

Eros' Arrow

by Gerardo Arenas

Psychoanalysis is a praxis that is possible only if it obeys two rules: free association and evenly-suspended attention. The first one urges the analysand to say everything without filtering anything under any circumstances, and the second one exhorts the analyst to listen to everything without filtering anything under any circumstances.¹ Lacan noted that the name of the first rule does not suit what it prescribes. He raised few objections to the name of the second rule, however, although he remarked that when *gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit* is translated by “evenly-suspended attention” or *free-floating attention*, the emphasis is not on the hanging or fluctuating character of that attention, but on the evenness of the level it must be held at.² This does not mean that one should relax one’s attention in order to let oneself get carried away with what one is listening to, but instead must be alert to everything, without leaving anything out, like the audience of a thriller.³ It is, then, a constantly-alert attention.

Freud highlights that one rule is the counterpart of the other.⁴ Both complement each other and establish the duty of not prejudging for the analysand and the analyst, which is a reasonable duty since none of them know where or when that which could relieve the suffering of the patient will come up. They wait (one while talking, the other while listening) without knowing for what. In this respect, theory, experience and intuition are irrelevant for the analyst, because if he does not hold his attention evenly alert to every detail, “he will be following his expectations or inclinations”, and so he will run the double risk of “never finding anything but what he already knows” and of falsifying what he

¹ Cf. Sigmund Freud, “Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis”, in *Complete Works*, London, Hogarth Press, 1964, vol. XII, p. 111; “On Psycho-Analysis”, *ibid.*, p. 208.

² Jacques Lacan, “The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956”, in *Écrits*, New York, Norton, 2006, p. 442.

³ In “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Years-Old Boy” (*Complete Works, loc. cit.*, vol. X, pp. 22-23, 65), Freud suggests us not “to ‘understand’ a case at once”, “suspend [*in Schwebe*] our judgement and give our impartial attention to everything”, ignoring no detail.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis”, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

listens to.⁵ The psychoanalytic technique entails an absolute submission to the singularity of the analysand. Therefore, it makes no sense to define the analytic symptom with reference to any normality: there is no universal norm able to calibrate the singular symptom as such. The symptom is not characterized by its *relative* difference, i.e. its deviation measured with respect to an ideal or statistical norm, but its *absolute* difference, which cannot be determined a priori or universally. However, Freud's submission to the singular is even more radical, because not only does he make a plea on behalf of putting analytic knowledge aside in the experience and taking each analysand as if they were the first, but he also challenges the analyst to address each session as if it were the first: to "be aware of the surface of the patient's mind at any given moment" and to be oriented towards what at the time (*derzeit*) could be active in them.⁶ Years of practice only train the analyst to disregard those years as the basis and reason of the psychoanalytic act. That is their *docta ignorantia*. Although his predilection for nonsense and negligible details may seem unjustified to lay people, it obeys strict methodological motives. In this respect, Freud's essay on "The Moses of Michelangelo" is not a mere successor of the papers on technique, but their real a posteriori introduction, the crown jewel that suggests how to appreciate and make use of details. There we read that, in order to distinguish an original painting from its copies, one must focus on the details that "every artist executes in his own characteristic way", just like analysts are "accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap [of their] observations".⁷ And in saying this he more clearly defines the sense of the second rule, since he suggests that the attention should be not so even, but doubled in those details that give to the analysand's discourse its peculiar and unique style. The position of the analyst,

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The Handling of Dream-Interpretation in Psycho-Analysis", in *Complete Works, loc. cit.*, vol. XII, p. 92.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo", in *Complete Works, loc. cit.*, vol. XIII, p. 222.– In his *Lectures on Literature* (Harvest, New York, 1982, p. 1) Vladimir Nabokov also proposes us to focus on the singular and fondle the details when we read, as well as not to passing to the "moonshine of generalization" before lovingly collecting "the sunny trifles of the book".

beyond their typical impassivity, seems like that of the lover, whose passion inclines them to be attentive to the minutiae of their beloved.

