



## Theorem: Pietro and Odetta in a Psychoanalytic Scheme for Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology

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**ABSTRACT:** Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is where one person's subjectivity meets another's in the hopes of freedom. The article interprets Pietro and Odetta from the film Theorem through a Freudian lens, using the stranger as a metaphor for the therapist. For this purpose, the metaphor of the outsider represents the therapist, who provokes internal movement that challenges the unconscious principles underlying the conflicts of both brothers and the entire family, revealing the truth of their inner world and their desire to bypass various defence mechanisms. In the same vein, the film suspends its characters in a dreamlike world from which they will wake up with the departure of the stranger ("the therapist") to face their lives from a free and healing position.

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### EVENT

A wealthy family from Milan, in the Europe of the first decades after the post-war period, immersed in the monotony of their daily lives, seemed to share life in unity when in reality there was a psychological abyss among its members, but above all a personal emptiness questioned by an anonymous and mysterious visitor who announces his arrival to become an intimate being that shakes the inner world of the father, his wife and his two young children, as well as the nanny and, probably, anyone who had known him. Thus, Paolo, the father, begins a process of transformation that leads him to repair his empire which he finally renounces as he also did with his fatuous authority; Lucia, his wife, asleep between the public and family duties of the "société", seemed to have denied herself, until thanks to the stranger she rediscovered herself in the most private aspects of her psychology. For their part, Pietro, the son, and Odetta, his sister, devote themselves to their youthful adventures, she from the deep attachment to Paolo and the rejection of any relationship that threatened to remove her from the Oedipal binomial with which she faced the world; Pietro, from the search for his identity and the questioning of his comfortable life.

The stranger's arrival changes how each family member sees themselves and others, by influencing their inner thoughts. Renovated insights appear in the nanny, starting with her countrymen's supernatural healing. The visitor departs after finishing his mission, leaving deep nostalgia, perplexity, and likely questions, as well as answers.

### Purpose

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this paper examines Pietro and Odetta from Pasolini's novel and film. In this context, the stranger is like the analyst, bridging subjectivity, and also offering knowledge that allows individuals to confront their desires, which remain elusive. Individuals confront the truth, the actual reality, which liberates them as masters, but makes them responsible and connected to internal and external reality, in a restorative position with themselves and others.

True, facing the artificial complexity of robotic psychotherapy in a society where "liquid" and automatic techniques are usually valued, or which apply formulas, preconceived epistemes, and clichés that reject dialogue, bi-personal construction, imagination, intuition, and discovery, a method focusing on one extreme of a Pasolini classic is proposed, recovering several of its various potentials regarding the analytic therapeutic task and its outcome.

## Psychotherapy I

Psychology's frameworks have seen different theories, each with its own ways of knowing, that have led to interactions and conflicts. Psychoanalysis requires specific focus, as it has greatly affected both the practice of psychology and understanding subjectivity from various fields.

It shows how this broadens our knowledge of mental life. Roldán (2004) emphasizes the intricate nature of human psychology and the understanding of human nature. It's commonly agreed upon in its multiparadigmatic essence. In psychotherapy, the intervener may concentrate on a perspective, depending on epistemological principles.

Within an integrationist position and the pragmatic order, Feyerabend (cited in Gargiulo de Vázquez, 2015) defends the "anything goes" approach, that is, knowledge should offer multiple views, because reality is extremely complex and therefore any attempt to account for it will always be insufficient. Then, there is no reason, for sticking to the limit of purism or inflexible observance of a single approach.

In an objectified world, where the patient's knowledge polarization aims to align with neopositivism and postmodernity tries to comprehend the human not from singularity but from undifferentiated generality, that's when psychoanalysis emerges as a real and forceful possibility that is exemplified in the following lines, through the analysis of two characters: Pietro and Odetta from *Pasolini's Theorem*, where complex symbolism let us making allegorical reflexions since psychoanalysis is able to help us to understand how analysis operates, its foundations and its potential positive effects for the psychotherapy and clinical psychology.

## Psychotherapy II

The visitor embodies the analytical action, arriving at the mansion, a fortress protecting the family and the housekeeper. Paolo, the father; Lucía, his wife; Odetta, the daughter; and Pietro, the son. They all act as if they are happy in a comfortable life, while concealing another reality within their minds.

This mirrors human existence, since, as Nietzsche (1877/2008) argued, all that exists is interpretation. Consequently, what we are is what we think we are. It is like "pretending" or just "ignoring it". Psychoanalysis brings individuals face-to-face with a concealed truth they've battled for years.

The visitor is the agent. A being that can awaken the hidden universe. As Shakespeare noted, life includes deer, jackals, and panthers living together. The visitor's actions unravel, trigger, and awaken something in everyone at the mansion.

Who could that visitor possibly be? He is someone who only gains the minimum trust needed to be received at home. Some similarities to the analyst's role become clear when sitting at the table and treating him as one of all, since Freud (1912/1991a) points out that a minimum of positive transference from the patient (an initial favourable disposition grounded in the patient's eros) is required for analysis to proceed.

