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PSYCHO-ANALYSIS OF THE PSYCHO-ANALYTIC FRAME

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EDITOR'S NOTE

José Bleger, a Kleinian psychoanalyst strongly influenced by Winnicott (1956 [chapter 40], 1959, 1965), sets out in this paper to investigate the nature and function of the ground rules of psychoanalysis—here termed the *psychoanalytic frame.* The result is a paper rich in insight, though one that has unfortunately attracted little notice by other writers. Bleger views the setting or frame as an institution and nonprocess, and as the essential representation of the early mother-child symbiosis in the analytic relationship. Out of these fundamental constants and their correct management by the analyst basic ego development is seen to unfold in the analytic experience. From this recognition—and here is the paper's major virtue—Bleger draws an invaluable technical conclusion: the analysis of impingements upon the frame must precede all other therapeutic work.

Winnicott (1956) defines "setting" as "the summation of all the details of management."[1] I suggest, for reasons that will become clearer further on, that we should apply the term "psycho-analytic situation" to the totality of phenomena included in the therapeutic relationship between the analyst and the patient. This situation comprises phenomena which constitute a *process* that is studied, analysed, and interpreted; but it also includes a *frame,* that is to say, a "non-process", in the sense that it is made up of constants within whose bounds the process takes place.[2]

The analytic situation may be thus studied from the point of view of the methodology it stands for, its frame corresponding to the *constants* of a phenomenon, a method or technique, and the process to the set of *variables.* Methodological considerations will, however, be left out and they have only been mentioned here to make it clear that a process can only be examined when the same constants (frame) are being kept up. Thus, we include within the psychoanalytic frame the role of the analyst, the set of space (atmosphere) and time factors, and part of the technique (including problems concerning the fixing and keeping of times, fees, interruptions, etc.). The frame refers to a strategy rather than to a technique. One part of the frame includes "the psycho-analytic contract" which "is an agreement between two people into which enter two formal elements of mutual exchange: time and money" (Liberman, 1961).

I am here concerned with the psycho-analysis of the psycho-analytic frame, and there is a great deal in the literature about the need for keeping it up and about the breaks and distortions caused by the patient in the course of any psycho-analysis (varying in intensity and features from exaggerated obsessive fulfilment to repression, acting out, or psychotic disintegration). My work in the psycho-analysis of psychotic cases has clearly revealed to me the importance of maintaining and protecting the fragments or

1. Paper read at the Second Argentine Psychoanalytic Congress, Buenos Aires, June 1966.

2. Here we might compare this terminology with that used by Liberman (1962) and Rodrigué (1966) respectively.

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elements which might have remained and which can sometimes only be achieved by hospitalization. Yet I do not want to consider now the problem of "disruption of" or "attack on" the frame. I want to study what is involved in the maintenance of an *ideally normal frame.* The problem is similar to what physicists call an ideal experiment, that is to say a problem which does not occur fully and precisely in the way it is being described or stated, but which is of great theoretical and practical use. This is perhaps what Rodrigué had in mind when he once referred to the patient whose history nobody has written and nobody will ever be able to write.

The way I have stated the problem seems to imply that such study is impossible, since ideal analysis does not exist, and I agree with this opinion. The fact is that at times permanently, and at other times sporadically, the frame changes from the mere background of a Gestalt into a figure, that is to say, a process. But even in these cases, it is not the same thing as the process of the analytic situation itself because, whenever "flaws" occur in the frame, we still tend to maintain it or restore it with our interpretation; this is quite different from our attitude in the analysis of the process itself. In this sense, I am interested in examining the psycho-analytic meaning of the frame *when it is not a problem,* in the "ideal" analysis (or at the moments or stages when it is ideal). Thus, I am interested in the psycho-analysis of the frame when it is maintained and not when it is broken, when it remains a set of constants and not when it has turned into variables. The problem I want to look into concerns those analyses in which the frame is not a problem—precisely to show that it is a problem—a problem, however, which has not been defined or hitherto recognized.

