

Traumatic Insistence: Reflections on the Concept of Negative in Psychoanalysis

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The so-called non-neurotic pathologies have been widely studied, as they require clinical intervention different from the analytic process for cases of neurosis. This proposal focuses on the neurotic and psychotic structures with the concept of negative as an operator for metapsychological and clinical debate. The negative may be associated with the neurotic structure with respect to the establishment of repression, the action of defenses in distinguishing psychic systems, and the overbearing presence of word-presentations. In this structural dimension, free association and analytic interpretation operate by means of the cut, the negative and the excess libido found in symptomatic and traumatic insistence. Regarding the psychotic structure, the foreclosure of the paternal function does not inscribe a negative, causing the subject to be adrift in language, their unconscious out in the open air. In this sense, analytic intervention acts on the traumatic insistence of language, playing the role of secretary to the psychotic (Lacan, 1955-56), helping them to weave ties and produce negatives before the invasive Other. Much research has focused on investigating the reverberation of trauma on psychic life as well as the unconscious content bordering on the drive—more specifically, the death drive and the idea of an excess. This communication proposal seeks in the concept of negative theoretical and technical elements to problematize these issues. For such, it analyzes the contributions of Freud, Lacan, and Green to the proposition that this concept can be considered an operator of metapsychological and technical reflection in traumatic insistence.

Keywords: the negative, traumatic insistence, psychoanalysis, metapsychology

Introduction

The so-called *non-neurotic pathologies* (Bleichmar, 2011) have been widely debated in the field of psychoanalysis as the interventions they call for differ from the clinical practice in neurosis. Although these are not considered new pathologies, much less new subjectivities, it is our understanding that they pose to the psychoanalysis community the need to dive deeper and unfold the traditional indications of the psychoanalysis technique with a view to improving and refining what is understood by non-neurotic pathologies. For such, we take into consideration the richness and complexity of psychoanalytic theory, its open-ended scope, and varied forms of management and application.

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In addition, we also highlight the need to subordinate the method to the object, redefining the conditions under which a mental structure breakdown requires not only a transforming intervention but also one that fosters new forms of organization. Therefore, the matters under scrutiny here are listening and careful reading of the theoretical and clinical issues. Above all, what is at play is the possibility to consider other angles in analyzing psychic pain.

We set out from the structural hypothesis principle, from which intervention unfolds. This proposal focuses on the neurotic and psychotic structures considering the concept of negative as a metapsychological and clinical operator for reflection. In psychoanalysis, the classical paper by Sigmund Freud (1925b), “A Negativa”, is considered a milestone in this discussion. Our proposal is to unfold this critical concept, as it addresses a particular aspect of metapsychology and its technical issues.

The negative may be associated with the neurotic structure with respect to the establishment of repression, the action of defenses in distinguishing mental systems and the prevailing presence of word-presentations. Within this structural dimension, free association and analytical interpretation operate by means of the cut, the negative, and the excess libido found in symptomatic and traumatic insistence.

As far as the psychotic structure is concerned, the foreclosure of the paternal function does not inscribe a negative, causing the subject to be adrift in language, their unconscious out in the open air. In this sense, analytic intervention acts on the traumatic insistence of language, playing the role of secretary to the psychotic (Lacan, 2010), helping them to weave ties and produce negatives in the face of the invasive Other.

On this topic, having looked into the reverberations of trauma on psychic life, as well as the unconscious content bordering on the drive—more specifically, the death drive—some studies stand out (Bleichmar, 2011; Marucco, 2013b; Roussillon, 2014; Scarfone, 2014). In unison, they draw attention to the moments that give rise to the psyche in which the drive, before reaching the point of representation, tends to unload on action or the body: “We are far from the repressed unconscious and, on the other hand, too close to the cauldron of the id (...)” (Marucco, 2013a, p. 188). The idea of an excess coming about and imposing a psychic work of connection and bonding (Freud, 1920), of traumatic insistence, points to some courses of action to address these challenges in contemporary psychoanalytic practice. Therefore, what is at play here is this traumatic insistence, the excess of drive, and its mental destinations.

