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An Introduction To Luis Hornstein's Work

Who is Luis Hornstein? This name elicits no association or psychoanalytic reference for most Canadians. He belongs to a powerful Argentinean psychoanalytic movement characterized by its creativity and its refusal to be imprisoned by dogma that thwarts analytic practice and leads to dead ends and Catch-22s. A freethinker and unconventional analyst, he does not hesitate to challenge the most alienating and deadening facets of psychoanalytic institutions. Psychoanalytic thinking itself does not escape his challenges. He protests against orthodoxies and occasionally provocatively denounces self-righteous thinkers and their pious disciples who suffocate psychoanalytic thought by reducing it to trivial or fetishistic formulas that lock it into easily digestible slogans: “What is repressed is the conceptual process from which these statements were drawn. This fetishization generates rigid formulas that become counter-invested and repress theoretical production. They become personal narcissistic bastions”¹ (Hornstein, 2000/2006, p. 245). Amidst the long list of his examples, Hornstein refers to Winnicott’s “good enough mother” and the “bedrock” of castration (a cliché to which Analysis Terminable or Interminable is reduced), or the fort-da of Beyond the Pleasure Principle. He is an ardent reader of contemporary French psychoanalytic thought and he feels close to Aulagnier, Green, Lacan, Laplanche, and Pontalis, whom he comments upon and uses as a source of inspiration for his clinical practice as well as a source of metapsychological inspiration. His work stems from Freudian and post-Freudian thought and is open to new scientific paradigms of thought focusing on the construction of contemporary psychoanalysis.

The critique of psychoanalytic institutions

Luis Hornstein was awarded the Konex de Platino prize for his psychoanalytic work from 1996 to 2006. It is important to note that this prize has been awarded on four occasions to psychoanalysts. In 1986 it was awarded to the two founders of the Argentinean Psychoanalytic Association, Angel Garma and Celes Ernesto Cárcamo, both of whom introduced psychoanalysis to Argentina, the former from Germany and the latter from France. Ten years later, it was awarded to Carlos Mario Asian for his work in promoting psychoanalysis.

1 The term bastion, sometimes translated from the Spanish as “bulwark,” is a technical term derived from the Baranger’s field theory (Baranger & Baranger, 1961/2008). The bastion is defined (Baranger, Baranger, & Mom, 1983, p. 2) as an immobilized structure which is slowing down or paralyzing the [analytic] process ... it arises in unconsciousness and silence, out of complicity between the two protagonists to protect an attachment which must not be uncovered. This leads to partial crystallisation of the field ... Sometimes the bastion remains as a static foreign object while the process apparently goes forward. In other situations, it completely invades the field and removes all functional capacity from the process, transforming the entire field into a pathological field.

In an interview with Javier Wapner, Hornstein stressed

the enormous future responsibility as a result of having won the “Konex de Platino” prize. I think that this recognition is related to the fact that I have continued to be a Freudian Psychoanalyst all the while espousing theoretical pluralism. I believe that the future of psychoanalysis rests on its ability to give shape to the multiplicity of current technical approaches. I also imagine a psychoanalysis that dialogues with other disciplines and that establishes connections with varied authors. I imagine a psychoanalysis that addresses the thinking part of Freud as opposed to what Freud thought. (Wapner, 2007)²

Subsequent to the interviewer’s question, highlighting how the scientific community has regarded freedom of thought, Hornstein quotes Castoriadis:

For psychoanalysis, we have to find a space between bureaucratic cretinism and dogmatic fetishism. It requires uprooting psychoanalysis from a certain deadly entropic imprisonment, because one of the characteristics of psychoanalytic groups is that they read only what their own groups produce. It is about producing clinically anchored thought that defies preestablished consensus. What is worrisome in the various psychoanalytic sects is their penned-in thinking. The followers are not even sufficiently interested in other schools to read their scientific publications and to refute them. A “follower” is someone that adheres to a doctrine and establishes a privileged relationship with his group while separating himself from the ordinary world. His uniqueness is diluted in a microcosm that possesses its own language, rituals and jargon. (Wapner, 2007)

Quoting Adorno, he says that whoever masters the jargon does not need to say what he thinks, or even to think it correctly, since the jargon exempts him, all the while devaluing his thinking (2003/2005, p. 50, n. 4).

Psychoanalytic journey

What is Hornstein’s psychoanalytic path? In 1970, with Oscar Massotta, he participated in the first Lacanian study groups in Buenos Aires. While Massotta talked to him about Lacan, he talked about Freud. At that time the Argentinean psychoanalytic world was under the Kleinian influence and few were studying Freud. “In Buenos Aires we assumed that Freud represented the college level while Klein was at the university level and that Freud had a historical value as opposed to a conceptual one” (Wapner, 2007). Reading Lacan put an end to this influence. However, it led to passionate storms within the Buenos Aires psychoanalytic community, and within France as well, resulting in a return to Freud by many analysts “who like Ulysses clung to the clinical mast.” He summarized this view with Pontalis’s words: “After an era where one could not be other than Lacanian, there followed another era where one could not continue to be so.” For him, Lacan was a polemist who challenged other trends, a fervent reader of Freud, but also the author of another psychoanalysis that was distant from Freudianism.

