

## **Body and infinite: notes for a theory of genitivity**

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*The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.*

J Conrad, *Heart of darkness*

*The idea of the Infinite is nothing more than the gateway to the abyss of the Other.*

M Walter

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### **1. A metapsychological yearning**

The theme of this congress —*Psychoanalytic Practice: Convergences and Divergences*— enables me to select as my point of departure the day-to-day experience of a practicing psychoanalyst, a standpoint from which the meaning of our common theory is redefined moment by moment. In thirty years of practice I have faced questions that, precisely because they continue to demand answers, make me glad of this opportunity to share them.

The fundamental theme I would like to discuss has haunted me as long as I can remember: the relationship between the radical singularity of the elements arising out of clinical practice and the necessary universalities of theory. How to articulate the individual —the only thing that exists— and generality— the only place where science may exist? The daily demands of clinical practice resurrect this question constantly.

We know that each analyst has a specific range of aptitudes and impossibilities. We know that theories will have a specific hue for each professional, and that personality is a differential that will tint not only each theoretical framing but also its development within a given practice. We also know that each patient-analyst pair will have its own history, that within this constructed field each session will have a unique destiny and that within this meeting, each moment in all its fleeting ephemerality can never be pinned down or repeated. To complete an already

complex picture, one must also take into consideration the historical background and cultural traits that impregnate all these occurrences.

The ephemeral and singular nature of the encounter between the psychoanalyst and patient may be broken down *ad infinitum* —exactly like our divergences. Indeed, in this perennial mutation each one of us diverges even from his or her own self.

On the other hand, precisely for this reason I believe there survives within our field of thought and practice a point of convergence, which I shall call a *metapsychological yearning*. This yearning, as evinced by the prefix *meta*, relates to a “beyond” our desire cannot fulfill: beyond the concrete, beyond singular experience.

Psychoanalysis, like metaphysics, poses essential questions that on the one hand cannot be answered in the sphere of experimentation, and on the other cannot be ignored. Thus, in the same way that we formulate questions about the meaning of life, about the nature of being, about the existence of the divine, about the possibility of knowing, we also ask questions that inquire beyond psychology. Beyond what is familiar and known to us, we seek transcendence, the foreign.

This is not a question of seeking a new science, of seeking more generic or more abstract concepts. It is not psychology in a new format. Radically: it is not a psychoanalytical psychology. It is a quest for the *beyond*. Metapsychology is a window into witchcraft; it is our witch, as Freud (1937) called it, a quest for the strange, moving towards the ultimate questions. This is why it presupposes this yearning, this movement “towards” And this yearning unites us, if we make our divergences converge in the idea of the infinite. I will use the idea of the infinite to articulate my thoughts on our convergences and divergences.

To resume: given the generality of the concept —which is the basis of science— how may I deal at each single moment with the singular, the object of our investigation?

At every moment in my personal life and professional career I have come up with answers to this question that have always proven to be provisional and insufficient for my daily practice. Spontaneously, the study groups I have conducted over the years have always ended up putting this question at the center of our discussions. Actually, it revolves around a Talmudic question: After all, what is psychoanalysis?

What I will try to develop here is this specific dialectic between the extreme uniqueness of each psychoanalytical gesture and the universality of a metapsychological yearning, a dialectic that will take shape through the approximation of a conception of the infinite and a conception of genitivity.

## **2. The paradox of the object**

For centuries, the backdrop to Western thinking was the coming of a Savior or Messiah. The Enlightenment introduced changes into this tradition. We learned to value knowledge as a means of mastering nature; light became the seat of knowledge, of positive science. We learned that darkness is the home of ignorance and the devil in all his forms.

We psychoanalysts all want to be welcome in the temples of wisdom; we want to be on the side of good, to live with the angels. How else could we present ourselves to our peers —

scientists, psychiatrists, other health professionals in the private and public sectors?

While we cannot forgo our Enlightenment heritage, we do need to reflect upon it, because our object of study, the wellspring of our knowledge, is denatured when exposed to light, exposed in a concept with which we never cease to duel. We strive to conquer our object, to force its final surrender to our purposes: “Unconscious, show me thy face!”

In seeking this face, which is *beyond*, I risk affirming that maybe we can know it only in the “biblical sense”, recalling that in the Old Testament tradition, knowledge is sexual and that according to the Commandments the infinite is denatured by being named or depicted. In the second topic, Freud (1923) felt obliged to add to the territory of the psychic that which never becomes genuinely psychic but arises from the infinitude of nature, from the infinitude of the obscurity of the innermost viscera. Language pursues it but cannot correspond to it. We scrutinize it but cannot conquer it.

Our form of communication is the spoken word, the word made flesh, the “pulsional” word (Green). Our theory fully makes sense only when it becomes incarnate, that is, when it becomes more than mere conscious knowledge. Thus we transmit knowledge primarily through experience. Hence the imperative need for analysis of the analyst, the cornerstone of our tradition, our permanence, our continuity, our reproduction. (Indeed, one might speculate whether the fact that institutions control the reproduction of analysts is not at the root of the mythical power such institutions wield and of so many other institutional problems.)

It is no accident that we usually discuss our papers in intimate seminars, so that they may work in us. This is how they are apprehended. They need to be incarnated in speech. However, the divergences between language actualized in speech and the written word, which is a precipitate, entail a risk. Saussure warns us that even more importance is given to this representation of the vocal sign, the written word, than to the vocal sign itself: “It is rather as if people believed that in order to know a person it is better to study his photograph than his face” (p. 34).

