

## Psychoanalysis, Disquiet of Self and Human Formation: a reflection about the time and the transience<sup>1 2 3</sup>

### *Psicanálise, Inquietude de si e Formação Humana: uma reflexão sobre o tempo e a transitoriedade*

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#### **Abstract**

*The essay relates the Freudian notion of transience with precious and fugitive elaborative moments which arise in the analysis sessions. It assumes the thesis that the analysis, by these valuable moments of encounter with the truth, is an exercise of the self on oneself, empowered by the kairós, proposed by Foucault in the Hermeneutics of the Subject. The author seeks in Greco-Roman antiquity the notion of disquiet of self, a constitutive ethical process of oneself that occurs in the relationship "between two", master and disciple. In this sense, the analytical encounter is conceived as one of the contemporary expressions of Foucaultian disquiet of self. The available and attentive listening, the beauty of the creations that, in a unique and ephemeral moment, are produced there, are reference to think about the function of the educator and the human formation.*

**Keywords:** *Experience, Psychoanalysis in Education, Education, Philosophy, Listening*

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## Resumo

O ensaio relaciona a noção freudiana da transitoriedade com momentos de elaboração preciosos e fugidios que surgem nas sessões de análise. Assume a tese de que a análise, por esses valiosos instantes de encontro com a verdade, é um exercício de si sobre si mesmo, potencializado pelo *kairós*, proposto por Foucault n' *A hermenêutica do sujeito*. O autor busca na antiguidade greco-romana a noção de inquietude de si, processo ético constitutivo do si mesmo que se dá na relação “entre dois”, mestre e discípulo. Nesse sentido, o encontro analítico é concebido como uma das expressões contemporâneas da inquietude de si foucaultiana. A escuta disponível e atenta, a beleza das criações que, num momento único e efêmero, ali se produzem, é referência para pensar a função do educador e a formação humana.

**Palavras-chave:** Experiência, Psicanálise em Educação, Educação, Filosofia, Escuta.

## Introduction

Bewilderment can reach us in different ways. We witness one of them when observing a small vase with a type of cactus. For more than 10 years, this plant laid dormant in a suspended vase stuck in a wooden partition wall in the backyard. Sometime later, when the partition wall is removed, the vase is taken to a covered hall leading to the same yard. One day, in March, after so many years, the cactus blossoms for the first time an exotic flower, lilac, large, cottony, velvety, with five ends, like a star. A single flower that did not last more than two days; we call it a transient flower because it is so rare, beautiful, fleeting and, at that moment, unique. Later, already in a different place, the cactus decided to release dozens of this flower, multiplied beauty, though still ephemeral, provoking thought and memory. Each reading of Freud's (2006c) text *On Transience*, published for the first time in 1915, reminds us of the ephemeral flower; every time we see it blooms, it evokes the spirit of the theme of this text, the delicate debates about the beautiful, as well as a fleeting moment of fruition and happiness, because it is finite, deserves or not to be appreciated.

Why then allowing yourself to wish something desirable, beautiful, captivating, if this object, as finite, can, in some instant, disappear? If even the human connection— intense and

appreciated bond— can someday be over? Would the finitude and fragility of everything that is good, good ideas and good projects, be enough to get us away from them and from the wish to live them so as not to feel the bitterness of loss? Freud (2006c) reflects on these questions in this text and, even if the concept of *kairós* does not come to mind, its reflections are very close to this dimension. A dimension that, to Michel Foucault, becomes significant when connected to what he calls a disquiet of self— *epiméleia beautoû*.

Foucauldian theory about the disquiet of self<sup>4</sup> aspires a way of life in which the subjects are permanently aware of their own formative experiences, even the most fleeing ones, however no less decisive on its establishment. The current essay intends to articulate the Foucauldian notion of restlessness of self with the transience proposed by Freud. The approximation between these two notions will be potentialized by the notion of *kairós*, a conceptual bridge that, being the inherent condition to raise the disquiet of self, works as a referent to examine transience.

*Kairós* is a theoretical operator that connects the two notions, allowing to think analytical work as an exercise of self, which is sustained in the disquiet of self, essential to human formation. We support the proposition that analytic listening, a joint work of appropriation of senses carried out by the analyst and the patient – and, perhaps, in the relation between teacher and student— becomes one of the possible materialization, in the contemporary work, of the disquiet of self.<sup>5</sup> We consider that this meeting is guided by a non-solipsist model of personal

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<sup>4</sup> First of all, we must justify our choice to use the Spanish version (Argentinean edition) of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* by Michel Foucault. We are specifically interested in the translation of the notion *epiméleia beautoû* as the ‘disquiet of self’, and not as ‘care of self’ used in the translations published in Brazil, as well as in the French and English versions. The notion of disquiet carries some conceptual provocative assumptions, regarding care. Disquiet represents a fixed place to be reached by the individual, as the disquiet subject is always dissatisfied with the state s/he is. The *epiméleia beautoû*, itself, in its conceptual base in the *Apology of Socrates*, as we will see, is considered a sort of thorn stuck in men’s flesh and, while there, will cause restlessness. Thus, disquiet is a state that shows the lack of quietness. While the expression ‘care of self’ can insinuate a state of comfort, of well-being, and satisfaction with the individual’s condition. This can lead to the false sensation that care of oneself implies reaching an end state that, when reached, can make the individual stop or stagnate his/her formative process. Besides this, the term ‘disquiet’ is closer to what we call, in psychoanalysis, psychic suffering. Thus, in our interpretation, disquiet of self is a previous, preliminary, a preparatory stage for the subject, once troubled, to care for oneself. Therefore, with that in mind, this English version of our essay uses the term disquiet of self when we, the authors, are writing. The term ‘care of oneself/care of self’ is used when directly quoting the original texts, as we have used the published translations in English for the excerpts.

