

# Intimacy, the Life Cycle, and the Analytic Relationship

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One of the most beautiful and poetic philosophical works of all times, in terms of both structure and content, is, perhaps, Plato's *Symposium*. The various characters attending the repast give speeches in praise of Eros, the god of love. Aristophanes defines love as *an innermost yearning for the restoration of a lost fullness, for the reencounter with a whole* – for being one with the loved one. He states that in primeval times humanity was divided into three sexes, namely, male, female, and androgynous. Humans were round and had four arms, four legs, two faces and, of course, two sex organs, and their two halves were joined by the belly. They were such terrible beings due to their vigor and strength, that they thought they could challenge the gods.

Since he could not destroy the human race because the gods would lose their worshipers, Zeus punished humans by cutting them in half. Apollo cured them, giving them their current shape, and later moved the private parts to the front. Love tries to restore them to their original state. When a man and a woman meet, therefore, they join in such a way that their union lasts their entire lives. Each tries to join and blend with the loved one so as to become one being. Consequently, our species will only reach happiness when one half of humanity meets its other half.

In his last speech, Socrates recounts a conversation he had with a wise woman, Diotima of Mantinea, who had been initiated in the mysteries of love. According to Diotima, love is not such a great thing, but it is not bad either. She claims that there is a middle term between opposites. For example, lack of wisdom is not necessarily ignorance – *opinion*, or *doxa*, lies in between. In the same way, what is not beautiful is not necessarily ugly. Furthermore, just as there are middle terms between opposites, so is there a middle term between gods and men, the Daimons (the Greek demons). According to Diotima, Eros is precisely a Daimon and, as such, represents a link between suffering mortal beings and the immortal beings that inhabit the heavens. Love, Eros, “desires” beautiful and good things, and since desire is a sign of lack, Eros cannot be a god. The fact that he wishes means he is deprived of beauty and good, which are characteristic of the gods.

Love, as such, seeks the good in itself, along with beauty, and wants to possess the good in general. This active pursuit of the good takes the name of *love* when it becomes the *production of beauty* through a fertilization process that encompasses body and soul. Since Antiquity until today, beauty, happiness, and intimacy (from the Latin *intimus*, inside, internal experience, relationship with oneself and with the other/others) are naturally related to the link, a key element of the life cycle and of the analytic relationship.

## **On the life cycle**

Intimacy plays an essential role in human relations from the very beginning – over the long period in which the mother carries her baby inside her and during the first years of its life, which were thoroughly studied by Melanie Klein (1932) and Winnicott (1958). Erikson (1980), in turn, describes the conflict between intimacy and isolation as typical of adulthood. Once an individual's identity is established, a task pertaining to adolescence, it is possible to forge intimate and reciprocal links and to accept the sacrifices and compromises required by these relationships.

“Sexual love is undoubtedly one of the chief things in life,” states Freud, “and the union of mental and bodily satisfaction in the enjoyment of love is one of its culminating peaks. Apart from a few queer fanatics, all the world knows this and conducts its life accordingly; science alone is too delicate to admit it” (Freud, 1915, p. 169-70). Intimacy thus reached restores the lost unity described by Aristophanes and reproduces the primeval bond we once had with our mother inside her uterus. Not for any other reason, says Freud, lovers tend to sleep after a love encounter full of pleasure and intimacy, as babies do when they are full of milk and motherly love.

Yet, what happens to intimacy in the times of liquid modernity? Listening to our patients’ accounts and observing the reality around us, we can see that there seems to be a phobic flight away from intimate bonds under the appearance of a huge, global intimacy. This process becomes evident in social networks and in dating sites such as Tinder and others. I believe that in this as in other issues, opinion or *doxa*, as Diotima would say, lies in the middle. Neither a catastrophic view nor a frantic acceptance of the alleged freedom of communication will be of help to us.

There are situations where online communication operates as a transitional object or phenomenon that allows young people to achieve intimacy. In other situations, by contrast, every human in-person relationship is erased. We can see how some people live in absentia or in effigie, as Freud would say, but in online attire. In any case, this is the language that is spoken today, and I doubt we will find an analysis that has not incorporated some form of communication with images or sounds introduced by patients through those little gadgets which no-one can forego.

In the last stage of the life cycle, there is an increase in the challenges posed by transformations in the intimate bonds we establish with ourselves and others. Besides the inevitable losses we suffer, both at work and within the family, which we must work through with the psychic resources developed over the course of our lives, an array of physical and mental changes take place. Moreover, psychic work is needed to face the inexorableness of our own death (Eizirik, 2013).

