



## An Ethics for the Psychoanalyst in the Postmodern Age

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*“76. Interpreting through dreams: what one ignores in a vigil state, what one is incapable of feeling – that is, if one has a good or a bad conscience toward another – the dreams reveal to us with no doubt.”*

F. Nietzsche  
(*Gemischte Meinungen und Sprüche*)<sup>1</sup>

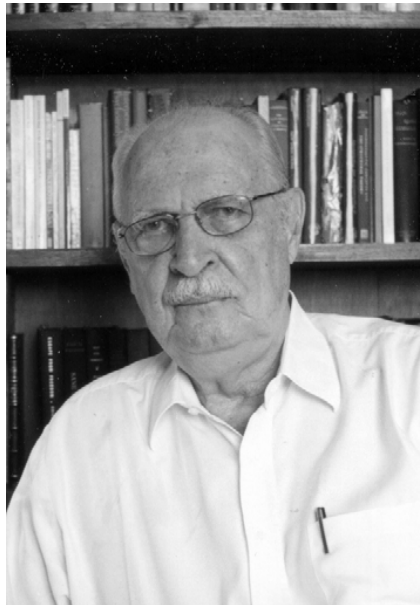
This epigraph – taken from one of F. Nietzsche's (1902) “opinions” as a philosopher of morality and critic of culture – associates the critical function of consciousness to the interpretation of dreams. As it allows us to place Nietzsche as a precursor of Freud it shows that value discrimination is beyond conscious awareness and it can also associate the interpretation of meaning to the function of judgement, which goes beyond the simple judgement of existence. It is by these associations that interpretation in psychoanalysis discovers, through the concept of a determinative unconscious and the structured ambivalence of a moral conscience, a double requirement that combines Socratic maieutics with Kantian criticism: the requirement made in the criticism of culture to denounce false values, and the requirement of “knowing about oneself” that points to a permanent conflict, that remains unknown at the threshold of consciousness. Thus Nietzsche provides us with an introduction to the thesis that this essay defends: it is through interpretation as a symbolic act, maintaining the metonymic displacement of unconscious desire in a process of questioning and discovery, that we clarify the dominant values of a singular subjectivity, which can only live its existence as a permanent and unsolvable conflict between “good and bad conscience”.

Since its beginning in the modern era, psychoanalysis has identified subjectivity with critical thinking and has expressed itself as a “hermeneutics of suspicion” that combines the criticisms of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud in the denouncement

of reason identified with consciousness as one of the “figures of power” (Foucault, 1980). Overcoming the reductionism to the intrapsychic, it has taken us to the conception of intersubjectivity and to the hypothetical construct of an a-chronic and unknowable unconscious (Freud, 1915), that is as transsubjective as language. As a theoretical practice psychoanalysis has recognized - since Sullivan wrote about the “illusion of personal individuality” (1950)<sup>2</sup> and quoted extensively Sapir's book on

*Language*<sup>3</sup> - the importance of the subject's formation through symbolic and linguistic interactions. It has accepted, through the relevance of the determinative value of language, the conception of intersubjectivity (Frie, 1997) in Lacan (1966) and Habermas (1983), and reaffirms that human phenomena, immersed in culture as a field of meanings and values, are not limited to the single dimension of instinctual automatism and are not reducible to an “essential core” of biological drives. Since the concept of unconscious desire was introduced by Freud defining the limits of objectivity, psychoanalysis has renovated hermeneutics with the “narrative-interpretive paradigm” (Green-

halgh, 1998)<sup>4</sup>, that combines free-association with



<sup>2</sup> In this paper, reprinted in the book *The Fusion of Psychiatry and Social Science* (1964, 198-226), Sullivan writes about the importance of language in a “pluralistic universe” to lead us to the notion of the unknown that is confronted with the need of “objectifying the mental life” associated to the use of the pronoun “I” for preserving, by “selective inattention”, a sense of self. It is through the denunciation of this illusion of a concrete and substantial I (ego), and quoting A.N Whitehead (1925) in denouncing “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness”, that Sullivan formulates his theory of interpersonal relations in opposition to any notion of “a durable, unique, individual personality”.

<sup>3</sup> H. S. Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relationships is the first, in the field of psychoanalysis, to value language as constituting psychic reality. He clearly mentions Sapir's hypothesis (Sullivan, 1953, p.26) about the formation of a symbolic world with the value of determination, and adds that the articulation of the first phonemes - “the appearance of articulated speech however uncommunicative or meaningless” - determine the difference between infancy and childhood, thus preceding Lacan in the postulation about the centrality of language.

<sup>4</sup> This narrative-interpretive paradigm – as opposed to a reductionistic positivist or empirical paradigm – has been associated recently to the clinical method, and, for the psychoanalyst, it indicates an intersubjective field in which meaning will be pro-

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the XI International Forum of the IFPS to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Erich Fromm which took place in May 2000 in New York.



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floating-attention seeking out the process of enunciation, that occurs through *deciphering*<sup>1</sup> as a creative form of experience. In defining consciousness “as an inevitable structured ignorance, inevitable in its error” (Ogilvie, 1987), psychoanalysis differentiates itself from a psychology bound to the conscious dimension, embraces the fields of singularity and contingency, and elicits from its practice in a field of meanings an ethics that differs from the morals in each individual history.

