Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytical Field: the experience of alterity

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Abstract
Freud postulated that going through “an experience of the unconscious” is the only possible way of becoming an analyst.
Psychoanalysis is a method, an asymmetric device that carries in its core the seed of the interplay of relationships of which this experience consists. It is a novel form of social link that promotes the experience of radical alterity.
The countertransference and the topic of the person and the presence of the analyst are discussed together with the notion of position in the device and the “desire of the analyst” as an engine for the cure.
An interpretation is accurate when it produces effects, has consequences, re-launches the process.
The experience is extreme and interior, can not be authorized by any previous knowledge since all knowledge has been questioned, and becomes primordial, its creator. The result that arises from this is that the analyst is only authorized by him/herself, that is: because of the experience of alterity in which he/she is constituted as such.

Keywords: Experience, Unconscious, Alterity, Device

From the beginning of psychoanalysis Freud had to deal with the demand of communicating and sharing with his colleagues the results of his practice of approach of the neurosis. He revealed the analysis of his own dreams and the dreams of others, he displayed multiple examples of the
psychopathology of everyday life, he published case histories and text commentaries in which he showed his discoveries in action, in his writings and conferences.

He described in detail the fundamental rule of the procedure he created and he gave advice to those who wanted to develop its practise.

It then results paradoxical that all this enormous effort to ensure the transmission of his discoveries, were not sufficient to prepare his followers and generate in them the conviction of the efficacy and truthfulness of the arguments on which he based his explanations.

Nevertheless, from the beginning, he always remits to the analysis of his own dreams as a source of evidence, support and reinforcement of the convictions he acquired.

Later this recommendation turned into a suggestion or instruction of the need to “experience of the unconscious”, taking the place of an analysand with an ‘experienced’ analyst.

This path, that carries hints of a rite of passage, will become the only possible way of becoming an analyst, that is to say: having been an analysand, having traversed the experience of the unconscious.

Freud’s creation, his invention, is a method, a device that carries in itself the germ of the relational interplay of which this experience consists.

This device, structured according to a fundamental rule that orders precise operations for each of the determined positions: free association for the analysand, and free floating attention and abstinence (which is not the equivalent of neutrality and much less of passivity) for the analyst, organizes a form of interlocution that is not a dialogue.

Nevertheless it is an experience in words, it reports what is going on when someone is talking with another, when he/she address him/her with what he/she is talking, in very special conditions, particular to the
specificity of the analytic experience, constituting a new form of social
link.
The aim of free association is not to inform or communicate, but to
facilitate the emergence of the “unknown knowledge”, one way in which
Freud named the unconscious.
The feasibility of free association, its operative capacity, depends on
abandoning goals, “meta representations” in Freudian terminology, which
would lead the associative process to a predetermined end.
The role of these representations is that of ideals towards which one tends
to. When they appear a joint sharing of them arises, and that in itself
operates as a resistance. For this reason the analyst has to move away
from that position, he/she must avoid occupying it, but committing the
“slyness” of converting the lack of goal into a goal: this is not about not
expecting anything, but of not knowing what is expected, which comes as
a surprise sanctioned by the analyst with his/her interpretation.
The analyst, to allow this, has to be positioned in the place determined by
the devise: the place of the Other. From this position only, will he/she be
able to respond to what he/she will understand as the unknown
knowledge, in the account he is given for being in that place.
Addressed to him/her is: “a discourse as a form of giving oneself to the
Other”, as Roland Barthes asserts. That what the analysand gives in
his/her associations as a truth of him/herself that he/she ignores or does
not recognize, entails a chain, it is something articulated in the demand
involved in the discourse. What is not articulated by the subject is the
unconscious desire. This is articulated in his/her demand.
Therefore: unknown knowledge, unconscious desire or the discourse of
the Other, lead as formulations to something of the articulated order
(structured as a language) and not to the realm of emotions, the affects or
ineffable experiences which Freud already said did not belong to the unconscious.

At the same time, the analysand addresses the Other with a narrative of love. Since he/she assumes that he/she has knowledge about the mystery of his/her symptom, he loves him: libidinal axis, measure of transference love.

Freud denied that this love was an artifice, it is as authentic as any other, and it will nevertheless turn the transference, crux of love and knowledge, into what is specific to psychoanalysis as a path, a road to follow that has no model in real life. A new kind of social link has to be thought of, a new discourse that Lacan would later express in formulations.

