

### Urban Listening: An Invitation to Psychoanalysis to Inhabit the City

*Escuta Urbana: Um Convite à Psicanálise para Habitar a Cidade*

*Escucha Urbana: Una Invitación al Psicoanálisis para Habitar la Ciudad*

*L'écoute Urbaine : Une Invitation à la Psychanalyse pour Habiter la Ville*

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#### Abstract

This article reflects on the possibility of developing a method for psychoanalytic listening to the city. Drawing on a study of graffiti, we later (a posteriori) identified several guiding concepts of what we call urban listening. They are: countertransference — understood by object-relations psychoanalysts as the analyst's readiness to experience within themselves what lies beyond the other's (possibly momentary) capacity for articulation; implicated psychoanalysis — the approach proposed by Frayze-Pereira for analyzing artistic productions, which requires acknowledging the position from which an analyst speaks; taking images (in this case, graffiti) as pictorial writing, following Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that is, as something that can be read; and, finally, recognizing the limits of this listening, brought into relief by the fascination and repulsion elicited by the gaze as objet a, a notion proposed by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. The listening proposed here is a singular experience that can be recreated with each enigma posed by urban traces to psychoanalysts.

**Keywords:** urban listening, countertransference, implicated psychoanalysis, pictorial writing, gaze.

#### Resumo

*Este artigo propõe uma reflexão acerca da possibilidade de construção de um método de escuta psicanalítica da cidade. A partir de uma pesquisa sobre pichações, a posteriori, identificamos alguns conceitos norteadores do que denominamos escuta urbana. São eles: contratransferência, compreendida por psicanalistas vinculados à concepção das relações objetais como a disponibilidade do analista de experimentar em si o que está para além da possibilidade (eventualmente, momentânea) de enunciação do outro; psicanálise implicada, abordagem sugerida por Frayze-Pereira, na análise de produções artísticas, e que envolve o reconhecimento do lugar a partir do qual um analista enuncia suas interpretações; tomar as imagens (no caso, das pichações) como escrita pictórica (conforme *A Interpretação dos Sonhos*, de Freud), isto é, como passíveis de leitura; e, por fim, reconhecer os limites dessa escuta, suscitados pelos efeitos de fascínio e repulsa do olhar como objeto a, noção proposta por Lacan em *Os Quatro Conceitos Fundamentais da Psicanálise*. A escuta proposta neste artigo consiste em uma experiência singular e pode ser recriada a cada enigma que vestígios urbanos proponham a psicanalistas.*

**Palavras-chave:** escuta urbana, contratransferência, psicanálise implicada, escrita pictórica, olhar.

## Resumen

*Este artículo propone una reflexión sobre la posibilidad de construir un método de escucha psicoanalítica de la ciudad. A partir de una investigación sobre pintadas (graffitis), a posteriori, identificamos algunos conceptos orientadores de lo que denominamos escucha urbana. Estos son: contratransferencia, comprendida por psicoanalistas vinculados a la concepción de las relaciones objetales como la disponibilidad del analista para experimentar en sí mismo lo que está más allá de la posibilidad (eventualmente momentánea) de enunciación del otro; psicoanálisis implicado, enfoque sugerido por Frayze-Pereira en el análisis de producciones artísticas, que involucra el reconocimiento del lugar desde el cual un analista enuncia sus interpretaciones; tomar las imágenes (en este caso, de las pintadas) como escritura pictórica (según La Interpretación de los Sueños, de Freud), es decir, como susceptibles de lectura; y, finalmente, reconocer los límites de esta escucha, suscitados por los efectos de fascinación y repulsión de la mirada como objeto a, noción propuesta por Lacan en Los Cuatro Conceptos Fundamentales del Psicoanálisis. La escucha propuesta en este artículo consiste en una experiencia singular que puede recrearse con cada enigma que los vestigios urbanos planteen a los psicoanalistas.*

