

## How does Analysis Work on Children? (And some Thoughts on Clinical Work Nowadays)

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First, I will try to make clear how I conceive children and the relationship with their parents; after that I will make some reflections on the changes in childhood and children “in the XXI Century”, as I have announced in the title. I will try later to pin point three crucial elements in clinical work and, finally, I’ll illustrate all this with a couple of clinical cases.

### 1 How do I conceive children and their relationship with their parents?

In “Hans” case, Freud affirmed that only the child’s father could have been his analyst. In 1932, he somehow ratifies this: parts of children’s psychic apparatus whereupon an analysis works (superego, resistances, the capacity for transference) “has to do” with the bond that they have with their parents. Although, nowadays, most of us do not think like this anymore, it would be convenient to retake Freud’s idea that children’s psychic apparatus is intimately linked to the link with their parents.

I consider the link between parents and children regulated by a *discourse* - a set of practices and rules that have an effect on the subjectivity of its participants. I have called this **infantile discourse**. What does this discourse consist on? The child, as all human beings do, asks himself more than what he can answer to his own self, and his characteristic resource before the emptiness without answer appears is to find consolation *supposing* that somebody, another living creature, *knows* what he doesn’t know. He usually thinks that “those” who know are his parents, and can thus live his life as if he or she could be the main character in a novel whose basic script he *presumes* written in his parent’s minds. Notice that this is a *supposition*: the parents *do not have to know* what the son *supposes* they know.

A child is taken to consultation when that *infantile discourse* in which he “lives” has shown difficulties to lodge a new emergent. This can happen for many reasons. For example he may imagine that he is a mistake for his parents, or he may think that they are a mistake for him<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The plot of the discourse may not be able to lodge a new emergent, or the child may notice that his parents don’t feel a genuine interest on him, or it may also be that the productions within him are of such an intensity that he is not able to suppose that his parents know anything about them; or his parents may have given him enough proofs that they don’t know what he supposes they should know; or it may also be that he feels he is not able to uphold his parent’s hopes.

### 2 "Child" and "Infancy" Yesterday and Today

"Infancy" names the set of institutional interventions that acting on the biological materiality of the son and his family; produce what each society calls "child". So that *children* brought up under different concepts of infancy, are different: infants and parents today are different from what these were like at Freud's time, differing as well from what they were like during the Middle Ages. Every period has its own idea of what "a child" is. Children *model themselves* according to this.

Nevertheless, the variations of the *concept of infancy* in the past took several generations in becoming evident, so that the beliefs on infancy could be taken as invariants. At present, the practices having to do with infants change at a speed without precedents: ours is the first generation crossed by more than one concept of infancy. This speed produces important consequences in our clinical work where it becomes difficult – and essential-to be able to differentiate, in children, what are *symptomatic presentations* and what are *social variations*. It can be useful to compare the concept of infancy when psychoanalysis was born with the one that prevails nowadays.

The **modern child** – the one who inhabited Freud's time- was conceived innocent, with no badness, no sin nor sexuality, *fragile and defenceless*, because of this he had to be *protected* of the deflections that the influence of adults could provoke on him. The family and the school educated him with great zeal so that he could be brought up to be a good adult.

But having received so many "cares" did not mean that the child was considered important for just being him. Life was organized around what was believed to be really important: his future. The modern child turned out to be *docile and malleable*. Literature and toys were *specially designed* to contribute to his "good education" and took into account strictly the division in "ages" in child's life time. Division that dominates most modern practices: the separation between child and adult - nonexistent in the Middle Ages and that tends to disappear at present- was sharp during modern times.

This happened within a closed familiar field: the conventional family took care of their children with great devotion isolating them of external influences. It is easy to conclude that this child faced a paradox: that style of bringing up children produced an exacerbated Edipus eroticism whose consequences the family had to forbid. This fostered the well known *neurotic conflict* seen along Modern times and well shown in Freud's clinical cases (Moreno 2006).