In this relational interplay the experience of the unconscious is possible if, and only if, the analyst is in his/her position (the one the device establishes) and from there responds by interpreting. From this point of view, the analyst forms part of the concept of unconscious.

The structure of the device itself establishes conditions of asymmetry for its operation, advising the analyst not to be a subject, and this abstinence rules out any form of inter-subjectivity.

To feel ones way in the interpretations, he/she will have to be listening attentively to what is addressed to him/her, trying to identify hesitations of meaning, ambiguities, inconsistencies, misunderstandings that fragment the coherence and continuity of the narrative, so as to bring “an Other reading” to what has been said.

The emergence of this Other reading is what makes the perceptions ominous, and what disrupts the complacency of meaning, it is what gives an experience of alterity.

Submerged in this verbal experience that is the listening in the transference, the analyst pays attention at the same time to the effects this
listening has on him/herself, the ways in which one is affected by the transference one has to sustain: what one feels, what comes to ones mind or what it evokes, what one, unaware of it, could be lead to act.

The term analyst being affected as such is what has been theorized under the name of countertransference. Effects of the discourse comparable to what emerges in the listening, can be used, to construct an interpretative formulation, but no immediacy, ostensible evidence or certainty has to be expected in the analysand’s discourse.

In the debates on countertransference what comes into play are to a great extent ideas and not phenomena.

In my view, considering this “being affected by” with the idea of countertransference (which I insist, is not “what is happening” but a an idea) and moreover to consider it being on a same level as the transference, that is: postulating the pair transference-countertransference, leads to present the practise and interventions of the analyst at a level of reciprocity that is confusing with respect to an exchange that, as I expressed before, is asymmetric in its structure.

Parallel to these discussions is the issue of the analyst’s personality: his/her characteristics or particular features, tastes, preferences, ideals, prejudices, political or religious convictions, etc. and the impact these would have on the procedure. This is usually in opposition to the notion of “presence”, that “being there” of the analyst in the device, in tension precisely because of the personal features that have to be subtracted from the interchange with the analysand.

This means that the orientation of the analyst in his/her practise does not derive from aspects of ones individual personality, but from having traversed the experience of ones unconscious in ones training analysis. The analyst is not “born”; his/her resources do not stem from his/her
inborn capacity or talent. If this would not be so, why embark oneself in an analysis?

Preserving one's position in the device is always in tension with what is intrinsically opposed to it, turning it fragile and unstable: the analyst's resistance. In its ambiguity, Lacan postulated that it is the only type of resistance.

Thus this position has to be maintained and recovered every time as a desiring position. It is dependent on a resolution, a decision sustained by what Lacan called the analyst’s desire.

This notion postulating the existence of a “stronger desire” is based on the platonic idea that the death wish is the strongest of all the wishes, since it is the one that keeps the souls in Erebus holding them there.

If the analyst stays and operates in his/her place, it is because what keeps him/her is a stronger desire than the temptations that draw him/her away from it.

The source, the origin of the analyst’s good practice stems from a guiding desire, and not from the ideas one believes sustain it. One’s position is maintained predominantly by one’s desire more than by one’s beliefs. Lacan postulates that a practice does not need to be enlightened to work effectively.

This stronger desire depends on the effects of the cure on the field of desire, a change happens, a mutation in the field’s economy.

The stronger desire, the “good desire”, emerges through withdrawing the adhesion to pleasure (the oedipal signifiers for Freud) as a result of the cure on the neurotic desire, the desire of the analysand.

The desire of the analyst, when it is not neurotic, is less subject to the rigidities of pleasure, and operates as an engine for the cure. Divested from the pleasure of the oedipal repetitions, one can be receptive to the
novelty of other encounters, preserving an enigmatic dimension that allows receiving the “otherness”, the alien, and recognizing it, sanctioning it as such, without reducing it to one’s self, to the familiar. There is a need for what some analysts formulate as tolerance or even courage in order to take in what is foreign, strange, the Other that “traumatizes”. Together with the ability to retain what is not understood and to respond re-inventing and preserving at the same time, the mystery, the radical otherness, that protects the singularity of the analysand. It has to be avoided that this singularity be engulfed in a universal knowledge, even in an ideal of authenticity that would lock him/her up in an identity with nothing left that suppresses the Other. On the contrary, aiming to allow the subject to find in the Other of himself an opportunity.

Because of this economic mutation in the desiring field, the desire of the analyst is not satisfied, like in the neurotic, with the appeasement that identifications bring. The manner in which the analyst is involved in the transference is not by identification. This enables him/her to operate in the first person, without copying or reproducing a model that legitimates him/her, although not leaving completely aside the determinations of his own ways.

