

Psychoanalysis and me

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When I started my personal therapeutic analysis and my training to become a psychoanalyst, the world was very different. The internet was a universe only accessible to a few, mobile phones had just appeared, and social media was not yet a topic of conversation. Information was spread through the radio, newspapers, or television; and the in-depth studies were conducted in libraries. As students, we were equipped with photocopies and handouts, the most we could. Books were expensive. They still are.

I don't know if the world was better or worse... I believe it was worse. It's an illusion to think that a hurried society is an invention of today. It isn't. It was already like this back then. There just wasn't as much information. Today we know everything! And that's a good thing! The problem is that knowledge, on its own, doesn't cure human distress. But it was already like this back then. None of this is Google's invention, nor Facebook's, Twitter's, or Instagram's. We have more information, yes, and perhaps we are subject to a more constant bombarding of promises of happiness and instant solutions. With this we might have to be careful, it's true. But critical thinking has always been necessary. Even in the past. The danger of quickly and easily adhering to disseminated information has always been a reality.

When I chose psychoanalysis, I knew, in a way, that I was choosing the longest route. But I preferred not to rush. I cared about myself and wanted that to happen with the help of someone else. In doing so, I didn't want to be self-sufficient. That said, when I started my personal therapeutic analysis, I had already thought so much about myself that there was no doubt that what I had yet to know wouldn't come through thinking alone. It came, as I later learned, through experience. Through the experience of revealing myself in a relationship – a relationship with my psychoanalyst – a therapeutic relationship; but a relationship nonetheless. It is for this reason that psychoanalysis isn't a quick process. It depends on the establishment of a relationship, because what needs to be healed arises in the context of that relationship. What we already know and what we don't know both exist within us.

I take this opportunity to pay a small tribute to my first analyst, José Carlos Coelho Rosa, with whom I ventured into knowing myself and in discovering my treasures and my

demons. To him, who recently passed away and whom I already miss so much, I offer my deepest gratitude.

Before starting the process – I will be calling the psychoanalytic treatment a “process”, since, as you know, that’s what it is; anyone expecting an end will be disappointed, because a process, by definition, has no end... But, as I was saying, before starting the process, we already know certain things about ourselves. We know about our pain, our distress, our symptoms, our concerns. We distrust the relationship patterns we establish with others, and we suffer because of them. We have some ideas of what lies behind our suffering, and that is exactly where the analysis begins: in the ideas we have about ourselves, even if we later realize we weren’t entirely right... And there are some things we only come to realize by living them with our psychoanalyst. It is not the thinking that changes us. What changes us is the lived experience, here and now. The thinking comes afterward, in the time we need to integrate what we figured out through experience. Anyone holding onto ideas of perfection for themselves should them go, it’s impossible to be that way. It hurts. In the beginning, it hurts. But it heals, it frees us, and it brings us closer to our true selves. The path is not always easy. The reward is having more and more of an authentic life.

We also loose the illusion that we absolutely need this or that to be happy – material goods, wisdom, “a happy romantic relationship”... it is all a lie. None of that makes us happier. Over time, we come to accept that happiness is an ideal, inaccessible, like all others, even though we can’t give up on it... At the cost of mourning, typical of maturation, we learn to accept reality and understand that almost everything we need is within ourselves. We inevitably need to fulfill who we are. Without that. we can’t neither live nor die...

It was this journey of finding myself that made me want to become a psychoanalyst. I sensed it very early on, still in my times as a college student, which is why I decided to begin my personal analysis at that time.

Another person I encountered right from the beginning was António Coimbra de Matos. With him, I took my first steps in psychoanalytic clinical practice, and with him also, I became myself. For many years, he was my main reference.

Early on, I understood, to a large extent, that my job as a psychoanalyst would involve helping people end their delusions about themselves. Paradoxical, isn’t it? Someone who, in order to help others, must let pain be felt... Yes. That is one of the biggest differences between psychoanalysis and any other psychotherapy. Psychoanalysis has no solution for human pain, psychoanalysis doesn’t cure symptoms. It helps the human being become more of a human being. And normally, that results in the symptoms disappearing... another paradox... We,

psychoanalysts, are not particularly interested in symptoms, but we end up observing, along the process, their disappearance, almost like magic... But, of course, for that to happen, it is necessary for the person to also lose interest in those symptoms; for the person to be more and more in contact with themselves so that everything else fades into the background. Selfishness? I don't think so. I think that those who benefit from psychoanalysis are not only the patients but also everyone with whom they interact, since it is not possible to genuinely give what we don't have. Being more full of ourselves gives us, without a doubt, more to offer to others.

