

What is to be understood by "the analyst's presence"?

Reflections on the material and represented elements
in the psychoanalytic session

Carlos Mogueillansky¹

When thinking about a psychoanalytic session, all of us imagine that there is a psychoanalyst actually present. Freud's self-analysis required that Fliess was present to support transference's phenomena. What is needed there? Why there is a need for a person to be at that place and to sustain it? If the notion of the analyst is close to a kind of neutrality reflecting itself into a mirrored surface; if the interpretation must be born from a sort of nobody telling what is told, lived and expressed there; if the goal is to check those repetitions evidencing the patient's own personal cause, is there any needed presence?

When it comes to registering, it is well known that the psychoanalysis rejects any sophisticated technical registration and favors instead the analyst's memory, which not only forgets but may also invent things that the analyst has never heard. When it comes to adopting a neutral stance, it is also well known that the transference may waywardly sway the analysts until they face a ghost of their own psyche. It is neither love – though it cannot be missing – nor suggestion what is looked for. The search for persuasion is also not welcomed in psychoanalysis. What is clear is that analysts must bring to it their humanity, their way of living, of listening, of receiving what is told to them, what is adjudicated to them, what is demanded and begged from them.

There have been many curious experiments with pets which took advantage of their patience and their availability for any kind of bonding, but when it comes to psychoanalyzing, pets fail. This all too human response seems to be of the order of the desire. It is only the human being who desires to be desired, and forges a strategy taking into account that he/she is in front of another human being who desires the same. The fact that human experiences rely upon a desire supporting another desire, the wish to be desired by another human being who also wishes to be desired, turns human bonding into a very particular relationship that is at the core of the analytical experience. The order of desire differentiates those relationships that are

¹ Las Heras 3745, 11° C, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Telefax: 54-11- 4801-4561. E-mail: cmogueillansky@fibertel.com.ar

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founded on desire from other ways of being, of coming together and of relating, in which what is at stake is only a comfortable and bureaucratic human interchange.

In the interchange between the analyst and the patient, union and separation are mixed. While union is the goal of the bond, reality brings with it separation. Fiction created in each individual is imprinted on an alien reality that separates his/her subjectivity from the other's. The process of working through, however, operates thanks to that fiction and takes advantage of it. It makes good use of each ludic space of experience and, with each move in the exchange; it gives rise to an experience that repeats, transforms, and creates new perspectives for memory. Nevertheless, that fiction made up of articulated desires leaves behind ample space for the separation needed for each member of the dyad to give freedom to himself/herself and to the other. Clarice Lispector has said that "to choose one's own mask is the first wilful human act, and it is done in solitude."

Between the self and the assumed mask, there are the ups and downs of choosing what to show and what to hide, what to concede and what to be as a person. That is why there is a well-known, familiar zone and a hidden, private one, alien or foreign to any exchange. Anyhow, in that game of displaying and concealing, Lispector says, if we are discovered in our true self, the other may fumigate us as a cockroach, since our foreignness impacts on him/her as if we were one.²

It is no wonder that this is one of the main sources of resistance. But there is always place for a playing in which one's own word and that of the other's interchange. The other's word becomes one's own and moves within the practical playing ground of mutual identities.³

In the agreements and disagreements, the selves and the masks, that take place in an analysis there is a specific production zone with its own rules. Around the actual presence of the analyst there is a playing ground in which that which is brought by the patient can be represented. In other words, the analyst's person is a presence and a material place on which a representational space can be defined. Within that space, the analyst will become invested as one more toy, provided that he/she does not resist to being one.⁴ When playing, nothing is what is: everything gains a meaning given by the succession of creations and productions, including both the facts transferred from the memory past and the current productions woven into the ludic fabric. Those two sources feed the game; they are mutually evoked, produced, altered and

² C. Lispector, "La quinta historia", in *Cuentos reunidos*, Alfaguara, Mexico, 2001.

³ G. Deleuze and F. Guatari, *Mil mesetas*, Pretextos, Valencia, Spain, 2000.

⁴ J. Valeros, Personal communication.

