

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CHANGES IN THE LAST TIMES

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At the last European Psychoanalytical Federation (EPF) Presidents' Council in November 2021, I had the privilege of being invited to present one of the speeches in the context of the scientific discussion with the EPF Executive Board and the whole group of presidents. In my opinion, the selection of the topic was quite accurate, as it was related to the *External and Internal Changes in the Last Time*, and I would like to present in this podcast some of the ideas that I had the opportunity to share there.

From my point of view such a current and interesting topic was a hinge theme between the topic of the 2021 EPF Conference on *Realities* and the last EPF Conference theme on *Ideals*.

In the argument of the 2021 EPF Annual Conference Heribert Blass, Jan Abram and Ewa Glôd, taking into account the internal and external changes of the last time related to the the pandemic and the emergence of the virtual world, they formulate transcendental questions related to the so-called remote analysis, that most of us have had to carry out in the wake of the pandemic:

When the body is virtual does psychic reality become easier to see? How in touch are we when listening to a patient who is talking through the internet? Can free association and free-floating attention prevail?... Are some patients facilitated to talk in more depth about their innermost anxieties online? Will the acknowledgment of the value of online analysis mean that the wider dissemination of psychoanalysis could become a new reality so that the controversy of remote analysis lessens or even evaporates?

At the same time, in the Argument for the 2022 EPF Annual Conference on *Ideals*, Heribert Blass, Jan Abram and Ewa Glôd raise new major and deep issues. In this context they state:

The pandemic of 2020 changed the way analysts customarily treat patients in a radical way and in a way that Freud, and the majority of us, would never have imagined remotely possible... During that time each analyst would have to rely on the patient to be responsible for the control of the setting and each analyst was exploring the issues concerning psychic work in the treatment of a patient who is not in the room with them. Are these changes calling into question an ideal of psychoanalytic work?

Turning to the outside world, how do we apply our psychoanalytic theories, arising from clinical practice, to understand the other kinds of pandemics such as, for example, the rise of populism on an international level?

I believe these were very important issues related to the subject of our debate to take into account in my presentation and in the very interesting dialogue that followed.

In that context I stated that if *material reality*, *psychological reality* (which corresponds to the self-preservation realm of the human being) and *psychic reality* (which is the primary object of the study of psychoanalysis) are closely intertwined, we can posit that there is no single reality, but rather a set of realities, the product of the way that each of us constructs and reconstructs our own reality. From this perspective, I understand that reality itself is always a reality that is signified and/or open to signification, closely linked to the internal and external changes that run through our history, and to the whole of our lived experiences which, in turn, construct and/or give rise to different types of desires, fantasies, and ways of relating to one another.

In relation to this, I would like to bring up the discrimination which is established between the *production of subjectivity* and the *constitution of psychism*. From this perspective, the constitution of psychism could be understood as referring to the whole of universal variables that we are made up of as psychic subjects and which remain permanent. Nevertheless, the production of subjectivity would be related to everything which mutates, in relation to the diverse modifications of socio-cultural and historic contexts, and which give rise to changes in people's mentality and way of life.

Beginning from this base, the founding and permanent elements of psychism, in addition to being the reference from which we think of psychopathology, are also the

pillars which permit us to explain new and diverse modes of emerging subjectivity. What is interesting in this approach would lie in that it permits us to refine our viewpoint, and avoids the prejudices which could lead us to think that many of the problems or difficulties of the subjects are the product of a specific time. This perspective also allows us to avoid the opposite danger of not considering sufficiently the effects of social and cultural contexts, believing that they do not leave a mark nor produce transformations in the type, level, and function of symbolization, or in the rise of new pathologies or discomforts and new ways of experiencing sexuality.

In recent times, there has been a certain consensus in relation to the idea that the rise of postmodernity did not lack effects for the configuration of a new type of subjectivity. On the basis of considering postmodernity as “the time which shatters the great tales” or as “the end of ideologies”, it would appear that this process had had as a consequence not only a lack of certainties, alongside with a growing relativism, but also a dismantling of the references, the ideals, and the identificatory processes that, at the same time, coexist with an increase in fanaticisms, which we could consider, in one sense, as a type of extreme defense against confusion and the void. On the other hand, we find ourselves faced with the so-called “new forms of sexuality”, which in the main tend to be accompanied by intrusion and separation anxieties, and disintegration anxieties, which reflect both the constitution of a precarious subjectivity and a symptomatic polymorphism as well as inconsistencies in the object relations which simultaneously co-exist with symbiotic and fusional tendencies.

