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Debate

Fascination and horror about psychoanalysis. Reflections on C. Gheorghe's article "Decolonization, polarization, psychoanalysis, privilege"

L. Poenaru

Centre Médical de Peillonex, Chêne-Bourg 1225, Switzerland

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"Freud is a great writer, an easy one, if you like. As for Freudianism, it is an embalmed discipline that turns on itself, it uses a language that is false in relation to the normal codes, interfering less and less with the outside world."
Marguerite Duras (Duras, 1989), *La passion suspendue*. Interviews with Leopoldina Pallotta della Torre.

Addressing the intersection of two polemical concepts, psychoanalysis and the University, exposes us to the intersection of various taboos that risk parasitizing the logical coherence of our proposal. The taboos of psychoanalysis are well-known, since they are at the origin of its exclusion from academic and clinical circles: persistence of theoretical dogmas, methodological and epistemological failures, etc. The taboos of the University do not confront us with controversies concerning the individual unconscious, but rather with those concerning the economic unconscious. The latent elements of the economic unconscious have been largely integrated by the public and institutions thanks to economic propaganda and the standards of modern life, which exploit the individual unconscious to the point of saturation. In the case of the University, it is increasingly a matter of industrial and corporatist way of knowing (Gaudillière, 2015) and determining what knowledge is legitimate; that seems to lead to aberrations in the evaluation of research (Gingras, 2014) and to capitalist logics based on the production, extraction and permanent accumulation of knowledge for the profits of the military-industrial complex (*innovate to win the*

war – Rasmussen, 2015). Probably in this case, as elsewhere, we are in a binary perspective (as we will see with Gheorghe; in press) or even algorithmic: target or waste, 0 or 1, go or die.

"Some universities, such as Manchester or Paris VI, will have as their only reference their world position in (academic) research. They will be evaluated and will find their public and private funds according to the international rankings that will have been imposed in the European and world market" (Laredo & Paradeise, 2010, §20).

This complex system of "laws", disciplinary norms, guidelines, scores, measures, monitoring, regulations, financing, rewards and creation of professional careers has become, consciously or unconsciously, consensual; on it depends the future of those who project themselves into a high level professional future, assuming the accumulation of capital and knowledge.

"The 'keep on knowing' imperative that sustains the knowledge regime contains a dual requirement: to organize knowledge in such a way that it serves the production of subjects of capitalism and contributes to the stabilization of the economic Other", Tomšič (2015) suggests.

The economic Other (to which Gheorghe is interested – 2022, in press) and the effects of its colonial and binary "laws" on university research leads, as Pardo-Guerra (2022) notes, to a loss of diversity, to standardization and to a remodelling of researchers' motivations by the binary logic of loss and profit. Concerning the Other, let us remember that it concerns the individual, society, the economy, but also research fields, whether psychoanalytical or not. Let us note as a preliminary that the big Other – at the origin of the capacity of symbolization according to the laws of a society (Lévi-Strauss, 1958) – is currently embodied rather by the corporatist fathers and by the artificial intelligence and not by the fathers of the traditional nuclear family of Freud's time. It is no longer a question of phallus, of masters or mentors. Therefore, to clarify the framework of our work, what psychoanalysis are we talking about in the face of the Cyber-Other? Should we redefine the very field of psychoanalysis? Also, which University are we talking about and how can psychoanalysis find its place in this context governed by profit?

E-mail address: liviu.poenaru@gmail.com

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For the great Other of cybercapitalism seems to be less patriarchal, more fragmented/disseminated, more omnipotent, more calculating, more seductive, more anticipatory, more programmatic, more machinic, more invasive, more viral, more addictive, more helpful, more perverse, more invulnerable. Its presence only reminds us of a power that is more and more uncontrollable, such as the obligation to produce content (scientific or not), to let ourselves be injected by *non-self objects*, and not to favor various symbolic processes, bearers of a subjective enunciation to be put at the disposal of the communication with the real other and its uncertainties.

“Offering both creative and destructive possibilities, perversion challenges boundaries and norms in every area of life and involves transgression, illusion casting, objectification, dehumanization, and the radical quest for transcendence” (Knafo & Lo Bosco, 2017, cover).

How then does psychoanalysis (whether clinical or academic) fit into this framework? For the symbolic law of cybercapitalism is economic, corporatist, virtual and operates, like Cambridge Analytica,¹ offshore, in labyrinthine networks of corporations that allow one to lose track of who made the law while circumventing it, and while giving humanity a model of symbolization that has become fraudulent, transgressive, and extraterritorial. With the social influence and the ordinary addiction to the digital, stimulated by the corporatist fathers in collaboration with the engineers of the Net, it becomes clear that the unconscious becomes essentially economic, since it's been colonized by an abundance of contents of economic nature that redesign the individual driving dynamics and the internal conflicts. These are the main factors responsible for the constitution of the economic unconscious, supported by the institutions, the universities and the dominant policies. It is thus an economic unconscious of which psychoanalysis, sciences, society and individuals pay the price. What laws should we recall in psychoanalysis in the face of the major changes we are seeing?

