

"The Paradoxes of Freedom: Structural and Historical Dimensions"

Ernesto Vetere

Lazos Institución Psicoanalítica de La Plata

"For freedom, I bleed, fight and endure", prematurely wrote Miguel Hernandez, giving voice to a fighter mortally wounded at the beginning of Franco's regime, without even suspecting that this horror would incomprehensibly last almost four decades. These same verses, in the twilight of the dictatorship, were taken up and sung by Joan Manuel Serrat, transforming that song into a universal anthem of freedom. When I set out to think about what I could talk about here in Barcelona, these rhythmic lyrics accompanied by their music flashed before me in a brilliant moment. Besides pointing me in the direction of what could be the topic of investigation for the occasion that brings us together today, this idea brought about two initial associations that I would like to at least sketch out. On the one hand, they are verses woven together by verbs: to bleed, to fight, to endure.

Far from any ontological pretension, freedom would be intertwined with the verb. If there is any possible margin of freedom, it is because that margin is made, it is the effect of doing, among others and we will see how, of the analytical task. On the other hand, these are verbs whose meanings reinforce the idea that the subject has to put a lot of effort into achieving it. Remembering that ethical maxim of Freud, we could add: Navigating is necessary, but it is by no means easy. On this paradoxical knot between determinism and freedom, I would like to share with you some reflections.

Every era raises its flags about freedom, and not always in such a poetic way. In recent years, this word has dangerously become the outraged cry of the new right-wing movements. Some of these political parties even call themselves "libertarians". With different expressions and nuances, of course, but with a common denominator: hatred as the predominant passion of being. That hatred invades the ear precisely through a wordless scream. It is then the crazy and hostile rallying cry for an individual freedom

without the Other and without others, which pushes towards the breaking of social ties and any ethical principle that may regulate them. They are called, in a critical way, "hate speeches", although it is actually more about of a hate that does not make a speech.

Our era also promotes a sweetened idea of commercialized freedom through official therapies. Here too there are various proposals but the idea of a sort of libertarian narcissism persists, which by pure will and courage could do without any determinism. This also leads to a short circuit with the other, conceived as a hindrance or, on the contrary, as an instrument for personal realization. In these cases, the aspect of love is not emphasized but rather reduced to the passion of being oneself.

In the face of this proliferation of disturbing messages, it is part of our responsibility as analysts to try to discern their impact on contemporary subjectivity and more specifically, on certain statements made by our analysands. Since these epochal dimensions of the discourse of the Other will be intertwined with the structural ones, in a unique way in each individual. The interweaving of these dimensions will determine the subject and it will be through the interrogation of these marks that new ways of doing something else with them can be constructed, even invented. This tension between determinism and freedom, an ancient theme of debate within the fields of philosophy and politics, has not been sufficiently addressed by psychoanalysis, at least not in those terms. Both in Freud and in Lacan, determinism has always been the royal path for the study of structure, but freedom never became a psychoanalytic concept. However, multiple allusions to a knowledge-how of the subject can be read in their theories, in the interstices of structure, which will produce its revitalization and openness. This knowledge-how will be sustained by something related to "subjective choice," which of course is neither volitional nor egoic nor rational, but which will also become determinative for the subject's destiny. A hinge between determination and freedom that will open new doors beyond the well-worn script of the phantasy. But let's go a little slower, because from the psychoanalytic perspective, there are also choices and choices. I propose then to make a brief journey that gives

foundation to the following passage: from the "choice of neurosis" to the choice of the *sinthome*.