**Palabras clave:** escucha urbana, contratransferencia, psicoanálisis implicado, escritura pictórica, mirada.

## Résumé

*Cet article propose une réflexion sur la possibilité de construire une méthode d'écoute psychanalytique de la ville. À partir d'une recherche sur les graffitis illégaux, a posteriori, nous avons identifié quelques concepts directeurs de ce que nous appelons l'écoute urbaine. Il s'agit du contre-transfert, compris par les psychanalystes affiliés à la conception des relations d'objet comme la disponibilité de l'analyste à éprouver en lui-même ce qui dépasse la possibilité (éventuellement momentanée) d'énonciation de l'autre ; la psychanalyse impliquée, l'approche suggérée par Frayze-Pereira, dans l'analyse des productions artistiques, qui implique la reconnaissance du lieu à partir duquel un analyste énonce ses interprétations ; prendre les images (dans ce cas, les graffitis) comme une écriture picturale (selon L'Interprétation des rêves de Freud), c'est-à-dire susceptibles à la lecture ; et, enfin, reconnaître les limites de cette écoute, soulevées par les effets de fascination et de répulsion du regard comme "objet a", notion proposée par Lacan dans Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse. L'écoute proposée dans cet article constitue une expérience singulière et peut être recrée à chaque énigme que les vestiges urbains posent aux psychanalystes.*

**Mots-clés :** écoute urbaine, contre-transfert, psychanalyse impliquée, écriture picturale, regard.

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This article is a focused excerpt from a master's thesis that set out to consider what graffiti can tell us about the city we inhabit. In that study, we walked through several neighborhoods equipped with methodological tools such as the flâneur's method developed by Benjamin (2009) and photographic, audio, and written documentation (a field diary). A posteriori, we formulated several hypotheses about the urban listening we carried out. Here, we share the theoretical-methodological foundations that crystallized from this singular inquiry. By venturing into other territories, we hope to contribute to psychoanalytic knowledge and practice.

Graffiti invited us to hear other languages within the city we live in. In a sense, we became foreigners in our own home, much as we do when we devote ourselves to psychoanalytic work in the consulting room. From this perspective, what we call urban listening initially belonged to the order of not-knowing. How, then, can one propose listening to the city — and more specifically, how can one listen through images (graffiti)? As Reis (2020) observes, our relation to the city is often from a lofty vantage point akin to an airplane view: the city-as-panorama. From that angle, the city appears immobile—without smell, noise, violence, traffic, or contact. The gaze soothes because there is a certain organization. By contrast, the author invites us to think in terms of the inhabited city: a city remade daily, open to multiple readings. No longer seen from the voyeur's perch, it is lived from the walker's point of view. Researching in the city — rather than researching the city — calls for a shift from the stance of observer to that of implicated inhabitant. Letting oneself be populated by the city — by what is foreign within it — is fundamental to this listening.

Multiple fields offered tools for apprehending something of the city we inhabit. The figure of the flâneur — first conceived by the French poet Charles Baudelaire in nineteenth-century Paris and later by the philosopher Benjamin (2009) as one who finds in urban details a way to narrate the questions of his time — was a crucial inspiration. More recently, the notion of the *flâneuse* has been developed to address the specificities of strolling as a woman in urban space (Brandellero, 2020; Stoll, 2020). In the 1960s, the Situationists, led by Guy Debord, opposed the society of the spectacle, alienation, and passivity by promoting techniques of urban action such as *dérive* and psychogeography (Jacques, 2003). In anthropology,

we drew on the method of “floating observation,” which entails remaining available to discover latent bonds between inhabitants and places in the city (Pétonnet, 2008).

The inhabited city is a cauldron of events and a cluster of more-or-less free associations; it is always in transformation. The city cannot be grasped in totality, resists fixation, and lives in immanence. It is a living landscape (Reis, 2020), inscribed daily, pulsing, and slipping away from any totalizing attempt at comprehension. In consonance with Freud (1900/2019), Benjamin (2009), and Didi-Huberman (2012), we add the hypothesis that, in the city’s remnants — from the ashes of the passions that ignite it — thought can be produced. Following Benjamin’s (1940/2012) figure of the historian as a ragpicker of what culture discards, we wager that graffiti are not social failures but Freudian slips — formations of compromise. A slip, in the sense of the real erupting into language, addresses passersby with enigmas.

