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# **LACAN AND CULTURALISM: A CHRONICLE OF AN “UNTIMELY” RESISTANCE TO PSYCHOANALYSIS**

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*Abstract:* Although neither Sigmund Freud nor Jacques Lacan ever neglected the place of culture and the social field for the subject, they always opposed “culturalist” ideas, even when such ideas no longer used this label. It is important to examine what both of these figures said about culturalism, but it is just as pertinent to return to other criticisms of this movement, which developed in the United States during the last century, because at present, this movement has returned covertly within French psychoanalysis. First, “culturalism” is neither a specifically American problem nor one that belongs to the past. Secondly, some decisive criticisms of this movement remain both germane and original: they are able to throw light on a theoretical current that, at least in France, now characterizes a dominant orientation of psychoanalytic work. Third, although Lacan himself foresaw it, the misuse of some of his notions has unexpectedly served as a Trojan horse that has enabled culturalism to return.

*Keywords:* Lacan, Freud, culturalism, French psychoanalysis, neo-Freudians, Adorno, Horney, Fromm, Marcuse, Zinberg, “new subject,” social criticism.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, the works of psychoanalysts who were part of the “culturalist” or “neo-Freudian” movement enjoyed considerable success. This movement was more of a current than a separate school, and what united its different figures was a “theoretical attitude common to all of them” (Marcuse, 1955, p. 248). This “cultural orientation” (p. 249) considers the relativism of socio-cultural factors to be the overriding determinants of the subject of the unconscious and the economy of its desire. In place of the complexes and structures that are involved in intrapsychic processes, it substitutes environmental factors. Viewed by its opponents as a sociologizing falsification of the foundations of psychoanalysis, it is well known in the English-speaking world and has been criticized in the work of Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Russell Jacoby, and to a lesser extent, Slavoj Žižek. In France and elsewhere, readers of Lacan have been aware of this movement’s existence and knew of its principal authors,<sup>1</sup> several of whom were psychoanalysts who had emigrated from Europe. Nevertheless, when Lacan discussed and criticized American psychoanalytic works, he emphasized ego psychology, which after Freud’s death, had become a sort of psychoanalytic orthodoxy; this is so much the case that his students and readers, even up to the present day, have tended to neglect the culturalist movement, which, for them, remained in the shadow of ego psychology. This article seeks to show that this misrecognition has had damaging consequences today for psychoanalysis in general and for Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular. More precisely, we shall argue that 1) “culturalist” ideas existed before the

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1 In France, the best known and most frequently cited of these authors are Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Erik Erikson, along with Harry Stack Sullivan and Abram Kardiner.

culturalist movement and had already been identified and criticized by Freud; 2) Lacan, like other psychoanalysts or philosophers in France and the United States, always distinguished his position from that of the culturalist authors; 3) although Lacanians, in particular, understood that culturalism constitutes a major deviation from psychoanalysis,<sup>2</sup> a form of it is nevertheless returning to fashion in France today, without being identified as such. Paradoxically, its propagation has been permitted, at least in part, by a misuse of certain notions that derive from Lacan's teaching.

To raise questions about Lacan and culturalism is to invite American readers to confront their own otherness, which requires the sort of double decentering that Claude Lévi-Strauss (1983) referred to as the "view from afar." This involves looking at other societies from a distance (here, Lacan's work and a significant branch of French psychoanalysis), and learning to see one's own ecosystem from the same distance, as if one belonged to a completely different culture (this concerns the need to examine the preponderant and problematic place of culturalism in American psychoanalysis). Thus, this article argues that, for psychoanalysis, culturalism is a resistance that could be called "untimely" and

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2 The term "deviation" comes from Lacan, who used it in 1964 in the "Founding Act" of his psychoanalytic school, where he stated that every psychoanalyst has the duty and responsibility to undertake "assiduous criticism" in order to identify and "denounce...the deviations and compromises that blunt [the] progress [of psychoanalysis] while degrading its use" (Lacan, 1964, p. 97). This responsibility includes an insistence on epistemological coherence, an ethical approach to clinical work and theory, and a concern for the political implications of psychoanalysis.

“irrelevant [*inattuale*]” in the sense in which these terms are used by Giorgio Agamben (2008, p. 40),<sup>3</sup> for whom they mean “truly contemporary.” For Agamben, what is genuinely contemporary cannot be reduced to the “present,” a moment that will itself soon become obsolete or outmoded. The contemporary is “untimely” and “out of date” because it is anachronistic (quite literally, outside chronology). In relation to this “dys-chrony” (p. 41) one must be sensitive to that which repeats in the course of time. To be sensitive to the untimely resistance that is constituted by culturalism is to approach these texts from the past in a way that locates and identifies in the present the shadow cast by their resistance.

Culturalism in psychoanalysis is a powerful resistance; it is not a dead element from the past, one that no longer concerns us and has been confined within a particular, supposedly finished, historical period. It is also not a national symptom; the conditions in which psychoanalysis began progressively to weaken were never confined entirely to North America. Let us emphasize finally that research dealing with the specific relation between culturalism and Lacan and his doctrine is, unfortunately, nonexistent. In contrast, in the United States and elsewhere, publications that address the reciprocal influence between humans and their socio-cultural environment are both widespread and valued. An examination of Lacan and culturalism is needed, for it is both original and eminently

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3 Giorgio Agamben is an Italian philosopher who was born in 1942. His work focuses on Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and especially Walter Benjamin. His wide-ranging interests include the history of concepts, particularly medieval philosophy, and he has been a visiting professor at a variety of universities in the United States (see Mills, 2010, May 14).

“contemporary.” It requires prudence and subtlety, for it reminds us of the clinical, theoretical, and political position of psychoanalysis, which is at odds with today’s dominant trends.

Before examining the position that Lacan and some of his representatives took towards culturalism, there needs to be a detour: an examination of Freud’s criticism of what could be called “preculturalist” ideas, as well as the ways in which Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and, more peripherally, Norman Zinberg criticized the development of culturalism in the United States. This preliminary detour is necessary in order to grasp the extent to which these criticisms, of which Lacan had some awareness, remain germane in relation to a current culturalism that does not call itself by this name, but which exists as a theoretical movement within the French psychoanalytic community. We shall thus see how we can encounter the shadow that the present casts on the texts of the past.