A relationship which lasts for years, in which a set of norms and attitudes is kept up, is nothing less than a true definition of *institution.* The frame is then an institution within whose bounds certain phenomena take place which we call behaviour. I was led to this study partly by a series of seminars on Institutional Psychology and as a result of my experience in this field (though at present limited). What became evident to me was that each institution is a portion of the individual's personality; and it is of such importance that identity is always, wholly or partially, institutional, in the sense that at least one part of the identity always shapes itself by belonging to a group, institution, ideology, party, etc. Fenichel (1945) wrote: "Unquestionably the individual structures created by institutions help conserve these institutions." But besides this interaction between individuals and institutions, institutions always work in varying degrees as the limits of the body image and as the basic centre of identity.

The frame is maintained and tends to be maintained (actively, by the psycho-analyst) as invariable; and while it exists as such it seems to be non-existent or it does not count, just as we become aware of institutions or relationships only when they are missing, are blocked, or have ceased to exist. (I do not know who it was who said about love and children that we only know they exist when they cry.) But, what is the meaning of the frame when it is maintained, when "it does not cry"? It is, in all instances, the problem of symbiosis, which is "dumb" and only reveals itself when it breaks or is on the verge of rupture. This is what happens, too, with the body image whose study started with pathology which first proved its existence. In the same way as we speak of the "ghost member", we must accept that institutions and the frame *always* make up a "ghost world", that of the most primitive and undifferentiated organization. What is always there is never noticed unless it is missing; we might apply to the frame the term used by Wallon for what he called "ultra-things", that is to say, all that which in experience appears as vague, undefined, without conception or knowledge of itself. What makes up the ego are not only the steady relationships with objects and institutions but the ulterior frustrations and gratifications with them. There is no awareness of what is always present. Awareness of the missing or gratifying object comes later; the first step is the perception of a certain "incompleteness". What exists in the individual's perception is that which experience has taught him might be missing. On the other hand, steady or motionless relationships (the non-absences) are those which organize and preserve the non-ego, and serve as a basis for the building up of the ego according to frustrating and gratifying experiences. The fact that the non-ego is not perceived does not mean it does not exist psychologically for the organization of personality. The knowledge of something is only apparent in the absence of that something, until it is incorporated as an internal object. But what we do not perceive is also present. And precisely because of this, that "ghost world" is also present in the frame even when this has not been broken.

I want to digress again, hoping to provide more elements for the present study. Until recently, we were comfortably working in the field of science, language, logic, etc., without realizing that all of these phenomena or behaviours (I am interested in all of

them in so far as they are behaviours, that is to say, human phenomena) take place within a context of assumptions which we ignored or thought nonexistent or invariable; but we know now that communication contains a meta-communication, science is a meta-science, theory a meta-theory, language a meta-language, logics a meta-logics, etc., etc. If the "meta-" varies the contents vary radically.[3] Thus, the frame is constant, and is therefore decisive in the phenomena of the process of behaviour. In other words, the frame is a *meta-behaviour,* and the phenomena we are going to distinguish as behaviour depend on it. It is what remains implicit, but on which the explicit depends.

The meta-behaviour works as a "bulwark", as M. and W. Baranger have called it, a phase in which the analysand tries not to risk avoiding the basic rule. In the meta-behaviour, I am interested in analysing the cases in which the basic rule is fulfilled, and I am concerned precisely with examining that fulfilment. I agree with these authors in regarding the analytic relationship as a symbiotic relationship; but in the cases in which the frame is being respected, the problem lies in the fact that the frame itself is the receiver of the symbiosis and that the latter is not present in the analytic process itself. Symbiosis with the mother (immobility of the non-ego), enables the child to develop his ego. The frame has a similar function: it acts as support, as mainstay, but, so far, we have been able to perceive it only when it changes or breaks. The most powerful, endurable, and at the same time least apparent, "bulwark" is, then, the one that lies on the frame.

I want to illustrate the description I have offered of the frame with the example of a patient Mr A., with a phobic character and an intense dependence disguised under the form of reactive independence. For a long time he wavered between hesitation, desire and fear of buying a flat in a purchase that was never accomplished. At a certain point, he came to know by mere chance that I had, some time before, bought a flat that was still being built, and this was the starting point of a period of anxiety and acting out.

