

The Current Effectiveness of the Analytic Act

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Paris, 2025

Selena is 15 years old and lives with her mother, María Selva, her twin brother, and another brother two years older than her. Her father died when they were young, and her mother has been in a relationship with Vicente for about eight years.

Until recently, Selena claimed to get along well with him. However, they recently had an argument. The cause was a cell phone charger she took without permission, claiming it was hers, even though it was among Vicente's personal belongings. He reproached her for taking something that belonged to someone else without permission.

The argument escalated, and, impulsively, Selena went out onto the balcony and told her mother she was going to jump. Her mother, not hiding her anger, told her to stop bothering him, brought her inside, and asked her to write to her analyst to discuss the matter. She does so on the spot, and the analyst answers her something, but tells her she'll wait to talk about it in the session. Days later, the mother requested an interview with her.

María Selva arrives at the same session, upset with her daughter, as she tends to answer poorly, doesn't help with household chores, and treats everyone poorly. She says she's never argued with her partner before, and that this episode disconcerted her: she feels she doesn't recognize her daughter, that she doesn't know how to treat her, that she can't stand her anymore, and that everything is more bearable with her sons, who are affectionate and obedient.

When Selena arrives for her session, she recounts what happened, but gives a different version: she claims they take things out on her. She also says she's not afraid of her mother; she assumes she does what she wants; but that deep down, that day when she went out onto the balcony, what she wanted was to be hugged and feel loved. However, instead of that hug, she received distance, an order to go to sleep, and instructions to speak with her analyst. This filled her with even more anger. This concludes the clinical vignette.

We are experiencing a historical moment that many place within postmodernism, while others argue that we have already entered a phase known as hypermodernism or late neoliberalism. This period is characterized by the crisis of grand narratives, the questioning of absolute truths, and a growing distrust of traditional patriarchal authority figures.

There is an attempt to impose the belief that all meanings are possible, that everyone could perceive themselves from a multitude of places, to which is added the preeminence of consumption and immediacy as the dominant logic.

We are thus witnessing an era marked by transformations in the ways of living, thinking, and building social ties. All of this invites us to reconsider our clinical practice and our role as analysts.

It is impossible to address these issues without, in some way, returning to the question of the Father. Throughout his work, Lacan gives it a central place, and already in its earliest developments, he returns to one of Freud's fundamental concerns: what does it mean to be a father?

It is the signifier that sometimes represents authority, the law in the unconscious, fundamental to regulating desire. When we speak of the father, we are referring to the symbolic function he embodies within the cultural order, within language.

To introduce ourselves to the question of the analyst's desire in contemporary clinical practice, I find it pertinent to recover some passages from Seminar VIII: Transference. There, Lacan returns to Claudel's trilogy as a way of staging what he calls "the contemporary tragedy of desire." These works, in his view, allow us to anticipate how human desire is structured from a Freudian-Lacanian perspective and how the variations of the castration complex are inscribed in modern subjectivity. From there, a propitious path opens up for thinking about transference and the place of the analyst, in light of the decline of the paternal function.

For example, in "The Humiliation of the Father" in the cited work, he points out that—and here lies the paradox that interests Lacan—thanks to his castration, the father remains necessary as the bearer of the Law, as the one who enforces what is established. It is not necessary, then, to be the omnipotent father that Freud attributed to the Victorian Oedipal father, but rather the one who keeps his word.

Returning to our vignette, Selena's defiance can be read as a demand directed at an Other. It is not a whim, but rather the exercise of a desire. However, as we see in this case, sometimes this defiance may not be read as something of a punishment appearing in its place.

In certain cases, we can observe how the father's authority evaporates in a culture that promotes the constant pursuit of limitless enjoyment. A culture that pushes the subject to always achieve a little more satisfaction, in a never-ending race that, paradoxically, leaves the subject immersed in constant discomfort. In my clinical practice with adolescents, this becomes particularly visible. Symptoms emerge that demonstrate an overflow of enjoyment: cuts on the body, threats and thoughts of suicide, inhibitions (today they call it INCEL), compulsive gambling, hyperconnection to social media, and substance use that act as a supplement to cope with the anguish in encounters with others, etc.

In the session with Selena, the analyst points out that it's okay for her not to be afraid of responding to her mother, of doing what she would like, of trying to fulfill what she wants, but that this has consequences: that not everything desirable can be achieved, and one must endure the difference between what one desires and the possible fulfillment of that desire. And one of those effects could be her mother's reaction. So, it's about thinking about what she does with what her mother said. What is her responsibility to take responsibility for the consequences of her words and actions? Because while she was seeking a gesture of love, it's difficult for that gesture to be understood if she asks for it in that way. Selena responds that she hadn't thought of it that way, but that she still doesn't feel ready to do so and doesn't want to continue talking, so she changes the subject.

From this, we can say that the analytic act hasn't changed in its fundamental structure: the analysand comes to analysis seeking relief from their discomfort. Today, we frequently encounter analysands (or parents, the educational community, psychiatrists, neurologists, etc.) who burst in with an imperious demand for an answer. A tyrannical demand that tolerates neither delay nor emptiness. In those moments, the analyst is expected not only to sustain the question, but to answer immediately, to complete the meaning, to satisfy the urgency, without the subjective work of sustaining a question.

Thus, the analyst is not only in the position of the Subject Presumed to Know, but can also be captured as someone who can suture the lack: they are sought out to provide something, an answer, a solution. In this attempt at displacement, we once again face the question of the analyst's desire and his act, which can only be conceived from that desire, but also how, from there, one intervenes to enable a gap amidst the logic of immediacy that tends to prevail in contemporary discourse.

Lacan warns us that "whatever the analyst does, the patient enjoys." Every gesture—be it a silence, a sigh, a glance at the clock—will be interpreted and leave a residue of enjoyment.

So, how do we think about the position of the analyst today, when the enjoyment that inevitably permeates him in the transference is no longer veiled, but often erupts with a logic of impunity, attempting to strip the analytic act of its ethical dimension?

To achieve something new, the analyst makes a bet in his act; he doesn't anticipate, he doesn't offer guarantees. He, too, is innovative, upholding the ethics of his desire as an analyst. Therefore, what it means is for the analyst to shift positions according to the different logical times in the course of a cure, fostering shifts in discourse. This allows us not to sacralize his place. The analyst's place is exactly the opposite of proposing himself as an object of identification. He continues to occupy the semblance of the object a, offering himself as that void in the field of the Other that sets in motion the subject's desire to sustain an enigma.

But, at the same time, it is essential to avoid feeding the deadly jouissance of the symptom, not confusing responsibility with punishment, as shown in the vignette, by trying not to leave the analysand in the position of someone who simply receives a mandate that blames him. In this sense, the analyst knows how to wait, sustains the word, giving value to that which currently appears devalued.

It is rather a question of sanctioning something in action that opens the possibility of a question, in which the subject can take responsibility for his enjoyment, giving rise to another version of it, one that is not symptomatic.

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