WORKING-THROUGH COLLECTIVE WOUNDS

TRAUMA, DENIAL, RECOGNITION IN THE BRAZILIAN UPRISING

RALUCA SOREANU

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To E.

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Introduction

In June 2013, a chant electrified the broad avenues of Rio de Janeiro, uttered by crowds larger than a million people: 'Vem! Vem! Vem pra rua vem!' ['Come! Come! Come to the streets, come!']. An enormous crowd was making an enormous invocation. It seems that what was invoked was a social phantasy, or an image, or a dream, in which everyone, the entire city, is in the streets and in the squares. What lies hidden in this image? What does the crowd want, from itself and from others? Why did this chant 'wrap' itself around a city and around a country? And, most of all, what happened to our psychic states, while we were chanting and after we stopped chanting?

A common spectre haunts social and psychoanalytic theories: that of the 'mob', the irrational crowd, the destructive or regressed collective.[1] In the following pages, I approach this spectre from the angle of a psychoanalytic theory of recognition. I also propose a psychosocial ethnography of the *precision* of the creativities of the collective, in relation to its traumatic wounds. The collective that assembles in these pages is one that is able to mourn, to create symbols, and to organise complicated scenes of re-enactment.

I write about different registers of the social, and most of all about the traumatic confusion between the register of redistribution and the register of recognition. Drawing insights from the trauma theory of psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi and his idea of the 'confusion of tongues', the book engages the social confusions of tongues that entrap us in the scene of trauma and that bind us in alienation and submission. What is particular to this formulation of the problem of recognition is that it begins with a psychoanalytic understanding of psychic splitting.

In these pages, I trace *the social life of psychic fragments.* In this, Ferenczi's voice is important because through a close look at his work we fill some of the phenomenological gap that exists in psychoanalysis around the problem of psychic splitting. In other words, we get closer to understanding what is being split in the psyche; what are the different 'moves' of the process of splitting; and what is the life of the fragments resulting from such splitting. Not all these fragments map on to the three Freudian agencies of the psyche: id, ego and superego. Some complicate the Freudian image, and demand from us new names and new descriptions. After a metapsychological journey alongside fragments, we will ponder their social life. Some fragments act to perpetuate traumatic violence. Other fragments are tied into intricate acts of containment, or into sparing something from being crushed, dissolved, ruptured, killed. Importantly, this is not the same as merely stating that we are all fragmented subjects, and that the individual is a liberal fiction. Working in the psychoanalytic tradition, we can understand that fragments can 'do' different things, psychically and socially, and that these 'doings' need to be theorised.

Addressing social theorists, the book quietly asks: who's afraid of metapsychology? Addressing psychoanalysts, it inquires: who's afraid of a revised metapsychology? In dialogue with social and political theorists, I point to how a number of psychoanalytic 'black boxes' populate social theory: unconscious, desire, eros, drive.[2] Without a model of the psyche, it remains difficult to bring together the psychic and the social dimensions of life.

In dialogue with psychoanalysts, I argue that many stories remain to be told about how violence travels across the social fabric; about how violent transmissions function to set the limits of our actions and our creativities;

about the kind of psychic states that sustain an enchainment of violence that encompasses an entire society; about the forms of traumatic violence whose authors are institutions; about the State and its own voracious attachment to violence.

In these pages, a conception of memory assembles, bringing an important modification to Freudian metapsychology. With Ferenczi, we can ponder on a new system of memory, the system of memory of the id, which makes repetition, remembering and working-through look very different. What I propose is to think in terms of memory-wounds, a collection of scars, making up a scar-tissue, without which there is no ego.

One of the most curious fragments of the psyche resulting from traumatic splitting is 'Orpha', as Ferenczi (1932a) calls it. A kind of 'guardian angel', it is responsible both for preserving life in situations of extreme violence and for omnipotent hallucinations meant to disguise violence and death. Starting from here, I speak of *Orphic socialities*, socialities of radical mutuality, socialities of psychic resonance, socialities of corporeal connection, placing bodies, body parts and organs in new forms of contact and new juxtapositions. I ask questions about the social operation of a psychic fragment that finds itself in a limbo between the death drive and the life drive. In a sense, this is pointing to a social and psychic complication: to an agency that, while involved in the preservation of life, can always flip into traumatic excess and deadly omnipotence.