<sup>5</sup> We must highlight that there is a great difference between the place of the educator and that of the analyst. We do not wish that our approximation on the disquiet of oneself, taken in the relation between master and disciple in the formative process of the later – but also of the pair –, serve as a confusion point of these positions. Freud (2019), in his first edition from 1912, worked extensively on the differences between psychoanalyze and educate, warning about the risks of using the analytical relation for pedagogical ends, that is, to colonize the will of the

availability, listening, and sharing construction of meaning, a *práxis* always dialogical, which is dedicated to human formation and can be a parameter to reflect on the ways of contemporary subjectivation — and, we might say, de-subjectification.

The first part of the text, entitled “On the disquiet of self”, deals with this concept based on the course given by Foucault in 1982, called *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. The second part, entitled “On transience”, intends to present the Freudian position about the transitory value. From them, we present a fragment of a clinic session that illustrates the notion of transience, as well as the disquiet of self.

## On the disquiet of self

The support of the subject faced by the inclemency of life is a pressing demand of psychoanalytic practice. Through psychoanalysis, this support takes place through the processes that constitute the subject itself from the perception of yourself. If we understand it like this, a fruitful field of dialogue opens between Freudian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian philosophy due to the concept of disquiet of self, a notion resumed by Foucault from the classic Greece and the first centuries of our era. Then, in what measure can the analytical meeting be understood as an exercise of the subjects themselves able to promote human formation as a disquiet of self?<sup>6</sup>

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subject by pre-formed goals, determined from the outside, by other people, and guided towards specific educational and adaptive ends. Voltolini (2011) reflects well our position when affirming, paraphrasing Freud, that there is a kinship between the practices of ruling, educating, and psychoanalyzing, proposed by the latter as connected among them by a common trace of impossibility. Thus, there are similarities and differences, as well as distinctions between pedagogy— as a university discourse based on a knowledge supported by techniques towards a result — and education in its more precise sense, as the process of human formation that aims to instill a symbolic order that promotes social bond, the collective, and the acquisition of knowledge mediated by the recognition of the other and by ethics. These positions are different from those of the analyst who discards any mastery. Socratic and non-sophist, the analyst helps to deconstruct the certainties coagulated in the subject and to produce restlessness without giving any of your knowledge, except the one of the method itself. Psychoanalysis is a *práxis* that works to finish itself and that operates from a vigorous refusal to use the power given through transfer to guide the subject towards an ideal, whichever it is.

<sup>6</sup> With the expression. “fruitful dialogue”, we do not affirm the existence of relations in full harmony between Foucault and psychoanalysis. This relation was always conflicted. About this theme, we could see that the philosopher had different positions regarding psychoanalysis depending on the moment of his work, i.e.: a more critical tone is seen in the texts on the analysis of power, such as *History of Madness* (2017a) and *Discipline and Punishment* (1999), while a more noticeable approximation can be seen in those texts on the analysis of the subject, as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2002). For the Foucault of this first moment, psychoanalysis would be— as it is paid, demanding a long time, and centered in the dynamic of transfer established between analyst and analyzed— one

We will start this understanding by the notion *epiméleia beautoû*, considering it as the first moment of *epiméleia beautoû*. In the dialogue *Alcibiades*, of Plato (2015b), Socrates questions the character Alcibiades<sup>7</sup>:

O son of Cleinias, that I, who am your first lover, not having spoken to you for many years, when the rest of the world were wearying you with their attentions, am the last of your lovers who still speaks to you. (p. 45)

Marked by the admiration of Alcibiades to Socrates as he was the sole *erastés*<sup>8</sup> to not abandon him, this prosaic principle of dialogue reserves a brief, though essential, reason to raise philosophy, that is, the disquiet of human spirits on their own conditions. Alcibiades was a Greek from the V century b.C, young, beautiful, aristocratic, wealthy, friends with influential political personalities in the city of Athens, in ancient Greece. This assembly of conveniences made Alcibiades act with disdain, driving away all those who got closer to him. The character is curious not only to discover why Socrates did not abandon him, but also to know why all other *erastai* rejected him.

