

The Quantitative Factor in the Transformations observed during the Psychoanalytic Process

Since the time of “The Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1895) Freud developed the idea of a psychical apparatus, whose function is associated with quantitative and qualitative transformations of energy, connecting this formulation with biological concepts such as protoplasm irritability and reflex reactions of the nervous system. In spite of Freud’s ambivalence with the specific work several of the ideas contained in it functioned as building blocks for concepts appearing later in the evolution of psychoanalytic theory. Also, the model for mental phenomena offered in the “Project for Scientific Psychology” brings us closer to the attempts of present research, in which neurobiology and neurophysiology try to find common links with psychoanalysis in the workings of the mind, in the processing, storage, recall and elaboration of stimuli (Kandel, 1999).

With the monumental discovery of the connection between the “manifest content” of the dream and the “latent content” and of the complexities of the ingenious dream work, Freud showed us, through the process of psycho-analysis, previously unsuspected psychical processes, not available to consciousness during the day (Freud, 1923) , intricate psychical movements, regressive and progressive, shifts from word-representations to thing-representations (Freud, 1917), peculiar connections in time and

space. The transformations observed during the analysis of dreams, aim at undoing the work of displacement and condensation, bringing complex and overdetermined constructions into their original building blocks. The quantitative factor as a mobilizing force contributes to the formation of the dream aiming at preserving the balance in the border between unconscious and preconscious. Excitations from the day's residues and, though them, what is set in action in the unconscious, with their energetic quota are transformed into a process of dream construction, in which of primary importance is the hallucinatory function of dreaming, which Freud defined as a sample of the psychical apparatus's primary method of working (Freud, 1900).

With the revision of the theory of drives in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920) and the new picture of the psychic organization in the *Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923) the ego, the super-ego and the id become the three regions of the mind responsible for its manifest and latent workings. Our efforts in psychoanalysis, according to this new model, aim primarily at increasing the strength of the ego and its independence from the id and the superego, and at enlarging its capacities perceptual and organizational, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. "Where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud, 1933a, p.80)

Freud retained an awe and admiration for the drives and the id, naming them mythical entities magnificent in their indefinite

quality (Freud, 1933b). Understanding and working on the distribution of the two primal drives, their mingling and defusion in progressive and regressive movements, and their resistance to transformation, especially of the drive of destruction are crucial in any psychoanalysis. Extremely forceful quantitative factors, related to the drives and to drive derivatives linked with object and self representations, may threaten and immobilize the psychoanalytic process in a context of a frozen and/or sadomasochistic analyst/patient relationship. Creation of such conditions may lead to the appearance of extremely resisting defenses, difficult to work on, such as primary anality (Potamianou, 2002), defined as a fantasy in the service of a defensive attempt of the analysand to immobilize excesses of excitations stemming from the transference relationship, and psychic retreat (Steiner, 1993) , meaning the withdrawal of the analysand from the overwhelming anxieties of the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive position to a third position, which in spite of its pathological organization, makes him feel safe and protected.

Regarding the transformation of the drives our effort during the psychoanalytic process, is to achieve a fusion/defusion balance between the two primal instinctual forces and such “taming” of the destructive drive, that allows for modifications in the psychic apparatus, which guarantee adequate functioning, pleasure in everyday activities and the absence or minimization of

behaviors indicating need for punishment and negative therapeutic reactions.

Expanding the ego's territory over the id for Freud, among other things, means qualitative change of the quantitative factor, leading to the use of small amounts of energy in order to promote its thinking function, increase its ability to postpone discharge (Freud, 1911), and extend the primacy of the secondary process and reality principle, versus the primary process and pleasure principle. However, the aim of any psychoanalysis is not to have absolute dominance of the secondary process, but to achieve a balanced mingling of the two modes of thinking and energy discharge, leading to the emergence of tertiary processes in the analytic relationship. The appearance of such processes, connecting primary and secondary, establishing liaison or play between the two, allows the construction of an optimum distance and of a third party, a third topical area, as some analysts propose, building conditions which favor symbolization and creative transformational processes (Green, 1986).

A concept that seems to be related to the stabilizing function of the ego, increasing its control over the primary process, is the concept of present unconscious, a system with a functional organization close to the preconscious (Sandler and Sandler, 1994). In this system current fantasies, influenced by derivatives of the past unconscious are formed, including transference fantasies, which are much more accessible to our analytic work

and aim, through substantial modification, to preserve the analysand's mental equilibrium.

The centrality of the object for quantitative and qualitative changes of energetic elements to occur is already mentioned by Freud in the Three Essays on Sexuality, where he states that libido, when it cannot be satisfied in the absence of the object, is transformed into anxiety (Freud, 1905). In this work he gives the example of a little child, who asks his aunt to talk to him in order to transform his fear and darkness into light.