In this way psychoanalysis tells us about a structural determinism and reveals the “dialogism” (Bakhtine, 1984) of a ternary logic, an Oedipian logic of “at least three” associated to the secondary processes of thinking, that permits the passage from nature to culture and establishes the difference between nature, society and culture. In this symbolic logic, that launches the individual into the agonizing game of an intersubjective field of values, we can differentiate between the expression or “presentation” (*Darstellung*) – that is connected to time and the sociocultural context – from the original impressions or “inscriptions” (*Eindrücken*), that follow a logic of exclusion and are subordinated to the binary logic of presence or absence. These primary inscriptions give their origin to unconscious representations (*Vorstellungen*) in what Freud (1900) conceived of – emphasizing the attribute of incognoscibility of the unconscious – as mnemonic traits in a “corporeal memory”. It was this conceptual differentiation that led him to postulate the “structural point of view” (Rapaport, 1959), in a perspective that enriches psychoanalytic theory because it associates itself to the structuring function of language; and refers us to the pre-symbolic, to the proto-sensations or “sentiences” (Sullivan, 1953)<sup>2</sup>, or even, if we accept the inclusive opposition structure/history of a “linguistic model” (Lacan, 1966), to the *articulation of signifiers* that, in isolation, have no meaning. Associated to criticism psychoanalysis relies on the presupposition of the absence of meaning and conceive the subject of doubt as opposed to certainty, denounces the propositions of any ethics expressed through imperatives; and denounces the hypocrisy of any morality associated to the dominant ideologies that oppose diversity and the movement of culture. In this association to critical thinking psychoanalysis discovers, through questioning a field of values, the possibility of a “moral genealogy” (Nietzsche, 1949), that brings relativity into the knowledge of a

duced in each singular clinical case “connecting teller and listener”.

<sup>1</sup> Lacan refers to the attribute of unknowability and to the “alphabet of the unconscious” (1977, p. 159) to emphasize the difference, in the interpretative act, between decodification and *deciphering*. In decoding we translate from a known language to another known language, in deciphering we are, like Champollion facing Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, trying to give some meaning to a radically unknown language.

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan (1953, p.27) uses of the word *sentience* to refer us to the “primary data out of which we came to have information”, and develops a “theory of sentience” as “primary data of experience – and of the phenomenology of memory” that applies to what cannot be said in the dimension of consciousness.

collective well-being and is in opposition to the idea of a “supreme well-being”, of a “state of bliss” that would be permanent. Thus it eliminates the imperative propositions, suspending the meaning of traditional ethics that searched for a universality of its formulations totally alienated from a practice; and confronts the philosophical ethics with the function of the unknown to reach the question of freedom in a process of valuation that, like history, does not have a conclusive ending.

Defining this relativism in a field of values that does not reduce itself to an arbitrary individualism, Perelman (1979), in an article that defends dialogical reason in a human context of ethics and freedom, speaks of a philosophy of pluralism and of the multiplicity of reasons that form the sociocultural context. He shows how an ontological monism – that defends the unity of being introduced to western metaphysics by the “great poem” of Parmenides – opposes the multiplicity of appearances, disqualifying all the phenomena whose existence is asserted by common experience. All the western cultures influenced by a Jewish-Christian ethics derived from monotheism, are associated to this ontological monism and to the idea of God as warrant of truth and model of human reason. This monism postulates that human knowledge is a replication, pale and imperfect, of divine knowledge that would have the solution for all moral problems. This knowledge is expressed by ethical imperatives that can only be supported in the consciousness of faith, and tend to eliminate any questioning when confronted with the doctrinal truth of a model of perfection. Spinoza’s (1952) philosophy is a good example of this search for an ethics with universal values beyond the sociocultural context and historical time thus providing a foundation for an axiomatic ethical monism, that would reduce all divergent opinions, all values in their infinite diversity, to only one value conceived in terms of perfection, utility or truth. The phenomena and the multiple values would be different appearances or versions of one fundamental reality, a transcendental essence that we would have to systematize and hierarchize in an univocal fashion, in search of a universal agreement that would deny individual and cultural differences. As a prototype of a monistic philosophy, that speaks of a “*substancial being* (God or Nature) *that is self-determinant*” (Chauí, 1999), Spinoza’s logocentric philosophy states that all conflicts are due to the fact that men “*do not allow themselves to be guided only by reason*”, and since freedom, according to Spinoza and all the ethical philosophies of consciousness, “*depends on reason*” (Broad, 1959). What reason would counsel to one man it would counsel to all men, thus postulating a homogenization of values that disregards historical determinism and denies the contextual determination of meaning. This monism of an ethical philosophy of consciousness, that is required to be total and in accordance with *virtue*<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>3</sup> “Virtue”, in the classic sense of the normative ethical philoso-



demonstrates, beyond the paradigm of an homogenization of values, how moral conscience disregards the overdetermination of psychical reality and establishes the principle of authority of an ontological and theological monism, thus imposing an ethics that gives supremacy to only one value, establishes an utopian self-determination of an independent individuality, and even associates the natural law of the species to a divine positive law associating ideality to reality, consciousness and law, denying unconscious determinism and the function of the unknown, the reality of a socio-historical context and the question of autonomy/heteronomy of ethics and pluralism.

