

## PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE WORLD OF WORK: FROM SOCIAL CONTROL TO THE PROBLEMATIC OF CHANGE

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**ABSTRACT.** This article aimed to provide some support for determining the place of psychoanalysis in the world of work in the 20th century through a historical overview focused on the two main strands of this applied psychoanalysis: the Anglo-American and the French. In the Anglo-American world between the wars, we see the emergence of a pragmatic, if not instrumental, use of psychoanalytic theory. In the French-speaking world of the second half of the 20th century, we see the use of psychoanalysis to develop both a critique of forms of work management and a reflection on work. Since the principal debates of the 20th century revolved around work, and it continues to be the center of the most relevant issues in social reality, namely precariousness at various levels, the article argues that a problem of this kind is crucial. The critical strand of psychoanalysis applied to the world of work indicated possibilities for transforming work organization valuable to work psychology.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis; work; emancipation.

## PSICANÁLISE E MUNDO DO TRABALHO: DO CONTROLE SOCIAL À PROBLEMÁTICA DA MUDANÇA

**RESUMO.** Este artigo visa a fornecer alguns subsídios à determinação do lugar da psicanálise no mundo do trabalho do século XX mediante uma incursão histórica centrada sobre as duas principais vertentes dessa psicanálise aplicada: a anglo-americana e a francesa. No mundo anglo-americano do entreguerras, verificamos a emergência de um uso pragmático, quando não instrumental, da teoria psicanalítica. Já no mundo francófono da segunda metade do século XX, assistimos ao recurso à psicanálise com o fito de elaborar tanto uma crítica às formas de gestão do trabalho quanto uma reflexão sobre o trabalhar. Visto que os principais debates do século XX gravitaram sobre o trabalho e que ele continua sendo polo das questões mais relevantes da realidade social, nomeadamente as precarizações em vários níveis, o artigo defende que uma problemática dessa espécie é crucial e que a vertente crítica da psicanálise aplicada ao mundo laboral indicou possibilidades de transformação da organização do trabalho valiosas à psicologia do trabalho.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicanálise; trabalho; emancipação.

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## PSICOANÁLISIS Y MUNDO DEL TRABAJO: DEL CONTROL SOCIAL A LA PROBLEMÁTICA DEL CAMBIO

**RESUMEN.** El presente artículo tiene por objeto determinar el lugar que ocupa el psicoanálisis en el mundo laboral del siglo XX mediante una incursión histórica centrada en las dos vertientes principales de este psicoanálisis aplicado: el angloamericano y el francés. En el mundo angloamericano, entre la primera y la segunda mitad del siglo XX, vemos surgir un uso pragmático de la teoría psicoanalítica. En el mundo francófono de la segunda mitad de ese siglo, esta teoría se movilizó con el objetivo de elaborar tanto una crítica de las formas de gestión del trabajo como una reflexión sobre el trabajo. Dado que los principales debates del siglo XX gravitaron en torno al trabajo y que éste sigue estando en el centro de las cuestiones más relevantes de la realidad social, a saber, la precarización en varios niveles, el artículo sostiene que dicha problemática es crucial y que la vertiente crítica del psicoanálisis aplicada al trabajo ha indicado posibilidades de transformación de la organización del trabajo que son valiosas para la psicología del trabajo.

**Palabras clave:** Psicoanálisis; trabajo; emancipación.

### Introduction

Psychoanalysis has demonstrated its possible contributions to contemporary culture and practices since the beginning of its dissemination at the end of the first decade of the 20th century. Freud was one of the first to map such an extension in *O interesse da psicanálise*, an article in which he outlined, in a way unprecedented in his work until then, the psychoanalytic discoveries that could serve other areas of knowledge such as psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, biology, and sociology. Although he sometimes expressed fears regarding the rigor of extensions like these, the possibility of them left him euphoric (Gay, 1989). And even more than a decade after that moment, he remained convinced of the importance of such an enterprise as attested by his confession to the socialist Hendrik de Man: “I always had the opinion that the extra medical applications of psychoanalysis are as significant as the medical ones, and, in fact, they may perhaps have a greater influence on the mental orientation of humanity” (Freud apud Gay, 1989, p. 290).

However, the success of these efforts gave rise to a dilemma that, according to historian Eli Zaretski (2006), had repercussions on the geography of the history of psychoanalysis. This dilemma was expressed by the author in the following terms: absorption *versus* marginality. That is, either psychoanalysis made its desire for legitimization a reality and adopted a pragmatic stance, risking being absorbed by the ‘establishment’, or it reaffirmed its utopian impulses and emphasized the idiosyncratic and disruptive dimensions of the psyche – the unconscious, sexuality, and drives. The result would be, in one case, to participate in social control, incorporating the masses into the new industrial order and organizing knowledge in a way that serves such objectives, and, in the other, to maintain its critical dimension and its characteristic interest in singularities. In fact, this horizon on two fronts materialized, ‘roughly speaking’, in the geographical appropriations of psychoanalysis: while, on its home continent, it generally maintained its original critical edge since its birth was marked by the insurgency against European sexual morality, in the United States, it was reoriented by the ideals of self-management and self-improvement characteristic of that country.

