the situation of psychoanalysis

Interview with Oscar Zentner

Toro de Psicanálise:

Could you describe the Lacanian Psychoanalytic movement in Australia, 100 years since the birth and two decades since the death of Jacques Lacan?

Oscar Zentner:

The birth of Lacanian psychoanalysis in Australia is tied to different circumstances: mainly to self-exile, to a singular desire and also to the psychoanalytic formation of its founders in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In October 1977, The Freudian School of Melbourne was founded by two Argentinean analysts: Marfa-Inés Rotmiler de Zentner and Oscar Zentner, exactly three years prior to the dissolution of L’École Freudienne de Paris.

I have taken the first of the Twelve Provisional Points of the Proposition of 2nd September, formalised subsequent to the founding of The Freudian School of Melbourne, in which we wrote the following: The School is founded by psychoanalysts and they interpret their act as a parapraxis. If indeed the analyst holds his act in horror, this real, which is a failed encounter cannot be unfamiliar to him in its structure.

Having received proof of the hostility and attacks aroused by the reception of the introduction of Lacanian psychoanalysis in Australia, and with the intention of receiving our own message in an inverted form, we attempted to seek knowledge of its existence abroad, beyond Australia’s geographical borders.

In this manner, we conveyed the communication of this foundation to Lacan and his tangible answer was translated into the invitation we received to join him in Caracas, Venezuela in 1980. This act, now in discourse, opened up the outline of a possible interchange between analysts. Similarly, the communication was conveyed, amongst other places, to L’École Freudienne de Paris and to the Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires.

We hereby made our wager with the act that evoked the metaphor of Alea jacta est, which, since the crossing of Rubicon, history has so often put to the test. Our crossing, and one with no return, was to approach the littoral of the first public homage to Freud in Australia. This wager merited the name of act in so far as it subsequently established the conditions from which a new discourse might be structured. This discourse turned the sleight of hand used by the Australian branch of the IPA into an anachronism, a sleight of hand that disguised its theoretical and clinical inadequacy as an assumed analytical neutrality, which in this case could be only be qualified as a generalised aphasia, given that their words were never pronounced in public up until a few years ago.
The agraphia of its members continues and as a result, ‘official’ psychoanalysis up until now has never established a psychoanalytic publication.

On the other hand we extended an invitation to read Freud as a primary reading, that is, directly from his own writings, writings that up until then were read as a secondary reference through the filters of a Fenichel or a Rickman. The first task of the School thus consisted of organising open and simultaneous seminars on Freud and Lacan.

As a result of the first public homage to Freud in Australia in 1979, forty years after his death, some of the works presented were published in the inaugural volume of the *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, a publication which became the first journal of Australian psychoanalysis and the first Lacanian psychoanalytic journal in the English language in the world.

Concomitantly we also opened a space for work in the psychiatric hospital where we undertook the presentation of patients, a space in which the psychoses situated us in a transference of questioning. As a consequence, a dialogue was opened with psychiatry, thus, for the first time, allowing questions that we had to work to be opened up, starting from what might be a possible psychoanalytic perspective that could be differentiated from what, up until that time, had constituted a dialogue of the deaf, in which the structural misunderstanding had been amplified into a mutual distrust in which the psychoanalyst of that time, feeling that he was at fault, had resisted listening to the genuine questions posed by the psychiatrist, which, by remaining neglected, were not able to be worked.

This whole situation, which is already in the past, contained dramatic moments in which the specular aggression unfurled with hypocrisy, promising many ‘riches’ that would flow to us if we renounced our act, or ‘misfortunes’ that we would suffer if we persisted with it. To be clear about this, it was said that our practice would be welcome and well-paid by having patients referred, having as the only condition that we call ourselves ‘psychotherapists and not psychoanalysts’. Threats of what would befall us were established, through legal and other pretexts, if we were to persist with our practice of psychoanalysis. Thus it was!

In order to give an account of these grave discussions, we wrote at that time a short paper, *Psychoanalysis in Australia*\(^8\), where we made use of a paragraph from Borges in his *History of Infamy*, the extreme condensation of which did not let slip that what was already confirmed in our reply through our refusal to retreat, and the fact of this not being negotiable, forever marked the clear-cut difference between the impossibility of the psychoanalytic act and the possibility of the political act, according to the Aristotelian definition of politics as science of the possible.