² All translations from Spanish are supplied by the author, unless otherwise indicated in the references.

In 1987 he felt that he was “not for Lacan, nor against him, but working with his concepts, upholding the debate with him that, especially at the onset, he was able to maintain with Freud” (Wapner, 2007). Today he would add, “With Lacan or against him, we cannot do without him, nor can we replace Freud by Lacan.” This brings him to differentiate Lacanian contributions from the “Lacanian effect.” In that sense his current task is to save Lacan from the Lacanian effect. He criticizes those who imitate the gestures of the Master but not his capacity to invent theory and as such “limit themselves to diffusing an empty esotericism that attempts to say a lot and ends up saying nothing.” The number of authors whose thinking has evolved from Freud’s is noteworthy. However, when we think of Lacan, “the only author who seems authorized to be original is Miller and all the others are relegated to being parrots or excommunicated.”

So what is Hornstein’s position?

As much in my personal experience as in the history of psychoanalysis, to think, we must, like the salmon, learn to swim against the current of institutional consensus. Generally speaking, institutions demand consensus and have little space for critical thought. In most institutions, what exists prevails and perturbs the emergence of new thought. (Wapner, 2007)

Hornstein distinguishes between a psychoanalysis of the frontier and a psychoanalysis of withdrawal. The latter “acts as if it has nothing new and important to learn and that all that is required is to review and revise,” as if the human psyche were always the same and psychoanalysis had the last word.

Hornstein refers to “Freudian, Lacanian and Kleinian administrators” (Wapner, 2007). With these we are treated to monologues on the training of analysts, institutional belonging, identity, and analytic filiations. When discussions occur, they are bureaucratic, offering much about what ought to be and little about what needs to be done. In contrast, the psychoanalysis of the frontier seeks to conquer new territories. Hornstein practises the latter and in that sense, like the salmon, swims against the current. He highlights the fact that psychoanalysis was born out of confrontation with the dominant disciplines of its time and we can do the same in our day. He writes that a century after its foundation, “you and I will struggle with the challenges triggered by its foundation” (2000/2006, p. 19). He challenges psychoanalysis to confront itself with new ways of thinking. It is an indispensable attitude. Otherwise, what awaits is scholasticism. If the basics are thought about and renewed, if they impregnate practice and likewise if practice impregnates them, we will manage to escape scholasticism.

Around which axes is Hornstein’s thinking organized? I can identify two: epistemological and clinico-theoretical.

The epistemological axis

The epistemological axes are centred on paradigm shifts in science. What are these paradigms?

They are basic principles that control and govern, often in a fleeting way, scientific knowledge, organizing it in such-and-such a fashion. We no longer conceive of what is scientific as the pure transparency of natural laws. We now think of a constructed scientificity because it contains a universe within itself of theories, ideas, and paradigms. Observation is itself tributary to the societal instruments of a given era. (2000/2006, p. 21)

These paradigms pose certain questions to psychoanalysis such as those of determinism, chance, and complexity.

Complexity is the new paradigm that has replaced simplicity, seen as characteristic of scientific thought since the seventeenth century. Descartes' second rule of method illustrates the latter: "Divide each of the problems in as many parts as possible, as this is required for a better solution" (1637/1947, p. 18) - in other words, to go from the most complex to the most simple in order to subsequently reconstitute the complex (Descartes' third rule), but if I may add, freed of its complexity. Simplicity is always apparent underneath changing conditions. It needs to be discovered, isolated. This is illustrated in astronomy as conceived by Copernicus and Gallileo. One argument retained in the seventeenth century was "Occam's razor": the best hypothesis is always the simplest, one that explains by using the least number of elements. Hornstein highlights that what follows is a deterministic and mechanistic vision that dissolves all that is subjective. Such determinism is perfectly illustrated by Laplace's famous myth that given all of the natural laws, combined with the universe's original conditions, we would be able to reconstruct its evolution and predict the future. In this conception of science, the functional model is constituted by an artificial machine. In contrast, the complexity paradigm places the emphasis on what has been woven together. We speak of complexity when the elements that constitute the whole are inseparable: the part and the whole, the object of knowledge and its context are woven together interdependently in a way that does not allow them be isolated.

Science today deals with complexity and opens itself to the unforeseen. Movement and fluctuations predominate over structures and permanence. It is a question of conceiving both the complexity of all reality, but also the reality of complexity. The key is a non-linear dynamic that permits access to the logic of chaotic phenomena. It is in these terms that the psyche escapes the constancy principle. In such states, turbulence never stops reproducing itself. History is destructive /creative. A recursive self-organizing loop replaces cause-effect linearity. We refer to recursive processes to signify those in which the products are simultaneously the producers of what produces them. (Hornstein 2003/2005, p. 20)

Inspired by Henri Atlan's reflections, Hornstein leans on the categories of determinism, chance, and the novel. In his description of the complexity of the universe, contemporary science reconciles the notions of determinism and of chance. They do not contradict each other as they do in the classical sciences. This is what allows us to conceive the category of the novelty. To postulate an absolute determinism, where our ignorance explains what is undetermined, implies that everything is predictable - if not in fact, then at least in principle. Likewise, if chance is only an illusion whose cause is once again attributable to our ignorance, the emergence of novelty would also be illusory. Yet in analytic work, we are prepared to tackle the unexpected, chance,

and chaos. A psyche totally submitted to determinism would be unable to take in anything new, to transform itself; but also abandoned to a pure chaotic disordered chance, the psyche would be unable to organize itself and, for starters, could not access its history. It would not be able to be born.