One day he told me about what he had learnt and I interpreted his reaction: the way he said it contained reproach at my not informing him of my purchase, knowing it was a fundamental problem of his. He tried to ignore or forget the incident by presenting strong resistance every time I insistently related this fact to his acting out, till strong feelings of hatred, envy, frustration, coupled with verbal attacks, began to appear, and were followed by a feeling of detachment and hopelessness. As we advanced further in the analysis of these situations, the "background" of his childhood experience gradually began to emerge from the narration of different recollections. At home, his parents had done nothing without informing or consulting him about it; he knew all the details of the development of the family life. After the emergence of these memories and my interpretation of them against great resistance, he began accusing me of having broken our connexion, and he said that he would not be able to trust me. Fantasies of suicide appeared as well as derangement, frequent confusion and hypochondriacal symptoms.[4]

For the patient, something had broken, something which *was so* and *had to be* as it had always been; and he could not conceive of its being otherwise. He was demanding a repetition of what had been lived, of what for him had "always been so", a demand or feature he had managed to keep through his life by restricting or limiting his ego in social relationships and by constantly controlling relationships himself, demanding a strong dependence from his objects.

I want to stress in this example how the "non-repetition", because the frame was respected, brought to light the steadiest and most permanent element of his personality, his "ghost world". The delusional transference (Little) or the psychotic part of his personality was a non-ego that constituted the groundwork of his ego and his identity. It was only with the "unfulfilment" of his "ghost world" that he was able to see that my frame was different from his, that even before the unfulfilment, his "ghost world" already existed. I must emphasize, however, that the maintenance of the frame was what led to the analysis of the psychotic part of his personality. The important question is not how many of these phenomena are due to frustration or the clash with reality (the frame), but how much of this area does not appear and is therefore never likely to be analysed. I am able not to give an answer to this question, but only to delineate the problem. It is similar to what

3. This variation in the "meta-" or variation of the fixed or constant assumptions is the origin of non-Euclidean geometry and Boolean algebra (Lieber, 1960). In psychotherapy, each technique has its assumptions (its frame) and therefore, its own "contents" or processes.

4. As Little (1958) describes it in patients whose transference is delusional, body associations of very early experiences began to appear in my patient. When he felt immobilized he associated to having been wrapped up as a baby in a band that kept him motionless. The non-ego of the frame includes the body and if the frame breaks, the limits of the ego made up by the non-ego have to be recovered through hypochondriacal symptoms.

happens with the character feature that must be turned into a symptom in order to be analysed, that is to say, it must stop being ego-syntonic. Should not whatever is done in the analysis of character be done with the frame? The problem is different and more difficult since the frame is not ego-syntonic on the one hand, and on the other hand is the groundwork on which the ego and the identity of the individual are built up; and it is strongly separated off from the analytic process, from the ego that shapes the neurotic transference.

Even if we assume that, in the case mentioned above, this material would have emerged in one way or another because it was there, the problem persists in reference to the psycho-analytic meaning of the frame.

Summing up, one might say that the frame (thus defined as a problem) is the most perfect repetition compulsion[5] and that actually there are two frames, one which is suggested and kept up by the analyst, and consciously accepted by the patient, and the other, that of the "ghost world", on which the patient projects.[6] The latter is the most perfect repetition compulsion since it is the most complete, the least known, and the least noticeable one. Rodrigué (1966) talks about a "pending transference" and the "difficulty arises because we are speaking about a phenomenon which, if it existed in its pure form, would have to be dumb by definition."

It has always seemed surprising and exciting to me, in the analysis of psychotic cases, to note the coexistence of a total denial of the analyst with exaggerated sensitivity to the infringement of any detail of the "habitual", the frame, and how the patient might become confused or violent, for example, because of a few minutes' difference in starting or finishing the session. Now I understand it better in that what becomes disorganized is his "meta-ego", which to a great extent, is all he has got. I think it is jumping to conclusions to talk all the time about a patient's "attack" on the frame when he does not adhere to it. He brings what he has got and it is not always an "attack" but his own organization, even though disordered.

