may be, present an opportunity for a collective confrontation of our own finitude, fragility and helplessness. These are common points to all people, regardless of race, gender, social class, religious beliefs or sexual orientation, which may open possibilities for establishing new social bonds, based on solidarity and an identification sentiment.

In his text, Freud also draws attention to the importance of arts in coping with this process:

It is an inevitable result of all this that we have sought in the world of fiction, literature and theater the compensation for what was lost in life [...] In the field of fiction, we find the plurality of lives we are in need of. We die with the hero with whom we identify; however, we survived it, and we are ready to die again, provided with the same security, with another hero. (Freud, 1915/1996c, p. 301)

Later, in the year 1933, in response to a letter from Einstein, who interrogates him by questioning *Why the war?*, Freud gets back to the point indicating an important way to endure wars and, we might add, disasters in general. He modestly states himself as unable to offer answers on such complex subject, but categorically, he considers “[...] *everything that stimulates the growth of civilization works simultaneously against war*” (Freud, 1933/1996e).

We learned it's life's instinct operation, of Eros, as amalgamates death's instinct, that possibilitates the sustain of civilized life. In this process, it is indisputable the importance of cultural, artistic and work activities as a fundamental reference in the work of life's reinvention. Life that has included the other, the city, the *polis*.

In this moment of isolation it can be said: The city is the house (Alzugaray, 2020). It is within the house's confines that we can rediscover the so longed and desired city, as written in Leminski's verses "[...] let me open the door I want to see if the night is good [...]".

An intense desire for the city as a space for affective, laborative encounters and as a privileged place to exercise politic's function, in its broad sense, as Arendt (1958/1995) indicates.

I believe this radical lackness, paradoxically, has increasingly presented the absent: the city. A lackness which can open the door to new ways, present and future, of inhabiting collective life.

Through the window of our homes, where we can see the city from, the streets and cell phone screens, or computers, through which we see people, we have to reinvent things like how "to be together", to sustain the pillars of civilized life.

The fact is, every *plague* marks a before and after. Although we do not know exactly where all this is going, the *after* calls us for invention and it is the poet's voice and the artist's action at that moment that is placed as a fundamental reference. As Fernanda Montenegro indicates in a recent interview: *Without the culture of arts there is no country, there is no country signature. There's nothing without arts culture.*

I will not dwell here about the attempts to destroy and dismantle the areas of art and culture in Brazil. There are hundreds of layoffs that we know have occurred since the end of May in museums and theaters' networks, especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The reduction in revenues, which already had been developing rapidly, by the *titular virus*, as suggested by Fernanda Montenegro, was aggravated by a necessary determination of social isolation due to the pandemic. A government which does not value artistic richness and cultural diversity of its own country exposes by itself it's rudeness and inability to identify with its own nation.

I prefer to conclude this editorial by talking about a fantastic work called *Projetemos (We Project)*, an example of a new light being invented in this moment of darkness. A true call to the possibility of building new languages, an insistence on a humanizing word that addresses to the Other. This Other,

which Lacan defines as a language field, a code's treasure, which emerges in the city's own epidermis, transforming silent building's cement into speaking surfaces.

The collective *Projetemos*, was created in Recife and quickly spread to several cities in the country. Those behind these actions are called VJs (video jockeys). Creators and operators of visual performances, who have generously created a tool that helps and enables others to appropriate this amazing communication performance.

Dozens of sentences and images are posted daily, always at dusk, with the most varied messages. The projections in the buildings effectively creates another way of occupying the streets, expanding and transforming our relationship with space by moebianly connecting us to others.

I emphasize the verbal tense — *present subjunctive* (presente do subjuntivo,<sup>1</sup> in portuguese) — of the verb “*projetemos*” (*we are to project*). If the verb *to project* indicates to shoot at a distance, to throw, to bold, *to project* associates present and future in a way which includes an assumption, a possibility, but fundamentally a will, a desire. An invitation to the release of words, phrases, that may reach the other in their social isolation and in that very moment of its pitch allows to break, immediately, with such distancing. The word that arrives as an image produces and affirms, simultaneously, the possibility of encounter.

Lacan (1955-56/1988), states that fantasy is a structure which, as a framework delimits a reality that can be lived, protecting us from the encounter with the deadly real. Within this perspective he indicates that fantasy is a *window to the real*. Its highlighted then, its clipping role, a reality delimitator, constituting a possible way of appropriating what's unbearable for each of us.

May we fling, from our limited windows the best words, by feeding on what arts and culture of diversity teaches us!

<sup>1</sup> The subjunctive's present can indicate a present or future action. It is used to indicate desires, hypotheses and assumptions. “O presente do subjuntivo pode indicar uma ação presente ou futura. É usado para indicar desejos, hipóteses e suposições.” Fonte: <https://www.conjugacao.com.br/presente-do-subjuntivo/>

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