I detect in myself a certain personal discomfort in presenting a text I wrote more than a year ago. I would perhaps have preferred to deal with concerns and associations more pertinent to my current moment. Be that as it may, perhaps there is no alternative but to oscillate between memory and the traumatic. (I will return to this point later.) These lines of T. S. Eliot in *Four quartets* support me:

*For last year's words belong to last year's language  
And next year's words await another voice.*

When written or spoken language becomes a *voice*, we perceive that our universals, the concepts with which we think, are incarnated also in our individual history, the times in which we live, the environment in which we develop, the situations with which we must deal. When we re-read the annotations we made in the margin of a Freudian text a week later, they get lost among new associations. It is always distressing to see how the memory of a clinical psychoanalyst is defective when compared, for example, with the memory of a reader from one of the other humanities.

Perhaps our reading is sustained by another means of knowing: as we read we read wounded by clinical practice, exposed as we are to the anguish brought to us by our object. Our realizations need to encompass conscious and unconscious perceptions. They therefore share

characteristics with what is unique and ephemeral in dreams, in metaphors, in poetry.

But if our clinical and theoretical perceptions are unique, and moreover are denatured by repetition, could this mean knowledge is impossible?

I don't believe so, because we have built an oneiric heritage that, when faced with new situations, we can use to create and elaborate dreams suited to a new moment. Our knowledge will have dual citizenship, inhabit two territories and inevitably use two different languages. At each step, it will have to move in two different systems. It will have to conform to the mode of functioning of the conscious mind and to the mode of functioning of unconscious mode. Thus our thinking and communicating will inevitably bear the character of dreams, because dreams are par excellence the creators of an agreement, however ephemeral, between the two loyalties. On the other hand, in order to express ourselves, we will also need to reflect on form, as in poetry.

Between the infinitude of the theory that haunts us and the ephemerality of the practice that beleaguers us, perhaps there is no other alternative for our writing than to fluctuate between the meanderings of a *flâneur*, who builds his own network of meanings as he wanders, and the pilgrimage of one who cannot do without the hope of visualizing a face.

In his reflections on the essay as form, Adorno (1958) exalts the possibilities and risks of attempting to articulate in writing the ins and outs of our thinking about an object not submitted beforehand to a system or method. The reflective nature of the essay makes it the form best adapted to psychoanalytical thinking. The essay form implies the hope that the text will permit a movement of the spirit whereby the whole of the reflection will exceed the sum of its parts and that it will pierce the body's surface so that knowledge can find repose in our depths. It also gives the reader greater autonomy, inviting him to find his own way through the constellations of meaning proposed in each reading.

This idea of constellation helps us understand how psychoanalysis shifts our knowledge to the continent of darkness precisely when it wants to illuminate it. Let us not forget, after all, that psychoanalysis set out to bring dreams from the land of magic and superstition into the heart of knowledge creation. Dreams are always there, says Freud (1900), and "they fade away before the impressions of the new day like the stars before the light of the sun" (p. 38). Object and means of our questionings, submissive to the reign of night, elusive, dreams permeate our being and define its architecture. The oneiric process is like the movement of the heart; vital and unceasing, it requires no conscious attention—and it too is a visceral movement.

### **3. M and the dead end**

A patient whom I will call M, in analysis for around ten years, begins to focus in her talk on the anguish that accompanies uterine bleeding. For months, M presents her struggle to avoid surgery. We talk at length about her anguish relating to castration, the loss of femininity, the passage of time and aging, the loss of the possibility of love, and death. The operation, which becomes inevitable as cancer tumors could develop, finally takes place.

Ensuing period is characterized by a depressive mood and by associations that repeat the pre-operative period; what is remarkable is the immutability of her psychic state, not habitual in this patient. M's salient feature is her ability to reflect on her own state of mind, along with an equally pronounced capacity for change.

This paralysis surprises me, and I realize we are missing something essential. Slowly an interrogation emerges from the meanders of her discourse, but cannot find words. I am reminded of the questions one of my daughters would ask me when very young, about a time before she existed: What could exist if she was not? Could a world exist if consciousness did not yet exist? My daughter evidently did not have the words, and I had considerable difficulty in understanding her rudimentary questions. These did, however, express the anguish of an existential problem that we may call metaphysical —she could not suspect the enormity of the question. We philosophize at any age, it is just the repertoire that expands.

But let us return to M. I was finally able to translate the question she was struggling to elaborate as something like this: after sex, what happens to its products? Do they simply encounter a blind sac? Do they just seep away? After the removal of her womb, ovaries and Fallopian tubes, if the vagina had become a dead end, what was the point of having sex?

In fact, M was saying that the sexual act no longer made sense and had ceased to afford pleasure. It is important to note that she had never mentioned any difficulties with the sexual act itself and that the verbal precariousness she displayed at this moment was unprecedented. Moreover, ignorance of anatomy or physiology was implausible, given her intellectual formation.

We spoke on this subject without success, until it occurred to me that the womb is not a mere container. This interpretation caused changes in M —but first it caused changes in me. It changed not only my worldview but also, and more relevantly for this reflection on the practice of psychoanalysis, my intentions and attitudes as an analyst.

#### **4. Genitality as gateway to the infinite**

It occurred to me that the womb is not only a container capable of harboring a pregnancy or signaling the hormonal cycle. It is a channel of communication between the vagina and the Fallopian tubes —which do not communicate with the ovaries. The tubes plunge into the peritoneum, where they open to capture the mature ovum released by the ovary. Thus the womb is part of a channel between the outside world and the depths of the viscera, the silent infiniteness of the entrails.

As translation of the patient's fantasy, a hypothesis began to take shape: without access to the mysteries of the body, the vagina did not connect to anything and had become practically an external organ. Thus, sexual intercourse would not achieve intimacy and would not enable a sexual encounter between two people to generate meaning and significance.