This article sought to show how this bifid geography is reflected with specific regard to the forms of application of psychoanalytic knowledge to the world of work. In this way, a reconstruction of a historical nature is carried out, which must be done, firstly, in order to have an overview of the great ethical-political and ideological differences between the forms of application of this knowledge to the most notable aspect of the social life in the 20th century. As Bendassolli (2009) highlighted, this century saw the institutionalization of work at social, political, and economic levels so that the main contemporary debates – about citizenship, social insertion, freedom, identity, autonomy, and ‘quality of life’ – passed through the job category. Because of this, according to the author, the 20th century deserves the designation ‘century of work’. Bendassolli (2009, p. 37) also shows that the “[...] psychological appropriation of work [...]” occurred in the same bifid way – more specifically, sometimes in the service of guaranteeing productivity, sometimes in search of achieving emancipation. However, as Malone and Friedman (2015) observe, the enormous cultural success of psychoanalysis and, on the other hand, the radical aspects that were obliterated by its instrumental appropriation by medicine and capital do not authorize us to take it as any psychological practice. For all these reasons, such a panorama seems so fundamental.

Still, this task proves to be crucial because work continues to have central importance to social life today. As Maciel (2021, p. 21) highlights, “[...] the gradual and inevitable increase in precarious and unworthy work around the world is one of the most relevant issues in contemporary social reality”. Furthermore, as Seligmann-Silva, Bernardo, Maeno and Kato (2010) explain, precariousness has become widespread so that even those in an apparently privileged situation experience insecurity and competition, in addition to being threatened with the series of mental disorders on the rise, such as Burnout, addictions, musculoskeletal disorders, and work accidents. Such phenomena impose themselves on contemporary clinics and indicate how important it is to consider the dimension of work for understanding subjectivity and suffering in contemporary times.

The historical reconstruction proposed below shows, firstly, in the Anglo-American world between the wars, the emergence of a pragmatic use of psychoanalytic theory – later used in a frankly instrumental way in the USA. Next, we sought to indicate, in the French-speaking world of the second half of the 20th century, the use of psychoanalysis to develop both a critique of forms of work management and a reflection on work. Therefore, this incursion attests that the use of psychoanalysis oscillated between a regulatory pole, in which it became an instrument of social control, and an emancipatory pole, in which it aimed to become a tool of autonomy through focusing on the processes that lead to change. Finally, a reflection is made on the importance of the critical potential of psychoanalysis in understanding contemporary social reality, plagued by the multiple precariousness of the world of work. This potential could contribute to investigations into the social psychology of work, whose position about psychoanalytic knowledge seems to indicate reservations.

### **Freud’s reception in the New World and Anglo-American psychoanalysis applied to work: pragmatism, effectiveness, and instrumentalization**

When reflecting on the conferences at Clark University in 1909 – the gateway to psychoanalysis in the USA, from where it spread throughout the West, reconfiguring culture and the way individuals began to see themselves (Zaretski, 2006; Ilouz, 2011) –, Freud (1952, p. 78) concludes, 16 years later, in his *Apresentação autobiográfica*: “[...] psychoanalysis was no longer a delusional formation [*Wahngebilde*]: it had become a valuable part of reality [*Realität*]”. From the imaginary and almost hallucinatory production

of a single man – who, at most, was able to share it only with select young people interested until then, forming what would be known as the Wednesday Psychological Society – psychoanalysis would have become an integral part of the cultural and scientific reality of the 20th century. Hence the feeling of “[...] realization [*Verwirklichung*] of an incredible daydream” (Freud, 1952, p. 78) of its creator.

However, Freud soon saw that his desire would conflict with the way this belonging would take place in a culture considered puritanical and pragmatic, such as North America. At the time of his autobiography, he could already attest to the ‘dilution’ of psychoanalysis in the USA and the ‘various abuses’ carried out in its name (Freud, 1952). Then, he moderately expressed the concern, expressed in his private correspondence, about the “[...] impulsive receptivity of Americans, coupled, as it seemed, with an extremely harmful lack of rigor and a no less harmful fear of sexuality, not to mention a counterproductive egalitarianism” (Gay, 1989, p. 513). In fact, the caricatural anti-Americanism nurtured by Freud was so intense that it is ironic that his intellectual creation was so welcomed in a nation for which he cultivated such contempt (Gay, 1989).