In parallel, current sufferings show themselves through a heterogeneity of loving links and through new subjectivities which respond to diverse symptoms, both from the descriptive point of view and through its metapsychological comprehension. From this perspective, we might ask ourselves if postmodernity, currently enmeshed in this still context of pandemic, hasn't also given rise to new subjectivities and new modes of relationship as well as to new referents and idiosyncratic ideals, and we might also ask ourselves which type of comprehension and approach they may require. At the same time, we could ask ourselves if the relationship between the shattering of the great tales and the end of ideologies might not have also brought, from another aspect, an enrichment and a greater freedom of possible ways of expressing subjectivity.

With that in mind, I believe that opening the limits of the analytic method permits us, and demands of us, a greater and greater attention to the idiosyncrasies of each patient, of each treatment, and of each encounter. In this regard, I would like to emphasize, precisely, the notion of “encounter” as a supremely important notion for psychoanalytic theory and practice.

Precisely, the *V Spanish Language Psychoanalysts Encounter*, in January 2020, on “The practice of psychoanalysis in current times”, highlighted how the approach to psychosis and childhood within the field of psychoanalysis, along with the whole group of non-neurotic psychic functionings, established the bases for developing expanded and renewing contemporary clinical thinking. This is a context which frames current suffering, along with the heterogeneity of links and new subjectivities, which account for the diversity and complexity of the characteristics and challenges which our current psychoanalytic practice faces in accordance with the complex epistemology of our age.

I believe that in this context, we are presented with not only the task of dialectizing diverse thinking and perspectives, but also that of glimpsing possible articulations or intersections among them in order to respond to new problems and questions. From this angle, opening the analytic method’s limits permits us and requires of us not only greater attention to the uniqueness of each patient and each analytic encounter, but also creative and rigorous responses that allow us to approach the complexity that each process requires in its particularity.

Beginning with the basis that the concept of setting is one of the key elements, introduced by contemporary perspective, that permits the analytic encounter and process, I believe that diversity in practice and variation of the same could find its unity and foundation, as well as its condition of possibility, in the *internal setting of the analyst* as a guarantee of the method. A method that unfolds in the *analytic field*, whose axis is transference-countertransference and which articulates the intrapsychic with the intersubjective.

Drawing from the premise that all the challenges and questions that so-called remote analysis has raised are contained within this contemporary perspective, I believe that the notion of *analyzerability* is of fundamental importance.

This notion of *analyzability* was originally postulated by Carlos Paz in 1971. Specifically, his profound study of and ample experience in the approach to borderline cases, and all of those clinical situations at the limits of analyzability, permitted him to postulate this concept.

Carlos Paz defined *analyzability* as:

[A] notion that refers to the degree to which a given patient and a psychoanalyst can commit to an analytic process, in which the patient can evolve and eventually be cured, without subjecting him- or herself to risks or excessive suffering, and the psychoanalyst can in turn be gratified in his or her specific task: the investigation and interpretation of the unconscious. We do not believe that it can be an absolute concept which permits us to divide patients into those who are analyzable and those who are unanalyzable in accordance with their psychopathological structures [...] It is a relative concept, which will arise from a multidimensional consideration, which must unavoidably include the patient, the possible analyst, and the total environment of both. It is thus a notion that will vary widely in accordance with distinct conceptions of an analytic process, of its limitations, of its expectations of a cure, of the distinct evolutionary and vital moments of the patient and of the analyst, and of their different environmental circumstances. (Paz, 1995)

Beginning with this concept of *analyzability*, there has been an extension of the clinical field. Based on this enlargement, specific to current clinical practice, it is possible to consider non-neurotic functioning not only as being paradigmatic of contemporary practice, but also as constituting the bases of its own paradigm insofar as the notion of limit as challenge can acquire the sense of not only being a barrier but also a territory of passage and/or transformation. A territory where the paths of psychoanalytic interpretation also grow and transform, moving from the plane of content to that of container, or from that of structured to structuring, and in which one must also keep very much in mind the *plane of affect* and the *form in which the interpretation is enunciated* in order to produce a psychic change.

Along these same lines, Teresa Olmos de Paz (2012), co-author with Carlos Paz of “Analyzability and vital moments”, in her remarks at the *I Spanish Language Psychoanalysts Encounter* posited that there was no single general method to apply to any object, and proposed as well that we consider the term *encounter* as it refers to the psychoanalytic process. An analytic process that she considered must be understood as a process where the condition of being analyzable coexists as a basis with a stable setting, sufficient motivation, and a psychoanalyst who is willing to confront the vicissitudes of the transference-countertransference link.

And in this context, living through the Covid-19 pandemic, where setting, as a primordial element, once more gains prominence in the patient-analyst relationship, I wonder:

If setting is something that we construct with each patient, as Donald Meltzer first manifested, wouldn't the concept of analyzability be precisely the guidepost from which we could establish the bases on which to build a given setting with each patient in a given context? And wouldn't the concept of analyzability be the element which permitted us to determine the criteria through which to consider an encounter properly psychoanalytic or not?