The foundation of *The Freudian School of Melbourne* marked, in the way in which it was born, a before and an after of psychoanalysis in the English-speaking world. It is also worthwhile emphasising that, in contrast to what would occur much later in the United States and in England, in Australia the Lacanian psychoanalysis that *The Freudian School of Melbourne* proposed was not a psychoanalysis of the university. On the contrary:
transmission necessitated psychoanalysis in intention, since from the very beginnings its principle task was the formation of analysts. As far as the pendant of psychoanalysis in extension was concerned, the IPA group tolerated it, even encouraged it, in order to leave the field open and restrict pure psychoanalysis to a private hunting ground of the official society. In this way, with no major problems, what was delimited was that the psychoanalysis that they continued to call ‘applied’, was to become strictly academic.

This whole scenario was subverted with the distinction that we established from the beginning, in order to separate that part of psychoanalysis that is able to be taught from that which is transmitted\(^9\), through it being precisely in this non-coincidence that the particularities of what we understand as the singularity\(^10\) of Lacanian psychoanalysis are given.

In relation to what was said in respect of Lacan’s death, let us repeat what we wrote at that moment in the *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*: “The death of Lacan cannot be reduced to his physical disappearance. Through his transformation forever into a signifier, his death is, for us of the School, the abundance of his discourse”.\(^11\)

With his death Lacan redoubled his own affirmation by which a subject is always represented by a signifier for another signifier. In this way Lacan, through his name, became this signifier, and, through his death, this mute real, but, in the end what did this signify for us, beyond the multiple possible interpretations? Not even his death prevented his name being used as a screen,\(^12\) thereby avoiding taking up the consequences that follow and which we find perfectly sketched out in the words left to us by Freud with Goethe, as: *what thou hast inherited from thy fathers, acquire it to make it thine*.\(^13\)

With these necessary impasses we will only be capable of advancing if we have the courage to open and to work a path that, in so far as it is knotted to a name, will be closed off, prohibited, and when not, repressed. That which I designate as work could also be called destiny, but not one that awaits us, but rather as what we must do. Only the opportunity to do so can lead us to becoming loosened from religion, the same one from which the psychoanalyst suffers and of which Lacan warned for those who were able to listen, and in his attempt to make us hear proposed *going beyond the father*, with the condition of first being able to *make use of him*.

Indeed, I am here putting forward something that does not date from today, that is, in what manner did Lacan make use of Freud? In the manner asserted by many, in hearing in the famous *return to Freud*, as a return? This is not what I would put forward: what I am asserting is quite different: *this return to Freud* was precisely *the point of no return*, and it is our responsibility to be able to accept this cut that was produced between Freud and Lacan.\(^14\)

The fact that this does not guarantee the act would not be reason enough to reject it. The psychoanalytic act can only be guaranteed retrospectively and, furthermore, in the place in which we are left as effect of that act, if act there is, knotted, or simply extinguished.
**Toro de Psicanálise:**

How do interchanges usually occur between the analysts and the institutions of Australian psychoanalysis with other fields of knowledge and art?

**Oscar Zentner:**

In regard to this, both analysts formed in *The Freudian School of Melbourne* as well as those from the branch of the *International Psychoanalytic Association* intervene in various fields of knowledge and the arts according to their abilities and their disquiet. There is no way of generalising this without being misleading and trivialising the question. What is certain is that each analyst is directed in this by his or her transferences.

Now let us explain this: the relations that analysts sustain with other fields of knowledge, in the field circumscribed as psychoanalysis in extension, have often been an extension of the manner in which one also works clinically. It is not so much the relation with these fields that is at play, but rather the conception that is worked with, and from which one starts off, in what is said regarding what is understood as psychoanalysis.