Let us compare this picture with what we see **nowadays**, not a simple task for several reasons like the ideological content that surrounds these questions and the fact that we live in a transitional period that is still going on. What is certain is that present children do not have much to do with modern conceptions which are still valid - perhaps by social inertia- in the parents' minds brought up under the influence of another ideology.

Our time is marked by the so called *Informatic Revolution*, the fall of the ideal of progress and idealisms that have disappeared as well as the ambitions of self improvement together with the devaluation of effort. No longer is it possible to state that the child is completely innocent, devoid of sexuality<sup>3</sup>, *docile and malleable*: he cannot be considered any more like an “emptiness to be filled up by adult contents”. The *fragile and defenceless* category, as well as his state of non imputation, is nowadays under revision from many points of view. The typical child-hero of contemporary films is no longer the obedient child who shows how he is able to defend the ideals left aside by adults (like in “the boy”); he frees himself from the grasps that traditional society tries to impose on him (like in “Home alone”). The practices and favourite games of present children, beyond any indication made by adults, are **connective**. The child and the new games dodge the filters once imposed by institutions. The *division* – strictly imposed time ago- *by ages* that sanctioned what was allowed, what was not, and at what age; has also disappeared: the idea that now prevails is that there is *one preferred age*, the age of the young adolescent. Children and adults pretend to look like young adolescents.

The present family has a “new member” of great influence: the *mass-media* allied to the impressive development of the computer science technology. The children – its favourite partners- (on the contrary way of what happened in Modernity) usually teach adults “how things truly are” in the domain of contemporary technology. For that reason, among others, the traditional school is no longer the “second home”. Just provides old fashioned technological tools for computer science connection. Traditional education is tremendously boring for present children. Modern family (and other Modern institutions) seems exhausted. It should prepare children to face an uncertain and “fluid” future, and instead it is prepared for confirming a stable past. For that reason, toys that once miniaturized a stable past, today miniaturize the future, anticipating what keeps changing.

Even so, the *infantile discourse*, described above, *holds on*, although parents are no longer the owners of all the *knowledge*: they soon show themselves old fashioned. On the other hand, *symptoms and neurosis* which prevailed in the *Modern child*; show in the present a tendency to show *splitting mechanisms*. Splitting amongst the many realities that contemporary society offer (we have in mind *second life* or *chats*, that promote “being another person”, or games with *transformers* and “transformations” –not disguises- of the different characters). In addition, the individual, solitary, progressive and biographical figure of Modern heroes, today vanishes in a fusion of authors and anonymous readers who operate altogether and in an instantaneous time: as you can see in *blogs, photologs, Wiki pages, You*

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<sup>3</sup> This was shown for the first time by Psychoanalysis and every days is announced in the daily news that tell us about the appearance of a criminal child and by the extreme popularity of videogames and TV serials that would have been inadmissible twenty years ago.

*Tube*, or the popular and expanded invasion of street *graffittis* and *Second Life*. So, nowadays, when children have to face obstacles and conflicts they turn, more and more, to splitting mechanisms instead of repression, to action more than to representation; they, definitively, prefer flashes of instantaneous and alternating presentations than lineal narrative. Very often the situation just mentioned, alters the "capacity for paying attention" to more monotonous, lineal and chronological things; that is, the core of Modern Pedagogy. This produces enormous difficulties in the implementation of traditional educative systems, and has contributed to inaugurate a new diagnosis: ADD.

### 3. Curative Factors

I will now refer to Psychoanalytic curative factors in children. I consider, though, that these factors are valid in all psychoanalysis and that they continue being valid in nowadays clinical work. I will mention three of these factors.

**The first one** has to do with the idea that the analyst is able to restore part of the disturbed *infantile discourse* filling up a place that has been left vacant within him. The parent's simple request for help means to the child that there is a recognition that the discourse is operating with some sort of mistake. It is as if they were saying "something is going wrong between us and we need an outer glance". In that "place-analyst" in which we are requested for help, the child may – and he usually does- suppose that we will find out what is going on in him, this allows his parents "to rest" for a while from the emotional burden experienced by his unsuccessful functioning. That mean, that the *infantile discourse* is somehow recomposed by the simple fact of the request for consultation. This justifies the surprising improvements that usually take place after a few diagnostic interviews. This phenomenon that takes place due to the analyst's presence constitutes the background of two more factors that I will now approach.