In psychotic transference, affection is not transferred but "a total situation, the whole of a development" (Lagache); it would be better to say, the whole of a "non-development". For Melanie Klein, transference repeats the primitive object relationships, but I think that what is still most primitive (the non-differentiation) repeats itself in the frame. The ambiguity of the "as if" of the analytic situation studied by W. and M. Baranger (1961-62) does not cover "all the aspects of the analytic field" as they express it, but only the process. The frame does not accept ambiguity, either on the part of the patient or on the part of the analyst's technique. Each frame *is,* and does not admit ambiguity. Similarly, I believe that the phenomenon of participation (Lévy-Bruhl) or of syncretism admitted by these authors for the analytic situation, only applies to the frame.

Jaques (1955) says that social institutions are unconsciously used as a defence against psychotic anxiety. I believe them to be the depository of the psychotic part of the personality, i.e. the undifferentiated and non-dissolved portion of the primitive symbiotic links. Psychotic anxieties take place within the institution, and, in the case of the psychoanalytic situation, within what we have described as the process—what "is in motion" against what is not: the frame. Reider (1953) describes different types of transference to the institution instead of the therapist and psycho-analysis as an institution seems to be a means of recovering the lost omnipotence of sharing in the prestige of a great institution. I believe that what is important here is to consider the psychoanalytic situation as an institution in itself, especially the frame.

The development of the ego, in analysis, in the family, or in any institution, depends on the immobility of the non-ego. This denomination of non-ego makes us think about it as something non-existent, but which actually exists to the extent that it is the "meta-ego" on which the very possibility of formation and maintenance of the ego depends. Hence we might say that identity depends upon the manner in which the non-ego is kept up or handled. If the meta-behaviour varies, the whole ego undergoes changes in proably equivalent degrees as regards its quantity and its quality. García Reinoso (1956) has said that just as it is true—as Freud had pointed out—that the ego is corporal, so is the non-ego. We might add something else: that the non-ego is a different ego, having different features, and I suggest (Bleger, 1967) calling it a *syncretic ego.* This also implies that there is not only *one* sense of reality and a lack of it: there are different structures of the ego and sense of reality.

The non-ego is the background or the frame of the organized ego; the "background" and "figure" of a unique Gestalt. Between the ego and the non-ego, or between the neurotic and psychotic part of the

5. This repetition compulsion is not only a way of remembering but a way of life on the requirement to live.

6. Wender (1966) has said that there are two patients and two analysts, to which I now add: two frames.

personality, there is no dissociation but a cleavage, as I have described it in a previous paper.

Miss N was a very rigid and limited patient who always lived with her parents in hotels in different countries; the only thing she always carried with her was a small picture. The unsatisfactory relationship with her parents and the constant moving had turned this picture into her "frame", what gave her the "non-change" for her identity.

The frame is the most primitive part of the personality, it is the fusion ego-body-world, on whose immobility depend the formation, existence, and differentiation (of the ego, the object, the body image, the body, the mind, etc., etc.). Patients with "acting-in" tendencies or psychotic patients also bring "their own frame", and *the institution of their primitive symbiotic relationship*; yet not only they, but all patients bring it too. Hence we can better recognize the catastrophic situation which to a variable degree is always created by the analyst's breaking the frame, e.g. holiday, changes of time, etc., because in these breakings a "crevice" is opened into which enters a reality that appears catastrophic to the patient; "his" frame, his "ghost world" remains without depository and it becomes evident that his frame is not the psycho-analytic frame, as happened with Mr A.

I now want to give an example of a "crevice" that the patient maintained till he felt the need to recover his omnipotence, "his" frame.

Mr Z, the only son of a family who in his childhood was wealthy and socially influential and united, lived in a huge, luxurious mansion with his parents and grandparents, for whom he was the centre of attention. For political reasons, a lot of their possessions were expropriated, and this brought about a great economic decline. The whole family tried hard for a while to live like rich people, concealing their disaster and poverty, but his parents finally moved into a small apartment and accepted a job. (In the meantime his grandparents had died.) When the family faced and accepted the change, he continued living up to appearances. He withdrew from his parents to live on his profession as an architect and he covered up his great insecurity and economic instability so well that everybody thought him rich. He lived and encouraged his fantasy that "nothing had happened", preserving in this way the safe and idealized world of his childhood, his "ghost world". The impression he gave me in the course of treatment was that of a "well-to-do" person, belonging to the social and economic upper class, who, without the showing-off of a "parvenu", maintained an air of security, dignity, and superiority, of being over and beyond the "miseries" and "pettiness" of life, including money.