At this point, it is important to distinguish our proposal of urban listening from territorial listening. According to Broide (2019), territorial listening seeks to understand the diverse ways people inhabit specific social spaces in the city. It begins with immersion in the field and includes walking, direct contact, interviews, and other devices of speech and listening. Its goal is to grasp how people who circulate in a given geographic area live, dwell, and work. Urban listening converges with territorial listening insofar as both begin with walking the city. However, by proposing to listen to cultural productions — graffiti — rather than to graffiti writers (or residents, etc.), we diverge from territorial listening. One might say that territorial listening presupposes society as its matrix, whereas urban listening takes culture as its matrix.

Addressing listening also requires ethical considerations. How should we position ourselves when listening to an urban cultural production? Our ethic is not to colonize the city with psychoanalysis but to learn and create with it — to be affected by what we encounter. Discussing psychoanalysis and art, Frayze-Pereira (2011) argues that psychoanalysis is not a mediation between the public and artists, as an art critic might provide. It is not the task of psychoanalysis to evaluate, qualify, or disqualify a work of art — and, we would add, any cultural production. The psychoanalysis that takes an interest in art—what the author calls “implicated psychoanalysis” — lets itself be guided by the work and, by opening itself to the artists’ labor, renews itself as a knowledge revealed in an unending experience of interrogation. In this sense, the ethic of urban listening is an ethic of creation and of the time of listening (from voyeur to walker), not of haste and unveiling. Such a stance avoids appropriating the object of study and helps create a fertile territory of encounters where a new language can emerge. In this new language — where subject and object of study are marked by encounter, blurred, even at times fused — the researcher’s subjectivity is strongly called upon.

In this article, through a literature review, we present the conceptual weave that undergirds the methodological approach we call urban listening, in light of the singularity of the thesis research. As the researcher walked through selected neighborhoods in search of graffiti, certain psychic formations arose within her. We understand these formations as countertransference effects — echoes of the unspoken or unsayable in urban grafisms resounding within the analyst’s subjectivity. To support this view, we discuss how this concept can slide from the clinic to the cultural field. In keeping with the ethical ideal of not colonizing cultural productions with psychoanalysis, we turn to Frayze-Pereira’s (2011) notion of implicated psychoanalysis, which recognizes that interpretation implicates the interpreter. Our hypothesis is that clarifying the position from which an analyst speaks requires analyzing how they are affected by the material to be interpreted (countertransference).

Treating graffiti as images, we propose that they can be listened to. Accordingly, we develop the concept of “pictorial writing” as taken up by Freud (1900/2019) in dream analysis. Yet, given the specific nature of graffiti — images that unsettle and capture — we understand that something of the drive dimension escapes the image. While it demands psychic work, it also relaunches what is encountered, indefinitely, toward new openings. To address this dimension, we engage Lacan’s (2008) concept of the gaze as *objet a*. Having traced this path, we hope that our singular experience of urban listening may inspire analysts to prick up their ears to what echoes in the city’s traces.

### Urban Listening: From Countertransference to Implicated Psychoanalysis

As a fundamental rule in psychoanalysis, we say the analysand should speak whatever comes to mind, without restriction. In counterpoint to the analysand’s free association, we have the analyst’s words, which emerge from evenly suspended attention. Psychoanalysis is thus a cure through speech and listening — both as free as possible (Akhtar, 2016). Beyond being essential to clinical work, these elements also prove vital in other territories where psychoanalysis dares to venture. Regarding psychoanalytic work in cities, as Broide (2019) reminds us, its history in Brazil is as old as psychoanalysis itself, and we increasingly see collectives taking shape: “Psicanálise na Praça Roosevelt” (São Paulo); “Psicanálise na praça” (Rio Grande do Sul); “Escutando a cidade” (São Paulo); and many others under the banner “Psicanálise na rua” (Minas Gerais, Goiás, Federal District). Psychoanalysis has also moved beyond the consulting room into so-called extramural territories. But how does the psychoanalyst operate in the streets? How does the analyst’s mind function in other settings of psychoanalytic practice?