The answers for these questions are not as important as the fact that they existed, because their presence describes the amazement of Alcibiades faced by his situation – a decisive aspect for the emergence of philosophy itself. Therefore, the philosophical liveness originates at the *thaumázēin*, which is exactly the perplexed admiration that makes disquiet emerge as other certainties are lost. This exercise, apparently banal, keeps its own complexity. Because of this, it

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more device and power of domination and standardization of human sexuality and, therefore, a direct descent of psychiatry. A great part of this criticism is focused on the relation of power that transfer allows in the inevitable asymmetry between analysts and analyzed. For the Foucault in the second moment, after revisiting the classics of ancient philosophy and resuming the value of truth in the relation between master and disciple, the analytical relation would establish an ethical and formative position, contraposing the former perspective. We do not entirely disagree with the general lines of this delimitation, but highlight that the relation between the philosopher and psychoanalysis was always tense and emphasize that this division cannot be accepted simplistically, as, even within the two Foucauldian analysis, power and subject, both position of approximation and conflict are present. We add, together with Cunha (2014), examining the theme from the psychoanalysis perspective, how illusory would be to seek a psychoanalysis that, due to the incorporation of certain guidelines pointed out by his criticisms, would become Foucauldian and, therefore, immune from this same criticism, becoming then a good psychoanalysis, contrary to the bad psychologies and psychoanalysis that would have not incorporated those. A position such as this, though reassuring, would be naïve and nonsensical, as it would be contrary to a position worthy of Foucault's thought. We should understand, mainly, that his criticism lies on a fundamental and ever-present doubt of any type of psychotherapy – for its generic characteristic of moral intervention – that is free of any power relation.

<sup>7</sup> Character of one of Plato's Dialogues with the same name: *Alcibiades*.

<sup>8</sup> The loving relationship (*eros*) between a *erastés* (older man) and an *erômenos* (young) was an affective and educational relation in which the younger man was prepared for life.

is important to notice, for example, that, if Socrates got closer to Alcibiades in the same moment that all other *erastai* surrounded him, no *thaumázēin*, in this situation, would emerge in his pupil. Socrates, then, seeks the most appropriate moment to question him, because the *thaumázēin* is singular and, because of this, the way some is bewildered is not, necessarily, the same as someone else.

However, as we stated in the introduction: *bewilderment can reach us in different ways*. Socrates, as a master of disquiet of self – *epiméleia beautoû* –, finds the most favorable form, in his understanding, to emerge the *thaumázēin* in Alcibiades, which was possible thanks to his posture always attentive to the other, as he states himself “meanwhile, I have observed that your pride has been too much for the pride of your admirers” (Platão, 2015b, p. 45). It is possible to notice the specificity of the mastery of Socrates due to his ability to, first, welcome the other in his individuality to, later, attract him. That is, the master, when reaching the pupil does it – aware and conscientious of this asymmetry– with the notion and the consideration for the singular need of the other. He recognizes that, without this disturbance, *erômenos* could hardly be involved in such a long dialogue with his *erastés*.

Socrates does not end his pedagogical provocation there because, as he had observed him at length, he knew his greatest ambition: to rule the city of Athens. Due to his attention to how Alcibiades neglected himself, he also knew his lack of preparation to rule the city. If he could not rule himself, he could not rule the city well. Therefore, Socrates imposed to Alcibiades several questions on what a good ruling means. Thus, outraged, Alcibiades is so impacted that he declares: “: I solemnly declare, Socrates, that I do not know what I am saying. Verily, I am in a strange state, for when you put questions to me I am of different minds in successive instants.” (Platão, 2015b, p. 87), “it is possible that I have been for long in this state of ignorance, without realizing this” (Platão, 2015b, p. 121).

The perplexity of Alcibiades results from his loss of convictions, because he recognizes himself disconnected from the subject he believed to be an expert. In philosophy, the most legitimate way to create *thaumázēin* is to perceive oneself as ignorant in what one believed to be an expert. Therefore, this surprise becomes a *sine qua non* condition for a legitimate dialogue in which the interlocutor is genuinely interested by the theme in evidence. Alcibiades piously believed he no longer needs to anything beyond what he already had to enact his wish to rule the city. He was enough in himself. Because of this, the flexibilization of this place, allowed by

*thaumázēin*, prepares him to listen and welcome the other. In other words, now Alcibiades, from his condition as a speaker, is also in a lacking condition – and, consequently, of listener –, because it is in this instance that we perceive, faced by a dialogue that questions– whose lack of certainties expels him from the comfort zone–, which the other becomes, then, key to establish oneself.

*Thaumázēin* is a brief instant in which the subject realizes a specific situation. It is an absolutely ephemeral instant that, often, we prefer not to live, due to the restlessness that might arise, because, though transient, it is not an end in itself, as its effects are its continuity and its sense. The disquiet is, as shown by Michel Foucault (2002) in his lectures at *Collège de France*, in 1982, published under the title *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the main legacy of *thaumázēin*: “the care of the self [disquiet] will thus be looked upon as the moment of the first awakening” (p. 23). This notion would be in the principle of the theory of disquiet of self – *epiméleia heautoû*. Because of this, during the first classes of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault dedicates himself to show how he inserts himself, within philosophy, in this cultural notion, not only through the dialogue Alcibiades, but also in the *Apology of Socrates*.

We could say that the Socratic *gnóthi seautón* (know thyself) is the second moment of *epiméleia heautoû*. Foucault (2002), when reading the *Apology*, presents us a beautiful description on the notion of disquiet of oneself: “is a sort of thorn which must be stuck in men's flesh, driven into their existence, and which is a principle of restlessness and movement, of continuous concern throughout life” (p. 24). It is important to highlight that this principle can and should be understood in a double sense– a paradox, at first: on one hand, it does not intend to lead men to a state of calmness towards oneself, that is, the subject should never, will never quiet down in face of your condition; on the other hand, if this first dimension is answered, it guides men to certain state of serenity faced by the world and your own passions. That is, when permanently quieting oneself, the subject prepares him/herself to deal with the adversities of the world and not to become a slave of one's own passions.