In many of the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud's call for the analyst to take on details in search of the singular reverberates, just as the connoisseur uses them to identify an original work and differentiate it from its copies. As it is gathered from the technique papers, the desire of the psychoanalyst is then to apprehend the singularity of the analysand,⁸ that singularity which Freud, using an expression of Schopenhauer, calls *the core of our being (der Kern unseres Wesens)*. What does this core consist of? At the sunrise of his experience, Freud states that the *Kern* is made up of "unconscious wishful impulses", and at the end of his life's path he says that it is formed by drive aspirations of the "obscure *id*",⁹ but, beyond these differences in nuance,¹⁰ the core of one's being is, for Freud, always a synonym of unknown drive, of impulse which seeks satisfaction in the shadows; that is, a *will* which inhabits us without our knowing. What do we strive for by discerning or constructing the *Kern* in analysis? To give it up? To assume it as our cause? Also in this connection Freud proposes respecting the peculiarity (*Eigenart*) of the analysand, since ultimately that outcome is irrelevant.¹¹ Analysis leads to solving for and locating (and hence, identifying and recognizing) the core of our being, for which a technique which permits one to dispel the obscurity that envelops that core was created; thereby the analysis confronts the analysand with that which makes them unique and which is most their own although they do not know it. What they then do is of no concern to the analyst or to the analysis itself.

⁸ "The analyst's desire is [...] to obtain absolute difference", says Jacques Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, The Seminar, Book XI, New York, Norton, 1998, p. 276.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *Complete Works*, loc. cit., vol. v, p. 603; *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, *ibid.*, vol. xxiii, p. 197.

¹⁰ These differences are minor indeed, since in "The Unconscious" (*Complete Works*, loc. cit., vol. xiv, p. 186) Freud says that "the nucleus of the [unconscious] consist of [*Trieb*]-representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis; that is to say, it consists of wishful impulses", and so he also takes *core of the being* and *nucleus of the unconscious* as equivalent to each other.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, op. cit., pp. 176, 179—Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Donc*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2011, p. 388: "What the subject does [with it] is his business".

The being whose core is sought after is singular, i.e. that what makes that being something unique, inestimable, irreplaceable, as Lacan says;¹² it should be an *it* (*x*) about which that being, and only that being, could say: *I am* it. Why does *it* concern the psychoanalyst? At the beginning of his work, Freud says that that *x* consists of unconscious wishful impulses, elusive to the preconscious and thus compulsive. A wishful impulse is a will, and the fact it is unconscious means that what makes us unique is a longing which inhabits us without our knowing. Asserting that the core of our being is made up of our unconscious wishful impulses amounts, then, to state that *we are what we want without us knowing*. And, as the preconscious is formed by word-presentations,¹³ pointing out that it cannot grasp those impulses means that the core of our being is hard to pin down with words, i.e. that *we are something that does not get named*. Finally, setting forth that those impulses act as a compulsion implies that that *Kern* drives us and that its efficacy manifests itself incessantly, peremptorily, so that *we are that which governs us*. For Freud, then, the core of our being is *a will which, without us knowing, inhabits us, governs us, and is refractory to words*. It seems an uncanny Thing,¹⁴ a sort of paradoxical possession. On one hand, that *Kern* is ominously strange, but it is also most intimate,¹⁵ what defines our style, what makes us what we are. With his thesis, Freud then universalizes the singular xenopathy: everyone has their own one. At the root of our dreams and symptoms lies that throbbing and insistent core which inhabits, governs and characterizes us. That is why, for Freud, that core concerns the analyst, and the goal of analysis, no matter the therapeutic effects that could as well be eventually obtained during the path, is to reach it; in other words, *come into being where it was*. Why is it so hard to solve for and discern that *Kern*? What

¹² Jacques Lacan, *Transference*, The Seminar, Book VIII, London, Polity, 2015, pp. 170-171.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious", *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

¹⁴ Cf. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", in *Complete Works*, *loc. cit.*, vol. xvii, pp. 219-252.

¹⁵ In *The Ego and the Id* (in *Complete Works*, *loc. cit.*, vol. xix, p. 23), Freud borrows the from Groddeck, for whom "we are 'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces". – To designate the intimate exteriority of that core, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (The Seminar, Book VII, Norton, New York, 1997, p. 139) Lacan forges the term *extimacy*.

