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# Analytical Setting: Time, Relation, and Complexity

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The definition of the psychotherapeutic setting has never been entirely delineated on the one hand because of the various guidelines that tend to give preference to one element or the other in turn, and on the other hand because of the complexity of the topic. As a matter of fact, according to many well-informed opinions, the setting in classical analysis would be very different from the one that is generally created in psychotherapy, even though the setting represents one of the criteria for deciding what is analysis and what is not.

Freud faced this problem, but not systematically. The rules that he indicated are still used today, although not as rigidly, and they are represented by an internal and an external aspect; that is to say, a benevolent neutrality—the flowing attention that means not wanting to concentrate on anything specific and the rule of abstinence that means abstaining from giving the person being analyzed any indications that are not relevant to the purely psychoanalytical situation. On the other hand, the codified frequency of the sessions, the constancy of the timetable, the modality of payment, and the use of the analytical bed are still all part of the external conditions. As we pointed out initially, some differences exist in the settings, but we can still find some common elements: the psychoanalytic setting is regarded as a container in which the dynamics of the relation between therapist and patient are elaborated, the anxieties, the distances, the functions, and the way to perceive reality and unknown. But in the definitions of setting, whatever they are, it seems possible to establish rather a general idea involving a list of behaviors rather than a set of rules for functioning within a structure of relations that are absolutely decisive for the therapeutic goals.

Taking a step backward, we have to remember that analytical therapy, and therefore all psychotherapeutic treatments, was born and evolved from an oversimplified deterministic conception of the world. The evolution of the complexity changed the background that was typical of Freud's period, and it introduced new ideas about the phenomena that psychiatrists and psychotherapists study: the elements that constitute the psyche, such as verbal and body language, depend on complex cognitive structures that are hardly reducible to simple dynamics.

In other words, we have witnessed a complication of the variables we meet in relational dynamics: the complexity of the world constituting of a bio-psycho social whole in many cases does not follow linear dynamics, and therefore complications and deterministic chaos can cause behaviors for which the output is not proportional

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to the input. It is clear that under these conditions it is possible to employ a new set of instruments that some use in a conceptual way, as a reference model, and others use to derive technical mathematical meaning, as has happened with schizophrenia and bipolar disturbances, and in the use of once unthinkable systems such as the transposition of models of research of dissipative systems, of the neural nets, of fractal mathematics, and of the theory of catastrophe. The study of illnesses in dynamic terms showed that the old paradigm of homeostasis may have to be reconsidered in light of the observations indicating that living systems have a higher possibility of vital success in the perspective of complexity than in a perspective of apparent stability.

In this view the definition of setting as explained above becomes inadequate: our starting point proposes that the setting forms a living structure, a complex system, a system of autopoiesis with the different phases and levels of organization that come from the contact of the analyst's fractals and the analysand's fractals. We are combining here the concept of the fractal figure with a basic concept in character analysis: the concept of trait. A fractal figure is a figure characterized by schemes that you continuously find in different orders—schemes, forms of the whole, that repeat themselves in similar ways, in every variety of orders and sizes.

The trait of character is a scheme, a figure, a form that we acquire at a particular stage of our evolution, in one of the developmental phases. This form, this scheme is by analogy a fractal figure: the structure of the character is based on traits that are etched by their own history and on them it "folds" and "unfolds" the form-character: these etched signs determine the building of the personality on a model that will organize itself on schemes that are similar to themselves and that will determine the fundamental order. This way, the character's order shows some elements that are constantly present in any observation carried out in every developmental phase that the model has: for example, the topic of acceptance—a trait that has an intrauterine origin—will always repeat itself in diachronic development, and its architecture will always be similar, even in the different phase explications. This fractal figure is imprinted in its specificity by the signs etched by its own history—*character* literally means etched sign—that remain in our personality's organization and that can be acted upon or recalled by the scenes of here and now.

If the setting is a living form, it has the capacity of a negentropic gradient. Negentropy is a negative variation of entropy starting from an original value; the birth of the individual, the origin of life, the beginning of the biological evolution: this variation of entropy means the acquisition of greater order that is more evident with higher evolution. Negentropic development and character development can also be put together, and they form the evolution and stratification of the different organizations, of the different phases, and of the different phase shifts in the building of character, throughout the history of a person, up to the consciousness of the self. And there is a strong association with what Prigogine has said: away from equilibrium the matter becomes visible.