Psychoanalysis opposes this homogenization of values, and gives to the interpretative act its singularity thus implying a relativization of the individualized moral in each personal history. It can think about a widely contextualized ethics surfacing, paradoxically, out of the unawareness of all the values in conflict. This ethics emerges from a basic and unsolvable unconscious conflict linked to the narcissistic structure; and denounces the exclusive opposition between the individual and the collective. As it makes use of the *inclusive*<sup>1</sup> and contradictory opposition individual/collective it puts into play the dialectics of experience, and opposes itself to the accomplishment in the ideal of the “supreme well-being” thus affirming that conflict is permanent. This unsolvable conflict in human relationships is described by psychoanalysis as taking place between “*being-for-yourself*” and “*having-to-be-for others*”, between the binary structure of narcissism and the object relations of the “Oedipal” ternary structure, between confronting the existing values in a sociocultural context with the values associated to the attributes of this individual and concrete existence that can question itself about its desire. Because of this uncovering of the “unconscious desire”<sup>2</sup> within the questioning of values that are at play in each singularity we can state, recognizing the contribution that analytic philosophy have brought into a general theory of values, that ethics – as irreducibly pluralistic as psychoanalysis – cannot be associated with normative and impos-

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phies, is that inherent and essential quality that singles out and identifies an object reduced to a one-to-one relationship. In accordance with this conception there would be an ideal human nature; and to be virtuous would consist in acting in accordance with this ideal, and to be vicious would be acting against it.

<sup>1</sup> Since Kant we know the difference between an *exclusive* opposition that follows the model A and B - an opposition of entities associated to the notion of conflict - and the *inclusive* opposition referred to the model A-non-A, which is, since Plato, the basis for dialectics. This inclusive opposition, that shows the “unity of the opposites”, is the contradiction between non-entities: a term of the pair does not exist without the other, A can be defined only by the (double) negation of non-A, and non-A is only defined as the negation of A.

<sup>2</sup> The unconscious “desire” (*Wunsch, Begierde*), “structured as a language” and defined as the drive organization of memories, is the effect of symbolic articulation of a field of values and it is not a need; it cannot be reduced to biological drives. The subject of desire is essentially excentric (determined by “Otherness”) and insatiable because it is not referred to the object that would satisfy it, but is conceived *with* the object that *causes* it.

ing moral imperatives. As R.M. Hare (1962) says, in an analysis that is part of Wittgenstein's (1961) tradition, the imperatives are moral propositions that, in their paradigmatic use, are in language and are capable only to *tell* us what we can do. These propositions only say what can be done, valuing the analysis within the significant retroaction of thought and summarizing descriptively *what was done* in a process experienced as a singular process within a history, and that can only be described as presenting conflicting values that the authoritative imperatives try to deny. The propositions of the ethical philosophies are never normative, as there is no isolated function in language that can make a fragment of a discourse have a normative value. These postulates appear, in linguistic analysis, demonstrating only that the ancient and classic problem of values theory associated to an ontology – that intends to surpass the abyss between *being* and *ought to be* in a prescribed way – is a false problem because there is no clear distinction, in language, between the descriptive, the constative, the performative, the cognitive, the non-cognitive, and the simply apelative. Therefore, ethical judgments cannot be reduced to an empiricism, cannot be reduced to an imperative, and cannot be contained in an explanatory proposition that would be objective enough to justify its universality.

What is simply expected from a philosopher of morality – as from the psychoanalyst's ethics - is that he does not attach himself to propositions that aim to be universal, and respects individual differences to the point of postulating a *principle of difference* as part of subjectivity. It is not that he could have a privileged discourse or an exemplary life that would justify his ethical judgment, but that he may *describe morality in such a fashion that it would demonstrate the work of a living discourse in its living practice*. More specifically, he could create a “conceptual map” of the nature and the limits of ethical *justification*, showing that what is being proposed, in any ethical proposition that tries to be imperative, is a quest for the power of influence. The denouncement of justification – that *rationalizes* imperatives while prescribing duties and creating the selfishness/unselfishness opposition – leads us to *recognize* a pluralism in ethics and a consequential *renunciation* to any ambition for power; and to realize that the questioning proposed by psychoanalysis, the contextual questioning of the unconscious desire, is a permanent questioning linked to the concept of an interrogative subject as a function of intersubjectivity, thus undoing any imperative proposition and allowing for diversity in values.

The ethics coming out of this questioning in an essentially interpretative practice, that recognize “*questioning as one of the attributes of truth*” (Aulagnier, 1996)<sup>3</sup>, cannot be an imperative ethics.

<sup>3</sup> Piera Aulagnier associates herself to the concept of “interpreted truth” of an alteritarian subject when she says that “*the secular questioning about the life of the psyche was radically subverted and deeply changed by the Freudian practice*”, that,