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articulated, in an underground rhizome of convergent and divergent nets.⁵ This rhizome is so intricate that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate in it the facts coming from memory from the effect of productive creation⁶ –were it not for the repetition incurred by the former. This effect has been called *transference* by psychoanalysis.⁷ In transference, there is a current production of facts articulated between the past and the present, between memory and experience. Today, we conceive of it not only as the repetition of accumulated memories,⁸ but also as the procreation of current effects articulated with the patient's history. These effects give rise, in the here-and-now of the analytic session, to an experience, a history and a future expectation, in a triple production that is both simultaneous and divergent. This does not mean that the traditional analytical concept of the current re-edition of the past should be abolished; instead, it should be reaffirmed and supplemented within a perspective illuminating several elements that take part in the current effect of the transference, which is always the focus of the cure and of the analytical devices.⁹

But the acknowledgement of the present should not deflect the analysts from the goal of their work. When we say that transference is a current situation, we are not implying that it belongs to the perceptual, objective and quantifiable world. Playing is an occurrence, a current activity developed in the present.¹⁰ Its ludic effect comes alive in a unique space. While we can see the results of playing in laughter or in the participant's concentration or emotional commitment when he/she play seriously, we cannot describe what happens there without denature it. What is ludic, transferential and meaningful is, by its own nature, actual; but its actuality has the space and time of hermeneutics, and its scope falls beyond the space and time of physical events. In order to observe and describe its nature, we must resort to other approaches to space and time, those characterized by the deferred action (the *Nachtraglichkeit*)¹¹ and the virtuality of all experiences that turn around meaning.

The actuality of any play is developed with the material support of toys and games, and of a specific place and space. It makes little difference that it is played with toys or with words, that it consist in playing or in associating, that there is a verbal interchange or a graphic one with

⁵ W. Bion, *Learning from Experience*, Karnac, London, 1962.

⁶ Deleuze and Guatari, *op. cit.*

⁷ Freud, S., "Dinámica de la transferencia", *Obras completas*, Amorrortu editores, Buenos Aires, 1979.

⁸ Freud, S., "Recordar, repetir y reelaborar", *Obras completas*, *op. cit.*

⁹ Freud, S., "Análisis fragmentario de una histeria. Epílogo", *Obras completas*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Freud, S., *La interpretación de los sueños*, Ch. 7, b), *Obras completas*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Freud, S., "Proyecto de una psicología para neurólogos", *Obras completas*, *op. cit.*

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drawings and colours, that it take place on a couch, on a piece of paper, or on the floor of the playroom. In each and every case, the play can or cannot be performed, or there might be analysis or resistance, according to the adventurous disposition of the parts. The material support includes, in the first place, the analyst, who takes part in the play with his/her own person and presence, strengths and weaknesses, talent and mediocrity; who sees the analytic-ludic at a distance so as to be able to sustain it, and contaminates with his/her own neurosis and difficulties the space for adventure. The person and presence of the analyst is the terrain on which the space for playing is inscribed and delimited, and where the availability to sustain transference is given and taken. Without that availability, transference is nothing but a wild experience; it is no more helpful than a biological repetition. Analysts must know they usually resist to accept their being a toy to be used. In trying to comply with the rule of abstinence, that is undoubtedly their greatest challenge. To accept being a toy is to accept having an almost impersonal role, that of a mere toy that takes part in the play and holds that attributed meaning. Analysts leave that role each time they interpret from the viewpoint of a foreign nobody, a Greek chorus who in telling the facts gives its own version by combining the repetitions, transformations and productions made during the play.

This material support is (or should be) able to represent the ludic productions developed in the course of playing – what emerges and what is invoked, what is remembered and what is created –, without resisting¹² that which must be represented. At that point of articulation, there is a solid merge between what is represented and its representing material support. Clearly, a cloth blown here and there by the wind is not useful to represent a solid ground to tread on, unless that cloth is a magic carpet. Also, a sword can hardly represent a nutritious object, unless it can be used to cut and open a nourishing fruit. These images throw some light on the welding between the meaning and its material support, its channel and its technical underpinning. To be sure, it is in that welding that happens what is less transmissible of a psychoanalytic session, what we call "the conditions of its evidence". Freud said there is no way to transmit the conviction one gets during an analysis. It is as difficult as to transmit the funny feelings provoked by a well-told joke, or the magic of a play... The effect takes place within a virtuality that can only be experienced by engaging in the event. The main problem is that this engagement must fill some requirements: to be present is not enough. One has to stake and to risk something personal. This risk makes the difference between the bureaucratic parody of a presence and the

¹² J. Valeros, "La coerción: problemas de técnica en el psicoanálisis de niños", *Psicoanálisis*, 7: 3, 517-551, APdeBA, Buenos Aires, 1985.

adventurous commitment in which one runs the risk in order to become, in the course of the experience, someone different from what one was before. Only when these conditions are fulfilled, a joke, a play or a psychoanalytic session may have an effective result.