As a starting point, let us remember Freud's categorical formulation in "Psychopathology of Everyday Life": "There is nothing in the psychic realm that is a product of free will, that does not obey determinism." Nevertheless, he always placed on the side of the analysand the attempt to decipher their dreams, forgettings, and lapses. Paradoxically, in order to unravel the unconscious determinations of these formations, he proposed the rule of free association as the only rule of the analytical device. This associative freedom -and its corollary on the side of the analyst, floating attention- will be the very expression of the tension between determinism and freedom. We know that the analysand is not very free when it comes to taking the floor -since he is ultimately taken by his words- But it is through those words -dictated by the discourse of the Other- that the invention of a saying can take place. That saying will be an event and that event, a modest act of freedom. Freedom as an effect -never as a substance- can only be thought of from the notion of an act. This logic of the act -and therefore, of the end of analysis- will redefine the potential scope of the notion of free association, by situating this rule, present from the beginning of an analysis, in the direction of the exercise of a *savoir-faire* with *lalangue*, a new definition of the unconscious from Seminar 20 on and one of the names of the *sinthome*, from Seminar 23 on. A *savoir-faire* with *lalangue* in which the analysand and the analyst, from different places and functions, will participate, but which will also anticipate the necessary breaking point for the conclusive passage from analysand to analyst.

But let's revisit the proposed journey from another angle. Returning once again to the times of subjective constitution, we come across another primordial meaning of choice: the already mentioned "choice of neurosis". Very early on, Freud places at the very center of the determinism of neurosis an elective instance that defines which form it will adopt. In his letters to Fliess and in his early texts, this expression, "choice of neurosis,"

already appears, understood as "the decision about whether to develop hysteria, obsessive neurosis or paranoia." It will be a "conditioned choice" - determined by the places of fixation of the libido - perhaps a logical antecedent to the "forced choice" that Lacan will refer to in Seminar 11, but this time in relation to the subject's significant dependency.

The forced choice inherent in alienation will be made between being and sense. In this first operation, strictly speaking, there will be no room for freedom. In fact, Lacan himself, following the Hegelian path, argues that through this alienation, human being "embarks on the path to slavery. Freedom or life! If he chooses freedom, bang! He loses both immediately—if he chooses life, he has a life amputated of freedom." It is for this reason that the essential twist produced by the second operation will be necessary. Separation will express the subject's liberation from the aphasic effect of the signifier, allowing him to find in the intervals of the discourse of the Other a possible space from which to play the game of desire in a different way.

This dialectic will enable the "function of no". And from here we will project another trace that starts from these first "no's", makers of childhood, to the "everything, but not that" other name of the *sinthome*. We can never anticipate the consequences of a "saying no". A paradigmatic example of this can be found in the character of José Saramago's novel, Raimundo Silva, a text editor who is responsible for preserving the integrity of the written works entrusted to him. He leads a lonely and mundane life, from his house to work and back. Until one day, he comes across a text on the history of the Siege of Lisbon and, upon finishing his correction, decides to write a "no" where a "yes" was supposed to be. That elective moment will definitively change the written history of Portugal and his personal life. In addition to the siege of the city, another siege will fall, helping him to build a new relationship between his loneliness and others.

This example shows us how a "saying no" can acquire the status of an act, with unpredictable effects afterwards. This passage from the psychic to the tychic will imply another relationship with that contingent, unpredictable thing that can only take place beyond the fenced borders of the phantasy. The "everything, but not that" which Lacan finds in Socrates' position will lead him to postulate precisely that: this formula accounts for a possible position towards life and death, which he will later call heretical. Referring to Joyce - and appealing to the Greek term *haeresis*, which means "choice" - he will say: "It is necessary to choose the path by which to take the truth. This is all the more necessary since, once the choice is made, it does not prevent anyone from subjecting it to confirmation, that is, to be heretical in the good way, the one that, having recognized the nature of the *sinthome* well, does not deprive itself of using it logically, that is, until it reaches its real...". That truth articulated to the real, and singular for each one, will only be achieved and renewed each time, from the "choice of the *sinthome* on", emphasizing the ambiguity of the genitive. Because once the choice is made, this know-how, becoming necessary, will also choose for us. It will not allow us to stop doing it. Those moments of freedom will only be possible from the inscription of impossibility, impossibility that will take over from impotence when it is no longer linked to the original determinism but to the incurable nature of the subject and the world. "Everything, but not that": the "but not that" that pierces the "everything" will be the heretical point where the subject, in each of those moments, he will be able to make his desiring choice again: disregarding the father, but only on the condition of serving himself of his *sinthome*.