It is therefore in this borderline context in rapid change, which clearly arouses fascination and horror, knowledge and wars (military, economic and psychological), totems and taboos, that we ask the preliminary question of this commentary: Which of the two universes, that of psychoanalysis or that of the academic–military–industrial complex, is more guilty of dogmatism, perversion, colonialism or binarity? Many will say that the answer is not difficult to give. Let us admit, indulgently or not (if some of us consider that the current military–industrial complex is leading to the dismantling of the world), that each field, like each individual, presents its ambivalences, its attempts to take power, its intricacies and entanglements of life and death drives, and let us be interested more specifically in the case of psychoanalysis by starting from the debate that Cosmin Gheorghe (2022, in press) opens within the framework of the present issue of the journal *In Analysis*, issue devoted to “Psychoanalysis at the University”.

“Decolonization, polarization, psychoanalysis, privilege: toward a cosmopolitan and culturally intelligent psychotherapist” by C. Gheorghe

In his opening contribution to the debate, Cosmin Gheorghe, a clinician and professor in San Francisco (California, USA), chooses to give less importance to the usual criticisms of psychoanalysis and to

¹ Cambridge Analytica is a British “Non-Financial Management Consulting” company combining digital data mining and analysis tools. The company is at the center of a global scandal in 2018, accused of organizing the “extraction” of the personal data of 87 million Facebook users in order to target pro-Brexit messages in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the US in 2016.

focus our attention on the advantages of non-dogmatism in the broad sense, implying the less explicit one of capitalism. Indeed, the latter, while developing the inescapable globalisation, technologies, communication or integration of multiculturalism, simultaneously generates a dominant and colonising culture attached to a binary thinking (also present in psychoanalytical epistemology).

The field of cultural intelligence is, according to Gheorghe, one of the ways toward the elimination of binary thinking, which also underlies psychotherapeutic perspectives. The solution would be a cosmopolitan psychotherapy including a plurality of concepts and theoretical orientations with the aim of decolonising our knowledge and our psyche. In other words, it would be a matter of prioritising, also from a psychoanalytical perspective, a multimodal, nuanced and culturally sensitive psychotherapy. The result would be a unified mind-body approach, in which research and evidence-based practices are not reduced to a medical, pathology-based model. It would not be reduced to neither the cognitive-behavioural therapies in vogue in today's neo-liberal culture of extreme individualism, nor to an obsolete psychoanalysis based on the description of the white male in the early 20th century industrial society.

Binary thinking seems to be correlated with a radical (fundamentalist) individualism, as well as a neo-liberal and colonial mentality, which are rapidly being adopted by many other social systems (nations, cultures), to remain economically competitive at the global level.

“[T]he idea is not whether to teach or not psychoanalysis in universities. But rather how much and what kind of psychoanalysis would benefit more the future generations of therapists. In many countries, psychoanalysis still is the main approach to psychotherapy, leaving little or no space for other models and theories. In the United States, on the other hand, there is every model you can imagine, while many training programs rarely offer a solid psychoanalytic perspective, focusing on whatever is trendy in psychotherapy at the time. This is a great example of binary, colonial thinking, where the newcomers completely replace one theory with another, throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater, and replacing it with their own tub, soap, and preferred newborn”. (Gheorghe, 2022, in press).

Working with the psyche within the individual must include, according to Gheorghe, equal attention to a bidirectional relationship with the collective (social, professional, and personal relationships), as with the environment (ecopsychology). In his argument, the author insists on the devastating effect of binary thinking and extreme individualism (caring for the individual while allowing relationships and the world around us to decay) which has pushed life “off stage”, becoming “ob-scene” (Baudrillard, 1981). The reality of extreme individualism (which has been largely promoted and reinforced by psychotherapeutic practices) would thus have fractured and alienated the world around us. This observation calls for the promotion of non-binary and non-dogmatic psychotherapies, taking into consideration policies that fracture the individual in order to put him or her on the tracks of productivity.

Gheorghe agrees with Eric Kandel, 2002 that psychoanalysis still is a “coherent and intellectually satisfying view of the mind”, but is perplexed by the assumption that this view automatically applies worldwide.

“Why would psychoanalysis be *the most* coherent and intellectually satisfying to *all and any culture*? To what extent psychoanalysis is relevant at all, let alone *most satisfying*, to people in California, Madagascar, the Amazonian jungle of Peru, Afghanistan's new Taliban government, or the gypsy community from Timisoara, Romania?” (Gheorghe, 2022, in press).

It is in this context that cultural intelligence becomes not an option but an imperative, he suggests, since for many cultures psychoanalysis seems to represent a rigid framework into which the psychoanalyst attempts to fit them, in the name of healing their minds, their lives and perhaps their souls. And since “every dogma generates an opposite dogma”, it appears that in many European universities psychoanalysis is the law, while in the so-called progressive American universities, in the name of liberation and freedom, an anti-intellectual approach has been born, with supporters as dogmatic as some of the followers of Freud and Lacan.

The author concludes:

“As history has repeatedly demonstrated, there is no decolonization if that process results into a new class of colonizers imposing their paradigm. Decolonial thinking doesn't mean exchanging one dogma with another; but rather striving to escape the rigidity and simplism of binary thinking and learning to see the world as macro and micro networks of systems, deeply interconnected at multiple levels” (Gheorghe, 2022, in press).

Subversion, autonomy, normativity

Our author introduces us to an original critical universe, identifying binarity, colonialism and extreme individualism in capitalism as well as in all therapeutic approaches, including psychoanalysis. We could argue that psychoanalysis from the outset had a subversive and liberating aim, resisting the imperialist imperatives of science and industry, questioning the subject not in its relationship to the environment, to its prescriptions and to its standards, but to the singularity of its drives and fantasies, which are necessarily outside the norms. But was its goal to make a normed subject, to let him develop outside the norms, or to help him reposition himself in a critical perspective vis-à-vis the norms in order to find/create a new singularity, more autonomous and with fewer pathological effects? As far as I know, these options have never been clear to the psychoanalytic perspective.

