

“Pandora’s Box Has Been Opened”: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Politics after 2017

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Abstract: This essay proposes a diagnostics of the current predicament of Lacanian psychoanalysis, based on the recent political crisis of the WAP, in 2017. Based on this critical study, we then investigate the history of different articulations between Marxism and psychoanalysis in order to delineate the underlying ideological relation currently allowing psychoanalysis to consider itself a judge of political thinking. Finally, we confront this ideological position with a schematic theory of the compossibility between fields, a different way of conceiving the non-relation between forms of thought which does not continue to reproduce this problematic articulation.

Key-words: WAP, crisis, non-relation, compossibility

1. Lacanian revolutions

Lacan’s answer to the political militants who interpellated him during his seminar in Vincennes, on December 1969, is well-known:

“the revolutionary aspiration has only one possible way of ending, only one: always with the discourse of the Master, as experience has already shown. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a Master. You shall have one!”¹

Years later, in *Television*, Lacan would further ratify the intensity of his original reproach: “They got on my back, which was the fashion at the time. I had to take a stand” - and extract from the effects of his intervention the correctness of his stance: “A stand whose truth was so clear that they've been crowding into my seminar ever since. Preferring my cool, after all, to the crack of the whip”².

However, it is quite remarkable that, three years prior to the famous “incident” at Vincennes, Lacan had been adopting a rather different position with regards to the “revolutionary aspiration”. In his *Response to philosophy students*, from 1966, he declared: “in order to avoid any misunderstanding, take note that I consider that *psychoanalysis has no right to interpret the revolutionary practice*”³. But if it was not psychoanalysis which had the right to interpret revolutionary practice, who was it that interpreted the desire of revolutionaries, three years later, at Vincennes? A man called Jacques Lacan, of course. In fact, it is quite easy place ourselves in Lacan’s shoes, losing his temper, trying to captivate the interest of a young audience in his complex theories,

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¹ Lacan 2007, p. 207

² Lacan 2001, p.534

³ Ibid, p. 208

but being constantly interrupted and made fun of. It does not take much - certainly no psychoanalyst - to call a group of disorderly teenagers a bunch of hysterics searching for a leader.

What should grab our attention here is rather how Lacan did *not* interpret the situation: how could he not realize that, by “crowding” into his seminar, these students *had already chosen their master* - precisely the one who had ascribed some meaning to their desire? Here psychoanalysis is effectively at stake, but not as a clinical praxis so much as an ideological resource which allows us, psychoanalysts, to distinguish the delirious desire of revolutionaries, supposedly trapped in an “imaginary” circuit, from the purported truth-effects of an out of place analytic intervention: “a stand whose truth was so clear” that led revolutionaries to abandon their aspirations for a master and come crowd Lacan’s seminar!

If it is true that “wild interpretations” outside of a clinical setting usually say more about the interpreter than about the one being interpreted, then it might be useful to utilize this preamble as a point of inflexion, leaving aside the question of a Lacanian theory of political revolution in order to focus a bit more on the revolutionary cycles of Lacanian psychoanalysis itself. The term “revolutionary cycle” does imply here some of the irony that Lacan ascribed to it - when comparing political transformations and astral orbits⁴ - but it is employed more in the sense of the “cyclical crises” of which Marxists speak, or of the “economic cycles” of Kondratieff and Kuznets, which correspond to more or less determinate temporal sequences of productivity and subsequent economic stagnation. In fact, the history of Lacanian psychoanalysis displays a cycle of more or less 18 years, and which now undergoes the closure of its fourth turn: 1963, 1981, 1998 and - as we will argue here - 2017. Approximately every 18 years a new institutional crisis takes place within Lacanian psychoanalysis⁵, followed by a new debate on the articulation between politics and psychoanalysis - and, curiously enough, a new reference to the figure of Louis Althusser.

The tensions at stake in Lacan’s so-called “excommunication” from the *Société Française de Psychoanalyse* (SFP), in 1963, are well-known⁶ and, even at the time, the political dimension of his conflict with the *Internationale Psychoanalytique Association* (IPA) did not escape Althusser⁷. Besides the seminars and articles dedicated to Lacan

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4 Ibidem, p. 420

5 In the following analysis, we will focus on the trajectory that connects the SFP, the EFP, the ECF, the Forum of Lacanian Schools and the WAP - even if the actual ecosystem of Lacanian School is rather vast and pulverised.

6 Roudinesco 1997

7 Althusser 1999, p.151

and psychoanalysis, and his long letters to Lacan on the problem of constructing a theory for the clinical practice, the Marxist philosopher was also crucial in helping Lacan to reestablish his teaching in a new academic setting and with a new audience. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Althusser was sufficiently implicated in Lacan’s institutional trajectory to intervene, almost twenty years later, at the time of the dissolution of the *École Freudienne de Paris* (EFP). In 1980, during a gathering in which the dissolution of the school was to be voted by its members, Althusser asked to speak in order to denounce that there was something strange in the way the vote was being dealt with, as if Lacan had performed an “analytic act”, which should then be “worked through” by the remaining members of the institution, when in fact there was a political and juridical process in course, one in which the founder of the organisation did not have any more say than anyone else⁸. What should surprise us, perhaps, is how easily Althusser’s old students, as well as Lacan himself, disregarded his intervention - even interpreting it as a sign of his poorly resolved transference relation with Lacan⁹.

What makes this 18 year interval between the foundation and the dissolution of the EFP so significant is, of course, its repetition: in 1998, the *World Association of Psychoanalysis* (WAP), founded by Jacques-Alain Miller in 1992, reached a critical point and split into two fields: the WAP, still led by Miller, and the *International Forum of the Lacanian Field*, under the guidance of Colette Soler. The irony of finding, within psychoanalysis, the same dramatic scissions, the same accusations of revisionism and the same mixture of personal and theoretical disputes which are so easily recognised in Leftist political organisations - problems which psychoanalysts in fact commonly evoke as justification to keep away from the “neurosis” of political militancy - might have been so evident that no one bothered to reflect upon it. Nevertheless, it is again in Althusser’s work that we find a theoretical anticipation of this tragicomical solidarity between Marxism and psychoanalysis. Already in 1978, in a text called *Marx and Freud*¹⁰, he described how the tendency within Marxist and psychoanalytic institutions to undergo a movement of “truth-revision-scission” was in fact an effect of the constitutive and paradoxical structure of each field, an effect of their status as “conflictual sciences”.