### **Freud and the Premises of Culturalism**

In “Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness,” which was first published in the journal *Sexual-probleme* — edited by the German sexologist Max Marcuse — Freud (1908) sets out the opposition between sexuality and culture, thus anticipating his later formulations in *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In this text, he was discussing late nineteenth-century ideas found in the works of Otto Binswanger (1896), Wilhelm Erb (1893), and the American George Miller Beard (1881, 1886). These works anticipate every point of the axioms of culturalism. In them, we find the prevalence of the “society-personality” dyad, and the guiding idea that, since subjectivity is the product of society, the appearance of a “new” form of nervous illness is correlated

to “new” modifications of society. This “new” nervousness, described clinically in terms of an absence of limits and subjective constraints, reflects the traits of the liberal society that emerged in the context of the Industrial Revolution. In this sense, it already differed from, and was prior to, Freud’s discussion of the types of symptoms that ensue from castration, and which involve hindrances and inhibitions. In these “pre-Freudian” conceptions, the “subject” is thus conceived of as the product of its environment, which, in turn, is described as having undergone recent mutations that both overwhelm and shape the subjectivities of their age: the disruption of moral ideals, the correlative unbridled pursuit of money and property, the rise of competition, the intensification of stimuli — an intensification that involves the loss of modesty — and the globalized extension of communication networks (not, in this case, the Internet, but instead the telephone and the telegraph!) As will be shown later, in recent years and long after Freud’s death, analyses have emphasized the poisonous effects of the expansion of pornography, liberal capitalism, and the Internet; claiming to be “new,” they are, in fact, old, and some of them are even older than psychoanalysis!

Freud, in “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness,” took an unequivocal position towards what he refers to as “these and many other similarly-worded opinions,” an expression that shows that such conceptions were neither rare in his time nor unknown to him, and were even relatively commonplace. For him, the problem “is not that they are mistaken but that they...leave out of account precisely the most important of the aetiological factors involved” (Freud, 1908, p. 185). The sexual etiology of the neuroses is both irreducible and always particular. For this reason, neurotics must be approached

case by case, a situation that prevents him from drawing conclusions that are too general about social trends. In short, and Freud would remind us of this occasionally, *the lack of sexual satisfaction is constitutive of desire, and this is the case whatever the social and political context may be*. This lack is inherent in the satisfaction of sexuality and the drives, and it is the invariant consequence of castration, which Freud thought of as a complex that could not be circumvented, and then as an irreducible “bedrock” (Freud, 1937, p. 232).<sup>4</sup> If the true cause of the discontents within civilization derives not so much from historical and cultural contingency, but rather from the very constitution of sexuality and desire, then “the injurious influence of civilization reduces itself in the main” (p. 185) to the relative and environmental determinants that are specific to a particular cultural ecosystem. Freud never modified this position: the sexual is the most significant and efficacious of etiologies, and the preculturalists neglect this decisive factor in order to privilege cultural etiology, which is always variable and relates to historical developments. As will be seen later, this was indeed the case with mid-twentieth century culturalism, which candidly acknowledged its break with Freud.

Doctrines such as those of Erb and Beard implicitly deplore a loosening of social norms, which has supposedly been responsible both for the decline of morality and modesty and for the emancipation of sensuality. Freud (1908, p.

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4 As will be discussed below, Lacan understands castration as a symbolic operation that establishes subjective structure. It is an effect of language on the subject. In necessarily depriving every subject of a part of its *jouissance* (see note 23 below), it creates a lack that will constitute desire and determine object relations. These elements are structural and do not vary according to the contingencies of any social or historical context.



185) examines these ideas because they are exemplary cases of precisely what he is quite correct in attacking: the “harmful suppression of the sexual life of civilized peoples (or classes).” Such ideas are thus built upon a reactionary foundation, which has been covered over by a supposedly empirical assessment of the “current” state of affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in breaking with Alfred Adler, whose theory reserved a large place for social determinants of the individual, Freud argued that he underestimated the place of sexuality in the etiology of the neuroses; instead, he privileged the function of the ego and the processes that involve secondary elaboration and rationalization. Accusing Adler of “hopelessly mix[ing]” the “biological, social and psychological meanings of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine,’” Freud (1914, p. 55) unequivocally rejected the use of the term “psychoanalysis” to designate the Adlerian movement. When he became aware of the spread of Adler’s ideas, especially because of G. Stanley Hall’s interest in them, Freud (1993, p. 554) wrote to Sándor Ferenczi on May 16, 1914: “Next he [Adler] will be called to America to free the world from sexuality and to base it on aggression!” Indeed, according to Freud, Adler and Jung shared an attempt to dull the cutting edge of the truths brought out laboriously by psychoanalysis, *in order thereby to gain mainstream approval*. This evasion at the heart of Adler’s

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5 As will be discussed below, a similar observation served as the basis of Marcuse’s (1955, pp. 260, 268) criticism of Fromm: while culturalism may seem to be progressive, it actually tends to be “moralistic” and even to involve the “spiritualization” of freedom and happiness.

doctrine takes on the appearance of progressive thought, but is really “too far-reaching an adjustment to the demands of actuality” (Freud, 1914, p. 58).

These remarks of Freud’s are particularly important, for they prefigure several dominant themes of culturalism. These themes are not limited to its emphasis on current conditions, its account of the individual’s formation and “self-actualization,” its blunting of sexual causality and its correlative promotion of social and cultural determinants; they also extend to the concern with addressing a general readership and the popularization that this implies.

It is also not too far-fetched to think that the reasons for the success of culturalism in American psychoanalysis derive from these conditions and that culturalism has its roots not in Freudianism or even in “neo-Freudianism,” but in Adlerianism. This highly pertinent hypothesis was advanced by Fritz Wittels (1939), who felt that the term “neo-Adlerian” was more appropriate than “neo-Freudian” for the movement represented by Karen Horney.<sup>6</sup> H. L. Ansbacher (1953) revived this argument in 1952 and drew up a questionnaire for the members of the American Psychoanalytic Association to determine whether they considered “neo-Adlerian” to be more adequate than “neo-Freudian.” The majority of the members who responded found “neo-Adlerian” to be more precise. Many of them also believed that neither was entirely adequate and that a new term should be proposed.<sup>7</sup> For his part, Ansbacher, who sympathized with Adler’s theories, reached the lucid conclusion that the success of “neo-

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6 Horney’s book *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* had been published that same year.

