

Romanian Society for Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic understanding of ageing (from midlife and beyond)

Opening Words

by Guillermo Julio Montero PhD and Alicia Mirta Ciancio PsyD

Bucarest, February 10th, 2018

It's not easy for us to thank you for this invitation with words. We don't know how to achieve it because words may betray our inner feelings: they are often worn, demeaned, emptied, tired. Facing this dilemma we thought that the best signal would be the delivery of something entirely new for this occasion, as a means that our «thanks» could be inferred through our personal commitment with the proposal.

When I met Gianina Micu as a member of Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Ageing's IPA Committee, we were talking about «my» Bucarest. I told her that Bucarest brings to my mind two names, two Mirceas: Mircea Eliade and Mircea Cartarescu —my two Romanian idols. I also told Gianina that I didn't know anything else about Romania... Though afterwards I knew I was wrong.

Immediately she asked the Romanian Society for Psychoanalysis and The International Psychoanalytical Association for our invitation, a lot of Romanians came to my mind, and I found that many other Romanians had been important in my life, out of Cartarescu and Eliade.

I thought of Romanian cinema —something well known in our country—, a source of great stories and enormous directors: Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Radu Muntean, Corneliu Porumboiu, and many more. I also remembered Eugene Ionesco —his plays are always on stage in Buenos Aires—, the great linguist Eugenio Coseriu —who thought in our neighbor country Uruguay about synchrony, diachrony and history—, George Enescu —whose suites and sonatas for piano and violin are astonishing—, and many more.

I will also tell you one of the secrets of my youth related to another Romanian: Tristan Tzara. You can't imagine how many times I opened a dictionary randomly to see which was my full-of-meaning word, just in the way he did when he founded *dadasism*, the true forerunner of surrealism.

So, Romanians had been part of my/our life/ves in many ways without noticing it. From now on, Romanians will be part of our lives differently, because we are sure we'll meet a lot of you and we'll remain related as friends, not only as colleagues.

But if we would address our thanks personally we must mention not only Gianina Micu, but also Rita Teodoru and Alfred Dumitrescu: the three of them are the real makers of the conference.

They helped us with suggestions as well, and gave us the freedom to select the subjects we'll deliver today and tomorrow.

We come from far away, from the Austral side of planet Earth, where it exists such different ways of living than the ones originally known in Europe. Argentina is a beautiful country — exceptional in many senses— despite the fact that it may be thought as two entirely different countries. One big city, rich and proud of itself as Buenos Aires —a city living in fascination with Europe: especially with the so called European «civilization»—; and the rest of the country —also huge, and full of natural resources though in this case living in poverty due to economical corporation's exploitation, but facing Latin America in this case. These two «countries» exist giving their back each other, mostly in political terms.

This disparity gives source to a social mismatch which is part of our idiosyncrasy since ancient times. This became maximized these last two years after last political elections when the last twelve years of social inclusion and participation changed for a different model of society. This situation fosters such a discomfort that deepens the split of the society. Currently controlling media corporations are in power, making hypocrisy and lack of truth their reign; currently dominant corporative companies are in power trying to leave the regulatory functioning of the state, while they try to make people believe that the country must be managed as a big «enterprise».

These factors brought back forgotten memories of discomfort, because we have again political prisoners, ideological persecutions, fierce repression of social manifestations as well as unemployment and helplessness.

It's something hard to understand the reasons of this change, because current government won through free elections and half of the society accepted this reality being aware of the consequences. In order to find an explanation we think in the Heraclitean concept of enantiodromia. Enantiodromia comes from the Greek *enantios* meaning «contrary» or «opposite», and *dromos* meaning «race»: «running towards the opposite effect or running towards the opposite side of reality», as if reality were always running against what's happening. This concept don't relieve us, but perhaps it is useful for the understanding of such an important change.

Again —as every now and then happened—, the huge and enormous achievements of our loved and beautiful *Grandmothers of May Square* —May Square is the central square in Buenos Aires— try to be demeaned. Last civic-militar dictatorship (1976-1983) killed 30000 young people of our generation (we might have been one among them, of course). Many of them were kidnapped and killed immediately —a process that civic-military authorities coined cynically as «missing people»—, other were given sleeping pills and thrown to the river from a plane (their

corpses began to appear in the coasts later on)... but pregnant women were jailed and remained there till labour. After giving birth they were also killed and newborns were given or sold to military friends, who disguised newborn's true identity giving their own last names and adopting them illegally —none of them ever told any of these children the truth about their origins—. There were hundred in that situation and *Grandmothers of May Square*, slowly from 1979 on began the search of their grandchildren. When scientific tests made it possible to have the exact matching DNA composition of many of these babies (now all of them men and women around forty years-old) with the ones of the living relatives who lost youngsters in the seventies, individuals that had suspected they weren't blood children of their parents went to Grandmothers of May Square and... till now they recovered 130 grandchildren that can be themselves and live now within their authentic identity.

At this time, we think you already know that we are against pusillanimous and cowards that hide their way of thinking: we are against the current situation, after twelve years of social achievements enjoying freedom. Of course, we must declare that our way of thinking is not the mostly shared by media-class —the think of ourselves as media-class professionals—, but we only want you to know our way of understanding reality. In this case, we feel as proud *black sheep* or proud *white flies*.

Of course, we understand that psychoanalysis as the proper tool to understand subjective feelings is a means to acknowledge inner resources at work, because each individual may work-through the way social affairs influence their feelings. This is the reason why we think that a non promising reality is not enough to determine individual destinies, because sometimes these events foster creativity and the renewal of hopes —as it has already happened. We feel among this kind of people: we always acknowledge the existence of a rest of freedom within us.

But we also have several situations that unite all Argentinians as a non split country. Among them, the two main situations that unite us are football.. and psychoanalysis.