While the ego evolves as the main stabilizer in the workings and the economy of the mind, the object gains in importance through the modifications of cathectic energy. A series of complicated vicissitudes of cathectic processes connect id, ego, superego and object during all phases of development reinforcing the role of the ego as mediator and opening the road to sublimation (Freud, 1923). According to Freud, one way the ego obtains energy from the id, utilizing it for its own organization and functions, is to direct the energy to itself by identifying with the object (Freud, 1933a). In Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety what is attributed to the object is a crucial regulating function for the state of accumulated tension in the ego. It is stated that the infantile ego depends on the object for obtaining satisfaction of his desires, while it can reach a state of helplessness if, in the absence of the object, excitations cannot be mastered but instead increase, creating a dreaded economic situation (Freud, 1926).

Freud set the foundation for the significance of the object in all developmental phases of the psychic organization. Since then several aspects of the complexities of early object relations have been explored, extending, enriching and deepening psychoanalytic theory and our understanding about the analyst/analysand relationship in the unraveling of the psychoanalytic situation.

In psychoanalysis, the relationship to the object finds its main expression in the transference, which remains one of the main transformational tools in analytic work. Transference indeed reactualizes the past object relations, bringing them active and alive into the present. I will focus on the effect of the transference and the analyst/object on the binding and modification of the quantitative factor. As the psychoanalytic process proceeds, through this relationship, various elements and their energetic quota are metabolized and transformed in both partners, allowing for representational psychic activity to emerge.

Freud himself seems to appreciate the strength of the energetic elements and their contribution to the formation and modification of the transference. Quoting Ferenczi (1909) he compares the analyst to a catalytic ferment like in chemical reactions, which attracts to itself the effects liberated in the highly intense conditions of the psychoanalytic relationship (Freud, 1912a), proposing a function which mobilizes and binds excitations at the same time. In addition, transference is

described as battlefield in which all forces struggle to find expression (Freud, 1917). The well known description by Freud (1912b) of the analyst's unconscious functioning as the telephone receiver, which transforms the patient's unconscious derivatives into sounds and eventually into meaningful material is another reference to successive transformations of energetic elements into qualitatively different material, revealing new aspects of the analysand's psychic reality.

A model of early object relationship reactivated in the transference is what Winnicott calls the holding function of the analyst (Winnicott, 1958; 1965). This means the analyst's ability to allow the analysand's autonomy to evolve without "impinging" on him, his ability to survive, like the infant's mother, the patient's aggression, providing an emotionally supportive environment and leading to a creation of a safe analytic space for the analysand. The aim is to tame the derivatives of aggression in both partners and transform the battlefield of the analytic situation and relationship into a safe playground, offering the opportunity for the ego to increase its capacity to be alone and symbolize.

The container analyst (Grinberg, Sor, and Tabak de Bianchedi, 1996), who receives the elements projected by the patient, especially uncontrollable emotions, fulfilling a good analytic function, like the good-breast mother with a capacity for reverie, metabolizes these elements and returns them back transformed and more tolerable. The quantitative factor in those

emotions and the analyst's capacity to modify them is crucial for the way the psychoanalytic process will evolve; if it will lead to mental growth or to collusion.

The capacity of the analyst to stimulate excitations in the analytic work which do not overwhelm the patient but remain in an atmosphere of safety, this optimal seduction (Potamianou, 2001) of the analyzand is another function of the analyst/object, which facilitates thinking, leading to the formation of binding constellations instead of stagnation and/or disorganization.

The presence of primitive pregenital aggression in the activation of early problematic object relations associated with regressed ego states, appearing in the transference of borderline patients, is a manifestation of entanglement of especially forceful drive derivatives linked with object and self representations, leading to equally forceful countertransference reactions, burdened by projected aggression and making the analysts's work extremely difficult (Kernberg, 1975).

In the continuous attempt to revise and check theory against experience in the transformations observed during the psychoanalytic process, the quantitative factor retains its importance. It can be increased, diminished, displaced, discharged or modified, determining psychical states and motions. It can be the mobilizing force for progressive and regressive psychic movements, associated with a dynamic fluidity, which allows us to observe continuity in the psychic functioning, to trace

connections and compare a great variety of mental acts. Frozen formations within the psychic apparatus of a fetishistic nature may function as stable rocks, that often preserve the ego from further disintegration, but on the other hand they are associated with stagnation and immobilization.