7 Seventy years later, we may well ask whether such a new term ever emerged in the United States, and, if so, what (other than “culturalism”) it might be.

Freudianism” in the United States really amounted to the success of the Adlerian approach.<sup>8</sup> This position should not be disregarded, and it has not been. For example, following Wittels and Ansbacher, Russell Jacoby (1975) explored the connections between the “neo-Freudian” culturalist movement and Adler’s work; even more recently, Slavoj Žižek (1994) has also taken up this critical perspective.

### **The Critical Reception of American Culturalism: A Few Decisive Remarks**

Erich Fromm undertook a critique of Freud’s “Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness,” and it was published in the journal of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* of the University of Frankfurt, an institute had been directed by the philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer since 1931. Entitled “*Die gesellschaftliche Bedingtheit der psychoanalytischen Therapie*” (Fromm, 1935), this article was later translated into English as “The Social Determinants of Psychoanalytic Therapy” (Fromm, 2000). Strangely enough, Fromm saw in Freud’s text the proof that the founder of psychoanalysis adhered to the bourgeois values of fin-de-siècle Vienna; such a conclusion, which is the reverse of the actual case, seems to result from a prejudice against Freud’s real positions.

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8 Freud clearly and concisely rejected Horney’s proposal that penis envy in girls is a secondary phenomenon (see Horney, 1926; Freud, 1931, pp. 240–243). Although she would become the most vigorous proponent of culturalism in psychoanalysis, the task of identifying the seeds of that approach in what Freud held to be a divergence from psychoanalysis is beyond the scope of the present article. However, we can note that Freud did not hide his antipathy towards Horney, whom he described, in a letter to Jeanne Lampl-de Groot (see Freud & Eitingon, 2004, p. 736n3), as “spiteful and scheming [*méchante et intrigante*].”

The philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, another member of the “Frankfurt School” who had joined Horkheimer in New York, was hardly sympathetic to psychoanalysis, but developed an intelligent and acerbic critical reading of the culturalist movement in a lecture, “Revised Psychoanalysis,” which he delivered in 1946 to the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society.<sup>9</sup> In it, he argued that when the “neo-Freudian” or “revisionist” school — terms that referred mainly to Fromm and Horney (Adorno, 1972, p. 14) — made the environment an essential cause that determines the subject, they were merely uttering “platitudes” (p. 15); their arguments transform psychoanalysis into “higher-level social services,”<sup>10</sup> which had “come to terms with common sense,” thereby becoming “universally acceptable” (p. 27). For him, Horney’s undervaluing of sexual libido in favor of social determinants amounts to nothing more than a form of “righteous indignation” (p. 28). In thus losing its subversive qualities, psychoanalysis is made acceptable for “social conformism” (p. 29). These criticisms of Adorno’s are very close to Freud’s, who saw in Adler a willingness to yield to the requirements of present circumstances and common sense. Adorno also remarked that Horney’s emphasis on the importance of current social conditions was in the

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9 Adorno’s lecture was originally presented in English, but was never published in that language. A German translation by Rainer Koehne, “*Die revidierte Psychoanalyse*,” appeared in *Psyche* in 1952, in the *Frankfurter Beiträge zur Soziologie* in 1962, and then in Adorno’s *Gesammelte Schriften* in 1972. The German text was translated into French by Jacques Le Rider in 2007. Quotations from this article have been translated into English from Le Rider’s French translation.

10 Nearly ten years later, Marcuse (1955, p. 260) would take this a step further: the neo-Freudian style “frequently comes close to that of the sermon, or of the social worker.”

service of a pragmatic spirit, which was seeking to banish the past and determinants that stretch back to childhood.

Finally, Adorno criticizes, quite appositely, Horney's strong interest in the new: she was a *neo*-Freudian concerned with *New World* psychoanalysis (rather than that of "*Old Europe*") and its "*New Ways*." Nevertheless, her understanding of novelty is hardly original, and instead resembles the procedure of trite advertising slogans: her promotion of the "new" is entirely bound up with "mass production, which proclaims that every standardized gadget is something unprecedented, which has never been seen before" (p. 40). This is a strong thesis: while culturalist ideas seem to question dominant ideologies — Fromm (1956, pp. 100–201), for example, denounced "capitalistic societies" — they end up by allying themselves with the principles of these ideologies.

Marcuse, who was also a member of the Frankfurt School, opposed Fromm more directly in the 1950s. He focuses especially on Fromm's conception of love, showing how, in reality, "progressive" culturalist ideas are conformist at the precise point at which they seem most critical, and moralistic where they seem most political. Contrasting psychoanalytic ethics with the "idealist ethics" of culturalism, he (1955, pp. 257–260) argues that there is a flaw in this idealism: it assumes that changing society will liberate human beings. This assumption constitutes a disavowal of psychic reality in favor of social reality. Žižek (1990) also takes up this criticism, pointing out that, for the Frankfurt School, the problem with the culturalists is not so much that they longed for a nonrepressive society (which is quite commendable) but instead that they thought that a completely free individual could exist, an individual who would be constrained by neither repression nor internal limitations. This "individual without limits" is a

fiction that, as we have seen, can be found in the pre-culturalist works discussed by Freud; it is also present in the recent work of some French psychoanalysts, as will be discussed below.<sup>11</sup>

In a sense, as Žižek (1990) stresses, the members of the Frankfurt School, in criticizing revisionism, were undertaking a sort of “return to Freud,” which prefigured that of Lacan.

In the 1970s, Russell Jacoby (1975) developed the notion of “social amnesia”; this designates the manner in which certain ways of developing psychoanalysis have suffered from a collective forgetting of its foundations. He was thus continuing earlier criticisms of neo-Freudian revisionists, while also arguing that Alfred Adler, R. D. Laing, and David Cooper were a part of this movement.