Psychoanalysis, therefore, more than concerned with the symptomatic apparatus, is concerned with causes, and more than concerned with results, is concerned with the journey. This is why, when the person reaches out to us in a hurry, our first job is to help them understand that their hurry is their main enemy. And then, over time, we build conditions to start the process.

When I began entering this world, there was only one type of psychoanalysis: the classic Freudian psychoanalysis, even if included some derivatives. This psychoanalysis was aimed at the profound, at individuals already established as mature people who had decided to dive into the unconscious with guidance. Like any other psychoanalyst at that time, I also graduated in Freudian's school. However, from early on, I got interested in Donald Winnicott's studies. For many years, I walked that path alone, but in 2013, thanks to Irene Borges Duarte, I came across Elsa Oliveira Dias, Zeljko Loparic, and then, the remaining colleagues from IBPW – some of whom are present here at these conference – and I began to have partners and interlocutors of highest quality.

Today, we can say there are many types of psychoanalysis derived from classical psychoanalysis, such as Kleinian, Bionian, or Lacanian, naming only the most well-known. But only one of them offers itself as a new paradigm (as conceived by Loparic) because only one of them subscribes to radically different premises. For the first time, Oedipus stopped being at the center of the comprehension of human phenomena. Before it, there is a whole story involving the human baby from the most primitive stages. It has fallen to our generation of psychoanalysts to witness this huge revolution brought about by Donald Winnicott.

Of course, many other authors also refer the importance of looking at the pre-genital stages. But, one way or another, they also have Oedipus and the classical theory of the psychosexual development as reference. Winnicott is the first to offer us a theory that encompasses the entirety of the instinctual dynamic – the theory of human maturation – but going beyond it, as not everything can be explained by the instinct.

I believe that not even he understood the extent of the change he made. It was also this change that led to the creation of the different Winnicottian associations all around the world. Most of them, much like ours, are integrated into the current IWA (International Winnicottian Association), which I had the honour of founding in May 2013, along with the Brazilian group and the representatives of the other countries present at the time in São Paulo.

This Winnicottian psychoanalysis, in addition to addressing those who have matured in the different kinds of human suffering, also includes those who haven't found a sense of existence. Even if, many times, they are capable of many things in many different areas – sometimes they are extremely intelligent – they lack existential suffering. For them, life doesn't have a unique and personal path. They don't suffer from internal conflicts; they suffer from a lack of connection with the world. Many times, these are the people who arrive in the greatest hurry. They show up with multiple symptoms or because they feel indifferent to living or dying. For them, the classical psychoanalysis, based on introspection, free association of ideas, and interpretation of content, isn't enough. What is needed is a psychoanalysis that favors the *being*, and, in its own time, the pulse of experience. What is needed is a psychoanalysis that addresses not what exists in the depths but what doesn't yet exist in its primitive state.

Therefore, we, as Winnicottian psychoanalysts, are primarily an environment; we are the environment that allows for the experience of the encounter – of the patient with themselves and with the world. We are the environment that facilitates the access to what is the most true within the person and introduces them to relationships with others – or allows them to modify the kinds of relationships that generate illness. Then, once they have found themselves within themselves and discovered the path to become more true to themselves, the world becomes a place worth inhabiting and life one that is worth living, even with all of its pains, losses, and sorrows...

Another important aspect of the Winnicottian approach is the possibility of preventive work, both at the *setting* level and in the level of interaction with various institutions that work with people. And that also interests me a lot.

Working with children, for example, allows for a huge preventive extension, and that is wonderful.

I think parents who have the courage to face their children's suffering are very brave, and in doing so, they help their children enormously, especially if the children are young. Adults have other resources, but children only have their parents (when they do...). This is why it is also necessary to support the parents when they show this courage. Moreover, without their involvement, the child's treatment will always be incomplete. We need to help the parents so

that they can help their children, and we must build a working team with both the child and the parents so that the therapeutic process can be productive.

All of these are discoveries of Winnicottian psychoanalysis. Classical psychoanalysis and its derivatives focused only on the intrapsychic, the environment was not important. As a result, parents were left out of their child's treatment; the less interference, the better. Winnicott brings us beautiful examples of the treatment of children involving their parents, one of them being the marvelous case of Piggie.

Then we also have teenagers. Adolescence is a phase of life in which everything is open. A lot of things that went badly in the past can now be fixed almost spontaneously in the analytical process. The problem is that in adolescence, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are almost "contraindicated". Teenagers need to oppose their parents and adults in general. Therefore, entering therapy is almost felt as submission... We have to be very careful with that. If they don't feel respected, they will not adhere to the treatment. This isn't the same as letting them do only what they want. In addition to needing to be respected, they also need firmness (even if they themselves don't realize this).