The contract and the rules of the game

The points agreed upon in the contract to play a game – whether it will be played here or there, now or then, alone or together with some other person, during a shorter or a longer period, only today or tomorrow too – should be differentiated from the conditions related to the material support of the game. The latter includes things that always exist – and must exist – but are affected in their way of being by the ups and downs of the game and the meanings produced in its course. In this sense, I think that the actual psychoanalysts contracting a treatment – who have their own modalities and usages, and stage in the sessions their real person, their age, gender, experience, address, available time, cost – should be distinguished from the analysts that, being present in the session, in the game of creation and of transparent meanings, take the role of an underpinning supporting everything that is played there and everything welded to their presence. In this second stance, their presence depends on the welding effects between what is played and what they play, between the transparent meanings adjudicated to them and what they create or what is produced within them. It is a weld between an opaque support and the transparency that illuminates it, between the cloth and the picture, but also between the picture and what it represents. The effect is then an interaction turning alive, in the novelty of a current creation, a transparent meaning that comes from the past, or from what never happened. Once it happens, once it actually lives, its emotional evidence has a weight of its own, becomes a fact one can take recourse to, a fact one can remember or one may long to retrieve. It is a produced object. It may be a house built with little toy bricks, a spinning top, a narrated dream, a particular session, a phrase, a word, a dead squirrel drawn on a sheet of paper, a look of the analyst at the end of a session, a way of crying, a journey, a voice inflection. That object is unique. Something got welded in it, and from that moment on, it became a monument, an attesting witness of what happened or was experienced. In a kind of psychical stenography, patient and analyst refer to it in order to save words, though mainly as a commonplace they appeal to in order to reach a consensus.

The analyst bears the same weld and has for a long time a character and meaning (idealized or persecutory, relieving or blameful, liberating or enslaving) that will not be easy for him/her to get rid of. The certitude that is placed upon him/her has a history and can be dated to

a certain moment of the analytic game. This certitude is placed upon his/her person and in his/her presence, and arises from an actual act, from one experience developed in the transference. That blending of a particular meaning to the figure of the analyst anticipates that the analytic process will deal with it during more or less long periods, and it may either have beneficial effects or give rise to severe obstacles and resistances to the working through before giving in to the interpretative strategy.

The model proposed by Melanie Klein when studying Ruth Kjær's life¹³ may be helpful to throw light on this issue. In the same way that a stain may appear on a wall when a framed picture is taken down, there is only a mark there, an indication that something has been propped against the wall. That stain is in the exact place, but now there is nothing except a blurred, vague image, the outline of the frame, an open cell to be filled. A meaning or a series of meanings that have never before been there may however emerge, and then it seems that they have always been, and that it is perfectly logical that they emerge in that wall, in that session, with that analyst.

The analytic game as a frame of experience

The open cell lays there in order to reflect something that belongs to the patient's person, to his/her self and history. It must be stressed, however, that between the reflection and the insight there can be a big difference. That reflection is alien in that though it tells what it has to tell, it does it from an outside place. We are both stricken by what that place shows and convinced by the powerful message it transmits. This product is a dual version. On the one hand, it tells to what is reflected in it: "You are this, thus you are seen, and thus you see yourself." On the other hand, it tells: "You are this; I am not you and can tell you so." Luigi Pirandello explored

¹³ M. Klein, "Infantile anxiety reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse" (1929), in *Love, guilt and reparation*, Hogarth Press, London, 1975. Among other subjects, M. Klein deals here with Ruth Kjær's drawing "of her mother on the blurred, vague shades of a wall" during her mourning process. We borrow this anecdote only as a visual model in order to describe the weld between the transparent meaning and the support. As Ole Olsen has explained in "Depression and reparation as themes in Melanie Klein's analysis of the painter Ruth Weber" (*The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 2004, 27, pp. 34-42) that painting actually is the picture entitled *Josephine Baker*, drawn in 1928 by a successful woman painter who used the pseudonym of Ruth Weber. It is a charcoal drawing of a nude woman sit on a bed, looking at a vase placed on a window sill at the right of the observer. For more details, see H. Madsen, *Malerinden Ruth Weber*, Nordisk Literatur Forlag, Odense, 1968, and especially K. Michäelis, "Der leere Fleck", *Berliner Tagblatt*, March 24, 1929.