Might this not be the kind of psychic organization that makes prostitution possible, exempting its practitioners from the anguish of having sex with multiple partners they do not expressly choose? Or again, might it not help us comprehend the apparent ease with which today's adolescents maintain multiple sexual relationships and the fact that they effectively experience distress only when a relationship becomes intimate? Is it not the case that a psychic structure such as this precludes certain situations required for the intimacy of psychoanalytical intercourse and presents specific challenges in which the supreme virtue is being able to wait a long time for analytical meanings to emerge?

M's question obviously did not refer to physiology, but rather to the psychic representation of

anatomy. When Freud (1923) says the ego is corporeal, he means it is organized in terms of how it apprehends, incorporates and constructs the functioning of the body; this organization then returns to the body, giving it meaning. Thus, for example, the functioning of the digestive system is perceived as if it occurred in discrete parts and ingestion and excretion are perceived as independent. Reproduction could be attributed to the digestive container and be realized through anal or other fantasies.

Arising in the body and now organized as a physiology of the act of thought, these functions or ways of thinking may shift to any other organ, relationship activity or worldview—here we have the power of transference, according to Freud's first definition (1893-1895) For this to happen, some bodily functions have to be able to reach the psychic apparatus and undergo transformations that make them mental qualities. They must be able to become perceptions and memories.

As an inverse example, recall we do not have a psychic representation of the pancreas and its functions (Nosek). The first representations of civilization and the child regarding mental suffering always indicate places in the body. Depression is in the liver, fear in the digestive apparatus, love in the heart. The body's mental marks on the mind will then build the framework within which future perceptions will be organized. Animism is preceded by corporeal modes, shaping life.

We all have clinical experience of patients with psychic organizations in which, based on formulations such as “to give is to lose and to incorporate is to gain”, primary analogies with bodily functions may achieve some social and economic success, in evident contrast with failure in love.

In the case of M, as the result of a traumatic experience, the territories of the corporeal and the mental were shuffled or even inverted. The hypothesis I formulated for her created other dimensions of time needed for elaboration in the analysis, enabling her to reopen the mental channels that afford access to the infinite mystery of her nature and recreate her own meanings.

But let me return to the changes I have identified in myself as a result of this interpretation. For example, I no longer expect any interpretation to be capable of creating the necessary transformation. I hope the mental trajectories may be reconstructed through multiple experiences and the verbalization of these experiences. This understanding, which stems from practice and is present in my theoretical reflections, dictates my participation in the session, transforming my presence and my way of observing. Theory and description—and actual perception of the clinical facts—are defined by theoretical lens through which we investigate and draw conclusions. Clinical description cannot be separated from a complex theoretical presupposition that orients my way of observing, but theory refigures the meaning made explicit by new constellations and thus allows itself to be illuminated by practice. Meaning emerges for both participants in the relationship.

Indeed, this point connects with Freud, who already in his *Project for a scientific psychology* asked how the quantitative discharges of energy that strike the psychic apparatus are transformed into mental qualities. It is a question that runs through all his work and that we have inherited. It is a good question that future generations of psychoanalysts will go on asking.

## **5. Metaphysical desire**

From clinical practice I will extract the hypothesis that meaning is born from the inaccessible infinitude of the entrails, in a relationship with another subjectivity. Always ephemeral and insufficient, meaning inevitably requires something more, something in the body itself and, at the same time, beyond it. This is what enables us to go on living.

Paradoxically, this is perhaps where the sexual position least considered in our theorizations, genitality, is situated. Even in our milieu, there is still a tendency to identify this term with the concrete and to confuse it with adult sexual activity. This is a mistake, because thinking is also associated with an intuitive image of bodily functions. Furthermore, genitality is present from the beginning of life.

At this point I need to refer to Bion (1962, 1963) and shall digress a little. For Bion, thought is made up of a hierarchy of specific paths that pass from beta elements to alpha elements, then to dreams, and then to conceptual thought, arriving finally at more sophisticated thinking of the kind engaged in by scientists, philosophers and artists. Let me also recall that these transitions take place in relationships between subjectivities defined by a container/contained link.

Bion symbolizes this relationship in a male/female ideogram representing and evoking the biblical mode of knowledge: Adam meets Eve and thus begins the human story. Paradise is nature; its loss will be established in the tradition as the Fall.

This is the moment of man's entry into culture, into history, into thought. We no longer have instinct to guide us; we have no predetermined paths to follow. Before us is the infinite—the future is its territory, and it also reigns in the past. Desire is no longer a function of estrus, because we no longer observe the seasonal calendar. One alternative is to rediscover marks of memory, of past experiences. This brings us to the classical space of neurosis as a reliving of reminiscences.

Another alternative is *metaphysical desire* (Levinas)—that which desires beyond what is given and plunges into the infinite. Its trajectory is trauma: paths without a past, trails to be blazed, meanings to be constructed. This is the path of terror and of generosity. I consider this to be the “poetics” of genitality, of trauma, and of the necessary and peculiar concept of the infinite of which I speak here. The infinite is an object that traumatizes its concept; were it not so—that is, if the concept could encompass its object—the infinite would itself be destroyed.

Shock and awe are the hallmarks of metaphysical desire. Arising without preparation or routine, it brings the repose of a partial and ephemeral meaning and the pleasure of having completed a hazardous journey. It is the peace of survival, added to a glimpse of oneself and a perception of one's own humanity. It is the activity of creating a dream which cannot be created in isolation: someone will always have to dream what no other can. This dream will have the genetics of both dreamers. As the fruit of a relationship, the dream's destiny will be to make its own way.

## **6. Yearning for a “successful” practice**

In previous paper I have talked about the courage needed to abandon oneself to another subjectivity, stripping oneself bare and offering oneself up in one's basic figuration. There is the danger of not being received by the other, of risking the pleasure of the encounter and losing oneself in a fusion from which there is no return, and finally of returning to isolation.