By attempting to respond to your question it becomes obvious to us that, in general, art as well as other fields of knowledge are considered to be an impoverished sublimation. This is according to a point of view (limited in our opinion) that is restricted to the categories of reality and fantasy, making of the latter that which is opposed to the former. This opposition which is confined to the symbolic-imaginary duality leads, no doubt, to a conception that, however undesirable, appears to be subjected to the principles of paranoid interpretation in which, effectively and primordially, there exists “a symbolic whole” that is consequently interpreted, starting from the premise that “this very whole has to do with all”. The theory utilised, by not recognising what lies outside of it within the walls well-contained by this duality, prohibits an encounter with that which, though not being known does not cease to exist – the real. We have attested to the fact that the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are not able to be renounced in clinical practice nor in psychoanalysis in extension. This is evidenced in the clinic through analyses that are interminable even when they finish, in which certainties that ought to have been lost are reinforced. It is also attested to, in second analyses as in supervision, through these subjects who steadfastly attribute meaning to this all that does not exist, and, finally, in the obscuring and omnipresent premise that they drag along, attempting to maintain the existence of the Other.

For the same reason, psychoanalysis that ignores the tripartition (real, imaginary and symbolic) uses, as we have already said, a bipartition that finds, like a ring on a finger, the response to creation and scientific discoveries in a dialectic of inter-relations between fantasy and reality. Thus, a pre-Freudian subject in whose dual dialectic is displayed its true religious vocation is revived, by once again giving signals in order to orient itself by the values of a contrived education that they receive under the auspices of an analysis, avoiding any encounter that might imply the slightest chance of realising a change of discourse. In this manner resistance is reinforced and always opposes, from the predictable repetition of its
Automaton, blindly retreating from the danger of an encounter with the possibility of a Tyche, which might end up promoting changes against the grain of meaning.

Toro de Psicanálise:

In what way does the publication of the psychoanalytic text occur, and how does it circulate?

Oscar Zentner:

Our objective, since we founded The Freudian School of Melbourne was the transmission of psychoanalysis and the formation of analysts. This objective, as we briefly and explicitly explained in the Twelve Provisional Points of this foundation, implied that the analyst would give his proofs and that such proofs would not remain unable to be articulated under the pretext of neutrality or confidentiality. The analyst, definitively, could not confuse his clinical practice with an ineffable mysticism, as Balthasar Gracián demonstrated, now a long time ago, saying: what is well said is well thought, and not the other way around. This turn of phrase, as we understand it, is a call to give testimony that the work, analytical included, can only flourish and be enriched in any interchange when the basic conditions are fulfilled. This was also the new social bond between analysts that Lacan hoped for, even though it is quite clear that, up until the present, it has remained a sketchy outline.

These minimal conditions were those which, for the first time in Australia, led to the public and open circulation of texts demonstrating that the analyst was and is convoked by at least two things: one, in which he is in a position maintained only by the desire that sustains it, in so far as he is able to be the support of the transference that is addressed to him in order to conduct an analysis; and the other in which the experience drawn from his enquiries, answers and impossibilities are carried to a writing, as the only form in which something of psychoanalysis might have the opportunity of a transmission that, if it does not attain the status of matheme, at least does not fall into the seduction afforded by the influence of religiosity through the mysteries.

Thus those concerned were convoked through texts that, for the first time, were exposed like testimonies to be examined by others. This became, thereafter, the form in which psychoanalytic texts began to circulate, opening new transferences that, in being directed towards writings, promoted and produced other writings.

With the risk of exaggerating, I want to emphasize the novelty that resulted from this modality here in Australia. It was this same modality that subverted the attitude of the traditional analyst, making unsustainable his position as the ‘untouchable’ guardian of a legality underwritten by the invariability of a letter that was kept in order that it not be read.

Toro de Psicanálise:

Paraphrasing Lacan, how could “The situation of psychoanalysis in 2001” be described?
This question obliges me to repeat myself, but how could I repeat myself without quoting myself? That is where false modesty could very well play a card, since, even in disguising this ‘self-plagiarism’, it would still demonstrate despite appearances that there might be someone who still believes in the plagiarism of ideas. The serious thing is that such a belief, and I am not referring to true paranoia, but rather to the so-called analysts who do not even question the fact that the unconscious, the psychoanalytic one I mean, is structured as a language, with the consequence that ideas do not travel from thought into language, but rather that it is through language that there are thoughts, such that plagiarism can already be found in speech itself, which speaking one language and not another implies. So I will answer the question from something that I put forward elsewhere. It is tempting to make use of the situation and speak of a crisis and certainly in speaking of a crisis no one will complain about the lack of an audience, but to calm things down it would be important to first define a little of what is understood by crisis. Firstly, and amongst other things, crisis (krisis), etymologically, means to separate, danger, to make a decision.

