Plea for a Measure of Privacy in Psychoanalytic Education

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In this presentation I shall attempt to address the impact exerted on psychoanalytic education by extra-transferential forces that intrude on the very nature of psychoanalytic “paidea” or pedagogical path. Issues of self-disclosure, anonymity, and neutrality will be revisited under the umbrella of a contemporary cultural mode that thrives on dismissing the right to privacy. Psychoanalysts increasing rely on telephone and computers intimate a significant revision of the classical psychoanalytic frame. In this regard I shall address the cyber-revolution as it impacts on the ‘sacrosanct’ of the psychoanalytic setting. The fate of subjectivity in a cultural climate that demotes privacy will also be addressed.

I’ve became interest in the topic of privacy after an incident in my practice that lead me to question whether the information revolution heralded by computers has began to undermined the basic right to privacy with detrimental results.
Ms. S

Ms. S, a bright, educated, articulated young woman in treatment for over four months left me a message canceling her next session. Unable to fill the hour, I resign myself to utilize the hour to complete some notes and make a few phone calls. When I was about to settle at my desk, the bell rang. I thought it was the postman delivering a letter. I opened the door and I found myself in front a woman I’ve never met before. She said: “Are you Dr. Tylim?” To which I replied affirmatively. “Oh well –she went on- S gave me this hour because she couldn’t make it…I just Googled you and liked what I read…She is a good friend of mine. I know all about her and about you now…May be I could work with you as well…” Startled by the incident I could only come back with “I worked only by appointment.” She left in a huff.

Ms. S seems oblivious to boundaries, never mind to the fact that psychoanalysis’s effectiveness depends on the maintenance of an optimal degree of privacy. She hasn’t learnt that when privacy is tempered with, psychoanalysis is in danger. Her acting out is symptomatic of her psychopathology that strives in blurring differences between what ought to be on-scene and what ought to remain off-scene. Has Ms. S operated under the flow of a perverse transference yet to be analyzed, or has she internalized the cultural Zeitgeist that declares privacy obsolete?

Now more than ever before in the history of our discipline psychoanalytic educator must advocate for the psychoanalytic dyads right to privacy. The tenuous boundaries of cyberspace, the cultural pull towards revealing and exposing the self on
talk or reality shows, online or via mini-cell-phone cameras—threatens to contaminate psychoanalytic education with an “anti-privacy virus.”

The retreat from the conscious to the unconscious is unlikely to occur under time pressure and the scrutiny of multiple eyes or devices—be it phone/camera or managed care included. Technology may render the most private of settings onto a stage of perverse scenarios, acting outs, or enactments. Two incidents further illustrate the impingement of technology on the analytic setting.

Mr. G recorded the entire session on his cellular phone without the analyst being aware of it. He confessed to it a few months after. Ms. R, while lying on the couch, and holding her I-Pod phone proudly took a picture of her analyst sitting behind her. Has the time arrived to ask analysands to turn off cellular or digital devices before entering the waiting room?

**Etymology:** Privacy is a variant of private, which comes from the Latin privatus. Privus means, “single”, also it refers to something that does not belong to the state, not in public life, or deprived of office. It is the past participle of privare, meaning to deprive or release.

The word privacy does not appear in the United States Constitution, yet everybody recognizes the fundamental right to it. Brandies called the right to privacy "the right to be alone" (Alderman and Kennedy, 1995). The right to privacy often clashes with
other people or institutional rights, i.e. the right of a free press, the employer's right to run a business, the right of managed care to assure cost effective utilization of services, etc.

Incursions into people’s privacy often confer a feeling of pseudo-mutuality and artificiality. Contemporary dismissal of privacy trivializes that which is most intimate – including psychoanalysis. The dismissal of privacy strives for the abolishment of secrets. The latter attain a special status in our society. It either sales to evening news or to sensational press, or it’s thrown away. Secrets are thus commodities in a society obsessed with consumerism.

Privacy has become the object of desire for entrepreneurs who are in the business of making money - be it in the publishing industry, Hollywood, the arts, and in some ways managed care which has the power to determine which private matter deserves reimbursement, and which doesn’t.

Has that which once was a moral imperative - the search for truth, become The Market Strategy of the twentieth first century? Is our culture dictating a rule of transparency in attempting to abolish repression and announce the final dismissal of privacy?