The specificity of therapeutic work among different age groups is immense. We are going to have the opportunity to see this not only in the sessions dedicated to each theme but also in those focused on the exposition of the clinical work. I would like to thank the colleagues who made themselves available to bring their cases. It is an immense act of generosity to share our clinical work, because in doing so, we are simply offering who we are. Furthermore, we can only learn from clinical work. It serves no purpose to read books if it doesn't come from what draws us to the clinical work. So, thank you very much. You are the highest point of these journeys.

Moreover, Winnicottian psychoanalysis also applies to the work with families, couples, and groups (we will also have a communication dedicated to this theme). Winnicott brought us the possibility of understanding psychoanalytical intervention in different contexts. This opening allowed us to reach many more people – through the work with institutions, for example – and allowed us a better comprehension of the different environments that involve each person. Each of these topics is a world without end, which is why you shouldn't worry about the future of these journeys...

But going back to my path – because that is what was being asked of me when I wrote the reduced version of this text – what brought me to psychoanalysis, and subsequently, to Winnicottian psychoanalysis, was my interest in everything that pertains to human life. It has

always been a strong desire of mine to understand people's way of functioning – both mine and others'.

I have always been very sensitive to everything that pertains to the meaning of life and to the various distortions shown by human suffering. I remember being interested, since I was very small, in everything related to ways of living and to people's feelings, both in my everyday life, in the books I chose, the movies I watched, or the music I listened to...

For example, a piece that touched me deeply was "Perfume" by Patrick Süskind, which was also adapted into a film (which I also watched). More than being shocked by the character's violence, I wanted to understand how a murderer was built, what lies behind all that inhumanity. Jean-Baptiste – the fifth of a sibling group of stillborns (or babies that survived only a short time) – is born in a shack in the middle of a fish market and, unlike his siblings, survives. The narrator notes that he might have had a different will to live compared to his siblings. He is born into a confusing environment that is unprepared and filled with excessive stimuli, including olfactory ones. From the moment he is born, nothing protects him from this erratic and chaotic environment, which is marked by extreme poverty on many levels.

Without knowing exactly why, his mother placed him on top of a shack. Seeing him from afar, the market-goers presumed she had tried to kill him. Without further explanation, they hanged her, and the baby was left deprived of a mother almost since his birth. Apparently, there is no one to take on the role of substitute mother, and the baby then grows up in an impersonal and totally negligent way. By age 13, he is sold and starts working in a tannery. His obsession with smells becomes evident – the narrator describes him as "greedy" for smells; a glutton for odors.

Personally, it was very important to me feeling – even if at the time I couldn't comprehend the full dimension of the phenomenon as I do today – that what the character searched for so obsessively was a glimmer of contact with his mother, who was lost prematurely. The oldest memory he kept of her, without him even knowing – in a primary bodily register – was brought up by this excess through the odor.

It was this curiosity about what lies beyond human mystery that made me a psychoanalyst. Being a psychoanalyst is far more than something you can learn; it is something inscribed in us, though we don't really know since when. It is almost an inevitability, a destiny. Our greatest gratification in each therapeutic process is witnessing the emergence of what each person truly is.

Because no one is born a murderer, no one is born inhibited, perverted, maniacal, paranoid, or depressed. People aren't born sick. They get sick. Sometimes very early on, as was

the case of the character of this story. What is wonderful in psychoanalysis is precisely this “seeing the person beyond their disease”. No other therapy is capable of this. However, psychoanalysis doesn’t promise quick fixes or miraculous cures... everything is suffered... but there is no price for maturation.

The cure is the resumption of interrupted maturation because what makes us ill is what happened to us – or what should have happened and didn’t – and stopped us from continuing to be ourselves. What makes us ill is what leads us astray from the path of who we are; it is having needed to distort ourselves to survive. What psychoanalysis gives us is the possibility to return to that path – in an accompanied way, of course. Alone, nobody can do it, or at least no one can do it fully.

Most recently, I came across the book *Family Ties* by Clarice Lispector, and I was very interested in the way the characters seem not to belong to themselves, especially in the tales *Love*, *The Rose’s Imitation* and *The Family Ties*. I really like Lispector’s subtle firmness and incisive way of exposing human nature in suffering. Apart from this, I believe art in general, and literature in particular, are a good source of learning for psychoanalysts. And for patients too.