This essay is built upon the psychoanalysis method involving, in the first place, the concept of negative under study in our doctoral research, which aims to analyze the contributions of this concept to the interface between contemporary art and psychoanalysis. From this relation with the theme of the negative, the study develops on the basis of free association and unfettered “reading”, placing the negative as the privileged “subject”/signifier under analysis. As mentioned, we have been searching through the writings of Freud, Lacan, and other psychoanalysts such as Silvia Bleichmar and Norberto Marucco (Argentina); Dominique Scarfone (Canada); Rene Roussillon (France); and Christian Dunker and Vladimir Safatle (Brazil) for indications for reflection on the negative, the associations they make, and the metapsychological relevance of the concept these authors point to.

Therefore, this analysis focuses on the clinical issues involving the negative as an operator of language, a metapsychological operator potentially developing into actions that affect the mental structure and course of treatment. Thus, we seek to contribute to the field of psychoanalytic clinical practice by means of theoretically articulating different authors and of the crucial circumscription of the negative within subjectivity.

On Traumatic Insistence and Essential Helplessness

According to the psychoanalytic theory, helplessness is inherent in human beings. A fragile being needs to be cared for and fed by others before becoming a human proper. Language cuts across this encounter; it modulates and shapes this relationship, but also allows for the transmission of cultural traits, values, and ideals. Therefore, the so-called Other under the Lacanian perspective is a priori confused with the first other who fulfils the maternal function. This condition of one's insufficiency and dependence upon another adds to the inability of language to circumscribe the discomforts of the body and the misalliances that are also produced by virtue of this human denaturalization. What does the other want from me? How can that pleasure be experienced again?

In this sense, helplessness is essential and speaks of the human condition as a non-whole, but intertwined with another, with the linguistic dimension, which is never complete. By means of the experiences of essential helplessness, an Other is crossed by their Other shapes and passes on potential means of coping with helplessness.

But trauma insists. According to Lacan, the Real, as the impossible, insists mostly in the sexual realm, the body, and in death—essential dimensions of living that are never entirely fulfilled, that forever insist in not writing themselves. Trauma insists, invoking significations that remain at the border and do not close the hiatus.

The first experiences of satisfaction and even of shaping the ego, from identifications and images, inscribe traces in the process of constitution of the subject. It is by means of language, the symbolic imprinted on a pure body and on a supposedly complete image, that we identify the process of subjective structuring, references to mother tongue and symbols.

In this sense, the non-whole dimension of language is our first contact with the negative. The dynamics of the drive unfolds from it, setting out in search of an object assumed to be lost, a process guided by the principle of pleasure. Paradoxically, however, it never entirely ends, as the object is unable to fill the entire void of lack, perpetually leaving space for the drive. What is at play is the search for a reencounter—destined to remain a non-encounter. Thus, the drive is satisfied in this cycle, in the search for the object that is lost in a non-instinctive, denaturalized condition; it does not seek fulfillment, but a perpetual something more. According to Lacan, language creates a hole, a significant dimension that tries to shape the subject's needs but fails constantly, sending the subject into the dialectics of desire instituted and maintained by the absence, the negative.

The Negative Inherent in Language and as an Operator of Mental Structure

In its negative dimension, language allows for reference in the absence of the referent. It allows any phenomenon to represent something beyond itself. A gravestone stands for death and the humanity of our bodies. Language cuts as it draws the line around the use and meaning of words, which necessarily implies a negative dimension. That is not it! This is not a pipe.

Crying and the sense mothers make of it, the exchange of speech between two persons changes what they used to be. Passwords, laws, and customs contribute to a symbolic organization for the pure Real of the body, the sexual sphere and death, the only certainty inhabiting humanity. Mallarmé compares language to a smeared coin travelling silently from hand to hand (Lacan, 2005). Empty, banal phrases communicate the need of the speaker and the importance of saying, phrases that seek to find meaning in the face of the negative of language, which always leaves a remainder.

In this vein, language alone plays the role of interfering in, and repressing, the relationship between one and the object, the other, and their own ego. In the operation of constitution of the subject mediated by language, the Other is the instance instituted by the traces of culture, one's mother tongue—it is beyond the reality of the other.