The frame was well kept, the patient paying regularly and punctually. As the cleavage in his personality was being more deeply analysed, as well as his acting in two worlds, he began to owe me money, to be unpunctual, and to speak—with great difficulty—about his lack of money, a fact which made him feel very "humiliated". The breaking of the frame meant here a certain disruption of his omnipotent organization, the appearance of a "breach" which became the way to get in "against" his omnipotence (the steady and safe world of his childhood). The fulfilment of the frame was the depository of his omnipotent magic world, his childish dependence, his psychotic transference. His most profound fantasy was that analysis would strengthen that omnipotence and would give him back his "ghost world". "To live" in the past was the basic organization of his existence.

The following material comes from a session just after his parents were seriously injured in an accident. During the previous session he paid me part of his debt, and he began the present session by telling me that he had brought me so much money and still owed me so much. He felt the debt "as a breach, as something missing". After a pause, he went on: "Yesterday I had sexual intercourse with my wife and at the beginning I was impotent and that frightened me". (He had been impotent at the beginning of his marriage.) I interpreted that as he was now living a difficult situation because of his parents' accident, he wanted to go back to the security he enjoyed in his childhood, to his parents and grandparents within him, and the relationship with his wife, with me, and with the present reality made him impotent to accomplish that. He had a need to close the breach by paying me the whole of the debt, so that the money might disappear between us, so that I, and everything that made him suffer now, might also disappear. He answered that the day before he had thought that he in fact only needed his wife not to be alone, she was a mere addition in his life. I interpreted that he also wished me to satisfy his reality-needs so that they might disappear and he might thus go back to the security of his childhood, and to his fantasy of reunion with his grandparents, father and mother, just as had happened in his early years.

After a silence, he said that when he heard the word fantasy he found it strange that I should talk of fantasies, and was afraid of going mad. I told him that he wanted me to give him back all the security of his childhood which he tried to preserve within himself so as to cope with the difficult situation and

that, on the other hand, he felt that I, and reality with its needs and sufferings, got in through the breach which his debt had created between us. He finished the session by talking about a transvestist; and I interpreted that he felt like a transvestist: at times like a rich and only son, at times like his father, at times like his mother, at times like his grandfather, and in each one of them both *poor and rich.*

Any variation in the frame brings the non-ego to a crisis, "contradicts" the fusion, "challenges" the ego, and compels reintrojection, re-elaboration of the ego, or stirs the defences to immobilize or reproject the psychotic part of the personality. Mr Z could accept the analysis of "his" frame till he had defensively to get it back; and what is important is that his "ghost world" appears and is questioned with "flaws" to the frame (his debt) and that the recovery of his "ghost world" was linked to the fulfilment of *my* frame precisely to ignore me or destroy me.

The phenomenon of reactivation of symptoms at the end of a psycho-analytic treatment, which has often been described, is due, too, to a mobilization and regression of the ego because of a mobilization of the "meta-ego". The background of the Gestalt becomes a figure.[7] The frame, in this way, may be considered as an "addiction" which, if not systematically analysed, may become a stabilized organization, the foundation of the organization of the personality, and the individual gets an ego "adjusted" and modelled upon the institutions of which he is part. It is the basis, I believe, of what Alvarez de Toledo, Grinberg, and Langer (1966) have called the "analytic character", which the existentialists call a "factic" existence, and which we might recognize as a "factic ego".[8]

This "factic ego" is an "ego of belonging"; it is made up and sustained by the admission of the subject to an institution (which may be the therapeutic relationship, the psycho-analytical society, a study group, or any other institution); there is no "internalized ego" to give internal stability to the subject.

