

AUTHENTICITY AND ANALYTIC STYLE*Fulvio Mazzacane¹*

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Abstract: *The question that has prompted this article could be formulated as follows: what are the vicissitudes of the analyst's subjectivity in the bi-personal models and, more specifically, in the Bion field model? Using a clinical vignette, the author shows his own "toy box" mainly the way he uses reverie and the interplay between plot and characters in the session.*

Keywords: analytical style, authenticity, characters, field model, reverie, transition.

Introduction

The question that has prompted this article could be formulated as follows: what are the vicissitudes of the analyst's subjectivity in the bi-personal models and, more specifically, in the field model?

What happens to analytic identity in the transition from theoretical configurations where the analyst predicates his identity on a strong concept of interpretation and well-defined roles, to analytic styles which value moments of immersion and symmetry in the therapeutic relationship? Models where we recognize the need to temporarily set aside our own subjectivity?

When discussing the object and transitional space, Winnicott (1971) lays a lot of stress on the implicit role of paradox, which must be accepted,

¹ Italian Psychoanalytical Association; fulvio.mazzacane@gmail.com

tolerated and respected and that must remain unresolved. The resolution of a paradox leads to a defensive organization, to a false self-organization.

In the concept of the analytic third (Ogden, 1994), the paradox that involves the analyst's subjectivity, as both protagonist and observer of what happens in the therapeutic relationship is contained, in acceptable terms, very similar to the Bionian image of binocular vision (Bion, 1967). Ogden describes a configuration that enables the analyst to capture the simultaneous presence of the analytic third and the patient's and analyst's subjectivities in relation to it.

From a radical perspective of the field model, the analyst's identity is temporarily disregarded and the only voice in the session is the field's. The paradox seems exasperated to its utmost, but we must not forget the metaphorical value of the images we create to define psychoanalytical events. The image of a parenthetical identity is key to emphasizing how significant transformations occur whenever intimacy between patient and analyst gives rise to something original which, like a baby, despite having its parents' DNA, is actually unique and unrepeatable. This level prevails and dictates its laws.

The paradox is to be respected but, as Winnicott writes, it must not defeat the will to investigate, an activity which can only stem from a disjointed, formless functioning, from a rudimentary game in a neutral zone, the aim of which is not to unravel the paradox, but to think of it as a boundary that we challenge every day.

The toy box in the analysis of adults

Psychoanalysis has developed as a highly specialized type of playing at the service of communication with oneself and others. Even with adults, the analyst presents his/her own "toy box", partly similar (but not identical) to other analysts', and partly completely original.

The analyst's subjectivity and the uniqueness of each therapeutic relationship is thrown into relief by the fact that, with each patient, we use

a different language, different tones of voice, different pitches, volumes and inflections in the discourse, a different choice of words and syntax so as to convey something unique that is transformative of both patient and analyst.

In any case, I do not believe in the existence of the Stem Analyst, a perfectly clean slate where any likely plot and game can actually take shape. I think that we can play many games with our patients, and we can also learn new ones from them, but not every kind of games imaginable. I am not thinking of a limitless number of developmental possibilities.

Bearing in mind the idea of the possible games, I imagine that, initially, the analyst brings his/her alpha function into the session which, in a good analytic pathway, will progressively give way to the couple's alpha function. In a previous paper (Mazzacane, 2011), reflecting on the analyst's identity, I surmised that each one of us brings into play some character types, allowing them to develop and take on an original shape as a result of the contact with the patient. These types are surmised to match the factors of the analyst's alpha function.

Considering my style of work, the factors that I had taken into account were:

a. A "heroic" component, understood as the capacity to disregard a strong identity, the readiness to immerse oneself in emotionally charged situations, high gradients of symmetry (not within the parameter of responsibility, which is always the analyst's), being the bearer of outmoded values.

b. The presence of a musical, rhythmical component.

c. The playful aspect, understood as the chance to play and learn new games, to create an atmosphere where emotions are more easily brought into play.

d. The capacity to learn from experience, leading to an ongoing readjustment of one's framework of reference.

e. The medical perspective, as a state of mind that allows for an assumption of responsibility for the patient's welfare and imagines the

analytic pathway as a sequence of more or less serious diseases of the field, whose treatment triggers some sort of immune response in the patient.

f. The need to feel part of the team of one's authors of reference, of the group of colleagues, of the patients, between moments of collaboration and conflict.

g. The awareness of the possibility that dangerous developments for the relationship could be set in motion.

h. The way in which we live up to our analytic tradition, without unnecessary compliance nor iconoclastic rebellion.

In order to illustrate some of the abovementioned technical aspects, I present here a part of a session with Claudia, a young female patient.