If Althusser was no longer with us by 1998, there was still - and perhaps more active than ever - a movement, initiated around the time of the EFP’s foundation, in 1963, which remained faithful to his project

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8 Ibid, p.125

9 Althusser reports that his intervention was met with a blunt interpretation by one of the presents: “One may wonder on which couch you are in order to speak as you do”, Althusser 1999, p.182

10 Althusser 1999

of never accepting psychoanalysis or Marxism such as they currently present themselves, constantly forcing them to be rethought in the light of their interactions. Even Jacques-Alain Miller himself had defended this project for a certain time¹¹, as have many others, who continued on this path long after the *Cahiers* and after Miller himself moved in another direction. This is the movement to which diverse names such as Alain Badiou, Michel Pecheaux, Chantal Mouffe, Luce Irigaray, Ernesto Laclau, Jorge Alemán, Judith Butler, David-Pavón Cuellar, Slavoj Žižek, Alenka Zupančič, as well as many others, belong: a heterogeneous set of philosophers, psychoanalysts and political militants who have maintained a theoretical basis in both Lacan and Marx, and who have further investigated the project of extracting lessons from psychoanalysis for emancipatory politics, while always reassessing, through philosophy and psychoanalysis, the political legacy of the XXth Century. So it might also not be a coincidence that, at the same time in which the crisis of the WAP came to the fore in 1998 - and without this split demanding any reevaluation of the political dimension of psychoanalysis on the part of Lacanians - the popularity of this heterogeneous movement of thinkers of Lacanian inspiration reached its peak. The missed encounter between politics and psychoanalysis was staged at this new scansion point once again: Lacanian institutions, ever more worried about protecting their clinical orientations - but to protect them from *whom?*, it should be asked - observed with outright despise and distrust the popularisation of Lacan's ideas and their absorption by the Left, as if nothing useful for psychoanalysis could come from this process.

This brings us, finally, to the present. In 2017, the *École de la Cause Freudienne* decided to position itself - not as a group of public intellectuals, but as an institution - against the candidacy of Marine Le Pen in the French presidential elections. Several activities were planned and an "Anti-Le Pen front"¹² was created by the ECF, who also promoted the circulation of a petition against the reactionary candidate¹³. But the concern with her possible election did not only justify the mobilisation of the School's institutional apparatus, it was also used as a way to delimit, within the political field, the idea of a certain transitivity between the defence of psychoanalysis and the defence of the neoliberal candidate Emmanuel Macron: to criticise Le Pen was not enough, it was also necessary *not* to support Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the centre-left candidate, and, most of all, to avoid the nostalgic universe of the radical Left. And besides the abundant use of psychoanalytic-inspired interpretations

11 Hallward & Peden 2012

12 <http://www.causefreudienne.net/event/forum-anti-le-pen/>

13 *Lacan Quotidien n.632: Appel des Psychanalystes contre Marine Le Pen* - available at: <https://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/2017/03/lacan-quotidien-n-632/>

in the critique of the political positions of other Leftists - such as the already famous diagnosis of the "narcissism of the lost causes" - a dangerous syllogism was proposed: (I) psychoanalysis depends on freedom of speech, (II) only the State of Law guarantees this freedom, (III) both the radical Right as the radical Left are willing to suspend the State of Law, hence (IV) to defend the practice of psychoanalysis is to fight against both of these political fields¹⁴.

The institutional mobilisation by the ECF around the affirmation that there is only one political position that is coherent with the "discourse of the analyst" marks a new sequence in the history of Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is surely undeniable that the last two decades were filled with a myriad of public polemics involving prominent figures from the WAP and other Lacanian schools, but their positions were as debatable as those of any other public figure, coming down, in most cases, to provincial quarrels. However, even if we are not short of examples of situations in which the institutional apparatus of the Lacanian schools was put to an ambiguous use as means of giving further visibility to a personal political position - only to repeat the problem of mixing personal and institutional dimensions which has accompanied both psychoanalysis and political organisations for ages - this had never led, until now, to a concrete politics of re-orientation of the WAP as a whole.

In the beginning of 2017, the WAP created an international forum to internally debate the political orientation of Lacanian analysts around the world¹⁵. In the submission form to partake in the forum, one can find an explicit clause claiming that analysts who are affiliated to a political party or movement are not allowed to participate¹⁶. At the same time, psychoanalysts who have been engaging with party politics at their own risk have been "denounced" by the WAP as perverting the truly "coherent" form of political participation of an analyst - which has led, for exemple, to the circulation of a petition against the presence of a famous Italian Lacanian psychoanalyst in a school for the formation of political militants within the democratic party in Italy¹⁷. Analysts in Spain and in Argentina, who have directly or indirectly participated in Leftist populist movements, were accused of "unconsciously" desiring the suspension of the State of Law - and, therefore, of desiring the consequences that this suspension has historically led to, such as the persecution of Jews¹⁸.