Hornstein writes,

The unpredictable event, what occurs at the intersection of two totally independent causal chains, plays a primordial role in complex systems. Successive bifurcations occur in those systems that are distant from equilibrium. Between each of these bifurcations exists a plateau, a kind of meseta where the laws of determinism prevail, but before and after these critical points, chance reigns. Only feedback (which can be related to the après- coup theory)³ makes it possible to understand the process; there is only uncertainty while it is underway. (2000/2006, p. 101)

From that standpoint, “the subject is an open self-organizing system because encounters, links, trauma, reality, and mourning organize the subject and the subject in turn recreates what(s) he receives” (Hornstein 2008, personal communication).

Clinical-theoretical axes

As a “psychoanalyst of the frontier” looking for new territories to explore, Hornstein has been drawn to consider the implications for psychoanalysis of narcissistic, borderline, and depressive pathologies. In this work, he starts from the fact that many analysts think the treatment of patients with these kinds of pathologies obliges one to turn one’s back on Freud and to forget his work. Another version of this belief can be found in the common view that Freud only treated neurotics. This kind of statement shows that analysts are not above clichés, stereotypes, and ready-made thinking, and furthermore that a surprising ignorance of the Freudian corpus persists. Hornstein challenges these assumptions and shows how, starting from 1914, Freud’s work is theoretically engaged in ego and superego pathologies, a few examples being 1914, schizophrenia and paranoia; 1915, melancholy; 1924, masochism; 1927, fetishism.

Starting with *Narcissism: An Introduction*, Freud will create a new compass for research by taking into account both the ego and the superego whenever, in the overall clinical picture, they pose a problem. Freud started from the hypothesis that normality demonstrates the articulation and integration of what in pathological situations appears to us as fissures. Thus he found it necessary to think about paranoia and schizophrenia in order to explore the ego; to look at melancholy to study the superego-ego relationship; perversions, to study sexuality; hypochondria for everything related to the body. (Hornstein, 2003/2005, p. 195)

What is central to these pathologies? To grasp the full scope of this question, Hornstein revives a Freudian idea that dates back to the origins of psychoanalysis: psychic difficulties

³ Après- coup refers to the French translation of Freud’s term *Nachträglichkeit*, which Strachey translated as “deferred action,” but is now more commonly understood in English as having to do with the “retranscription of memory.”

are linked to culture. According to him, the modernism-post-modernism debate intersects with the contemporary episteme: death of the subject, death of the ego, crisis of reason, defeat of thought. We could talk about an ego discomfort in contemporary culture that is echoed in many philosophical and sociological works. Freud conceived the ego as both constituted and constituting, thus eliciting its creative capacity. The contemporary ego seems pulverized,

a floating space without points of anchorage or of reference, a pure availability that adapts to the accelerated onslaught of messages emanating from the mass media. When we ignore this factor in psychopathology, we fail to take the role of ideology into account, worse, we acquiesce to the “official ideology” that equates lucidity and pessimism. (Hornstein, 2000/2006, p. 17).

Hornstein highlights the point that certain authors, starting from the problematic of narcissism, tend to establish correlations between the historical-social dimension and subjective constitution. Some thinkers maintain that today’s ego is “fragile, fractured, fissured, fragmented.” This emerges from the debates on modernity and the ego. Others, who connect with post-structuralism, maintain that the dispersion of the ego is the same as that of the social world: “The one and only unique subject is the decentred subject.” From this standpoint, “narcissistic problems would occur because people lose hope to control a larger social environment and withdraw to solely personal preoccupations: ‘the improvement’ of their body and their psyche.” Postmodernism rejects the certainty of traditions and customs that once played a legitimating role in modernism. Quoting theoreticians of the Frankfurt school, he maintains that “the dissolution of traditional frames of reference have generated a ‘decline of the individual,’ a passive over- consumption” (Hornstein, 2000/2006, p. 17). Identity becomes precarious with the simultaneous loss of cultural roots and internal landmarks. “Subjectivity recedes to a defensive core by withdrawing into itself” (p. 18). The position of the individual with respect to the law and taboo changes because of weakening moral and religious prohibitions but also as a result of the increasing ambiguity of sexual and parental roles. The narcissist is dominated by neither an internalized conscience nor guilt.

Returning to the current clinical scene as understood by Hornstein, his first requirement is to elaborate a metapsychology encompassing the ego, the superego, destructiveness, the dispersion of drives, and the splitting of the ego.

