

## The Eternal Presence of the Absent

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### Abstract

Subjects become capable of autonomy, attachment and creativity only when they acknowledge the presence of objects in their inner world. Object relations are relational endeavours. Such tasks, though, are not linear or soundless. Dependence on the object and reparation processes necessarily occasion some suffering and mental pain. Omnipotence and denial, though appealing, will only temporarily relieve disturbances. Paradoxically, refusal to face the necessary pain will only confirm the ever-present reality of the object and its importance, as shown in the clinical case here related.

**Keywords:** *Object; Relation; Dependence; Denial; Transference; Absent Presence*

Absence, hear thou my protestation

Against thy strength,

Distance and length;

To hearts that cannot vary

Absence is presence;

Time doth tarry.

(John Hoskins, "Absence", citado por Joan Riviere em *The Unconscious Phantasy of an Inner World Reflected in Examples from Literature*, 1952).

The very current theme of the refusal to suffer is especially inspiring, because in addition to stimulating thinking, it is broad in its possibilities of understanding. And clinical reflections, part of the call that leads us to write, always take us beyond the themes, even the most exciting ones.

The refusal to suffer is an illusory possibility that we have created, given the inevitable experience against which this refusal is erected: the experience of pain. To refuse, however, to live the experience is to admit, by default, the existence of pain.

In addition to the discussions about the nature of what is scientific and what is not, we find that the truth that concerns our psychoanalytic profession is that which refers to psychic reality, assuming the existence of an internal world. Thus, in the psychoanalytic tradition there is a definite objective, the possible search for the truth of the mind, which will necessarily include psychic pain.

In this search, each of us will choose his referential instruments, to support the exercise of our individuality as psychoanalysts. I consider my referential to be that which concerns to object relations and the mental constitution based on these, which includes the inherent obstacles to any relational encounter.

The model proposed by Klein and developed by her followers starts from the disaggregated experiences of the first moments of life, the schizoparanoïd position, which suppose omnipotent, almost magical strategies, to mitigate the frightening impacts of primitive encounters.

Moving towards integration, supposedly achieved in the depressed position, the presence of the object looms large, but mainly its autonomy is undeniable.

This fact is a narcissistic shock of considerable proportions. At that moment, although the chances are reasonable for the development, there is also the inexorability of pain due to the loss of the object, as the need and dependence will imply the recognition of the otherness and the uncertainties brought by this recognition.

The object, which due to the need for primitive survival, was believed to be the omnipotent possession of the subject, presents itself as what may be available, but by its own deliberation. Therefore, the object is always autonomous. His absence will constitute a landmark in the relationship. The existence of the other and his autonomy will also be the vehicle for self-expression for the subject: the libidinal choice for the object and what is inherent to it means growth and creativity.

Contrary to this, another possible choice is denial fueled by destructive narcissism, which aims to annihilate the dependent part and the capacity of recognizing the object's autonomy. There is, then, one more paradox in relation to psychic pain: denial also confirms dependence. This is the pain inherent and inseparable to the human being, characterizing it and giving it a relational quality.

The surrender necessary for object dependence, however, is not lived without vicissitudes. Freud tells us in *Civilization and its discontents* [1], that suffering threatens us to come from three directions:

- Our body is destined for dissolution;
- The outside world can overwhelm us with its fury; but, mainly,
- The suffering comes from the pain of relating.

Pain and relating form a binomial that touches us. We analysts are the object of the transference. Therefore, in this field we will experience all the relational pain of the pair and we will try to help our patients to enjoy human interaction, as possible as it may occur to obtain their greatest achievement.

Bion [2] speaks of an important difference between feeling the pain and suffering the pain to possess it. When we are able to tolerate suffering by surrendering to it, pain becomes legitimate and transforms us, a result far removed from the limiting masochistic purposes. It means not only surrendering to finitude but possessing it; not only to doubt the object and its availability, but to be the doubt for the object; not only seeing the other but learning from experience that distance is the link that allows us to look. The omnipotent timelessness

of the schizophrenic unconscious, then, will give way to the depressive temporality of relationships and limits, which are the conditions for the encounter.