14 Miller 2017a

15 Material on the "La movida Zadig" Forum can be found at <http://lacaniannet.weebly.com/>

16 The submission form can be read at: <http://lacaniannet.weebly.com/sinscrire.html>

17 Focchi 2017

18 Miller 2017b and Miller-Rose & Roy 2017

In Slovenia, an absurd and slanderous campaign, explicitly supported by the WAP and its publications, is currently in place against Slavoj Žižek and the School of Theoretical Psychoanalysis, accusing them of having hindered the development of “true” clinical psychoanalysis in the region, due to their political and theoretical commitments to socialism¹⁹. At the same time in which these and other actions are being promoted, the WAP has created new platforms for debating the political orientation of Lacanian psychoanalysis - which also means the creation of filters, determined by the institution itself, as to who gets to participate in these discussions. In one of these publications, we find the following interview with Jacques-Alain Miller:

“Pandora’s box has been opened for too long! We have now Žižek, who “žizekianises” Lacan, using the rudiments of a doctrine that I have taught him in my seminar. We have Badiou, who “badiouanizes” Lacan, which is not good at all. It is time to close once again Pandora’s box. Now that the analysts of the ECF have been convoked to take the streets and to position themselves as psychoanalysts in the political debate, carrying the flag of the State of Law against the heirs of the Counter-Revolution, those who amuse themselves with Lacan’s toys, for the pleasure of mesmerised audiences and who tour American universities with pseudo-communist threats, need to drop it, or change their tune. Laughs are over! As Lacan would say”²⁰

This was the year of 2017: the end of the cycle, initiated in 1998, of a more or less stable disarticulation between psychoanalysis and its political interpreters, but also the beginning of a new phase in its history, one in which we can no longer laugh at the missed encounters between Lacanian psychoanalysis and politics. It has now become undeniable the possibility that a Lacanian institution might make use of its theoretical framework as means to reject, slander, segregate and delegitimise - the irony! - precisely the intellectuals and militants who have found, usually outside of the small province of Europe, the need and means to continue the program of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, in search of a new articulation of psychoanalysis and Marxism. Most of them, in fact, directly associate themselves to the post-Althusserian legacy, who after all returns once more to the stage. And the recognition that this new use of Lacanian psychoanalysis is possible is further reinforced by the silence with which it was met amongst Lacanian intellectuals and analysts - some quite satisfied with the

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 19 Nina Krajnik - the main spokesperson of this campaign - has an illustrative interview in Gilbert 201=7, but we can also find other articles, with sensationalist titles such as “The Truth about Žižek”, or “Žižek, the Fraud”, in WAP’s official publication *Lacan Quotidien*: <https://www.lacanquotidien.fr/blog/2017/06/lacan-quotidien-n-720/>

20 Miller-Rose & Roy 2017žŽižek,ni,framework. See Badiou, Tupinambá lar 2017b10

situation, some indifferent to it, while others still reserve their critiques to the private sphere, having already become accustomed to working through these conflicts outside of the public domain²¹.

It remains to be seen how many of us - sufficiently distant from the seductive episode at Vincennes so as not to forget Lacan’s previous position regarding revolutionary practice - will feel motivated by this new historical scansion to question what underlying impasses in Lacanian theory might have led, or at least allowed, for this sort of dangerous political appropriation, and to investigate what kind of new alliance between psychoanalysis and revolutionary politics is necessary today in order to meet the challenges of this new conjuncture.

Our own wager is that there are structural reasons for the current predicament of Lacanian psychoanalysis, amongst them its supposedly political effects, which is why a preliminary process of disarticulation between the two fields is necessary if we want to break out of this repetitive cycle. However, as we will see, this process of disentanglement does not entail that we are no longer allowed to conceive of a political dimension to psychoanalysis. Rather, it prepares the ground for us to recognise *the absolutely ordinary status psychoanalysis acquires when considered politically*. Despite all the specificities of the analytic clinical practice, and all the important consequences that the existence of psychoanalysis entails for other fields of thought, one of the crucial insights we can extract from the current crisis of Lacanian institutions is that the time has come for us to see psychoanalysis under a new light, one which combines the affirmation that *psychoanalysis is not in itself political* with the recognition that, from the political standpoint, psychoanalysis is subjected to all the regular ideological, geopolitical and economic constraints that organize our contemporary social world. If it becomes impossible to simply derive from psychoanalytic theory the basis for its political positions, we are then invited to recognise the autonomy of political thinking itself and to confront the same challenge that engages us all when deciding how to orient ourselves and our institutions within the political world. To fight for political novelty - in psychoanalysis as elsewhere - is ultimately a political struggle, one that cannot avoid a direct confrontation with political ideas.

But before we can begin to sketch what such a (non) relation between politics and psychoanalysis could look like, let us first step back and contextualize the saturation of the previous cycle, from 1998 to 2017, within the long history of articulations between psychoanalysis and politics, as this will help to clarify the basic premises of this project.

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 21 One of the few serious public responses of intellectuals who were not directly cited by Miller in this polemic (as it was the case with Jorge Alemán) came from David Pavón-Cuellar - who chose however to focus on “millerian” politics, rather than on the underlying structural problem which determines it, Pavón-Cuellar 2017b

2. A brief history of the relations between psychoanalysis and politics

It is possible to divide the history of the relations between psychoanalytic theory and Marxism into at least three distinct sequences, roughly speaking²².

In a first moment, we have the autonomous theories of Marx and Freud themselves: trajectories which, given the very amplitude of their respective projects, had to ultimately cross and contrast. It is not our purpose to reconstruct these tensions here, but it is not difficult to recognise that, rather than composing a harmonic whole - as if, on Marx's side, we had a theory of society and, on Freud's, a theory of individuals - it is the very superposition of the two authors which prevents the establishment of any direct compatibility between them: Marx had his own theory of individuality and psychism, while Freud had his own concept of culture, civilisation and social structure.

The work of Marx is evidently centred on politics and economics, and his theories adopt a point of view which allow us to think the internal logic of a world in which social exchange and social reproduction are almost exclusively organised by commodity exchange - leading to the commodification of labor, money and natural resources. But we also find here several contributions concerning individuality - both in what concerns the social constitution and reproduction of individuals under capitalism as well as to the pathological dimension which accompanies these specific social constraints. However, even if Marx clearly recognised the value and importance of individuality in a new society, he opposes it to the idea of individualism, that is, to bourgeois ideology and the centrality of personal satisfaction through the consumption of commodities. For Marx, no great change in the social determinations of our world could come from an exclusively individualist transformation, tailored to the measure of personal consumption. On account of this, the Marxist perspective challenges Freud and psychoanalysts into showing that the transformations promoted by the analytic theory and clinic do not merely aim to adequate its patients to the constraints of bourgeois society.