To shed light on narcissistic organizations it will be necessary to conceptualize the simultaneous relationship and opposition between the ego and the object. What is the correlate of a metapsychology of the ego and superego and what is the correlate of a metapsychology of clinical narcissism? Starting from a clinical perspective, a metapsychological viewpoint, and beginning with Freudian and post-Freudian contributions, it is this problem that I have attempted to address. (Hornstein, 2000/2006, p. 8)

For Hornstein, the resources that enable us to renew our investigation into the foundations of our understanding (metapsychology), our nosography (psychopathology), and our practice (technique) are clinical work itself, and the Freudian and post-Freudian contributions that help us to sketch out the metapsychological horizon (pp. 18-19). All of this reflection is rooted in the Freudian Grundbegriffe: the underpinnings of his clinicaltheoretical work - the drive aspect, sexuality, the unconscious, transference, repetition, and the question of psychic structure.

Borderline states have become an unavoidable psychopathological reference. “They represent a challenge to the ‘classical’ nosography, transforming the clinical references and requiring reformulation of the metapsychology that originates from the neuroses and the techniques that ensued. Borderline states present relatively stable clinical characteristics between neuroses and psychoses,” writes Hornstein (2005, p. 211). He notes that neurosis, psychosis, and perversion as categories antedate Freud, though Freud himself displaced their meaning and rethought their interrelationships. On the other hand, the concept of borderline states is intrinsic to psychoanalytic history. Jacques André goes as far as saying that this event implies an analytic paradigm shift (1999/2008, p. 5). To illustrate this paradigm shift, Hornstein suggests, like André, that the borderline condition represents the opposite of what psychoanalysis originally aimed to uncover: the repressed. In consequence, when it is a question of borderline psychopathology, Hornstein trains his attention on the ego.

The duplication of the ego

Two concepts of the ego confront each other in contemporary psychoanalysis. These go back to unresolved Freudian issues. Throughout his work, Freud maintained contradictory meanings for the ego. Hornstein (1988, p. 46) reminds us of the first Freudian definition of the ego: “The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the directed influence of external reality through the medium of the Pcept-cs . . . the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id” (Freud 1923, p. 25). Freud assigns diverse functions to the ego: control of mobility and perception, reality testing, anticipation, temporal organization of mental processes, rational thought, but also misunderstanding, rationalization, and compulsive defence against drive demands. In this context, the psychic apparatus is thought of as

the outcome of specialization of bodily functions and the ego as the result of a long evolutionary adaptation. The id remains a natural reserve of the untamable and treatment tends to reduce what is unreal in the subject world by correcting these areas that are not submitted to the reality principle. (Hornstein 1988, p. 47)

As Laplanche observes,

Between the ego as an individual (in a non-technical sense) and the ego as an agency (instance), that is, as an element of psychic structure, there is a relation of contiguity or, to speak more precisely, a relation of differentiation. Here the ego appears as a specialized organ, literally an extension of the individual, undoubtedly charged with particular functions, but only in the sense of situating something that was already present in the living being. (1970/1989, P- 88)

This is what Laplanche proposes calling the metonymie concept of the ego, which predominates in ego psychology. The latter has opted for autonomous ego functions, the adaptation of the ego to reality, and its regulatory power over the psyche, which has generated notions such

as neutralized energy, which would be available exclusively to the ego, to the concept of a “conflict-free” sphere of the ego, and to the postulate of a synthetic ego function.

The second concept of the ego rests on “identification and narcissism within the intersubjective Oedipal space” (Hornstein, 1988, p. 48). The ego results from identifications that make it the id’s love object, the intrapsychic residue of intersubjective relations. As Freud wrote in *The Ego and the Id*, “When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the id as a love- object and is trying to make good the id’s loss by saying: ‘Look, you can love me too - I am so like the object’”³ (1923, p. 30). Laplanche proposed calling this second conception of the ego “metaphoric.” “The Ego is simultaneously linked and separated from the Id. It is more like an organ of conjunction and disjunction than one of integration” (Hornstein, 1988, p. 48).

This opens the way to the identificatory genesis of the ego, which cannot be reduced to a defensive agency or the conscious organ that furnishes information about reality; more profound than its own self- conception, the ego is the great reservoir of libido, “since in the beginning it is a totality of undifferentiated love for which no external world exists” (Hornstein, 1988, p. 48).

Lacan radicalized this concept of the ego. Summarizing the Lacanian concept, Hornstein writes that the ego is like an orthopaedic psychic envelope originating from the intersubjective thread of infancy and the state of infantile helplessness and distress: the ego is not the subject (“I”), but rather the site of imaginary identifications. There is an impossible coincidence between the ego as the referent of the deictic “I” and the subject of the unconscious. The ego confuses itself with the simplicity and unity of the reflexive pronouns I and me, generating a fiction about its identity that conceals desire, which is why we accentuate its function of misrecognition (Hornstein, 1988, p. 48).