As Hale (1971) showed, under the influence of the characteristics of the time in which they lived, North Americans highlighted some elements present in Clark’s conferences. The emphasis on therapeutic efficacy, the deflation of heredity, and the conviction in resolving the neurotic conflict are traits that emerge in them, transcribed as the famous *Cinco lições de psicanálise*, as well as the denunciation of the pathogenic nature of Victorian morality and obscurantism. It is also necessary to remember that the conformation of American scientific and popular culture, which at times revolved around pragmatism and behaviorism, was decisive in the way in which psychoanalysis was incorporated in the USA.

However, psychology applied to work in the country was very distant from psychoanalysis. As Baritz’s (1960) seminal study reveals, what was seen at the time in the world of work was the use of a psychology of instincts, developed by William McDougall, and differential psychology, the foundations of which had been laid by Francis Galton and James McKeen Cattell. The first sponsored the inauguration of applied psychology in the area of advertising, whose beginnings date back to the works of Walter Dill Scott; the second informed the nascent industrial psychology, whose first systematic outline was due to Hugo Münsterberg. Both Scott and Münsterberg were skeptical about psychoanalysis, coming from academic psychology, so Freud’s impact was not seen in these psychological approaches that debuted in the world of production.

However, about a decade later, in the 1920s, Freud impacted the business world, albeit indirectly, through the work of his nephew Edward Bernays. This shaped the consumer culture of the beginning of the last century by demonstrating to large sectors of the economy that consumption should appeal to the non-rational but irrational side of individuals, based on the unlimited field of desires – and not on the restricted slice of needs – the creation of news and the search for opinion makers (Fontenelle, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Hence, Bernays’s interest in mass psychology, such as Freudian psychology, had shown the strong relationship between leader and group and its influence on the individual, a striking relationship that could be seen remotely. Creator of public relations, through which he carried out ‘consent engineering’, Bernays candidly saw himself as a liberator, according to Justman (1994), a kind of

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<sup>3</sup> There were several of his works, but one of them became paradigmatic, in which we see the aforementioned achievements intertwine: with the task of spreading the habit of smoking among women and advised by psychoanalyst A. A. Brill, who expressed the phallic character of cigarettes, Bernays created news and arranged elegant women lighting them as if they were ‘torches of freedom’ amid a Thanksgiving parade in 1929, a time when the desire for female emancipation was on the rise (Fontenelle, 2017). The venture was an absolute success.

pragmatic Freud, with the mission of showing the public how to express and emancipate themselves from the constrictions of the past. However, although a certain Enlightenment spirit could bring them closer, beyond blood ties, nephew and uncle could not be further apart: the egalitarian hedonism with utilitarian features, the power of manipulation, the concern with adjustment, the vision of society as an accommodation of interests (Justman, 1994) – these are some of the traits that oppose Bernays and Freud. On the other hand, if considering that one of the assumptions of North American psychoanalytic understanding was that the domestication of the unconscious implied the obtaining of a “[...] new and powerful source of success and happiness” (Hale, 1971, p. 408), then it is necessary to recognize the continuity between this psychoanalysis and that of the creator of public relations.

It is also necessary to remember that the ‘irrational side’ of individuals was also the object of investigation of work relations by the leaders of the so-called School of Human Relations, as observed by sociologist Eva Illouz (2011), but it is necessary to assert that, contrary to what she suggests, such investigation does not indicate that it took place under the intellectual patronage of psychoanalysis. Illouz highlights the role of Elton Mayo in introducing not only a language of affection and therapeutic categories in the business sphere but also the “[...] ‘psychoanalytic’ imagination in the workplace” (Illouz, 2011, p. 23, emphasis added). However, as Hsueh’s (2002) in-depth investigation showed, Mayo drew his therapeutic approach from the works of Pierre Janet, whose influence on North Americans was greater than that of Freud and from Jean Piaget’s clinical method in particular. In fact, although Mayo maintained some interest in psychoanalysis for some time, he became progressively critical of “Freud’s speculative arguments” (Hsueh, 2002, p. 173), supposing that they lacked an empirical basis. Thus, the assumptions that led to Mayo’s interventions, which showed that they considered what the Taylorist and behaviorist rationality of the time preferred to ignore, were not derived from Freud’s psychoanalysis but rather from authors somewhat distant from it.

Nevertheless, those famous Hawthorne experiments of which Mayo was part were able to show the importance of investigating group processes for the effectiveness of organizational operation – an aspect that represented the condition for the entry of psychoanalysis into another context. Hawthorne represents a decisive step towards understanding and overcoming collective forms of opposition to the logic of business efficiency. There, aspects were identified that would later be explored in England, more specifically at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR), where psychoanalysis would emerge as one of the privileged tools in the attempt to domesticate opposition to management (Miller & Rose, 1988). In Hawthorne, on the other hand, the theoretical references were different: in addition to the therapeutic approach mentioned above, anchored in Piaget and Janet, a sociology of organizations inspired by authors such as Durkheim.