On the other hand, we have Freud's writings, which investigate the psychic apparatus and the process through which each one constitutes themselves as individuated beings, with their own identities and their own modes of satisfaction and suffering. However, throughout his study of the psychic "interior", Freud never ceased to highlight the fundamental role of external elements in this process of individuation: natural aspects, pertaining to the organic and physiological structure of humans, as well as social ones, such as the role of culture, customs and familial relations.

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²² A beautiful work of reconstruction of the nuances of this long history can be found in Pavón-Cuéllar 2017, a book which I have reviewed elsewhere, Tupinambá 2017, pp.752-763

Nonetheless, even if he never disregarded the enormous influence of collectivity in the genesis and maintenance of individuality, Freud's research led him to consider the relations which individuals establish with their social environments - be those familial, religious or political - as being active ingredients in their libidinal economies, and, therefore, as relations that can be distorted by our own expectations of personal satisfaction. Because of this, even if Freud never denied the necessity of social change, the Freudian perspective challenges Marx and all revolutionaries to show that their worldview and strategic vision are not conditioned by unrealistic expectations of well-being and social harmony.

In other words, the intersection between these two autonomous projects, far from uniting them, comports a series of quite abstract *conceptual challenges*, given that none of the two fields directly depended on the other in order to continue its own development. This "disarticulation-by-superposition" is quite distinct from the association between psychoanalysis and Marxism which characterises the following sequence, which might be called - in a very broad sense, and not without some conceptual loss - the "Freudo-Marxist" period. By this denomination, usually restricted to the project of the Frankfurt School, a very general theoretical strategy is being singled out, one which includes thinkers who sometimes have almost nothing in common: the project of developing a critical framework that would unite both Marxism and psychoanalysis and which would mobilize both Freud and Marx in the attempt to understand a *common object* or phenomena whose very existence would require the simultaneous adoption of both points of view.

An important example of this sort of object, which would require the elaboration of such general critical theoretical standpoint, was the failure of the Weimar revolution in 1919. According to a somewhat orthodox reading of Marxist theory, a socialist revolution should find a more fertile ground in more advanced capitalist countries. However, even with the instability created by the war, even with a politicised worker's movement, with strong leaderships, and even with the productive forces in Germany offering effective means of a greater socialisation of wealth, still the promise of a socialist revolution gave way, instead, to a republican constitution with restricted popular participation and, right after it, to the rise of nazi-fascism. Different aspects of this perplexing situation suggested the need to complement Marxism with a psychoanalytic view, since the analytic concepts seemed to increment the understanding of the ideology and culture of the middle classes, the enigmatic logic of the masses, the dangerous fascination with authority and the notable effects of the instrumentalisation of reason.

It is important to note that the idea that this renewed encounter between Freud and Marx was in fact required by these social phenomena themselves did not only lead to a program of theoretical unification, but also allowed for different strands of Freud-Marxism to find a formal place

within academic institutions. The Frankfurt School, associated with the Institute for Social Research of the Frankfurt University, was founded in 1923 and, even if many of the thinkers connected to it did not share the same view of what this “critical theory” would be, they still shared the affirmation that it was the very objects of research which brought about the need to articulate Freud and Marx²³.

From abstract challenges to common objects, the history of this articulation can be punctuated yet a third time, insofar as thinkers such as Louis Althusser or Jacques Lacan countered the previous view and proposed, in different ways, the emptying out of any positive interconnection between psychoanalysis and Marxism, allowing only for certain *structural* isomorphisms between these theoretical perspectives.

If the failure of the Weimar revolution, and the subsequent rise of fascism, informed the Freudo-Marxist research program, we can surely associate the failure of the “de-Stalinization” of Marxism to the political and theoretical project of Althusser²⁴. The famous twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party, in 1956, put on the agenda of a whole generation of European Marxists the need of settling accounts with “Marxism-Leninism”. The so-called “secret report”, presented by Nikita Khrushchev, denouncing the horrors of the Soviet regime under Stalin, made common knowledge the already known limits of the Soviet project and led many Marxists to find ways to distance themselves from the official interpretation of Marx - for example, seeking in his early writings the basis for a more humanistic view of political action. Althusser’s project could be defined as the one which, identifying both the irreflexive adoption of Marxism-Leninism as well as its humanistic revision as equally problematic deviations, found in the question of the *method*²⁵ - rather than in some new social object - the basis for reformulating the Marxist theory, a method which, for Althusser, could also be recognised in Freud’s thinking.

For Althusser, psychoanalysis and Marxism share no common object: the first deals with the critique of the “homo psicologicus”, while the latter deals with the critique of the “homo economicus” - and even if the ideology of psychology feeds economic ideology, and vice-versa, these are in fact totally distinct conceptual fields²⁶. However, for him both fields make use of a common method: both are materialist discourses, which seek to know reality through means that are irreducible to individual experience, and both are dialectical discourses, in which the subject is immersed in the world which she seeks to conceptually

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23The canonical work on the history of the Frankfurt School remains Jay 1996

24 Elliot 2009

25 Althusser, 2006 and 2016

26 We refer here, once more, to the essay *Marx and Freud* in Althusser, 1999

grasp and transform. Once the unconscious and political economy were decoupled as theoretical objects, what was left as a common ground was only a similar epistemological statute, that of being “conflictual sciences” - sciences whose objects of investigation include aspects of the very science which seeks to apprehend them, which is, in fact, the reason why both fields would present similar institutional histories, filled with scissions, internal conflicts and new organisations, constantly immersed in internal debates and processes of revision. This common method allowed Althusser to identify, in each of these fields, internal problems and open questions and, through this, to initiate a process of theoretical reform which did not presuppose that the solutions to outstanding impasses already lay dormant somewhere in the writings of its founding fathers. In the case of psychoanalysis, for example, Althusser considered that the Freudian theory of sublimation had not yet found its proper formulation, up to the measure of Freud’s own rigor. In the case of Marx, a series of open and fundamental problems could then be tackled, such as the development of a materialist theory of ideology, a new comprehension of historical causality, a new view of the role of theory with regards to political strategy and practice, to name a few.