Theories of recognition run the risk of turning into intricate sites of entrapment in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, where the contours of the master and of the slave are eternalised, and so is the grammar of their encounter. To avoid this, some important theoretical work still needs to take place around the idea of recognition. The theory of recognition that I formulate here talks about the *confusion between the registers of the social*.[3]

As a psychoanalyst, I have deep confidence in the work that can be done in the consulting room, on the couch. But in the pages of this book, the 'frame' for mourning is relocated to the streets and squares. June 2013 in Brazil has shown that the wounded crowd can mourn in the streets and squares and that some important libidinal mutations take place when there is nobody organising the mourning in a tight choreography, and the sheer pressure of the traumatic mark becomes the main organising force of the scene.

Forgetting the Recent Past

There is a way in which this book is also a memory project in itself. Starting with 2014, a strange 'veil' started falling on the important events of 2013 in Brazil. June 2013[4] began to be more and more distant, to migrate to a corner of memory, or to be simply banished, forgotten, a kind of anti-event. In this book, I treat the *forgetting of the recent past* (including a 'thick' recent past with revolutionary qualities) as a symptom. That this should be the fate of such an ample and creative movement is a matter of great concern. We could argue that we are more theoretically prepared to consider the traumatic forgetting of the times of military dictatorship, with its tortures, forced disappearances and ideological impositions. A traumatic forgetfulness of the recent past, in times of democracy, appears to us as more difficult to disentangle. June 2013 is sliding out of the recent history of Brazil, precisely because of its immensity as a psychic collective event. Our journey here will thus be one of memorialisation as well, of trying to hold on to collective shapes that are threatening to turn themselves in *phantasmas*,[5] to disappear into the tear gas smoke, to slide under the veil of traumatic forgetfulness. This forgetfulness could be seen as happening at the intersection between the eternal present installed by the workings of neoliberal capitalism and the melancholia of the left which is holding on to an idealised, perfect, pure political object instead of engaging with the actual mobilisation in the streets and squares. But there is yet another driving force behind this forgetfulness of the recent past: *a traumatic state of identification with the aggressor, a state of voracious attachment to violence, an arrest in the scene of trauma.* What is puzzling here is that *institutions too can act as traumatised subjects.*

Some voices (Cocco 2014a; Safatle 2016) alert us to the fact that the left-wing democratic cycle in Latin America has ended and that no political force has yet developed since its demise. We are thus in the strange temporality of emergence, of the in-between, when something has ended, and nothing distinguishable has yet appeared. As I am writing these lines, in 2017, Brazil's political future is still to be dreamed-up. At this time, how we remember June 2013 is of crucial importance.

Walking with Ferenczi

To theorise this state of voracious attachment to violence, I am in constant dialogue with Sándor Ferenczi, a psychoanalyst of the Hungarian School of Psychoanalysis. Ferenczi is a generous but complicated thinker. Layer upon layer, we discover his political and ethical vocabulary, and his philosophical affiliations with thinkers such as Spinoza, Cornelius Castoriadis, Gregory Bateson, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, José Gil. Because of this intricacy, I stay close to his texts, and at times I let different aspects of his work, written in different periods, 'talk' to each other. In this way, Ferenczi can be taken seriously as a social and political thinker, and not only for his metapsychological inventions and revisions to Freudian theory. The journey alongside Ferenczi takes shape in the space of his 'double difference': as a *social theorist* and as a *psychoanalytic theorist*.

Many of Ferenczi's psychoanalytic ideas contain more of a social and political gesturing, rather than a full articulation. My project is one of *transposing* some of his ideas from the psychic domain to the social domain. This transposition comes after more than five years of 'living with' Ferenczi in thoughts, in writing, and, most of all, in the consulting room. It also comes after the realisation that even while I was looking at the creativities of the streets and squares, Ferenczi was still my companion. Some elaboration of his ideas was crucial for my making sense of complicated scenes of creativity or of violent destructiveness. While working on this transposition, I arrived at the theory of recognition that I write in the pages of this book.

If we remain in the domain of psychoanalytic theory, Ferenczi has a distinctive place. In many respects, he is a radical thinker and a radical practitioner.[6] In his writings we meet a metapsychology that is different from Freud's. It is a *metapsychology of fragmented psyches*. Ferenczi is also at the heart of the creation of a social clinic, the Budapest Polyclinic, where important ideas on countertransference were developed, while opening psychoanalysis to a population of patients who would not regularly have had access to it.