We listen to words, nonverbal communications, and silences. With respect to graffiti, we can listen to the verbal content of inscribed phrases; to the nonverbal dimension of images on walls; to silences — when we notice where graffiti seems integrated into the urban landscape and thus fails to provoke estrangement; and to erasures, so common in contemporary cities. Faced with the question of how to listen to all these possibilities, we first lean on Freud's (1912/1996) famously nebulous line in one of his technical papers. In *Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis*, he writes: "The analyst must turn his own unconscious, like a receptive organ, toward the transmitting unconscious of the patient" (Freud, 1912/1996, p. 129). In other words, by attending to what arises in the analyst, one can attune to what belongs to the patient. But what is the analyst's unconscious at work on behalf of the analysis — or on behalf of another mind? Does it make sense to think of a meeting of unconsciousnesses when we take the street as a worksite? And how might we conceive such a meeting when our proposal is to listen to images?

The debate on countertransference first appears in the psychoanalytic literature in 1909, in correspondence between Freud and Jung concerning the Swiss analyst's feelings for his well-known patient, Sabina Spielrein. Although Freud regarded it as an obstacle, he introduced the concept into the field's future development, maintaining that knowledge of countertransference related to analytic progress. It was Sándor Ferenczi, however, who threw new light on the concept in response to an expanded clinic. Ferenczi proposed technical modifications to meet clinical needs, especially in psychopathologies rooted in trauma — cases at the limits of analysability, where prevailing technique fell short. Drawing on categories from romantic aesthetics, he broadened the field by developing notions of empathy, affectability, and "feeling within." For Ferenczi, particularly when analysands present narcissistic splits, the analyst must be able to feel the other within in order to express what had been inexpressible: both traumatic experiences and the analysand's capacities (Dallazen, 2020).

As Dallazen (2020) further notes, from the 1940s onward, authors aligned with the British school — Winnicott, Paula Heimann, and Racker among them — conceived countertransference as far more than an analytic hindrance. By the mid-twentieth century, analysts had begun to treat it as a technical instrument. Countertransference was elevated to a psychoanalytic tool for accessing the unconscious, and analytic experience came to be understood as a practice of mutual affectation aimed at fostering shared dreaming. But what exactly is this concept? How does this instrument work?

According to Dallazen (2020), countertransference is a tool for listening to what cannot be verbalized because it lacks representation in the patient's psyche. In this view, the analysand communicates via projective identification — placing their phantasies within the analyst, who then feels them as if they were his or her own (drawing on Susan Isaacs's formulation of phantasy, a very primitive psychic process preceding the establishment of language). For this reason, the analyst must invest in the mnemonic traces that emerge in his or her own psyche, giving shape to the analysand's contents that could not be inscribed, so that primary symbolization may occur.

In our urban listening, each walk generated a psychic production in the researcher — dreams, images, and sounds recorded in a field diary (which we will not present or discuss here, as this would exceed the scope of the article). We understand these productions as effects of countertransference — psychic work elicited by encounters with the graffiti's muteness — at times a strident muteness. This does not mean, however, that graffiti should be thought strictly through the lens of the unsayable. We may suspect that they express something of a culture's traumatic register, yet we still propose they bear the status of compromise formations — enigmas addressed to passersby. In urban listening, the unspoken interests us no less than the unsayable. Countertransference work does not concern itself solely with what has not been symbolized.

To understand countertransference as a listening instrument that is not confined to the unsymbolized, we can draw on other authors. Akhtar (2016) revisits Fliess's "The Metapsychology of the Analyst" to clarify the process by which one can hear what the other is not saying. When empathy is present, the analyst transiently introjects a given content from the patient and subsequently projects it back onto them. Countertransference would thus be the instrument through which the analyst allows their mind to be populated by the patient's internal world in order to know it better.

Figueiredo (2021) speaks of "primordial countertransference" as a disposition of the analyst's mind — a readiness to open to the unknown. It is a prior availability for listening to the other and to oneself, inspired by the analysand, and it encompasses not only trauma (and phantasies) but also conflicts, fears, desires, fantasies, styles, and more. From these perspectives, countertransference can be conceived not merely as a conduit to the unsayable, but also as a means of engaging the unspoken. Even so, does it make sense to employ this clinical instrument for urban listening?

Perhaps we can think of countertransference as a tool that enables contact between two different languages. When faced with an unfamiliar tongue — graffiti — parts of society respond with rejection. How can there be other codes, other languages, in the city? Better to erase them. In this context, countertransference functions as a technical instrument that allows the psychoanalyst to find a hospitable territory in which to receive a foreigner.