Let us return to Horney’s programmatic text, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (1939), which was translated into French in 1951. Three years later, in 1954, the French psychoanalyst, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis published an article whose title parodied Horney’s work: “*Les mauvais chemins de la psychanalyse ou Karen Horney, critique de Freud* [The Wrong Ways in Psychoanalysis, or Karen Horney as a Critic of Freud]” (Pontalis, 1954). Like Adorno before him, Pontalis noted that Horney had psychologized and sociologized psychoanalysis, a revisionist approach that could well have seductive effects on readers. Criticizing the naive

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<sup>11</sup> This conception is also found, more or less, in Lasch, although he considers such

“liberation” to be the pathological effect of drives that have become unbridled by the decline of social authority. In this, he differs from the neo-Freudians he criticizes, but moves closer to the work of certain French psychoanalysts (see below).

claims that the subject's lack of satisfaction is the result of privations imposed by society and that sadism, rather than being linked to the death drive, is simply a reaction to environmental influences, Pontalis emphasizes that Horney's work contains "a certain number of very widespread misunderstandings of what it criticizes and errors in its conclusions, which would be well worth our while to recognize quickly" (pp. 218–219). This indication of the urgent need to identify such misunderstandings and errors suggests that culturalist ideas were already pervading the French psychoanalytic community in the 1950s. It was, indeed, during the same period that Lacan made his uncompromising criticisms of culturalism.

### **A Contraband Flag**

Scholarly research suggests that although Lacan may not have read Marcuse, he was familiar with Adorno and Horkheimer, whose work had inspired his articles "The Family Complex in the Formation of the Individual" (Lacan, 1938, 1988), and "Kant with Sade" (Lacan, 1963). Nothing indicates that he was aware of the content of Adorno's 1946 lecture, but he had certainly read Horney's work, either in English or French, and it is highly probable that he had also read the severely critical article by his analysand Pontalis. Consequently, he was well aware of the presence, in the psychoanalytic publications of his time, of the "sociological tendency sometimes referred to as 'culturalist'" (Lacan, 1955, p. 298), and also deplored that psychoanalysis was generally "becoming increasingly environmentalist" (Lacan, 1957–1958, p. 151).

Although his remarks about culturalism are relatively rare, most of them were made in the course of the 1950s. It has frequently been observed that Lacan's references to Anglo-American authors tended to occur during this period,

and became rarer in the 1960s and afterwards. This change probably took place because his relation to various institutions also changed; until 1963, he had been a member, first, of the *Société psychanalytique de Paris* [Paris Psychoanalytic Society], which was affiliated with the International Psychoanalytic Association, and then of the *Société française de psychanalyse* [French Society for Psychoanalysis], which was seeking to become a part of the IPA. In this context, Lacan was still situating himself in a dialogue with English-speaking psychoanalysis. After 1964, when he founded his own school, the *École freudienne de Paris* [Freudian School of Paris], this ceased to be the case. From that moment on, the audience of his seminar changed and he devoted his energies to refining the foundations of his doctrine, giving less attention to works produced within the IPA.

For Lacan, culturalism was “the most questionable aspect of the development of psychoanalysis in the United States” (Lacan, 1964–1965, June 23) and he did not hesitate to qualify this movement as a “contraband flag” (Lacan, 1960, p. 688). This expression resembles the one used by Ernest Jones (1953, p. 362) in his discussion of Freud’s sense of irritation that the analysts who dissented from his theory were “sailing under false colors.” To compare culturalism to a “contraband flag” is tantamount to saying that this movement was smuggling in all sorts of counterfeit commodities, which were then being called Freudian and psychoanalytic.

One of Lacan’s unchanging positions was to consider that the opposition between the two major movements of American psychoanalysis during this period — ego psychology, with its supposed “biologism,” and “neo-Freudianism,” with its attachment to the socio-cultural field, an opposition, as it were, between nature



and culture — arose from a “false antinomy” (Lacan, 1964–1965, June 23). For Lacan, these movements had much in common: they both allotted a central place to the ego<sup>12</sup> and its function of adapting to reality, which, for the human being, is always a social reality. Furthermore, Lacan never really believed (or wanted to believe) in Freud’s naturalism. He therefore gave very little credence to the “biological” orientation of the theory claimed by, or imputed to ego psychology; this tendency “of course has nothing biological about it except the terminology” (Lacan, 1955, p. 296). This fashion of placing ego psychology’s biologism in perspective goes a long way towards lessening the opposition between it and culturalism. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that Lacan considered ego psychology to be as problematic as “neo-Freudianism.” His reference to culturalism as the “most questionable aspect” of what happened to psychoanalysis in the United States indicates that this movement and its divergences from psychoanalysis seemed worse than what could be seen with ego psychology.

Yet although he clearly considered the culturalist movement as an adversary of psychoanalysis, Lacan was able to recognize the quality of some of its most eminent representatives. Thus, for example, he did not hesitate to highlight the importance of Erik Erikson’s commentary on Freud’s dream about Irma’s injection (Lacan, 1978, p. 155). Likewise, he paid homage to Horney as an “innovator on the clinical plane” (Lacan, 1957–1958, p. 274), as well as for the subtlety of her observations on both the castration complex in female

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12 For example, in his second seminar, in his discussion of Freud’s dream about Irma’s injection, Lacan states that Erik Erikson’s conception of the ego converges “quite singularly” with Heinz Hartmann’s psychologism (Lacan, 1978, p. 148).

homosexuality and the unconscious sources of a daughter's identification with her father (see Horney, 1924).

On March 9, 1955, Lacan made a remark that says much about his position on culturalism. He refers to

a man called Erikson, who describes himself as an advocate of the culturalist school — for the good it will do him! This so-called culturalism consists in emphasising in analysis those things which, in each case, depend on the cultural context in which the subject is immersed. This aspect has certainly not been ignored up until now — I am not aware of Freud, nor those who might specifically qualify themselves as Freudians, ever neglecting it. *The question is to know whether this element should be given pre-eminent importance in the constitution of the subject.* (Lacan, 1954–1955, pp. 147–148, emphasis added)