Claudia

CI. I had a dream: I was in Africa on horseback; a black man on a galloping horse leads the way. We were coming from the mountains, we had come down to the plain, and it was swelteringly hot. There were lots of children with bloated bellies. The man says to me: "*I'm sorry to bring you here where it's hot and there's suffering*", I answer that I expected such intense heat. Now that I'm telling you about it, I remember the allusion to Dante and Virgil in the previous session, it seems to me that the roles have nothing to do with us; I don't feel led by you but assisted.

[Pause]

I was thinking that when I'm alone in the car I drive instinctively, aggressively, whereas if I'm with someone else I am clumsy.

An1. If there's someone with you, you try to hold back, you don't want to show your aggressive side.

C2. I identify with my car, old fashioned, beautiful but full of problems, it lets in the rain, steams up and has no petrol gauge..... I need to experience the car as if it was my home.

An2. Like in the dream, there are less comfortable places, where there's more suffering but where it's well worth living.

The dream introduces some characters, the black man, the bloated children, the heat, Dante and Virgil, Us. The first associations add the car and aggressiveness. It is impossible to know from the start which of them will undergo a development – they must all be kept alive in the mind, but if we start thinking of development we certainly find traces of the analyst. I choose to underline the aggressiveness and suffering which refer back to the excessive heat and the bloated children, undoubtedly because they resonate with me in a way that I'm not yet aware of. The sweltering climate in which the dream plays out also reveals the narrative level of choice: a dream with a clear association with something mentioned in the previous session points to a raised emotional temperature.

C3. When I'm away on business I feel the need to take the house with me, I travel with a little plant I'm very attached to and my black cat, I have always liked the idea of a caravan. The cat, the little plant, the car, they all need my care.

An3. How come you've got a black cat?

C4. It's more diabolical.

An4. The subject of the devil is coming back....

C5. Yes, my bad side has always been an obsession. When I was little my mother lost her temper over nothing, and I would always apologize without knowing why. I thought it must be my fault. She hates cats even though she calls me "kitten".

[Pause]

A few days ago, I dreamt I was at work; suddenly I began starting shooting a machine gun and killed some people. I have always been problematic, but I never thought I would go that far. Funny how this dream should occur soon after Marco, my boyfriend, said that I am a good person.

An5. What you called the bad side seems to claim attention at all cost. Fortunately, there is more to you than just the Princess [Princess is the nickname that Claudia was given by a much loved relative].

C6. I can't dole out my aggressiveness in small doses; I shoot it all out and then apologize.

[Pause].

I am afraid of psychoanalysis, I am afraid that psychoanalysts are like those superheroes who turn nasty, they may not mean to it but they have a natural propensity.

I choose to ask her about the black cat, in the past I'm sure we talked about Bulgakov's novel *The master and Margarita*, where the cat is demonic, and the subject of his diabolical side had been mentioned. The choice seems to lead to a narrative development, the dream related by Claudia, no matter when she dreamt it, is a very important indicator of analytic intimacy. The very sequence of pictograms, supported in its development by a memory or a film, would have carried a different specific weight and would have had a different impact in terms of emotional distance.

When I playfully say "*fortunately, there's more to you than just the Princess*" I am simply inviting her to go on, but I raise the temperature, maybe too much, because the focus clearly shifts from the patient's inner world to the couple, as the analyst reveals his 'feeling'. The patient's answer is an invitation not to go beyond myself and scale down a little.

[Pause]

What are you thinking about?

An6. Those films come to mind where the Princess lives in a beautiful castle, surrounded by luxury but can't wait to play with the gamekeeper's son, wallowing in the mud. Playing in the mud, knowing that you can splatter or be splattered with mud, means accepting that unexpected or unwelcome aspects of oneself may come to light.

C7. I remember those films. Yesterday I was watching *Sex and the City*, the main character broke wind and the whole episode revolved around the problem that she hadn't been perfect.

An7. So even in this room it would be important to let out a fart.

C8. Sometimes I make it a point to be unpleasant, but other times wallowing in the mud is a pose, it is not spontaneous.

An8. Yes, sure. The difference between a fight and wrestling comes to mind.

C9. I'd like to throw away the Princess's clothes.

The patient's question turns the analytic practice on its head but introduces the idea of talking as dreaming (Ogden, 2007), of improvisation which requires the analyst to temporarily set aside his/her role and bring more personal aspects into play. The reverie that has taken shape in my head starting from the aggressive content presented by Claudia through her style of driving and that has addressed the diabolical aspects understood as relatively unmanageable configurations of the relationship, does not admit further elaboration and translates into a micro-tale which is a cross between a fairy-tale and something out of Lady Chatterley's Lover. Claudia plays the game and expands on the subject, backed by a more serialized, less ambiguous narrative level to talk about difficulties and bring into play different aspects which she has yet to master.