Although we adopt countertransference as developed within object-relations psychoanalysis, we do not ignore Lacan's (2010) critique of the notion in the seminar *The Transference*. For Lacan, communication between the two unconsciousnesses in the analytic dyad risks a blind spot: the analyst's unanalyzed residues. Moreover, such communication tends toward immediacy — i.e., it bypasses mediation by the Other. In this perspective, analytic work remains confined to the field of

intersubjectivity; put differently, to the imaginary register. The prefix “counter-” itself would suggest a specularity: the patient’s transference on one side, the analyst’s countertransference on the other. For Lacan, what is at stake in this debate is the analyst’s own transference — imaginary when captured in the mirror dimension, symbolic when oriented by the desire to shift away from subjectivity and occupy the place of the “dead”: “we are never identical with our function” (p. 236).

While we recognize the pertinence of Lacan’s warning, we maintain that countertransference — and thus the intersubjective dimension — does not necessarily collapse into specularity. The roles of analyst and patient are distinct and asymmetrical. In addition, rigorous handling of feelings stirred in the analyst by the patient’s transference is presupposed. Such rigor — whose limits we acknowledge — is built through personal analysis, supervision, and theoretical-clinical dialogue within analytic associations.

Concerned not to turn the city into an object, we turn to Frayze-Pereira (2011). He observes that psychoanalysis often approaches art on the terrain of application, offering interpretations that purport to elucidate the truth of a work or its author. He asks whether it is possible to break out of this closed loop in which the work becomes a mere illustration of psychoanalytic theory. As a way out, Frayze-Pereira proposes “implicated psychoanalysis.” Faced with a work, the analyst should investigate the effects it produces in him or her and give discursive form to what results. Interpretation thus emerges from a living relation between the work and the one it confronts. Any psychoanalytic interpretation implies the interpreter. It is not exhaustive, and it carries a measure of risk when communicated, since the analyst reveals the gaps in their reading and the limits of their listening. To undertake such work, the analyst must have engaged with their own unconscious — an essential condition for speaking of others’ unconscious, even when the material is cultural production. Our hypothesis is that recognizing the position from which an analyst enunciates interpretations (an analysis of implication) cannot dispense with an analysis of countertransference — i.e., of how the material to be interpreted affects the analyst’s subjectivity.

Thus, Freud’s (1912/1996) enigmatic remark about the analyst’s unconscious, read together with the countertransference concept and Frayze-Pereira’s (2011) proposal, underscores the importance of the listener’s unconscious. But what should be done with what is heard? Put differently, how do we work<sup>1</sup> through the encounter with these images in the city? To address these questions, we now turn to the specificities of listening to graffiti.

### Listening to Graffiti: Pictorial Writing and the Gaze as *Objet a*

The relationship between images and words is complex and often tense. Images and words also permeate the analytic encounter — not only at the limits of technique, but in dream analysis as well. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900/2019) introduces the concept of pictorial writing (*Bilderschrift*) to suggest that dream content (visual images) must be understood as language. As Derrida puts it (1967, as cited in Kuntzel, 2019, p. 142): “*Bilderschrift*: not image inscribed, but pictorial writing; an image given not to a simple, conscious, present perception of the thing itself — supposing it exists — but to a reading.” In this sense, the dream is a pictographic puzzle and must be read in its symbolic relations.

For Rivera (2011), pictorial writing concerns signifying images. She likewise returns to Freud’s position that dreams are not merely hallucinatory images but are to be approached through the interplay of the visible and the sayable. Because of the fugitive nature of images, access is through the dream as recounted. Even when a dream presents a sequence of organized images with a narrative thread, it acquires meaning only through a secondary operation, an *a posteriori*. Freud’s notion is crucial for thinking how to “listen” to images: to make them speak.

Didi-Huberman (2012), in his work on aesthetics, also articulates images and language. For him, one cannot speak of images without speaking of the ashes of a kind of fire. This aligns with Lacan’s (2008) comment on the dream — “Father, can’t you see I’m burning?” — and his claim that every symptom circumscribes a small fire, something still smoldering. Images, he suggests, are among the inventions we create to register our fears and consumptions. Words and images are thus not opposed; together they form, for each of us, a treasury — or a tomb — of memory. Yet every memory is threatened by forgetting, every treasury by looting, every tomb by profanation.