In this context, and together with all of these approaches, I would like to broach the issue that Freud raised in 1913, in his article, *On beginning the treatment (Further recommendations on the technique of psychoanalysis)*.

The extraordinary diversity of the psychical constellations concerned, the plasticity of mental processes and the wealth of the determining factors, oppose a mechanization of the technique; and they bring it about that a course of action that is as a rule justified may at times prove ineffective, whilst one that is usually mistaken may once in a while lead to the desired end. These circumstances, however, do not prevent us from laying down a procedure for the physician which is effective on the average.” (Freud, 1913)

Here, Freud underscores the characteristics that must accompany the setting measures: rigor and flexibility, and he reminds us that the rules of the game take on their significance from the creation of the game plan, which corresponds to that of psychoanalytic treatment, and which he compares to the “noble game of chess”. In this way, the setting conditions are designed according to the fundamental rules proposed by Freud: free association for the analysand, and a corresponding floating attention by the analyst, which can develop their possibilities to the full.

For André Green, this is the fundamental nucleus of the analytic work, typical of the classic cure or classic psychoanalytic treatment of neurotic structures, which continues to be the basic model and the reference toward which it is inclined, beyond possible technical variations and changes in mechanism. For André Green, internal setting is at the root of psychoanalytic identity and will guide, according to the uniqueness of each patient, the choice of setting, with the goal of assuring optimal operating conditions and of safeguarding the continuity of analyzability.

In a joint work titled *Reflections on setting after Covid-19*, Virginia Mora and I considered which elements were the minimal fundamentals that constitute psychoanalytical setting, and we attempted to differentiate breaks in setting from transformations of the setting. In this sense, we agreed in considering that setting is something living and dynamic, which is created and re-created with each patient, underscoring the importance of internal setting as the true support of a possible working alliance between patient and analyst.

We also highlighted that for analytic work, setting, although flexible, must be fundamentally stable, without being subject to arbitrary or capricious changes which reject the rules of abstinence and neutrality. In this way, we considered that when a change of setting takes place, for reasons that the analyst considers relevant, we felt it was important that this change should respond to a counter-transferential elaboration by the analyst, and that, at the same time, it could have previously been analyzed with the patient, which would permit us to differentiate the action from the acting out, as well as the breaking of the setting from the transformation of the setting (Mora, V y Puchol, M, 2020).

If at the beginning of my presentation I considered that the theme of the EPF Council discussion related to *External and internal changes in the last time* is a hinge topic between *Realities* and *Ideals*, I concluded there remembering a saying stated by some philosophers in relation to current time: “We are living in the hinge moment in history” (Parfit, D., 2011).

A few months after my presentation at the EPF council, the Russian invasion of Ukraine took place with its terrible and painful level of destruction. The number of refugees and internally displaced persons is immense and the pain immeasurable. Once again, we are confronted with the terrible uncanny, and also with the same question that united Freud and Einstein in 1933: *Why war?*

In the IPA's webinar on *Why war? Finding peace*, it was raised how “the Russian invasion in Ukraine updates the need to rethink the psychic impact of war, its consequences and the place of psychoanalysis as a comprehensive and helpful tool. Making peace is an explicit wish that unites us in favor of the direct victims, visualising the long-term effects and expressing solidarity with all the suffering people”. Thus, if, on the one hand, there is something of the more terrible side of the destructive impulse that has remained unchanged over the centuries through a *transgenerational radioactivity*—as Yolanda Gampel (2005) called it, on the other hand, we now have the possibility of formulating and reflecting on these questions at a new level of depth and complexity.

In the IPA webinar to which I have referred, Viviane Chetrit-Vatine (2022) considers that it is “the matricial third, the one who would make it possible to put an end to the reiterated killings, to allow the internalization of a paternal principle and the possibility of establishing laws... of life (Chetrit-Vatine, 2013, 2014).” She has positioned it prior to the establishment of the law; and does not reduce it to self-preservation but rather correlates it “to the capacity that is as specifically human as that which permits the worst cruelties, namely, the capacity for *affected* responsibility for the other (Chetrit-Vatine, 2012, 2016)”. From her point of view “this openness to the other, its ethical dimension, is part of the maternal feminine dimension of every human being” and I think that it also remains at the core of “the emotional ties between men that operate against war”, as Freud said (Freud, 1933).

Emotional ties are the basis of the identifications between human beings and in the feeling of responsibility and interest in them that allows us to put ourselves in the other's place through identification in order to understand them as they are and as they feel (Klein, 1937). Identification which, as Manuela Utrilla concluded in her book *An Odyssey of Thought* requires "love and respect, respect and love for the dignity that every human being deserves. In a word: to love life".