The anguish proper to genitality is joined by all the anxieties of the other phases of sexuality, which never miss the chance to join this encounter.

The isolation, the return to oneself, the repose will be possible only through a small and volatile addition of meaning. Who will risk laying herself bare in the presence of another subjectivity that insists on self-protection?

The construction of meaning in analysis is by no means a neutral movement. It is a movement, as I normally say with a degree of impunity, that puts psychic gestures under the aegis of genitality. The construction itself must be interpreted, so that what has taken place between the participants in the analytical intercourse can be put into words. The “mutative interpretation” (Strachey) that pursued me at the beginning of my practice will ultimately prove to be a sexual psychic movement. The neutrality we always seek becomes possible through verbalization, verbal explication. The neutrality comes not at the beginning, but at the end of a complex and frightening journey. It will not be a permanent attitude, but an unstable acquisition. Only here can we rest. (Once upon a time you could light a cigarette...)

However, the need for new meanings soon imposes itself: the visceral universe does not stay still, its horizon is the infinite. How many fruits are generated in one analysis? And how to accompany their development?

We all have experience of relatives and friends, children, even our own children, who come into our consulting room as if they were entering some awful inner sanctum, sacred and sexual. It is this kind of spontaneous apprehension that enables our patients to intuit the future analytical experience as a special place, where as in no other they will be able to present themselves in their own truth, where each one’s own meaning may take one more step forward, where they may seek their own being. This is the place—like a temple or alcove—where the word may be born. Therapeutic projects that are unaware of this will be poor and shortlived, because they will claim to know the desirable destination beforehand.

The same incomprehension may also be at the center of the so-called crisis in psychoanalysis, with all its retinue of positivistic and pragmatic intentions, a mere adaptation to our day and age. These “good intentions” signal surrender to the market, the abandonment of the surprising subversiveness and power of our knowledge and practice.

Of course the surrender is not explicit. We are not in cahoots with business or big pharma, but understandably we too want a place in the sun alongside the producers of solutions and welfare. We want to prove we have a body of knowledge and can overcome suffering. We even dare claim certain superiority in this area. We want procedures, measures, certainties. Positivism insidiously infiltrates our thoughts and expels us from our home.

## **7. Uncapturable object**

In 1923, Freud asks how we can obtain knowledge of the unconscious. He asks whether consciousness dives down into the unconscious or the unconscious advances from within to reveal itself to consciousness. In other words: Is the unconscious appropriated by knowledge or presented as a revelation, as the unveiling of its existence?

In choosing the answer Freud shows great conviction. He opts for the negative: neither alternative seems acceptable to him. What he finds adequate is to say that the unconscious has

a corresponding configuration in consciousness. In this passage theory and practice converge, because the question is both clinical and metapsychological (indeed, metaphysical). Freud tells us that the unconscious reveals itself when brought into connection with verbal images in the preconscious mind. In its dive into the visceral infinite, it cannot be captured.

There are three types of unconscious at this point in Freud's work. The preconscious can be brought to the surface with an increase in investment. The other two are the repressed and that which is not yet linked with representations and has not yet come into existence for the psyche proper. The latter is recoverable but dwells in obscurity, in the infinitude of our innermost depths and the external world. While the repressed unconscious allows itself to be recovered, the recoverable waits to be given contours, to be given representation. The second topic imposes itself, and the trajectories leading to the creation of the repressed unconscious are brought to light, as it were. The second topic shows the path that precedes the first topic—it is like revisiting the *Project for a scientific psychology*.

At this point, the question about how we make the unconscious conscious develops in two directions. Both involve processes of recovery and construction. In the first case, we are dealing with the recovery of memories; in the second, with the formation of trajectories. Representations must be found in the consciousness that correspond to what has been forgotten or to what will be created by the mind. In both cases we need a repertoire, a pool of memories to contain the two processes of elaboration.

The schema proposed by Bion (1962, 1963) helps explain the passage to conceptual thinking, i.e. from beta elements, which are like concrete things, to alpha elements and from there to communicable thought, which may be shared. I note that Bion uses new words with no prior associations to describe thought not compromised by memories. Implicitly he proposes that if we want to be similar to him, we will have to be completely different from him.

In any event, the pool of memories enabling this process is to be found—from the very beginning and throughout the entire trajectory—in culture. In Bion's language, the individual requires the container/contained, male/female relationship to undertake this passage. This conjunction in turn requires the container of the container, i.e. culture, as a shelter for the protagonists.

The individual's passage to culture therefore takes place in a struggle with culture. In the maternal metaphor, the mother needs the father and culture to dive into the abyss—triangulation is inevitable. This schema prevents us from generating a unipersonal metapsychology, from considering the spirit in isolation. Its course, which leads to knowledge of something human, bears the imprint of genitivity from the outset.

What interests me here, with this chain of truisms, is a critique of the Enlightenment's claim to possess and master the object through knowledge—a pretension that was once present in my psychoanalytical practice, always lending it a shade of insecurity and impossibility. Indeed, since our reflections accompany practice, I believe all of us may share this insecurity about the certainty of our knowledge. For me, it was never just a matter of epistemological doubt, but a state of mind that has stayed with me in all my professional experience.

Representative constructions are ephemeral, and receive only on a temporary basis their unconscious and foreign object—which will inevitably continue on its way in search of new hospitalities. The affirmation that my practice was *scientific* did not convince me, since my object could not be clearly defined, nor did the universals remain stable in the inevitable

confrontation with the uniqueness of each analysis.

In my personal experience, it was in aesthetics that I first encountered the possibility of reconciling the truth of the universal with the uniqueness of its expression, as in a work of art. Equally useful was the idea that each work of art creates its own world, as does adequate experience of the analytical setting. Moreover, art presupposes the constant presence of authorship in the work itself, in contrast with scientific law, whereby lack of authorship interferes neither with the law nor with any results achieved.