In Budapest, the psychoanalytic beginnings were marked by a uniquely robust and effervescent pluridisciplinarity. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the exchanges of avant-garde intellectuals (writers,

musicians, painters, psychoanalysts, medical doctors, lawyers, economists) took many shapes and referenced psychoanalysis intensely (Mészáros 2010, 2014).[7] In the summer of 1919 Sándor Ferenczi was appointed professor in psychoanalysis, in the first department of psychoanalysis within a medical university (Mészáros 2010; Erős et al. 1987).[8] Ferenczi lectured to full amphitheatres and to enthusiastic audiences. The voices of psychoanalysts were heard in the national press, as they were often consulted on a great variety of topics, from psychopathology to matters of everyday life. Finally, many of the prominent literary figures of the time (such as, for instance, Sándor Márai) found inspiration in psychoanalytic ideas and constructed a psychoanalytically-dense literary universe.

Despite this colourful beginning, as the decades passed, Ferenczi became a complicated 'object of memory', on which many of the inner conflicts of psychoanalysis as a field of knowledge were played out. Over more than two decades, Ferenczi and Freud exchanged more than a thousand letters. The theoretical labour that took place in the pages of this correspondence marks psychoanalysis to this day. In 1933, there was an important split between the two. As many writers have shown (Bergmann 1996; Brabant 2003; Haynal 1997, 2002; Martín-Cabré 1997; Schneider 1988), this split had traumatic consequences in psychoanalysis and led to a forgetfulness that lasted decades around Ferenczi's contributions to psychoanalytic theory and technique.[9] In the past two decades, we have seen a 'Ferenczi revival' (Aron and Harris 1993; Harris and Kuchuck 2015; Keve and Szekacs-Weisz 2012; Rudnytsky et al. 1996) with a growing interest in his work and complex legacies. I believe that all these acts of 'turning to' Ferenczi are forms of reparation for the traumatic forgetfulness I described.

In the pages of this book, I take the steps toward a 'second movement' within the 'Ferenczi revival', where the gesture is not to explore the richness of Ferenczi's contribution to the field of psychoanalysis and to clinical practice alone, but precisely to 'walk with' Ferenczi outside his disciplinary home, and to propose a *social analytics* centred on the ideas of the confusion of tongues and identification with the aggressor. A new socio-political vocabulary can emerge from here: new kinds of sociality and new forms of power can be described.

Seen from the Street Level

I observed the events of June 2013 not from the window,[10] but from the street level. I joined the enormous events while going to or coming back from the consulting room, and while seeing Brazilian patients in a psychoanalytic social clinic.[11] My Brazilian patients gifted me with symbolisations that are part of the story I am telling today.

I also remember very well the particular kind of intensity and anticipation that I felt a few hours before going to the first protest of over a million people, when the social media 'pulse' allowed some thoughts about the magnitude of what was to come. I was pacing up and down in my office at the university, and a question coagulated in my mind. It is a question I now know many protesters shared in those days and hours: 'What can I bring to the protest?'. On that day, I took twenty printed copies of a poem by Paul Celan, which I carried in my bag and never got to use. The protest turned out to have a faster rhythm, so my imagined gesture had no place. But what matters here – and what runs through the theoretical core of this book – is that I found myself, after having touched in my mind only the 'edges' of the huge protest, *in a state of ritual-preparedness and, ultimately, in a state of mourning*. I was preparing, without knowing why or for what exactly, by way of movements, body postures, objects that I carried with me, and objects I left behind. And just as I was preparing, so were another million people. When we met in the streets, it was a very powerful encounter. The psychic states we traversed then need to be considered, pondered on, theorised.

We were perhaps in political love. But we were also going to face the deep end of hatred, violence and destructiveness, with the repression of the protests by the state authorities.

This book makes many of its points through *psychosocial vignettes*. Akin to clinical vignettes, their aim is to *capture a movement of the libido, or the expression of a symptom, or the resolution of a symptom, or a particular kind of regression, or a kind of dreaming-up that puts some symbols in relation to others*. Taking up the role of rhythm-analyst, I write the vignettes from the memory of a psychic place where, while containing as much as possible of the workings of my own bodily rhythms (a racing heart or a heavy breath), I retained as much as possible of the movement of libido

that was unfolding around me. Just as in the clinical world, the quality of vignettes is that they contain, in the first instance, something akin to an *enigma*: not all meaning is readily revealed, and the analyst struggles to make sense of details, allusions, intensities and fragments.