Let us say, in other words, that his whole personality is made up of "characters", that is to say, of roles, or—to put it another way—that his whole personality is a façade. I am now describing the "extreme case" but quantitative variation must be taken into account because there is no way to abolish completely this "factic ego"; neither do I think this necessary.

The "pact" or the negative therapeutic reaction represents a perfect fixation of the patient's non-ego in the frame and even its non-recognition and acceptance by the psycho-analyst; moreover, we might say that the negative therapeutic reaction is a real perversion of the transference-countertransference relationship. The "therapeutic alliance" is, on the contrary, an alliance with the healthiest part of the patient (Greenacre, 1959); and this is true of the process but not of the frame. In the latter, the alliance is established with the psychotic (or symbiotic) part of the patient's personality (whether with the corresponding part of the psycho-analyst's personality I do not know yet).[9]

Winnicott (1947) says:

> For the neurotic, the couch and warmth and comfort can be *symbolical* of the mother's love; for the psychotic it would be more true to say that these things *are* the analyst's physical expression of love. The couch *is* the analyst's lap or womb, and the warmth *is* the live warmth of the analyst's body. And so on.

As to the frame, this is always the most regressive, psychotic part of the patient (for every type of patient). The frame is a permanent presence, like the parents for the child. Without them, there is no development of the ego, but to keep the frame beyond necessity, or to avoid any change in the relationship with the frame or with the parents, there may be even a paralysis of development. Rodrigué, in a book on transference (1966), compares the psychoanalytic process with the process of evolution.

It has been emphasized that the child's ego organizes itself according to the mobility of the medium that creates and provides his needs. The rest of the medium which does not generate needs, is not distinguished and remains as a background in the structure of personality, and as yet this has not been given proper considerations.

In every analysis, even one with an ideally kept frame, the frame must become an object of analysis. I do not mean that this is not occurring in practice, but I want to stress the meaning or significance of what is being done or remains undone, and its

7. It must be this fact which has led some authors (Christoffel, 1952) to the breaking of the frame as a technique (giving up the couch and having the interview face to face) a point of view I do not share.

8. I have dealt more intensively with the "factic ego" and the "syncretic ego", the "corporal ego" and the "internalized ego" elsewhere (Bleger, 1967).

9. I do not believe that this psychotic split transference which is placed on the frame is the consequence of repression of infantile amnesia.

importance. The de-symbiotization of the analyst-patient relationship is only reached with the systematic analysis of the frame at the right moment. And here we are likely to find the strongest resistance because it is not a repressed thing but something split and never differentiated; its analysis disturbs the ego and the most mature identity reached by the patient. In these cases we don't interpret what is repressed; we give rise to the secondary process. It is not interpreted on amnesic gaps but on what never was part of the memory. It is not projective identification either; it is the expression of syncretism or the patient's "participation."

The frame is part of the patient's body image; it *is* the body image in the part that has not been structured and differentiated. It is thus something different from the body image itself; it is the body-space and body setting non-differentiation. That is why the interpretation of gestures and body attitudes frequently becomes persecutory, because we do not "move" the patient's ego, but rather his "meta-ego".

I want to present now another example which also has the peculiarity that I cannot describe the "dumbness" of the frame but only the moment when it reveals itself, when it has stopped being dumb. I have already compared it with the body image, the study of which was started precisely by the consideration of its disturbances. In this case, however, the psycho-analyst's frame was vitiated.

A colleague brought to a supervision session the analysis of a patient whose transference neurosis he had been interpreting for several years; but the intractability of the case induced him to bring it to supervision. The patient "respected" the frame and in this sense "there were no problems"; he associated well; there was no "acting-out"; and the analyst interpreted well in the area on which he was working. But the patient and the therapist used the familiar form of address to each other because the patient had suggested this at the beginning of his analysis, and the therapist had accepted it. The analysis of the therapist's countertransference took many months till he finally "dared" to correct this familiar form of address, interpreting to the patient what was happening and what was hidden behind it. To stop using the familiar "tu" to each other as a result of its systematic analysis revealed the narcissistic relationship and the omnipotent control, and how the person and role of the analyst had been suppressed because of this familiarity.