Lacan (2005) also conceptualizes the Other as the place where *it speaks*. The unconscious structured as a language, guided by the principle of pleasure, organized by the mechanisms of condensation and displacement and by the trait of atemporal age, does not contemplate negation, as it is articulated in a net where paradoxes, ambivalences, and idiosyncrasies have a place.

Symptoms could be thought of as smothered speech, excess of no's, insufficiency of no's.

The Negative as an Operator of Metapsychological Reflection

Freud's paper "Die Verneinung" was originally published in 1925, and the translation into Portuguese we used as reference, by Ernani Chaves and Pedro Heliodoro Tavares, was published in the collection *Obras Incompletas de Sigmund Freud* under the title "A negação". With regard to this short, however dense piece of writing, we are somehow familiar with both the clinical description and the initial explanations of the author about the role of the negative utterance in the speech of clients under psychoanalysis.

You ask who that person in your dream might be. It surely isn't my mother. We therefore rectify, it is the mother. In interpreting, we take the liberty to ignore negation and extract from it the pure content of the event. It is as if the patient had said, "Actually, it was my mother who came to mind as connected to this person; however, I am not at all inclined to admitting it occurred to me." (Freud, 1925a, p. 141)

Our analytical attitude to explore unconscious ideas and fantasies present in the client's discourse—guided by the Freudian maxim to *make the unconscious conscious*—is often taken by surprise by the use of the negative (*It surely isn't my mother*), where it seems as if the client is more interested in tricking us than in accepting unconscious contents.

Firstly, it must be noted that the client's "no"—their use of the negative—says more about a mental operation than it simply implies a concept. Precisely by virtue of this, the point is not to analyze the utterance itself, replacing a negative with an affirmative utterance, and not to identify the unconscious behind the "no", but the opposite: the "no" in the client's discourse arises as one of the potential paths to the unconscious. Therefore, we are faced with a mental operation, an attempt of the mind to put the silenced dormant to work, to give it a voice.

The unconscious, therefore, will rise as negative if, and only if, it is firstly under the action of what Freud has called repression. It is by means of repression that the unconscious becomes negative in thought. The exercise or the role of thought in psychoanalysis is precisely to propose its suspension, by virtue of which the inversion of the negative form of the unconscious into its positive form takes place. In order to carry out this work, Freud proposes a reading of the negativity status of the unconscious, i.e. of how this negative mode arises in thought and speech.

Secondly, regarding Freud's citation, what initially seemed to be a descriptive piece of writing on a single phenomenon observed in clinical practice takes an unexpected turn that raises the *Verneinung* mechanism to a structural level, placing it at the origin of thought. It is a *verneinung* that allows the subject to think—i.e. negation is a necessary condition for thought, which frees the subject from the effects of repression, of the compulsion of the principle of pleasure.

By analyzing the means by which repressed content can rise to consciousness, Freud postulates that this mechanism derives from the Ego's intellectual function, which judges whether an idea is acceptable or not.

Reflection on this judicative activity compels the author to investigate the origins of judgement, the preconditions allowing for the constitution of the mind. At the origin of the process of judgement, we find negation associated with the most primitive organization of the Ego that seeks, for the first time, to draw a line between itself and the outer world, expelling unpleasant and introjecting pleasant content, which became known as *judgement of attribution*. Following this first operation, the *judgement of existence* comes into play guided by the attempt to find traces of the old objects of satisfaction.

In addition to the idea of the negative as a symbol that allows the return of the repressed through the suspension of repression (Freud, 1925a), Green (2010) highlights the evidence left by Freud himself throughout his work about the negative term: a neurosis as a negative of perversion; the negative therapeutic reaction; the negative transference.

Green also mentions the existence of other psychic events that, although mentioned by Freud only in a subtle way, carry the trace of the negative and can be easily identified, such as mourning and loss of the object, the dream-work, the representations in its relations with the drive and the death drive itself; the concept of defense and repression.