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this return of one's self-image when he contrasted the theatrical actor's experience with that of the movie's actor, who sees himself reflected on the screen. The film actor is estranged by the strange person he meets there, so close to him and so alien at the same time. The forceful strangeness of one's reflected self-image is an observable fact and, as such, it outweighs the inner vision. And it is the more forceful since it is not presented by a mechanical device –say, a mirror or a recorder – but by a human being invested by a desire and moved, in his/her turn, by a desire. That randomness frames the analyst as a presence, whether he/she knows it or not, and his/her interpretation will be made from that place.

Curiously enough, a strange, relentless emotional effect pervades the analyst – that shade on the wall – after that and surrounds him/her with a unique aura. His/her exceptional value makes that subjective production something unique, especial, and irreplaceable. The welding has been so strong that from then on the transparent meaning and the support go always hand in hand. As a valuable Renaissance fresco, it is extracted, transported and deposited in another place together with the wall on which it has been painted. From that moment on, it belongs to the wall; it belongs to the body and person of the analyst. Its replacement by a copy is never good enough; the copy may transmit an approximate idea, may reflect the meaning of the original, but it never has the force of its aura.¹⁴

In the same way, the analysts carry with them that mark: the transference residue remains in them in spite of their efforts to get rid of it in interpreting. Freud would say that that viscosity leaves a history-making trace. New ways of working through, new derivative ways are built upon it, half-way from something of the past that was repeated, half-way to something produced in that body, in that toy, in that analyst. Although the interpretation has the effect of unbinding the transparency from its support, the effect is not immediate, and the delay is important. A double view of the toy, very needed for the working through, is based on it. The toy is and is not what is predicated of it. It has the whole emotional force of the original (re)presentation and the whole virtuality of being just a toy. In its double face, a play of repetitions and transformations is enacted through which personal pain is articulated within a playful story and history. Finally, the story is known, the toy is forgotten; it is thrown into the lumber room and gets mixed with other pieces of junk. There remains, however, the vague feeling that something original has happened in it or with it, that could not have happened with any other thing. That aura dimension of the toy and of the analyst generates some very peculiar,

¹⁴ W. Benjamin, “La obra de arte en la era de su reproducibilidad técnica”, *Discursos interrumpidos*, Editorial Planeta, Buenos Aires.

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individual emotional effects. It is not only a result but the cause of some other emotional effects. It not only invokes transparent meanings, but is also productive because of its opaque presence, of the fact of its being an experienced fact, of its being welded to an experience. In the first place, we have the effect of the weld between the transparency and the support; in the second place, it is a cause that starting from the here-and-now of the transference generates emotional effects in the future course of that psychoanalysis.

What is presented there? First, the transparent meaning of that which has been represented at that place, the practical reference of that representation, what is traditionally called the "transference projection." Second, the practical, material presence of the analyst acting as a support, as the canvas of the painting. Third, the talented or mediocre capturing that took place: the artist and the creative effect of his/her look placing a definite representation there. Finally, there is something else beyond what has been positively represented: a frame, a cell, a space, either deliberately produced or found by chance, as that stain on the wall, that spinning top, that dream, that sympathetic voice one believes to have heard. That cell is an outline¹⁵ containing in itself an unexpected actual occurrence that emerges at a certain moment, when it is opened.¹⁶ The content of the outline gives rise to many simultaneous phenomena and is the result of the condensation of converging networks. In Chabert's report on his patient Blanca, they converge in the story entitled "Piel de asno" (The ass's skin) and in many an anecdote about the girl's life and transference. In that case, and in general, the unexpected event is an echo of a series of stories, anecdotes, events that never happened, dreams, things we have been told, or we have imagined, or we did not even believe we were going to think. That diverse material comes together at the outline, as the sudden recalling of her dead mother by Ruth Kjär when she was near the picture that had been there but was taken down, near the love of life that had also been there but then was lost in depression, near the hope turned into cynicism. Those networks converge and resonate in that mother now living on that wall, in that charcoal smudge made in a hurry, with an urgent need of producing a mother so as to calm the strange, indefinable longing of producing further.

