



Biancoli_R_1991

The Being Mode in the Hour of Psychoanalysis

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The Paper „The Being Mode in the Hour of Psychoanalysis“ was presented at a Workshop on Frommian Therapeutic Practice, August 30 - September 1, 1991, in Verbania-Pallanza.

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1.

The distinction between having mode and being mode would seem to be the basis of the Frommian clinic. The psychoanalytical session is the place where the question „Who am I?“ is posed. The non-alienated response can be experienced only in the being mode.

After a life-time dedicated to psychoanalysis, Erich Fromm wrote „To Have or To Be?“, published in 1976. Many times has he claimed his theories to be based on clinical experience and indeed we can note that gradually, from the 40's, the pages and propositions dedicated to psychoanalytical technique converge to define a possession-centred and an activity-centred orientation which respectively are directed towards the having mode and the being mode.

In the having mode the stress of affection in one's experience is placed on things one has: one's body, one's intelligence, one's capabilities, one's car, one's house, etc. The identity of the person tends to be found in a storehouse of things. The past becomes a series of facts, an inventory of events and possessions.

Whatever one possesses may be lost; every single thing is at risk¹. A specific, inevitable anxiety exists regarding the loss of what one has. This is an anxiety with social conno-

tations, given that it is society itself which favours structures that are more consistent with the having mode. The insurance policy market represents a social response to the risks inherent in this mode of experiencing life.

Techniques socially forecast for escaping from risk are widely covered in texts on Economics and Management, since the having mode is so deep-rooted and widespread as to furnish the illusion that this and only this is reality and that all the instruments for its comprehension and expression must be prepared.

The entire system of social life puts into practice a subtle and unconscious filter of human experience. The contents of experience, be they individual or collective, are selected by social „filters“², and are largely withheld in the unconscious. Subtle and complex perceptions have a special filter, according to their significance. A determining function of filtering is performed by language. Vocabulary perhaps does not offer enough words to describe certain experiences, yet provide a wide range of terms for describing other experiences, which are then brought into consciousness in their entire complexity of nuance. Even grammar, syntax and etymology provide, in various languages, different ways of perception and conscious assumption of the experience. A further filter is the logical filter, which, on the

¹ Fromm, E. (1976a), *To Have or to Be?*, GA Vol. II, Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 347-349.

² Fromm, E. (1960a), *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, GA Vol. VI, pp. 323-327.



basis of rules of thought, leads to the conscience eliminating everything which appears illogical. A third filter regards the contents which are being experienced, given that in every society there are taboos which impede awareness of given thoughts, sentiments and emotions.

It can be understood why the being mode does not lend itself much to verbal description; both because many words haven't been spent on it and because it does not consist of just intellect - the movement of experience which pertains to it cannot be encapsulated in a logical-formal conceptualization. Concepts are not excluded from the being mode, but are not sufficient to represent it, as it involves sensation, emotion, sentiment, fantasy, words and silence. The total immediate experience of being a functioning active centre, a self, must be lived in its movement, without being objectified into a concept. The experience of an internal action, something produced by oneself and correlated to the world in a lively fashion, does not allow itself to be squared up into a final, definite discourse.

The totality of human experience, collected in the being mode, can disassociate itself on the dividing line between discursive thought and the underlying lived content. Experience in its integrity of sense is repressed, and put into the depths of the unconscious, while the concept and word usurp the place of totality and fall into the having mode. It is the alienating path from being to having the thought of a sentiment takes the place of feeling, the thought of an emotion takes the place of becoming emotional. The overall experience no longer exists. Its verbal representation is emptied out and crystallized and becomes an object, something to possess, to have.

A path of falsification of self is to limit oneself to thinking something rather than experiencing it or feeling it, and so reducing it to an object, a possession³.

³ Fromm, E., (1968a), *The Revolution of Hope. Toward a Humanized Technology*, GA Vol. IV, pp. 322-325.

2.

In the having mode the past is felt as a storehouse of memories. One can have recollections just as one can have possessions. Time is just chronological and the present is nothing but an extension of the past.

The psychoanalytical session can redeem itself from the having mode by referring to the living memory of the patient, which represents the past relived in the present, according to the being mode⁴, which is not out of time, yet ungoverned by time. The „hic et nunc“ of the session may revive the past, rendering it present and immediate. Even the future may be subjectively anticipated in a „hic et nunc“ under gestation⁵.