In fact, psychoanalysis had nothing to offer in terms of the systematic investigation of group processes. Psychoanalytic research on them had not yet taken place. One of the great scholars of such processes, René Kaës (2017), stated that psychoanalysts would soon begin to understand that psychoanalysis could not approach groups and institutions based only on ‘Freud’s speculative assumptions’: it would be necessary to invent a method and raise hypotheses that could be put to the test. Although seminal and axial, Freud’s conclusions in texts such as *Psicologia das massas e análise do eu* were only indications. More than determining the function of the group in the individual’s psychic structure and showing the centrality of identification, it was necessary to understand how the “[...]”

endopsychic model of the group is capable of organizing the psychosocial processes implemented in the group” (Kaës, 2017, p. 41) – i.e., understanding the processes occurring in the group itself and the phantasmatic realities it creates. This is why Bernays, in fact, interested precisely in exploring (economically, above all) the identification between leader and mass, was able to make some use of Freudian psychoanalysis.

After the Second World War, on the other side of the Atlantic, this understanding was verified and extended to organizations. The transformations required by this process, which revolved around the Tavistock Clinic (TC), founded in 1920, and the TIHR, created from that in 1946 in England, were exposed by Miller and Rose (1988). They show us that such transformations were consolidated after three remarkable moments: the mental hygiene movement of the 1920s and 1930s, the emergence of psychological expertise during the Second World War, and the establishment of relationships between industrial productivity, group processes, and mental health in the post-war period.

From the First World War to the interwar years, psychodynamic principles were used in mental treatments but without any priority being given to psychoanalysis. However, during this period, something fundamental occurred with the mental hygiene movement (and, we could add, which would prove crucial for the opening of institutions to the psychoanalytic approach): the link between the precariousness of domestic health and a series of social problems (from mental disorders to crimes and organizational inefficiency). This event brought to light the enormous importance of managing family relationships and child development. After the Second World War, finally, with the advent of a mental health policy – which, therefore, made the concern with mental disorders transcend the asylum walls – and from the invention of modes of intervention carried out in the period – regarding selection, training, maintenance of group morale, and forms of psychological treatment – organizational efficiency began to be linked to the management of bonds between members of a group. Such transformations, which occurred exemplarily in TC and TIHR, marked, always according to the authors in question, the “[...] emergence of a new expertise and [a new] language for the government of subjectivity and social life” (Miller & Rose, 1988, p. 177).

In this context, we witness the advent of Anglo-American psychoanalysis applied to the world of work. According to Arnaud (2004), the first organizational psychoanalytic theory and the first intervention methodology in this domain were born in TC and TIHR. Having inaugurated the decisive theoretical and clinical derivations of Freudian intuitions about unconscious group processes and, above all, Kleinian considerations about the defensive processes of individuals arising from contact with archaic anxieties, English researchers were finally able to carry out a systematic investigation of groups.

Among them, Wilfred Bion stands out as a pioneer in developing a psychoanalytic interpretation of group processes. Having been part of the team at Tavistock and military hospitals such as Northfield in London, the psychiatrist of Indian origin was able to acquire extensive therapeutic experience with groups, which allowed him to understand two modalities of parallel functioning, one called ‘work group’ or ‘sophisticated group’, guided by the achievement of a specific task, and a ‘basic-assumption group’, guided by shared fears and assumptions of an unconscious or ‘proto-mental’ nature (Bion, 2004). The Bionian model could indicate a field of causes of the disorders that affected the functioning of the most varied groups and had profoundly impacted the then-nascent field of group dynamics.

Soon after, following the path opened by Bion and also starting from Melanie Klein, Canadian physician, and psychologist Elliott Jaques developed his so-called ‘socioanalytic’ approach based on an organizational intervention of unprecedented proportions. Given the

United Kingdom's withdrawal from the sorry state in which the economy was after the war, the British government, in 1948, decided to form the Industrial Productivity Committee and allocate funds for research aimed at increasing productivity through improved cooperation between managers and workers (Trist & Murray, 1990). The company that became the object of the research was the Glacier Metal Company, a London metallurgical company that employed around 1,500 people. Jaques led the research with the task of reducing the conflicts occurring there and promoting changes in the company's organization and culture, having reported the entire process three years later in the book *Changing culture of a factory* (A mudança de cultura de uma fábrica), which ended up being the Institute's first major post-war publication and having successive printings (Trist & Murray, 1990). It is worth noting, according to Arnaud (2004, p. 40), that Jaques' experience in this firm "[...] constitutes, even today, the most ambitious psychoanalytically-inspired organizational intervention ever carried out [...]", which has transformed it into a major reference for numerous researchers and interveners.