Each time we look at an image, then, we should consider the conditions that prevented its disappearance. Didi-Huberman (2012, p. 214) stresses the importance of recognizing in the image “what has tragically survived an experience, recalling that event more or less clearly, like the intact ashes of an object consumed by flames.” Images are an aspect of history — collective rather than individual — and working with images means working with remains, the ashes of history, what has

<sup>1</sup> Dallazen (2020), in *A Perlaboração da Contratransferência*, revisits the German term *Durcharbeitung* — rendered in Portuguese as *perlaborar* — which appears in Freud’s original “Lembrar, Repetir e Perlaborar,” to distinguish it from the English translation “elaboration,” which in German would be *Bearbeitung*. In German, *perlaborar* (*Durcharbeiten*) means to work through a task and to traverse it from beginning to end. By contrast, *elaborar* (*Bearbeiten*) means to work on material — digesting or transforming it. The original term refers to the psychic work performed by the patient in response to an analyst’s interpretation, while preserving the notion that this material is processed through — i.e., via — transference. The emphasis and distinction between *perlaborar* and *elaborar* lie in the former’s focus on traversing material, whereas the latter concerns working on material. We therefore retain the original term, as proposed by the author, because working through material differs from working on material — an allusion to the displacements that underlie our study.

tragically survived a cultural experience. Graffiti meet resistance from sectors of society and media that condemn and seek to erase them. Yet they persist. What, then, do these images tell us, and how can we listen?

Didi-Huberman (2012) proposes that we discern where the image burns — where its beauty still harbors an unresolved crisis, a symptom — where the ash has not cooled. This is what burns in a formation of the unconscious and summons us to read/listen. In such encounters, legibility is not given in advance. We may expect suspense, a provisional muteness in the face of an object that disconcerts and strips us of the capacity to make sense; language must work upon that silence. An image “well looked at” is one that first unsettled us and then renewed our language — and thus our thought.

With Freud and Didi-Huberman, we can think of graffiti images — the visible — as a point of departure for a work of language. This is an implicated work, in which seeing, saying, and feeling are entangled, each extending and deepening the others. Frayze-Pereira (2011) helps clarify this process by revisiting Freud’s essay on *The Moses of Michelangelo* to think the dynamics of the visible and invisible. Captured by the sculpture in San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, Freud (1914/2012) returns repeatedly, focusing on seemingly minor traits — the anger in Moses’s gaze, the hand in the beard, the way he holds the tablets. Freud consults prior commentaries and even requests drawings of possible movements with the tablets. As Frayze-Pereira notes, Freud completes the seen scene with imagination. The unrepresented moment becomes part of representation: an invisible dimension is constructed from the visible. Freud builds a scene to the extent that he “listens” to the sculpture as language.

From this perspective, graffiti can be read through the lens of pictorial writing. This reading is implicated and singular: it treats an image as language, whether by adding words to think it or adding images to read it. Such linguistic work matters because these images are collective and often express conflictive cultural aspects. Graffiti thus belong to the realm of a society’s unsaid — what is difficult to see and to speak. Even as we argue for an approach that allows connection with graffiti as pictorial writing, we acknowledge another necessary dimension: the limits of such listening.

In their enigmatic character, graffiti provoke a mix of captivation, rejection, and curiosity. In social discourse and in law, graffiti are defined as vandalism — and thus criminal. At the same time, a growing body of scholarship examines them. They seduce and repel. This duality led us to take them as language, even as, after our walks, we realized we had seen them somewhat “blindly” and heard them somewhat “deafly.” While we recognize the dialectic of the visible and the sayable, it is essential to discuss the limits of listening through Lacan’s concept of the gaze as *objet a*.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (2008) posits a split between the eye and the gaze. If an eye sees, it is because there is a thrust to look: “what we have to discern, along the path indicated by [Merleau-Ponty], is the pre-existence of a gaze — I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides” (Lacan, 2008, p. 76). Thus, “we are beings looked at in the spectacle of the world” (p. 78). An ontological reversal occurs: the gaze is not on the side of the subject but of objects — “what fundamentally determines me in the visible is the gaze that is outside” (p. 107). This gaze is not the gaze of a transcendent consciousness; its incorporeal materiality is evanescent, a flash, a glint. The gaze hooks the eye, yet escapes vision.