When guiding an attentive look on oneself and, therefore, getting uncomfortable with oneself, Socrates proposes a specific way to access one of the most well-known Greek precepts in the history of Western philosophy, the famous “know thyself”, *gnóthi seautón*. Always assumed as the trigger of the undiscussable importance of knowledge, and a true knowledge, this precept stimulated great thinkers on the endless search for the absolute truth. This search, in innumerable

opportunities, disregarded the subject as the main objective of *gnóthi seautón*. It is thus, according to Foucault (2002), this dimension that Socrates, through *epiméleia beautoú*, recommends and warns: knowledge or truth should always intend the transformation of the subject. This way, the *gnóthi seautón*, when considered in the ethical perspective of access to knowledge, does not resign the subject in process of subjectivation, because it demands precisely the exercise of the subject on the subject himself and its consequently transformation on the knowledge of self.

This way of conceiving the place of knowledge in the world, Foucault calls spirituality. The knowledge of spirituality is an ensemble of searches “which are not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth” (Foucault, 2002, p. 33). Therefore, the dimension that gives sense to knowledge is the movement that the subject enacts on oneself to reach truth. This exercise of one over oneself is the price to pay to access the truth and that can be understood, from Socratic philosophy, as the ability of each individual to question oneself, necessarily demanding the presence of another, as is the case of Alcibiades. Thus, this leads us to a formative relation typical of this exercise demanded by the *epiméleia beautoú*: the relation between master and disciple.

Therefore, we can identify a third moment in the process of disquiet of self, delimited by the emblematic relation between the master and the disciple (*stultus*). There is always a pressing risk that restricts human formation, the stagnation faced by what we have become. Disquiet of oneself is a peremptory state that, dangerously, conforms us and the comfort that sickens us. As a result of the lack of ability to bewilderment, the subject, in this state, is unable of self-examination and, consequently, unable to be the author of one's own life. The subject's quiet position in front of oneself is, therefore, a place from which one has no conditions to leave on one's own. Foucault (2002) calls this subject *stultus*, someone that is unable to guide by conviction his/her own way of life, because “*stultus* is someone who is dispersed over time” (p. 136).

What does it mean to be “dispersed over time”? Is it a state of inattention with oneself regarding the time one lives? Or is it the condition of someone who is negligent with the time of oneself? Is it the subject's time or the surrounding historical time? Let us take as a starting point the following statement by Foucault (2002, p. 135): “*stultus* is first of all someone blown by the wind and open to the external world”. It is an individual that, summing up, is indiscriminately receptive to all his/her time offers, because the time one lives determines

oneself and this, deceptively, strengthens him/her, as one thus believes to be aware of oneself. This unconditional adaptation to what the work offers is what comforts, what offers the sensation of disquiet of oneself.

We could say, with Socrates, that *stultus* ignores your own state of ignorance. If ignoring it, disquiets and, thus, comforts and continues, unaware of oneself, disperse in the surrounding time. As s/he is disperse in time, is at the mercy of all and any wind and, because of this, does not intent a way of life, accepts all and any way of living determined by others. Accepts any demand, because, as *stultus*, cannot *discriminatio*, that is, separate, or discriminate, select the content of external representations (Foucault, 2002). Unaware to what one receives and goes on one's subjectivity during its constitution, *stultitia* is, to Foucault (2002, p. 134), um "morbid, pathological condition one must rise above".

To leave this state, *stultus* should be surprised with oneself, to want as one ought and as one should want oneself, though "it is a will that does not always will (Foucault, 2002, p. 136), because willing as one ought is to will a sole object, to freely, absolutely, and permanently desired oneself, here taking in the sense of ideals, protecting ideals of oneself, as wanting as one ought puts in play the balance between want and duty, creating internally a constant question: should I do what I want to do? *Stultus* does not will nor freely, because it is always determined by the external; nor absolutely, because, while wanting something, despises it; nor permanent, because wants with carelessness and indifference (Foucault, 2002). It is an individual that does not know how to educate her/his own will to guide themselves, who does not look within them, as shown by Alcibiades.

By wanting everything and anything and, for that reason, wanting nothing, *stultus* is restless with oneself and, thus, does not care of oneself, disregards one's own time. Time as an external reality, internalized in its subjectivity through the representations of the world, not only makes them lose themselves in time, but also does not keep track of their own time, as *stultus* is aware of anything, except themselves.

Freud (2013), in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, first edition from 1915, when dealing with the opposition between pleasure and displeasure and the primitive working of the pleasure ego, shows the assimilation to the Ego of all that is a source of pleasure and a projection exterior to what causes displeasure. This simplification, however, is unsustainable and soon the subject learns that in the exterior world are the sources of pleasure. If this discovery frees the subject

from the danger present in the first stage, i.e., of closing oneself, s/he can fall into a new danger, that is the adherence to the external objects offered by the world.