In the first part of the book, I start from a discussion of *trauma* and the *symbol*, and arrive at a *theory of recognition centred on the idea of 'registers of the social'*. In the second chapter, I trace Ferenczi's conception of the symbol, and show how it travels to the social domain. I reflect on the place of materiality and the body in relation to the symbol. I capture the emergence of a 'vocabulary of pleasure' in Ferenczi's work, which amounts to a pluralisation of our conception of the drives. I refer to the 'pleasure of resemblance' [*Lust an der Ähnlichkeit*]; the 'pleasure in repetition' [*Wiederholungslust*]; and the 'pleasure in rediscovery' [*Wiederfindungslust*] (Ferenczi 1915a, p. 406). To this, I add *the pleasure of analogy*, which I see as a *doubly relational pleasure*. I go on to show how thinking in terms of the pleasure of analogy changes our understanding of groups and collectives, and takes us away from the Freudian insistence on processes of identification. I argue that there are other kinds of 'glue' that make the social bond hold, which exceed identification. Furthermore, drawing on Ferenczi's little known idea of *utraquism*, I make an epistemological exploration and I talk about a *logic of analogy* in our making sense of the world. My aim here is to show that our epistemologies are libidinised affairs: they have an erotics. Finally, I talk about trauma as an interrupted symbol.

In the third chapter, I put Ferenczi in dialogue with Castoriadis, and I propose a 'magmatic' understanding of the social. The chapter implicitly asks the question 'Who's afraid of metapsychology?', and shows how in social theory 'the unconscious' is often treated rather thinly. While keeping the commitment to Ferenczian metapsychology, I discuss alienation and ideology in terms of 'hypocrisy'. Furthermore, I explore the utopian elements that arise from here, and a curious new political actor, *homo infans*. Finally, I specify one of the main answers that the book proposes to the question of 'the social life of psychic fragments': starting from the Orpha-fragment of the psyche, a 'guardian angel' coming into being in the moment of the traumatic attack, I explore *Orphic socialities* and Orphic acts.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to discussing the idea of recognition in terms of registers of the social. I point to how there are always smaller or greater mis-inscriptions, mis-translations, mis-recognitions traversing the social domain. There is an inclination (of traumatic origin) to answer a social demand in a social language other the one in which it was originally formulated. While I treat denial as prior to recognition, I also argue that pondering on the primacy (or not) of recognition does not lead us in very productive directions: instead, a more interesting question relates to the metapsychology of recognition, and to the psychic fragments that are involved in either the act of denial or of recognition. Taking the confusion of tongues seriously creates a novel strand of critical theory, where the forms of dismemberment and fragmentation of the psyche are carefully investigated. Finally, I look at the confusion of tongues between the *register of redistribution* and the *register of recognition*, which I see as particularly important in our historical moment. Streets and squares filled with crowds protesting are 'frames' for working-through the confusion between different registers of the social.

The second part of the book discusses *trauma* and *denial* and ponders on the psychic fragments implicated in denial and in the transmission of trauma. In the fifth chapter, I speak of memory-wounds as wounds-toward-memory, marking the psyche's capacity to be affected. I also show how Ferenczi pluralises our conception of repetition and I offer a Ferenczian rereading of *Nachträglichkeit*, the complicated temporality of 'deferred action' in Freud. *Nachträglichkeit* refers to a temporal logic that governs the psychic world, where an event emerges from the interaction effects between several distinct temporalities. I discuss the crucial idea of the 'identification with the aggressor' and I go through several of the psychic 'moves' that help us to understand it better, in a close-to-phenomenological manner. Among the psychic fragments resulting from traumatic splitting there is the 'teratoma', a dead twin-inside, and perhaps a repository of a 'mad' part of the superego.

In the sixth chapter, I look at the *phantasmas* that haunt the Brazilian present time, and that cause not only the denial of the societal violence of the distant past, but also the traumatic forgetfulness of the recent past. I discuss the particular phenomena of memory that account for the place June 2013 occupies in Brazilian political imaginaries. Alongside this

traumatic forgetfulness, I discern 'memory sites' where the collective organises its frames for mourning.