On the contrary, the quantitative factor tied up mainly to the drives may provide the force to overcome resistances and allow fresh material to emerge, to be explored and elaborated giving the opportunity for destabilization, and eventually for reorganization of dynamics and psychic economy under better ego regulation. Our interventions and interpretations often have a triggering function on various levels of psychic organization. Past traces of personal experiences and relationships with their energetic quota become alive again in the transference, burdening this relationship with an unusual intensity and forcefulness for both partners. The transformations that are called for in this case include quantitative and qualitative changes that allow the construction of a safe space in the analyst/analysand relationship in which both parties contribute their share in the unraveling of the analytic scene and the analytic scenario.

The transformations of the quantitative factor refer to the analyst as well, in this unique psychoanalytic situation. Under the burden of tensions and excitations his analytic working capacity, his responsiveness, his ability to work through, his associative and representational thinking may be affected, unless energetic

components are modified into bound quiescent components and eventually into psychic formations in the context of a shared reality.

I will conclude my talk with a clinical vignette showing transformations observed during the psychoanalytic process.

A young woman, married, came to treatment with the chief complaint of not being able to control her anger especially towards her son. She was physically violent with him on certain occasions, and she had the fantasy that during his adolescence he would become a monstrous youngster for whom limits it will be very difficult to set. She was aware, however, that she was burdening this relationship with her own conflicts and traumatic experiences from childhood and adolescence.

When she was five years old her mother died from cancer. In the memories she preserved from that period of her life, she described her mother as being ill at home, weak and pale. She recalled also a memory, when she was 4½, standing between her parents and holding their hands. Feeling the father's hand much stronger and more robust than her mother's, she made a choice for this strength, as she felt it, and prayed to God to take care of her father and keep him well. The mother died few months later and when this scene comes to her mind, even to day, she feels full of guilt for the preference she expressed.

The father was described as a very rigid and demanding person who was pressuring his children to do very well

academically. During the elementary school years the patient was admiring and caring towards him, trying to meet all his demands. Holding, embracing or playing with him, for her, equaled to being in paradise. Hell broke loose when she entered adolescence. She was continuously provoking him with her behavior and their relationship turned into a constant battle of a sadomasochistic nature. She was neglecting her work at school, she was behaving as a delinquent being often on the edge of catastrophe. While in this destructive turmoil she was able to put herself together for periods of time and eventually, in spite of wanderings and adventures, to enter the University and complete studies, that gave her the opportunity for a good professional carrier. She got married and gave birth to three children, two girls and a boy. She managed to build a life that met criteria of a very good functioning, fulfilling her father's wishes, but continued to have extreme outbursts of anger losing control verbally and sometimes physically.

As the psychoanalytic process evolved, the maternal imago appeared as a sweet person who, however, could not stand for her rights, confront others and protect herself. The analysand expressed phobias of cancer referring to herself and to the analyst, that were understood as an attempt, through identification, to retain the maternal object. Material emerged related to the period of mother's illness, her death and the incomplete mourning that followed. In her memories and in her

fantasies about the mother the image of passivity and weakness prevailed, and her belief that the mother died, because she did not have the strength to confront the others' attacks and fight for her rights and her place in life. In this context her violent outbursts were understood and interpreted as her attempt to fly away from the identification with the passive, weak mother, and instead to identify with the father, to identify with the aggressor. One day, while in the session she had the following fantasy. She is in a dark tunnel with water that gives the impression of a sea in which waves create turbulence. At times she is on a boat and other times she is into the water and she is struggling not to drown. While she is fighting with the waves, she realizes that nearby there is a lifeguard, whom she does see at times and at others she does not, who is watching her, ready to help

Her associations had to do with her adventures since her childhood and the oscillations from life to destruction and vice-versa. She recalled Victor Hugo's "les Misérables» from her childhood and specifically the scene in which Jean Valjean is running in the underground sewer system while Javert is chasing him. She placed herself in the place of Jean Valjean in her attempts to fight the destructive elements, internal and external, that threaten her. However, at the present time she is not alone. The analyst-lifeguard is there next to her, ready to intervene. She commented also that for the first time she had the feeling that the terrors in her life may not be completely real, but

something like the horror house in the amusement park for little children.

I do not want to elaborate on all aspects involved in the formation of the analysand's fantasy but just to focus on the transformation observed from acts of violent discharge to a fantasy of fighting the waves, in a context of a relative safety associated with the presence of the analyst, visible or not. The formation of this fantasy, among other things, shows the binding of the energetic factor and its quantitative and qualitative changes. The ego is not overwhelmed in a state of helplessness but in the presence of the analyst/object and his holding and containing function, its representational activity is mobilized reinforced by the investment of childhood memories and fantasies from her readings about Jean Valjean.

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