

DO YOU HAVE FAITH IN PSYCHOANALYSIS?

Imagination as the key ingredient for the effectiveness of psychotherapy

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Abstract:

According to Isabelle Stengers, modern medicine has expelled hypnosis and suggestion in order to achieve scientificity. However, imagination is always present in treatments – especially those related to mental health – so it might be worthwhile to explain this phenomenon instead of reducing it or ruling it out. In this article, we shall explore how classic psychoanalysis has remained within this rationale and some alternatives to be found in contemporary authors. This requires a profound revision of the notions of factuality and fictionality that have determined the development of psychoanalysis, a discipline oscillating between scientific aspirations and literary sensitivities. Guided by the emphasis in ontology given by philosophers such as Michel Serres, Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, we will provide a constructivist and prospective account of psychotherapy as a process in which imagination is not bounded to the individual mind but rather as a refined collective practice that enables the patient to embrace her becoming. Thus, imagination can be reintroduced as the chief cornerstone for the parallel healing of the patient's illness and psychoanalysis' epistemological paradoxes.

Keywords: figurability; imagination; psychoanalysis; scientism.

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Resumen

Según Isabelle Stengers, la medicina moderna ha exiliado la hipnosis y la sugestión de su praxis en aras del estatus de científicidad. Sin embargo, la imaginación siempre está presente en los tratamientos – especialmente aquellos en salud mental – así que convendría tratar de explicar este fenómeno en vez de descartarlo de entrada. En este artículo, se explorará cómo el psicoanálisis clásico ha mantenido esta racionalidad científicista y se examinarán algunas alternativas inspiradas en autores contemporáneos. Esto requiere una profunda revisión de las nociones convencionales de facticidad y ficción que han influido en el desarrollo del psicoanálisis, una disciplina de por sí oscilante entre las aspiraciones científicas y las sensibilidades literarias. Siguiendo el énfasis puesto por filósofos como Michel Serres, Bruno Latour y Donna Haraway en la dimensión ontológica, se ofrecerá un retrato constructivista y prospectivo de la psicoterapia en tanto proceso que no limita la imaginación a la mente individual, sino que la conceptualiza como una práctica refinada que le permite al paciente apersonarse de sus devenires. Así pues, la imaginación puede ser finalmente posicionada como la piedra angular de un proceso de sanación doble: tanto de las enfermedades del paciente, como de las paradojas epistemológicas del psicoanálisis.

Palabras clave: figurabilidad; imaginación; psicoanálisis; científicismo.

Introduction

Ever since the birth of psychotherapy, there have been an ongoing debate about its scientificity and the (in)convenience of the irruption of subjectivity in it. Nowadays, with the burgeoning crossings of evidence-based medicine and AI systems, it might seem that therapy finally might become a standardized device, anchored in proven causal relationships between risk factors and mental illness. Still, subjectivity – with its inevitable pliability and taste for fantasies – remains an open question. In this article, engaging simultaneously with contemporary philosophers of science and present-day psychoanalysts, we shall explore whether imagination is a danger for the project of a scientific therapy or, perhaps, a necessary condition for it. Despite the fact that there are many other types of psychotherapies critical of the scientism of double-blind trials and protocolization of treatments, we will limit ourselves to psychoanalysis since in this discipline the conjuncture between fact and fiction, rationalism and imagination, is more salient. Our interest is not to plea for a more flexible science that condescendingly accepts the inescapability of subjectivity. Rather, we will argue that imagination is a transversal phenomenon in psychoanalysis and that – with the recognition of its ontological specifications and its proper technical training – fictionality is a key ingredient for both the patient's emotional well-being and psychoanalysis' epistemological paradoxes.

A neglected question; or the pebble in the shoe of health sciences

Science does not know its debt to imagination.
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Poetry and Imagination*

The mind sickens due to wild fantasies that hinder the subject's ability to navigate the world and relate to others. Conversely, the mind heals thanks to the faith put in a caring therapist and a brighter future. Thus, imagination is both poison and remedy: a *pharmakon*. Isabelle Stengers claims that imagination haunts psy-sciences, whether we consider the pejorative definition of the placebo effect given by the pharmaceutical industry or the aversion to suggestion present in psychoanalysis¹. Ever since medicine aspired to the status of modern science, argues the Belgium philosopher, it has been concerned not only in healing patients, but mainly in distinguishing between real and false cures. On the one hand, a real cure would be caused by an active chemical substance or by the adequate analysis of transference (more below). On the other hand, any cure polluted by the patient's illusions or the therapist's subjectivity will be immediately labeled as false. Although this *modus operandi* has proven useful, Stengers acutely observes that there is a difference between expelling imagination from treatments and actually explaining its healing powers². Certainly, medicine – including psychiatry and clinical psychology – can perfectly continue working within this framework, but nothing prevents us from exploring the path opened by Stengers. If we could enhance our comprehension of imagination, perhaps we might dissolve this *pharmakon*, extract its healing properties and discard its harmful effects.