Psychoanalysis, being a field of questioned values, has to refuse a normative ethics that would deny historical individual and cultural differences and the singularity of the psychoanalytic act of interpretation. Thus, even though there is not a psychoanalytic ethics mistaken for a philosophical ethics, there is the ethics of the psychoanalyst who questions his practice and is confronted with the diversity of multiple values hierarchized by the different forms of being in each culture. If, through this questioning of a practice in its historical and sociocultural context, we expose the ethics of the psychoanalytic function, there must be an ethics of the psychoanalytic institution as it is associated to the formation of the psychoanalysts and to the “desire of the psychoanalyst” (Cottet, 1983), that Lacan (1986) theorizes in a proposal of permanent investigation. We could also infer, from Freudian theory and practice, an ethics, as we discover as Freud did, in his theorization associated, through the works of the “Frankfort School” (Rouanet, 1998), to criticism in modern age (Habermas, 1987), a critical theory of culture confronting us, through the issues of narcissism and the undestructibility of the unconscious desire, with the persistence of conflict in the symbolic. This interrogation of values can be associated to the ethical philosophies, enriching the critical thinking that leads us to denounce the illusions of desire, and can indicate the limits of psychoanalytic knowledge when it says that this knowledge is as partial and inconclusive as psychoanalysis – limited to an intersubjective field - is only a partial and conjectural knowledge. Because there are no ideological recipes for the course of the Oedipian structure, and because the truth that psychoanalysis discovers is the *partial* truth of desire, the conflict is a permanent conflict of values; and all we can do, as psychoanalysts who know that we cannot guide the analysand to his “true good”, is to help discover the limits of the “sensual and psychic” reality, that is, the impossibilities of the unconscious desire as expressed by the demand and the limits of knowledge established by the attribute of unknowability of the unconscious that Bion (1970, p.26) refers to as the sign “O”, denoting what is an impossible contradiction, the aspiration of the ideal absolute truth, the transcendental, the pure essence, the “thing in itself”.

Erich Fromm (1947), one of the first psycho-

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instead of searching, in the intimacy of ones conscious self, for a completely singular and/or universal truth, creates a relationship to the Other as a condition for a possible access to the *partial* truth of desire, for what cannot be represented as a simple access to oneself.



analysts to bring together ethics and psychoanalysis, in his social psychology based upon psychoanalytic concepts proposes an opposition between authoritarian ethics and humanistic ethics. As a critic of culture, Fromm emphasizes the value of questioning taken from Freudian theory. He also affirms that the psychoanalytic process is in itself a search for truth and “*neurosis itself, in a final analysis, is a system of moral collapse, although adaptation is not, in any sense, symptom of moral success*”. Fromm turns psychoanalysis into an ethical proposal associated to a humanistic philosophy using the concept of *biophilia*, the love for life, as the basis for his ethics that indicates a field of differentiated values; and associates itself to the preservation of the metonymic displacement of the unconscious desire. Fromm’s proposal gives in to a romantic individualism, exaggerating his humanism in a naturalistic ethics with stoic resonances from an anthropological model, in principle reducible to the dimension of consciousness. How-

ever he does describe the destructive “necrophilic” moral conscience, and, in keeping with Freudian suggestion of the permanence of conflict, he tells us how the authoritarian conscious feeds on sadism (Vital-Brazil, 1993), thus allowing the destructive impulses to act under the disguise of virtue, making room for a savage capitalism. This predatory capitalism, in his interpretation of the ethical discussions of master Eckhart, favors “To Have” over “To Be” (Fromm, 1976). It can transform into merchandise any cultural product; deform, under the perspective of immediate profit, the entire cultural project, and maintain the hypocrisy of the distortions of values in the social field that associates justification with an ethics of repression.

Freud (1923) had already convincingly demonstrated that interpretation as a symbolic act indicates, through the wish for recognition and the concept of an Ideal of the Ego, that the individual tries to maintain his symbolic identification close to collective values. But Fromm (1973), as he questions primary aggressiveness, does not consider these Freudian findings, and runs the risk of breaching the inclusive opposition individual/collective as he supervalues the individual in a social ethics associated to an utopian Marxist humanism (Fromm, 1956) that tends to deny that conflict is permanent and suggests that the civilization process could have a conclusion in the “brotherhood of man”. We do not have to accept Fromm’s interpretation of Freud when he writes that Freud would have identified moral conscience with the superego. The instance of the superego in Freud, if we recognize the structural point of view,



is clearly a topical concept that has its unconscious dimension, a psychic instance that cannot be isolated from the second topic which has to be considered in relation to the phenomenology of individual and collective guilt, maintains a reference to the ideals of realization of the individual and does not necessarily identify itself entirely with the authoritarian conscious. The inevitable antagonism, postulated by Freud (1930) between the “*instinctual demands and the restrictions imposed by culture*”, comes from his recognition of the inclusive opposition that reunites the individual to the collective in the argumentative reason of practical discourse around what he called superego (*Überich*), as one of the instances of his second topology that gave dominance to the structural point of view. This concept clarifies the feeling of guilt, and therefore suggests an ethics which is always oscillating between the individual morals and the collective values of a particular culture.

This collective “moral order”, individualized in a personal history, can be understood as giving itself in association to an antecedent of the superego: the Ideal of the Ego as a constant that, besides mediating the relationships with the imaginary, regulates the successive identifications of the Ego with the images around individual values and permits symbolic identification. Giving specific recognition to this Ideal Ego as it accesses the order of the symbolic, Freud (1920) raises the question of narcissism and associates the formation of the subjective Ego to the values of the social group. Thus he gives to this inclusive opposition individual/collective, that structures the issue of the unconscious desire, cultural representation and symbolic production, a value of “presentation” (*Darstellung*), that gives basis to the hermeneutic experience (Gadamer, 1960) and recognizes interpretation as a symbolic act identified with the “historical conscious” (Gadamer, 1999)<sup>1</sup>. This is how Freud can give to *Darstellung* the sense of referring to the updated problems of the unconscious representations, placing the interpretative act in a context and making a productive intersection with the differentiated problems of presentation and decision – or of the essentially narrative and rhetorical movement of a dynamic unconscious (Chaitin, 1996) that expresses itself through language throughout time – and discovers its efficiency of symbolic determination as it establishes meanings and values