In any case, Marcuse's (1992) position comes to mind: psychoanalysis has failed to diagnose the general disorder (that of society, economy, politics). The sociological diagnosis would, it seems to me, make it possible to relieve anxieties, shames and guilt which are generally attributed to the psychic maturity of the individual, to his defensive capacities, to his memory and rarely to a society which makes him sick. It is, of course, simpler to say that it is his family or his unconscious that did not make him a “self-made man” in the good tradition of the “American way of life”.

It is very unfortunate to note that clinical psychology textbooks, as well as postgraduate training in psychotherapy (whether psychoanalytically oriented or not) rarely if ever address the issue of social pathologies. Elias (2010) provides a fictional and exemplary illustration of an academic who is going through a state of anxiety that could also be linked to his academic profession characterized by a structural statutory insecurity:

“One cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that there is some affinity between the structure of the personality and the disciplinary and social structure of the profession chosen by a scientist. But, in any case, a psychiatrist's diagnosis and – perhaps even more so – his therapeutic prescriptions would be incomplete if they were not informed by a clear sociological diagnosis relating to these – and other – aspects of the patient's occupation. This is a largely unexplored area of social psychiatry” (Elias, 2010, p.53).

Unfortunately, this domain – to be extended to the whole environment – remains repressed in psychiatry as in other clinical approaches. Nevertheless, it seems essential that any treatment

consider this angle. From a sociological perspective, [Cabe & Robert-Tanguy, 2008](#) consider that the sociological diagnosis:

“goes beyond simple observations to provide an understanding of the determinants and characteristics of the behavior of actors within their organization, their representations, and their relationship with the system within which they interact. Sociological intervention thus seeks to decipher the modes of regulation of the socio-organizational system and the effects they produce, from the social, economic, technical point of view, and to identify the dynamics of action favorable to the development of the organization” (Cabe & Robert-Tanguy, 2008, p.40).

The same economic forces (colonial and individualistic as defined by [Gheorghe, 2022, in press](#)) teach and train therapists with the objective to treat the individual not the system. Thus, if an individual is injured, we have trained ourselves to treat the injury and not to confront the aggressor, especially since the aggressor we are talking about is often unnamable or part of the global consensus. The system, therefore, teaches us to remain (consciously or unconsciously) scientific accomplices. For, as [Watkins and Shulman \(2008\)](#) explain:

“Problems are identified and located at the level of individual. The system's contribution is obscured. Thus, understanding and helping one person or one family at a time is the predominant mode within the psy-complex (the industry surrounding the assessment and treatment of troubling emotions and deviant behaviors). In classes, system transformation is suggested as a secondary activity, but it is rarely listed in job descriptions of counselors, social workers, and psychologists. Basically, the psy-complex would not be thriving if it did not sustain the social system as presently constituted” (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. XI).

Or we may think of [Kosowski Sedgwick's, \(1990\)](#) criticism, along with all queer and gender theorists, of the normative character of psychoanalysis, a discipline that seems to have joined, in its ambivalence, the capitalist culture that decides what is normal and what is pathological according to the capacity for productivity:

“Psychoanalytic theory, at least in its quasi-astrological luxuriance of cross-taxonomies of physical zones, developmental stages, representational mechanisms and levels of consciousness, seemed to promise to introduce some amplitude into debates about what the differences between people are, but in the end, as it crossed many institutional boundaries, it became only the thinnest of metatheoretical disciplines, shining forth elegant operative entities such as the mother, the father, the pre-oedipal, the oedipus, the other or the Other. At the same time, in the institutional and less theorised confines of intra-psychoanalytic discourse, a severely normative ethical programme annihilating difference had long sheltered in the shadow of developmental narratives and metaphors of health and pathology” (Kosowski Sedgwick, 1990, p. 44-45).²

It is extremely important to hear Gheorghe's point that psychoanalysis remains dogmatic and therefore must aim for inclusiveness, plurality of perspectives and decolonisation. As it is of paramount importance to hear that the University also experiences, at a more subtle and imperialist level, colonialism and binarity. It seems to me, however, that this obscures or dismisses (certainly due to lack of space) many other epistemic, epistemological, and methodological issues that deserve to be recalled in this discussion related to psychoanalysis at the

² Translated from French by the author.

University. I have explored in a previous contribution (Poenaru, 2019) the presence and effects of cognitive dissonance and social-cognitive conflict (concepts emerging from social psychology) in psychoanalytic organisations and epistemology. One of the main dissonances seems to be generated by the confrontation of psychoanalysis with scientific theories and more broadly with multidisciplinary, placing the field at the limits of knowledge and, paradoxically, proposing knowledge outside scientific norms.