A 31-years old patient tells me of the following recollection from her infancy: „I used to go to see my grandmother in hospital. She was ill with cancer. I had a doll. The nurses mistook the doll for my little brother“. She is speaking naturally and I feel some great truth is about to emerge. I ask confirmation. „The doll was mistaken for your little brother, was it?“ She replies with a bewildered „yes“, as if it were the first time she had thought of it. I can see bewilderment in her glance, then uneasiness and worry. I don't insist with words and smile at her. Her eyes now meet mine and after an instant are placated in a kind of conscious a sent.

At that moment past is present. In the equivalence of doll and baby lies much of her psycho-affective story. My immediate impression, which afterwards proved to be true, is that the patient is able to comprehend the episode as follows: the nurses, for fun, tell her that the doll is her little brother; she, as a little girl, believes that they believe it to be true; she, as an adult, reconstructs the course of events according to the principle of reality.

⁴ Fromm, E. (1976a), *To Have or to Be?*, GA II, p. 361.

⁵ Idem.



If the patient still believed that the nurses really thought the doll to be her little brother, she would be psychotic. But we instantly understand each other without words: the nurses are having fun. Yet hers is not a game, or rather not just the game of a five-years old girl: The girl doesn't see that the nurses are joking, because they are saying what she too feels: there is a mother-girl who has two dolls, one big (the patient) and one smaller (the doll-little brother).

I could have invited the patient to produce some free associations, so as to make her speak of dolls, her sick grandmother, her relationships with children, her mother - to collect information and get to know her better. Above all, applying the basic rule, according to Freud⁶, one would get nearer to the unconscious contents and promote their discovery. The criticism of Fromm on the method of free associations is accompanied by recognition of his modernity and comparability to Modern Art, which destroys form and conventional logical connections⁷, whilst he is however decisive in recognizing that this method favours resistances⁸. Fromm demonstrates the connection, in Freudian psychoanalysis, between the free associations of the patient and the suspended attention of the analyst⁹. This relationship easily leads to a situation of words which get further away from the repressed content. Suspended attention is correct behaviour, yet is insufficient¹⁰. Intense concentration on the part of the analyst is also required, so as to create a climate of interest and vitality in the session. The person under analysis must feel the analyst's participation, feel that he too is feeling.

⁶ Freud, S. (1913), *Zur Einleitung der Behandlung* (On Beginning the Treatment), Collected Papers, vol II, Hogarth Press, London 1946, pp. 355-357.

⁷ Fromm, E. (1968), *Trascripción de seis conferencias*, Ciudad de Mexico, Febrero 4 - marzo 18 de 1968, Tübingen: Erich Fromm Archives, Conferencia del Febrero 4, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibidem* p. 9.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 27f; Conferencia del Febrero 11, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ *Ibidem* Conferencia del Febrero 11, p. 6.

Analysis is a dialogue between the analyst and the person being analysed, aimed at establishing who the latter is. The dialogue is based on reciprocally communicated responses and reactions. To what the person under analysis communicates, the analyst reacts emotionally and communicates his own reaction¹¹. Both identities are at play.

3.

When the patient tells me her doll was mistaken for her little brother, I have an emotive reaction, which I express with a question. Her words are simple, but the meaning bears something faintly enigmatic, so subtle that it could easily be passed off as an obvious, banal communication. My question to her is explorative, even in my own regard: what are we feeling? Her reply, the bewildered „yes“, the voice, the eyes, her complex emotional reaction to my question opens me out to her, whilst she opens herself out to me. That is, I look at her from inside herself. This is possible only in the being mode, as a total experience which does not ignore reasoning but which doesn't get bogged down in it.

Looking at a person from within dispels the concept of interpretation or better still, as Fromm says¹², it is the ideal interpretation when the analyst feels what the patient is inadvertently feeling. When distinguishing between seeing a person from inside and outside, Fromm cites Bergson, Whitehead and Santayana¹³. A passage from Bergson's „Introduction à la Métaphysique“¹⁴ sums up the idea in few words: „...Philosophers, despite their apparent differences, are agreed on distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies movement around the thing in question, the second implies entry into it“.

¹¹ *Ibidem* Conferencia del Febrero 11, p. 22.

¹² *Ibidem* Conferencia del Febrero 25, pp. 11f.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁴ Bergson, H. (1903), *Introduction à la métaphysique*; it. tr. „Introduzione alla metafisica“, Laterza, Bari 1971, pp. 41f.



Fromm claims that the relationship between analyst and patient must be „center-to-center“¹⁵, that in order to understand a person it isn't just sufficient to know things about, that person. He writes: „The analyst understands the patient, only inasmuch as he experiences in himself all that the patient experiences“¹⁶.