I used to think our art was especially tragic, for the work we created with our patients would always have only two spectators and, however valuable, would come to rest in the unconscious, where it would be forgotten. Passing on this creation to others required good writing, one of the talents of the founder of psychoanalysis, so that the two participants could each produce their own account. As in art, it was not a question of capturing the object. Art is content with partial constructions of meaning.

All this seemed to me to be adequate for thinking about the analytical experience.

## **8. Levinas: the face, the infinite and ethics**

Surprising and challenging, the viewpoint of Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and infinity* has helped me address these difficult questions. Levinas also starts from the traditional model of knowledge as the fitting of the object to its concept, but translates this into an attempt to transform the Other into the Same. What is sought in knowledge is removal of the strangeness, the otherness of the object, so that it can be possessed by the subject. We seek to naturalize the foreigner: he loses his identity and learns to speak the language of the family to which he belongs. As such, he is stripped of his condition of being alien, *Unheimlich*.

Here I am also reminded of remarks made by Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). Tracing the history of the relationship between myth and reason, the authors show that myth, normally associated with pre-scientific darkness, already contains an element of enlightenment, thanks to its obsession with the mastery of nature, and that the historical process of construction of the identity between object and concept, a cornerstone of enlightenment science, ends up returning to myth. This is a telling criticism of the positivist conception of knowledge, which, based on procedures of separation, classification and definition, refuses the tension inherent in the permanence of singularity, the unknown.

However, as we read in the *Dialectic*, “men purchase the increase in their power with alienation from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to men. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them (p. 20)”.

It is possible to draw a parallel between the modes of knowledge and the modes of psychic sexual development: the body and the infinite may connect as a pair. In the sphere of the individual, moreover, each mode of thinking has a prior history —relational and corporal— and also participates in a prior history of social forms of relation. Thus the ego is not just the projection of the corporeal surface; it is also the projection of the entire social body. In even broader terms, it is the result of the appropriation not only of basic object relationships, but of all forms of social relationship. (Here the idea in physics of the similarity between the very large and very small finds fertile new ground for exploration.)

This character of the self is obviously not constituted through mimesis, but entails infinite variants of the processes of mental creation. It has the color of the drives invested in it. Thus what occurs is not mere imitation; on the contrary, the creator and the created are transformed in the act of creation itself —and here there emerges another element of the poetics of genitivity and its relationship with the infinite, i.e. a kind of superstructure of the corporeal, apprehended and configured in the various forms of thought.

Although they start from different philosophical traditions, both Levinas and Adorno/Horkheimer highlight the act of violence against the existence of otherness, the act of destroying foreignness that is contained within the movement of knowledge. Positive knowledge, knowledge which is formalized and creates procedures, has proved remarkably powerful in terms of material progress and resource development. Nonetheless, when it too became myth it proved problematic as a means of knowing the human and stopping the violence, which, concurrently with progress, never ceases to grow in intensity. As Adorno says, the Enlightenment as myth and embodying the celestial certainties of science authorizes itself to practice the violence of non-religious wars on an even greater scale.

It may well be the case among us that the conviction that we possess the truth also lies behind the small wars we wage in our organizations. I always find this perplexing, because such organizations are the essential space for discussion of our convergences and divergences: the space for dialectical reflection upon our practice, which is at once scientific, because it is conceptual, and concrete, because it respects the singularity of the object, opening up to the knowledge of the other with the courage to face the infinite.

Levinas argues that a human face shines before us like something strange, like a foreigner. The use of the word *face* is justified by its expressiveness, by the permanent movement it evokes. The presence of the face places us before the infinity of otherness. The face —the other, the foreigner— does not reveal itself to us and cannot be captured. It is like the infinite: it cannot be completely contained by the concept. As propounded by Levinas, the infinite is exogenous in origin and is placed in us. (For comparison's sake let me recall the Cartesian conception. For Descartes, the infinite preexists us and is endogenous. Its presence in us is one of the proofs of the existence of God.)

If we are prepared to forgo the violence of knowledge, if we are not incited by the urgency of ontology and the power of positivism, we encounter the territory of hospitality: this means receiving the foreigner as such, allowing him his own existence. This gesture, configured as goodness, does not ennoble or exalt me; its character comes from the infinite to be received, unraveling my possibilities. If infinite, it will resist full apprehension through the concept. Otherwise its character will be lost, for the identity of the infinite derives from the impossibility of being contained by its concept. It is the same with otherness, which is denatured by apprehension.

Just as the infinite traumatizes its concept, the other traumatizes me. Receiving the other is an imposition —I submit to it. I permit the other's presence and refrain from catechizing him. I become a hostage to the infinite. Like a god, the foreigner may not be named without sacrilege.

In the Jewish Passover ceremony, every year the ritual question is asked: Why are we gathered here tonight? To remember the times of slavery, of helplessness, is the response. The question evokes the analytical encounter: Why do we meet? The response we yearn for is to be found in another part of the ceremonial room. Tradition requires saving the best seat for one who is

to come: the outsider, the traveler, the foreigner and prophet Elijah, Eliyahu Hanavi, who never comes, the herald of the New, who can be received as a guest on this night.

Levinas writes: “We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics” (p. 30). Conversion is not on the horizon. When did we forget this?

At this point, an astounding notion of knowledge is configured: the first step in knowledge is ethics. Ethics precedes ontology. According to Levinas, a student of Heidegger, being is not only not captured in knowledge but is not revealed in poetry, contrary to his master’s claims. But being can “be received”. For us psychoanalysts this is a radical hierarchical deflection: psychoanalysis is no longer a talking cure but a listening cure. We can imagine a mute analyst, but not a deaf one.