This is an aspect that interests us in this context, because it reinforces the idea that, easily, we assume what causes immediate pleasure, and that the external can be plentiful of pleasures, offering the subject the immediate sensation of being aware, permanently observing oneself. The legitimate process of self-formation does not cause immediate pleasure, on the contrary, can be filled with displeasures. *Stultus* confuses the enactment of pleasures with self-care. There lies the need of a master, s/he should contribute with the individual to guide the perspective to oneself, as the only object one should want forever. But, the master is not someone who should see in the place of the disciple, but the one that promotes the condition of the disciple to look at him/herself.

Faced by this, we remember that “bewilderment can reach us in different ways”, however, without the needed sensitiveness to do so, we let it go unnoticed, without realizing its possibilities. In other words, insensitiveness towards oneself, typical of *stultus*, protects him/her from *thaumázēin*. This shows how indispensable is the presence of the other (master) to break away with the insensitive armor we build to get used to quiet down faced by oneself.

The presence of the master – a representation of the other – in the life of the *stultus* prepares and broadens the possibility to observe *kairós*, the most appropriate moment for “that” subject to form him/herself.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, *kairós* is “the occasion, this being precisely the situation of individuals with regard to each other and to the moment chosen for saying this truth” (Foucault, 2002, p. 366). *Kairós* is not a chronological time, *chronos*, but one that is singular to *that*

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<sup>9</sup> On the most appropriate time for the subject to form oneself, we must consider that in the “Class of January 20-first hour” Foucault surpasses *The Hermeneutics of the subject*, a specific understanding from the dialogue *Alcibiades*, in which time was *hour* and, therefore, there would be a certain and determined state of existence reserved to the *epimèleia beautoû*. In fact, on the contrary, Foucault tries to foment the disquiet of oneself as a process of self-formation co-extensive to life. Overcome, then, the reduction of disquiet of oneself coextensive to life. Thus, overcoming the reduction of disquiet of oneself is to the conception of *hour* implies moving towards a broad perspective of time as *kairós*, “which is the particular conjuncture, as it were, of an event.” (Foucault, 2002, p. 95), which can and should take place during the whole life. About this theme, we can follow a more detailed criticism of Foucault (2017b) to this first and origin phase of *epimèleia beautoû* in a lecture given in 1983, in Berkeley, at the University of California, entitled *The Culture of Self* in which he affirms that the disquiet of self “should be a permanent relation with oneself. Socrates, as you might remember, recommended Alcibiades to enjoy his youth to care for himself” (p. 77). Faced by this, we can agree with Foucault and ask ourselves: why could a time, privileged and specific, support a complex conjecture of discoveries and transformations of the subject? Foucault (2017b) uses Epicurus to justify the need to always philosophy, at youth or in old age, as there is no predetermined time to take care of the soul. Such posture shows a certain limit in the reach of the dialogue *Alcibiades* when dealing with this theme, thus justifying the research of exercise in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, encompassing other texts and historical moments in the development of philosophy.

individual, in which s/he can be a certain way that, before, was neither possible nor predictable. It is a circumstance that is only noticeable when the subject is uneasy with her/himself or when the master pedagogically acts over her/him.

*Kronos*, in Greek mythology, was the God of time and represented the immortality of the Gods. However, *Kronos* was always concerned with the idea that one of his children could remove him from his sovereign place and, as a precaution, started to devour them. Because of this, everyone feared *Kronos*, as *Kronos* – time – could destroy and devour everything and everyone. It is the personification of the linearity of time and the impossibility of its return. On the other hand, *Kairós* was not a metric of time, it was not a measured and defined time, but the appropriate time, the singular time, the right opportunity for a certain individual.

For our ends, the image of *Kairós* that, among other characteristics, has all his hair to the front and, thus, a bald nape, he can thus be grabbed only when is in front of us, after he is gone, we can no longer catch him. It is instantaneous. This is exactly the idea that decisive moments or instants in life are rare, scary, and, thus, if we are not permanently restless with ourselves, we lose the grandness of that transient moment of time. The disquiet oneself, therefore, is not a definite place or a time to which the subject can arrive. The disquiet of oneself is a movement and, because of that, is not a final state to be reached, but a way of inhabiting the world during one's whole existence. This is exactly the point that leads us to the issue of transience proposed by Freud.

## On transience

Freud wrote *On Transience* in 1915, in the middle of World War I, which had already left a sinister trail. These were times of war and death, times of loss, loneliness and deception, times of disbelief and hopelessness – clinic figures that already foreshadowed what would become the death drive – they were lurking around to, surreptitiously, occupy people's minds.

The scenario that frames the text, in contrast with the quite pessimistic direction of the theme and the debate, is bucolic: Freud walks in a meadow, in the Dolomites, together with a silent friend and already well-known poet<sup>10</sup>. The poet admires the surrounding natural

<sup>10</sup> Nowadays we know they were Rainer Maria Rilke, the poet, and Lou Andreas-Salomé.

exuberance, however, feeling no enchantment. On the contrary, he shows his concern with the somber idea that all this would disappear, would die in the following winter, as every human beauty and all which was beautifully and sublimely constructed by the human hand and genius. The transience of all he say in that moment made him feel that nothing had value.

