

Psicoanalisti in un mondo plurale: perdite, incontri e costruzione collettiva

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(Contributo Originale in lingua inglese)

Riassunto:

Questo lavoro nasce dalla collaborazione tra psicoanalisti del Brasile e dell'Argentina, impegnati in pratiche con popolazioni vulnerabili attraverso accordi con i Ministeri dell'Istruzione di entrambi i paesi. Si tratta di interventi intersectoriali che trascendono i quadri clinici tradizionali, proponendo nuovi strumenti per interpretare le singolarità di ogni esperienza. Nel marzo 2023, in risposta alla crescente escalation di violenza, è stata concordata la presenza di psicoanalisti nelle scuole di Porto Alegre e lo svolgimento di almeno quattro incontri tra psicoanalisti ed educatori. Attraverso l'analisi di una "vignetta" clinica in cui l'aula diventa scenario di violenza, esclusione e stigmatizzazione, vengono proposti strumenti interpretativi per ripensare i quadri e i referenti che sostengono la pratica psicoanalitica. Il lavoro riflette inoltre sulle logiche che plasmano le soggettività e le dinamiche istituzionali. Si sostiene l'attivazione della "capacità negativa" come mezzo per aprirsi all'ignoto, smantellare i pregiudizi e rendere possibili incontri trasformativi. La nozione di "perdersi" viene rivendicata come percorso verso il nuovo, mentre viene esaminata criticamente la logica categoriale che classifica ed esclude. Da una prospettiva prospettivista, si argomenta che ogni fenomeno esprime un punto di vista — e che percepire significa entrarvi a far parte. L'intervento psicoanalitico viene presentato come un dispositivo di instaurazione, capace di legittimare forme di esistenza emarginate e di aprire spazi per la trasformazione soggettiva e collettiva. L'opera invoca un'etica dell'incontro e pratiche che spostino i confini dell'istituto, rendendo possibili nuove forme di "comune".

Parole chiave: Violenza scolastica, alterizzazione, etica dell'incontro

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Psychoanalysts in a plural world: losses, encounters and collective construction

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Original Contribution in English

Abstract:

This work stems from the exchange between psychoanalysts from Brazil and Argentina who engage in practices with vulnerable populations through agreements with the Departments of Education in both cities. These are intersectoral interventions that transcend traditional clinical frameworks, proposing new tools to interpret the singularities of each experience. In March 2023, in response to escalating issues of violence, it was agreed that psychoanalysts would be present in schools in Porto Alegre, and that at least four meetings would be held between psychoanalysts and educators. Through the analysis of a vignette in which a classroom becomes a scene of violence, exclusion, and stigmatization, interpretive tools are proposed to rethink the frameworks and referents that underpin psychoanalytic practice. The work also reflects on the logic that shapes subjectivities and institutional dynamics. It advocates for the activation of "negative capability" as a means of opening oneself to the unknown, dismantling prejudices, and enabling transformative encounters. The notion of "getting lost" is reclaimed as a pathway to the new, while the categorical logic that classifies and excludes is critically examined. From a perspectivist standpoint, it is argued that each phenomenon expresses a point of view – and that to perceive is to enter into it. Psychoanalytic intervention is presented as a device of instatement, capable of legitimizing marginalized forms of existence and opening spaces for subjective and collective transformation. The work calls for an ethics of encounter and for practices that shift the boundaries of the instituted, enabling new forms of the common.

Key Word: school violence, othering, ethics of encounter

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This work emerges from the exchange of a variety of practices that psychoanalysts from Brazil and Argentina carry out with vulnerable populations. In Porto Alegre, within the framework of the collaboration between the Porto Alegre Psychoanalytic Society (SPPA) and the Municipal Secretariat of Education (SMED), and in Buenos Aires, within the Psychopedagogical Assistance Program of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Buenos Aires. In all cases, this is an intersectoral effort that goes beyond traditional clinical approaches.

In a previous work, “Psicanálise situada e plural: extensões, interrogações e inovações conceituais” (Wald et al., 2022), we set out to delve deeper into our toolbox to enrich our understanding of the particularities that arise in different experiences. We took as our starting point some affects and feelings that emerged in the transference field during interventions that occurred in clinical situations in the social field in Porto Alegre and Buenos Aires. Identifying the multiplicity of affects that arise when working in conditions of extreme vulnerability enabled us not only to expand our conceptual tools, but also to explore alternative ways of thinking about the notion of the common.