For Lacan, the cultural factor, even if it must be taken into account, does not have this pre-eminent importance in the constitution of the subject. If psychoanalytic treatment is directed in a privileged way by the “referential systems made available to [the subject] by the state of cultural affairs to which [s/he] is a more or less interested party” (Lacan, 1953–1954, p. 50), then s/he will get lost in what Lacan calls “empty speech”: superficial talk that carries the subject away from unconscious truth. Such truth cannot be reduced to the configuration of the socio-cultural environment. What takes precedence in this constitution is not the subject's *culture* but its *structure*. The term “structure of the subject” designates a strict and unconscious logic of signifiers, a logic that is composed, for example, of the symptom, the position in sexuation, the montage of the drives, and the way that fantasy has been put together. Unlike the historical

development, cultural contingencies and social phenomena in which the subject is plunged, this structure never varies. Unlike the subject's various types of identification, the formal envelope of the symptom, and the scenarios that the fantasy inhabits, which are modified by the contingencies of history, the structures of the subject, the symptom, and the fantasy are invariant.<sup>13</sup> Lacan, throughout his theoretical work, always defined the subject in terms of the cut between two signifiers. It is a pure effect of language, which is located in the gaps within what is said. This subject has no qualities, is "a mere point of fading [*évanouissement*]" (Lacan, 1973, p. 224), and cannot be subsumed within any assigned ethnicity or gender (Lacan, 1973–1974. January 15). The subject is thus not coextensive with the person and cannot be reduced to the identifications that represent it in the social field, although these identifications themselves do vary according to the historical period and discourse within which the subject is located. This fundamental irreducibility to social and identity assignments (which are the signifiers of the Other) also constitutes the subject's fundamental liberty. Each psychoanalyst has a responsibility to be attentive to the new ways of expressing subjective suffering, which do change according to the period. Yet although analysts must get their bearings in relation to the new forms of demands that are addressed to them, they orient themselves in the treatment by means of structural markers involving the economy of desire; such markers are, as it were,

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13 In this sense, Lacan's structuralism is neither a "fixist" theory nor a foe of history. This is how it is possible, for example, for Žižek (1994) to use the (invariant) graph of desire as a way of interpreting the logic that is inherent in social, ideological, and political phenomena as diverse as the passion of Christ, the films of David Lynch, or Nazism.

“untimely.” In the course of his teaching, Lacan sought to define this structure of the subject on the basis of various theoretical models, a history that will not be dealt with in this article. The development of these various formalizations draws, of course, on concepts that existed in the knowledge of his time; what Lacan was trying to grasp through them, however, is neither contingent nor something that exists only in relation to a particular cultural atmosphere. It is connected to the fundamentally linguistic “constitution” of the subject, whatever the geographical and historical latitude in which any particular subject may be found. This constant reference to structure explains why Lacan was equally dismissive of ego psychology, with its supposedly biological causality, and culturalism, with its social causality (see Lacan, 1958, p. 16).

Lacan seems to have understood that his conception of the unconscious as “structured like a language” could lead people to believe that his doctrine included culturalist elements, since language can, of course, be considered as a social and cultural phenomenon. He sought to defend himself, however, against such a risk of confusion, and this is why, in a note added in 1966 when the *Écrits* first appeared, he stated that he “claim[ed] to contribute” to culturalism “in no regard” (Lacan, 1966a, p. 608). Earlier, he had stated clearly that his doctrine’s promotion of the relation between humans and the signifier had nothing to do with culturalism; the relation to the signifier does not designate the human being’s “relationship to language as a social phenomenon.” Instead, it involves a relation with a linguistic order in which we always come up against immutable laws of substitution (metaphor) and combination (metonymy). Such laws participate in “instituting the subject” of the unconscious and preside, for example, over the conditions in which symptoms are formed (Lacan, 1966b, p. 578).

Our hypothesis is that Lacan, fearing that analysts would misinterpret his teaching by confusing his orientation with culturalist presuppositions, anticipated, without knowing it, the ways in which some of his students would go astray.

In this context, it is worth noting that, during his seminar on the *Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse* [*Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis*], Lacan (1964–1965, June 23) asked Jacques-Alain Miller<sup>14</sup> to discuss “Psychoanalysis and the American Scene: A Reappraisal,” an article by the psychoanalyst and addiction specialist Norman Zinberg (1965), which had been published in the French-English journal *Diogenes*. In this long and detailed article, whose great documentary interest was recognized by Lacan, even if he did not consider it to be a theoretical or clinical landmark, Zinberg shows that there is a connection between the popularization of psychoanalysis and its progressive deformation. He argues that, in the United States, psychoanalysis had been the victim of its own success, for it had become the vehicle of analysts’ determination to gain social recognition and acceptance: “the farther psychoanalysis moves” away from treating the “unpleasant ideas stemming from the drives,” the “more acceptable it becomes in many circles. And when acceptability becomes a wish in itself, the more likely is analysis to give up what makes it special and be swallowed up by its popularity” (Zinberg, 1965, p. 105).

This remark is not unrelated to Freud’s similar reticence and Adorno’s criticisms in 1946. Yet this attempt to assimilate psychoanalysis did not only

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller is Lacan’s son-in-law and the executor of his estate; he is responsible for the transcription and publication of Lacan’s seminar and is the founder of the World Association of Psychoanalysis.

involve its popularization. Zinberg also showed that it had been brought into the university under the colors of interdisciplinary research and that this had led it to be watered down. This interdisciplinary use of psychoanalysis gravitates around the same polar opposites: sometimes psychoanalysis moves towards psychopharmacology, and sometimes, under the influence of culturalism, it turns towards the social field. This movement towards the social occurs in terms both of epistemology — with its incorporation into cultural anthropology in the work, for example, of Margaret Mead — and of its extension into areas in which psychoanalysts could take part: prisons, courts, hospitals, cinema, industry, social relations and social work, etc.<sup>15</sup>

In his commentary on Zinberg's article (see Lacan, 1964–1965, June 23), Jacques-Alain Miller argued that in the United States, psychoanalysis had sutured the class struggle, in conformity with both capitalism and the concern for the “pursuit of happiness.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, the culturalist movement of American psychoanalysis “was attempting to bring about this adequation between human beings and their environment.” This adaptive and utopian goal was very far from the acceptance of castration, which, creates lack while instituting desire; for Freud and Lacan, this acceptance was the true horizon of analysis. In this context, it becomes possible to grasp the difference between two understandings of psychoanalysis: the first is oriented by both consenting to castration and renewing the subject's relation to unconscious desire, which is the correlate of castration;

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<sup>15</sup> This extension of psychoanalysis into the social field resembles what has happened in

France with the development of the profession of clinical psychology.