According to Hornstein, however, describing the ego at the onset as an apparatus of misrecognition that does not speak but is spoken, and is condemned, from the beginning, to alienation, is insufficient to decree its death. Freud (1926, p. 95) had already warned analysts against the danger of exaggerating the dependent condition of the ego into a psychoanalytic *Weltanschauung*. “Where Freud spoke of the ego’s dependence,” writes Hornstein, “certain analysts discover a weakness, a sign of ontological inferiority” (1988, p. 51). In contrast to Lacan’s critique of the ego, Hornstein recognized Freud’s nuanced view of the ego. Freud had insisted on the ego’s “power to control access to consciousness,” in spite of what he had earlier (1923) described as the ego’s “dependent relationship to the id and to the superego,” in which he had “revealed how powerless and apprehensive it was in regard to both and with what an effort it maintained its show of superiority over them” (1926, p. 95).

Towards a metapsychology of the ego

The inherent theoretical contradictions in Freudian ego theory due to its bipolar conception led Lacan to cast a curse on ego psychology, suggesting a prohibition on ego studies that helped

to obscure the way in which the new pathologies reintroduce the question of the ego. For these reasons, Hornstein deems it an urgent matter to develop a new metapsychology of the ego. I will limit myself to exploring several essential threads of the rich construction that he elaborates in *Cura Psicanalitica*.

The ego is an agency (instance) inseparable from language

Access to speech and access to ideational representation take place simultaneously.

The characteristic quality of ego productions is composed of what can be said, uttered. Every experience, every act implies the co-presence of an idea that allows them to be thought and then to be named. For the ego, what is not linked to a word representation has no existence, which does not mean that the ego will not suffer from its effects, (p. 67)

The ego permits the advent of a subjectivity founded on self-comprehension mediated by naming and conceptualization. Consequently, “we cannot institute a radical heterogeneity between the subject and the ego. The opposition between symbolic and imaginary must be taken up as a dialectic internal to the ego and part of its definition” (p. 68).

Identificatory issues underlie the formation of the ego. In fact they are at the hub

The ego is constituted in the relational space with the Other, that is to say, it is formed in intersubjectivity. We are dealing with a paradoxical situation; subjectivity can emerge only in recognizing itself as identified by the Other. The mother relates to the infant by projecting a number of identificatory statements that it invests and adopts by repeating them. These will give shape to the ego. In fact, these statements are identificatory wishes that concern the child’s future. This ego anticipated by the mother is from the start a historicized ego that inscribes the child from the onset “into a temporal and symbolic order; but this does not mean that ego is condemned to misrecognition [as Lacan would maintain]” (p. 73). If the maternal discourse provides the first representations, this does not mean that he is the passive result of the discourse of the Other. The identificatory process, of which the ego is the product, is the outcome of its own process of elaboration, mourning, and appropriation of these first communications. When this work is completed, the ego will be able to enunciate them as its own.

The ego must have a number of identificatory bearings that are not subject to threats of oscillation or radical doubt

If it is true, as Piera Aulagnier asserts, that the unit “identifier-identified” is the pre-condition for the existence of the I, then points of certainty or stability must be sustained in the space of the “identified.” Symbolic identification becomes possible and is preserved by the relation that exists between the identifier and these points of certitude that are present in the identified. Thanks to this relationship, “the identified is ensured of its inalienable right to recognize itself as identified and identifiable in relation to certain concepts of functions with universal value that are independent of the real ‘thing’ that originally embodied them” (Aulagnier, 1979, p. 27). In this sense, following Aulagnier, Hornstein writes that “in the register of identification, the

test of doubt could impose itself on anything that lies outside these points of certainty” (1988, p. 74).

The ego will be required to represent itself as the stable pole of libidinal investment that will subsequently include its own space and its relational universe. Secondary narcissism transforms object desire into self- investment; the ego is transformed into an object of desire, (p. 74)

In the face of suffering, the ego, as a result of its narcissistic nature, will attempt to impoverish its object relations. In this manner it tries to escape the object, even to the point of installing the object within itself. Through this process of identification, the ego seems to free itself from ties of dependence to the object and as such from the frustrations that have their source in the object. Identification neutralizes the object. “The narcissistic regression is not so much a sign of the ego’s love for itself as of the failure of the love that the ego deposited in the object” (p. 74). In that context it is important to highlight, along with Hornstein, that “in addition to being alienating, identification is structuring” (p. 75).

But, if it is true that the “objectai pole and the narcissistic pole give shape to the libidinal capital of the subject” (p. 74), the ego is obliged to find an explanation for its suffering that will prevent it from totally disinvesting the Other, its reality and its body. Using Piera Aulagnier’s formulation, which he feels close to, Hornstein asserts that the ego is condemned to invest. The ego is

condemned for and by life to give thought and meaning to its own bodily space, to the object aims of its desire, and to the reality with which it must learn to coexist. These activities assure their maintenance, no matter what happens, as the privileged support of the ego’s libidinal investments. (Aulagnier, 1986/1991, p. 239)

If the ego tends to withdraw its investments when the object, the body, and reality become the source of suffering, its task is also to oppose this withdrawal. “Thinking, investing, suffering: the first two verbs highlight the two functions without which the T [Ie Je] could never emerge, or maintain its place in psychic space. The third is the price it must pay to achieve this” (Aulagnier, 1986/1991, p. 242).