By placing oneself at the centre of another person, one can see that person's totality, the operation of that totality, the internal movement which expresses the external manifestation¹⁷. This makes it possible for the analyst to feel himself what the patient is feeling, but what the latter is not yet aware of feeling¹⁸. Fromm traces an evocative parallel between the disposition of the analyst and the novelist, who sees his characters move according to internal logic¹⁹.

My patient desires no children, is afraid of having children. She is not able to relate to children and feels hatred towards them. A clear light from the „center“ of the person who is in front of me falls on this impediment to her living her life. Here is a woman, who in part has remained a rigidly fearful and dismayed child. Here there is the incapacity to play as a child, which, as Winnicott teaches²⁰, has become in the woman a limitation on her creativity. Her relationship with spontaneity is icy, and likewise her relationship with children who are interactive by their very nature. The past is present here and so too is the future, certainly as the destiny of womankind, but even moreso as a human individual who fears the implicated relationship, the risk of life which is continually changing. Not only does this woman fear and hate children, but outgoing people too, even though she feels a conscious attrac-

tion to their vitality, which vexes her. Resentment expresses conflict. When I ask her if the nurses really believed that the doll was her little brother she doesn't reply with a limpid, decisive „yes“, but a perplexed, bewildered „yes“. This way of replying reveals the conflict between two fundamental passions. The verbal „yes“ is pronounced, and, having said this against the principle of reality, she expresses the survival of feeling infantile, the fixation on a world where children are not respected and loved, but merely looked after. The child has been inhibited as regards her faith in life. An altered and perturbed realism convinces her that life leads towards death, that processes are spent and that children and dolls are interchangeable. In the context of the patient's story lies the explicit theme of the death of the cancer-stricken grandmother. In our communication the illness of the grandmother does not emerge, but is set as the background and lies there in sombre fashion. The fundamental passion which makes the patient respond with a „yes“ lies in a strategy of survival²¹ which adjusts her to the affective climate of her family, without tenderness, without impulse, without joy. Heart-broken requests for affection, vivacity, spontaneity meet with disapproval and therefore the child represses them. The need to belong to a family, the fear of remaining alone and abandoned tie her to the old world, to that mechanical horizon which makes her say „yes“ to a doll and baby being equal.

But the „yes“ is uttered with a feeble voice, different from her usual voice, accompanied with a bewildered gaze, an overall expression of perplexity. There is another fundamental passion behind the reticent „yes“ which wants to say „no!“ - a doll is a doll and a baby is a baby, as undoubtedly the nurses knew, but they were just joking and entering into the normal play of a child with her doll. Yet this sane realism finds no verbal voice. It is the kind of realism that has always perceived of life as being gestation,

¹⁵ Fromm, E. (1960a), *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, GA Vol. VI, p. 333.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Fromm, E. (1968), *Trascripción de seis conferencias*, cit., Conferencia del Febrero 25, p. 9.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 7, 10.

²⁰ Winnicott, D.W. (1971), *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock Publications, London.

²¹ Jorge Silva-Garcia, seminar held in Bologna, May 1984.



generation, development, but which has not been able to prevail. Biophilia has ever wanted the patient to grow as a person, to be a woman who lives her affections freely and fully.

All this is seen in the movement from the inside of the person, from her „center“. My question meets with a dual reply, since what is heard is not confined to just hearing words, but a way of being present. Suspended attention accompanies the intensity of the analyst's presence, which can be compared to „water in a pond, which exercises a uniform pressure over the entire pond bottom, ready to enter into even the smallest of cracks which may appear“²². The crack opened by the patient is her tone of voice, a stupefied and bewildered air. With a smile I confirm the appropriateness not of her verbal reply, which is pathological, but of the other response, which kind of sabotages the first reply by a voice alteration, a lost look. I confirm the sane, adult part: At this point she looks me in the eyes, and in an instant the lost *gaze* disappears. Her eyes now confirm that they see what mine see.

I attempt therapy by giving her the sensation that I understand her real self in the conflict. We have noted²³ that Fromm, and Horney before him, anticipate Winnicott's distinction between true self and false self. In his latest book too²⁴, Fromm writes that the analysis is able to reach the original identity of a person, identity at birth, consisting of genetically-given potentiality. In the present character of a person we can see how much the original components have been favoured or contrasted by later experiences. We can see up to what point traits of character imposed by family and society have prevailed, replacing the real identity of a person with a false identity²⁵.

²² Idem.