**The second curative factor** is the unfolding during the session of blocked issues that did not evolved adequately in the *infantile discourse*. This *unfolding* takes place in the transference *play ground*, in the direct relationship with the analyst, (this has to do with Freud's traditional description of repetition in transference of a *cliché* with an object whose internalization "corrects" the parental objects) this pours some new light on those locked issues or what did not properly evolve. All these circumstances take place in the real time of the session, flattening out the past and promoting the emergency of what should have taken place and did not. In order to make all these movements possible, the analyst cannot exclude himself from the play scene. This compels him to be in an **immanent position**, that is to say, being part of the situation and being totally there, where things are happening, offering in the *transference play ground* part of what has been excluded and making use of his own child's psychic parts so that he can connect with what has been specifically excluded in that

child's mind (Guignard, 2003; Moreno, 2002)<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, - promoting a contradiction that is essential to go through in any analysis- a **third factor** arises: part of the analyst must also be in a **transcendental** position; that means to say, that he has to stay "at a certain distance from the scene" and has to build up a conjecture of what is going on. It is suitable to keep that distance (the child is a good detector of this), although this distance must not be an unreasonable one.

As most probably you have already realised, the **immanent position** has to do with Bion's *reverie*, with suspended attention, receptivity or the listening of Freud's unconscious; the **transcendental position** has to do with interpretation, having more to do with a metaphor that with *reverie* (dream fantasy). An "unpredictable event" should advent (A. Badiou, 1988). When this happens, the analyst - even from his privileged place- is inevitably implied in it. A crucial paradox of our work: clinical work shows a lot of these "mini eventual events", which we cannot imagine in advance nor promote.

I will now try to illustrate, what I told you above, with some brief clinical material: to start with, a slanted glance of Little Hans Freud's case; after that, fragments of children's analysis in which I will try to emphasize this double **transcendental-immanent position** and how the analyst has to expose himself, so that a completely new experience emerges and blocked issues can be unblocked in the transitional space that we are able to build up.

#### 4. Examples of Curative Factors:

During the former three years Hans' family's life was a comfortable and happy one. The boy was "all he" loved and needed by his mother. His father's difficulties in regulating that relationship did not bring problems forward till then.

That harmony was altered in the boy's fourth year of life: his penis began to need a space for enjoyment, and his sister's birth. Hans' harmonious *infantile discourse* was disturbed and he tried to look for answers to the enigma of the relocation of elements in the "Oedipus program" of his family's universe. His mother insisted in taking Hans -as a whole- as her possession and for her own pleasure. The boy's sharp logic did not help him enough to sort things out; his father's knowledge, besides been suffocating for him, was also distant and detached; and the horse, Hans's great invention, as a joker occupied different places, but didn't help him to really solve anything (besides paying the high cost of a severe phobia). The last character that appears in my reading of the case is "the Professor". A genuine psychoanalytic encounter started to take place, built up by the boy and propitiated by Freud's attitude, which made possible a crucial aspect of the boy's cure.

The 21<sup>st</sup> of March Max Graf tells Hans for the first time of the existence of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Immanence* is the property that makes a certain reality stay locked over, exhausting its chances and its possibility for action. *Transcendence* is considered "over" and "further" what is purely immanent.