Reverie as a process

Let us consider reverie as a parameter by which to approach the analyst's subjectivity. The word reverie, like many others in psychoanalysis, is increasingly used as an all-round term, carrying an excessive overtone of vagueness.

According to Bion (1967, 1991) reverie is that state of mind which is open to the reception of any signal coming from the loved object, the state capable of capturing the child's projective identifications, regardless of whether they are perceived as good or bad. For Bion, reverie is one of the factors of mother's alpha function.

Ferro (2015) makes more narrow use of reverie. In the ongoing chain of pictograms produced by the alpha function, what happens is that one may not remain hidden in a sequence of pictograms but come into direct contact with the analyst. In the analyst's mind an annoying, insistent image persists, a pictogram that hinders the listening process, which is connected to the analytic situation and sheds light on something that the analyst did not yet know.

For Ogden (1997, 2016), reverie is a construct where the analyst and analysand participate in unconscious inter-subjectivity. In order to use it, the analyst must put up with the feeling of being adrift and allow it to slowly acquire meaning. Experiencing reverie transforms the analyst, enabling him to allocate meaning and turn something that was quite different just minutes before into an analytic object. This experience does not only concern those states that refer to the analyst's active receptiveness – for Ogden our ruminations, fantasies, bodily sensations, fleeting perceptions, images emerging from half-waking states, moods and words that cross the mind are also important. The analyst's mental activity during the session is full of ordinary, sometimes embarrassing thoughts which one tends to hide, but that should be captured instead, in the acceptance of a disturbing kind of self-awareness.

Two non-analyst authors influence my idea of reverie: the first is Peirce (1908, 1929), who describes it as the ideal state of mind for creative abductions, a state where images that belong to our baggage are revitalized. When we enter a state of mind of this kind a mind-set is produced whose only purpose is the setting-aside of all other purposes: pure play, without rules. Peirce calls "*Play of Musement*" the process whereby the mind looks for connections between ideas, brutal effectiveness and signs. The conjectures we produce, just like our theories, must always be thought of as *on probation*, subject to approval, under constant observation.

The second is Eco (1994) and his concept of *inferential walk*, an escape from the session's text to avoid the tyranny and the lure of the text itself, an attempt to escape its pressure with a view to the elaboration of an original reading.

Starting from the need to differentiate the analyst's various states of mind during the session, from the oneiric ones to those narrowly focused on the patient's material, I think of reverie as a process unfolding in the analyst's mind, stimulated either by the patient's discourse or by the special quality of being with him/her in the session, an explorative process that can lead to

the formulation of hypotheses with uncertain outcome. In order to avoid a magical use of the word, we must also take into account that sometimes the exploration might lead into cul-de-sacs, or simply lose its way, with feelings of loneliness and powerlessness. The moment we close the bracket, reverie asks to be subjected to translation work, more or less lengthy, so as to become useful material. At times, however, it tends to impose itself through its playful aspects and can be the beginning of “talking as dreaming”, a situation naturally fraught with potential dangers due to the risk of enactment.

Reverie is therefore a process that may have various functions and different outcomes:

- a walk along the patient’s text from which the analyst returns full of sensations, characters, metaphors, insights that can be invested in the relationship – in this sense it becomes the cradle of the “third”;
- a maintenance procedure of the analyst’s mind, which allows him/her to linger temporarily in oases at moments when the analytic atmosphere is barely tolerable, conjuring up the possible developments in the relationship;
- the warning of a breakdown in one’s mind due to the special intensity of the patient’s projective phenomena or to moments of limited efficiency;
- the fruitless exploration of pathways leading to the experience of disagreeable feelings which the patient unconsciously asks us to feel;
- the possibility of activating, within a group of colleagues the development of unlimited stories.

Plots and Characters

The narrative approach to characters has been thrown into relief in psychoanalysis. The characters coming onto the session can leave their historicity behind in order to acquire a life of their own within the tale.

In the analytical field the first step towards the exploitation of studies on characters rests on Propp (1928), who, in his text *Morphology of the fairy tale*, outlined the functional statute of characters: they are immaterial, what matters is what they do and how their ‘doing’ fits into the unfolding of the narration.