In this paper, we propose to examine a situation that foregrounds the problem of discrimination and the challenges posed by diversity in contexts of profound precariousness. Drawing on a vignette, we offer interpretive tools to critically reconsider the mechanisms and referents that underpin our psychoanalytic practices.

What we take for granted – as normalized, as “natural” – the ways in which we understand the self, reality, the social, the family, and the epistemic practices linked to modes of knowing, are in fact historical and situated constructs. These frameworks prescribe specific logics for the production of subjectivities, realities, and the configuration of the collective. At the heart of the modern paradigm lies the logic of class, and our cognitive and epistemopolitical practices tend to classify, categorize, and pigeonhole. In psychoanalysis, these practices are mirrored in the logic of the signifier – through the imperative to name, to assign identity (Wald, 2022).

We propose to reflect on these logics based on a four-session intervention held in Porto Alegre¹.

Intervention

In March 2023, biweekly meetings began at the SPPA headquarters with principals, assistant principals, and educational advisors from the Municipal Elementary Schools (EMEFs) that were facing serious problems of violence.

During these meetings, it was agreed that the presence of psychoanalysts in schools would be essential, and that a series of at least four meetings (conversation circles) should be held in each institution. These premises were established based on the group's belief that, given the magnitude of the issues, it was necessary to build a meaningful connection with school staff. At the same time, attacks on schools in Joinville and São Paulo – where students were killed – were generating extreme tension in educational settings across the country.

To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, the Secretary of Education created what it called “Flow Correction Classes”, made up of students with significant learning delays. At this school, 17 male students, mostly Black and of varying ages, were gathered in a class. The class became so unmanageable that one student assaulted a teacher, who filed a report and, frightened, abandoned the class.

Our first surprise came as we climbed the hill. We were apprehensive during the ride to the top, where the school is located, because it's a very violent area and we'd never been there before. However, as we climbed the uneven, narrow dirt roads, we were surprised by the kindness with which the locals guided us, gave us parking spaces, and had a pleasant sense of community spirit from a perspective/architecture we're not used to. The fear gradually faded and transformed into surprise. When we arrived at the school, we were surprised to find a beautiful, colorful, and organized library, with an abundance of

¹ The intervention was implemented by Flávia Friedman Maltz, Denise Lahude, and Andrea Etzemberger, and was discussed and developed within our working group.

books on the tables, many of them about racism, and a pleasant encounter with a painting by a Black Machado de Assis and another of the murdered activist Marielle Franco².

First question: how is it that a school with so much antiracist material places its most “problematic” students – mostly Black boys – together in a single class?

In the four meetings we held, all in the library, there were always students gathered at other tables, looking at books, playing, organizing shelves, or using a computer. Overall, we were struck by the qualified human resources there, with the skills and sensitivity to carry out their work, to welcome the students, and to support their development. How to understand what was happening? What was being enacted in this school beyond the teachers’ awareness and good intentions?

When entering a new territory, it is essential to engage our negative capability, following Bion’s (1992) recommendation to free the mind from memory, desire, and prejudice in order to connect with the unknown. We must remain open to exchange and mutual learning, and be willing to deconstruct our prior knowledge. In a sense, encountering the other requires the capacity to lose oneself.

In her text, *Una guía sobre el arte de perderse* Rebecca Solnit (2020) distinguishes between two meanings of the word lost:

“Losing things has to do with the disappearance of the known; getting lost has to do with the emergence of the unknown. [...] When you lose something, you still know where you are – only one element is missing. “But if you get lost, then the world has become larger than your knowledge of it” bringing with it a loss of control” (Solnit, 2020, p.10; author’s translation)

This is precisely the point: to recognize the existence of the unknown and to venture into zones marked as terra incognita.

² Marielle Franco was a Brazilian politician and human rights advocate, known for her activism in support of marginalized communities and her outspoken criticism of police brutality. Her assassination in 2018 shocked Brazil, sparking widespread protests and an ongoing investigation. Franco was a prominent figure in Rio de Janeiro’s political landscape, and her legacy continues to shape the national conversation on social justice and the fight against violence in Brazil (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

“It is not a matter of judging events or categorizing them according to pre-established values, nor of attempting to restore “lost paradises” or insisting on the fulfillment of neatly designed expectations. The point is not to apply preexisting thought. If we do not allow ourselves to get lost, the other may feel violated by our prejudices and enact the rupture. Solnit asks: «How do you go about finding things that, in some way, are about extending the boundaries of one’s being into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?” (Solnit, 2017, p.9).