This observation allows us to identify a psychoanalytical malaise evident both in the successive internal conflicts and in the marginal place that the discipline occupies both in society and in academic circles. Psychoanalysts (Balint, 1948; Zusman, 2003; Mills, 2004; Cooper, 2008; Eisold, 2017; Heenen-Wolff, 2017; Kernberg, 2004, 2010; Zagermann, 2018) who are members of prominent psychoanalytic societies underline the totalitarian, dogmatic and sectarian functioning and the group impermeability. This can be understood as a borderline problem revealing an external group face that is too opaque (excessively filtering subjectivation/integration of reality) or even too conflictual (persecuted), and an internal face that is too open towards the knowledge of an unlimited and unknowable unconscious (opening up to dogma and axiomatic theoretical positions). The two layers of this psychoanalytical 'skin-ego' (Anzieu, 1992) interact and favour a quasi-autistic reverie, a defence mechanism by which an individual substitutes a daytime reverie for the pursuit of human relations, a kind of disconnection from his environment and reality, raising the question of the presence of the (theoretical) third parties.

It is possible to assert that psychoanalysis is in constant evolution and that it is practiced and thought of in multiple ways, more or less close to scientific culture. Our delimitation, which is certainly reductive, concerns general traits or an average that ignores, for reasons of space, the variability that can be observed around it (in particular the neuropsychanalytic current or that of psychosociology based on a psychoanalytic approach that can be found in the Anglo-Saxon schools). It is, of course, impossible to propose an exhaustive list of the epistemic, epistemological and methodological defaults of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, before questioning the theme that is at the heart of this commentary – the fascination and horror about psychoanalysis – let us point out a series of problems that may arise in practice and teaching:

- repression of environmental factors (social, economic, political, cultural, climatic) from the understanding of early development (reduced to a family nucleus isolated from the environment);
- repression of History (Mazurel, 2021);
- confusion between theory-research-clinic (Poenaru, 2021a);
- refusal of theoretical triangulation both in clinical interpretation and in the validation of qualitative and/or quantitative research results;
- reduction – in France, for instance – of the teaching of methodology, including research methodology, to clinical contents, to a curriculum isolated from the dynamics of the main field of scientific psychology (HCERES, 2018);
- persistence and systematic consolidation of patriarchal ideology through using the Oedipus complex as the basis of individual psychological organisation;
- misunderstanding of the 'scientificity of psychoanalysis' – a subject repeatedly discussed in the framework of the journal *In Analysis*;
- repression – paradoxically – of subjectivation (as evidenced by LGBTIQ+ minorities);
- non-development of the "Critical Ego" (an instance that can only favor mentalization, metacognitions and better defenses against an environment that saturates, exploits, exhausts and modifies individual neuro-cognitive-behavioral structures for profit and manipulation).

Fascination and horror about psychoanalysis

It is obvious that psychoanalysis arouses fascination and horror, certainly much more than other scientific fields, which places it at the edges and even produces its exclusion from academic and clinical circles. Fascination because it remains the discipline that has gone the furthest in unveiling the unspeakable as well as in discovering individual conflicts, fantasies and drives – revealing also the horror of *fundamental violence* (Bergeret, 1984), of *private madness* (Green, 1990), or the *Civilisation and its Discontents* (Freud, 1930). Freud discovered the dynamic unconscious, a sort of dark continent of humanity within which obscure, unspeakable, shameful, singular drive conflicts are conducted. We will always be indebted to him for his insight into the multiplicity of psychic movements and for his hypotheses concerning their origins and fates. Listening to these psychic zones that are irreducible to the established order, whether social or scientific, is what makes psychoanalysis original, while at the same time being the source of epistemological misunderstandings and, in particular, the confusion between theory, research and the clinic.

However, if psychoanalysis has resisted imperialism and scientific control by remaining on the sidelines – at its own risk and peril – it seems to have exposed itself, due to a lack of third scientific parties, to sometimes very serious errors (the example of the treatment of autism is only the tip of the iceberg?) of reasoning that have generated aversions and fright. Why is this? Does the explanation lie solely, as the proponents of psychoanalysis often repeat, in the unconscious' repulsive inability to express itself, or is it also due to its techniques, epistemology and theories as suggested above?

Let us be subversive and free in our associations until the end, and ask some more questions. What if psychoanalysis was also a prison gate, a framework where one learns to come to terms with life, with voluntary servitude, with the rules, with the certainties of its axiomatic theories, with the order established by the Oedipal organization, with the so-called mature defenses synonymous with submission? What if psychoanalysis was a setting where one admits (for reasons of self-knowledge and healing) to be violated in one's deepest intimacy to reactivate the monsters of childhood and infantile sexuality in order to reinstate the fear of authority, of patriarchy? And if it were a place where we lose our freedom to fall into the living madness that makes us lose everything and gain everything at the same time, where we suppress chaos under the pretext of free associations but well directed by the laws of society and dogmatic theoretical diktats, where we are made to believe in a space of freedom and inclusion that would make us discover our singularity but which, in the end, digs the grave of our psychic death?

The question of mnemonic reconsolidation, which is more than essential for the psychoanalytical perspective, is studied, among others, by Cristina Alberini (2013). This author underlines the unstable character of the mnemonic trace, especially during the retrieval of a memory. The latter, according to Alberini, stabilizes and reconstructs itself, following a recollection, by associating itself with the data from the context of re-actualization. The consolidation of a long-term memory is therefore not irreversible, as has long been imagined. For by offering a device specifically designed to open and reactivate deep and potentially unconscious memory, does not psychoanalysis risk reinscribing and consolidating, with the help of *God Logos* (Freud, 1927) and its interpretations, a normative memory, a colonialist culture dominated by men as well as by capitalist power and social isolation (recalling the *extreme individualism* mentioned by Gheorghe)? Doesn't it risk operating a distortion of the truth, of the individual and of the psyche, while playing the card of the deep truth or the memory-based truth.