<sup>16</sup> Miller attributed this phrase to the American Constitution.

the other seeks to optimize the individual's position so that "all skills can be exploited fully," as Adorno (2007, p. 31) put it. This second conception recalls Lacan's (1956, p. 204) criticism of psychoanalysis as "human engineering" in 1953.<sup>17</sup>

Zinberg (1965, p. 107) concludes his article by calling upon Americans to think about the future and, referring again to Erikson, to resist the "promotion" and watering down "of our discipline. We may at this time come close to having a second chance. It is hard to be patient, but perhaps by our example we can help the burgeoning analytic institutes in Europe and Japan to avoid our mistakes and spare their countries so many bad jokes." More than fifty years after Zinberg expressed this warning and this hope, one can wonder whether American psychoanalysts still believe that they will be given a second chance. In the United States, what, at present, is the status of both neo-Freudianism and the critique of it? It is possible that the rehabilitation of Fromm's work<sup>18</sup> and the success of the humanistic approach — especially by way of relational psychoanalysis — are more recent forms of culturalism in American psychoanalysis.<sup>19</sup>

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17 This conception is also not unrelated to the "new subject" of current French psychoanalytic literature, which is emancipated from castration (see below) and is even freed from its unconscious.

18 This can be seen in, for example, the publication in 2019 of a new translation of his article "On the Feeling of Powerlessness" (Fromm, 1937).

19 For example, the work on "social psychoanalysis" by Lynne Layton, Nancy Chodorow, and Nancy Hollander. See Layton (2020).

In Europe, and particularly in France, forty years after Lacan's death, almost no one is still interested in culturalism. While there are a few exceptions (such as Di Mascio, 1995), it is rare even to read the word "culturalism" in the French psychoanalytic literature. While culturalism has, unfortunately, very rarely been approached from a critical perspective by American psychoanalysts, French psychoanalysts seem to view it as a sort of museum piece, which has its place in the gallery of American psychoanalysis, but which is entirely unrelated to them.

However, the influence of culturalism has not dissipated and this approach remains alive and well. In fact, one might say that it is quietly and covertly thriving in France, which is precisely the country where one would have least expected to find it.

### **The Return of Culturalism: The French Situation**

In France, despite the many kinds of psychotherapies that are available today on the "mental health" market, psychoanalysis has managed to preserve a unique place for itself. Psychoanalytic activities — the organization of conferences, the publication of books and articles in specialized journals — remains rather abundant. Lacan's teaching has marked the various currents within French psychoanalysis, and psychoanalytic presentations and publications often refer to Lacanian notions; they do so in a more or less precise way, depending on the author and the psychoanalytic school to which s/he belongs.

Nevertheless, for about twenty years, a considerable movement towards culturalism has been observable among psychoanalysts, not only through their presentations and publications, but also through the politics of analytic schools and associations. This has occurred despite the fact that they almost never use the term "culturalism," and certainly do not claim to be culturalists. This absence of



this term from French discussions has even made the culturalist arguments that are being developed more, rather than less powerful. In all of this, it is easy to discern the irony of history. Lacan had understood that his work could be confused with culturalism and had distinguished his approach from it. Nevertheless, culturalist ideas are now returning and being extended by means of expressions and (misused) arguments that derive from his teaching.

In 2002, Charles Melman<sup>20</sup> published a book-length interview in which he announced that, in our age,<sup>21</sup> the subject of the unconscious has undergone a profound change. Basing his argument not only on his own clinical experience and but also on news items and anecdotes about everyday life, Melman (2002, 2009) claims that we are now dealing with “new subjects,”<sup>22</sup> or, to be more

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20 The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Charles Melman was a student of Lacan's and a member of the Freudian School of Paris until its dissolution in 1980; he went on to become a founding member of what is now the *Association lacanienne internationale* [International Lacanian Association].

21 In other words, our age is no longer that of Freud or even of Lacan.

22 Although the term “subject” is often used interchangeably with the term “subjectivity,” Lacan considered them to be completely different, and preferred “subject.” The conflation of the two terms and renewed interest in forms of subjectivity (whether or not these are “new”) may derive more from the influence of Foucault than from Lacan. It is not by chance that, among psychoanalysts working in French universities, the promotion of the terms “subjectivity” and “subjectivation” has coincided with a renewed interest in Foucault. The problematic Foucauldian usage of Lacan has been advanced in the United States by Judith Butler (Marty, 2021) and in France, in the past decade, by the

precise, a “new psychic economy” (*nouvelle économie psychique* or NEP); the acronym for this term deliberately evokes Lenin’s “New Economic Policy.” Melman argues that the current political economy, which is based on “neoliberal” capitalism, acts to determine a psychic economy whose principles, requirements, and especially flaws are homogeneous to it. According to this perspective, libidinal economy is thus modeled on the market economy, free trade, and globalization; therefore, according to Melman, it is characterized by a removal of all kinds of barriers and subjective limits.

The “new subjects” (Melman, 2009, pp. 233–234) of this “new psychic economy” therefore have a looser relation to castration (as a limit) and thus to Oedipal prohibitions. As a result, the sexual reality of their unconscious and their (new) symptoms, which, for Freud, is based on the repression of sexuality, would be less important. Instead of repressing their drives, these new subjects would act on them and would lack sexual inhibition. The result, still according to Melman, is the form of exhibitionism that is being noted nowadays in society in general, and especially in its cultural productions. Finally, he deduces from this that these subjects, who are without “limits” (Melman, 2009, p. 228), are ill-suited to transference, and recalcitrant to analytic treatment. This creates a serious and unprecedented difficulty for psychoanalysis, submitting it to a forced choice: either it must adapt to this “new psychic economy” — or whatever one chooses to call it — or it will disappear.

Melman's work is exemplary in the precise sense that it has served as an example and a model. Upon its publication, it had a great success in France, and since then, many analysts have made exactly the same argument; this has occurred even when they claim to disagree with Melman and use a somewhat different vocabulary. This is particularly the case of Jean-Pierre Lebrun, Melman's interlocutor in the book-length interview. Lebrun went on to edit his own collection of books at Éditions Érès, one of the major publishers of psychoanalytic works in France. This series was initially entitled "Humus, Subjectivity, and the Social Bond," and in terms of sales, it has been relatively successful. Its editorial line involves the attempt to understand the subjective changes observed by psychoanalysts as they take part in "social life." In early books in the collection, the editor described its orientation as follows:

This collection welcomes texts that attempt to theorize how the contemporary mutation of the social bond has affected subjectivity. Its field is located at the interface between psychoanalysis and the social sciences, and to this end, calls upon *both* research in the latter and elaborations — theoretical as well as clinical — in the former (see Lebrun & Volckrick, 2005, front matter, emphasis added).