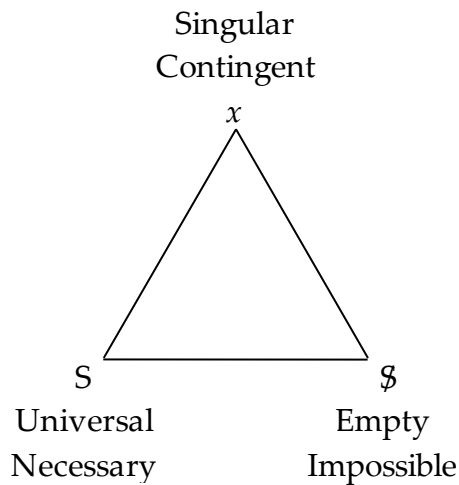
is the reason of the obscurity which envelops the *Kern*, hiding it from others and from ourselves? To answer these questions, Freud states that, if primary processes exist from the beginning, whereas secondary ones arise later, “the core of our being, consisting of unconscious wishful impulses [*Wunschregungen*]”, cannot be seized or inhibited by the preconscious, and therefore those wishes become a compulsion.¹⁶

As we have seen, two basic rules define the analytic action subtended by transference, an action oriented to the singularity of the analysand (the core of their being, according to Freud). The analyst’s desire can then be defined as identical to that orientation. What makes us believe that observing those two rules will unfailingly lead the analytic experience towards the sought-after singularity and will turn the analysis into “an action that goes right to the core of being”?¹⁷ What guarantees that the rules given by Freud will invariably set the right course? If we formalize the logical structure of both, it is not hard to demonstrate they will. To do so, we must remember that the dimension of the singular and contingent, where the goal of analysis belongs (the sought-after *x*, peculiar to only one), opposes the dimension of the universal and necessary (corresponding to the signifier, *S*, which belongs to more than one) as well as to the dimension of the empty and impossible (characteristic of the subject, *\$*, which operates as one-more with respect to the signifier), and the two latter are perfectly compatible with each other.¹⁸ These three logical dimensions can be graphed as vertices of a triangle.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *op. cit.*, pp. 603-604.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power”, in *Écrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

¹⁸ Cf. Gerardo Arenas, *En busca de lo singular*, Buenos Aires, Grama, 2010, chapter 4, and Jacques-Alain Miller, *Extimidad*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2010, pp. 110, 138, 220, 226, 458.



Using this tool, let us examine the two cardinal rules of analysis. We have said that they are not only correlative to each other, but seem to be complementary; however, although such correlation may seem obvious and indisputable,¹⁹ the kind of complementarity which links them is far from evident. Yet, if we look at the foundations of those rules and the uses which they enable, we will see that each rule is tied to a principle and that their mutual complementarity is not a synonym of symmetry.

Firstly, let us note that the rule of free association only makes sense if its fulfillment by the analysand is linked to a *principle of responsibility* by which the subject (\$) shall accept becoming a vassal of the uttered signifiers (S).²⁰ Lacan puts it this way: “One is always responsible for one’s position as a subject”.²¹ By means of a vector linking the lower vertices of the triangle we can represent what this principle stipulates:

$$\text{\$} \rightarrow \text{S}$$

Introducing and enforcing this principle is the tacit key target of the so-called

¹⁹ Why would the analyst urge the analysand to say everything without filtering anything under any circumstances, if the former did not listen to the latter in the same way?

²⁰ *Subject* and *vassal*, synonymous in many languages, refer to *submission*. Concerning what we denominate here as the *principle of responsibility*, cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Donc, op. cit.*, pp. 49s, 288ss.