What interests us in this experience are the innovations derived from it about the application of psychoanalytic theory, published by Jaques (1978) in a work that also became a reference. In it, the Canadian author states his thesis that one of the primary elements of cohesion between individuals in institutions is the defense against anxiety – especially paranoid and depressive types. In Kleinian theory, such anxieties are linked to fundamental ways in which the individual relates to the world (grouped in psychoanalysis under the name 'object relations') established in the earliest childhood: these are schizo-paranoid and depressive 'positions' (a term that Klein prefers to the term 'phases' since they comprise anxieties and relationship modalities that return throughout life, under certain conditions) (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). In short, in the former, one experiences intense anxieties of a persecutory nature, which trigger the most archaic defense mechanisms (those that imply the 'splitting' of the object into 'good' and 'bad'), while, in the latter, one experiences depressive anxieties combatted by different defense mechanisms that are less archaic (manic or more appropriate, such as reparation and inhibition) (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Jaques read organizational dynamics through this Kleinian conceptual grid and sought to illustrate it with examples, such as paranoid anxieties in the paradigmatic case of a ship captain seen as a 'good' and idealized object and his mate seen as 'bad'. What was operative in this reading, however, is revealed in the Glacier case study, which indicates that the phantasmatic conflicts between management and workers could be elaborated (working-through) through the promotion of meetings between representatives of the parties, in which unconscious mechanisms were built to deal with the paranoid and depressive anxieties that were at play (Jaques, 1978)<sup>4</sup>.

According to Miller and Rose (1988), interventions promoted within the TIHR, such as this one by Glacier, marked fundamental changes in the way of facing industrial and social problems. Far from being just functional responses to organizational problems, they represented a "[...] new conceptual grid for understanding economic life" (Miller & Rosa, 1988, p. 184), which mobilized not only psychoanalytic but also psychiatric, anthropological, sociological, and organizational skills to understand a wide range of problems in industrial life. To these disciplines were also added the knowledge of Field Theory by Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin and the analysis of sociotechnical systems, advanced by pioneers of the institute such as Eric Trist and Fred Emery. Underlying all this knowledge and giving

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<sup>4</sup> The path followed by Jaques also includes the important works of Isabel Menzies Lyth, also from Tavistock, with emphasis on the pioneering article on nurses' anxiety toward death and suffering, defensive techniques, and other aspects witnessed in nursing.

it unity was the central notion of 'group', a condition for understanding work in organizations, and what made the "[...] 'relational life of the company' [...]" (Miller & Rose, 1988, p. 184, emphasis added) the main theoretical focus of Tavistock's approach. This new conceptual grid centered on group processes allowed the opening of an entire field of analysis and intervention that equated psychic health and managerial efficiency so that "[...] the group provided the means for creating techniques through which the individual's subjectivity could be integrated into objectives of the organization" (Miller & Rose, 1988, p. 186).

Thus, psychoanalysis became an important part of this regulatory project. Until then, secondary among psychological theories applied in the American industrial world, it now gained prominence on British ground, where, having shown its relevance during the Second World War and emerging from it representing "[...] the most advanced body of psychological knowledge then available" (Trist & Murray, 1990, p. 6), also managed to equate the importance of psychic health with the financial health of the company.

Although regulatory, this British undertaking cannot be equated with the North American one in terms of instrumentality. Although it was not a major theoretical reference to the North American world of work, psychoanalysis, as Zaretsky (2006) remembers, played a fundamental role in the construction of the US cultural industry. The so-called Freudianism served as a necessary artifice to turn the Fordist gears, as it counterbalanced the heavy, uniform, and rational Fordist morality with an emphasis on the role of fantasies, singularities, and the irrational. Thus, "Fordism needed Freudianism because it articulated the inner desires of the worker" (Zaretsky, 2006, p. 136) – desires from which someone like Bernays knew very well how to derive value, as seen above.

Furthermore, the operative potential of psychoanalysis did not go unnoticed by North Americans for long. In the 1960s, they engendered an autochthonous and eclectic form of psychodynamics applied to the world of work, the 'psychodynamics of leadership'. Founded by Harvard professors Harry Levinson and Abraham Zaleznik, it focuses on the relationship between leadership and organizational dysfunctions, starting from a heterodox approach (ranging from Freud to culturalist analysis and analytical psychology) and advancing a typology of leaders, the effects of pathological leadership styles on the organization and phantasmatic collusion (Arnaud, 2004). This last aspect was explored especially by Manfred Kets de Vries, one of those who delved most deeply into the psychoanalytic approach and who showed that the objective of investigating aspects like this is to teach how to recognize and manage these dysfunctional behaviors. Thus, the hallmark of this approach is using psychoanalysis on a frankly instrumental, sometimes even caricatured level – which is expressed in titles such as *O guia do executivo para entender pessoas: como a teoria freudiana pode transformar bons executivos em melhores líderes* by Zaleznik.

On the other hand, the British undertaking proved to be serious and served as inspiration for the critical tradition of French psychosociology, whose important role will be seen below. One of its great representatives, André Lévy (2001), highlights, for example, the influence of the socio-technical approach and Jaques' work, especially on a given group of this tradition – which will be identified below – concerned with the promotion of interventions in places of work. However, Lévy (2001, p. 49) recognizes the clear regulatory intent in a work like Jaques', pointing out that it "[...] is inscribed, at the same time, in the register of productive organization and in that of the exploration of conflicts and unconscious ghosts".