But the question that you posed to me did not name the word crisis, and, no doubt, in paraphrasing Lacan, it is yourselves who invite one to make it resonate by repeating it, and by virtue of this I suggest that in the question about the situation, this word is already implied, in so far as it suggests the suffering that is implicit, as being inconclusive in any situation until the resolution of the said crisis.

I recall in passing what Lacan said to us in opening his paper “The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Formation of the Psychoanalyst in 1956”: “It is rare to celebrate the centenary of a birth. To do so supposes that the work provides a continuation of the man, which conjures up survival. It is precisely the appearance of this that we have to denounce in our double theme”. And I ask you, without believing for a moment that I am exaggerating, if in answer to your question you are not obliging me, on the one hand, to have to recall these same words that Lacan used in order to refer to Freud’s birth, without refraining from first pointing out that the celebration of the work which endures beyond his death does not succeed in hiding what the same celebration obscures, which is nothing more and nothing less than the letter of Freud, which was then canonised through rituals that ensured, by repetition, that this letter would almost attain the status of Latin, in other words, that which is clearly called the prestige of dead languages. And on the other hand, does your question not also compel one to apply Lacan’s very words to the centenary of his birth and twenty years since his death?

It is certainly no small thing, but we are forewarned that knowing this is no guarantee, neither for us nor for others. Thus, since being Freudian in the era that Lacan was dealing with in this writing was no guarantee, being Lacanian in the current era is no more so. But is this the situation being referred to, the crisis, suffering included? This is far from certain and I prefer to delimit my scope in order to have some saying which might favour a certain efficacy. Although such crises are few in number, they pass almost unnoticed when we have them, when they occur. A crisis is neither stupor, nor scandal, nor even surprise.
What your question roused in me suggested the word crisis, and, I accepted that it could well not be your question but mine, which nonetheless gives the following answer. In the field of psychoanalysis we ought to be able to speak of crisis in so far as we reach a limit that necessitates a change in the situation of discourse, and it is indeed also in this way that we mark the encounter, the Tyche, with the real. Effectively, it was the situation of psychoanalysis and the formation of the analyst in 1956 that Lacan resolved in the heart of psychoanalysis, by working fallen concepts, demonstrating and approaching, with the crisis that he precipitated, the limits of the Freudian psychoanalysis.

And now let us move to the knot of your question, the situation of psychoanalysis in 2001. Effectively, we are here, but in regard to the crisis that would resolve this situation, and that no doubt in so far as there might be a situation it would need to be resolved, there are still no signs. In other words it is necessary, nonetheless, to work these Lacanian concepts that remain far from being exhausted, even if they too have been touched by the religious fervour that attempts to fix them in an up-to-date Latin.

Contrary to what is generally asserted, it is the danger of the disappearance of psychoanalysis that lies in what you invited me to speak of with the word situation. If this is correct, what can be inferred is clear: a crisis is not something that happens, it is something which is reached only when border concepts are subverted with an epistemological cut: this is what we call the real. Lacan brought us, not a solution, but a dit solution, indicating which logic had to be promoted in order to attain a making use of the father, a going beyond him. Regrettably, this indication did not facilitate a making use of the father in order to go beyond him, perhaps by the haste with which pèreversion was taken as a touchstone for all parricidal fantasies, which from the psychoanalytic myth of the Oedipus complex onwards, assists the repression of the father, in other words his perpetuation, when not simply the promotion of the jouissance of this Other that does not exist.

Toro de Psicanálise:

In Australia, is there, in effect, participation of the psychoanalytic discourse in questions concerning the social bond?