This radical renunciation inherent in the movement of receiving otherness, this surrender of the self before the face, reminds me of something Freud says in the 1895 *Project for a scientific psychology*: “The initial helplessness of human beings is the primal source of all moral motives” —or, more properly, of ethics. In this context, absolute devotion to the other, to the emerging human being, to the new face that traumatizes the person receiving it, is the primordial ethical act. In its imperativeness, it creates the human.

Recall that Freud is thinking here about the afflictions of the human organism which as yet lacks the means to find ways of eliminating unpleasure in the outside world and therefore needs the devotion of another human being willing to surrender, to be taken hostage in order to be of service. This primal ethic is not of superegoic origin, but primary or maternal, as in ancient matriarchal religions. I cannot recall any other place where Freud returns to this argument.

Laplanche proposes something new by affirming that the child’s psyche is organized as a response to traumatic elements in the erotic presence of the adult. In this dual elaboration, the conceptual hallmark of genitality is once again present, and metaphysics and metapsychology are more closely linked than we normally suppose. More importantly, they will inevitably act as guides to practice.

From Freud we learn that sexuality, in its different manifestations, configures “ways of being”. Different ways of perceiving reality and responding to it are organized on the corporeal base. Here we have the classical theme of the modes: oral, anal, urethral, phallic etc. Other bodily elements are also projected on to the mind: the skin, breathing, rhythm —the world clashes with the sensory, and everything perceived as intensity is organized as psychic quality.

But what we perceive as intensities are not physical qualities. They are the corollary of absences, of the lack of representative contours. In classical terms, we postulate that the stimulation that reaches the psychic apparatus will be colored by drives, which impose the search for objects in the external world that confronts them. The drive functions as an intrinsic intentionality, organizing capture and the response to be given to whatever we find before us. Drives are ways of organizing lived experience. Thus they are constituents of the primary mode of knowledge, here necessarily deformed and charged with an extensive coloring of subjectivity.

## 9. The infinite silence of the entrails

If knowledge and meaning are to be developed, there must be a new movement, which can even be simultaneous. In this reflection, I want to suppose that placing other sexual modes under the hegemony of the genital means giving primacy to the construction of knowledge as a form of human meaning. Stepping back, we see it was the role of the drives to be apprehended in their interaction with objects. The objects of the drives will be present within another subjectivity, which will be organized in its own sexual mode. Thus the drives cannot be separated from object relations, either at their origin or in their final organization.

The oral mode focuses on the object of “knowledge” in an attempt to incorporate it, possess it, fuse with it. This is the goal of this mode of desire. Other modes aim to eliminate undesirable elements or those not incorporated into knowledge, organizing it so that it is presented clean, without the impurities that accompany any act of living. There are desires to control the object: we want to see it dominated and submitted to our power. We may want to split the object into parts, to classify it. Ultimately we want the object to become part of ourselves. (We have all had the experience of going to a play, a concert or a lecture and applauding more enthusiastically the old hits we already know and have memorized. We are applauding ourselves)

A necessary reminder: otherness, which cannot be reached, creates in us a movement of identification that modulates our character. All the sexual modes are present in the construction of knowledge. Nevertheless, aren't new paradigms said established only with the passing of the generations? As analysts, don't we have preferred “modes” of performing our work? Isn't choosing an analyst also a question of elective affinities? Should we not perhaps take these characteristics into account, take into account the analyst's own sexual modes and hence modes of knowledge? After all, no questions about analyzability end in diagnoses of the analysand.

All the movements of sexuality and knowledge that I have mentioned have self-referentiality in common, a priori. They refer to the Same, in the language of Levinas. Only in genitality is there a movement in which desire turns toward the Other leaving otherness intact. Desire seeks what is beyond me, the infinite. The object of desire does not complete the subject but keeps it in suspense.

Returning to my previous remarks, I can now say that genital desire has the characteristics of seeking beyond, like metaphysical desire. We are used to attributing to it a lyrical, poetic quality, but strictly speaking the relationship with the infinite gives it a metaphysical character. The latter in turn moves in poetics, which is inevitably transitory and provisional.

We will always need new poems and songs to render love. It cannot be captured, but isn't that the case with the definition of any feeling, love or hate, jealousy, envy, helplessness, nostalgia, sadness, depression, fear, horror and so many others that we have so often treated with excessive familiarity and nonchalance? Isn't it rash to treat them as qualities that are given and well known to the point where they can be defined in a manual? What authorizes us to treat them as if in a scientific analysis?

The presence of the other's face, when it appears before me, triggers an attempt to capture its reality. At the same time, otherness seeks to be captured, to be apprehended by me and in me. It seeks the concept of itself in me. This corresponds to a realization of the idea of the infinite in the finite —and we may call it desire. It will always be a yearning that cannot be fulfilled but cannot cease striving. It will never find satisfaction, but on its way it constructs meanings and perceives constellations capable of illuminating acts and questions. It is a factor of survival and

reproduction, but it also constructs our ability to live and know. Human destiny is presented in this perpetual quest.

In the corporeal mode of genital sexuality, we find the embryo of its psychic representative. Thus meaning is born once again from the infinite silence of the entrails, in contact with another being that takes it in and welcomes it. In this event, meaning is born for both foreigner and host. If the process is two-way it is even more complicated. The functions are permanently inverted and interchanged —this is the Freudian lesson on human bisexuality.

Meaning has no point of arrival. It is different from what we usually call *truth*. It does not claim a universality that can be shared. Its aim is to achieve a representation of itself which, through self-recognition, will provide a means of living and resting in itself.