“The identificatory process has as its aim and condition to provide knowledge both of the ego of the future and the future of the ego” (Hornstein, 1988, p. 76). With the waning of the Oedipus complex, a new discourse of structural integration emerges and, with it, the opportunity to invest identificatory symbols derived from this rather than the discourse of a specific Other, as was previously the case. Modification of the problematic of identification is modified concurrently with the libidinal economy. The shaping of the ego’s image opens out to new points of reference.

The ego gains first access to the future because it can encompass the encounter between present and past states of being. This implies that it can realize and accept the difference between what it is and what it desires to become: the ego has to render thinkable the thought of its own coming into being - to imagine the difference between its self-representation, what it may become, and what it will actually discover in the process of becoming. The future cannot be reduced to

the identificatory project because the ego must also accept the unknown and in particular the unforeseeable nature of its own death. (Hornstein, 1988, p. 76)

This process imposes on the ego the task of sketching out its own temporality. This becomes possible only through the investment of a space-time that is yet to be and thus ego's own difference from itself. "The appropriation of an identificatory wish that takes into account the non-return of the same is essential for ego function" (p. 76). With the waning of the Oedipus complex, the investigation of the ego and the ideal to be reached can no longer await the response of the primordial Other; the ego must try to find its own answer. Henceforth the ego will be separated from its own ideal by an irreducible gap, a difference

that represents the assumption of castration in the identificatory register . . . Access to the ideal demonstrates that the subject has met the fundamental challenge to renounce the objects that supported his narcissistic and objectlibidinal investments in the early years, (p. 77)

A final theme related to the emergence of the ego is the entry into historical time. The latter occurs only on the condition that the ego becomes its own biographer: "Its history is just as libidinal as it is identificatory" (p. 77). But this biographer works with fragmentary documents, having lost all those relating to "the archaic and fantasmatic beings that were the first inhabitants of his psyche" - documents that can testify only to their own destruction. The task is to transform these fragmentary documents into an open historical construction whose first requirement would be to submit its own version of history to revision, occasionally inverting certain paragraphs, inventing others. This is a process of reorganization and reconstruction of its contents and particularly of its casualties when the need manifests itself. The maternal gaze and discourse will permit the ego to think of a time prior to its existence by presenting itself "with a text that precedes it, a history of 'heroes, fairies, and witches' where the link to the ideal ego survives" (pp. 77-78).

Narcissistic pathologies

In both Freudian and post-Freudian contributions, Hornstein remarks, the term narcissistic pathology refers to clinical problems that frequently have nothing in common. He begins by trying to specify what narcissism means. It is a stage of libidinal development, of ego formation, and of object relations. "It is a composite integrating various tendencies: converging satisfactions on the self without taking reality into account; seeking autonomy and self-sufficiency with respect to others; actively attempting to dominate and to negate otherness; favouring the fantasy over reality" (2003/2005, p. 179).

Hornstein brings to light the multiple senses of the term:

On one hand, undifferentiation of self and other; on the other, regulation of self-esteem as well as an exaggerated interest in representation of the self. In pathological narcissism, exclusive self-interest is flagrant, together with a desperate and defensive search to promote and maintain the self. In "trophy" narcissism, this exclusive interest is integrated into other goals and activities.

The kind of activities specific to trophy narcissism (ambitions, ideals, object compromises) are not motivated fundamentally by the need to maintain and to sustain identity and self-esteem but rather are outcomes of such activities. In the measure that a certain self-cohesion and self-esteem is assured, the subject is increasingly free to orient his life, not so much in relation to narcissistic motives as through negotiated realization of desire. (179-180).

He insists that his research is not focused on finding a univocal term but rather in expanding the theory of narcissism

in a sufficiently complex manner so as not to immobilize clinical work or turn it into the mechanical application of rigid, dogmatic ideas. As Hamlet said, there are a lot of things between heaven and earth. For example the famous trinity of psychoses, neuroses, and perversion is as helpful to thought as it is a hindrance. We do not understand narcissism. As such it is a magma that must be clarified by models that will inevitably take on a greyish tone. (p. 180)

Faithful to Freud in his view that psychoanalysis must tackle the roots of conflict and postulate models, Hornstein has elaborated four clinical forms with their respective metapsychologies, whose aim is to clarify conflict:

We speak of narcissistic pathology when it is a question of identity that is at play, what Freud named the sense of self. The latter is involved in schizophrenia, paranoia, and borderline states. The deficit here is in the consistency of the ego; we are faced with an issue of identity, “thought of as movement, searching, and becoming” (p. 181). There is an inconsistency of the ego. Its limits are imprecise. “The conflict exists inside the self and in the capacity to maintain identity through change. We can define the issue when this conflictual axes predominate in the subject” (p. 181). This first model gravitates around identity. Hornstein emphasizes that this is not a psychoanalytic concept. However, he maintains that the question of identity is always present in the analysis of narcissistic and borderline organizations. It thus becomes important not only to define it appropriately but also to give it a metapsychological status as opposed to maintaining it by default. Using Alain de Mijolla’s formulation, Hornstein asserts that the most pertinent question about identity is not so much Who am I? but rather From whom was I constituted? What are we talking about when we talk about identity? “It is a fabric of complex and variable links into which are woven narcissism, identifications, instinctual life, structural conflicts, current history, repetition, and everything else that participates in the make up the subject” (p. 181). The identificatory project, as defined by Aulagnier, aims at a continuous self-construction of the I (Je) necessary for its inherent temporal movement.