<sup>1</sup> Gadamer's hermeneutic, that tries to find through interpretation the clear meaning of culture and human truths, opposes truth and method, and denounces the objectivity of the “explanation” (*Erklärung*) of the sciences that depend on the demonstrative proof of a restrictive positivism. Searching for a dialogic dimension of men in history, Gadamer speaks to us about two hermeneutic approaches of comprehension that cannot be reduced to the method and brings together science and art: men's comprehension of his historical tradition and the comprehension in experiencing aesthetic pleasure. In his definition of modernity, he emphasizes the theme of historical consciousness referring to history's interpretative dimension that values language and he writes: “It is the modern man's privilege to have full consciousness of the historicity of every present and of the relativity of every opinion”.

in the social dimension and gives direction to the historical development of culture. When we read Freud (1923), who differentiates between moral consciousness, superego and the feeling of guilt, we are already referred to the conflict in the intersection between Id (*Es*), Ego (*Ich*) and Superego (*Überich*). This conflict becomes evident in the psychoanalytic act of interpretation, which recognizes the “alteritarian” unconscious, indicates the real and restores the symbolic function. Any romanticism or utopia is denied in the Freudian skeptical *realism*, which establishes that the conflict, between the individual and the collective, is insolvable.

When Freud (1916) suggests that “we should listen to the gentle voice of reason”, he leads us to his “*ethics of the signified difference*”<sup>2</sup> related to a process which, if put in dialectic terms between “I and the Other”, associates the “gentleness” of reason not to cold reasoning, or to rationality as the epiphenomenon of a human nature, but to skeptical reason that makes the psychoanalyst part of the search for truth (Vital-Brazil, 1999), and has to deny acceptance to the meanings produced by an interpreter, the unique texts of a phenomenological Ego (represented by the pronoun “I”) that interprets his history according to his own desire. It is this renunciation of the produced meanings that takes us to the interpretative activity in a process which is, according to Levenson (1972, p.21), a search for the “relevance of truth” in a field of changing values also determined by the conjuncture, the “here and now” of an intersubjective field where one lives the interpretation of the meaning. This search for the *partial* truth of the unconscious desire – a truth that, since Hobbes and his “theory of fictions” (Lebrun, 1983), has a “structure of fiction” -, that psychoanalysis establishes as relevant in a specific sociocultural context, uses the concept of a dynamic unconscious to shape an interpretative practice which recognizes the value and the “effectiveness of the symbolic” (Lévy-Strauss, 1967, p.216) expressed through words. This interpretative practice differentiates the “phenomenological I who speaks” from the subject as a function of an intersubjective field, a subject who is an inconclusive “becoming” and who only comes about in this interpretative context. The Freudian ethics is built, thus, on a practice and on the structuring genesis of an aphorism which imposes a permanent injunction: “*Wo Es war soll Ich werden*”. This we may translate, recognizing the differentiation between the narcissistic Ego and the Subject as a function of intersubjectivity, in a more extensive manner: “Where It (*Id, Es*) was the I (*Ego, Ich*) as a Subject shall come to be”. This Freudian injunction, not

<sup>2</sup> Emphasizing the concept of structure, as it indicates the sociocultural determinism of phenomena and associates psychoanalysis to the social sciences, Freudian ethics could be said to be an “ethics of the signified difference” (Rinaldi, 1996) that gives relevance to the partial truth of the unconscious desire, and defines a “politics of the singularity” as “the necessity of making commitments to a particular collective good”.



normative since it does not refer to contents or attributes of this subject, only indicates a being who can only be “as longing to be” in the structuring void between an It (*Es, Id*) and an I (*Ego, Ich*) condemned to incompleteness, an unsubstantial Subject as a function<sup>1</sup> of an intersubjective field that indicates an “I who still is not and never will be”. A subject who poses a permanent question because of death and the unconscious, an I cast as a subject only intended in a field of values where the metonymical displacement of the unconscious desire refers it to a becoming, to an inconclusive process of “coming to be” that also indicates a process of interpretative questioning, and the necessary mobilization of unconscious developments in this I (*Ego*) that tells us of the demand for analysis when *it asks itself about its desire*.

This injunction, which takes the interpreting subject to the practice of a process, is directed to the unconscious desire and is different, according to Lacan (1966, p.765) in his opening article on the questioning of ethics from the psychoanalytic point of view – *Kant avec Sade* –, from Kant's and Sade's ethic imperatives which intend to stand as universal norms. The Kantian categorical imperative, as the maxim of Sade, “*gets its authority from the imperative of moral law*” and must apply “*to all cases*”, thus disregarding any value that appears in the singular process of a practice of discovery that can be accepted or rejected. These imperatives disregard the relative autonomy of the psychic organization in a culture that establishes a hierarchy of values. They deny that the ethical order is equivalent to the symbolic order and organizes experience in different ways. They do not consider the unconscious desire demanding for the realization of the impossible. Lacan, in this article, tells us how the death of desire can come about, in Kant, by the universality of the law that has no object because it refers to the imposing of an ideal of a model subject of humanity; and by the extinction of the law and the disappearance of the subject in the fixation of the desire in an object, as in the “Sadian phantasmatic” which excludes any reciprocity. In Kant, the subject only encounters the law when “*it does not have any object before itself*”, and in Sade's *Philosophie dans le Boudoir* (1986) the object is impossibly reduced to a body as an “orgastic object”, an object of violent “enjoyment” (*jouissance*). Neither of the two extreme imperatives consider the law of symbolic castration which is opposed to the fantasy of omnipotence. They do not even consider the regulation of individualized desire in a story to be interpreted. These extremes do not consider the Oedipian structure in its value

of “normalization” of unconscious desire that gives dominance to the ternary logic of the symbolic and imposes the creative act in living. This makes the Freudian aphorism, referring to the appearance of the subject as a function, a guideline, not only because the “*Wo Es war*” injunction, included in a conceptual scheme, orients us in a practice and is justified in the theory of this practice, but because it points to the “*essential vocation of the imaginary as symbol*” (Lacan, 1966, p.457).