Lacan’s formula provides: “less allocation of authority. More confidence to invoke the personal in the practice”, he emphasizes the confidence that can only stem from “the experience of the unconscious” the only thing that is constituent of an analyst.

Summing up: an analyst maintains a position (as such relative to others): his/her being of the devise, sustained by a desire that is the result of having gone through the constituting experience.
Different questions attempt to narrow down the results of maintaining the position of the analyst. One of these is: when is an interpretation accurate?

Answer: when it produces effects (echoes, waves, resonances). i.e.: when it has consequences. Associative sequences as the only way to verify the efficacy of an interpretation. Associations are produced, the process is re-launched.

The interpretation does not limit itself to unmask hidden pre-existent meanings, in an effort to make the world transparent. It consist in a strategy for the production of new symbolisms, the creation of imaginaries that construct new meanings, in struggle with others which in their inertia maintain what in place of semblants and by way of repetition resists the re-writing of the act of enunciation.

The interpretation is not a tool to arrive at the ultimate truth, it does not pretend to describe reality, but transform it. The notion of praxis is upheld by the idea that the interpretation is an instrument of criticism, bringing about a crisis of identifications which tend to consolidate in the inertia of certainty.

The process that interpretations promote, a series of transformations that the analyst by means of his/her presence and action in the device puts into motion, is not something that stays under his/her absolute control.

Freud compares it with the role of men during fertilization and pregnancy: they start something that then continues following its own laws.

This is about not hindering the process: not encouraging resistance.

These operations in which the analyst “de-subjectivises” him/herself, he/she removes him/herself as a subject to become the transference object, puts into motion what is proposed as a treatment, a cure,
something that involves a therapeutic outcome. If the latter would not exist, why would one undertake the psychoanalytic adventure?
That leads to a second question about effectiveness: how does this experience cure?
Some psychoanalytic schools of thought’s usual answer translates the “make the unconscious conscious” into a process of knowledge of Socratic-maieutic roots: know thyself.
However the interpretation does lead to the imaginary effect of completeness, completion by acquisition of a new “self knowledge” suggested by the idea of insight.
On the contrary, the recognition of the emergence of the unconscious produces subjective division, perplexity. Who talked? Who enunciates that which arises in the associations? Perplexity that drives the analysand to work, more than a sense of having reached enlightenment.
On the other hand, “insight” is not a term that comes up in the Freudian vocabularies, and it is not clear what the German meaning is in the few occasions in which it appears in the Standard Edition as part of a description.
Therefore the experience does not seem to be an instrument to achieve an end (e.g. self-knowledge), but an end in itself.
It is neither something that aims for something else, i.e. ordered according to ideals to achieve. Freud warns us: the ideal of the cure (furor sanandi) works in the same way as any ideal proposed as an aim, as mentioned before, as a resistance in the development of the process.
In this case it is not the achieved–ideal?- result that counts, but whether it has been arrived to through an analytic process.
There is something in the process itself, in the pursuit of the analytic work that is curative, that transforms the analysand.
This is what the expression “the cure results on top of it” tries to convey, i.e. it happens through this process, and it is hindered if it is sought frontally and in a premeditated way.

Finally thoughts with respect to the cure: what is sought as cure is not the complete suppression of the symptoms, as it happens in the medical model that tends to a “restitution ad integrum” of a state of normality or proposed health, but the passage from neurotic misery to ordinary hardship, the part that corresponds to us in the ineradicable discontents of our culture.

One does not start the psychoanalytic experience divided, split, to come out of it integrated, unified by the knowledge provided by insight. Melanie Klein herself pointed out the restrictions of the integrative process.

The aim is to produce a subject who can perceive his/her splitting, that which he/she “carries in the fog” and that constitutes his/her frailty. He/she should “know what do to about it”, narrate it, well-talk about it, do something so that the frailty becomes speech.

The symptom is also a specific form of satisfaction: the sexual life of the neurotic.

We understand as therapeutic effect the analytic work that modifies these forms of satisfaction, these modalities of pleasure.

In conclusion: psychoanalysis should alter, transform, and have an effect on the sexual life of the analysands.

This does not mean that the unknown of the knowledge, the unconscious, disappears. It persists as the “incurable” leftover of the analytic work.

In this word experience in the field of language, which is what psychoanalysis consists of, two operations develop simultaneously: on the one hand, the need to lodge that leftover, which is a castoff and at the
same time a limit of the articulated knowledge. This is a task that tests the analyst ability to retain, to register without understanding.