This analysis of the social psychopathology of these "new subjects" serves as a continuation of a social criticism that aims especially at capitalism; this criticism had already been found in Fromm's work. Yet this ideology of the new psychic economy — which describes a form of both society and subjects that is simultaneously unbridled and marked by loss — is a renewal of what Lacan, now long ago, had called a "cliché of decadence" in society (Lacan, 1959–1960, p. 251, translation modified). Such a cliché is hardly new and has occurred

repeatedly throughout history, and not only in the domain of psychoanalysis. It can already be found in the social/clinical descriptions of Erb and Beard, as well as, to some extent, in the work of Lasch. It is also significant that numerous psychoanalysts who locate themselves in this movement invoke the authority of facts that they have observed and upon which they are basing their opinions. Lacan thought that this form of empiricism, which appeals to “clinical facts” without questioning the conditions of meaning that lead us to consider something to be a fact, was a sort of ideological divergence from psychoanalysis. He called it a “question-begging appeal to the concrete” (Lacan, 1966b, p. 578). The French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard (1938, pp. 33–63) referred to this as an approach by means of “primary experience” and saw it as an epistemological obstacle. This propensity to place the legitimacy of experience and “field” observation in the forefront of her argumentation can also be found in Horney, especially when she invoked Bronisław Malinowski in opposition to Freud (Di Mascio, 1995, p. 196).

When these “new subjects,” who are impelled by an unlimited and uninhibited thirst for *jouissance*,<sup>23</sup> are observed in contemporary society, they are considered to be radically new. These descriptions are actually more akin to tracing-paper copies of the patients who suffered from “nervous illness,” the condition that Wilhelm Erb had already unearthed in the nineteenth century, and which had given rise to “many other similarly-worded opinions” (Freud, 1908, p.

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23 “*Jouissance*” is a Lacanian concept that is not equivalent to “pleasure.” Whereas pleasure aims at homeostasis through lowering tension, *jouissance* relates to an increase in tension (whether in excitation or pain) (Miller 2000); it is how the body experiences and concretely realizes the subject’s singular connection to sexuality and satisfaction.

108). For Melman and numerous other psychoanalysts who are interested in how the subject has changed in relation to political, social, and cultural mutations, the subject of the unconscious is not an effect of structure. It is, instead, a direct and covariant effect of culture. The language that determines the subject is thus reduced to a social phenomenon.

This is quite precisely an updating of the culturalist divergences that Lacan had identified in the 1950s. Indeed, the very use of the word “new” and its synonyms — the “*new* psychic economy,” “*new* symptoms,” “*new* subjects,” like so many products of neoliberalism and *contemporary* society<sup>24</sup> — is vulnerable to the same criticism that Adorno had leveled against Horney. It is intimately allied with the mass production of commodities that “have never been seen before” (Adorno, 1972, p. 40). Ironically, this is the same mass production that these psychoanalysts are criticizing. Thus, this culturalist conception of a “new subject” may well be only one more product on the market, a product that is being promoted by the same psychoanalysts who are criticizing globalization. In this regard, it is worthwhile to recall Freud’s (1924, p. 213) comment that “it would be interesting to devote a whole study to mental reactions to novelty; for under certain...conditions we can observe...a thirst for stimulation which flings itself upon anything that is new merely because it *is* new,” or at least because it is thought to be so.

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24 The term “contemporary” is omnipresent in these psychoanalysts’ work. They use it to mean “what is happening now” rather than to mean, in Agamben’s sense, “something that, as ‘untimely,’ is constantly recurring.”

As for the society that would supposedly be without limits, where sex would be everywhere and the limit would be nowhere, Lacan downplayed both its importance and its impact on the subject of the unconscious. For him, “The invasion of sexomania is nothing more than an advertising campaign” (Granzotto, 1974, p. 29). As such, “it’s a fad, part of the feigned liberalization” of our regular lives. In other words, it is a lure, an illusion, like religion, which makes us believe that we can free ourselves from castration, lack, and the impasses upon which desire is founded. In believing that they can identify a limitless world filled with unrestrained, “liberated/liberal/libertarian” new subjects, these psychoanalysts may well turn out to have been duped by such “feigned liberalization”; as a result, they may also be the most fervent consumers of this advertising phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> Marcuse (1955, p. 268), who was not a clinician, remarks that, in our consumer society, “precisely because we can visualize the universal satisfaction of individual needs, the strongest obstacles are placed in the way of such satisfaction.” No uninhibited or liberated subjects are to be found here; on the contrary, at the moment when all appetites have been whetted by consumerism, castration, as a psychic process that cannot be eliminated, reappears in the

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25 When Lasch notices the growing interest among psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts in narcissism and the ego, he looks to their clinical descriptions for material to confirm the existence of new forms of ego disorders, which would stem from the culture of narcissism. Yet he scarcely touches on the idea that these mental health professionals might themselves be influenced by this very culture, in both their theoretical focus and the elements they highlight in case histories (see Lasch, 1979, p. 43).

symptoms of the time. Desire never ceases to have to deal with its own constitutive limits.

It could also be wondered whether such weakening of unconscious sexuality in this new psychic economy, is not, instead, a characteristic of those analysts' own position. Like Horney, many psychoanalysts of today are turning away from the sexual "meaning" (and its constitutive impasses) that has always been specific to psychoanalysis (and which is always coordinated with castration), and are privileging the subject's social determinants. In this respect, the recent success, among psychoanalysts in the French university system, of gender studies is probably yet another sign of the return of culturalism. The promotion of the term "gender" as a social construction of sexual identity, as opposed to "sex," which is supposedly essentialist and naturalist, often enables psychoanalysts themselves to criticize Freud and, once again, to highlight the primary importance of the socio-cultural context in the constitution of the subject. Although Lacan was certainly aware of the concept of gender (see, for example, his brief discussion of Stoller's *Sex and Gender* (1968a, 1968b) in his seminar (Lacan, 1971, p. 31)), he himself never assigned a specific place to it. This did not prevent him from considering that the subject's sexuation is not identical to anatomy; a man can have a "feminine" position in sexuation and a woman can have a "masculine" sexuation. For Lacan, sexuation is subject neither to biological criteria nor to social determinants and environmental influence. Instead, it involves an unconscious positioning and a mode of jouissance that would be singular for each subject.