The seventh chapter engages the traumatic voraciousness of the State. The traumatic confusion between life and death is not reserved to individuals and groups, but it extends to institutions, to state structures, and to the State. At times, the State itself 'eats' political symbols. We meet a voracious State, with an appetite for violence. A State that is marked by a traumatic insistence on violence. A State that is identified with the aggressor.

The third part of the book is made up by a sequence of vignettes, where the theoretical trails walked in the first two parts of the book come together, and where the focus is on *trauma* and *recognition.* The eighth chapter looks at the semiotisations around the figure of Amarildo, who disappeared without a trace during a police investigation. This discussion brings important clues for understanding a particular modality of State power: *hyperpolitics*, a politics of pure traumatic excess, consisting in the erasure of the demarcating line between life and death.

The ninth chapter is dedicated to another semiotisation of the Brazilian uprising, where the movement baptizes itself with the name '20 centavos' ['20 cents']. I argue that the curious apparition of the monetary symbol, of the coin, at the heart of this naming is aimed to turn capitalist semiotisations on their head and to relibidinise the abstraction of money.

The final chapter traces, through a recomposition of 'oblique lines', two scenes in the Brazilian uprising where Orphic socialities become discernible. The crowd is able to preserve something: itself or things that matter.

Notes

1. In her book, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler (2015) addresses the operation of this spectre in the sphere of democratic theories.
2. Among the voices in contemporary social and political theory that take psychoanalysis seriously, I mention Judith Butler (1997, 2006), Slavoj Žižek (1997), Alain Badiou (1988).

3. While I am in dialogue with Jessica Benjamin (1988, 2018) and Axel Honneth (1996, 2012), I discuss the problem of recognition in terms of sub-languages (registers) of the social that are in tension with one another and create fundamental misunderstandings.

4. The 'spark' of the 'June 2013' moment came from the *Movimento Passe Livre* [Free Transport Movement]. However, the mobilisation cannot be reduced to a single set of demands. Instead, in the following pages, the 2013/2014 uprising in Brazil will emerge as having an ample symbolic repertoire. This repertoire ranges from the specific demand of retracting the twenty-cents raise in the price of public transport (which gave the name of the uprising, '20 centavos') to more complicated and enigmatic demands that summon our interpretative powers, such as 'Por uma vida sem catracas' ['For a life without turnstiles'].

5. I write 'phantasmas', as this is on old (and out of use) Portuguese spelling of 'fantasmas' [phantasmata]. Through this move, I wish to preserve a lost letter and a reference to the colonial past, which is encapsulated in all the 'ghosts' and complicated transmissions that I discuss in this book.

6. Affirming Ferenczi as a radical practitioner can be supported by a series of actions and attitudes. To recall just one instance that captures his position on difficult issues for the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century: in 1905, Ferenczi became the Budapest representative of the International Humanitarian Committee for the Defence of Homosexuals, created by the prominent Berlin sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld. He signed petitions calling for legal reforms around the criminalization of homosexuality and he published the article *États sexuels intermédiaires* [*On the Intermediate Sex*] (1905), which argued against seeing homosexuality as a degenerate disease. Freud expressed his sympathy for this Committee, but he did not wish to be associated with the initiatives for legal reform. The two men had not yet met. See Stanton (1990).

7. The medical weekly *Gyógyászat* [*Therapeutics*] had an important role in popularising psychoanalytic ideas. Some of the main literary criticism journals, such as *Nyugat* [*The West*], and sociology journals, such as *Huszadik Század* [*The Twentieth Century*], also played a crucial part in articulating psychoanalytic concerns. A group set up by medical and engineering students, *A Galilei Kör* [*The Galileo Circle*], openly pursued the goal of making psychoanalysis part of the university curriculum for training medical doctors.

8. While this appointment was short-lived, and it was revoked only one month after, in the heat of the political events in Hungary, it did reflect the presence of psychoanalysis in Hungarian cultural life.
9. In *The Basic Fault*, Michael Balint spoke of the magnitude of the consequences of the split between Freud and Ferenczi: 'The historic event of the disagreement between Freud and Ferenczi […] acted as a trauma on the psychoanalytic world' (Balint 1968, p. 152).
10. See Henri Lefebvre's chapter 'Seen from the Window' in his book *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre 2004, pp. 27–37).
11. I am referring to the psychoanalytic social clinic of the Instituto de Estudos da Complexidade, Rio de Janeiro.

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Part I

Trauma and the Symbol