By using this familiar form of address, the patient imposed his own frame, overlapping the analyst's, but really destroying the latter. The analyst was compelled to cope with a task that represented too great an effort in the session with his patient (and in his countertransference), and this led to an intensive change in the analytic process and rupture in the patient's ego, which was surviving under unsafe conditions and with a very limited "spectrum" of interest, with intensive and extensive inhibitions. The change of the form of address through analysis led to the conclusion that this was not an obsessive phobic character but a simple schizophrenia with a phobic-obsessive characterological "façade".

I do not think it would have been efficient enough to modify the familiar form of address from the very beginning since the candidate did not have the technical experience to handle a patient with a strong narcissistic organization. The analyst must not agree to use the familiar form of address himself, though he may accept it on the part of his patient and analyse it at a suitable time (which I cannot place retrospectively). The analyst should accept the frame the patient brings (which is his "meta-ego") because there the non-solved primitive symbiosis is found summed up. But we must state, at the same time, that to accept the patient's "meta-ego" (the frame) does not mean to abandon one's own, by means of which one is able to analyse the process and to transform the frame itself into a process. Any interpretation of the frame (not altered) stirs the psychotic part of the personality. It makes up what I have called a split interpretation. But the analyst-patient relationship outside the strict frame (as in this example), as well as the "extra-analytic" relationships, enable the psychotic transference to be concealed and favour the "development" of the "psycho-analytic character."

Another patient, Mrs C, maintained her frame until she progressed in her pregnancy. She had never shaken hands since treatment started, but she now stopped greeting me when arriving or leaving. I strongly resisted including in the interpretation that she had stopped greeting me, but I could see in this the mobilization of her symbiotic relationship with her mother, of highly persecutory features, which became active because of her pregnancy. Not to shake hands when arriving or leaving has been maintained but there still lies an important part of "her frame", which is different from "mine". I believe that the situation is even more complex, because not to shake hands is not a mere detail which is missing to round up the frame. It is evidence that she has another frame, another Gestalt which is not mine (that of the psycho-analytic treatment) and in which her idealized relationship with her mother remained split. The more we deal with the psychotic part of

the personality, the more we must take into account that a detail is not just a detail, but an expression of a Gestalt, that is to say, of a special organization or structure.

Summing up, we may say that a patient's frame is his most primitive fusion with the mother's body and that the psycho-analyst's frame must help to re-establish the original symbiosis in order to be able to change it. The disruption of the frame, as well as its ideal or normal maintenance, are technical and theoretical problems, but what basically blocks off any possibility of a profound treatment is the disruption the analyst himself introduces or admits in the frame. *The frame can only be analysed within the frame,* or, in other words, the patient's most primitive dependence and psychological organization can only be analysed within the analyst's frame, which should be neither ambiguous, nor changeable, nor altered.

SUMMARY

I propose to call the *psycho-analytic situation* the sum total of phenomena involved in the therapeutic relationship between the analyst and the patient. This situation includes phenomena which make up a *process* and which is studied, analysed and interpreted; but it also includes a *frame,* that is to say "a non-process" in the sense that it represents the constants, within whose limits the process occurs. The relationship between them is studied and the frame is explained as the set of constants within whose limits the process takes place (variables). The basic aim is to study, not the breaking of the frame, but its psycho-analytic meaning when "ideally normal" conditions are maintained.

Thus, the frame is studied as an *institution* within whose limits phenomena occur which are called "behaviours". In this sense, the frame is "dumb" but not non-existent. It makes up the non-ego of the patient, according to which the ego shapes itself. This non-ego is the "ghost world" of the patient, that lies in the frame and represents a "meta-behaviour".

The role of the frame is illustrated with some clinical examples which reveal the placement in the frame of the patient's most primitive "family institution". It is thus the perfect repetition compulsion, which brings up the primitive undifferentiation of the first stages of the organization of personality. The frame as an institution is the receiver of the psychotic part of the personality, i.e. of the undifferentiated and non-solved part of the primitive symbiotic links. The psycho-analytic meaning of the frame defined in this way is then examined, as well as the relevance of these considerations for clinical work and technique.

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