Among the many reflections on aging that we find in literature and philosophy, we owe Philip Roth (2001) the idea that elderly people are marked by time and that the others look at them as has-beens. Yet being old means that we continue to exist and, despite our age, are still full of life, desires, and fantasies. Like any person of any age, moreover, we still feel the need to establish and maintain links.

At this stage, the bond with ourselves acquires particular significance. A crucial aspect of aging is passing time. Danielle Quinodoz (2009) refers to “seconds of eternity.” During these intense moments, we feel that we exist. Chronological time seems to stop, and life acquires full relevance. The shock of beauty, of love, of certain silences, of great pain, and of defining choices and the awareness or insight produced in analysis are examples of these seconds of eternity.

A special link that develops during this period of life is our relationship with our grandchildren, with whom we relive our moments of eternity in the present and experience the unique emotion of feeling that our life will continue after our death, as in Diotima’s description. In this way, we can find comfort in the face of the loss of love bonds. In his recent movie, *Youth* (2015), Paolo Sorrentino offers us with his usual mastery a reflection on intimate bonds, time, old age, and death that is both sober and of great emotional impact.

### **The analytic relationship**

The analytic relationship provides the stage for our patients to share the story of their lives and of their psychic suffering, as well as the history of their intimate bonds, their aggressive bonds, and their

inevitable solitudes. There have been many contributions to the characterization of the analytic relationship. Yet Melanie Klein and Bion's concepts and insights inaugurated a new paradigm, and Racker (1953) and Baranger and Baranger's (2008) key notions of countertransference and analytic field have allowed present-day analysts to work more closely with the emotions shared in each session. In addition, these notions have enabled us to work with deeper analytic material.

Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984) considers that in most cases, analysts bring to their work a balanced combination of feminine and masculine traits that are the product of their own maternal and paternal identifications. Nonetheless, this author thinks that femininity bears deeper traits that transcend these identifications. In her work, she examines specific aspects of the countertransference, which, she argues, differs according to the analyst's gender. For instance, the disposition to maternity includes the ability to wait and to see a relationship unfold thanks to a slow, patient everyday work that recalls pregnancy.

There are two authors who, in my opinion, have pushed the boundaries of psychoanalytic practice. I am referring to Thomas Ogden and Antonino Ferro. If we turn to one of Ogden's works, "On Not Being Able to Dream" (2003), where based on Bion and Funes the memorious, Borges's character, he studies a clinical material in detail, we can closely follow the movements of the analyst's mind. Analysts use all their memory and dream resources to create, along with their patients, a network of dreams over the course of the sessions that can give present and past meaning to patients' inability to dream and to establish an intimate connection. Ferro, for his part, discusses the elements that define and constitute an analyst in his book *Torments of the Soul* (2015). There, he shows how we can develop an analytic condition based on our daily clinical work.

In my contributions to the question of analytic listening, I tried to study and recontextualize analytic neutrality. I examined analytic listening in traumatic situations, as well as changes in that listening that take place when analysts become progressively older (Eizirik, 2015). Concerning the arguable notion of neutrality, I maintain that it is still useful as long as we view it as a position from which analysts, in our interaction with our patients, observe them without losing empathy, spontaneity, or naturalness but maintaining a manageable distance. We must keep in mind, however, that this position is threatened by internal and external influences, and that we do our best to sustain it.

We should always be ready to use our disposition to maternity, a second look, or the serenity needed to find either the right interpretation or question, or the silence that allows us to experience moments of intimacy in the analytic relationship. When the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1962) writes about the search for poetry, we can hear him speak of the search for an instant of intimacy or, perhaps, of eternity:

Penetrate deftly the kingdom of words:  
Here lie the poems that wait to be written.  
They are paralyzed, but not in despair,  
All is calm and freshness on the untouched surface.  
Here they are alone and dumb, in the state of the dictionary.  
Before you write them, live with your poems.  
If they are obscure, be patient. If they provoke you,  
    hold your temper.  
Wait for each one to actualize and to consume itself  
In the power of language  
And the power of silence.

Do not force the poem to come out of Limbo.  
Do not pick from the ground the poem that was lost.  
Do not flatter the poem. Accept it  
As it will accept its own form, final and concentrated  
In space.

Come closer and contemplate the words.  
Each one  
Has a thousand secret faces under a neutral face  
And asks you, without interest in the answer,  
Poor or terrible, which you will give it:  
Have you brought the key?

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