It is also worth noting that the problems with interested Althusser were, usually, formulated as epistemological obstacles internal to the very theoretical fields which he so ardently defended, rather than as new social phenomena - even if the crisis of Soviet Marxism, the challenges of Maoist cultural revolution and the anti-colonial struggles were undeniable influences in his project. The fact that these problems were considered essentially theoretical obstacles to be overcome by an appropriate theoretical method also allowed Althusser to remain within an academic environment. However, given that these impasses did not correspond to well-defined sociological objects, but to the need of establishing new positions within the conflictual realities of psychoanalysis and Marxism, Althusser was equally obliged to remain connected to the psychoanalytic and political organisations of his time - as demonstrated by his engagement with Lacan’s EFP and the French Communist Party.

Lacan, like Althusser, also argued that psychoanalysis and Marxism had no common objects, and he also claimed that the revitalisation of the psychoanalytic movement was conditioned by the traversal of obstacles that were internal to its own theory and practice. Still, and even if it is not possible to underplay the effect that the Second World War had on his work, the “historical failures” which explicitly mobilised Lacan’s teaching were rather the “social decline of the paternal imago” - a transformation which required psychoanalysis to let go of some theoretical presuppositions hindering the update of clinical practice - and the decadence of the *International Psychoanalytic Association*, which had allowed for the revision and outright neutralisation of Freud’s greatest

insights²⁷. This double challenge led Lacan, on the one hand, to consider in innovative ways how both contingency and social structures affect the constitution of subjectivity and, on the other, to reconstruct Freud's theoretical apparatus in such a way as to avoid the same conceptual traps that led to the psychologising revisions of the IPA.

Unlike Althusser, however, Lacan did not claim that Marxism and psychoanalysis shared a common method, rather asserting that there was a "homology" in the "logical space" mobilised by both fields²⁸. That is, both Freud and Marx would have considered the same logical paradox in their theories on libidinal satisfaction and surplus-value, respectively - even if these two theories do not deal with the same object, nor do it in a similar way. Still, if, on the one hand, Lacan claimed that this underlying recognition of a fundamental paradox at the heart of the logic of representation led both Freud and Marx "not to bullshit"²⁹, on the other, Lacan recognised an essential asymmetry between psychoanalysis and Marxism: while psychoanalysis would fully assume the structural role of this paradox - leading, for example, to a universal theory of the "discontent" in civilisation - Marxism, which theorised it as the specific characteristic of a particular historical period, would remain attached to the illusions its overcoming and the coming into being of absolute social harmony.³⁰

Althusser and Lacan demarcate, in this way, the beginning of a new phase in the articulations between Freud and Marx, a sequence characterised, paradoxically, by the *non-relation* between the two. For Althusser, this lack of articulation opened up mostly to epistemological questions, given that the theoretical reformulation of each field relied on a total separation of their objects, while requiring them to recognise the immanent contradictions to their theoretical and practical apparatuses. For Lacan, this "non-relation" had an eminently ontological status, so that the only admissible conceptual solidarity between Freud and Marx concerned the very "topology" of the representational space, a feature both of libidinal and political economies, while the asymmetric treatment given to this ontological impasse in each field justified the psychoanalyst's underlying distrust in revolutionary aspirations.

This sequence was both accompanied by a call to the "return" to the original positioning of Freud and Marx - given that both authors invested in a similar immediate separation between psychoanalysis and politics - as well as a new sort of invitation or conceptual challenge: if there is no direct relation between psychoanalysis and Marxism, then

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27 Roudinesco 1997

28 Lacan 2008

29 Lacan 1999

30 Lacan 2007

it is possible to imagine - and, effectively, to invent - new *indirect* ways to relate them. It is under the orientation of this immediate non-relation between Freud and Marx that we should therefore understand, for example, the project of the *Circle D'Épistémologie*, which joined together young Lacanians and Althusserians, like Jacques-Alain Miller and Alain Badiou³¹.

The attempt of the "young Miller" to propose a mediation between the discourse of historical overdetermination, in Althusser, and the discourse of unconscious overdetermination, in Lacan, through formal logic and a critique of the Frege's project is a paradigmatic example of the effort to produce "ruled transformations" between the two fields - here, through a philosophy of science of Bachelardian inspiration³². Another example would be the position of Slavoj Žižek, who sought to substitute the mediation through formal logic for an innovative use of Hegelian dialectics, proposing a "borromean knotting" between philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis, so that not only the relations between Freud and Marx ought to be mediated by Hegel, but also the relations between Hegel and Marx should go through Freudian theory, and so on³³. The same can be said of the project of mediating the relations between psychoanalysis and Marxism through a theory of hegemony and discursivity, as in the work of Laclau e Mouffe³⁴, or of the project of reclaiming the challenges of a general ontology while respecting the autonomy of "generic procedures" such as psychoanalysis and Marxism, as with Alain Badiou³⁵. The examples abound and, as never before, they extrapolate the confines of Western Europe³⁶.

Another property shared by these different projects is their increasing distance from any organised institutional project - political or psychoanalytic. Besides the complex relations with the academia - increasingly distrustful of both psychoanalysis and Marxism - these thinkers have generally placed themselves at a certain distance from political parties as well as from the analytic schools, contributing to the mutual distrust between "clinical" psychoanalysts - increasingly concerned with the "purity" of Lacanian thinking - and those who continued the project of articulating psychoanalysis and politics - increasingly frustrated with academia, institutions and political organisations. This distance was clearly recognisable at the time

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31 Hallward & Peden 2012

32 Ibid

33 Žižek 1989

34 Laclau, & Mouffe 1985

35 Badiou 1982

36 Pavón-Cuéllar 2017a

of the crisis of 1998, when the separation between the institutional impasses of the WAP and the thinkers interested in the relation between psychoanalysis and politics led to a near-absolute theoretical silence about that institutional scission.

3. Lacanian ideology

This rather brute overview of the history of the relations between psychoanalysis and Marxism clearly does not consider the near infinite ramifications, anticipations of later moments, persistences of previous paradigms, and important exceptions that would most certainly enrich this panorama. But it is quite sufficient for our purposes, as it allow us to make two introductory observations concerning the current *Lacanian ideology*.