Freud comments that, in this inevitable decrepitude of everything that is beautiful, can arise two different states of the soul. One of them is the tedious and pessimistic boredom, the hopelessness and the lack of interest in the world, presented by the young poet. The other possibility is for the spirit to raise itself in a rebellion against such fate: “This is not possible! It cannot be true that all art and beauty needs to fatally succumb”. This position leads to a claim to perpetuity, a denial of the finitude of everything that exists, encouraging a belief that all beautiful things are immune to destruction and should be saved from all harm. It is clear that this demand of exception faced by finitude clashes with reality. In the conversation, Freud decides not to join the pessimist boredom, nor advocate in the name of an exception of perpetuity in favor of beauty. He replied to his poet friend, however, in his thesis that transience would lead to the depreciation of the moment and the beauty it portrayed.

To Freud, the fleetness of time increases the value of what is transient, and the restriction of the possibility of enjoying it makes it even more pleasant, despite its short time. The beauty of a face or the lines of a human body can disappear forever throughout a life, but, in exchange, other aspects of beauty will reveal themselves between two people that like each other; if a flower opens for only one night, its transient blooming is no less striking. Similarly, Freud does not understand why the beauty of art or the pleasure of an intellectual conquest can be undermined due to its inherent temporal limitation and adds:

There may come a time come when the images and statues that we admire today have crumbled, or a race of humans comes after us that no longer understands the works of our poets and thinkers, or a geological epoch may arrive in which all the life on earth ceases. The value of all that is beautiful and perfect is determined only by its significance for our emotional lives; it does not need to survive and is therefore independent of the absolute duration of time. (Freud, 2006c, p. 310)

Here lies the key to Freud’s argument in the text. In *A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad* (Freud, 2006e), originally edited in 1925, the author forges the idea that some experiences produce psychic impressions so deep that are registered forever, never to be erased. Its indestructible traces will be reordered, recombined, reprocessed, reconfigured non-stop in each

new significance given by a life experience and the reflexive self-criticism produced over them, in a continuous movement of psychic translation. To Freud, this working of the psychic apparatus: an ulterior device of representation and resignification that makes human beings obstinate translators of themselves.

It is not the permanence in time that is considered for the durability of a psychic experience. The external time, measured in minutes and hours, the time of the clock, of the secondary process, of temporality (*kronos*) of Ego, has little to say on the process of inscription and register of the psychic marks. The fleetingness of an experience can, for better or for worse, be extremely fast in duration – the time of a phrase, a tragic scene witnessed that lasts few seconds, a mistake, an unexpected meeting, a misunderstanding, a bad word, a striking class, some big news– but can instill perennial marks that follow the subject forever. In this case, what is important is the mark that the experience was able to leave within the subject, and not the fact of being enduring or not, what shows, in a ways, in Freudian terms, the difference between *kronos* and *kairós*.

Not by chance Freud used in his arguments the problem of grief and loss. In the text, he considers that the tedious boredom as well as the rebellion against the finitude of beautiful things are subjective answers, and revolt of the soul against the grief that clouds the subject, leading him/her to devalue the enjoyment of beauty due to the dark menace that it will all end. The result can be indifference. It is exactly the indifference of his two conversation companions that leads Freud to this conclusion. Both listen to him carefully, but without showing any restlessness or subjective change due to his words, continuing unchangeable in their positions of sullenness and boredom.

Freudian reflection on transience opens the way to understand that grief is a state of the soul that makes us feel an acute awareness of time, especially the time loss, finitude, and how much our narcissistic wishes have stopped us from enjoying our loved ones while they are present. This sensation is inevitable. Nowadays, due to the narcissistic clutter that undermines our everyday life, we can never enjoy the full time we have with each other and everything this conviviality can give us. Routine, full of its typical little pettiness, occupies us in such a way that our availability to those we want is not as full as we wish. The present experience – and this can be particularly felt in education, in the different life spaces it takes place– can rarely be valued appropriately. We cannot even see that time does not stop, that life passes, time passes, and

there will come a time when someone close will be missing. To escape this terrible angst raised by this perception, we ignore this vital dimension. It would be impossible to live thinking all the time about the final day. When the loved one is missed, when we mourn, the curtains fall, and we can no longer continue with the daily farce: we have an acute contact with this temporal dimension and become temporarily able to understand that we let go of many precious experiences due to the damping of the routine. It is when *kairós* takes the place of *kronos*.

As this conversation takes place a bit more than a year after the beginning of the war, Freud attributes the reason for grief to the shock with hopelessness, brutality, and irrationality—effects of the circumstances. War mercilessly destroyed the beauty of many cities; crumbled the beauty constructed by artists and their works, destroyed the pride felt by the conquests of culture, shattering the hope of no longer existing differences between peoples and races; made people lose the respect for the lights when thinkers showed themselves blind to partisanship; crushed the supposedly impartiality of science, whose developments were used for destruction. Unveiled, then, all the brutality of a life of drives, evilness that education and civility should have surpassed after centuries of psychic work, and exposed the ephemeral quality of the works and attributes believed to be permanent. It is worth remembering that, these times of war, were also of dissidences in the increasing group of psychoanalysts, of *Mourning and Melancholia* (2006d), originally edited in 1915, and of the unavoidable considerations on narcissism, whose inaugural text is also from 1914 (Freud, 2006b), conflicts underlying the life of the author and whose tensions we know through textual production.