From a perspectivist viewpoint, every phenomenon expresses a point of view – it has its own perspective – and to perceive is to enter into that point of view. Lapoujade (2018), following Souriau, wonders how we see, how we render perceptible new kinds of beings, otherwise invisible. It becomes necessary to repel assumptions, prejudices, and illusions – to purify the field of experience. Our own fantasies shape the way we construct and interpret a problematic situation.

The problem arises when we come into contact with something outside of thought – or more precisely, when thought is shaken by a force it cannot comprehend yet cannot ignore; when what has been thought is no longer sufficient. The problem emerges when we perceive inconsistencies and begin to read them as signs. What is inconsistent? That which doesn’t add up, doesn’t fit, cannot be captured by representation (Duchatsky, 2010). The problem was not given – it was something to be constructed collectively, and we would all be co-authors of that invention.

First Meeting

The group that welcomed us was large – ten educators were present. In this first meeting, the teachers described their approach to this group of students as one marked by confrontation. As the afternoon shift approached, they would say, *“The afternoon is coming – here comes the bomb!”* They expressed their difficulties, frustrations, and fears regarding the class, as well as the lack of institutional support to address the needs they had identified.

We were struck by their characterization of the class as misogynistic, sexist, and authoritarian – a group that *“only caused chaos.”* They recounted episodes in which they

felt they had no control: students refused to stay in the classroom or sit down, showed no respect, vandalized the school, broke brooms, and destroyed everything in sight.

Yet amid these accounts, a dissenting voice emerged in defense of the students. It pointed out that the group had been labeled as “*wrong*” as needing correction, and that they had come to embody the role of “*garbage*” – those who shouldn’t be there, who don’t belong, who have no place. And so, they behaved according to those labels. Some teachers referred to them as the “*reflux class*”, and nervous laughter followed.

“*The bomb*”, “*the reflux*” – these are the terms through which this group of students comes into being. The bomb evokes a phantom of destruction; reflux refers to what returns as harm. Disease, trash, destruction, death? Pandemic residue? Social detritus?

Overall, we encountered a demoralized group of educators, though a few stood out – those who, with hope, effort, and hesitation, sought ways to change the situation. They also noted that several teachers had taken leave for emotional reasons, further exacerbating the already critical shortage of human resources at the school. We ourselves felt overwhelmed and overburdened. How can one generate a space of hope amid such despair?

During this first meeting, all the teachers and the supervisor introduced themselves. Some were not directly involved with the class, while others worked closely with it. One of the teachers in charge had suffered verbal aggression and threats from students, leading him to file a police report. He did not participate in the conversation circles.

Among those most involved, Professor N. – who had been with the class the longest – shared her deep frustration. She had worked with “difficult” classes before and had extensive experience in this kind of work. She clearly expressed her desire to “*make it work*” with this group, but admitted feeling more than frustrated – she felt like a true “*failure*” unable to achieve anything with them. She shared that she is currently in therapy, trying to understand and integrate the lessons from her experiences into her life.

M.F., the Portuguese teacher known for her creative ideas, shared that she currently feels devoid of hope. She had been on sick leave and had only recently returned. Speaking about her personal life, she recounted the pain her family endured due to her brother’s

experience of discrimination – a situation that ended negatively and deepened her sense of solidarity with the students in this class.

She became emotional as she described seeing her brother reflected in those maladjusted boys – most of them Black. She empathizes with them and insists they must be viewed differently. She also emphasized that teachers must take responsibility for placing so many students with serious difficulties into a single class, without the necessary capacity to understand or support them. Her comment unsettled certain representations, as it touched the human dimensions, the pain and suffering of these young people beyond their violent behaviors, and challenged the adults responsible.

Young people acting out; teachers distressed and/or depressed. We ourselves felt identified with both sides – angry with the teachers, yet pressured to find quick solutions. What kind of existence was instituted with the creation of this class? What does its name legitimize? The question of identity emerges as something rigid, entangled with the dynamics of othering. An othered group is not an identity-based community, but a category naturalized through discrimination, to which a homogeneous, alien identity is assigned. Through projective identification, such a group can become the repository of all that is bad, thereby annihilating any alterity inherent to subjective singularity (Ayouch, 2017). An othered group can become a bomb.

Even if they didn't enter or sit in the classroom, these students consistently came to school, enacting their identity as marginalized subjects – seeking to be seen and heard amid a conflict that seemed irresolvable. Some teachers, in turn, began to voice their own concerns and personal ghosts.