The house's entrance signifies the residents' subjectivity at the start of analysis. A space for exchange begins with stories, narratives, and their significance.

The family's dreamlike story references what Freud called (1915/1922a) "thing-representation," where the body turns into an object of repressed desire. So, good manners and the etiquette of an honourable family have no place except in the hidden recesses of a "should not be". Despite the societal norms and the taboos within the family, they lack the trust to share their inner world.

## Psychotherapy III

Freud (1900/1991b;1901/1991c) stated that dreams fulfil wishes and offer access to the unconscious. Therefore, as psychoanalysis reveals, desire concerns not the erotic drive of the most visible object of its manifest content but the hidden one and, at any rate, how the two condense in hallucination (Freud, 1915/1992b).

This mechanism is observed when Pietro is confronted through the encyclopaedia with his access to diffuse images that allude to penis, but also to phallic: the first one with the mere object he denied or he did not know about himself, to finally return to the regularity of the phallic mandates given by his development in a world of men, where he seemed to feel happy.

Encouraged by the hallucination, he tries to touch the visitor's nudity, perhaps to recognize his own homosexual nakedness. Analytic psychotherapy aims at patient self-understanding, without judgment. The strong desire that prevented the young man from sleeping then enabled him to rest deeply, without concern of finding himself next to another man.

Pietro will then find the turning point he's missed. Initially, he seemed to better understand his situation when the visitor left. In psychoanalytic understanding, the cessation of therapy seems to be the symbolized achievement through the painting as a meaning of self-affirmation.

Thus, by the reality examination principle, which is sustained by the senses (Freud, 1915/1992b), Pietro devotes himself to an artistic activity, discovering shapes, shades, colours, strokes, sublimating his impulses and eroticism in the assiduity and dedication to this aesthetic new endeavour.

Nevertheless, focusing on art, the young man now learns to seek disruptive creations against the rigidity of the conventional mandates of the heterosexual while he withdraws from the world to reencounter his inner self. Therefore, Pietro displaces the homosexual conflict in his artistic works. The psychoanalytic effects appear resolving repression and paranoia —see, for example,

the development of these concepts at Conference 20 (Freud, (1916/1991d)— from the rejection and rupture with the *status quo*, while he starts to navigate in a new reality.

In the psychoanalytic view, once the visitor goes away, in other words, when psychotherapy “ends”, the young man can improve true understandings on himself. Self-affirmation and emancipation are reflected in his paintings since then. Thus, by the examination of that reality, which is sustained by the power of the senses (Freud, 1915/1992b), Pietro is committed to his art, using it to explore unfamiliar forms, colours and express his authenticity.

However, at the beginning Freud was not convinced about the properness of the artistic creations as undoubtedly manifestations of the unconscious, because for him the artist — a writer, a poet or a painter—, is limited by the conscious rules of aesthetics and publicity, mitigating the effects of the daydream the subjectivity (Freud 1910/1992c; 1910/1992d). In other words, Freud, referring to the work carried out indistinctly by Rank, Sadger, Reik and Abraham on the subject, concludes that "... The doctrine of neuroses made the sources of artistic creation recognizable and raised the problems of the artist's reactions to these incitements and the means by which he disguises them..." (Freud, 1914/1992e, p.35)

#### Psychotherapy IV

The stranger represents Odetta's father, who is constantly in her thoughts. The leader who sits always at the head of the daily lunch table, the great businessman who used to rest for a little in the garden. In that state of peace, Odetta can get close to him, but it's not enough to build new memories and reinforce her love.

For the girl, Paolo, her father, means everything. Her inner and outer world, where she denies herself, are "imprinted" by him. The father's presence fills every space; the unresolved Oedipal complex keeps Odetta trapped in two systems: the first is regression, because despite her youth and entry into adult life, she seemed psychologically stuck in the early years of her childhood. Thanks to the stranger, she processes her desire uniquely, in the dream dimension where she permits herself to face the forbidden, with incest linked to her exclusive and non-inclusive love from the ghost.

The dreamed sexual encounter with the guest is an Oedipal sexual proximity with Paolo, but first and foremost the discover of the Odetta's hidden sexuality. Before the visitor's departure, she, herself, realizes she is in that woman scenario: "I am afraid, I only loved my father," she says. Freud, when dealing with Oedipus resolution in women, points out that the path differs from how this process is unfolded in men, for example, in women, he admits that the Oedipal elaboration occurs in the genital stage (Freud, 1916/1991d). Then, Odetta's new self-knowledge is related to her desire and how much her father means in her life.

In Odetta at least three defence mechanisms are amalgamated: projection, then displacement of the desire as an oneiric channelling in the dreamed encounter with the stranger which could be impossible without a good part of the filial love not expressed to her father, now expressed to the stranger. Thus, expectations and countless affections are interlaced, because as it was mentioned before he, the stranger, becomes that forbidden part of her father, and the visitor fosters Odetta's unconscious woman erotism to show up, while the sense on being daughter continues alive. She becomes then daughter and woman altogether in a highly complex framework which explains her transitional paralysis.