"Professor", this causes no reaction on the boy (p.30). The second time that he says something about him, on March the 28th, something quite different happened: Hans sees his father writing and asks him: *Why do you write that? I'm sending this to a Professor who can help you with your problem*, his father answers. Hans adds: *I'm sure you have told him that mum took off her shirt. Did you tell that to the Professor?* Let us notice that as soon as somebody appears to whom Hans can suppose a knowledge on him, Hans takes advantage of that and suggests the father to send him the text of an unanswered enigma: a mother with a shirt on, is a tempting naked mother. The dialogue continues. The father answers once again with his occlusive knowledge about the reality of things: *Yes, but he will not understand how you imagine a giraffe can be wrinkled*. Hans "has been touched" by this new figure that he feels is important: *Tell him that I don't know, and he won't ask any more; but if he asks about the wrinkled giraffe, he can write to us and we will write him back. I don't know*. He has created someone (very different to his father) who may not have answers but is able to listen to him. The Professor is built up by Hans, as someone who is capable of certain ignorance.

The plot of an encounter is outlined: the Professor imagined by Hans has much to do with Freud, who in page 56 of his clinical case writes: *... one does not have to understand what arises from the unconscious with the aid of the precedent but with the aid of the subsequent*. That means that if we don't understand what is going on, it's better to wait.

On Monday 30th March the only encounter between Hans, his father and Freud takes place. I only want to emphasize a pair of details of that "session". Freud, tells him: *You are scared of your father because you love your mother so much. You think that your father is in rage with you, but that is not true: he loves you and you can confess anything to him without fear. Long ago before you came to this world, I knew that a little Hans would arrive who would love his mother so much, and for that reason she would be forced to be afraid of his father*. Then Max interrupts him (something quite strange considering his submission to Freud) and asks his son: *Why do you think I'm in rage with you? Have I ever beaten you? Oh yes, you have beaten me*, the boy answered back. *That is not true. When did I do that? This morning*, he answered. Freud continues telling us, with certain surprise, that he was telling the truth.

The characters are already positioned: Freud occupies the place of someone who apparently knows what is going on and explains it. This creates a space in which there is a spontaneous emergence (in the heat of **immanence**) of the most urgent and blocked issues of the father-son link plot: the aggressiveness denied by the father and the non recognition of the son as somebody quite different from his rational conceptions. The boy can correct this,

and the father could leave transitorily his position of a *know-all*<sup>5</sup>. The next communication of the father reads: "On April 2<sup>nd</sup> the *first improvement is verified*" (underlined in the original text); from now onwards Hans "directs the therapy", and he launches into the process: the session seems to have had its effects.

I will now raise a divergence with Freud: he thinks (p.100) that this improvement was caused by the elucidation that the child received (from Freud) in the session about the inevitable struggle with his father and that he had no hostility towards him. He adjudges the cure to his explanation in **transcendental position**. My opinion is that the improvement had to do with the reordering that Hans' *infantile discourse* underwent: what happened within the **immanence** of the situation. For the boy a place was installed where he could suppose that somebody knew how things were going on or would be able to know. The father was left – due to the new order – a bit more free for his function: he reveals for the first time that he hit his son<sup>6</sup>.

Towards the end of the case we can see little Hans "picking his parents' brain once again" and reordering *the infantile discourse* together with them. This is what most probably dissolved his phobia. The references to the professor in his conversations with his father become more random. "Write to him" he will say the last time that he names it in the file (p64). Near the end of the case he will tell his father: "*you know everything*"... an indication of readjustment of his *infantile discourse*.

### 5. Some Other Curative Factors

What determines the success of a therapy is the possibility that in an actual and immanent present situation, issues belonging to a present, past and future, may come together building up a creative atmosphere. The crucial thing is that in *the transference play ground*, built up with games and some other practice, emerge split up, repressed elements, never produced before, or unknown meanings. Children in analysis usually expose themselves quite a lot, and demand the analyst to appear as someone with a decidedly active performance.

In order to illustrate what I have just been explaining I will present a technique I use

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<sup>5</sup> This is important: If someone pretends to know everything about somebody else does not allow him to *suppose* that knowledge, which is a central aspect of infantile discourse.