Violence in schools, poverty, low academic performance, and youth identities do not become problems until they take the form of a sign – a force that compels us to think at the edges of what has already been thought. And if it compels us, takes hold of us, touches us, it is because it expresses itself, taking shape within a fabric of existence. Boundaries begin to blur. It had now become “*our*” problem too, because we could intervene in some way. Something becomes a “*problem*” when it provokes a kind of invention or intervention that introduces new qualities, new modes of expression.

We envisioned a space where radical imagination could be mobilized, where enigmatic signifiers could be activated in search of new meanings – so that, together, we might begin to shift the rigid barriers of othering. We placed our hopes in the emergence of both new and reclaimed identifications, making it possible to break with the identity the group had come to embody – an identity that had trapped the students and destabilized the teachers' own sense of themselves as educators, leading to anger and frustration.

Second Meeting

Fewer teachers attended this meeting, but M.F. and N. were there waiting for us. The librarian was also present, moving around the library space, attending to students while listening to our conversation. Everyone resumed their reflections, feeling heard and welcomed by us, and suggested that the conversation circle was provoking something different within them.

The group commented on this sensation, and feelings began to circulate and feedback into one another. We tried to speak about the importance of being seen and heard, suggesting the idea of dividing the class into small groups to individualize and personalize each student – just as they had done in the previous meeting, naming a student who appeared in the courtyard or passed by the library window, sharing an anecdote or detail from their life, trying to get to know each one's story. In line with this idea, they recalled how a class functioned better with two teachers in the room, and how more attention helped students become more willing to interact.

At one point in the conversation circle, a teacher who hadn't attended before and had just returned from leave due to panic attacks spoke at length about the extreme fear she felt coming back to school after the Joinville attack and the murder of a former student of hers – nineteen years old – by drug traffickers from the community. She said these events revealed the dangers present in the area. She also spoke of the constant fear and illnesses among teachers. Out of one hundred educators, seventy were working and thirty were on leave due to illness. How can we contain the psychic states generated in situations of extreme violence?

Once again, we are confronted with our own limitations in the face of vulnerability, but even so, speaking, listening to each other, and validating what is experienced in the mind and body makes sense.

Third Meeting

From the beginning, N. – the teacher most closely connected to the class, who never missed a session – was present. We returned to the topic of dedicating attention to each student or small groups of students. At that moment, the librarian joined the conversation, saying she would like to participate. She shared that students often came to the library to talk with her, and that these encounters offered visibility and emotional closeness with the students.

She was very active, bringing her questions, moods, and frustrations, while showing that she firmly believes in her role within the school institution. She gave a very bitter account of her position as a network educator, saying they are deeply undervalued and work with few resources and little support, serving students with great needs. She feels she must split her life in two to survive the devaluation and harshness of her work. Yet she affirms that she believes something can be done – even if outside the school – where she ultimately finds the pleasure that sustains her life.

Toward the end of the meeting, M.F. arrived and told us, without enthusiasm, about a video the class was making. Toward the end of the meeting, M.F. arrived and spoke to us, without much enthusiasm, about a video the class was making. The story had been proposed by the students themselves – *The Nerds' Revolt*, a tale of revenge involving a nerd zombie, a horror story – and was being developed collectively. She even had the film's images with her. We asked to see it, and she showed it to us, and we emphasized the importance of this experience and of the expression of these young people, who were being welcomed and listened to by her. These students who supposedly "*couldn't do anything*" had, in fact, written the script, directed, and acted in the film.

We were struck by the teacher's lack of enthusiasm. She felt this wouldn't improve anything, that it wouldn't change the situation – and besides, the students couldn't write the script, only create it orally.

We then became aware that the pressure to comply with the official curriculum was intense, and that it was essential to create space for alternative actions where these students could simply “*be*”. Teachers, too, are victims of their normative unconscious.

We believe that these superego (internal) and institutional (external) demands can be challenged in the conversation circle. However, for the moment, this had been more evident in creativity and freedom of action (short film) than in affection and awareness of it.

We felt intrigued and overwhelmed by the teachers' lack of enthusiasm and their profound bitterness toward the reality they find themselves in. Once again, we identified with them in their hopelessness and inability to recognize the enormous progress achieved, due to imposed and rigid educational assumptions, as well as in their confrontation with the harsh reality of school. The teachers, too, in some way, had to “*lose themselves*” in order to encounter the unique characteristics of their students, their ways of creating, producing, and expressing themselves.

How do we think about the subjectivities of these young people who make a film called “*Revolt of the Nerds*”? Do they see themselves as nerds? Do they want to be nerds? What is their revenge?