Privacy is autonomy within society. It is broader than secrecy since it suggests a social structure together with its supporting social ethic. Privacy and secrecy are not synonymous. While secrecy – from secretion- refers to a leaking of a content that cannot be contained, privacy implies a residence, a permanent home that shelters the complex elaborations of internal worlds. Secrecy is one aspect of privacy. The privacy of the analytic setting may be invaded or impinged by noise, a cellular phone ringing in the middle of a session without a secret being spilled in the process.
The right for privacy favors a balance between autonomy and sociability. This may be called the ethic dimension of privacy that it is both natural and cultural determined. The natural equivalent of privacy may be identified in animal territoriality, a concrete hard-wired system operating in many species. Evolution has transformed human biological determined territoriality into abstract and elaborate manifestation via symbolization (i.e. private ownership of goods, of our bodies, ideas, believes, fantasies). Psychological boundaries may be regarded as expressions of “territoriality.” Territoriality may be understood in a broader sense as the reluctance to invade other people’s physical spaces, and by extension, the reluctance to intrude or invade internal spaces.

The private space created by the analyst-analysand, is a fertile soil for the sharing of fantasies, thoughts, and feelings than a daily, ordinary social exchange of kitchen variety may claim to be. Private fantasies are the psyche’s intimate possessions, even more so than dreams that are more likely to be shared with friends than fantasies are. Privacy is a locus, a container of fantasies, and a reservoir that becomes source of power to its owner. Privacy reinforces a sense of self as autonomous (Person, 1995). It confers protection against intense shame and guilt that may erupt should individuals be forced to reveal their selves in public.

How can psychoanalysts defend themselves against the dangerous intrusion of third parties? Organized institutions such as insurance companies, government, or special commissions tend to appoint themselves as guardians of a space designed to foster the very same rights they are violating? (Right for privacy). What’s the future of psychoanalysis in these times of cybernetic revolution? Is cyberspace bound to become the new space or dwelling of individuals’ inner thoughts, fantasies, and dreams? Is the
transitional space being challenged by electronic/virtual archives that by-pass the presence/absence paradigm of the transference and countertransference domain?

The Internet may be praised for its democratic, anti-hierarchy stand and its capacity to blur social and economic boundaries across cultures. However one must also considered the effect that the new technology is exerting on the right to privacy. Internet forums tend to thrive in the non-man's land where public matters blur with private ones. The on-scene and the ob-scene (off scene) are becoming one and the same. Internet abusers suffer from a pervasive hunger to access the private realm of the ‘other’ while maintaining their couch potato status (pun not intended). Although on one hand the Internet opens worlds, it also isolates individuals under the mantle on anonymity. Web surfing may backfire, and the original intent of creating a global village may be transformed in the main instrument in the erosion of privacy.

“Second life” on line seduces its constituency to renovating, destroying, or building new identities. Anonymity is the best antidote to playing out fantasies in text or images. As per Internet expert Lawrence Lessing the ring of invisibility that surrounds the shepherd Gyges in one of Plato’s dialogues may be linked to anonymity on line. “Under such circumstances, no one is of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice”(Caldwell, 2007, p. 11). On line authors have taken advantage of using different names or aliases to give themselves highly positive reviews on line. Old social rules or codes for moral accountability do not apply on cyberspace.

Electronic mail is transforming the public and the private space eliciting concomitant ethical and legal revisions. The discipline of psychoanalysis owes big part if its development to snail mail. Does e-mail bound to produce a major shift on the content
and form of what analysts and analysand alike record in their psychic life? Some may argue that the spontaneous mnemic association may be in its way out. Are psychoanalysts beginning to witness the death of psychic representations? Derrida (1994) poses the question whether computers or machines in general may destroy spontaneity, and even more whether they may render obsolete the existence and the necessity of the psyche.

Last spring a colleague alerted me that someone was commenting on my therapeutic skills over the Internet. It was one of my analysands who did not feel the need to conceal his identity in the wide whole world – neither mine for that matter. He had opened a blog and was posting comments after each of a four times a week analysis.

I confronted then a serious dilemma? Do I violate the information my colleague shared with my by confronting my analysand? Am I violating my patient’s right to expose his transference on cyber-space? If left to my patient, analyst should be ranked on line the way many employees corporation rank (and in some case roost) managers e-mailing the not-very flattering comments to the global village.