On the other hand, as said before, there is a need to dislodge any meta-representations which as an ideal order the associative developments to reach a deductible, calculable end-result. This puts to the test the conviction of the analyst to exercise the rule of abstinence. This conviction only develops with his/her own analysis.

From this perspective the experience of the unconscious, involves the tension between two relational modalities of the talking person with language in the order of alterity.

For this reason the developments of different authors from different disciplines, philosophy, literary criticism, sociology, art history, on the notion of experience are extremely illustrative.

All of them have in common that they take as a starting point for their views the relationship of human beings with language. A relationship where the ‘infants”, the living being, becomes human in the process of developing into a talker, user of the mother tongue, when he/she is included in the order of the discourse that precedes and conditions him/her, over-determining him/her.

These approaches explain the tension generated and maintained between the original relationship of the “infans” with language and what has been called: purposive rational action. The latter postulates an understanding of language as informative, as an instrument which in a dominant gesture tends to reduce the diversity of things into the unifying and objectifying work of the concept, producing an articulated world view from this functional and pragmatic version of language.

Seen in this light, language operates as a conceptual engine disdainful of the narrative and sensitive dimensions of experience. The latter then
remains restricted as an experiment ruled at the empirical level by a mathematical articulated language that reduces the singularity to the particular case of an engulfing totality. That postulates what is necessary and universal as an ultimate metaphor of the course of the subject in the scientific era. This era defines a new understanding of experience in modernity.

This way of understanding language contrasts with the experience of the “infans” that establishes a relationship with things tending to own the diversity of the world, without subjecting this diversity to the rule of unity of meaning. A relationship of the language and the objects that interweaves with them, without an empirical reduction that would place them as part of an assembly line, as functional resources of the system, but instead preserves the resonances of their given name, their originality, their irreplaceable quality.

As a reflection of this relationship of the “infans” with the world what is described is the child’s out of step walking, with no specific course, nor tied to a purpose that forces him/her to predetermined routes, akin to the experience of the “flaneur”, allowing to be carried away by improvisation and chance, discovering meaningfulness in the unexpected, in what appears suddenly in its particularity, but allowing to throw light upon the structure of an existence.

The fundamental rule aims to reproduce the conditions of this relationship of the “infans” with language, by tending to establish free association and its flow not subject to a goal. There something is not reached by a purposeful search but by surrendering to the flow, so as to gain access to the hidden labyrinths of the narrative of the analysand, and then only partially revealed.
Hermetic and at the same time true word that has the power to change one’s life, giving admission to truth play, language play with the potency that the word acquires when it is revealing, a caesura in the midst a particular associative sequence.

The language play, that materializes the aforementioned surrender to the flow, is the language of the child that starts to use words. The child talks in the same way as it plays, he/she puts his/her language into play. This does not mean that the infantile language is paradigmatic for all language, but that the beginning of the child’s language occurs in the form of play.

This experience of language that the free association, not without resistance, establishes, intends to modify the present, not by a ‘progressive’ path that transforms it into a projected ideal to which it has to adapt (“one that would give a satisfactory response to the needs of future generations”), but by the path of regression that would allow gathering the unsatisfied dreams from the past. In them, in what has still not been uttered, that awaits in the midst of the unutterable, in the unborn, lies a hope of a future that does not have to be confused with a promise of happiness.

The experience of the unconscious as a gateway to this radical alterity, highlights the features with which the definition of experience has been attempted: extreme and interior.

Extreme because it sheds some light on what happens when a subject makes the decision (not always consciously, and the decision could also be not made) to radically cast doubts, advancing to the extreme of the possible, beyond the established knowledge. Traversing the level of identifications in which he/she recognizes him/herself. In this extreme experience there is a renunciation of one-self, a questioning of one’s being in order to establish a new being. Passion for negating, which is
neither scepticism nor methodical doubt, but trust in the vastness of creation.

Interior, not for being subjective, individual or taking place in a dimension of internal worlds, but: interior in itself, since only in its own midst can one capture “the irreducible unity of the set of different operations: intellectual, aesthetic, moral, that the discursive thought must discern, but which are inseparable for the experience strictly speaking” These qualities mean that the experience can not be authorized by any previous knowledge since all knowledge has been questioned, but then the experience becomes primordial, its creator.

The result that arises from this is that the analyst is only authorized by him/herself, that is: because of the experience of alterity in which he is constituted as such.

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