Joan Riviere [3] impresses with the tragic and beautiful description of the depressive position, where she shows the great difficulties in the painful task of repairing what omnipotence, which beckoned with a false possession, destroyed in the object. Of course, I am talking about object relations as they are in the internal world, coloured by the unconscious phantasy and which, therefore, by the projective identifications, serve as a model for all relations.

Reparation, which confirms object autonomy, is the greatest paradigm for the possible encouragement we will obtain, in the task that will follow us for a lifetime: recognizing that, if we are not alone, it is only because the object has goodness [4]. If it is possible for the subject to enjoy a confident hope in the survival of the object and its strength, in the internal world there will be greater integration with it, since the destructive force attributed to omnipotence itself will decrease.

John Hoskins, the poet quoted by Joan Riviere, ends his poetry with the recognition of the absence of the object, which makes it present in a unique way. The object becomes the introjected presence, absent but recognized as such. Such accomplishment is shown here beautifully, as only poets could do:

In some close corner of my brain

There I embrace and kiss her

And so, I both enjoy and miss her...

In Joan Riviere's words, the glimpsing integration and the consequent panic in the face of the task ahead, to carry out object recognition, are beautifully described: "... love brings sadness and sadness brings guilt... the tension is intolerable, but there is no way out... we are alone, there is no one to share or to help us... there will be no one to feed us, not even to be fed "...

With only the fragile possibility of reparation it is certain that we will not reach the object, but what we have done with it. The repaired object will then be something only close to the real object, which will be the absent presence that will accompany us... More qualified will be those who are relatively able to integrate it, in its good and bad aspects. Only then will the mourning for narcissistic fullness bring the relationship as a legacy. This is the subject's great gain, the good introjected object that promotes reflection and insight.

However, as Eric Brenman [5] points out, such introjection will always be imperfectly acquired. To keep in mind the initial narcissism, which supposes the belief in the possession of the idealized primitive object, the superego, without rest, campaigns for the deceptive perfection of fullness, that is, it refuses to be humanized by the possibility of the relationship.

Nowadays, patients who have no possibility of representation have been spoken with insistence, that is, patients who have not developed towards object relations, forming, in short, autistic nuclei without symbolization. As I understand, these "states" have always existed. And they can be understood from various theoretical angles, but we should not lose the object perspective, because even looking from the point of view of the subject as a result of its efforts towards relating, the relational unfeasibility assumed the existence of the object, which may or may not be functional for the subject's development.

We psychoanalysts, who have the mission of transmitting and teaching psychoanalysis, but fundamentally reverence it daily in our offices, as a tribute to its founding status, the clinic, regardless of the theoretical prism that explains it, we face and avoid pain, including ours; with the appreciation for the object and, precisely for the appreciation, with the attacks and the denials of dependence; with the possibility of admiration and the inexorability of envy.

Just as the psychoanalytic text is vast and beautiful in its possibilities of choice, the clinic's adventure is varied in its nuances, both those that gratify us and those that frustrate and sadden us. BUT WE HAVE NO EXIT unless we live them fully. Otherwise, we will repeat the current demand for instinctive discharges and an unbridled race for a supposed autonomy that attacks the bond, dissociated from relationships and affections. The excessive call for action, one of the characteristics of our time, goes contrary to our purpose, the search for thought through transference experience.

It is in the transference, the most representative characteristic of our work and a greater expression of the model of primitive relations, where we will live the comforts of the encounter and where the discomfort of the pain of each analytical pair that is formed will also happen. Through these, transformations will occur to both components of the pair. This is the generosity of this peculiar relationship, which allows analysts to learn from patients, through the pain of relating, to be better at what they do.