The disdain for the fleetness and finitude of beauty is the result of a melancholic hopelessness. It is what, contradictorily, pushes men and women to a life reduced to the moment, as, in the following moment, nothing will be there. This insane consumption of the transient, which we referred to when talking about *stultus*, paradoxically, does not allow us to separate, amidst its fury, what is perennial, beautiful, and truly valuable, from the simple immediacy of pleasure. You enjoy the first thing you see as if it were the last in life. It is a type of protection against the world, an alienation out of the world, towards narcissism, in which sublime goods and values lose value due to their fragility to confront time.

To Freud, those who do not believe in the value of things earned— as its fragility does not confirm the fantasy of indestructibility in a concrete time and space – and are removed

from the firm disposition of keeping a continuous renouncement to everything are in an unsolvable mourning for what was lost. He concludes:

It is to be hoped that the same will be true for the losses of this war. Once grief is overcome, it will be seen that our high esteem for cultural riches has not suffered under the experience of their frailty. We will rebuild everything that the war has destroyed, perhaps on more solid ground and more enduringly than before. (Freud, 2006c, p. 311)

The text shows a strong conviction on the value of thought and a deep hope in the future, despite all the contrary reasons that a narcissist humanity, creator of violence and war, insists on offering. The complaints, the mourning of what was not lived, for what you do not have, for the lack, and for what you did not receive are ways to continue without recognizing what was received and lead to a constant waste of the internal treasure of each one, now without value. Thus, imprisoned in a selfish self, but dispossessed, the subject feels a bitterness that what the other has is always better, their house is better, their life is better, things are easier to them.

It is not to advocate in favor of accepting every suffering in silence, nor that one should support quietly all the trials of life, nor transforming pain in virtue to reach the shallow, naïve, and irritating work behavior, so current nowadays, which uses an empty positive and optimistic perspective of: “Don’t be shaken! Be happy! Move on no matter what happens and regardless of what is missing to you”. However, we need to distinguish what is the duration of something in the hours of the clock in the secondary and rational process from what instantly— by the conjunction of intensity, surprise, and uniqueness— acquires a force that is not fleeting, expect that measured in minutes or hours that can arise from this moment.

## **In the space of analysis, Esperança**

The analytic space is a space “between two” of shared work. It is also plentiful of examples that teach us about the value of transience and the meaning of disquiet of oneself. Maybe it is a privileged space to see how great trembles and passages of the deepest and most touching beauties take place in an instant. About this, we remember Esperança, a woman from a small hamlet in the countryside of a small town, who lived a life full of privations – often, humiliations—, because she wanted to study to become someone. The most striking aspect of this story is that all the work she has gone through was not exactly necessary, due to, for

example, the miserable condition of a family which could not help her, but the price she needed to pay to go ahead, to distinguish herself, and, mainly, to wish for herself the access to human formation and education. The family could have helped much more and protected her from what she has gone through, but chose to make her deal with her choice and pay for her turmoil, revealing a sadistic way to deal with any member who dare to be different.

Today she is very well, we might say, she won in life. In analysis for three years, even with three weekly sessions and a lot of interpretative work, until the data of this session, after two and a half years of analytic process, she could never use the divan. The initial resistance for her to do so was abandoned, because we understood that— more than a resistance — in her refusal she manifested a reluctance whose meaning was that this woman could not bear the idea of coming to a place where she could comfortably lay down, to take care of herself, and think about life, without her body being always ready, stiff, observing the environment to answer any order. The interpretation of this material impacted, but was never enough for her to risk laying down and enjoy.

After this time, on a nice day, Esperança arrived at her session apprehensive and restless with a pill on her hand: “Do you have a glass of water?”, she asks. “No. I’m sorry, but I don’t”, was the unassuming and sincere answer. “Well...I’ll take this later than...I have to tell you some things today and I don’t know if I could do it here...I think I’d rather do it here...I think I’ll need to lay down...”

We agree with a head nod, indicating the divan with one arm, a gesture indicating the way. She lays down. By that we mean that she sits, and then places her elbows on the divan, places the hands under the head to keep it higher. She is tense, uncomfortable. Noticing that, we ask: “Would you like a pillow to get more comfortable?” offering comfort. She answers: “No... there is no need...”. “Ok then... But it is important that you are, first of all, comfortable. And completely relaxed and at ease”, was our answer.

This was not simply kindness, but the solidary expression of who had heard for many years about the time she worked as a maid, with no salary, in exchange for accommodation and food, the body always tense at the disposal of the bosses’ orders, regardless of the time, always willing to let them at ease, at the expense of her readiness. This line is an interpretation, a word with the power of an act indicating her the way: now she is the one that should be attended; she is the one that needs to abandon herself of everything so she can be free and occupy her mind,

lost in her thoughts, using time at her disposal, though the time of the session is short. She stays laying down and continues like that, in silence, contemplating a new perspective of the room, quiet for a time, until we ask her: “What are you thinking about, Esperança?”. “No... I was here feeling... It’s good... Soft... I was feeling this moment a bit”, she answers. After some time silent, we told her it was okay, she could be at ease, to let her thoughts wander and whenever – or if – she wanted, she could say something. Later, she breaks the silence: “Now, I don’t know why, my son came to my mind...I remembered that yesterday I tried to give him a pacifier and he spit it...I gave it again, and he pushed it out with his tongue. And I remembered that you asked me once: “And don’t you insist with the pacifier? Do you let him refuse it like this? Don’t you offer it again?”. So I tried to make him take it...He pushed it like this with his tongue (imitates, placing the tip of her tongue out between her lips and laughs). After I tried to give him a few times, he accepted it...And was quite cheeky!”.