<sup>6</sup> When Hans comes out from that session, he asks his father -with sharp irony- "Does the Professor talk with God? He knows everything even before things happen. From now onwards Little Hans recalls the professor every time his father doesn't understand him or makes it difficult for Hans with his 'know-all' position that doesn't allow the possibility for a transitional space. For example, on April 14<sup>th</sup> (p61), Hans admits he has imagined a scene where his sister dies...His father adds: *so then you could stay alone with mum. A good boy doesn't have such desires*. Hans continues: *but he is allowed to imagine this things*. His father insists: *That is not proper*. Hans recalls that person that has made it possible for him to think those things he doesn't understand, and answers: *but if I think this, it would be a good thing to write a letter to the Professor*. "The Professor" has become a crucial character for him. The father, bashfully appears as someone who deprives: "*That is not proper*".

with children who accept my proposal to use it. In this, the drawing of both of us (the patient and mine) is used, but there are some other equivalent options I also use (theatre representations; text creation with stories, puppets, or simulating a PC screen, etc.) In smaller children or those who don't want to create a comic strip, I use a variant of D. Winnicott's squiggle game (1971). "The comic strip between two" has a more proactive argument than squiggle and favours more complex interactive and imaginative developments. It has something in common with the popular well-known virtual game *Second Life*: the characters of true comic strips are real *avatars*, but the story of "the comic strip between two", is an invention between two, in a transitional space of increasing complexity. What I try to do is, on the one hand show you how I use this technique and, on the other hand, illustrate from my point of view, how analysis works within the pair *immanence-transcendence* I've been explaining above.

### 6 "The Comic Strip Between Two"



The first step in the implementation of this technique is that the child has to accept it. The request is to make a comic strip between us two. We divide a page in about eight squares and, in the first one, one of us draws one or more characters. The one who did not



draw at that time, writes what the characters “say” or “think”. They make a bubble and write within it (we can also write comments on what is going on in the comic strip). The one who writes draws the following picture of the sequence. The one who drew the first picture, now writes what the characters say in a second picture and draws the third picture. What they say and the drawings of the third picture, is now written and drawn by the other one. And so on.

Thus, a story is being built up. This plot is not known beforehand: we have created it both. Although my participation is quite spontaneous, it doesn't usually lack some type of intention (for example, if I understand that something is about to emerge, I try to promote it). But anyway, the superiority of the patient's immanence and spontaneity, allows us to analyze the comic strip taking into account the patient's motivations as well as mine. What goes on in this test (the same thing happens in all session) is what happens within the transitional space “between” us both; in the bond between the two of us. The comic strip is therefore the result of two *immanent* participations, even though from time to time participation in *transcendence* also takes place.

As I've already said, it is essential for the analyst to expose his infantile aspects evoked by the patient. The patient will reply connectively<sup>7</sup> producing an emergent (and vice versa). This work, beyond the specific technique, reveals to be the heart of our practice: it is not an archaeological work (C. Botella, 2007) of discovery of the hidden past; nor is it the enlightenment coming from some investigation the analyst is undertaking; it's a production we have both made together. What is essential is that the child unfolds aspects of himself that have not had a space within the *infantile discourse* and that the space created “between” us two can cause the appearance of a new emergent, like the lightning that from the past pours light on actual emergence. Even so, sometimes, as if I were a third author of the comic strip, I write a comment to the drawing from a **transcendental position**. This is equivalent to an interpretation.

### 7 - An illustrated vignette from a clinical case

I will only tell you a knot - one among so many others!- belonging to Marcos' analysis, a boy who suffered from *encopresis*. I was consulted when he was 8 years old. In interviews with his parents they told me about an episode that they thought “of not much importance for Marcos since they had never told him anything about it”: Lucrecia, his mother, was an adoptive daughter and had been Mario's brother's girlfriend. For some reason, unknown by me, Lucrecia “fell in love” with Mario (Marcos' father). She had sexual relations with him and conceived a child (Marcos). Because of this, the engagement to Mario's brother was broken. She married Mario, and Marcos was born. All these events took place in the middle of a

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<sup>7</sup> When I talk about *connective and associative* I refer to a specific functioning of the psychic apparatus. (Moreno 2002).