²³ Bacciagaluppi, M. (1990), *Le vedute di Fromm sul narcisismo e sul Sè*, in: *Psicoterapia e scienze umane*, 1990, 24, 3: pp. 66-81.

²⁴ Fromm, E. (1979a), *Greatness and Limitation of Freud's Psychoanalysis*, GA VIII, pp. 310.

²⁵ Idem.

4.

The correlation „center-to-center“ between analyst and patient is theorized by Fromm in „Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis“ (1960). It seems to me that the problems surrounding the difference between knowing things about the patient, from the outside, and experiencing what the patient is experiencing, from the inside, is further illustrated by the later distinction between the being mode and the having mode.

The position of the analyst towards the patient was defined by Sullivan as „participant observation“. Fromm would prefer to say that the analyst is an „observant participant“, but then adds that this is not enough, since participation still means finding oneself on the outside²⁶. Seeing another person from the inside is a paradox, given that one must become the other person whilst, at the same time, remaining oneself²⁷.

The logic of the subject-object relationship does not permit the subject to be himself whilst at the same time being the object. This logic is one of the social „filters“ which Fromm speaks about. The having mode makes use of the separateness between subject and object. Yet in analysis we have two subjects and, if we don't want one of them to become an object, it is necessary to go beyond the having mode into the being mode, which can express itself even in paradoxical logic.

For Fromm, the specific nature of the analyst's offer to the patient is competence²⁸. The psychoanalytical relationship is not exactly a relationship of love, friendship, but rather is characterized by the specific competence of the analyst to be the patient whilst being himself. We are dealing with an interior activity which extends and touches on the exercise of revealing one's humanity in

²⁶ Fromm, E. (1960a), *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, GA Vol. VI, pp. 332f.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 333.

²⁸ Fromm, E. (1968), *Trascrizione de seis conferencias*, cit., Conferencia del Febrero 25, pp. 14f.



the other, to experience the human universal in oneself and in others.

Information on the patient and knowledge of surrounding details may indeed prepare the terrain for understanding the totality, but by themselves cannot lead to the „center“. In the „center-to-center“ correlation, understanding is improvised²⁹, even if it may be aided by previous work. This understanding arises in the analyst as his response to the overall communication of the patient. By activating a dialogue, the analyst - he too in global terms - expresses to the patient what he has understood. The patient in turn reacts: by either defending himself, or sensing a limit in the analyst, or agreeing with him in various ways. Comprehension may be felt in a liberating or dramatic manner. If this involves a repressed content being made conscious, Fromm defines it with the Spanish word „concientizacion“³⁰.

In the having mode the „center-to-center“ correlation is in any case impossible. One may objectify a person, collect lots of data regarding the person and hypothetically reconstruct the entire life of that person. The nucleus, the „center“ of the person, however, remains inaccessible. Profound contact is made only in the being mode: an act of love may give to the other complete knowledge, just as the art of psychoanalysis may permit the analyst to enter into the center of the patient's world and observe the lines of movement of that person's whole personality.

The being mode is the condition for the correlation „center-to-center“ since it means the absence of all types of possession. It signifies experiencing whatsoever another individual is experiencing. Possession and intrusion would close the door. It may happen in the having mode if one wants to grasp the other person and at all costs violate his intimacy. The result is a sadistic and even de-

structive attack³¹. No-one is obliged to reveal himself in his hidden intimacy, neither under threat nor torture. The „center“ of the violated person becomes increasingly distant, to a point where knowledge of him is no longer possible³².

These considerations help us understand why, according to Fromm, psychoanalysis is an art and not a technique³³. Understanding a person is like understanding a poem. Art is applied only to the living, whilst technique, even though born out of a whole series of rules of art, tends to alienate itself in its application to the inanimate. Psychoanalytical technique runs the risk of becoming crystallised and rigid, and expressing only the having mode. In the being mode, psychoanalysis is an art which examines the life of the person - not a formalized technique. The only meaning of the word technique which can be admitted is the first and foremost of its meanings - that is a set of psychoanalytical rules of art.

²⁹ Fromm, E. (1957a), *Man Is Not a Thing*, GA VIII, p. 26.

³⁰ Fromm, E. (1989) *Vom Haben zum Sein. Wege und Irrwege der Selbsterfahrung*, ed. by Rainer Funk, Beltz, Weinheim und Basel 1989, p. 96.

³¹ Fromm, E. (1957a), *Man Is Not a Thing*, GA VIII, p. 24.

³² Idem.

³³ Fromm, E. (1978), *Psychoanalytic „technique“ - or the art of listening*, Unpublished notes. Tübingen: Erich Fromm Archives.