By tracking these theoretical evidences, Green (2010) advanced the psychoanalytic theory by instituting a metapsychological and technical status to the concept of negativity. He takes from the Freud's paper "New Introductory Conferences to Psychoanalysis" written in 1933 the interpretive key by which almost everything we know about the Id is of a negative character compared to the ego. In other words, we would be facing a paradoxical situation, where the noisy and most affirmative instances of the psychic apparatus, the Id, only can be known in the negative of what we know about the ego. For Green (2010, p. 262) and inverting Freud's statement, "The Ego is the Id in the negative (or negativity)".

Therefore, speaking about negativity refers both to what makes it possible getting closer to the motions of the Id and to the death drive as what operates in the work of representation where the motion of the Id transforms itself in an investment of the self, ensuring the permanence of representations. The main metapsychological interest lies in its transformational value.

Recent studies in psychoanalysis (Bleichmar, 2011; Marucco, 2013b; Roussillon, 2014; Scarfone, 2014) are unanimous in pointing out a need to undertake a thorough review both in metapsychology and in psychoanalytic technique. The classic device in psychoanalysis—the talking cure (Freud, 1895) —no longer contemplates the understanding and healing of the presentations of the unconscious evidenced predominantly by the body and the act.

Bleichmar (2011), for instance, sustained her metapsychological and technical review in a careful approach to the representational status by recognizing the non-homogeneity of psychic symbolization. According to her, representations of various orders coexist in the psyche, convoking psychoanalyst not be only undo the repression, but also operating in the symbolization's labor. This is due to the

(...) coexistence in the treatment process the activation of secondarily repressed representational currents (those that are the object of free association ...) of others that are primarily repressed (that were never transcribed as representation-word) and even those that are preserved as unrelated evidence that circulates through the psyche without a defined topical status. (Bleichmar, 2011, p. 180)

In common, these authors emphasize the original and the archaic in terms of constitution and psychic retreat for a time and place close to repression, before the logic of desire and the predominance of the word was installed.

In common, they highlight the need for a specific psychic work of these unconscious elements that approach to the drive concept, more specifically the death drive.

Lacan (2010, p. 21) contributes to this discussion, analyzing that the return of the repressed, apparent in the “no” expressed in speech, intensely points to the repressed that structures neurosis. “Whatever falls under repression returns, as repression and its return are two sides of the same coin. The repressed remains there and is very articulate in expressing itself in symptoms and a myriad of other phenomena.” (Lacan, 2010, p. 21).

The so-called judgement of existence thus creates a guiding axis, an ideal ego derived from the operation of repression. Symptoms, as formations of compromise between conscious and unconscious, when articulated with repression and judgments of attribution and existence, create a sort of subjective style. A manner of being that is metaphorized by symptoms forms the bases of the relations of pleasure and non-pleasure.

In this way, the negative is inscribed as a secondary process, repression, censorship. From the multiplicity and incompleteness of language and the signifiers making up the unconscious, the negative arises to pose barriers, circumscribe the primary process, and designate what may or may not come to surface.

On Mental Structures and Their Clinical Implications

The negative is inscribed in the condition of language but is also reinforced by symbolization of the paternal function, introducing the dimension of censorship, more specifically, of repression as a structuring operation for neurosis.

Regarding the course of treatment for neuroses, it may be pointed that the concept of negative reveals its entire unfolding—beginning with language, the repression imposed by the paternal function, and the return of the repressed. In neurosis, the psychoanalyst is in the position of the subject supposed to know and, by means of transference, repeats and updates the subject’s relationships. The neurotic believes that someone, as the paternal function suggests, is able to deal with the mother’s desire. Someone is capable of providing some guarantee before the original helplessness. Even though this proves unsustainable over the course of treatment and the psychoanalyst aims to step out of this position in order to allow the subject to perceive him/herself as the one carrying his/her truth, this role is essential for the course of treatment and establishment of the relationship of transference.

Thus, from the weight attributed by the neurotic to the negative, excessive negation, and repression of desire, psychoanalysis seeks to open up meanings, suspend symptomatic repetitions. The latter, in their complex structures, paradoxically involve pleasure and displeasure. Therefore, by updating essential relationships by means of transference, the analyst follows up, witnesses, and points to fixation points, excess meaning that symptoms carry on the course of treatment.