Before anything else, our attempt to localize Lacan as one of the great proponents of a new way of articulating Freud and Marx, psychoanalysis and politics, also implied the inscription of the previous analysis of the “cyclical crises” of Lacanian organisations within a more general theoretical paradigm. This begs the question, then, of the relation between the paradigm of the “non-relation” - and, specially, the asymmetric treatment given by Lacan to analytic and revolutionary aspirations - and the limitations of the Lacanian field when thinking about its own social, economic and political existence.

In fact, if, on the one hand, Lacan sought to preserve the structural dimension of the “sexual non-relation”, such as conceived by Freud, and thereby using the “realist” severity of psychoanalysis to counter the utopian and delirious aspirations of non-psychoanalysts - that is, if he identified psychoanalysis as the discourse which is capable of abstaining itself from this mirage - it is then perfectly understandable that the identification process within the Lacanian field takes place *in opposition* to the dramas of group formations, mastery and institutionalisation in general. The very way in which Lacan named his formulas for discursive structures - the discourse of the “analyst”, of the “master”, of the “university” and of the “hysteric” - suggests that *within* psychoanalysis there is no threat of imaginization or identificatory sutures: when these effects emerge, we are already in another discourse, which supposedly describes not psychoanalysis, but its “others”. The structures we consider to be more “productive”, such as discourse of the analyst or the hysteric, take on names that refer them back to the analytic framework, while “unproductive” or outright demonised discourses - of the master and the university - take on the name of political or academic instances. But none of this alters the fact that this theory of the four discourses was elaborated by psychoanalysis itself, and that the objects and situations it legitimately refers to all take place within the clinical, institutional and conceptual universe of psychoanalysis. Nor does it alter the fact that it remains perfectly possible for one to *identify with a discourse that is*

critical of identifications - as the rituals of seduction amongst Laconians attest to everyday. In other words, it is part of the very paradigm of Lacanian thinking, certainly due to the collateral effects of its mission to recuperate the subversive edge of Freud against later revisions, to treat all strategies of defence against the real as intrusions coming from outside of the “proper psychoanalytic” practice.

At the same time Lacanian theory expanded in unheard ways the clinical and theoretical reach of psychoanalysis, it also removed from the proper practice of analysis the legitimate existence of identificatory and hierarchical structures without which it would have been impossible to found a school, and much less to internationalise it. The very act of dissolving the EFP can be read in this same key: what most likely perplexed Althusser, after all, was the way Lacan reduced the *organisational* problem of an institution - whose social network extended not only to the main “cadres” and the remaining analysts, but also to the analysands and their families - to a *narcissistic* decision, as if the “ossification” of his teaching was an offensive and unexpected process, the product of tendencies external to psychoanalysis itself³⁷ Rather than demonstrate the capacity of the analytic position to remove itself from identifications, the dissolution of the EFP would then serve as a good example of how the process of dis-identification can perfectly function as just another social identity, precisely when the “real” of a situation required psychoanalysts to respond like *any other* collective organisation and to engage with organisational challenges as *anyone* would - that is, politically³⁸. And it is precisely this other face of the real - not as *cause* of desire, but as its *consistent* support - that remains beyond the theoretical limits of Lacanian psychoanalysis, insofar as “consistency”³⁹ has been reduced within its theoretical framework to an imaginary effect and therefore has no place within the “analytic discourse”.

This brings us to the second crucial observation, which also stems from the effort of situating, within the paradigm of “non-relation”, the new moment of the WAP, since 2017 - which, as we previously described it, can be defined by the institutional proposition of a transitivity between the analytic and the political positions. It is, however, not a matter of

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37 Lacan's position is particularly clear in his text *Monsieur Aa*, written just after Althusser's intervention, where Lacan talks about the transformation of psychoanalysts into “jurists” and negatively compares the School to a trade union - as well as makes some dismissive remarks about Althusser - the text is available at: <http://espace.freud.pagesperso-orange.fr/topos/psych/psyssem/dissolu9.htm#monsieur%20A>

38 Yuan Yao and I have analysed the details of this dialectics between identification and dis-identification in the case of the EFP's dissolution in Tupinambá & Yao 2013

39 Already in 1979, Alain Badiou warned us that the philosophical and epistemological presuppositions of psychoanalysis could lead to unsurpassable obstacles for the Lacanian theory of the real, whose effects could be minimal in clinical practice, but were palpable when psychoanalysis sought to think political processes within its own framework. See Badiou 1982

contrasting the paradigm of a non-relation between psychoanalysis and politics and this immediate identity between clinical practice and the defence of the State of Law, currently upheld by the WAP, but rather of recognising that the *latter is only possible under the auspices of the first*. It is perfectly coherent with the Lacanian paradigm the fantasy that, if only psychoanalysis is capable of dealing with the constitutive dimension of our discontent - which is why not even the analytic method is shared by psychoanalysis and political thinking - then *only psychoanalysis can truly guide contemporary politics*. This realisation could help to clarify, in fact, the symptomatic dimension of the justification so commonly presented by so many psychoanalysts as to why one should keep a distance from the tradition of emancipatory politics, as well as from collective organisations: on the one hand, it is said that “clinical work is already politics”, thus recognising the importance of politics and social transformation, on the other, all other forms of political work are to be avoided because politics itself cannot avoid trying to suture, harmonize or overcome our constitutive discontent. In other words, once the asymmetry between the analytic procedure and concrete political practices is established, given that only the former “touches on the real”, while the latter covers it up with idealisations, the autonomy of psychoanalytic thinking becomes no longer a *regionally* defined - that is, it no longer needs to respect the limits of its legitimate application - and becomes *generalised*, as if it could set the criteria of validity of any other field of thought, politics especially.