The other mechanism is the condensation, perhaps personified in the visitor himself, and all the unconscious attributions that they arouse on the part of the girl; the trunk, a small fortress of her interiority, governed by the young woman herself, represents the enclosure of the external and internal, the past and the present, where Odetta keeps a set of objects or childhood memories.

The little instrument is especially significant, maybe representing the father's gift to the girl who, along with the photo album, has stopped the time, implying they, dad and daughter, will be together eternally.

The second system that advances and operates in parallel is the repression. In the 22nd Lecture Freud is forceful in pointing out that repression is more complicated and greater than regression, constituting the core of hysteria (Freud, 1916/1991e). The first system, mentioned above, involves the defence of something that was repressed; the second refers to something unknown which was placed in the unconscious, between one and the other there is a commitment. Freud (1916/1991f) stresses that thanks to that compromise the two opposing forces reconcile in the symptoms.

Apparently, Odetta had had a "normal" life, not much different from any upper-class *demoiselle* that suddenly will be subverted by the presence of the guest. In effect, Odetta was defending herself repressing a terrible truth brewing in the depths of her family relationships. Odetta's deep unconscious conflict will find another way to dominate her.

What was repressed in Odetta? Although the film lacks sufficient elements, it is possible to infer generally that the girl was caught between a superego (perhaps the most implacable, demanding adherence to bourgeois social norms) and the instinctive desires of the id. But, what is the nature of that desire?

The young woman's love is intertwined with a deep hatred for her father and the desire to eliminate him. The aggressive impulses hidden in her apparent passivity (in the "normality" of his daily life) is observed when she “removed him” from his place in the garden, from that place he seemed most vulnerable and from where she used to "photograph" him. In fact, the empty images with no one in them take place when Paolo was not at home.

The empty father's place in those pictures connotes nostalgia and wishes to get him back, but it could also mean the opportunity to put someone else in there instead. The latter is highly probable because, at the end, she places gradually images of the outsider

(handsome and seductive) before her dad. Additionally, once she hallucinated Paolo very sick when he was not. Soon the photographs reflect the real nature of the Odetta's unconscious desire: seduction and death coexisting in the same internal sphere. Hence, in Odetta repression is not the sexual incest itself, Freud (1916/1991e) says that regression is fixed in the sexual, but repression is associated with something much broader and deeper. According to Pasolini's plot what keeps repressed in Odetta is the desire for the death of her father. In other words, in her unconscious world, Odetta is Paolo's lover and executioner, the one as a prelude to the other. As a result, the psychogenic paralysis recognized by the doctor – who backed off admitting his scientific inability to attend to the problem of the young woman who had been lying motionless in her chambers since the stranger left –, places us only before the description (the repressed is always description and dynamism for Freud) of the repressed unconscious material that in a didactic intention this paper tries to overview by altering purposely the chronology of the events in Pasolini's film. After all, the unconscious we know is always timeless.

To continue with Odetta does not get out of bed because of a terrible paralysis with no apparent organic cause, the psychoanalytic work discovers her unconscious was plotted. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy decodes that desire, making it conscious for the girl, helping her to process it in a healing way, since the incestuous conflict and especially that of hating and eliminating her parent, have become both, body and symptom.

Finally, the absence of the "friendly visitor" triggers in melancholy as a prelude, in the Freudian sense, of lack of something and search for something that once upon a time was lost (internal object) —see Freud's Mourning and Melancholy (1915/1992f)—. More than that, the stranger seems to be the epitome of forbidden desire, that's why the young daughter needed to be sure of his true departure, somehow like "he is no longer there!!" or "I wish he hadn't left!!".

Despite that, it is most likely that her unconscious dictates the opposite, that is when paralysis arises as a "refuge" from "the despicable". In Odetta's inner world, her father was someone she was supposed to love and "venerate", but in her unconscious dictatorship, Paolo was, in fact, someone she needed to get rid of.

### Psychotherapy V: conclusion

This article has tried to rescue clinical and psychotherapeutic insights from Pasolini's *Theorem*, focusing on the psychoanalytic connotations of two of its characters: Pietro and Odetta, intending to externalize psychotherapeutic paths from the discovery of the unconscious reality of both of its protagonists. Analysis explores the "visitor," whose actions expose repressed truths. Through Pietro and Odetta, the film shows us the complex and chaotic hidden mental world of human beings.

Thus, recovering clarifications from Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the patient's inner subjectivity could be reorganized in a healing way, making conscious what is unconscious. Although psychoanalysis promises nothing but knowledge, as was inferred from the film, it is a remarkable possibility in psychotherapy and clinical psychology, practitioners can deploy to deeply understand and intervene in the complexities of human suffering and discontent.

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