Fortunately after holding back my own countertransference, I caught an enactment at its early stages. The analysand brought it up in the context of analyzing his concealed wish to increase the frequency of his session. Cyber space was an expansion of the analytic setting.

The right to privacy on cyberspace has been and continuous to be a thorny issue (Flichy, 2007, p. 169). Analytic setting and my own narcissistic injury not withstanding, multiple factors are conducive to the need for monitoring. Terrorism in it multiform varieties, international pedophilic rings, child pornography, and other outlaw activities
prompted federal officials to spy on cyberspace clashing with right to privacy advocates. In this regard, encrypting techniques aimed at disguising communication may hinder the work of the state. Should cryptoprograms be monitored by the state? If so, what is the fate of privacy on the Internet?

I believe that this is an important issue for psychoanalysts. Future psychoanalytic education may need to include seminars not only on how to frame and conduct telephone sessions, but also on cyber-sessions that may involve texts and images (The truth that many analysts do it already but don’t feel comfortable talking about it). Privacy is bound to become a central issue in light of big brother’s ability to intervene/spy for “security” reasons.

Group of Cryptorebels or cryptopunks have organized themselves against state regulation fearing the return of a totalitarian regime. These groups produced a so-called “Crypto Anarchist Manifesto” (Flichy, 2007, p. 170). Cryptorebels argue that if privacy is outlawed, only outlaws will have privacy…” An ordinary citizen or analysts working on cyberspace, may not be able to afford the type of cryptography necessary to protect the patients’ privacy.

During the late nineteen century psychoanalysis heralded a cultural Zeitgeist that challenged the illusion of consciousness favoring disclosure. Offering a synthesis between Enlightenment and Romanticism, psychoanalysis brought together the quest for scientific knowledge and the appeal of the irrational. At its early stages, psychoanalysis
had a Utopian core (Bergmann 1993). The search for that, which was confined to the privacy of the mind, those secrets of the psyche, entrusted Psychoanalysis with a double mission. Psychoanalysis was to liberate with a chimney sweeping, and also offer a container, a space, a home entrusted with the preservation of life narratives. Techniques were devised aiming at facilitating connections and build links between unconscious and pre or conscious material, so the closet or traumatic memories could be cleaned up. The new discipline was to bring the truth of human nature to light in the privacy of a setting (the home or archive to be) well defined by a solid frame.

Freud’s love for honesty was such that according to Ferenczi (1988), Freud stopped loving his patients when discovering that hysterics lie. Although honesty was Freud’s guiding principle, the demand for privacy clashed with the demands of science. Freud understood this dilemma in regard to his patients and to his own self. In “Studies on Hysteria” and “Interpretation of Dreams” he tried hard to disguise the identity of his patients whose sexual life he felt compelled to elaborate on when discussing the sexual etiology of their neurosis. Freud accused Viennese physicians of reading his case material as a form of entertainment not unlike the contemporary readers of modern biographies being curious about the transgressions of the rich and famous.

Freud found self-disclosure necessary but certainly painful. Interpreting his dreams was both an act of courage and an act of self-restraint. Overall the father of psychoanalysis shied away from delving into the libidinal sources of his dreams, refusing to undress for his readers.

Freud was a private man who mistrusted the public appeal generated by psychoanalysis in America. The tenacity of psychoanalysis' expansion in the New
World surprised him. He considered the United States as a "gigantic mistake." Freud regarded the Americans, by in large inferior, individual who were only good in bringing money and study the question of technique (Gay, 1988).

The founder of psychoanalysis rejected a Hollywood producer's invitation to write a story for the screen with the same sarcasm he had conveyed to Ernest Jones when the latter proposed to edit a popular book for an American audience. Freud seemed to have anticipated the perils of allowing the media to infringe into the privacy of the psychoanalytic domain, privacy that he believed it needed to be preserved from distortions and trivial pursuits. The media as it is know, has managed to distort our discipline calling psychoanalysts to invest in the arduous task of selling its good to a skeptical consumer who will rather go to the mall than reflect.