In light of this interpretation - in which the supposed monopoly of “the real” by psychoanalysis leads it to simultaneously reject and identify with political practice - it also becomes quite clear why the French presidential election ended up prompting the political campaign of the WAP. Let us imagine a victory of Le Pen, the right-wing candidate: the very fact that *nothing would change for psychoanalytic practice* would depose against the fantasy that clinical work is, by itself, committed to some subversive political effect. It was necessary therefore, to fight against her candidacy, but not due to what it would change for France, but because of what it would leave exactly in its place. Lacanian psychoanalysis would survive unharmed to her government, what could rather not survive was the fantasy concerning the immanent politic effects of the psychoanalytic clinic. It is not a surprise, then, that instead of a grand institutional “act”, what we witnessed was rather a massive staging of this very fantasy: the time had come for psychoanalysts to position themselves politically as *psychoanalysts*.

It is up to us now to inscribe this new moment in the history of the relations between psychoanalysis and politics, just as other historical events which led us to rethink this articulation and to recognise new scansions within this process - that is, it is up to us to inscribe this moment as a *historical failure*, perhaps the first one which Lacanians have no “other” to blame.

4. After the non-relation

However, what could it mean to think once again Lacanian psychoanalysis? That is, how could we abdicate, as psychoanalysts, from the standpoint of psychoanalysis such as it exists today, without thereby leaving our own field? To remain within the schematic considerations we have sketched in this study, let us consider the different ways in which psychoanalysis can position itself with regards to other fields - generalizing some insights already gained in our periodisation of the relations between Freud and Marx, while signalling a possible alternative route to our current predicament.

Let us consider, then, the four general orientations through which psychoanalysis might articulate itself to other practices and fields of thought.

A. *Unilateral contribution.* A first possible strategy here is to claim that the psychoanalytic field has access to a certain dimension of life which, despite only being intelligible from within the analytic frame, has relevant consequences for other fields and practices. For example, psychoanalysis alone is capable of considering the libidinal dimension of group identifications, while politics, which would be attached to an underlying commitment to ideals, cannot articulate by itself a critique of ideals - hence psychoanalysis would have something to add to the political field. Here politics is thought from the standpoint of psychoanalysis: there is nothing of the analytic practice or theory at stake in this contribution, the object of intervention - political practice - is localised outside of the analytic domain.

B. *Correlation.* It is also possible to propose a less asymmetrical articulation between the two. One might recognise, for example, some similarity between specific aspects of both fields, allowing the psychoanalyst to orient herself by it when taking a political stance. The paradigmatic case here is probably that of democracy: insofar as Lacanian psychoanalysis claims to orient itself clinically by the singular and radical alterity of each subject's mode of enjoyment, and insofar as democracy is associated to the construction of a heterogeneous social space in which divergent and even contradictory positions co-exist, there would be a certain *correlation* between the analytical orientation and the fight for democracy. To defend democracy is a compatible commitment for a psychoanalysts, just as psychoanalysis is a practice that is in dialogue with the challenges of democracy - preparing individual subjects to deal with the alterity of others, with the empty centre of power or with the arbitrariness of social representations.

C. *Separation.* There are also strategies which invest in the negative articulation between psychoanalysis and its others. One might argue, for

instance, that psychoanalysis simply has nothing to do with politics - a position which can be defended in at least two ways: one might argue it out of principle - claiming that each field has its own object, its own practice and purpose, and therefore have no effective intersections - or because we identify some inherent deficiency in the other - claiming, as we have seen, that politics is so caught up in certain commitments that it would just be impossible for it to absorb any serious psychoanalytic input. Here, the only legitimate form of relation that remains is therefore a critical or negative one: to constantly revise the different idealised links that we create from time to time amongst fields, forcing a proximity that is not truly capable of preserving what is essential to each discipline - if the disarticulation has been argued out of principle - or to psychoanalysis - if it has been argued through the depreciation of another field.

However, it is not the case of choosing between these three positions - even if we might formalize the current crisis of the WAP as displaying a closed circuit between these three alternatives. It is, after all, perfectly possible to maintain, simultaneously, that psychoanalysis can contribute to the reformulation of non-psychoanalytic questions, that the analytic field has affinities with non-trivial positions in other spheres of life and thought and that it is also necessary to criticise impostures and imaginary articulations between psychoanalysis and other theories. What should be noted, however, is that *in none of these three positions psychoanalysis appears as one of the terms under scrutiny*: be it as the field which contributes to another practice, as the one which provides our orientation within other discourses, or as that which should be preserved from the intromission of others, psychoanalysis is always present as the place *from which* one thinks, never as what is given to be thought. An observation which brings us to the fourth possible articulation between psychoanalysis and other fields of thinking.

D. *Compossibility*. This fourth case would be the one in which the affirmation of a commitment that is extrinsic to psychoanalysis demands that we also reconsider its own limits or foundations. It is the strategy at stake in claims such as “what must psychoanalysis be if I affirm that x or y is possible for politics?” - for example: if there is such a thing as a consistent thinking of real social equality in the realm of the material conditions of social existence, then what are the consequences of this for our understanding of the idea of singularity in the clinic? Or even; what is it that singularity *cannot mean* for psychoanalysis if it must respect the possibility of a thinking of social equality in politics?

It is crucial to note that this fourth position is not simply an inversion of the first, in which psychoanalysis appeared as that which questions and supplements other fields from its own establishes position. There is an essential distinction between taking the current state of political or militant thinking for a safe harbour from which we can

evaluate the limits of psychoanalysis - a position which would just mean a return to the first form of articulation proposed above - and questioning the limits of a discipline from the standpoint of the exigency that it remain *compossible* with the challenges of another. After all, who today would maintain that revolutionary politics was ever capable of articulating a complete doctrine of social equality? But, at the same time, which other field of thought is truly in condition of interdicting the claim that the development of this doctrine is a legitimate political challenge, perhaps the limit-point out of which politics constructs for itself the renewal of its thinking? Compossibility is, therefore, neither an asymmetrical relation between different fields, nor a correlation, nor even a pure effort of separation between them. It is a matter, instead, of affirming that the task of formulating the interiority of a practice or theory should not entail the legislation over the limits of the possible within other fields of thought - hence the conditional form: “if x and y are possible...”. If it is part of the interiority of politics the possibility of thinking equality in its own terms - which does not imply that “real equality” should be a concept with any pertinence for psychoanalysis as such - then what would psychoanalysis have to be so that *both forms of thinking are possible within the same world*?