Identity refers back to a feeling, “an interior experience that leans anaclitically on the identificatory construction requiring the presence of certain reference points without which self-recognition cannot be maintained” (Rother de Hornstein, 2002). The preservation of a sense of identity is the essence of this first model.

The second model no longer poses the question of the consistency of the ego but rather that of its value. What am I worth? This seems to be the question that nags the psyche of certain subjects. The issue of worth is the axis around which their activities, their relational ties, in short, their

entire lives rotate. Authors like Kohut and Bleichmar focus on the theme of narcissism, on the vicissitudes of the feeling of self-esteem.

What does Hornstein mean by self-esteem? It is a residue of infantile narcissism as well as achievements in keeping with the ideal, “a composite that is more or less sustained by object relations and their narcissistic repercussions.” If we take up his formulation we would say “that it is the tributary of a history (libidinal and identificatory), of achievements, configurations of object ties, as well projects, seen from a future perspective, that indicate a path to follow” (Hornstein, 2000/2006, p. 67). As a composite, self-esteem contains three elements: The first concerns the narcissization of the self, the second the ego’s achievements that are consistent with the ideal, and the third object links and ties. If we take up with the author his distinction between an expansive narcissism and one of withdrawal we might say that in the first “certain ties - stable or compulsively substitutable - compensate for the fragility of the feeling of self or that of self-esteem” (p. 68). In the second, on the other hand, there predominates

a defence against the danger of fusion-confusion, through distance from the object and negation of all dependency. Such narcissistic organizations aim for self-sufficiency and above all “to avoiding being devalued,” the feared result of the object’s contempt and of self-contempt. These subjects are contemptuous towards themselves because they are dependant, because they feel like prisoners of their desires, so when they renounce drive satisfaction, narcissistic pride offers them some compensation, (p. 68)

The question here is that of narcissistic investments. What do we know about such investments? Once again, picking up on Freud’s idea, we would say that they constitute a projection onto the object of an image of one’s self, of what we have been, of what we would like to be, or those who were once the idealized figures. Hornstein makes an essential point: in the narcissistic choice of object, the object is not incidental. On it depends the reason to live, and its loss revives dependency. Moreover, the object threatens the ego; it is not available, and one never knows when it will be and when it won’t. “The object’s desires, projects, anxieties barely coincide with those of the subject” (p. 69). The patient seems caught simultaneously “in an autonomy that transforms itself into a devastating solitude and a proximity with the object that confines it to a deadly fusion” (p. 69). Hornstein maintains that the understanding and therapeutic approach in this kind of pathology will be determined by the theoretical choice. The same analysand can go through periods of expansion and withdrawal. Why seek fusion? Hornstein asks himself. Because alone, they fear losing their feeling of self or of self-esteem. They fight separation/intrusion anxiety by creating a continuous series of narcissistic object relations, protecting themselves as well from fragmentation or the loss of limits that accompany separation. Otherness is what is intolerable. An excessive presence corresponds to intrusion. An excess of absence is equivalent to loss. The absence-presence pair cannot be disentangled. How can absence be tolerated by differentiating it from loss? Because we fear losing our own limits and our sense of identity, we attempt to avoid fusion. Such persons try to make themselves self-sufficient by negating any dependence. They establish only transitory ties and, if these persist, they disinvest them libidinally. This is another modality of narcissistic vulnerability. Strong defences arise in face of the possibility of a non-empathic response from the object that could provoke a narcissistic hemorrhage. These are the defences that attach themselves to object ties. (p. 69)

The axis of the third model is confusion between the real object and the fantasized object. This is, as Hornstein writes, “to live talking to oneself without acknowledging the separateness of anyone or anything” (p. 181). The issue here is not ego structure itself but perception of alterity. “The ego constructs itself, and with the ego, the object is constructed as Other. Accepting alterity, this Other upon which I might depend, that I may need, involves a process of mourning that is not undertaken without consequences” (p. 193). Giving oneself over to another can generate enormous distress and suffering; the subject is then dominated by separation and intrusion anxieties. Inversely, intolerance of distance from the Other is another way of not accepting alterity. “In the clinical setting we see affectively disengaged patients who become disorganized if they go beyond a certain threshold. This is a narcissistic issue because it involves fantasies of self-sufficiency in which there exists no recognition of the Other as Other”(p. 193).

