

## Communication Disorder: Contemporary Art and Psychoanalysis *Desorden comunicativo: arte contemporáneo y psicoanálisis*

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### **Abstract:**

This revision seeks to analyze the methodological intersections of contemporary art and psychoanalysis, by considering the value attributed to communication disorders by both fields. I will analyze elements of "In the Face of time: History of art and anachronism of Images" (2000), by Didi-Huberman. In addition, I will single out two texts that are crucial to the psychoanalytic method: "The Uncanny" (1919), by Freud and "Function and field of speech and Language" (1953), by Lacan. The concept of the uncanny is central to this approach, since it reveals the proximity between strangeness and familiarity. It is through the concept of the uncanny that psychoanalysis unfolds the perspective of a negative aesthetics, which is not at the service of the completeness of communication. Instead, it focuses on the cracks that paradoxically allow us to say more and to look at the latent contents of communication. Contemporary art and psychoanalysis both use non-linear communication. Research performed at their intersection is based on qualitative methodologies and seeks to analyze exemplary situations in culture, such as the discourses of an epoch and works of art. In this methodological encounter, there isn't a single meaning to be sought. On the contrary, it is the researcher's task to reflect on the paths that lead to the creation of a work of art, as well as on the ideals it conveys, its singularity and its relationship with culture. He can then render visible the complexity and the multiple meanings embedded in the work of art.

### **Keywords:**

Communication; psychoanalysis; contemporary art; culture; method

### **Resumen:**

*Esta revisión busca analizar las intersecciones metodológicas del arte contemporáneo y del psicoanálisis, considerando el valor atribuido a los desajustes de la comunicación en ambos campos. Analizaré elementos de "Ante el tiempo: Historia del arte y anacronismo de las imágenes" (2000), de Didi-Huberman. Además, voy a destacar dos textos que son cruciales para el método psicoanalítico: "Lo inquietante" (1919), de Freud y "Función y campo del habla y del lenguaje" (1953), de Lacan. El concepto del*

*inquietante es fundamental para este enfoque, ya que revela la proximidad entre lo extraño y la familiaridad. Es a través del concepto de lo extraño que el psicoanálisis despliega la perspectiva de una estética negativa, que no está al servicio de la integridad de la comunicación. Las grietas que, paradójicamente, nos permiten decir más y observar los contenidos latentes de la comunicación. Tanto el arte contemporáneo como el psicoanálisis utilizan la comunicación no lineal. La investigación realizada en su intersección se basa en metodologías cualitativas y busca analizar situaciones ejemplares en la cultura, como los discursos de una época y obras de arte. En este encuentro metodológico, no hay un único significado que buscar, por el contrario, es tarea del investigador reflexionar sobre los caminos que conducen a la creación de una obra de arte, así como sobre los ideales que transmite, su singularidad y su relación con la cultura. Luego puede hacer visible la complejidad y los múltiples significados incrustados en la obra de arte.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Comunicación; psicoanálisis; arte contemporáneo; cultura; método.*

## 1. Introduction

This revision, titled “Disorders of communication: Contemporary art and psychoanalysis”, proposes to analyze the language and the forms of communication with which psychoanalysis and contemporary art are concerned. In addition, it seeks to reflect on the developments of research methods that are theoretically grounded in these two fields of knowledge, which distance themselves from approaches based on understanding and linearity.

To this end, I have structured my proposal along three structural axes, which will reveal the specificities of these methods. The first axis concerns the "fundamentals" of the conception of language that brings both fields together. The second axis addresses what I will call "lighthouses", the objectives towards which research and practice are oriented. The third axis concerns the "objects", which vary widely in both fields, and necessarily involve the researcher. These issues bring us to the question of the value attributed to communication disorders by both fields.