The “subject of knowledge and unknowledge”, that appears as a function of the intersubjective field, the *intended* subject of psychoanalysis that is associated to the interpretative act, indicates a process based on an ethics that has truth as its basic value in a productive intersubjective field of meanings. This psychoanalytic act, as it deconstructs the reiterating meanings of repetition, produces new meanings associated to the displacement of the unconscious desire, thus making the practice of psychoanalysis a denouncement which takes place in a process of discovery that undoes the illusions of meaning. In one of Freud's (1937) last works, we find this valuation of the psychoanalytic process referring to truth and based on the assumption of consciousness as error: “*The psychoanalytic situation*”, he says, “*is based on the love for truth, that is, in its acknowledgment, which should exclude any illusion and any error*”. This love for truth, for a truth that can only be “half said”, a *partial* truth since there is no conclusive truth that could be formulated and totally defined, keeps the psychoanalytic act in a process of displacement and disillusion which are associated to the ethics of the psychoanalyst in a permanent tension of conflict. As Lacan says (1977, p.292), “*truth is founded on the supposition of the untrue, it is a contradiction*”, it is, in its proposition, the denouncement of illusion and error, and the psychoanalyst satisfied to denounce “what is not”, takes the narcissistic Ego to a confrontation with the symbolic castration, to its “subjective destitution” and the incompleteness of being.

As we try to establish an ethics for the psychoanalyst's function, we can quote Lacan (1977<sup>a</sup>, p.292) when he discovers the “*subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire*”, and say that a proposition that presents itself as impossible shows us that “*far from giving in to a logicizing reduction where desire is concerned, we discover its irreducibility to demand, and what prevents its referral to a need*”, we discover the peculiarity and the uniqueness of desire in the “*sole discourse that is convenient* (which is) *ethical and not psychological*”. Since we overcame the dream Assman (1997) ascribes to Freud of an universal “cosmotheistic ethics” in his book on *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939), and accepted the “*nomotropic desire*” (Santner, 1999) implicit in the event-structure imposed by a “law of covenant” and the cultural modes of normativity that we find in a moral and political being, we are referred to this discourse that is irreducible to any biological con-

<sup>1</sup> Defining the subject as a function implies using the linguistic model to say that this subject is caused by the articulation of the signifiers, and it is not substantial (in the sense of Aristotle's *ousia*). This subject is not a thing but is a *hypokeimenon*, a *supposition* that finds its material basis when we can conceive that it is constituted between what Freud called “thing representation” (*Sachvorstellung*) and “word representation” (*Wortvorstellung*).



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ception or to the conscious proffered meaning. This living discourse, which takes place in a field of scattered values, confronts us with the difference and forces the engagement in intersubjectivity where one lives the conflict of values, and it indicates an ethics that implies the “suspension” (*Aufhebung*) of the psychoanalyst ambition of power who consequently will not use the power that is given to him by the transference phenomenon, the power of influence that could impose his own values. The psychoanalyst as the *practitioner of the symbolic function*, that “may want not to desire”, does his subjective *ascesis* and places himself as a function of the intersubjective field. He uses the instrument of interpretation and can always recognize, by the symbol *reunion* - in the mathematical sense of set theory -, the conjunction of an intersubjective field that deconstructs the reiterating meanings of repetition. As the meanings are deconstructed, he facilitates the change of subjective positions, and keeps the metonymic displacement of unconscious desire as imaginary fixations are undone and the accomplishment of the narcissistic destitution of the subject is favored, demonstrating the impossibilities of the unconscious desire.

What is necessary, in a process guaranteed by the “psychoanalytic frame” (Bleger, 1966) and by the psychoanalyst’s ethics, is the transit from a primitive world of unconscious fantasies, ruled by the pleasure/displeasure principle and a binary logic of exclusion, to a moralized and legalized personal world, directed by a reality principle in the historic and sociocultural context that recognizes the difference between the possible and the impossible, giving credit to the ternary symbolic logic of creativity. This reality principle, in *inclusive* opposition to the pleasure/unpleasure principle, does not do away with the imaginary and does not bring about any numbness of desire, since “psychic reality” itself (*Realität*) – differentiated from the Real or “material reality” (*Wirklichkeit*) – is a field of values where unconscious desire is inscribed. It is in this field of a differentiated psyche, that we can recognize the ineffable object that Alcibiades looked for in Socrates’s body, as is shown in Lacan’s reading (1961) of Plato’s “Banquet”: the object as a “treasure of image” – *agalma* – defining the relation *éras-tes / erómenos* between “To Have” and “To Be”, two manners of relating to the lack of the primary object (the “mother’s image”) which demonstrate that the “lover” substitutes the “loved” and isolates the object itself as the desiring subject. This substitution gives to the subject who desires – the *éras-tes*, the “lover” – the possibility of a dynamic “being” (in the sense of “wanting to be” according to his own desire) instead of a static “having”, bringing another meaning to the subject of desire that may “wish to be desired” as a secondary and intentional wish; and relating the unconscious desire to the radical “otherness” (*alterity*) of the great Other who can say that desire cannot be reduced to the relation subject/object if we refer the subject of desire to the oedipian structure, but desire is de-

sire of another desire, is desire to be desired in the permanent displacement in relation to substitutive objects, symbolic objects which make history.