Day after day, in this time that has no time, the transference, we are apprentices of our trade. And even imperfect, this relationship will have the grandeur of the possible relationship. If the transference refusal for suffering is very intense, this will also bring the refusal for development.

Psychoanalysis is not a practice for happiness, as it seeks psychic pain as a possibility for integration. And it is far from being magical, because its advances have always been the result of the effort in front of the clinic and its challenges, guided by the recognition of the individualities of the subject and the object. In the transference, the analyst and his patient.

Next, I bring a clinical reflection, as a complement to the theme of this article. In the imminence of separation, triggered by the proximity of the end of analysis, a patient relives, in the transference, the most intense primitive experiences.

Antonio has been under analysis for sixteen and a half years, with a frequency of five weekly sessions. In a month of July, we marked the end of his analysis for the same month of next year, at my suggestion and in agreement with him.

After four months of this agreement, the intense and suffered continuity of the reparation experiences included the recognition of gains in life through analysis. However, as one might expect, it also meant the inevitable and necessary contact with his destructiveness with the reorganization of rather perverse defenses, which evolved to legitimate primitive and current object relations, including the wife, children and the analyst.

It was on that occasion that Antonio brought the following dream: "I was very thirsty and went to a bar, one of those modern corner taverns, very beautiful on the outside and inside. I went in and asked for a glass of water. The attendant gives me water in a dirty and dusty glass. I get so furious, I throw everything, glass and water, in his face. He looks at me in surprise and tells me, very sad: Sir, it was just asking for another glass, it didn't need so much violence. There is always water here. I was the one who was surprised then and replied: You couldn't give me a dirty glass, because I'm still thirsty".

In the face of so much thirst, as well as the attendant, I too was surprised, doubting my ability to discern. Was Antonio prepared to leave the analysis, or was this apparent setback an integral part of the process? At that time, there was no way to evaluate, just to endure Antonio's experience with an analyst compared to a slack attendant. I kept this countertransference information and immediately after my doubt, I realized clearly that Antonio was beginning to feel the possibility of separation as something so suffered, that he needed to reactivate experiences of contempt for the object.

So, I believed that he was communicating to me a form of denial already known, pretending he didn't need it and despising anyone who gave him something. But, subtly, he informed in the dream: I am still thirsty. I understood this almost hidden part of his speech as the possibility, the only one at the moment, to consider the object.

Antonio continues: “This was a silly man’s dream, because it was obvious that, due to the fact that I had treated the attendant badly, rudely, he might as well have humiliated himself and given me another glass, with a spitting revenge inside... But no, he was polite, he was a little sad, but he showed me that I needed water to quench my thirst and that he had to give ”.

I tell him it was not a silly man’s dream, but that of someone who was afraid of running out of water and without his own resources to quench his thirst, as well as needing analysis and not having his daily sessions anymore. Apparently, it would be easier if the glass was dirty and I was a humiliated and vindictive analyst who would not be missed.

Antonio cries in silence for a few minutes. And he tells me that he thinks he needs even more time to put up with this idea of leaving. I answer that we could follow our path, seeing what the day to day, until next year, could do for the thirst that he still felt. If necessary, we could, together, review the scheduled date.

He thanks me and says he is calmer. And he admits that what he is really afraid of is not being able to do without me the task of keeping sane, adding that he does not doubt that I know what I do, because if I proposed the possibility of leaving, I thought he was able.

So, it was done. We continued with our daily work. Antonio oscillated a lot between moments of greater integration and suffering and others, in which he sarcastically and bitterly denied the dependence on his mother, whom he said only served to give birth.

He covered me with praise, saying that I was the most important person in his life, that no one had ever turned to him in such a dedicated way, etc. They were very seductive, very placating and very split words. I felt compelled to help him, identified his suffering and showed him the need to keep me in a place where nothing bad would happen to me, but that I thought he was very resentful of me for having suggested the end of his analysis.