The eruption of the gaze into the scene of the world wounds perception and shifts perspectives. In Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, it alights on the anamorphic skull that mars good form, reminding us that power and wealth do not exempt us from death. In classical visual art more broadly, the picture often returns a unified image of the subject — stabilizing him. As Lacan notes (2008, p. 102):

the painter “offers pasture for the eye” but invites the viewer to lay down the gaze as one lays down arms — an Apollonian, pacifying effect addressed not so much to the gaze as to the eye.

Fugitive, the gaze — as *objet a* — finds shelter in transgressive artistic expressions that do not hesitate to wound the spectator’s eye to awaken it. If it has any substance, it is a substance of *jouissance*: “if a bird were to paint, would it not be by letting fall its feathers; a serpent, its scales; a tree, by shedding its leaves and making it rain leaves?” (Lacan, 2008, p. 114).

Since antiquity, with Plato, vision and gaze have been divided. Vision pertains to objects, bodies, artifacts, mathematical theories; where vision fails, gaze emerges as the cause of knowledge. For Plato, the philosopher’s activity is to contemplate, examine, observe — moved by a transcendent gaze, we might add. After antiquity, we lost this distinction, later revisited in psychoanalysis through the scopic drive, which treats the eye not only as a source of vision but also as a source of libido (Quinet, 2002).

For psychoanalysis, Lacan (2008) identifies the gaze as the specific object of the scopic drive. It produces brilliance and fascination in the world of vision but is an object of *jouissance* that eludes the ego. It is not a passive object of perception but an active one that subverts us. It is not destined to know but to un-know, becoming a source of anxiety when the scopic drive reveals itself as a gaze bearing mortifying *jouissance*. Regarding the two valences of *jouissance*, Lust and Genuß (pleasure and displeasure), the gaze is both a cause of jubilation and an impossible-to-bear object of anxiety (Quinet, 2002).

The gaze in psychoanalysis is ungraspable, invisible, drive-laden — the gaze as *objet a* in Lacan’s algebra. This object is not part of empirical reality; its modalities — oral, anal, gaze, voice — are not given to the senses: they are not seen, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted. The *objet a* causes desire, but also anxiety. If the invisible complements and deepens the

visible — as we saw with Freud (1914/2012) and Frayze-Pereira (2011) — there is also, within the invisible, something that escapes. Might graffiti carry a spark of the *objet a*, causing desire (to see) and anxiety (at having seen)? If so, how do we work with that dimension?

We approach the visual field through Lacan's three registers: imaginary, symbolic, and real. In the imaginary, contemplation sustains an ideal of completeness between subject and object, which would satisfy lacks of knowledge, being, and/or truth. This is the realm of the visible, of perceptible objects and mirror-structured images — the domain of the ego. Here sits what Barthes (2011) calls the *studium* of photography: recognizing the photographer's intention, harmonizing with it (whether to approve or resist), above all understanding it — an education, a knowledge, a politeness.

Rivera (2011) describes something akin to this register in the “image-wall,” a dimension that conceals fissures and invites the illusion of a homogeneous world. This dimension soothes us, making us forget we are not masters in our own house; it calms and pleases. Regarding graffiti, we may fall into this stance if we infer what they “mean,” or what graffiti writers “intended,” as if we already knew — speaking for graffiti rather than making them speak.

The real is the register of drive causality, invisible to the human eye — a beyond that escapes mirror and representation (Quinet, 2002). Rivera (2011) names as “image-hole” those images that open onto this register — images that problematize reality and summon us into a heterogeneous world, an irreconcilable space: pulsating chaos. Barthes (2011) touches this register with the *punctum* of a photograph — the detail that wounds the viewer and floods the entire image, breaking the *studium*. From a single mark, the photograph is no longer “just” a photograph.

The *punctum* cannot be generalized or predicted; it is always singular and corresponds to the point at which the image touches a subject (Rivera, 2011). We can extend *punctum* beyond photography to images more broadly — and even to Lacan's *objet a* — as a veiled, hard-to-name affect. On each walk, at some moment, we were touched by *puncta* in the city. Something singular seized us in a graffiti photograph we “took” — or, more precisely, by which we were *taken*. In working in the city, something may capture us and leave us unmoored, demanding psychic work.