Something has been set in motion. What do we see in these forms of existence that elude school prescriptions? Is common ground possible between them and the teachers? And between the teachers and us? How does it affect them that the students prefer oral scripts to writing them down? What remains of a teacher of students who film their script but don't write it down? What remains of a psychoanalyst if they can't tell the teacher how to get a student to write the script? The question is how a mutation of thought occurs: there is a mutation if an encounter is experienced, that is, if affects are mobilized that break established meanings.

Fourth Meeting

They reached out to request this final meeting, which marked the close of the intervention. It was a very promising conversation in which two teachers spoke about how important it was for them to receive us – “*the psychoanalysts*” as they called us – and how much it

helped them realize how they were doing and what they hadn't been activating. They said it was deeply meaningful to have been heard and accepted in their complaints and frustrations – something absolutely unusual – and that they wished other colleagues at the school could benefit from the experience. To get lost and be transformed, to recognize oneself in other modes. We, too, had become others: our affects, desires, and representations had been stirred.

As for the class, they took new measures, proposing to make pizza with the students every week – but only if they followed the rules they had collectively established.

Another interesting development was the proposal to change the name of the class, to stop calling it “*Flow Correction*”. The students decided to paint a portrait of the class and, although they didn't want to change the class name, they asked that the phrase “*Follow the flow*” be written on the painting.

Something begins to find a place – because it is given a place. To give something a place means to open oneself beyond preconceived containers.

In this sense, giving space to pizza-making and to renaming the class implies opening a kind of play that allows each situation to find its own way of playing. To discover one's own rules of the game – not universal or transcendent, but limited and, above all, shared. It's a shift in perspective: we can remain stuck in what cannot be done, invoking a norm, or we can produce something different.

To give place is an act of instatement – a political and ethical wager on the transformative potential of our psychoanalytic interventions. In this sense, *"the proposal is to transform the map that represents a psychoanalysis-center and "dissident" practices on the margins into a psychoanalysis understood as a cartography that "maps" the multiplicity of dimensions impacting the totality of our practices"* (Wald, 2023)

Final thoughts

What logic underlies the configuration of a class labeled “*Flow Correction*” – a space where students facing the greatest challenges are isolated and grouped together? What shifts occur that, some time later, allow these young people to create a portrait of the class and inscribe the phrase “*Follow the flow*”?

Something was de-essentialized – lost as inert substance, transformed into process, set into motion. Something continues to flow.

Denise Najmanovich (2020) refers to the “*container model*” to illustrate how, in Western thought, we tend to operate within Aristotelian logic. We perceive ourselves and others through categorical frameworks – clear, distinct classifications that resist hybridity, mixture, and contamination. The correlate of this categorical logic is the immunitary paradigm. Roberto Esposito (2005) in *Immunitas*, argues that xenophobia functions as an immunological defense against an external enemy – a classical and intuitive conception of immunology as a binary opposition between self and other. In this view, all forms of discrimination are, at their core, immunological.

Lapoujade (2018), in his reading of Souriau, suggests that certain forms of existence assert their right to become more real – and to do so, they require a process of instatement. To instate is to legitimize existences, to affirm their right to occupy space and time. The present is post-pandemic; the geography is a country marked by structural racism. This is precisely what these young people demand through practices of counter-conduct (Lazzarato, 2006), which open bifurcation processes in relation to dominant pedagogical subjectivity, enabling unheard-of singularizations. Can we interpret the insurrection of these youth as a political gesture against the prevailing pedagogical subjectivity – a framework in which they are denied a place?

In *Por un arte de instaurar modos de existencia que no existen*, Pelbart (2014) writes:

“Perhaps another political and collective subjectivity is (re)emerging... for which we lack categories and parameters: more insurgent, anonymous, multiple, of movement rather than party, of flow rather than discipline, of impulse rather than purpose” (Pelbart, 2014, p.85; author’s translation)

When working with vulnerable individuals or minoritized populations, we are summoned to bear witness to modes of existence that demand to be seen through our eyes. These are fragile existences, closer to nothingness, and they are the ones that most urgently seek to become real. Just as science requires experimental devices to instate theories (Latour, 1983), psychoanalysis also relies on instatement devices – tools that privilege process,

Our devices privilege processes and transformations: novel meanings are instaurative and transform us as well – if we allow a shift in perspective to take place. Pelbart (2022), in another text, writes

“Perhaps all this depends, at its core, on a rare theory of encounter. Even at the extremes of solitude, encountering another is not an extrinsic collision, but rather the experience of the distance that separates us, and the act of flying over that distance in a mad coming and going”. (Pelbart, 2022, lines 135–137; author’s translation)

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