²¹ Jacques Lacan, “Science and Truth”, in *Écrits*, p. 729.

preliminary interviews, and it is not always easy to achieve. The analysand's slip of the tongue is usually the royal road towards this goal, whereas verbal hallucinations can, on the contrary, be the most stubborn and sometimes insurmountable stumbling blocks. Similarly, the rule of constantly-alert attention has only meaning if its fulfillment is linked to a *principle of respect* which compels the analyst, every time they read what they hear, to submit the universal and shared character of the signifier (S) to the radical singularity (x) of the analysand.²² So, we can represent this principle by means of the vector linking the left vertices of the triangle:

$$S \rightarrow x$$

If installing the principle of responsibility in the analysand is not easy, ensuring the right installation of the principle of respect in the analyst is even harder, as shown by the practice of supervision.²³ First of all, as a general rule analysts belong to the same parish as their analysands, so the risk of comprehension, correlated to their imaginary identification to the interlocutor, endlessly assails the analyst, pushing them into the thick forest of common sense. Secondly, if verbal hallucination is usually the biggest stumbling block for the analysand's assumption of their responsibility, the knowledge of the universal, which can operate like the former to the analyst,²⁴ is similarly able to undermine their possibility of respecting the singular and might even prevent them from that. Lastly, the principle of respect is inseparable from an ethical position which obliges analysts to reject both the siren song of the master's discourse and the voluntary servitude analysands offer them as a function of discursive structure or jouissance choice.

This formalization of the two principles governing the basic technique

²² "The analyst respects the patient's individuality and does not seek to remould him in accordance with his own [...] personal ideals", stresses Freud in "Two Encyclopaedia Articles", in *Complete Works, loc. cit.*, vol. XVIII, p. 251.

²³ Cf. Gerardo Arenas, *En busca de lo singular, op. cit.*, chapter 19.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

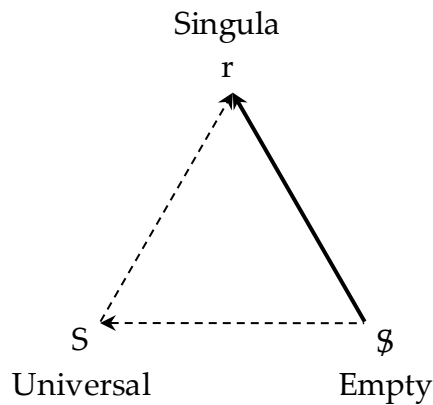
rules shows that they are not symmetrical: one of them submits the (empty) subject to the (universal) signifier, and the other submits the universal to the singular.²⁵ Moreover, it denounces the misleading evidence of correlation between both rules: such a correlation does not come from an alleged contractual complementarity at the level of communication, as it might seem at first sight, but from the logical order arising from their functional dependency. In fact, free association does not guarantee the subject's access to the singular without the help of that alert attention which submits the universal to the singular, and in this sense the second rule is the required supplement to the first one; but also the submission of the universal to the singular in alert attention does not take place if free association is not linked to the principle of responsibility, and that is why the first rule is logically prior to the second one, whose effectiveness depends on that of the former.²⁶ And the main benefit of this scheme is to prove that *the combined observance of the basic rules do necessarily orient the subject (\$) towards the sought-after singular (x)*. Hence, the functional precedence responsible for the logical correlation between the principles sustaining those rules can now be represented, with elegance and simplicity, as the sum of the vectors that represent them,

$$(\$ \rightarrow S) + (S \rightarrow x) = (\$ \rightarrow x)$$

i.e. as the resulting vector (solid arrow) of them both (dashed arrows):

²⁵ Its graphical representation does not result in two symmetrically-opposed vectors.

²⁶ In the figure, the second vector thus begins where the first one ends.



This resulting vector defines the analysis' orientation summarized by Freud in the well-known formula *Wo es war, soll ich werden*,²⁷ where *ich* stands for the subject (\$) of the experience,²⁸ and *es* is the sought-after singularity (x),²⁹

$$\$ \rightarrow x$$

Since the subject is necessarily under transference and this is a kind of love (which always points towards the singular),³⁰ this formula can be named *Eros' Arrow*.

Now we can perceive that x does not only represent the arrival point of the subject at the end of the analysis, but also the position of its transferential correlate, so that it designates also the place occupied by the analyst in the libidinal economy of the analysand.³¹

The numerous problems condensed in Eros' Arrow were the center of a systematic and unceasing interrogation pursued by Lacan.³² Here we will only

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Die Zerlegung der psychischen Persönlichkeit", in *Studienausgabe*, Book I, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse und Neue Folge*, Frankfurt am Main, S. Fischer, 1994, p. 516.