For example, in couple therapy we often hear partners exclaim, “He never hears what I say to him.” Noise - understood from the perspective of complexity theory - does not reach them, and one might even say that there is an anti-noise defence or, as Freud said, “a protective stimulus barrier” (Freud, 1895, p. 283).

The fourth model refers to the clinical phenomenon of emptiness. This pathology corresponds to “the absence of certain ego functions or to their loss due to excess suffering” (p. 182). Hornstein approaches this fourth model by way of the death instinct as conceived by Freud, Aulagnier, and Green. “The desire of non- desire: when excess suffering leads to withdrawal from a previously valued function or object . . . Excessively prolonged suffering leads to the abolition of the corresponding psychic function” (p. 196). In Narcisismo, Hornstein maintains that the regressive tendency of the death instinct aims at a time of being before desire, a state of tranquillity free from all representational activity.

It aspires to the disappearance of any object that could provoke the emergence of desire through its absence. The libido ceases to lean on egoism in the “narcissism of death” [Green]. The inertia principle reigns over the pleasure principle. Clinically, this is evident in all narcissistic pathology that presents empty psychic states and disinvestment of the ego. (p. 82)

We can compare Hornstein’s analysis to Green’s idea of the disobjectalizing function. What is attacked is not only the object relation per se, “but all its substitutes - for example, the ego and even the fact of the investment itself insofar as it was subjected to the objectalisation process . . . But disinvestment is the particular manifestation of the destructivity of the death instinct” (Green, 1993, pp. 118-119).

The four models concern the ego: coherence, self-esteem, undifferentiation of the object, and loss or non- development of functions (Hornstein, 2000/2006, p. 182). They refer to distinct conflicts. “These are metapsychological axes that don’t pretend to embrace all clinical situations, but rather do justice to the complexity associated with narcissistic issues (plural because they are numerous), clinical questions that we should not try to settle prematurely” (p. 24).

Conclusion

We can recognize in Hornstein an analyst with fine clinical skills but also, rarer, an analyst who thinks psychoanalytically in a contemporary scientific, epistemological, and philosophical context. He does not deprive clinical work of theoretical oxygen by enclosing it in a series of empirical recipes that paralyze thought. He maintains that psychoanalysis will survive only if it sustains a dialogue with other disciplines. The aim of such dialogue and exchange is not to transform psychoanalysis to the point of losing its specificity but rather to keep it alive at the heart of scientific and philosophical culture.

I have extracted the following themes from Hornstein's work: the complexity paradigm, the metapsychology of the ego, and narcissistic and borderline pathologies. These are at the heart of contemporary psychoanalytic practice, both theoretical and clinical. At several points in his writing Hornstein defines himself as a "Freudian psychoanalyst betting on theoretical pluralism." What does being Freudian mean for him? I would say that he is in line with an aphorism of Goethe's, in spirit if not literally, one that Freud cited on two occasions, the second in the last paragraph ?? An Outline of Psychoanalysis: "What thou hast inherited from thy fathers, acquire it to make it thine" (Freud, 1938, p. 207).

"This was an epilogue for Freud, but it is a prologue for us," Hornstein would write (1993, p. 91). Using Laplanche's terms, his work is truly one of filiation, understood as a psychic elaboration that breaks free of the progenitor even as it continues his work. The inheritance consists in appropriating the methods of investigation and the theoretical imagination to foster a way of thinking that takes off from Freud. This avoids the pitfall of dogmatic thinking that "assumes the text has exhausted the potential of experiential truth" (2000/2006, p. 214). Investment of thought becomes possible along with the right to think what the other does not think or has not thought. As Hornstein emphasizes, Freud and his work comprise a foundational identification understood as a symbolic inheritance. If it is turned into a destination rather than a starting point, "Freud and his work are coagulated and frozen into an imaginary identification leading to rigid orthodoxy." (p. 212, n. 4). In the name of theoretical pluralism, Hornstein is very critical of orthodoxies perpetuated by psychoanalytic institutes and societies that risk turning psychoanalysis into a faith-based sect. On one hand, theoretical pluralism refers to the struggle against theoretical closure that "idealizes an already achieved project, thus fulfilling a death wish with respect to thought" (2003/2005, p. 33). On the other hand, it implies opening oneself up to other theories in order to avoid the inevitable blind spots, those characteristic points of privilege or avoidance that arise in any perspective. Confronting these blind spots and testing them clinically enhances the analyst's capacity to listen and to understand.

Hornstein's work is thus an invitation to weave theory and practice in such a way that the richness of clinical practice gives rise to metapsychological propositions that are congruent with it. To borrow the terms of complexity theory, it is an invitation to practise psychoanalysis as a way of thinking "turbulence" and "noise."

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DAVID BENHAÏM is a psychoanalyst in private practice. It works for the journals *Le Coq-Héron*, the *Journal of Psychoanalytic Group Psychotherapy* in France, *Intersubjetividad y Psicoanálisis* in Argentina, *Letra Urbana* in United States. He is a member of the Drafting Committee of the *International Journal of Couple and Family Psychoanalytic*. He works on the concepts of relationship and intersubjectivity in the thought of René Kaës and Argentine psychoanalytic thought.