Oscar Zentner:

Whilst taking account of your question an earlier, preliminary question occurs to me, and here it is: to any possible treatment of the social bond by the psychoanalytic discourse. Because from the point of view of the social bond, it is not from the side of psychoanalysis that anything can be expected, as your question seems to suggest, neither the participation, and even less so in effect, participation of the psychoanalytic discourse in questions concerning the social bond, above all if we remember that not even at the level of the relations between analysts have there been many signs of a new social bond up until this point.
Even though it might seem abrupt to answer in this way, I am answering cautiously in regard to what can be latent in an interchange that leads us in one way or another to agree. Therefore, to oppose this inertia and to not betray myself, I would like to remind you of something that Freud very lucidly wrote: when one begins to give way with words, one ends up giving way in substance. At the risk of appearing simplistic, I emphasise what my work as a psychoanalyst determines and demonstrates to me. I will give you my answer then as a question: it would have to do with desire, the very same one, which when overcome by jouissance [...] made us recognise the Eros through which life discovers how to prolong its jouissance in the reprieve of its decay. If this presupposed social jouissance existed, would it be anything other than macabre?

It is enough to remember what occurred and what will certainly continue to occur, when someone, psychoanalyst or not, promises, or simply promotes, the effective participation of the psychoanalytic discourse in the social bond. Moreover, from what place could this be done? As an analyst? And how would it be justified, if not by the promise of the good? I would truly not recommend it; as is said ironically and dryly in English: By asking for it, you get more than what you bargain for.

Toro de Psicanálise:

2001 was the year of the Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis of Recife. What is the importance of that event at this juncture?

Oscar Zentner:

I have participated in the Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis right from the beginning, and, regarding the origins of the idea of such a Reunion, I wish to remind you that it has its antecedents in the convocation made by Lacan in 1980, to his Lacanos in Caracas. With the death of Lacan in 1981 and the dispersion of the analysts who recognised themselves in Lacan’s teaching, four years later the first Lacanoamerican Reunion of Psychoanalysis was brought to fruition with the structure with which we are still familiar.

The importance of this Reunion is evident as much by its very different characteristics to any other reunion or psychoanalytic conference, as by the work of exchanges that are promoted and by being reaffirmed by the fact that each one speaks in his own name, sustained only through clinical practice and the impasses that interrogate us.

Its importance is also manifested in the means by which it subtly indicates the different ways of presenting one’s work and of opening dialogues that are generated out of urgency. Finally, the fact that there is no pre-determined theme allows the possibility, even with the risks it carries, that, in effect, when one speaks one does so from the moment that questions one and not from an a priori indication by the superego of what one ought to question.

It is also a Reunion that allows the presentation of one’s work in the state of an ongoing work in progress, facilitating the overcoming of inhibitions and putting aside the ridiculousness of having to be mummified by the supposed possession of a knowledge. It is worthwhile
recalling what was said in the seventh point of the foundation of The Freudian School of Melbourne: “[...] the difference between psychoanalysts is a product of their work, that is why it is neither asked nor indicated, it is recognised”. 26

**Toro de Psicanálise:**

In light of these elements, what can you say regarding the future of psychoanalysis?

**Oscar Zentner:**

The future of psychoanalysis? This is a question that gives me the shivers, as Lacan said, and on this point he demonstrates that he knew very well what he was saying. I have often listened to those who spoke of marvellous tomorrows and a future full of promises as the most direct reference to the suicide in which they would meet their end.

An answer concerning the future could not be other than that of making it present, to conquer it, not to wait for it. I accept that there dreadful things that remain, that the panacea of drugs might make psychoanalysis seem superfluous and other many other dark predictions like that of the end of the world, not that of the delusion, but rather the delusional idea of being atomised, even if this is certainly also a possibility now. If alongside these possibilities imaginary death does harm, it is what makes Freud say: *Si vis vita parabellum*, contrary to what obsessional neurosis demonstrates in the permanent preparation for death, to the point that he does not live. And it is the analyst who should then redeem the significance of this saying: *If you want life prepare yourself for death*; or, in the words that Lacan reads to us from Dante: *The only sin is sadness*. And it is well-known that sadness is not what is felt for what one had and lost. No, sadness is something else. It is, in effect, that failure in the subject to not have had the courage to desire what he or she wants.