The analytical experience proves that after that smudge is placed within an outline, something changes. Knowing Ruth Weber's true story, we cannot say today that she left all her crying behind and took a new approach to her existence. However, the example of Ruth Kjär is

¹⁵ C. Mogueillansky, "El papel del contorno en la representación", 2006 (unpublished).

¹⁶ C. Chabert, C., "Presentación de un caso clínico", *Psicoanálisis*, APdeBA, 12: 3, 517, 1991. (Originally published in *Journal de la Psychanalyse de L'Enfant*, 7, 1989.)

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helpful to indicate that when in the course of an analysis something must be on that wall, actually it is never there, or is never there forever. Nonetheless, one must try and do something in painting with that which was produced there,¹⁷ must go on playing with that created toy until the ludic experience is finished. According to the mythical Kleinian case example, in that smudge, or outline, the patient's congealed mourning met with her need to find a place for her dead mother within the logic of pictures hanged and took down, lent and returned, and also painted... so that what had been irremissibly lost, fixed to the mother, could be incorporated to a circuit of comings and goings, and of productions that "put Ruth in a different position" as regards herself, her mourning and her pain. We could say that that mythical process was a working through, it had a beginning and then it was deployed before the dumb presence of the wall –a necessary but at the same time ludicrous wall, a diluted but very valuable wall.¹⁸

But the model of the wall, however helpful has been to us until now, loses part of its value when we consider that the analysts do not offer themselves in that same way. Their desire is to be analysts in that process. The interchange with the patient generated by the analyst's availability goes beyond receiving or including some content within a cell.¹⁹ In that interchange, the mutual desire to be desired of the two participants in the relationship (patient and analyst) is articulated. It is apt to distribute several human positions in which both interlocutors notice that the other, subject as he/she is to its humanness, responds from another place. It is this lack of certainty as regards the other; this needed calculation, this eternal surprise when he/she responds, what makes the difference between a human transaction and any other affective relationship, and what has rightly deserved the former the name of "bond." The patient and the analyst take part in a bond in which both engender some novelty with their interventions in a word-and-action play flowing in circles, in spirals, in progressions, accepting some meaning and usage conventions, being repetitive, transforming the already lived events, and producing adventurous experiences.

These four dimensions of human experience allow us to find the analysts' locus and the availability of their presence as selves, as human persons that offer their ability to desire and be desired. The analytic setting demands that the analyst's presence follow some rules derived from functioning relevance, the rules that have demonstrated their usefulness for the development of

¹⁷ H. Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, Routledge, London, 1992.

¹⁸ H. Segal, "A psychoanalytical approach to aesthetics", in *The Works of Hanna Segal*, FAB, London, 1952, pp. 185-2005.

¹⁹ M. Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Gallimard, Paris, 1969.

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an analysis. Two conditions of the analyst's presence are the rule of abstinence and the freely floating attention, both of which are simultaneously limiting and orienting as to what, when, how and where can the analyst as such be a creator. The analyst should be quite aware of the impact of his/her presence, which evokes, produces, and causes new effects. To limit this to the perceptual listing of his/her gender, age, personal characteristics and personality is to close off the inquiry to these more subtle facts I am trying to emphasize, quite often involved in the deviant course of an analysis.

What is there in that presence? Is it an object or an effect? That forceful, needed presence has led many people to think that it is actually an object,²⁰ a veiled, unseen object, fallen from view, and so hardly objective that it does not seem to be worthy of that name. Why not think it could be a meaningful effect, a positive, actual, current fact insisting in its cause of significances?²¹

Key words: acting out, toy, working through, playing techniques.

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²⁰ J. Lacan, *Seminario de la angustia* (1962-63), Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2006.

²¹ G. Deleuze, *La lógica del sentido*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2007.

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Summary

This paper refers to the analyst's function in his analytical position. His role is to act like a toy open to the patient's meanings. In his task, at first, he is an actor who takes part for a while in the subjective life of the patient. Later, he gives him a narrative record of the facts, like a Greek chorus. This way, he deploys three important functions: a) as a toy, he let the analytic playing gains the sense of the acting out; b) by playing, he let this sense become different transformed meanings and finally, c) by relating, he helps the patient to make a history with these meanings