However, for us to identify a true emancipatory intention, the British undertaking had to abandon this 'record of productive organization' – which, however, was central as we saw and from which psychosociology managed to stay away, as will be seen. Thus, no matter



how different it may be from North Americans, the application the British made of psychoanalysis to the world of work could not hide its regulatory purpose.

### **French psychoanalysis applied to work: criticism, change, and emancipation**

In the middle of the last century, the Freudian doctrine, on an ideological level, was rejected in France because it was considered reactionary. According to Roudinesco (1988, p. 199), the French communists waged an “[...] anti-psychoanalytic war [...]” which, in effect, indicated little knowledge of that doctrine, amalgamating it sometimes with anti-Americanism, sometimes with Nazism, and opposing it with the materialism of psychologies such as those inspired by Pavlov. In fact, the group’s great nemesis was North American-style psychoanalysis, considered adaptive, conservative, and imperialist. The expression of this position, which ended up having wide repercussions, was published in the famous magazine *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1949: it was the infamous article *Autocrítica: a psicanálise, ideologia reacionária*, written by eight important psychiatrists, such as Louis Le Guillant and Lucien Bonnafé, and which highlighted the mystifying character of psychoanalytic theory, its idealistic conception of the relations between the individual and society, and the esoteric conception of its technique. Articles like this show an anti-Freudianism that would only subside in the mid-1950s, when we began to see the “[...] abandonment of the crusade” (Roudinesco, 1998, p. 206), in this important magazine and others, such as *La Raison* by Henri Wallon.

On a doctrinal level, psychoanalysis was left aside by most physicians who sought to overcome the crisis in which French psychiatry was. The history of this search, richly narrated by Isabelle Billiard (2001), began with a dual movement: on the one hand, the intervention in the psychiatric debate of the psychogenetic and sociogenetic theses regarding the etiology of mental illnesses – that is, the defense, on the part of authors like Lacan, of a purely psychic causality, and, on the part of authors like Bonnafé, of an environmental causality in the occurrence of psychic illness – starting from the *Colloque de Bonneval*, in 1946; on the other, the emergence of a humanist concern centered on rescuing fundamental but hitherto forgotten, human dimensions – of this as “[...] a being of language, relationships and freedom, which transforms itself over time [*dans la durée*], endowed with imaginary and symbolic capabilities [...]” (Billiard, 2001, p. 98). In addition to this destabilizing movement, a radical review of hospital practices was underway during the Second World War, when experiments in collective psychotherapy and ergotherapy were tried, which ended up promoting an unprecedented rapprochement between madness and work, and a reflection on the place of psychiatry in society, which resulted in the advent of social psychiatry and the initial formulations of work psychopathology. The sociogenetic aspect, contrary to the psychoanalytic framework, emerged in this psychiatric reorganization movement.

Interestingly, however, this aspect, as well as the initial formulations of work psychopathology, brought decisive contributions to the features of psychoanalysis applied to the world of work in France. Of the three founders of the ‘first foundation’, Le Guillant, Paul Sivadon, and Claude Veil, two were crucial to the creation of such features: Veil, on the one hand, for the content of his psychopathological reflections inspired by psychoanalysis; and Le Guillant, due to the style of his reflections, which, however, were far from Freudianism, as they were based on a sociogenetic vision. Both authors became important to this applied psychoanalysis: Veil, for the elaboration of a ‘clinic of the subject’, in which the influence of Freudianism was evident in a focus on the relationship between

psychic dynamics and the norms of the work environment; Le Guillant, for having founded a 'clinic of situations' concerned with investigating the pathogenic nature of certain types of tasks (Billiard, 2001).

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In the wake of a 'subject clinic', key reflections on psychoanalytic extraction in work psychopathology began to be made in the 1960s. Following the trends of the Anglo-American armed forces, physician-colonel André Missenard carried out a vocational analysis of air force pilots through psychoanalytic instruments, focused on the candidates' defensive strategies and Oedipal conflict. Referring to Tavistock's work, in the second half of the decade, Jean Ochonisky published an important article in which he elevated the work to the status of anguish therapy due to its sublimatory nature. Finally, at the same time, to study nervous fatigue and exhaustion among French train drivers, Jean-Jacques Moscovitz conducted research with them in the light of the analytical framework, in which fundamental methodological innovations are seen, such as analysis of demand and group interviews that gave insight into the 'transferential movements' of railway workers (Billiard, 2001).

