

The Stoop Can Also Be a Couch: A Psychoanalytic Manifesto*

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Abstract

The practice and theory of psychoanalysis offer ways to articulate what is happening in the world beyond the confines of the couch. Yet in practice, most of us still remain indoors, operating within our office walls or the bounds of cyberspace. The stoop, however, is an ideal metaphor for psychoanalysis' place within society: a space that elevates a building and serves as both a gathering spot and a threshold—a blend of the public and private. As Lacan describes, this exemplifies “extimacy,” where the intimate converges with the external. It is a space where inside and outside meet, enabling us to engage with our neighbors and the world around us.

This manifesto introduces psychoanalytic thinkers and projects from around the world that have been “othered,” bringing psychoanalysis beyond the couch and into the streets. I believe that psychoanalysis must step out of the office and onto the stoop, to meet and engage with “neighbors”—theories, paradigms, and approaches that allow it to fulfill its own values.

The Neighbors

Feminist Theory

Our feminist neighbors reveal how gender ideologies, along with their power imbalances, shape our collective psyches. Gender studies and queer studies bring critical insights, exposing contradictions within psychoanalysis itself: while psychoanalysis claims awareness of heteropatriarchal structures, it often still upholds the mother-infant dyad as the foundational paradigm. Feminists help us question binary sexual orientation and gender identity frameworks and introduce the concept of intersectionality. Yet, we must acknowledge that queer communities, in particular, may approach psychoanalysis with

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skepticism—justifiably so, given that psychoanalysis once pathologized non-heteronormative forms of sexuality.

Critical Theory

Critical theorists provide essential insights, challenging power structures that perpetuate oppression, marginalization, and violence.

Gaztambide (2015) emphasizes the need for psychoanalysis to critique “the lies of consciousness and society” and to address what is left out in both individual minds and public policy. Like critical theory, psychoanalysis has the potential to question even the most sacred social norms. Yet a true critical stance demands not only theory but also reflection and action. Psychoanalysis has room to grow here, as it often remains fragmented due to rivalries over theoretical distinctions rather than engaging with the world at large. Meeting on the stoop might help us tear down these walls, linking us more meaningfully to the world and to each other.

Mestiza Consciousness

Chicana feminist thinker, poet, and activist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) coined the term 'mestiza consciousness' to describe the state of consciousness that emerges from the experiences of individuals inhabiting multiple intersecting identities, cultures, and worlds. Mestiza consciousness is not merely a construct relevant only to those with mixed ethnic backgrounds; rather, it is a state of mind characterized by a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity, a nonbinary way of thinking and identifying ourselves with groups and social positions not limited to our ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications.

If we meet these neighbors on our stoop, we will learn that our lives and psyches are deeply intertwined with our social and physical environments. The intimate experiences shared on the couch are shaped by systems of power, oppression, and resistance. Mestiza studies challenge the subject-object duality that constrains us in “doer and done-to” dynamics, as Jessica Benjamin (2018) argues.

Gaztambide (2015) critiques the elitist status of psychoanalysis, arguing that it reproduces societal class hierarchies by reserving the “pure gold” of analysis for a select few while excluding those deemed “too concrete” or “unsophisticated.” Our Mestiza studies neighbors remind us that psychoanalysis is enriched when it is accessible to all, rather than just to the privileged few.

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French Post-Structuralists

French post-structuralists, especially Félix Guattari, criticize psychoanalysis for often suppressing the socio-political contents of the unconscious, even though these forces shape our desires. Michel Foucault, too, examines how power operates within society, shaping our subjectivities. Unlike traditional views that understand power as something held by a few and used to oppress others from the top down, Foucault argued that power is not just repressive but also *productive*: it shapes our identities, knowledge systems, and even desires in subtle ways (1978). Psychoanalysis could benefit from a dialogue with Foucault's ideas, determining whether it serves as a normative ideology or as a tool for resistance and subversion.

Marxist Social Theorists

Psychoanalysis enables patients to confront their internal resistances, while Marxist theory urges oppressed classes to recognize their alienation and push for social change. The Marxist perspective, however, often remains confined to academia. Engaging with Marxist social theory could deepen psychoanalysis' potential to empower patients to reclaim their desires from a system that exploits them for profit.

If the personal is political, the unconscious must be political as well. We should understand the concept of a "libidinal economy" as inherently linked to political economy, given its profound impact on our lives.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point out, desire operates within and through socio-economic systems, making it inseparable from political and economic structures.

In this sense then, we could argue that the political economy and libidinal economy are one and the same. Without this understanding, we risk ignoring how power is distributed and how we participate in our own and others' exploitation. Our Marxist neighbors remind us that neoliberalism is more than an economic theory—it is a lifestyle that extracts productivity and pleasure from our own suffering. Psychoanalysis is uniquely equipped to explore this paradox, helping us navigate the tension between liberation and the allure of our own alienation.

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Enrique Pichon-Rivière and Operative Groups

Finally, let us invite Enrique Pichon-Rivière to the stoop, an Argentine psychoanalyst who developed “operative groups” (1985) a unique form of group therapy and social intervention designed to address both individual and collective issues through active collaboration. Rooted in psychoanalysis and social psychology, operative groups are structured to explore interpersonal dynamics while working toward a shared task. In operative groups, members naturally take on different roles, such as leader, follower, or skeptic. These roles often emerge from unconscious dynamics, and Pichon-Rivière’s method helps participants recognize and understand these roles as reflections of deeper psychological and social structures. By analyzing these dynamics, participants from all walks of life can learn about their own patterns of behavior in group settings.

Pichon Riviere’s work highlighted the power of community engagement, yet he was “evicted” from psychoanalytic spaces of his time. We might ask why. Could it be that our discipline, too, struggles with “attacks on linking”? When we sever our ties to the social, we risk ignoring how we impact and are impacted by systems such as climate change, war, and colonialism. By bringing Pichon’s work and similar contributions into greater awareness, we can work through what psychoanalysis has repressed.

Conclusion

These are just some of the neighbors we can meet if we step outside our offices. Once we do, we must humbly ask them how the world sees us and our psychoanalytic lens. The stoop may be colder and harder than the couch, but it offers a vital vantage point. Remaining indoors, cut off from our neighbors, risks turning the analytic couch into a stoop of surveillance and control.

Many in private practice may believe they have escaped the mental health industrial complex, but even within the confines of our own offices we remain at risk of perpetuating its ideology. If we learn from our neighbors, we might develop new subjectivities and begin our “beautiful struggle” together. For psychoanalysis to be a force for liberation, we must examine our history and recognize its blind spots.

What are the consequences of staying within the comfort of our offices, ignoring socioeconomic factors while restoring individuals to “normal” functioning? As Stephen Mitchell (1993) warned us , we risk preserving “purity” at the expense of those in need.

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When analysts write, who are they writing to, and in what language? Are we communicating in accessible ways, or are we only publishing in peer-reviewed journals?

For how long can we ignore capitalism and climate change? Will we listen when new generations of analysts raise these issues, and how will we respond? Will we find the courage to bridge our alienation and engage in collective growth? If not, as Jacques Derrida cautions, psychoanalysis may become “a perverse and sophisticated appropriation of violence, or a new weapon in the symbolic arsenal.”

Let us heed the words of Ian Parker and David Pavón Cuéllar (2016): “Psychoanalysis listens to how our alienation and misery lock up what we want to cry out.” We can no longer afford to listen only within four walls; we must step onto the stoop, work through our narcissistic wounds, and recognize that the beautiful struggle requires us all—together, with our neighbors.

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