### **10. B and the fertilization without intercourse**

A woman aged approximately 40 comes to me for re-analysis. I will call her B. In the first meetings she presents herself as a successful professional with an organized family. She had undergone analysis for many years with well-oriented analysts and had resolved most of her issues. At that time, what most concerned her were the many love affairs that she had had since adolescence and that had never brought her marriage into question. They were uncontrollable passions, very romantic, frequently platonic, and characterized by the adhesiveness to which she submitted herself and possibly her partners. With respect to her own family, according to B adhesion to her parents was uppermost. They had always demanded great sacrifices of her and continued to do so at that time.

I was told all this in a measured and sensible fashion. B said she wanted to resume analysis because, although she felt free of the affairs, she realized something was missing. What bothered her was a state she defined as a “lack of meaning” in her life

My schedule was full, so I said I could refer her to another analyst or she could wait until I was free. B chose to wait. It would mean waiting some months, but I soon began receiving calls in which she claimed it was urgent that we begin. On the telephone, B reported intense fears which prevented her from sleeping; she was suffering long nights of insomnia. There was despair in these remote appeals that had not been evident in our first encounters. I felt practically summonsed to begin the analysis, and so I did.

Once under way, the analysis went smoothly and adequately. B talked about situations, problems, episodes from her daily life, and apparently understood and interpreted them appropriately. She said her insomnia and contacts had improved.

Gradually, however, there began to prevail in my perception a state of lack of meaning. I noted that invariably her discourse revolved around events, either remote or recent, or something she had thought of or felt on the way to my consulting room. The impression was that I only had access to hand-me-down feelings —and I told her so: I said I felt I was in a second-hand store that dealt only in used feelings. B confirmed this, saying it was difficult for her to share affective situations and feel present in them. She felt very bad about this but was terrified of giving up this mode of being.

On the other hand, things I had said frequently reappeared in the following sessions in a way that indicated a reasonable process of elaboration. In other words, there was development. B

was elaborating her fears and reconstructing the meaning of her history, even though the climate and mode of the sessions remained unchanged.

This peculiar mode of fertility in the analysis soon becomes the object of our investigation, enabling us to see the meaning in our encounters.

The perception that no event was produced in the actual session led me to recollect that the reproduction of certain beings occurs through fertilization outside the body. The male and the female deposit gametes externally—in the water, for example—and these then meet, generating a new being. Our relationship was like this: there was fertility without intercourse.

However, while this was the rule with B, it was not unusual at particular moments in other analyses. Psychoanalysis includes events that have become lost in our phylogenetic evolution. It can be quite common in clinical practice, in cases of infertility overcome by success with in vitro fertilization and uterine implantation. This is what happens when a mother, after giving birth this way, creates or recreates the mental trajectories of her genital anatomy and becomes pregnant in the normal way.

These perceptions led us to center the analytical work on the construction of the psychic anatomy of femininity and the components of her anguish.

## **11. The traumatic and the infinite**

With more than one hundred years of analytical practice behind us, our common resources have developed immensely. In the early days an analysis lasted weeks and Freud might ask a patient to refrain from making sentimental or economic decisions during this process. Today no one is surprised if analysis lasts years or a whole lifetime. Knowledge in the field of psychoanalysis never ceases to grow, as evidenced by our publications. Whereas in the beginning our themes could interest anyone, today they are becoming more and more specialized. Despite its relevance to all the humanities, psychoanalysis is still equated only with the work of Freud in the cultural milieu.

Perhaps we are responsible for this, because we split our knowledge into many specialisms and schools. Our debates have become disputes to determine ownership of the truth. Furthermore, we have divided our object into psychopathological identities: this has undoubtedly caused problems, but at the same time we have created an enormous collection of procedures and practical knowledge. We have become more powerful by developing a scientific base. Nevertheless, perhaps we have neglected the metapsychological quest.

Freud left us a dual legacy: a discipline that questions the traditional ways of thinking and whose object, the unconscious, vanishes upon exposure to light; and thinking that has inherited that tradition and remains loyal to its Enlightenment origins.

As a Jew from Central Europe, Freud was emancipated by the Enlightenment ideal. (Let us recall that when the Jews were given permission to enter Vienna, he was four years old.) As Bauman notes in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, the Jews loved the German Enlightenment culture and its heroes, Kant, Hegel, Goethe, Beethoven, and so many others. They loved a Germany which no longer existed and whose contemporary reality they did not understand and which would make them particularly vulnerable to the horror that loomed on the horizon. Bauman describes how the Jews ironically saw themselves as Germans, even though in most cases

assimilated Jews lived and worked only with other assimilated Jews, lacking the acceptance for which they yearned outside their own milieu.

It is difficult to commemorate the condition of being a foreigner. As heirs to this tradition do we not have dual citizenship? On the one hand, we work with an eruptive discipline; on the other, we yield and try to show that our knowledge is positive and that we deserve respect among the *bien pensants*. We define pathological entities, establish classifications, propose therapeutic strategies —only to find us ourselves faced with universal forms, forms common to all. The categories explode and we return to the infinitude of our object, the unconscious. We have no alternative but to go back to metapsychology, our home, open the door and receive, without illusions of domination, the face of the other that will give our home meaning.

The patient enters the room: our task begins. The question could be: Who's there? Who am I? We would be in the field of identity, of the quest for totality, for ways to appropriate the object. We would be in the field of ontology or positive knowledge.

On the other hand, if we accept that ethics is primordial, the gesture will be different: it will be to permit the arrival of the other and thus grant permission to be taken hostage, to let the other exist, to allow the other to speak.

This will include permission to be traumatized. (When the patient enters the room, says Bion, we have two people in panic.) This is the basis for an invitation to associate freely, to be as one cannot be anywhere else. If the patient knows nothing about psychoanalysis or even if they think they know something, what mysterious force brings them to this room? Perhaps, beyond all the desires and transferences, there is in that patient the prior conception of a possibility of being. Asymmetrically, what is expected from the analyst is free-floating attention, by no means a bucolic process. On the contrary, it opens us up to be traumatized.