The relation of compossibility most certainly does not substitute other possible forms of articulation between these two fields, but it introduces an indispensable operator in the search for a new paradigm in the history of articulations between psychoanalysis and politics: a form of partnership which would allow us to find support in the autonomy of *other* fields of thought in order to better think the autonomy of our own practice. If the third type of articulation we introduced - the operation of separating politics from psychoanalysis to better protect the second from possible deformations - postulates an absence of relation, we could define the paradigm of compossibility as the proposition of a positive “non-relation”, that is, a solution which allows us to orient ourselves by the common conviction that both politics and psychoanalysis have the tools to formulate and solve their own problems. This is a productive separation, rather than a restrictive one, because it imposes as a condition for the development of thought - to both critical and constructive efforts of a given field - the imperative that it do not rely on the extrinsic interdiction of a similar movement within the interiority of other fields. From the standpoint of compossibility, psychoanalysis and politics do not think the same thing, nor do they think within similar conceptual frameworks - but this does not entail that any of them should thereby lose its status as a legitimate form of thought, which implies that both should remain equally capable of finding, formulating and overcoming their own historical limits.

The most explicit formulation of such operator can be found in the work of the philosopher Alain Badiou, one of the main proponents

of a new paradigm for the relation between psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy today. For Badiou, both psychoanalysis and politics are autonomous forms of thinking, fields capable of formulating their questions in terms of their own vocabularies, and of disposing of the immanent means to overcome their practical and theoretical obstacles - what the philosopher calls “generic procedures”⁴⁰. It is under the emblem of compossibility which Badiou then reconstructs, from the historical existence of these generic procedures, the role of philosophy: for him, philosophy does not produce new truth-statements, nor does it legislate over what is and what is not possible, it can only make an effort to know the historical singularity of the different non-philosophical procedures - such as the art, science, love and politics of its time - and try to systematise in a creative and provisory fashion a certain common horizon of what has become thinkable and possible within a certain historical moment.

However, even if the term “compossibility” is itself a Badiouian one, it is not hard to recognise the same impetus of overcoming the limits of the paradigm of “non-relation” within the work of other great contemporary thinkers. Slavoj Žižek, for example, has elaborated a “borromean” theory of how to relate psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy, one which - through a different strategy than Badiou’s proposal - also respects the autonomy of each field at the same time that it requires it each of them to be aware of the developments in the other ones⁴¹. The borromean structure, just like the operator of compossibility, helps us think both the interiority as well as the relation between the fields it articulates. On the one hand, such structure implies that there are not complementary relations between any two of these fields: philosophy and psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy, psychoanalysis and politics, are all unstable constructions which can only become stabilised through the - silent or explicit - mediation of the third field. Philosophy and psychoanalysis can only articulate through political decisions, the relation between politics and psychoanalysis depends on philosophical commitments, and so on. On the other hand, if this regime imposes a generalised “non-relation” between these fields, it also imposes another clause, namely, that every interiority is inconsistent: psychoanalysis, when taken far enough, poses problems that do not belong to its own field - questions that require political or philosophical reformulation - and the same happens with the other two fields. It is the combination of these two clauses - the first of “non-complementarity” and the second of an “immanent transition” - which justify calling this operator a “borromean” one.

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40 Badiou 2006

41 Žižek 1989

Another philosopher who proposes a similar form of articulation is the Japanese Marxist philosopher Kojin Karatani, who elaborated a sophisticated theory of the “parallax”⁴² - one that Žižek himself has discussed at length⁴³. Through an innovative reading of the theme of “transcendental reduction”, from Kant to Husserl, Karatani devised a way of thinking the articulation of fields which are *incommensurate precisely because of their almost absolute superposition*. Here, the central operator is that of “abstraction”, which Karatani defines as a suspensive practice: for example, in Kant, so that the object of scientific investigation might constitute itself - the object of statements concerning truth and falsity - we must first abstract, suspend, or “bracket” all questions concerning the beautiful - is it pleasing/displeasing? - and ethics - is it right/wrong? This suspension of aesthetic and moral domains is what operates the transcendental reduction of the thing into the object of science. But this does not entail an absolute exclusion of what has been abstract, given that what has been bracketed can be recuperated, and other objects constituted in a new process of abstraction: the suspension of the true/falsity question and of right/wrong lead to the constitution of the object of aesthetics, and so on. The consistency of science, ethics and aesthetics is, thus, a *relative* one, insofar as they depend on the fields each abstracts from, but this does not mean that any of them touch less on the *absolute* of their own domain, nor that they do not cover the *totality* of the objects of their interest - in fact, it is precisely because each bracketing constitutes a different totality that they are ultimately incommensurable amongst each other.

As these examples show us - all extracted from the works of different post-Althusserian thinkers - to think the compossibility between psychoanalysis and politics is to investigate, simultaneously, the separation and the solidarity between incommensurate regions of thought. Ultimately, it means to rely on the autonomy of *other fields* in order to better determine and conceptualise our own. As we have tried to show, neither one of the three great sequences binding Freud and Marx in the XXth Century have truly explored this operation - and we have recently witnessed some of the pernicious effects of insisting on an asymmetrical separation between the two, which silently places psychoanalysis in a privileged position amongst other fields of thought, called upon only to further reinforce the static closure of our own field.

Strangely enough, a consequence of the historical saturation of the current paradigm is that it becomes no longer enough for anyone interested in the advancement of “pure” psychoanalysis today to simply *remain* within psychoanalysis, for the very interiority of our practice is

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42 Karatani 2003

43 Žižek 2009

epistemologically dependent on several extrinsic “crochets” we do not recognise - but which make themselves legible once they are mobilised by our sense of superiority concerning other fields of thought. To truly gauge the current state of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the actual shape of its interior development, we must therefore begin by severing these silent ties, by criticising the means through which we have achieved the closure of our theoretical space, before being able to recognise the open questions and problems that lurk about in our conceptual and practical edifice.

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