scandal that reappeared every time they had a family celebration. These celebrations were a kind of torment for Marcos, even though he could not explain why this was so. Marcos apparently knew nothing of her mother's adoption neither about the "change" of couples. His uncle lived abroad. However he was provided with an invented story (money problems, inheritance etc.) the presence of "the secret" seemed to be a brutal complication in Marcos' raising and threatened also being a complication for Marcos' analysis. In fact, the obstacle was not so much the "not knowing", but the fact that the secret produced, for the sake of keeping it, deep lagoons in the boy's thinking processes. This was one of the most difficult situations - that usually appear and interfere with the analyst's function- the therapist "knows" something that the patient doesn't. After a year's treatment Marcos began to step out from the lagoons. Later I will tell you a bit more about how we faced the difficulties produced by the secret's presence. I will now show you part of a comic strip that we made together. He had been a year in treatment, three times a week.

Marcos was very excited with the comic strip that we were both inventing: Jorge, the main character of the strip, together with his friends had robbed everything the parents had ("everything" means the furniture of his house and a villa where they spent weekends). They did this for vengeance. Jorge's parents had made denigrating and insulting comments on Jorge's friends and their "doubtful lives". With the money obtained from the theft Jorge and his band decided to go away to the United States. Something happened there, this can be seen in the fifth page of the comic strip.



In the USA Jorge comes across "Peter" whom he seems to know from some other place. In the drawing that I made, Peter drops something that Marcos says is a photo. Marcos

writes: "photograph" and "the gentleman went running away and couldn't see it". Marcos draws in the following square a car (giving me the possibility to solve the situation, I thought), I decided that the photograph belonged to his mother and that a "phone number" (TE) was behind it. In the following picture I drew Jorge telephoning someone. Marcos wrote that he was phoning his mother – he doesn't find her- he wants to ask her if they have a relative in the USA and that they may "not arrive to their destiny", (I didn't know what he meant by that). In the next frame he draw Jorge tearing the photograph into peaces, looking displeased. Then in the same comic strip, I write one of those interventions, in which, from an immanent position, I write a transcendental one linked to a thought I had from '*out of the scene*'. I write as if I were a third character: "What were Jorge's thoughts? Why did he tear the photograph into peaces?" As you are able to see, the scriptwriter is trying to push a beat on Jorge so that he is tempted to talk: I draw a head and a place where I write "Jorge's thoughts". He then says: "For God's sake! I came all the way here just to forget what happened with my parents and... it is better for me if I tear the photograph into peaces". Then Marcos makes Jorge have a trip to Orlando and makes him enter the *Magic Kingdom*. Here I made another intervention from a *transcendental position*, an interpretation: "Jorge did not want to know anything that had to do with adults, nor of the rows at home. He wanted to go back to children's world"... It will continue (that session had already finished).



This happened in page 5 of the comic strip. In the 14th, almost at the end of the strip, something was arising that seemed to me revealing. After Jorge's failure to become independent - returned back home with his parents. Marcos drew Jorge dirty and damaged. I wrote: "dirty and tired, he thought that everything had lost sense... and that night..." I drew Jorge near the sea. I let myself express the depression that I guessed Marcos and Jorge had. This could bring about a scene in which "he washed himself" from dirty things that happened... and, on the other hand, he may try to kill himself (a subject that had already appeared in previous pages). But Jorge, didn't think any of these, he eludes both options: neither he takes a bath nor he commits suicide. "I will go home and take a bath", he says and he drew what could be a bath and a mirror where he looks at himself. I was astonished by his drawing. For me was almost a sinister representation of his encopresis/depression with the anal hole like a sort of drain pipe. I could hardly keep away from the impression this caused me and I wrote "he looks at himself and as he was so dirty he could hardly recognize himself. Who am I? He asked. What is this? There is a hole, and a smell comes out from it" I drew Jorge thinking in the next square, and he writes what he says or thinks "I am going to sleep". He draws in the following square and adds a commentary about a broken sewer and the

money he will have to pay to for its repair. Another secret unfolds: the encopresis, the smell, have to do with a broken sewer that will bring about greater expenses and bring to scene his father's excluding glance.

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