On the basis of my knowledge (postgraduate training in psychoanalytic therapy, doctorate in psychoanalysis) and my experiences (as an analysand, for more than 10 years, in response

to the injunction of an endless search for an unconscious that always evades itself, by definition), I can state that it is not the psychoanalytic setting (on the couch or face to face) that poses the greatest problem, but... the interpretation. Interpretation without a theoretical third party, based on an epistemology elaborated in enclosed groups, obsolete and sometimes sectarian, in which the plurality of factors and a critical, transdisciplinary perspective are missing. Like the interpretation of my last analyst (member of the Paris Psychoanalytical Society) who uses one simple dream to conclude: "Well, you bring me the proof, on a silver platter, that you are not ready to become an analyst". In this case, a person's professional future is decided by a dream he shared with his analyst. Who is repressing what?

Regarding the repression of subjectivation mentioned above, [Deleuze and Guattari \(1980\)](#), [Guattari \(1979\)](#) and [Lazzarato \(2010\)](#) agree with the postulate that language does not communicate subjectivity, but the subjectivation of the subject by the socioeconomic-political order, by what has been regulated by the latter (via grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc.). Analyst and analysand thus communicate their inner/intellectualized orders. The successive conditionings (rewards-punishments) appeared within the family, social relations and then relative to the school education, to the professional specializations, add to the constitution of an individual language which is not quite an individual enunciation, but a subjective castration/amputation (different from the Freudian castration, but probably echoing the latter) produced by social codes (or those of the psychoanalytical societies), social influence, social capital, financial capital, privileges, fear of exclusion, etc. We could retort once again that psychoanalysis presents itself as the exception of individual enunciation beyond power and normativity, a chance given to the individual to express freely (thanks to free associations and to the possibility of lying down without being in front of another individual in order not to establish, precisely, a standardized communication) the contents of his obscure parts; contents, fantasies or memories unspeakable elsewhere. To finally name his singularity and not the one imposed by the social structure. The problem of this very vast discussion remains always and still the interpretation of the expressed contents (or even the expectations communicated by the analyst via his interpretations and his theoretical and socio-political counter-transference).

It would be indeed great if psychoanalysis really adhered to its project of subversion and creation of a setting dedicated to subjective enunciation outside societal codes (where the subject liberates his thought and his subjectivity and consolidates his autonomy). Yet, history shows the opposite. Why did we fail in this magnificent project? Because it is a utopia (like communism)? Because the (theoretical) third party was ignored? Or because of internal sectarian organizations and political struggle between psychoanalytic societies that have parasitized the methodology and epistemology of the discipline with their power and domination, their paranoia towards the outside world (social, political, scientific) and their personal transfers on the discipline and the theory? And the question demands that we go further: Why this terrible failure?

In my opinion, as suggested for the question of mnemonic reconsolidation, it is just as possible not to liberate the subject, as the initial-ideal project of the psychoanalytical framework would have us believe, but to let him "express himself" without offering him the possibility of a critical thought (through the interplay of interpretations) regarding the environmental codes and their psychopathological effects. In other words, to interpret rather in collusion with the male domination and liberal ideology, which can only produce a new hacking (as do the algorithms of the digital world that exploit the neuro-cognitive-behavioral functioning while injecting new economic-political codes) of the internal world. We may even be made to feel guilty because our psychic

mechanisms do not have sufficiently mature defenses to face the pirate-capitalism established with the digital age. Once again, critical studies about LGBTIQ+ minorities (to take only this example) have a lot to say about the failure of subjectivation (but which one?). For where are the philosophical questions about autonomy, free will, self-determination, humility, sharing? Of course, it is neither the psychosexual perspective nor the evaluation of your capacities to adapt to economic warfare that speaks of it.

Doesn't listening to fantasy, memories, dreams (the nocturnal infantile, its terrors and desires) expose the unconscious to an injunction/intrusion exercised by psychoanalytical theories that simultaneously produce a mutilation (psychic, symbolic, impulsive, political) similar to the one exercised on women's psychosexuality and named by Catherine Malabou ([Malabou, 2020](#); [Malabou & Poenaru, 2021](#)) in her book *Le plaisir effacé*? Opening the unconscious to extract its deepest contents and then reassociating them (like capitalism) with the semiotics of the productivity obsessed, machinic world ([Lazzarato, 2010](#)) versus psychopathology, is this not the realm of horror? Is not dealing with the unconscious without the critical perspective and without the theoretical third party a way to reconsolidate the normative unconscious?

Stalin: Look at this. Do you know where this picture was taken?

Lidia: At Freud's house.

Stalin: Yes, in London. That's where the bourgeois perverts used to lie down and utter their neurotic nonsense! Stalin sleeps on the couch of the charlatan... What do you think? I know some people who'd like to know that. As soon as I saw this picture, I thought of the couch in this office... and of you. We'll play the Viennese game, you and I. Me on the couch and you in that chair there. Me remembering my dreams and you being a quack. What do you say? Don't you enjoy playing Mr. Freud?

Lidia: Why do you want to play that? What do you want to know about yourself?

Stalin: I want to know how it works. How he got their secrets out of them... Are you afraid of that?

Lidia: What?

Stalin: To hear my dreams.

Lidia: I'm not afraid of other people's dreams.