In each of the axes of analysis outlined, I will analyze different works of art that take the processes of deconstruction proposed by contemporary art to the limit. This involves re-situating the work of art, the artist and the public with regard to the canons and movements of Art History. I will analyze elements of "In the Face of time: History of art and anachronism of Images" (2000), by Georges Didi-Huberman. In addition, I will single out two texts that are crucial to the psychoanalytic method: "The Uncanny" (1919), by Sigmund Freud and "Function and field of speech and Language" (1953/1998), by Jacques Lacan.

## 2. Fundamentals

Figure 1. Paulo Bruscky, Máquina de filmar sonhos, 1977.



I will begin with the thought-provoking work of Paulo Bruscky, “Machine for Filming Dreams” (1977). This piece was created during the Brazilian dictatorship and it consists of a newspaper insert. Bruscky created it as a way to circumvent censorship and to captivate the reader into the world of imagination. Therefore, his proposal simultaneously articulates a critique of his living context and emphasizes a dimension of life that is lost in the pragmatics of daily routine. Bruscky captivates the spectator in an unusual way, shaking him out of his usual slumber. He reveals the allure of the possibility of capturing an elusive human experience, but also the horror of being confronted in a clear way by all those images that seem to have no meaning, and which come together with our most intimate desires in a fantastic and disconnected way.

Freud was the first to bring the realm of dreams into the field of science. By listening to the hysterical patients at Salpêtrière, he formulated the theory of the unconscious, a cornerstone of psychoanalytic thought. In the theory of trauma and psychic division, Freud claims that there is a system in the psychic apparatus that sustains a significant part of the human life and dominates its actions beyond one’s explicit beliefs. Man is no longer master in his own house (Freud, 1917).

Dreams, as one of the formations of the unconscious, are structured as a language. They speak, but not in a linear way. Their encrypted language says more, but also less, than one would like. It interweaves fragments of daytime recollections with memory and desires.

The disorders of communication involve the two dimensions of saying that sustain the whole of discourse: the conscious and the unconscious. One thing is what is said and another is the position of the subject when he says it. A dream reveals all its power

when it is told to another person, in the act of unfolding and blending images and words.

But not only in dreams do we perceive the presence of the unconscious with its multifaceted temporality and its ability to produce connections. Psychoanalysis, departing mainly from the contributions of Jacques Lacan, affirms that the unconscious sustains all speech. The unconscious is like a chain that supports linear and conscious speech, appearing in the structure of discourse and through its loopholes. What do you express in your speech besides what you intentionally say?

Both contemporary art and psychoanalysis have in common a critique of the objectivity of communication, as well the epistemological claim of an incomplete subject and an inaccessible truth. For both fields, precariousness is the foundation of existence and of the ways of being and acting. One common goal of both practices is the creation of ways to interpret reality and to reveal its complex and impure nature. In this process, certainties are suspended, in order to broaden the possibilities of the human life. The subject, in light of these epistemological grounds, is doomed to incompleteness, since he is a being of language.

### 3. Lighthouses:

Figure 2. Cildo Meireles, Abajur, 2010.



CILDO MEIRELES  
Abajur, 2010. 100x100x100 cm.

An important lighthouse that leads us to the encounter between art and psychoanalysis is the analysis of works of art as symptoms of an epoch. The symptom is also a formation of the unconscious, which establishes a compromise between what is shown and what is hidden. In the words of Georges Didi-Huberman, a philosopher and art critic: "... a symptom never arises at the opportune moment, always appears in setback, as an old malaise that returns to annoy the present... According to a law that resists

trivial observation, an underground law, which comprises multiple durations, heterogeneous times and intertwined memories" (2017, p. 43).

Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles created the piece "Abajur" (2010), (lampshade, in English), for the 29th São Paulo Biennial, whose theme was: "There is always a glass of sea for a man to sail in". The phrase clearly refers to a poem by Jorge de Lima, "Song one", which is part of the book: "Invention of Orpheus" (2017, p. 18). I will show the first verse:

"We undertake with the help of chance  
journeys that were never designed  
without scripts, without maps or astrolabes  
and without the letter to the king recounting the journey"

At first glance, Meireles' installation looks simply like a beautiful seashore. As in a Japanese lampshade, images go by as if the spectator was contemplating a day at sea. The caravel stands out as a prominent significant, possibly referring to a certain time period, dense with history and human achievement. But by "entering" the environment proposed by the installation, a certain mismatch is produced, since the image that we see is the fruit of the sweat and incessant work of men who are rotating the central cylinder. The spectator is brought into a state of suspension, his certainties are shaken and he is looked at by what seemed to be an object of pure contemplation. To what extent are you responsible for the work of the men who rotate the machine?

By breaking with artistic movements, with the perspective of progress in art, and with representation, contemporary art grounds itself in a critical knowledge of art history and in the function of art in culture. Artists and psychoanalysts fully explore the consequences of the misunderstanding and of the uncanny. The methods of free association and floating listening make the researcher navigate through words and images, highlighting significant points, repetition and the strangeness. Like the poet says, one should navigate, contemplating chance, without big projects to be carried through, but, at the same time, one needs direction and foundations.

Art and psychoanalysis are ways of interpreting reality that adapt their methods to the objects with which they are involved. Freud has always argued that clinic and research walk hand in hand, since regardless of how much theoretical and historical knowledge we have, we must consider the singularities of the objects with which we work. In this regard, praxis and research in both fields depart from epistemic and historical foundations in order to effect the intended deconstruction.

#### 4. Objects

Figure 3. Arnaldo Antunes, Muita luz, cega, 2006.





The poem-object of Brazilian artist Arnaldo Antunes opens our third axis. The piece: "Muita luz, cega" (Too much light, blind, in English) sustains the deconstruction that contemporary art calls into question, by the diversity of its purposes and materials. The critique of contemplation proposed by contemporary art brings it closer to an art that seeks to analyze its concepts, calling the position of the spectator and the artist into question by altering the objectives and objects of art. Arnaldo's phrase emphasizes with precision that the excess of light and the search for a full truth end up blinding and confusing the eye.

Art and psychoanalysis meet in this strategy of summoning our gaze to strangeness, to what seems without a place. In linear speech, the understanding is reduced to an imaginary dimension. In most cases, the language of advertising makes use of this discourse of cliché images, which captures the subject.

"The art of the psychoanalyst consists in suspending the certainties, consuming the mirages of the I, prolonging the act of saying" (Lacan, 1998, p.253). Accordingly, the method of psychoanalysis seeks the density of objects and discourses. The structural dimension of analysis involves the act of significant listening and looking towards what is strange. What stands out? Which words are repeated? What seems to be out of place? What nodes of connection emerge between the analyst and the object?

They hear half words, lapses, sighs, silences. The Analytical Act and the Creative Act come together through the precision of the cut, which becomes clear by its effects. The timely intervention gives meaning to a discourse, situating its time, its conditions of transmission and its possibilities of becoming.

## 5. Communication disorders as a method

The deepening of the unconscious is the general objective of all research based on psychoanalysis. Through this perspective there is no message and linear communication. We are always in the midst of confusion, of nonsense. The psychoanalyst and the artist seek to highlight these aspects, so that we may say more, perhaps elaborating the disorder of communication.

The ambiguous character of contemporary art also plays with misunderstandings. It is precisely at this juncture that art and psychoanalysis come together, since there is a utopian dimension to both conceptions. There is a search for the multifaceted character of reality and communication. Language, in the most diverse modalities in which it is presented, is an appeal to the other and to culture.

It is a mode of connection with the other and a way of belonging to culture. However, it is important to sustain the dimension of the enigma, since if it is lost, the subject is placed in front of a mirror, which on the one hand fascinates him, but on the other hand, announces his death, in the risk revealed by the double.

In this regard, contemporary art breaks with representation and contemplation, creating much more than answers, interrogations and unfolding of singularities. This is the ethical-political dimension that brings art and psychoanalysis together.

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