On the other hand, at this point, the influence of psychoanalysis on the important field of so-called French psychosociology was already much more mature and operational. Among its main currents were the applied psychoanalysis of Didier Anzieu and René Kaës, the investigations of Max Pagès, Guy Palmade, André Levy, Jean-Claude Rouchy, and Jacqueline Barus-Michel within the scope of ARIP (Association pour la Recherche et l'Intervention Psychosociologiques), the clinical sociology of Eugène Enriquez, the socio-psychoanalysis of Gerard Mendel. In fact, a huge variety of theoretical and practical subsidies can be identified in psychosociological investigations, as their own authors indicate (Barrus-Michel, Enriquez, & Lévy, 2016). However, as Lévy (2001, p. 43) attests, "[...] psychoanalysis represents an inevitable reference [...]" to them, providing them with basic critical support. It promoted, on the one hand, the necessary distance from Lewin's social psychology and, on the other, "[...] even more than Marxist or neo-Marxist theories [...]", the denunciation of the ideological character of reducing conflicts to communication problems (Lévy, 2001, p. 44).

However, not all of this varied group of authors remained close to social reality. As Lévy (2001) highlights, it was possible to identify, among them, two very different orientations regarding this aspect: one, represented mainly by Anzieu but also Rouchy, proposed group clinical work that did not take "[...] into consideration the specificity of processes and social structures [...]" (Lévy, 2001, p. 48); another, represented by authors such as Enriquez and Lévy, was characterized by "[...] greater interest in facilitating developments in real situations – companies, local communities, hospitals [...]" (p. 48). Thus, without a doubt, the authors of this second orientation deserve the most attention,

considering the present attempt to rescue psychoanalysis applied to the world of work. However, as Lhuillier (2013, p. 15) emphasizes, “[...] it must be recognized that psychosociology did not necessarily give a central place to work, to the subject’s activities on and in the world, nor even to concrete practices [...]”. Thus, no matter how robust psychoanalysis proved in this group, a psychoanalytically oriented reflection ‘on the work’ was yet to be done.

In any case, with such authors, a perspective well captured by Lévy (2001, p. 49, emphasis added) finally took shape.

However, the most important contribution [from psychoanalysis to psychosociology] seems to us the definition and illustration of ‘an issue of change’ considering particular psychic processes, both individual and collective. Defining change as a ‘continuous process’ and not a causally determined result – thus, non-ending and non-programmable – the psychoanalytic perspective marked a ‘break’ with previous modes of thought. More than determining the causes likely to lead to a given state sought and the means of acting on them in the quickest and most effective way possible, clinicians will be interested in the process itself, in the way it changes, in order to find, for a ‘work patient’, in which time is not measured, the elements of a ‘forgotten story’, and of reconnecting the lost thread. [...]. In the same way, the ‘change we speak of here is always experienced in the conflict between opposing forces’, of which none are sure of winning; it is never acquired once and for all: human situations are always in unstable balance; they are more or less durable, susceptible, at every moment, to falling into formlessness.

In this excerpt, we have evidence of a change not only of an epistemological nature but also of an ethical-political nature. On the one hand, instead of the hurried search for causes, the patiently waiting for the ‘process of change’, the ‘forgotten stories’, the ‘lost thread’. On the other hand, action that awaits understanding instead of an action aimed at effectiveness. Therefore, such action can never be reduced to a technique: it is political, as its scope is conflict, the realm par excellence of the ‘unstable balance’, the ‘formless’.

Twenty years later, from the 1980s onwards, Christophe Dejours fulfilled the need for a detailed reflection on work and psychoanalytically oriented work. He, however, did not initially explain his debt to psychoanalysis. Coming not from the psychosociological tradition – although, to some extent, under its influence – but from the psychopathology of work and strongly influenced by Alan Wiesner’s ergonomics, Dejours wanted to mark a difference about psychoanalytic knowledge. It was only when he named his discipline with the name by which we know it – psychodynamics of work – that the weight of the anthropological vision of psychoanalysis was highlighted by the author. Then, attention began to focus no longer on pathology but on normality, understood as a dynamic balance situated between suffering and pleasure. This approach brought to the fore the libidinal components of the bond established between human beings and work, which could develop following a sublimatory path toward health or a defensive path toward pathology (Ferretti, 2020).

From the end of the 1990s, Dejours used his theory to try to understand the roots of domination and to think about possible paths toward emancipation. On the one hand, in *A banalização da injustiça social*, the author focuses on “[...] subjective motivations” (Dejours, 2007, p. 17) of domination, which leads him to the detection of a simultaneous analogical and homological relationship between the neoliberal turn and the Nazi machine both sustained by the total mobilization of the work of fear. What would be at stake in both phenomena would not be the absence of thought, as famous reflections such as those of Hannah Arendt supposed, but rather the existence of a massive collaboration under the sting of suffering. On the other hand, in *Trabalho vivo*, he dedicates himself to thinking about what he calls the ‘politics of work’, which implies defending that “[...] the organization of work is a political problem in its entirety, which is not reducible to any political dimension” (Dejours,

2012, v. 2, p. 209). In other words, he defends an appropriation of the organization of work by everyone not only to intervene in the enormous problem of work-related illnesses but, above all, to rebuild relationships of solidarity and learn to 'live together', especially destroyed by the neoliberal turn. To this end, it would be necessary to develop "[...] a doctrine of work based on the systematic reassessment of the relations between work and the *polis*, between work and violence or civilization [...] between work and culture, between work and democracy" (Dejours, 2021, v. 2, p. 204).