The transposition of a scene over another– clinic expression of transference – shows its recognition of the insistence of giving her a space, in caring for her comfort, in wanting to hear her. It is also her way of thanking for not giving up after the first denial, for not succumbing to her repetitive way of being servile. We are her in the scene with the son; she is him in the scene with us. This matrix experience she lives with us is taken within her to the inter-humane exchange with her son, a part of us that she now takes as her own. A formative experience: she listens to our voice telling her ““And don’t you insist with the pacifier? Do you let him refuse it like this?”. A key acquisition for her is the moment we see the effect of self-formation taking shape, through her appropriation of what makes her live better. This moment is, at the same time, evasive and eternal, transient and perennial, as its effect leaves marks that will be permanently in her, an inheritance she can share with her son, a transmission chain of the effect of human formation she received. Give and receive, a new possible transit for someone that, faced by the insistence of her will to learn, has only suffered evasion, subtraction, and withdrawal. Esperança, by allowing her care for herself, transforms herself. Esperança teaches and learns, circulating and enriching with us and with the son, an exchange of symbolic goods that allow humanization.

How to evaluate the value of a moment such as this? How to explain such power concentrated in a unique instant? The crossing of so many themes, its point of confluence in this exact moment of the session, in these few minutes that the medicine leaves the scene to give way to the intensity of feeling compressed in these words? How to describe the privilege

that is to participate in a moment like this? This short story, and possibly many others, is the fullest explanation of the meaning of transience; it is also the approximation point with the dimension of *kairós*. The opportunity of living something like this – to witness the precious and brief instance in which the other human being transforms themselves – is given to us by the privilege of being in the analyst and educator position.

## Final remarks

Resignification in the face of life itself opens space for indifference and delusion with oneself. This pressing risk in human existence corrupts the subject to a point that s/he can no longer guide the eye to oneself attentively and concerned with one's formation. In this state, the subject alienates oneself to external determinations, renouncing the responsibility with oneself and, consequently, to establish a genuine and ethical constitution of oneself.

The formative nucleus that Foucault calls “disquiet of oneself” structures itself from two fundamental questions, as we could see: what happens with the being of the subject and the transformation of the subject through the access of truth. It is precisely in this sense that the philosopher indicates psychoanalysis as a field of knowledge in which structures reappear, as was with Esperança. According to Foucault (2002), in psychoanalysis

the problem of what is at stake in the subject's being (of what the subject's being must be for the subject to have access to the truth) and, in return, the question of what aspects of the subject may be transformed by virtue of his access to the truth, well, these two questions, which are once again absolutely typical of spirituality, are found again at the very heart of, or anyway, at the source and outcome of both of these knowledges. (p. 43)

If spirituality is one of the forms to access truth, psychoanalysis is, by analogy, a place to foment the disquiet of oneself, because it is a way of knowledge that questions the subject, which puts at stake the pathway to access truth and this truth transforms him/her. Psychoanalysis allows, therefore, a pathway to knowledge that potentializes the approximation between subject and truth.

Esperança shows through the fragment of her analysis presented here, the disquiet of self that promotes the delicacy of the precise moment, of the internal time, of *kairós*. Only when

she could lay on the fragment of history that emerged from this session, in the rhythm of an internal, peculiar, and singular time—it could not be before nor possible later – despite the gentle and concerned insistence to lay down in the divan and received the care she needed and deserved, only in this moment she could deeply understand – through the metaphor of the yond son– the value of the caring gestures offered to her. When enacting this movement, she appropriated from it and could replace it in circulation with the son: the disquiet of oneself implies the constant attention and respect of self and, consequently, of the other. This passage shows, besides this, how such understanding, far from being an intellectual process, touches the subject in all his/her being, producing an effect of self-formation.

It is important to recover, in this context, what we have said about the relationship between master and disciples: without the presence of the master, the disciple cannot leave her/his own *stultitia*, that is, the truth of the subject acts over oneself. The master – the teacher or the one who forms, in general– can only contribute to the departure of the disciple to her/his unknown state as one applies her/his pedagogical art on her/himself the pedagogical art. One of these dimensions of this art is, exactly, the sensitiveness faced by what happens in her/his existence, in the course of one's own history and that, in fact, is ephemeral as an event in a chronological perspective (*kronos*), however absolutely part of what the subject is or will be (*kairós*).

Writing is transitory. It starts and finishes, maybe lasting sometime in the soul of who does it. It is possible that it serves as a way to exemplify what we have worked in this text, if it lingers in the internal time of each one through the late effects of signification that may be produced. It would be possible to provoke, in its transience, the effect of producing lasting marks, with unfoldings capable of contributing to create sensitive and responsible educators, who do not wield to the appeal of making whatever and however their work, allowing then that some, if not many, turn into perennial what matters the most to the ethical order of the work of human formation and collective construction.

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