This is not the place to speak about football, but psychoanalysis is spread all over social classes. It's present at the university and in popular culture for a lot of time. You could find at any bookstore in Argentina —not only in Buenos Aires— a especial shelf for psychoanalytic books — absolutely well detached from self-help books, as we know it doesn't happen in other parts of the world—, you can find at any newsstand Sigmund Freud's Collected Works delivered weekly or monthly in cheap editions, it's so common to find characters as psychoanalysts or patients in cinema, theater or television, Psychology as a career was the most chosen one during thirty years at public and private universities, and more. Most of people regardless their social class has had

any psychological treatment or equivalent experience, it's also common to find journalists in television debating the usefulness or not of psychoanalysis. Medical care systems were obliged to offer psychological assistance to their associates because it was widely requested —though it remains an important share of people that keeps on paying their private treatments, as it is the case with Ali and me with our patients. Psychoanalysis is a strong presence, psychoanalysts are fully respected, psychoanalysis is a true social and cultural phenomenon... which luckily remains being «resisted». And perhaps, this may be the cause of its persistence, though we'll talk about this soon.

Given this landscape, you may think that there is an important source for the work for psychoanalysts in Argentina, and this is true. But it is also a truth that there is an important rivalry among different schools and colleagues, something that makes it difficult the beginning of the practice for young professionals.

Beyond our membership to The International Psychoanalytic Association, where I am the Chair of Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Ageing's Committee, we think we are representative of Argentinian psychoanalysis as a whole, and this is the reason why we'll make a brief reference to the tradition and validity it has —something that might have been the inner drive towards the two Argentinian presidencies of The International Psychoanalytical Association, currently under our colleague Virginia Ungar's mandate.

Argentine Psychoanalytic Association —the institute where we come from— have just turned 75 years-old! Settled in Buenos Aires and with more than one thousand members, it is the biggest institute in the country. We must also mention that in Buenos Aires there are two other official institutes —smaller than APA— with IPA's acknowledgement. There are also three different institutes in distant cities, such as Mendoza, Córdoba and Rosario.

Now, we'll watch a video where our current President Claudia Boresztejn speaks about several of the Argentinian important authors as well as she'll show us the house where the institute works. We want to highlight as an anecdote that the mansion where Argentine Psychoanalytic Association is settled was a personal donation of a wealthy patient in analysis for several years, as a thankful token for the benefit he gained for his life through psychoanalytic treatment. You must know that such a mansion couldn't have ever been bought by the institute because it is located in the most expensive part of the city. Let's watch the video.

But we also want to comment that we are representative of Travesia Foundation —Travesía means *journey*—, a psychoanalytic non-profit organization established in 1989 where I am the

President and Ali is the Vice-President. Travesia Foundation is devoted to research upon midlife transition and crisis from a psychoanalytic vertex, and its main target is gaining a true and authentic understanding of this phase of the human life cycle.

In order to achieve this target we have a *Research Department* where we work on new ideas and papers which we deliver at different congresses, we run a *Fall Meeting* yearly as a congress at the University —an all-day conference with 150 colleagues and students debating our papers as well as the ones of our national and international guests—, a *Department for Assistance* supervised by senior members of the foundation that is involved in treatments for people with economical limitations, a nine-year-old *Cine-Debate Workshop* joining thirty people monthly to watch and debate different films related to midlife and ageing, a small publishing company: *Entrevía Editorial* which has already published three books on the subject, a *Vocational-Professional Workshop* for people trying to find new roads after midlife, and finally, Ali created *Aiming-Up* a full midlife check-up in a brief series of interviews. You can find all this information in our website: www.fundaciontravesia.org.ar. Let's see a brief video prepared for the occasion.

We also want to share with you our positioning within psychoanalysis and as psychoanalysts. We think that psychoanalysis must be «resisted». We are against those who pretend its social acceptance without resistance, against those who want psychoanalysis to be confirmed by different scientific disciplines —as if psychoanalysis were unable to its own confirmations and validity through its clinical practice and its specific metapsychology. We think that if one day psychoanalysis losses its provocative and insurrectionary nature, it will be the beginning any kind of «pathological ageing» that may condemn psychoanalysis to a premature death.

It is indispensable for psychoanalysis to live and last within a never solved tension, in the middle of an uncertainty that launches psychoanalysis towards the unknown, forever and ever. We need psychoanalysis as something unsettling for people, something posing questions instead of offering answers.

To put an end and to make you know the way we think are live «inside» psychoanalysis and as psychoanalysts, we thought of sharing with you a brief familiar anecdote from our granddaughter (now she's three years old) —the only one at the moment:

We were taking care of her at her home —a flat in a beautiful neighborhood outside the city just in front of the local train station. We were telling our granddaughter that her house was beautiful because she could see from the lateral balcony the planes flying in the sky, she could see

from the lateral balcony the cars and bicycles passing for the main avenue opposite her house as well, and that she could see from the main window the train always passing again and again opposite her house. Then we told her that in our own house it happens just the same, because we could see the planes, cars and bicycles... but we regretted that we were unable to see the train because there weren't trains where we live. Our granddaughter answered right away with an immediate glance:

«You can't see the train because you don't have a window!»

With her answer we found a truth for the understanding of psychoanalysis. We need to look at things from a different vertex in order to remain «becoming» psychoanalysts. We don't think of us as psychoanalysts, but as a man and a woman always trying to become... psychoanalysts, always trying to become. psychoanalysts... This is the frame from which we understand psychoanalysis and this is the one we want to suggest everybody. For sure, this occasion will help us in our endeavor!

We'll try to exchange these kind of things with you in the next two-days conference, the ones that will begin after the debate or the questions regarding these Opening Words.

Thank you very much for everybody.