The significance of privacy in Psychoanalysis must be stressed in psychoanalytic curriculums. "Psychoanalysis is an extremely private discipline of sensibility and skill. The practice of psychoanalysis multiplies this privacy into a specialized relationship between two persons, who through the very nature of their exclusivity with each other change each other" (Khan, 1981). When this privacy is tempered with, psychoanalysis is in danger. The value of the psychoanalytic encounter relies on the maintenance of the isolation fostered by its regressive pull. The retreat from the conscious to the unconscious is unlikely to occur under time pressure or the scrutiny of multiple eyes. The contamination of the transference relationship renders analysis almost impossibility. Bollas and Sundelson (1995) argue that the analyst or psychotherapist duty to report discourages the violent person or the child abuser from seeking professional advice. They
advocate for psychotherapeutic confidentiality modeled after the lawyer-client, cleric-penitent, and journalist-source privilege one.

The duty to report (Tarasoff Vs Regents) a patient who may impose a serious danger of violence to another, the mandate to protect the safety of a child, the mediator role played by the therapist who joins a managed care panel, coupled with the seduction exerted by the media all have contributed to the repudiation of privacy.

The crossover from the private to the public world is certainly not confined to psychoanalysis. An almost systematic attack on the right to privacy has infiltrated all levels of social discourse. At the dawn of the twenty first century the preoccupation with protecting the public against terrorism has challenged basic human rights to privacy.

Exposure seems to have become a national obsession. TV talk show seems to feed on people ‘s victim status and the struggle against it. Person (1995), believes that Modern culture suffers from a dual allegiance to victimhood and self-determination. The media is filled with people referring themselves as "victims" and "survivors". To become public and testify seems to promises salvation or cure on the tube.

Literature, cinema, architecture, fashion, and politics, thrive on disclosure. In the biography genre a trend has emerged which aims at exposing the most inner thoughts and deeds of celebrities or high profile personalities. Joyce Carol Gates, borrowing a phrase from Freud, has referred to the new biography as 'pathography' (Kakutani, 1994). The secrets of the psyche, the perverse predilections that are hidden under the surface, and within a painstaking analytic process may surface, have become ordinary, routine object of tabloid journalism.
Millions of paperback copies betray secrets. The privacy of the self has being trivialized in the hands of consumerism and mass gratification of voyeuristic and exhibitionistic ambitions. During the first half of the twentieth-century, most biographical essays tended to idealize -if not canonized- their subjects. An emphasis on virtues contributed to a naive, innocent revision of a person's life. From the 70's on, with psychoanalysis stirring cultural expressions and the sexual revolution in its prime, the selling of 'forbidden' material has become common business practice. Biographies and laundry lists are, in many instances, interchangeable. Philip Roth and his ex-wife actress Claire Bloom have exposed their doomed marriage in separate accounts. Ms. Bloom's "Leaving a Doll's House”, and Mr. Roth's "I Married a Communist" are reciprocal autobiographical attacks on each other's privacy.

The enormous success of psychoanalysis in Hollywood was tainted with serious violations of the privacy of the psychoanalytic encounter. Renowned analysts were perhaps seduced by the glamour off an industry that creates and destroys celebrities overnight. Analysts courting Hollywood superstars had repeatedly jeopardized the privacy of their analysands. Major violations of the analytic attitude and its fundamental principles have recently been chronicled (Farber and Green, 1995). Farber and Green took "a candid look at the overheated love affair between psychiatrists (analysts) and movie makers". Farber and Green tell about analysts' birthdays being celebrated by a roomful of celebrities; Marilyn Monroe joining her analyst's family for dinner; Judy Garland's analyst being called by the studio when the actress was having a difficult time completing a film, a famous movie director writing movie scripts in collaboration with his beloved analyst, who was also cast (or miscast) in minor film roles.
The dismissal of privacy is the consequence of multiple factors that seem to have converged at the dawn of the new millennium. High technology has facilitated the feeding and availability of information as never before in history of mankind. The Seduction exerted by the media- as Douglas (1995) so eloquently stated it, made Exposure is necessary for an object to exist. Descartes' "I think, therefore I am", has been replaced by "I am on TV therefore I exist". Visibility conjures presence, obfuscating absences. Calvin Klein-of-the-waistband is a signifier of something that Is there. I have nothing to hide, seems to read the Pompidou Museum in Paris. The dismissal of privacy offers and illusion of equality in the social order. Differences may be denied. The inner and the outer are one and the same. Psychic Reality and external reality seem to converge.
REFERENCES


Times, 5/20/94.