Stalin: Well said. Let's start, come on. Settle down."

(Transcript of an excerpt from *Le divan de Stalin*, film by Fanny Ardant, 2016, adapted from the homonymous novel by Jean-Daniel Baltassat).

The novel (like the film) highlights the troubled relationship between Stalin (intrigued by the strength and secrets of the unconscious that could be revealed by the couch on which he sleeps), Lidia (his mistress, who tries to master the love and fear of the dictator) and Danilov (a painter appointed to consolidate the cult of the dictator by presenting Stalin with the monument of eternity that he has designed for his glory). The plot thus proposes a conflictual articulation between power and its representation, the dream and the knowledge of the unconscious, while questioning, paradoxically, the dangers of this game and the totalitarian utopia of wanting to master/know this space of freedom and madness, that of our unconscious, that of a dictator and his monument. All this seems to summon the antithesis present in the entities gathered by psychoanalysis, as well as the disorder present in its epistemology. And we think once again of the Freudian postulate: One is not master in one's own world (whether one is Stalin, a scientist, a psychoanalyst or an ordinary individual).

Don't the above findings and questions point to a psychoanalysis that simultaneously produces fascination and horror, the ones that underlie all power and its game of mirrors? In this same issue of the journal *In Analysis*, [Saudan et al. \(2022, in press\)](#) – inspired

by the monstrosity criticized by Preciado (2020) in front of an academy of psychoanalysts intolerant of monstrosity (Preciado's or psychoanalysis'?) – ask an identical question evoking an aberrant model with regard to the current time and norms. Nevertheless, we have some evidence that psychoanalysis continues to fascinate. For how can one not be fascinated by the unconscious and its uncontrollable force, or by psychosexuality (and their unspeakable madness in other scientific and/or clinical spaces also mobilized by their own normativity)? The strength and resilience of psychoanalysis is demonstrated by the fact that it is still taught in humanities faculties (e.g., Doha, Qatar) or art schools (e.g., Geneva, Switzerland), while it continues to be taught – covertly/ clandestinely or not – in many psychology faculties or in postgraduate psychotherapy training courses for psychologists and psychiatrists (weary of mechanistic or positivist theories). There is also sufficient evidence that it arouses horror, dread, repulsion depending on one's culture (scientific or not) or experience (clinical or not), which is the reason for its isolationism, exclusion, and systematic labelling as a *non grata* discipline.

The factors at the origin of this highly paradoxical posture are, as we have seen, multiple, and have to do with the internal organization of psychoanalytical groups (whether academic or not), individual resistance to parts of one's own psyche, as well as the economic, social and political organization of our environment – it is on this point that I complete Gheorghe who focuses his problematic on the real epistemological necessity to decolonize and 'de-binarize' psychoanalysis. This double *fascination-horror effect* pushes psychoanalysis into a binary *unavoidable/to be avoided* stance. The conflictive duality of psychoanalysis has been historically documented by both those whose lives have been saved by analysis, and those who have felt destroyed by its framework, its silences, its tendency to pathologize, its explicit or implicit prescriptions, normativity, and so on. The polarisation that I underline could probably be largely diminished if, as Gheorghe develops in the article that constitutes the starting point of this commentary, psychoanalysis was more permeable to a plural, cosmopolitan, culturally decolonised and politically attentive thought, without losing sight of its essence: the elaboration of internal conflicts linked to contradictory drives. Or if, as I proposed in another contribution (Poenaru, 2021a), it admitted to distinguish more clearly the three epistemologies that constitute it (of theory, of clinic and of research), while clarifying the polyvalent logics underlying these epistemologies:

- a classical framing logic combined with hybrid logics;
- intra- and intersubjective logics;
- the logic of interpretations (multi-factorial);
- the clinical medical logic;
- social, cultural, political, economic and, more recently, digital logics.

A 4th topical instance: the “Critical Ego”

For Gheorghe (2022, *in press*), it is more than urgent to train students not according to dogmatic and reductionist models, but on the basis of nuances and culturally intelligent critical thinking. For him, it seems obvious that critical thinking, existential preoccupations, questions about the meaning of work and life, are perceived as so many nuisances, obstacles that prevent economic growth. Let us recall that Freud configures the psychic apparatus according to a topical point of view (in addition to the dynamic and economic point of view) constituted first of all by three instances (unconscious, preconscious, conscious) maintaining conflictual and dynamic relations. This first topical view, which retains all its heuristic interest, is completed by a second one

(Freud, 1920), made up of three instances: the Superego, the Ego and the Id. From my point of view, this second topical system lacks an instance that I would call the “Critical Ego”, which is indispensable in the contemporary theoretical-clinical project.

In the Freudian culture, the Superego is the inheritor of the law. We return to the notion of law discussed in the preamble of this work. But which one? Economic? No, because Freud was not responsive to Marxist thought; his answer is given in psychosexual, cultural and mythological terms (oedipal, for example). But the law to which cybercapitalist society obeys is now, as suggested above, of an economic-political nature. This law is dictated by: corporatist fathers who themselves dominate the fathers of the nuclear family who have become the vectors of the corporatist fathers; the digital addiction induced by these laws; the artificial intelligence that programs the neuro-cognitive-behavioral complex; etc. The world around us, Gheorghe proposes, must be urgently included in the university training of future psychoanalysts or psychotherapists, who are still trained to focus on the infantile, irresponsible, powerless part of the patients. The unintended result is a therapy, which, as Gheorghe reminds us with Hillman and Ventura (1993), aims not at integrative healing, but at increasing 'productivity' by eliminating clients' rage and fear and the potential insubordination they could generate.