During this period, it was very common for Antonio to cry during his sessions. It seems that crying was a way through which his hatred, his sadness, his uncertainties, his fear flowed.

Five months have passed since the dream reported above, when Antonio arrives satisfied for a session and says that he was happy to have remembered a dream, without so much complaint and criticism. “More than that,” he says, “I think I have regained my ability to dream.” And tell me:

“The birthday party for Dudu (his eldest son, who would have a birthday party in the next few days) was being prepared in the courtyard of Aunt Rosa’s house. Shortly before the scheduled time, I went there and found that there was still a lot of dirt spread, which would make the party very unpleasant. I ran to my aunt and asked her, please, to help me clear up the rubble and so she did. There was time, because when the guests arrived everything was in order ”.

Following his account, Antonio remembers his mother and compares her to Aunt Rosa. His mother, according to him, had a very neat and clean house. With all these years of analysis, he says he has also managed to make his mother more efficient in the day to day of his head. “This is a great gain, it seems that today I have another mother, more complete”. He is anxious about his son’s party, as it is his first birthday at a new school and he is not sure if his friends will go.

I hear him talking with emotion. Despite the remaining debris, it is me he asks for help to make the party beautiful. And he integrates his mother in his associations, within the transference. So, I tell that this dream also concerned us and the party that he wanted to enjoy when he left the analysis, as an achievement of ours, of the work he and I had. Although some debris remains, it was me who he asked for help with the final arrangements.

Antonio agrees and remembers the dream of the tavern, where “there was only dirt and not the possibility of help”. “It was a terrible thing after that dream. I felt in my belly button what I can do with my violence, with you too, who is the person I like most after my family. (crying) Honestly, I don’t know what would become of me, without years of analysis. This is what I think, I’m still not very confident, here I have a chance to turn things around, but then what? I think I harm people, I may have caused Dudu harm with my verbal violence, my lack of patience with Guiga (the youngest son) and so many other things ”...

I show him the importance of what he is saying to me, despite the pain he felt. He was taking responsibility for his relationships and what he can do to the other. Antonio continues to cry and adds that it is no longer possible to go around dumping things on others, making others the pit. “Like it or not, I will never, ever, ever get rid of what is mine. The others accept me if they want”. When I close the session, Antonio says: “ Thanks. An hour like this is worth for many years. But I really want to stay here a little longer, as a safety margin ”.

Antonio stayed for another year and a half, leaving at eighteen and a few months of analysis. In his last session, he hands me a bag of black velvet, with several rough stones inside. In the middle of these, I find a jewelry box, containing a pair of earrings formed by two intertwined gold threads. And he says to me: “Here is what I was and what I have become.” On a small card, which I keep to this day, it says: “Just one word: Gratitude”.

The intertwining of two precious metal wires, which here represented, in my understanding, analyst and patient in harmony, transformed into a circle, where there is the possibility of never stopping, is a beautiful metaphor for the recognition of the object and gratitude for its autonomy, which make possible, for the subject, transformations in constant movement.

However, this recognition does not happen except through relational experience and the pain of relating and demands a considerable part of our commitment, as Green [6] says. And the admission that the refusal to suffer will be present is also part of this commitment. One more paradox of psychic pain: we analysts, who are sought to reduce suffering, will often be sponsors of this.

### Conclusion

If we always do so in the name of legitimating incomplete pleasures, of object relations that are not being lived, obscured by the triumphant mistakes of self-affirmation, which engulfs the other, denies dependence and which consequently does not favor thought, we will go on without the complete experience of relating.

But when we recognize the object’s autonomy, we also acquire the pain of the relationship as our greatest asset. This is the essence of the psychoanalytic search, to position oneself in relation to the other. And lucky will be the hearts that can change! For these, the yearning for the un-creative repetition of false independence, destined for failure, will give way to less fairy-tale, yet creative possibilities of relationships and their impasses.

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