Another example of this is cinema. The movies of Wim Wenders come to mind, for example, whose main concern is precisely the meaning of existence, much like Bergman.

Last month, I wrote a small note on *Perfect Days* in our association’s newsletter, in which I referred to the beauty and simplicity with which the character lived his everyday life. The happiness in the small things, even if at the cost of a simplified world.

It is very interesting how art touches us in such a singular and, at the same time, collective way. It allows us to access things that would be much harder to reach without it. We need to leave life’s objectivity in order to notice the subtleties of which we were made. For this reason, I would like to thank everyone who, through their art, helps us to live better. I take this opportunity to also thank the wonderful pieces of art – which refer us back to Winnicott’s scribbles – generously provided by Rita Pereira Marques, the most artistic amongst us.

Psychoanalysis also takes this path of art, through the hands of painters, musicians, writers. I’d like to take this opportunity to also thank the writers present at these journeys: João Tordo, who will grace us with their opening conference, and Guilherme Henriques, who is bringing us a reflection upon the text of Agostina Bessa Luís, *De Profundis*, in a sharing with our colleague Cláudia Fonseca, who, apart from being a psychoanalyst, is also a storyteller.

But more than integrating art, psychoanalysis is a way for life to also become a place of rest, discovered between the different tasks and hurried moments. It’s a way for life itself to

become a unique artistic moment, because without that, life has no intrinsic value. Life must have value in itself. It cannot depend on the results we are able to achieve. The path must have value on its own. And that is psychoanalysis's job.

And once you have started the analytic process, there is no way it can be interrupted. In cases where there are dropouts, it happens because the process hadn't yet started. Once it does start, it's a one-way journey and with an uncertain destiny. Not that it doesn't have an end. From an objective point of view, it does end, of course. But it never ends in the subjectivity of each person. It becomes part of them. More than that, the process because the person themselves, and vice versa. It is a fascinating journey, even if with its painful stops.

What is most similar to psychoanalysis? Liberty, of course!... The analytic process is profoundly revolutionary! At times, it's the foundation of the self, and there is nothing more revolutionary than that... We, psychoanalysts, are always facing revolutions, our own and our patients'. Because there is no way not to change a little with each change we experience. We are also a part of the process. This is why it's so important for psychoanalysts to also do their own analysis and seek supervision when necessary. There are very difficult cases, and we are also instruments of the analysis itself. It is also recommended to seek out analysis's tranches whenever necessary, either with the same analyst or with another. This was one of Freud's recommendations and remains relevant today. Moreover, we also need to study a lot. We spend our lives studying, and that also doesn't have an end. And no, we are not always analyzing people; that remains confined to the consulting room! Psychoanalysts need to be healthy people, as much as possible. This is why it's important for them to have balanced lives – emotionally, socially, culturally – because that is a source of health. Another important thing is to enjoy this profession. Otherwise, it would be impossible; it makes both the therapist and the patient sick... It is very important to have all of these factors in place since psychoanalysis is governed by the *ethics of care*. In this regard, we must be very strict.

The Portuguese Winnicottian Association, born from the Winnicott-Portugal site and the creative impulse of its members, celebrated its birth last year with the first journeys on Madeira Island. This year, we decided to celebrate it in its city of origin.

In Madeira we celebrate the *I am*, our first step in affirming ourselves as a group. This year, here we are, concerned and ready to assume our destructiveness, as without it, there is no creativity that lasts.

We, psychoanalysts, greatly need these moments of encounter, mutual exchanges, and shared learning. These are the moments in which we share our latest discoveries and reflections with each other. But they are also the moments in which we celebrate and support each other.

That's another thing I also like very much: my colleagues. I love learning from them and I love sharing my experiences, both as a professor and a supervisor. Many times, I find myself saying things I didn't even know I knew. I am inspired by people's gazes and the interest they show in listening to me. That is why I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who, in one way or another, has chosen to work with me.

In closing this text, I would like to explicitly thank all the colleagues who, with me, founded and helped create our Association. They are, besides myself, our dear João Justo (who might be the best person I know), Irene Borges Duarte, Helena Mourão, Joana Espírito Santo, Lia Nogueira, Rita Pereira Marques, Alexandra Luz Clara, Cristina Cruz, Catarina Rodrigues, Duarte Gatinho, Moisés Ferreira, Paulo Peralta, Rosa Castro, and our most recent acquisition, Veruscka Girio.

It is really a privilege to be surrounded by the people we chose, doing what we are doing, and, as Fernando Pessoa would say, being whole in what we are and what we do. Psychoanalysis is a passion. It is the only science who is also an art!