Yet in the context we describe, the Freudian Id is not only infantilized; it is forced to become a drive reservoir powerfully fertilized by economic logic due to the perverse game of propaganda and neuro-cognitive-behavioral and emotional manipulations that build blocks (Adolphs & Anderson, 2018) with our reflexes. Many examples are offered by the strategies employed by neuromarketing and nanomarketing that exploit our emotional base (Mileti et al., 2016; Costa Rozan Fortunato et al., 2014). Let us remember that the Freudian Ego is a defensive instance that:

“From the topical point of view, (...) is in a relation of dependence as much towards the claims of the Id as towards the imperatives of the Superego and the demands of reality. Although it poses as mediator in charge of the interests of the totality of the person, its autonomy is only very relative. From the dynamic point of view, the self represents, eminently in the neurotic conflict, the defensive pole of the personality; it puts into play a series of defence mechanisms, those being motivated by the perception of an unpleasant affect (signal of anguish). From the economic point of view, the Ego appears as a factor of connection of the psychological processes; but in the defensive operations, the attempts of connection of the drive energy are contaminated by the character that specifies the primary processes: they take a compulsive, repetitive, unrealistic aspect” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1997, p. 241).

It is interesting to note, already from this definition of the Ego, characteristics or potentialities such as: dependence, relative autonomy, unpleasant affect, contamination, compulsion, repetition, derealization. One cannot fail to recognize (in its exacerbated version) our relationship to the digital and mainly the ordinary addiction induced precisely by the capitalist exploitation of the characteristics that define the neurotic Ego. But is not the civilized Ego fundamentally neurotic?

Freud certainly could not foresee the evolution of society and configured his topicality, rightly or wrongly, according to the inescapable male domination, proposing a submissive Ego by default (which does not have to revolt, which has to do with the society that is offered to him or to which he is conditioned from the youngest age – see N. Elias, *The civilization of morals*, Elias, 1939). The revolt and the disobedience are of the domain of the psychopathology and concern a psychic immaturity to adapt to the laws of the society and to its symbolic prisons! The male domination is certainly still present

since it is mainly men who hold the industry, who program the artificial intelligence, our emotions, our cognitions and our behaviors, who are ready to destroy everything for the accumulation of capital or to show their warlike strength.

Yet other very powerful factors have emerged within cybercapitalist production, including virtuality, ubiquity, and the programming of society by artificial intelligence and the far right (Wylie, 2019) that seem to create a veritable dystopia in the psychic order established by Freud as these factors actively work towards the modification/exploitation of human nature for profit. Furthermore, the dystopia of the surveillance society (Zuboff, 2019) and control exploits the data it allows us to produce, through extremely financially profitable “free speech”, to disable movements of revolt [except those in the service of the far right – as was the case with the assault on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, or with Facebook’s algorithmic policies that delete, (e.g., anti-racist posts directed at white Americans and maintaining posts directed at blacks in order to foster anger, which in turn generates online engagement and political polarization)].

The Freudian Ego is therefore not programmed to be autonomous since “its autonomy is only relative” (even a source of anguish that reconsolidates repressions) and revolt would also mean fighting against inaccessible internal contents – characteristics that are highly exploited by the cyberpower society. Fighting against this nature seems to be a utopian enterprise by default, because the whole is locked in a vicious circle (perfectly exploitable by cybercapitalism) whose main engine is repression (overactivated by informational and drive saturation). The greater the anguish linked to the exposure to numerous stimuli, the more active the repression. How can we confront that which escapes consciousness by default and by design, which is at the origin of civilization and which is currently capitalized and militarized?

The dependence, in this logic, thus appears inescapable. Once again: “the self is in a relation of dependence as much with respect to the claims of the id as to the imperatives of the superego and the requirements of reality”. A reality that was largely repressed by the psychoanalysis, thus undermining its own theoretical base. The psychic configuration as defined by Freud, which nevertheless maintains all its relevance, is consequently a gold mine for capitalism since everything is arranged (dependence, contamination, compulsive repetitions, virtual derealizations), inside as well as outside, for the perpetuation of dependence relations, the creation of anxieties and repressions. To question this domination would mean losing a polarization that maintains civilization, social organization, production and life. Yet it is quite possible that this vicious circle, as Steve Banon has wished (see Wylie’s testimony, 2019 and Poenaru, 2021b) will lead to a global chaotization that is both dangerous and profitable (since chaos, like fear and anger, increases the information seeking and online engagement sought by Internet corporations).

Freud, as far as I know, did not imagine the critical individual; he foresaw and described him subjected, in a defensive-compulsive struggle towards a reality currently co-modified by his own contributions in connection with his own internalizations (transformed into drives and anxieties). If the Ego is characterized by a quite relative autonomy, the Critical Ego that we wish to elaborate can only be relative, but, without it, the individual (like the psychoanalysis) is amputated of the plurality of the possibilities and of his autonomy put in danger by the contemporary world. It seems to us more than urgent to work to the constitution of the Critical Ego in order to offer to the individual additional parts of mentalization and protection, as well as spaces and psychic potentialities of autonomous nature where lodges an individuality independent of the instances co-modified by the invasive cybercapitalism. A Critical Ego that allows the consolidation of free will and values (moral and humanistic) other than those induced by the dictatorship of consumption and its psychopathological effects.