In this context, knowing and being known are part of a fusional yearning, the fulfillment of a desire. Meaning is ephemeral: it will be destroyed of its own accord and should be interpreted as a genital moment of the analytical encounter. Since nothing is in fact appropriated, the search continues.

Ferenczi defined the quest for a fusional moment as a characteristic of genitivity, and perhaps this theoretical misconception is at the root of his clinical errors. The comprehending moment needs interpretation, so that its ephemeral nature can be made explicit. Its destruction, or rather neutralization, or better still its passage from act to representation, enables us to maintain the fertility of the field —hence genitivity, the field of psychoanalytical infinity.

When I began receiving patients who came from analysis undergone with other professionals yet seemed to have no internal perceptions at all, I inevitably wondered whether they had in fact undergone analysis —and inevitably tended to conclude that my own theoretical approach was superior.

If it was not modesty that introduced self-criticism, I should say that the constancy of the phenomenon led me to seek an alternative hypothesis: the emotional events that had acquired meaning or representative shapes disappeared from the analytical encounter; what was presented in the here-and-now was inevitably new and had not yet found rest in a representation.

This could be extended indefinitely. In my own cases, I noticed that while I believed repressed or split aspects had been dealt with adequately, nevertheless there was frequently no relief. There were merely vaguer symptoms, frequently psychosomatic.

Without resorting to preconfigured answers like repetition compulsion or a hypothetical death instinct, without transforming metapsychological questions into pragmatic responses, I venture to conclude, albeit remaining in the clinical field, that trauma persists where memories no longer exist.

Thus our task should be as follows: on the basis of dissolved memories, to make room for the existence of the traumatic in everyday life. At that moment the traumatic and the infinite will be presented as a conceptual pair and a clinical pair. A pair that will inevitably search for the paths of genitality and meaning, will inevitably seek the ethical being, which will welcome them.

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I have not dealt here with the notion of the infinite as limitless or unbounded. I have avoided equating the notion of infinity with the Freudian concept of overdetermination, which contains within itself the idea of appropriation of the object (Gabbard). Neither have I considered the infinite to be endogenous, as does Descartes to prove the existence of the divine. I have accompanied Levinas, for whom the infinite comes from the outside, as something that interrogates us and challenges us through the presence of a face that can never be possessed.

In professional terms, this openness to the infinite also allows me to apprehend the object of our interrogation from new angles, by listening to colleagues, even if their thinking is elaborated according to systems with which I disagree.

It is no accident that, even when we start from a shared practical experience, we can choose accounts of clinical situations that differ greatly from each other. This is part of our convergences and divergences, which guarantee the meanings of our conversation. Each of us has our own personal sense of metapsychology, and we therefore perform infinite acts against an infinite background. In clinical practice, this implies a radical inversion: the primacy of knowledge yields to the challenge of an ethics that is always yet to be achieved. It is fundamental to allow the face of the other, in the inevitable singularity of the analytical situation, to have a voice and ... to speak.

The quest for that which is beyond, metaphysical desire, the movement toward an encounter between the traumatic and the genital oblige us to seek transcendence and thus utopia, which will necessarily be on the horizon of our knowledge and our practice and perhaps —why not?— of our convergences and divergences.

## Body and infinite: notes for a theory of genitality

Leopold Nosek

**Abstract [49 words]** The author reviews the concept of genitality and, equating the unconscious to the infinite as understood by Levinas, attributes to psychoanalysis an ethics derived from reception of the other. Meaning is constructed under the aegis of the genital, the only sexual mode in which desire does not contain otherness.

**Abstract [428 words]** Following surgery to remove her womb, ovaries and Fallopian tubes, a patient asks: where do the products of sex go now? As the author understands, the vagina has become a dead end for her. This analytical situation will lead him to review the concept of genitality and propose a new articulation between the absolute singularity of each psychoanalytical gesture and the universality of what he will call “metapsychological yearning”.

A container of fertility, the womb is also part of a channel which from the outside affords access to the infinite silence of the entrails; without this access, the vagina becomes practically an external organ. According to the patient's fantasy, in this case the sexual intercourse will not achieve intimacy, preventing the encounter between two subjects from generating meaning and significance. Given that mind is structured upon a corporeal basis or as a correlate of a body, this interpretation rises a theoretical and clinical need to work with the concept of genitality and the infinite, which constitutes, as understood by Levinas, a peculiar object of investigation: the infinite ceases to exist if it can be contained by the concept.

The radical otherness of the unconscious imposes the analogy: it traumatizes its concept, just like the infinite. Equating the infinite with otherness means linking psychoanalytical theory and practice with an ethics derived not from positive knowledge, but from receiving the other in his alterity — I become a hostage to the infinite, I allow the other to traumatize me. I must receive the other with the courage to face the infinite. This gives rise to a notion of knowledge in which ethics precedes ontology.

The construction of meaning occurs in a conjunction of free-floating attention — this permanent disposition to be traumatized — and free association — a disposition to be as one cannot be anywhere else. While I strive to apprehend alterity, it strives to be apprehended by me and in me; it seeks the concept of itself in me. This corresponds to the realization of the idea of the infinite in the finite. We may call it desire — a “metaphysical desire”, one that plunges into the infinite following the trajectory of trauma, the path with no past, with no memory. Here meaning is constructed under the aegis of genitality, the only kind of sexuality in which desire does not encompass alterity.

The radically personal nature of the theoretical understanding of psychoanalysis as well as its clinical practice necessarily implies divergences *ad infinitum*. The convergences, on the other hand, are associated with a metapsychological yearning and only appear if the field of debate takes the infinite as its backdrop.

**Key words:** clinical; construction of meaning; ethics; genitality; infinite; metapsychology; trauma.

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