In the analytical field this perspective is under the concept of “functional aggregate”, suggested by Bezoari and Ferro (1991), a hologram resulting from the synthesis of verbal, bodily and emotive elements of the analyst and the patient, in constant transformation due to their correlation with the couple’s dynamics. In the analytical session the analyst and the patient construct the characters in an original way; they can be represented as human beings but also as concepts and relational configurations. Through them the analyst and analysand tell each other what happens between them in the game of projective identifications. They become the field’s factors or functions, it is impossible to distinguish them in their origin or even assign them to definite roles, they need to be evoked and transformed by the couple.

In the evolution of the modern, post-modern, contemporary novel characters has become multifaceted, engaged in a conflict between their own identity and the one allotted to them, they lose the capacity to leave a mark on reality or explain it, they are blurred, trapped in a weak reality, floating in a vacuum (Calabresi, 2010). In narrations the interweaving of plots tends to prevail, the blending of different narrative levels, beginnings and endings lose their function, multi-temporality dominates.

In the analytical session there are many ways of bringing a certain configuration into play, but it is quite different, in my view, if the literary genre is ‘crime’ or ‘sexual’, a film or a dream. The various parameters involved in determining the choice could relate to either more or less intimacy, to the degree of freedom of the tale. Restoring the relationship between character and plot, understood as the different strands produced in the session, means enhancing their supporting, albeit limiting, role in the couple’s workings, in their attempt to make sense of the narration.

We could say that the plot confers time and tonality to the characters’ movements in the narration. The plot implies the choice on the patient’s part of the literary genre or of the relational field that has come into being and been given a voice by the patient (Ferro, 2014).

My literary reference would be David Foster Wallace’s novels, his characters overwhelmed by events, who struggle to survive and acquire

meaning. In his novels different time levels coexist, which intersect with one another. At different times the characters may be actors, observers or narrators.

From an analytical point of view this links up with a couple coming to terms with the uncontrollable flow of life, trying to stay afloat, making sense of the various characters and narrations. The analytic couple participates in the daily battle with the past and with the events that try to irrupt into the session with their baggage of suffering. Naturally the temptation is to look for instant well-being through existential and psychoanalytical shortcuts.

In the clinical material that I have submitted it is possible to follow the development of the various characters: Claudia and the black man, the heat and suffering, Dante and Virgil, the car, aggressiveness, the black cat, the evil side, the Princess, the superhero analysts, playing in the mud, the wrestling/fight and the fart.

In my view it is important to match them with the different, alternating narrative levels: dream, memory from the previous session, personal tale, novel, reflection, film contaminated by a novel, TV series and configuration of the analytic couple.

The narrative threads, that unravel and come together again, each fulfil their own function, above all at the moment of surprise when the plots and the dystopian, dyschronic characters suddenly come together, when, as in the clinical part that I have presented, *Lady Chatterley* breaks into a fairy tale.

Conclusions

Ogden (2016) shows us that analytical style is a living process originating from the analyst's personality and experience and that rests on the analyst's skill at talking on the basis of the unique qualities of his personality, on the use he makes of his own experience as an analyst, analysand, father, son, spouse, master, student, friend, on his capacity to think in a way proceeding from, though independent of, his analyst's theory and technique, his supervisors, colleagues, forefathers, on the capacity to learn theory and technique and then forget them.

In the transference the analyst, says Ogden, should turn into either anyone or no one in the patient's life, someone who is happy with being

unnoticed, unacknowledged. Not be absent, but become absent, be someone who disappears, but not without leaving his traces tracks behind. The analyst's tracks are not the patient's identifications with him as a person, but the tracks of the experience of making psychological use of what the analyst has said, done, been (I would say: what they have done and said together, what they have become after the time they have spent together).

A key word to describe the essence of analytical identity through the identification of a moment when its genuine style finally emerges could be *transition*. If we think of the analyst's subjectivity we can indulge, fascinated by the narratological perspective, in an identity that is constantly being rewritten. Where even our personality is a text which we ceaselessly rewrite, such is our narrative with that patient we deal with, in each session, as if we had seen him for the very first time.

The suggestion is both powerful and productive, if we think of it as an ideal set-up we should aim for so as to avoid too much focus on the concrete or theoretical and concentrate instead on the new and unexpected. However, it should be integrated with what reality confronts us with daily in our wish to be individuals who cannot easily be reset, albeit in constant transformation.

We might think that our style, our authenticity lies in the way we face up to transitions, the level shifts we experience between 'me' and whatever is 'other'. In the way we tackle the transition of reverie when we return to the couple's discourse. In the way we transit from a bi-personal configuration on returning to a definite identity where the couple's configuration becomes once again asymmetrical. In the way we deal with our sense of loss when, after a time of immersion, we become aware of the disease of the field. In the way we, after the session, share our work with our colleagues and cast doubt on the certainties we thought we had.

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