To conclude, I cannot predict anything, simply because I would not be able to place anything prior to saying, not even my ‘unconscious’, a common error of those who promote *insight, holding*, intuition, feelings, these *tutti quanti* which Dalí genially designated as the *most prostituted*. The only thing I dare is – if you will allow me the neologism – to *post-dict*, but in order to avoid the easy and tempting pitfalls, the fact is that I cannot predict. Nonetheless, and it is because of this that I insist and take a risk, I can put a wager on the act and it will be from this act, if this is what I am doing, then yes, there will be a saying.

I have not even attempted to answer the questions in their totality, resulting from the precautions I take in order to avoid the temptations with which the good gestaltic forms of completeness, by appeasing anxieties, stifle the only possibility of situating something from lack, including desire. Let us deal with your question, if we can thus take it up again. You asked about the psychoanalysis of the future, or else the future of psychoanalysis. The latter, which you are really asking about, depends on what we are doing today; you in Maceió, Brazil, we here in Melbourne, Australia, and others in other places, wherever they might be.

I thank you for asking me these questions that allowed and stimulated me to endeavour to answer questions that I had to appropriate, since they were not mine, in attempting to
respond. And if the comparison is worthwhile, this is also the future of psychoanalysis – to be confronted by questions, which, in seeming strange, drag us out of the comfort of the apathy that, by offering us certainties, deprives us of our possibilities. The strange, in showing us its true face of the real, urges us, even if wavering, finally, towards the only new certainty, that which is born in concluding.

(Translated from Portuguese by Tine Norregaard-Arroyo and Michael Plastow)

References

1. This interview first appeared in the journal Antígona, No. 4, October 2001, 124-137 under the title “A Situação da Psicanálise em 2001”. It is translated and reproduced here with the permission of the editor and Oscar Zentner.

2. Psychoanalyst

3. Antígona is a journal of Toro de Psicanálise (Torus of Psychoanalysis). Here Toro de Psicanálise is the editorial committee that formulated the interview.


6. Lacan, Jacques: “If the analyst is winnowed as the scrap that I mentioned, it is by having a glimpse of how humanity stands in regard to good fortune (humanity is steeped in this: for it there is only good fortune), and through this he must have circumscribed the cause of his horror, his own, detached from that of all others, horror of knowing. [...] Thenceforth he knows how to be a scrap. It is what the analyst had to make him feel at least. If he is not carried to enthusiasm by this, there may indeed have been analysis, but analyst no chance. [...] The analyst, in authorising himself only from himself, passes his fault to the passeurs and the session continues for general good fortune – tainted, nonetheless, by depression” (“Note Italienne”. Ornicar? (1982). 9.)

7. The die is cast.

8. Zentner, Oscar: “This title, which we borrowed from Borges, multiplied our condensation in allowing to be heard in it what was disturbing him in the metropolises regarding what was happening at that time in their colonies” (Ornicar? 23 (1982). 188.).


17. Zentner, Oscar. “La psychanalyse en Australie”.


19. We find in the dictionary of the French language the following words of Montesquieu: Quand je pense à la la situation des princes, toujours entourés des hommes avides et insatiables, je ne puis
que les plaindre. (When I think about the situation of the princes, always surrounded by greedy
and insatiable men, I cannot but pity them.)

20 Not only in the reference Lacan made to *The Stolen Letter*, as *purloined*, deferred, as suffering,*
*souffrance*, but also as that which prevents a conclusion.


23 It is understood that since Lacan, it is well known that the only thing that is supposed is a subject.

24 The good is not only not desire, it is this kind of counterdesire in which the goods that always adorn
the path of being enjoyed by the Other are converted, incarnated like a custom into a little other,
in the same way that in former times those fields that *Arbeit macht frei* were adorned. See also
what I showed in “Winnicott avec Khan”.

25 Equivalent to: ‘We never thought we would to end up in this sort of situation’.

26 “The Twelve Provisional Points of the proposition of 2nd September 1978”. See: Zentner, “La
psychanalyse en Australie”.