What one intends, in the psychoanalytic practice and in the differentiation of this desiring subject, is to emphasize the passage from the *anomia* of the unconscious - a syntactic hypothetical structure ruled by the binary logic of all or nothing - to the naming of values. From the impersonality of a “pulsional” (drive, *Trieb*, *pulsion*)<sup>1</sup> erogenous body, through proscription and prescription of a field of values, in the context of a cultural heritage where values are inscribed, the “corporal Ego” (*körperliches Ich*) appears as subject in an ethical field of meanings in language. This field of values will “re-establish” itself in the deconstruction of meanings through the interpreting activity of the subject, and through the denouncement that the act of interpretation brings to a story where one is searching for the truth of the subject as the structuring of symbols representing the law and the ideal. We could say with Lacan (1966, p.765), that Freud could only state his pleasure/unpleasure principle, surpassing the prejudices of traditional ethics, which were part of the “*various myths of bliss*” in the XIX century, because the Sadian theme of happiness in evil was already appearing, forcing the acknowledgment of an untold truth in the uniqueness of each individual history and highlighting the “*polymorphism of perversion*”. This hidden truth – the *partial* truth of desire - would have to be uncovered even if it was against the values of the psychoanalyst’s conscience. The analyst would thus be involved in the conflict of values, and be part of the “transferential neurosis”.

Denying that psychoanalysis can be reduced to a psychology of intentions, we can find the psychoanalyst’s ethics in its function, and value the conflict model used by Freud in his theory once more. If psychoanalysis were, in its practice, a mere corrective psychological experience having the psychoanalyst as a model, it would have to state the positivity of an Ego (*Ich*) that could, in its unity, tell the truth and “all the truth”, denying the alterity principle and the determinism of an achronic and unknowable unconscious. It would state a knowledge by the psychoanalyst who would guide – as representative of a reality, thus reestablishing the equation knowledge/power – the patient to the fulfillment of his “real good”. The analyst would use the power that the transference phenomenon gives him, using suggestions necessarily associated to the adaptation to a social and historical reality, given as unquestionable and not

<sup>1</sup> This neologism, “pulsional”, is intended to call attention to the mistaken english translation for instinct of the german word *trieb*. It is already clear in Freud the distinction between the wholly psychical “pulsion” (drive, *trieb*) - that indicates a reality always “phantasmatic” differentiated from the real in its substantial “raw” state - and instinct (*Instinkt*) that can be referred to the biological drives. As Sullivan and Lacan theories implicitly suggest, Freud’s english translators blur this distinction between *trieb* and *instinkt* – and consequently the distinction between reality and the real - by translating both terms as instinct.



open to criticism. However, if we say that psychoanalysis is associated to critical thinking, and that it is the dialectics between the known and the unknown that brings us close to the language of desire, then we could say that psychoanalysis, by using in interpretation the concept of an unconscious “structured as a language”, and by indicating the inclusive opposition between the “two principles of psychical happening” (Freud, 1911), is hedonism’s own contestation. Thus we could postulate that the “true good” of any subject – its *Wunschvorstellung* or the representation of its desire –, is that the subject “does not know what it is, or even if it is” (Lacan, 1970), and there is no knowledge of the other that may constitute the absolute truth. It is exactly through the analyst’s failure to fulfill the demands of the patient that he will uncover the partial truth of desire and overcome a dilemma by stopping the search for an impossible accomplishment. In the discovery of a fundamental dialectic, in the field of meanings translated as ambivalence, the psycho-



analyst, recognizing that he is a product of the patient in the psychoanalytic act and has his place only as long as he is the object of transference, may come to formulate an ethics, not for psychoanalysis, since there exists no essence of a “psychoanalytic being”, but for the psychoanalyst in its function, in his practice accepting the narcissistic destitution and being able to undo the equation knowledge/power by the suspension of his judgment, that is, by resisting the narcissistic temptation that is always present, to use the power of influence of his own values. This suspension (*Aufhebung*) of desire that Freud (1937) could identify as the “assumption of the symbolic castration” associated to the end of analysis, requires a subjective position where there is a “hesitation of being” (Vital-Brazil, 1998), a radical doubt about the at-

tributes of an existence, forcing the psychoanalyst to have at least begun this “mourning of being”, the acceptance of an original “lack of being” (*manque-à-être*) which indicates the narcissistic destitution or subjective destitution. It is toward this situation that the psychoanalyst calls the patient in the direction of the cure, and it is this subjective position of the subject of doubt that brings to us the issue of transference linked to the structure of the discourse that implies only a *supposed* subject, a subject referred to the supposition of knowledge (the “*sujet supposé savoir*”) that only sustains itself, through transference and as assumption, while there is the recognition of a radically alteritarian unconscious.