²⁸ Cf. Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis", in *Écrits, op. cit.*, pp. 347s.

²⁹ *Der Kern unseres Wesens*, in his own words.

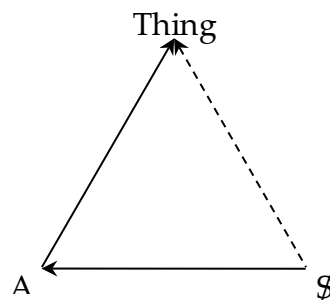
³⁰ Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, *De la naturaleza de los semblantes*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2002, p. 132.

³¹ Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Donc, op. cit.*, p. 452.– As a result, each new conception of the analysis' end is correlated to a new conception of the analyst.

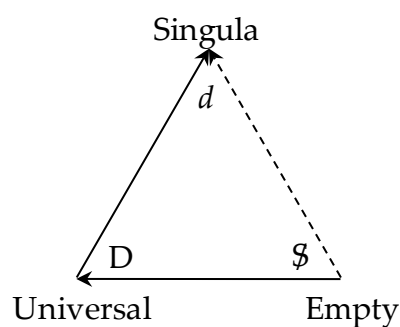
³² See Gerardo Arenas, *En busca de lo singular, op. cit.*

discuss the way he takes advantage of this structure to modify an aspect of the formula of Freudian ethics.³³

In his *Seminar IX*, Lacan reexamines the place of the analyst and points out that the subject is ultimately destined to the Thing, although it must pass through the Other (i.e. the signifier).³⁴ If we apply our categories to this assertion, we can read it, in terms of the triangle formed by the three logical dimensions, as: *through A to the Thing*.



Lacan emphasizes this twofold. Firstly, he says that the subject ($\$$), whose function is that of *one-more*, must constitute their desire (d) through demand (D). Now, if according to Freud the singular core of our being consists of a desire, the dimensions' triangle takes the following (equivalent) form:



Secondly, Lacan states that desire can only be constituted in the tension created by the relationship with the Other and originated in the advent of the unary trait,

³³ For other related problems, see Gerardo Arenas, *La flecha de Eros*, Buenos Aires, Grama, 2012.

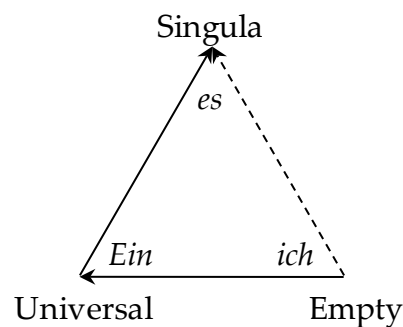
³⁴ Jacques Lacan, *L'Identification*, Le Séminaire, livre IX (unpublished), lesson of 28 March 1962.

given that it erases all but the irreplaceable 1 from the Thing. This means that the universalizing function of the unary trait is in tension with the singularity of *das Ding*, and thus the relationship between Other and Thing inherits the structural (logical) tension between universal and singular. Nevertheless, and beyond this, the subject can only reach that singularity through the (universal) signifier. Both remarks precipitate in two formulae used by Lacan to refine Freud's ethical imperative, namely,

–*There where the Thing was, I must come, and*

–*Wo es war, da durch den Ein werde ich* [Through the One, I will get to where it was].

To reach the Thing, the subject must then take another direction and address the Other in a sort of irreducible detour.³⁵ This is the origin of the profound affinity between object and Other, particularly manifest in love.³⁶ By the second formula, the dimensional triangle takes the following form:



The constitution of subject in the realm of the Other leaves the subject without attributes that could define its being. Hence, Lacan defines subject as a lack of being which, *durch den Ein* (through the universal, i.e. the common signifiers, the realm of the Other), will lead them to the singular core of their being, as Eros' Arrow shows.

³⁵ About this detour, see Jacques-Alain Miller, *Extimidad, op. cit.*, p. 447.

³⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 21ss.