The setting is a living form that is born from the first contact between analyst and analyzed and it has the possibility of progressively developing a negative version of entropy from the original value, up to stratifications and specific forms, in a historical process belonging to the relation itself. We are saying that the setting will develop its own character, and the setting's character will be the connection between the

character traits of the analyst and the character traits of the analysand, between these two fractalic figures, which will allow the possibility of a new complex system, its own self-organization, its autopoiesis, its developments, its phases. The character of the setting will allow an empathic contact, a being together with important consequences on the economy and negentropy of the self of the analysand and of the analyst and of the complex system of analyst and analyzed. To better clarify, the being together is a fractalic comprehension compatibility that probably takes place if the analyst has a fractalic figure larger than the one presented by the analysand.

The analyst's capacity to create contact determines a concept that has many analogies with the concept of flexibility, that is to say, the analyst's capacity to slide over his own positions, over the position of his own story's organizational levels, and to alight on the fractalic figure, able to find a resonance with the fractalic figure of the analysand. This move aims at creating a therapeutic alliance, a substratum of a possible coevolutionary development of the relation in the setting.

We highlight coevolution, and we validate it in three forms: it is not sufficient to have negentropic evolution only in the analysand, and neither is it enough to also have the analyst's evolution, but it is fundamental to have an evolution of the *relation* between analyst and analyzed. It is implicit in the interdependence and in the maintenance of the diversity of the parts.

An analysis of the scene of the setting as described above involves a rereading of transference and countertransference. We can think of them as forces that flow from the person's structure, from the traits, from the fractalic figures of the analyst and of the analysand, flows of stage, trait, and specific fractalic figures that meet in interactions that correspond and find a place in specific stages of the new form: relation. The interactions among different trait transferences and countertransferences within the same relation recalls the concept of structural coupling, defined as recurrent interactions that begin structural modifications in the system. And accepting that a coupled structural system is an intelligent system that learns, an analytical setting has the capacity for intelligent negentropic development; it has the potential for intelligent structural couplings between the articulation of the number of the fractalic figures of the analyst and those of the analysand, reinforced by the fact that the setting is a privileged operational space, specific and protected. It is important here to highlight the incredible responsibility that the analyst has towards this relation; that it is not a simple relation, but an analytical therapeutic relation, a relation that has the fundamental aim to allow the analyzed person's self a greater vitality.

We introduce here a new equation between what we call phase shift—real critical points of instability—and the point of bifurcation. The "how" of the phase shift is determined by a sign etched in person's history, in the architecture of his character's development. To be clearer we cannot, for example, allow a person, who in his own history has the "how" of the bifurcation point etched at a point of high destructural risk, to go up and down the different organizational levels of the personality with rhythms higher than can be supported by a phase passage that is extremely fragile without a specific countertransference in form and time. We believe we can talk about a time arrow in the relation, in the setting, in the complex living system that determines the evolution of the structural couplings, of the possible negentropic stages. Inside this relation it is possible to manage certain times that sometimes have the connotation of egoic time, sometimes of chronological external time or of inter-

nal emotional time: time of the self; time of the complex system self-other; time beaten by an absolutely rooted condition in the person's history, made up of fears, or alarms of vigilance; time connected to the economic supportability of the possible fractalic evolutions of the trait and state shift, connected to the possible new configurations of the form of the relation; specific time of the individuality of the system that defines the complexity; one trait time, more trait times; a time that traces; a time that etches; a time that is traced; a time that irreversibly beats history; a time connected to organizational areas where the vital flow can become rarefied, the auto-poiesis disintegrates, and a psychotic condition can explode; a time that defines form and is defined by the form itself.

The arrow of time indicates a direction for which past and future are not equivalent; and here we add that even more in the analytical therapeutic setting the states of time develop with the characteristic of irreversibility. Therefore, it is necessary to attentively revise the structure of all psychotherapy and to stop to reflect upon the key of optimistic reversibility contained in Freud's system: what is structured during the various stages of development, the different points of fixation, and the possible development of pathologies is not able to activate a regression that cannot be a reversibility in time, but that we can interpret as an actualization of the smaller fractals in the organization of that self. In the same way, it is necessary to reconsider how to carry on the therapy and the escapes into the atemporal or extratemporal unconscious.

We are requiring the analyst, a founding part of the new living form, a clear quality in the metacommunication, the capacity to talk about his own state and stage, an awareness of his self and of the other, and of the relation between self and other. This is a luxury that indicates negentropic stages quite far away from equilibrium, a creative touch that surrounds the form and continuously guarantees it. If we are allowed a parallel, the analysis of the character of the relationship, is the ego of the new living form, the awareness of the new living form that has reached the state of vision. And in this systemic fluctuant analysis, in this game of continuous cross references, we believe there is a characteristic of stage that also belongs to the new paradigm, in which the religion of uncertainty is one of its parameters, that does not have truth positions corresponding to negentropic necessities of minor stages, that has in the possibility of metacommunication an evolutive and constant point of bifurcation, a point of instability and fluctuation that gives the system the possibility of never closing.

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