We can thus agree with Lacan (1977), when he discovers the singularity of the psychoanalytic act and indicates that the subject, the basis of symbolic function, only accomplishes itself legitimately in this function when in search for the partial truth of the unconscious desire, that can refer us to the limits of psychic reality. Through this value of truth, psychoanalysis, placed in modern times with its “love for the inapprehensible” (Baudelaire, 1995) and being much more than a therapeutic method, can denounce in the “post modern condition” (Lyotard, 1984) the “*disenchantment with the spectacle of the world*” (Diggins, 1995) of a narcissistic culture. It can refer us to a “paradigm of complexity” (Thom, 1972), to a demanding “risk society” (Beck, 1989) dedicated to the “speed of change” in which we no longer live in compliance with nature or tradition, in which there is no symbolic order in the sense of a “*code of accepted fictions*” (Sizak, 1999) that could be permanent, and we are more close to Heraclitus and time as the core of reality than to the static ideas of Plato’s universe. It is in this postmodern age of globalization, of a digitalized and “computerized” world in which the formations of the unconscious (from dreams to hysterical symptoms) have lost their innocence, that psychoanalysis can discover its statute as a conjunctural science that situates itself between fact and fiction with a “probabilistic style” (Crombie, 1995) as it demonstrates, through the psychoanalytic interpretation, that the reality of the symbolic does not cover all of the real and makes evident the incompleteness of being, the relativization of all knowledge and the constitutive splitting of the subject. Differing from the psychotherapies – which take effect in the ambition for cure – psychoanalysis can criticize the present meaning of a pragmatism, aiming at objectivity and based on the utilitarian value of the effectiveness of action, as a value in this “informational age” defined by an ideology that quantifies information and associates it to the power of influence. The ideology of a neo-pragmatism (Rorty, 1980), that postulates the utilitarian value of effectiveness of action and reestablish the equation power/knowledge in a world dominated by the triumph of technology, imposes changes in the psychotherapeutic practices in search of social recognition that dilutes or even





disregards entirely the concept of the unconscious and the value of truth, and takes us back to a model of a positivistic science, referred in principle to “objective measurement”, that is empty of any humanistic value (Vital-Brazil, 1977) and complies with a social demand for adaptative results according to the values that are imposed by this dominant ideology.

What is required from the psychoanalyst is an ethics that does not deny psychoanalysis when possible and does not take from psychoanalysis its value of truth, its subversive value, its questioning and denunciation value. The specificity of its object places psychoanalysis as a project that does not impose a knowledge and does not cover an exercise of power, not even the benign power of influence that guides, orients and supports, and can prescribe modes of intimacy and relatedness. Intending through interpretation of the partial truth of desire to be accomplished as a process that subverts the subject's relation with its own history as a change of a subjective position is recognized, psychoanalysis, as it undoes the imaginary fixations of the subject, cannot predict the “politics” of the unconscious desire, and confronts with the possibilities of decision and choice of a relative and *finite* freedom. As it establishes itself in a practice, that by its “effects of freedom” transforms the imaginary fixation in conflict in the symbolic, or in Freudian terms, “the neurotic anguish in common human suffering”, psychoanalysis, reaffirming the principle of negativity of a skeptical reason, prevents the meaning from closing about itself, renounces the signified and maintains the metonymic displacement of desire giving all relevance to a “chain of signifiers”. It comes to designate its ideal goal as the narcissistic destitution of the subject, and it confronts with the essentially finite nature of the human scale, when it indicates the difficulties and impossibilities of the unconscious desire, points to the subjective destitution and brings up the presence of death between the realized meaning and the total absence of meaning.

The psychoanalyst's ethic at issue is thus along with his availability to listen, to affirm as a fundamental value the *recognition* of a determinism of the unconscious desire, and to make space for chance and contingency in a narrative-interpretive paradigm as this hypothetical construct, used in interpretative elaborations of an intersubjective field, reveals the limits of a knowledge restricted by the context where the interpretation takes place and makes the differentiation - emphasizing the attribute of incognoscibility of the unconscious - between deciphering and decoding, revealing the *cryptogram*, a cipher designed as an ambiguous puzzle that is not exhausted by the act of interpretation, and refers to the unrepresentable and to the inaccessibility of the real. From this position of recognition of the hypothetical construct of an *alteritarian* unconscious, we are placed in an intersubjective field of meanings that accepts the difference and is opposed to any judgement that implies the

narcissistic accomplishment of a scale of values. This particular position of the psychoanalyst, from which he departs and to which he always returns, is to recognize the function of the unknown, knowing that error is functional in relation to truth. This position is one that recognizes the interpretative activity of a limited intersubjective field of an ephemeral encounter, and maintains that psychoanalysis with its questioning and subversive value is unable to expect social recognition for obtained results. One cannot command the real or the “game of the signifiers”, and there is not for the psychoanalyst something beyond the psychoanalytic act as the accomplishment of his own good. The psychoanalyst can only accomplish the psychoanalytic act when he places himself in the Other's place as the place (*tópos*) of the alteritarian unconscious, and is able to erase his “I (*ego*) of opinion”, if he can, based on the psychoanalytic frame, surpass his narcissism to place himself as a “ternary constituent” that establishes the real/symbolic relation to be used in a relationship until it is exhausted as a useless object, in a radical “*renouncement ethics*” which is accomplished in the interpretation as a symbolic act.

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