These *puncta* both summon psychic work and open a new capacity to see, while also marking the limits of listening — what, paraphrasing Freud (1900/2019), we might call the “umbilicus” of a photograph, the point where it plunges into the unknown. Here we can join Frayze-Pereira's (2011) claim that every work is open and every interpretation interminable. Addressing the delicate problem confronted by psychoanalysis and aesthetics alike, he writes that what is at stake is a speech always fleeing full realization:

(...) if in psychoanalysis “the word proceeds from that which exceeds it” (...), the same holds for the entire visible, since there is always a remainder — something unsaid or unfigured, something unthought — always a horizon of the unrepresentable at the edges of representation (Frayze-Pereira, 2011, p. 39).

Faced with a work or exhibition that poses an enigma, the psychoanalyst proposes a “clandestine listening” and an “oblique gaze” to preserve the “power of the unrepresentable” (terms Frayze-Pereira borrows from Gagnebin). Beyond acknowledging what cannot be grasped, the *punctum* marks the singularity of research — an essential condition for others to listen to aspects that were not available to us.

From here, we can better define an ethic of not colonizing graffiti: not “giving them a voice,” but pricking up our ears to listen. Creating a contact zone seems an ethic that favors a stance of listening — a kind of customs post, a meeting place for foreigners where linguistic differences remain intact. Just as there is a “place of speech,” we can think of place(s) of listening. Walking a neighborhood on a Sunday is not the same as walking it on a Monday. What other listenings are possible in peripheral districts? How do the bodies that inhabit those neighborhoods shape listening? How does the analyst's “place of speech” — gender, ethnicity, social class, etc. — relate to listening itself? What do we leave out? Faced with such questions, how can we formulate an approach that maintains some constancy?

## Final Considerations

As should be clear, the urban listening we propose presents multiple challenges and questions, even as certain theoretical boundaries and technical tools can be delineated. It is an incomplete approach, open to invention, since it can be recreated with each urban object that unsettles an analyst. It is also polyphonic. Just as walking the city brought us close to a multiplicity of voices — often dissonant — our way of operating within it opened to authorships across different fields of knowledge and to psychoanalysts of varied orientations.

The urban listening outlined here, grounded in a study of graffiti, is marked by an encounter with alterity. In this sense, countertransference concerns the other who, introjected into the analyst's subjectivity, must be listened to; implicated psychoanalysis speaks to the possibility of interpreting a cultural production through the analyst's sensuous engagement with that object; pictorial writing points to the otherness of the image — its legibility; and the gaze, as *objet a*, refers to what in an image always escapes, calling for an interminable work of interpretation. Taken together, these concepts offered

tools to sustain an implicated listening as a way of finding alterity in the city — something beyond us that nonetheless came to inhabit us.

From the birth of psychoanalysis, one can trace its relation to the residues of social classifications; it has turned its thought toward the unthinkable of madness, of woman, of the child (Conte et al., 2016). Broide and Katz (2019), likewise addressing the unthinkable, argue that we must find conditions under which the common can be sustained. This is a work of invention. Psychoanalysis itself is an experience that creates a novel social bond. For this reason, it operates upon an unconscious without borders — though not without shorelines. In this light, urban listening can be understood as a way of forging a social bond with the unthinkable, with what is treated as waste in the official circuits of the urban: in our case, graffiti.

Listening—whether in the clinic, in the city, or elsewhere—always bears the singular marked by culture. Practicing psychoanalysis in other spaces, allowing oneself to be touched and inhabited by other possibilities, enables us to rediscover the capacity to create: to inscribe — like graffiti — something in the world where nothing stood before. We hope this article encourages each researcher, listener, and curious observer to bring something of their own to their encounter with the world, so that psychoanalysis does not become mere repetition but remains part of the terrain of creation. This seems to us a shared strength of graffiti and psychoanalysis: the capacity to invent other forms. As Gutfreind (2019) notes, analytic and artistic work is more prodigal in widening the question than in delivering the answer. In this sense, the analyst's craft resembles artisanal work, and urban listening aligns more with implication than with explanation. We extend an invitation to analysts to occupy the urban space with their listening.

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