In France today, there have been very few carefully argued criticisms of the concept of the "new subjects." With a few exceptions (such as, for example,

Koren (2010)), critics have not, or not yet, focused much attention on the hidden influence of culturalism. They have, however, shown how these works rely on a recurrent misappropriation of notions and quotations from Lacan's teaching, which they have taken out of their context. These include the phrases "the social decline of the paternal imago" (Lacan, 1938, p. 60) and "the unconscious is the political" (Lacan, 1966–1967, May 10), as well as the amalgamation of the notions of "subject" and "subjectivity" (see Guérin, 2010, 2019; Porge, 2009; Zafiropoulos, 2001). This is more than an epistemological problem. Its clinical repercussions are considerable, at least insofar as it is held that these "new subjects" cannot be treated with psychoanalysis.<sup>26</sup>

In France, during the last twenty years, current events and stories in the media have also contributed to the move towards culturalism in psychoanalysis. Indeed, institutional and media attacks on psychoanalysis have multiplied recently and have had serious effects, particularly on the social position of analysts and the way in which they are viewed by society.

In 2004, the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm), published a report on the performance of psychotherapies that concluded that psychoanalysis is ineffective (Inserm, 2004). The methodology of this report was, to a great extent, biased in advance in favor of quantitative methods and behavioral techniques of learning and training. It was sharply criticized by the analytic community, and the minister of health of that time ended

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26 Lasch (1979, pp. 42, 51), in accordance with his period and approach, also noticed that psychoanalysts were pessimistic about whether the new narcissistic disorders could be addressed by psychoanalysis.



up disavowing it publicly. That same year, a law was passed concerning the conditions under which the title of “psychotherapist” could be used.

Psychoanalysts, especially Lacanians, were hardly in favor either of considering psychoanalysis to be a form of “psychotherapy” or of having a status that is determined by the state. In response, a large number of psychoanalytic associations, including those possessing the greatest number of members, banded together into a “contact group” in order to highlight the specific interest of psychoanalysis. This merger, in fact, masked positions that were very different, and even divergent, in the French psychoanalytic “community”: some were not opposed to the state’s legitimization of psychoanalysis; others wanted an Order of Psychoanalysts, which would be managed by analysts themselves; some rejected both of these options (see Aouillé et al., 2010).

Finally, as of 2012, France’s Regional Health Agencies [*Agences Régionales de Santé*] repudiated the psychoanalytic approach as a way of treating autism. In parallel, there was a multiplication of books, documentaries, and newspaper articles that denounced a supposed danger of psychoanalysis; these were often produced at the behest of interest groups that were hostile to psychoanalysis. Advancing what sometimes resembles conspiracy theories, they asked that psychoanalysis be excluded from public institutions.

Confronted with a climate that is unfavorable to psychoanalysis, more and more analysts have yielded to the temptation to prove, to both the general public and the state, the legitimacy, usefulness, and social desirability of their discipline. In July 2018, the contact group of associations went on to issue a report on “the advances and contributions of French psychoanalysts in the fields of mental

health, youth, and culture” (Keller & Landman, 2018).<sup>27</sup> The next year, this report was published as a book under the title “*Ce que les psychanalystes apportent à la société* [What Psychoanalysts Contribute to Society]” (Keller & Landman, 2019). During the composition of the present article, these same authors have been preparing two other works, which will follow the same strategy: “What Psychoanalysts Contribute to University Research” and “What Psychoanalysts Contribute to Persons with Autism and Their Families.” This policy involves promoting psychoanalysis in all the spheres of society *in order to create an adequation between it and its environment*. To this end, they are turning more and more towards the social field, hoping, by popularizing analytic concepts, to make it legitimate and acceptable within the academy.

One cannot help wondering, however, whether this policy indicates, in Zinberg’s words, that “acceptability [has] becom[e] a wish in itself.” This wish is seeking fulfillment by means of a culturalism that, in France, dares not speak its name. It was this same wish that, in 1965, Zinberg, whether rightly or wrongly, considered to be the cause of the degradation of psychoanalysis in the United States. With respect to this, Freud himself made no concessions when he wrote in a letter to Paul Federn on April 21, 1932, that

when national and psychoanalytic interests come into conflict, the latter must not give way.... You are right to note that analysts, on the whole, are hardly capable of living up to these exigencies, but that should not keep us from voicing them after the fact. If you ask little, you will get nothing at all. (Freud, 2018, p. 177)

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<sup>27</sup> Aumercier (2020) has provided an excellent critical reading of this report.

## Conclusion

Each psychoanalyst has to face the exigencies that make psychoanalysis an experience unlike any other. Which should psychoanalysis fear most: attacks coming from the outside, which wish to get rid of it, or the more insidious attacks, which gnaw away at it from within, and which come from analysts themselves, who want to preserve it and make it lovable? It is impossible to conceive of psychoanalysis and the unconscious without also conceiving of the resistance *to* psychoanalysis and the resistance *of* psychoanalysis. It is in this tension — which can never give rise to a consensus — that psychoanalysis as theory and practice finds its own, always precarious, limit or perimeter. It is at this razor's edge that psychoanalysis reveals itself to be, in Marcuse's (1955, p. 238) words, "a radically critical theory." Psychoanalysis must remain there, never recoiling from the controversies it engenders, controversies that animate it by punctuating its history and contributing to its dialectical progress. This is why, in examining the culturalism of both the past and the present — the culturalism that is found both here and elsewhere, in both France and the United States — the present article not only treats it as a form of resistance, but also accepts and assumes the consequences of this critical position. I hope to have opened up several lines of questioning, and that these could provide some of the elements for future heuristic research and debate. For example, what are the current forms of culturalism in American psychoanalysis and why have they been so successful in the North American ecosystem? How do contemporary psychoanalysts view recent forms of culturalism? In France, where culturalism has been repressed, what are the pathways by which it has made its return in psychoanalytic theory and practice? How has this return manifested itself in the positions taken both by Lacanian

analysts in particular, and by other psychoanalytic schools, which have tended to embrace the social discourses that are dominant at any given time? These questions set out some of the terms and challenges for the development of a true contemporary politics of psychoanalysis.

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