In psychotic structure, it is no longer fit to speak of repression, but of foreclosure, as Jacques Lacan (2010) writes from his clinical experience and the Freudian analyses on the Schreber case. Foreclosure is precisely about the non-symbolic inscription of the paternal function. In this sense, a metaphor for the father does not take place, which causes the subject to live adrift in symbolic order.

Calligaris (1989) draws a comparison between neurosis and psychosis based on the tipping point metaphor. In neurosis, the subject is organized in such a manner that the paternal metaphor and the symbolic inscription it generates act as a tipping point that assigns meaning and value to their choices and sacrifices. On the other hand, in psychosis we think of an open grid, a map on which streets cross but no main road can be found. All paths are potential paths, which casts the subject adrift within the symbolic plane.

In this sense, the course of treatment in psychoses is necessarily different from that in neuroses, as the subject is already in a universe without boundaries, where “no” is scarce. What might seem as a neurotic paradise proves maddening, as a world with endless possibilities brings their entire fantastic universe out in the open-air of the subject. There is no repression nor censorship to divide the outer and the inner worlds. Thus, what can eventually be refused in the symbolic order, in psychoses, reappears in the real as hallucination, delusional formation, which reveals the extent to which the “psychotic subject ignores the language they speak” (Lacan, 2010, p. 21).

It is worth noting that the negative dimension of language and the condition of subject it creates is not eliminated in psychoses, which allows the subject to continue to speak. Delirium appears as text, a subjective truth that is not repressed but, on the contrary, extremely explicit. Thus, it is the analyst’s role to listen through the delirium as the truth of the subject. It is the relation between the speech and discourse of the subject and its signification—its order—that allows us to tell a delusional formation apart from a non-delusional one.

Faced with this different form of subjective structure, the role of the analyst needs to rest on a foundation other than the initial position of a subject supposed to know, but as a secretary to the alienated. In this position, instead of interpreting the excess of meaning—as in cases of neurosis—they help to gather the signifiers scattered across delusion formation and subjective structure itself. In this sense, the analyst acts as secretary to the subject in building a paternal metaphor that can provide a minimal guidance in the complex course of life.

Ordering delirium reduces psychic pain, as it is structured as a substitute for the paternal metaphor that has not been symbolically inscribed. For such, it is fit to follow-up the subject’s drifting movement without aiming to change the mental structure but to build a *sinthome* (Lacan, 2007), a know-what-to-do with a symptom. Faced with essential helplessness, the psychotic does not have a father to reach out to, a subject supposed to know. Delirium comes about the real to invoke meanings, a difficult task in the face of fragility towards the social bond, predominantly neurotic, guided by “no” and repression.

Concluding Remarks

Traumatic insistence involves our essential helplessness and our condition as language beings. It also reflects our instinctive dynamics realized in cycles with incessant movement.

This paper aimed to show the structural character of the mental mechanism of negation as an origin of thought production and constitution of the subject. From the negation that constitutes language and the subjects, we have analyzed the mechanisms of repression and foreclosure as different forms of inscription of the paternal function, by the excellent function of “no”.

Regarding neuroses, it may be said that the negative arises as a defense against trauma, imposing a barrier on its excesses, on the one hand, and super-investing some traits, on the other. The idea of denying by contesting something with a “no” or simply answering “no” suggests a device to which the subject resorts in order to deal with unconscious content that might arise or be uttered under negation. In these structures, the analyst sets out to open these excess points, helping to create other perspectives and interpretations, suspending repression, and accepting the content repressed knowing that there will always be a remainder of repressed content, as the unconscious only reaches the surface by means of consciousness and produces itself endlessly.

In psychoses, the non-symbolic inscription of the cut, the “no”, calls the analyst to symbolically articulate scattered signifiers, helping the subject to build a boundary, a minimal frontier that allows him/her to navigate the social bond.

In the face of traumatic insistence and the relevance of negation as a mental strategy, psychoanalysis, as a theoretical-practical tool, helps us to analyze the metapsychological minutiae and to qualify the course of treatment while maintaining the subject as central to ethical conduct.

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