To do this, it is more than necessary not only to participate in the political debate on public health and democracy issues, but also to develop a theory and a clinic of the economic unconscious including Freudian dynamics, but also dynamics programmed by artificial intelligence, which, unfortunately, is always several steps ahead of our unconscious, as well as of our knowledge. A clinical setting that assumes at the same time the subjective enunciation, the elaboration of conflicts programmed by the artificial intelligence and a digital anti-viral hygiene similar to the one set up during the COVID-19 pandemic. So when will we see masks, disinfectants, or vaccines, against social networks and a real public health policy that protects, for example, young Instagram users from suicide and self-harm?³

Conclusion

We have not heard the last of psychoanalysis and for a valid reason. Humanity is not fooled, it knows very well that there is an internal world that is obscure, contradictory, conflicting, frightening, unstoppable, rebellious, autonomous, hermetic. A block that is insensitive to the prescriptions of well-being, success and achievement of the consumerist society. An internal world subject to injunctions other than rationality and which expresses itself (fortunately for us and for our feeling of existing as a living being capable of being moved) more like a boiling volcano whose lava may boil over at any minute than like a soldier who follows the rules of his army to the letter. I would even say that the more we try to contain, manipulate, and pervert the natural movements of life (by proceeding to a bio-neuro-cognitive-behavioral extraction via an anthropo-cybercriminal capitalism), the more we produce suffering and the more the movements in question are expressed in a deviated (usually called “pathological”) way, or even as a manifestation of an attempt to regain a psychic balance. Bataille (1943) poses the question of the interior experience differently:

“But – it is undeniable – the advance of the intelligence had for secondary effect to diminish the possible in a domain which appeared to the intelligence foreign: that of the interior experience. Still it is an understatement to say diminish. The development of intelligence leads to a narrowing of life which, in turn, has narrowed intelligence. It is only if I state this principle: ‘the interior experience itself is the authority’, that I get out of this dead end” (Bataille, 1943, p. 20).

I am for and against psychoanalysis, for the development of this fascinating field of knowledge and against the dogmatic and monstrous culture that parasitizes it while making it unsuitable for the present context. After all, being for and against should be the duty of every scientist who bases his reflection on dialectics, contradiction and plurality of perspectives, since every argument falls into ideology if it is not allowed to confront contradiction. But are all psychoanalysts scientists? I believe that the University is performing a major amputation of knowledge by eliminating psychoanalysis from its teaching offer. This is in line with the global project aiming at the promotion of disciplines that serve the immediate interests of the economic laws and consequently the production of the economic unconscious. This factor could explain the parasitism and ideological colonisation of psychoanalysis by social engineering, a kind of collusion that allows it not to be totally isolated. However, psychoanalytic dogmatism and isolationism are

³ Horwith, J. (2021). The Facebook Whistleblower, Frances Haugen, Says She Wants to Fix the Company, Not Harm It. The former Facebook employee says her goal is to help prompt change at the social-media giant Wall Street Journal, Oct 3, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-says-she-wants-to-fix-the-company-not-harm-it-11633304122>.

not adequate responses to allow its promotion in academic circles and to allow the necessary dialogue with the sciences (mainly the human and social sciences). On the contrary, it seems to maintain cognitive dissonance, interference, and paradoxical responses on both sides of the epistemological barrier that is created.

This barrier could be softened by a clearer integration (and less disturbed by sectarian discourses), within psychoanalytic reflections and practices, of the epistemological and methodological structure of the humanities and social sciences (HSS) which, as I explored in another work (Poenaru, 2020), offers a model for a better scientific integration of psychoanalysis without distorting the specificities of its essentially qualitative research. It is thus a question of reciprocal integrations. As we now know, with the advent of post-positivism, the sciences, and more particularly the HSS, have largely surpassed the criteria of an objective, empirical and predictive science (which psychoanalysts often project, in the form of a paranoid defence, onto the whole of the sciences), in order to build its theoretical foundations from the postulate that human dynamics are not predictable and that they require access to unique meanings and historical elements that determine the phenomena observed. It seems to me that the integration of these principles without the usual resistance (“we have our own epistemology!”) can only favour the re-establishment or even the consolidation of the place that psychoanalysis must occupy in the universe of knowledge.

For psychoanalysts researchers and clinicians, like all contemporary thinkers, are in the urgency to collaborate in the understanding of the colonial, multidimensional and unconscious influences of the current war context (economic, psychological wars). The algorithmic proximity of cybercapitalism, of the strong social influence generated by the social networks, of the consumption, of the iconic obsession, of the programming by the technologies of the communication and the information, seems to produce a real imprisonment of the body/psychism in an economic unconsciousness transformed in a factory of hypnotic trance permeable to all the aberrations; an individual thus incarcerated in mental, emotional and mimetic contagions with exponential dimensions which cannot be controlled any more by the simple self-determination/autonomy (dissolved by this unsustainable grip) and even less by the rational logic that the official speeches of a society accomplice of this anthropological cataclysm (Pasolini, 2018) impose us. Cataclysm that could be simultaneously due to ignorance, human nature, collusion and the will to stimulate socio-digital-industrial production for profit, etc. Academics as well as psychoanalytical clinicians therefore have their role to play in deciphering this new world.

Disclosure of interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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