

# Group: The ethical position of the psychoanalyst

## The commodification of psychoanalysis

Alejandro Pignato (EFF)

The post-pandemic effects are evident in various aspects of society. Many activities have transitioned to online formats, and subsequently, hybrid models have emerged. Social networks now showcase an increased availability of therapies, training courses, and even online diplomas. Psychoanalysis is not exempt from these practices. We can observe training proposals that utilize advertising language, treating it as just another commodity in the market. These circumstances prompt us to consider the role of seduction in acquiring new "patients" (clients) and the ethical implications of our practice: are we serving an ethics of goods?

Distance treatments are not a recent development. As communication became more affordable, telephone sessions became more common, and now they have transitioned to online platforms. Several years ago, there were cost-effective ways to engage in phone sessions, allowing for analysis "at a distance." However, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was significant resistance within the psychoanalytic community towards adopting virtual modalities.

Technological advancements were expected to simplify many aspects of life, with claims that automation would lead to increased free time and reduced work hours. However, the reality has been quite the opposite. Technology is causing a decrease in labor supply, leading to increased profitability for companies.

Regarding the impact of new technologies on analysis, paradoxes also arise. On one hand, there are online "psi" care proposals across various theoretical approaches, particularly on social media. Here are a couple of examples I found on Facebook groups for Argentinians in Barcelona:

"My mother is offering online psychology sessions for Argentines in Spain at an incredibly affordable price, and she is highly professional."

"My name is XXX, and I am a psychologist. I practice integrative psychotherapy, tailoring treatments to each patient, providing not only a listening space but also practical tools for their specific needs." She concludes her advertisement with "anxiety disorders, immigrant syndrome, self-esteem and relationship difficulties."

During our initial working group meetings, in line with the thematic focus of this congress, we contemplated how to maintain an ethical position in the face of attempts, stemming from the discourse of masters, to massify and commodify therapeutic treatments. The aforementioned examples illustrate this trend: low prices, integrative psychotherapy (a one-size-fits-all approach), practical tools (quick fixes). Psychotherapies are transformed into consumer products at cheap prices.

However, there is more to it. Numerous proposals aim to assimilate psychotherapists into a market economy. We have encountered platforms that treat psychotherapists as "riders." I have even received collaboration offers in which I was asked to expand my "business" with "clients." The platform was designed to support digital employees and included the following:

- As a therapist, you will earn 60 euros per session, with no additional costs.
- We will pay you after each session, even in cases of sudden client absence or session cancellations within 24 hours.
- You will work with corporate clients for an unlimited number of sessions.

The capitalist system infiltrates different domains, appropriating discourses, and commodifying them. The pandemic has exposed something that was not entirely new: the objectification and commodification of individuals, turning them into "homo consumendis" who consume and sustain the system.

Within the master's discourse, various strategies to suppress anxiety emerge, adapting measures that uphold the system. Consequently, it is unsurprising to encounter such proposals.

Concentrating diverse lines of thought to offer consumable products serves as an effective capitalist strategy.

What concerns us is that this discourse and these practices are encroaching upon our own field. Attempts to alter the framework occur frequently: patients canceling sessions and refusing to pay, arguing that they provided advance notice; resistance to paying reasonable fees to avoid sacrificing other consumables; questioning the frequency of sessions and so on. Additionally, neurosciences and medically approved therapies utilize a discourse that undermines psychoanalysis under the guise of scientific legitimacy.

However, it is not the responsibility of the person seeking help to be aware that what they are engaging in is psychoanalysis. That is the duty of the psychoanalyst. While the individual may perceive their visit as seeking therapy or consulting a psychologist, it is the analyst who must be clear that it is an analysis (or at least aspires to be one).

Nevertheless, this seductive marketing discourse also reaches psychoanalysts and institutions, infiltrating social media platforms. We come across proposals with visually appealing graphics that not only aim for aesthetic appeal but also employ sales tactics. We have seen posters from psychoanalytic institutions promoting courses with sales-driven information, such as "includes: 15 sessions; 45 hours in total; access to recordings; certificate at the end; -price-" and finally, "ask about our promotions." The only thing missing would be the inclusion of "our operators are waiting for your call."

In the public sphere, what we commonly refer to as public health, we observe the privatization of administrations, where the administrative focus is on optimizing management and generating profits.

The ethical question that arises for psychoanalysts is how to sustain a practice rooted in a solid theoretical foundation while coexisting with present determinants. These determinants encompass

terminological issues like anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and framing aspects such as session frequency, diagnoses, reports, and treatment duration. Furthermore, there are demands from patients, such as telling the analyst what they want to do or asking for specific tasks to be performed for the upcoming week.

Drawing from Lacan's analysis in "The Reverse of Psychoanalysis," a current debate emerges. On one hand, there is an ethical challenge to maintain our position, and on the other hand, there is resistance to the encroachment of a discourse and practices that attempt, in a disguised manner, to take over not only the space but also the discourse itself. This debate revolves around how to prevent the conditioning factors of the present from causing us to revert to resources borrowed from the master's discourse.

The ethical position we seek is not a new paradigm or an exclusive contribution of Lacanian theory. Freud also emphasized the importance of issues such as the rule of abstinence, the neutrality of the analyst, and safeguarding the patient's privacy.

The continuous progress of science and technology constantly raises these ethical questions. Moreover, we now have the emergence of artificial intelligence, which is gradually permeating various spheres.

The demand from many patients for analysts to assume the role of knowledge, of the master ("tell me what I have to do"), is a challenge that psychoanalysis has faced since its inception. Overcoming this obstacle entails a labor-intensive task that could be described as artisanal.

However, there are other aspects influenced by capitalist discourse that contribute to the commodification of psychoanalysis. The prevalent practice of offering a "free first interview" on websites advertising psychological treatments is a marketing strategy. It communicates a message of "come, and I will convince (seduce) you to start treatment."

We cannot operate outside the social structure dominated by the discourse of the master, nor can we deny its existence. Perhaps the question lies in how to sustain a psychoanalytic discourse in the present time.