At this point, it can already be seen that this path of French psychoanalysis applied to work, briefly discussed above, highlights a critical concern. Although the suspicion of psychoanalytic knowledge until the 1950s was perhaps justified, whether due to its instrumental application mainly in the USA or its elitism in general, the following decades gave evidence of an unsuspected critical effort. Unlike its predecessors, this applied psychoanalysis demonstrated clear emancipatory objectives.

### **Final considerations**

What this historical overview of the two strands of psychoanalysis applied to the world of work – Anglo-American and French – sought to show was the distinction between two types of uses of the analytical framework, one regulatory, the other emancipatory. Even though French approaches were inspired by previous ones in some way, their paths were different for contextual reasons. Therefore, the directions taken should not be reduced to being determined by something like a 'national spirit', as Freud did: above all, historical constraints that drove these approaches.

This observation is important as it is first necessary to pay attention to the 'spirit of the time'. In our time, lavish in forms of neoliberalism, sustaining a critical vision and proposing emancipatory interventions in the world of work seems to be an increasingly arduous task. In this sense, the application of Lacanian theory, verified in a given line of organizational studies led by authors such as Gilles Arnaud, is perhaps paradigmatic, which strips this theory of its original critical vocation (Moncayo, 2018). In other words, this is a French appropriation of psychoanalysis which, however, appears to be regulatory.

On the other hand, the observation regarding our 'spirit of the time' should show the even greater importance of a critical approach today, especially considering our national reality. Refined readings of contemporary labor subjectivity and emancipatory interventions are urgent in Brazil. Not only because we are one of the countries in which work-related illnesses and accidents are most aggravated (Seligmann-Silva et al., 2010) but also because, here, the precariousness of work is structural and not just cyclical, as in Europe and the USA (Maciel, 2021).

Although Dejourian theory has seen an extraordinary reception in our country (Ferretti, 2020), national work psychology does not reveal the same emphasis as psychoanalysis. It is true, as Sampaio (1998) points out, that such psychology appears to be in perfect harmony with the precepts highlighted by Lévy in the excerpt reproduced above. That is, in this psychology, which differs radically from its predecessors, industrial and organizational, there is finally "[...] a place to glimpse man as a desiring being [...]" so that "[...] an approach to psychoanalysis is inevitable" (Sampaio, 1998, p. 27). Nevertheless, such an approach does not seem as effective in our country. In more critical works, such as those by Coutinho, Bernardo and Sato (2017), the field of worker health and solidarity economy, precepts such as those of Latin American social medicine, are identified as the main sources of 'social psychology of work', and the 'Italian Workers Movement' and authors

such as Paulo Freire and Peter Spink. In less critical works, such as Zanelli, Borges-Andrade and Bastos (2014), psychoanalysis is mentioned for its contributions to theories on motivation and leadership. Finally, in works such as Bendassolli (2009), which sought a systematization of the field, among the five 'ways of psychological appropriation of work' (that of 'constructs of organizational psychology', 'theories of social psychology of work', 'clinical perspectives on work', 'constructs on the meaning and psychological function of work'), only that of work clinics – and, in particular, that of Dejours – seems to have some importance to psychoanalysis.

This relative absence of psychoanalysis seems to indicate reservations about it. This position is clearer in Coutinho et al. (2017), who begin their book by denouncing the distant attitude of fifth-year psychology students in the 1980s about work psychology, more concerned with dealing with issues of an elite than facing a harsh social reality, then characterized by records of work accidents, dictatorship, and lack of public health resources. In the other two works cited, there is some predominance of a cognitivist view – somewhat justifiably since, as Bendassolli (2009, p. 32) showed, work psychology was significantly marked by the “[...] cognitive turn”.

The historical reconstruction made in this article is expected to show work psychology scholars, especially those who have reservations about psychoanalysis, how much the course of its application to the world of work has moved from a regulatory pole to an emancipatory one and, with this, as possibilities for transforming work organization were indicated. Furthermore, they must be asked to pay attention to the dedication with which much of Brazilian psychoanalytic reflection has been dedicated to hot topics of the national reality, such as racism, feminism, democracy, public clinics, and care in situations of environmental and social catastrophes. Finally, they must be reminded that Freud stated that the original vocation of psychoanalysis was to allow the subject to love and work, which indicates how much it, in times of increasing pathologies, precariousness, and acute social suffering, should, for coherence, distance from the regulatory pole and toward the critical pole.

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