To truly understand this challenge to psy-sciences, we should start by reviewing how Stengers retells the history of mesmerism. Franz Anton Mesmer claimed to have invented a liquid capable of curing several diseases regardless of the demographic conditions of patients. He also stated that his creation was amenable to experimental testing. In 1784, an interdisciplinary commission was appointed by Louis XVI to verify Mesmer's declarations. Stengers remarks that the commission did not play a role of passive observation, but rather:

invented a much more active method of investigation. It asked an accomplice magnetizer to magnetize subjects susceptible to magnetic crises without warning them; to magnetize them pretending to magnetize another person, and even, the subject having had her eyes blindfolded, to magnetize one part of her body while announcing that he was going to magnetize another³.

This procedure, a sort of ancestor of double-blind trials, allowed the commission to decree that Mesmer's fluid was ineffective and that cures were produced by the power of imagination. Note this striking paradox. The commission developed an imaginative method which provided conclusive results – and yet, it did not hesitate in denouncing the success of mesmerism by pointing out imaginative cures. We could say that imagination is also an epistemological *pharmakon*: sometimes it helps scientists in their pursuit of knowledge, while other times it is as misleading as the siren's song.

¹ Nathan, T. & Stengers, I., 2018, *Doctors and Healers*, London, Polity Press, 99.

² *Ibid.*, 108.

³ *Ibid.*, 93.

This primal scene of the scientific aspirations of medicine established a frustrating fact: «the cure proves nothing»⁴. Contrary to anatomy or physiology, applied medicine cannot resort to the suffering body as a reliable witness, since it can be healed for the wrong reasons. In this sense, health sciences – mimicking the methods of laboratory sciences – have been trying to purify the body and the illness from the pervasive influence of imagination. The pharmaceutical industry strives to find pills that remain operative irrespective of the singular psychiatrist who prescribes them. Psychoanalysis struggles to demonstrate that the transference⁵ emerges solely from the patient's prior unconscious conflict without a trace of induced material from the therapist. Again, such rationale is that of isolation, not explanation. The royal commission was not truly interested in figuring out the hidden mechanism behind Mesmer's cures, but to disqualify him as a charlatan by demonstrating that the fluid on its own was futile. Psychoanalysis performed a similar maneuver when Freud distanced himself from hypnosis. In 1973 David Rosenhan showed that psychiatric diagnosis could be easily misdirected by the interference of fictional symptoms reported by pseudo-patients. A more recent case would be the way Nature discredited Jacques Benveniste claims about the memory of water simply by pointing out the lack of rigor in his randomization techniques. All these cases reprise the same skeptic, gate-keeping attitude of the royal commission. Stengers stresses that modern medicine, exasperated by the unreliability of the suffering body, defends its scientific status by witch-hunting unconventional healers.

One might be tempted to appeal to cognitive sciences to elucidate the nature of imagination and therefore solve this impasse. It is indeed remarkable that the seminal work of William James, Graham Wallas and Marx Wertheimer – on the stream of consciousness, creative process and productive thinking, respectively – still inspires a great deal of psychometric instruments and laboratory experiments. After more than three decades of cognitivism dominance, psychologists have recently taken distance from the computational model of the mind⁶ and they have started to explore the synthetic capacities of the psyche⁷. Still, we should not overlook the sharp hiatus between cognitive and clinical psychology. As Ashmore, Brown & Macmillan have argued, the former is capable of widely replicating experiments and exporting their results to other fields, while the latter is constrained to a case-by-case basis⁸. In other words, experimental methods are suited for cognitive sciences, but psychiatry/psychotherapy ought to adopt another style of scientific reasoning: casuistry. Stengers goes as far as questioning that imagination is subjectable to experimentation of any kind. She states that «[s]ubjects can't be stopped imagining, interpreting or taking up positions on what they are being subjected to or on what they feel»⁹ and also that «[f]rom the experimental point of view, the question

⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵ See the handful definitions given in Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Karnac Books. Transference is «a process of actualization of unconscious wishes. Transference uses specific objects and operates in the framework of a specific relationship established with these objects. Its context par excellence is the analytic situation. In the transference, infantile prototypes re-emerge and are experienced with a strong sensation of immediacy» (455). Its counterpart, countertransference is «[t]he whole of the analyst's unconscious reactions to the individual analysand especially to the analysand's own transference» (92).

⁶ Cfr. Langley, P. et al., 1987, *Scientific Discovery*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

⁷ Cfr. Morrison, H. et al., 2019, "What is a Psychological Task? The Operational Pliability of 'Task' in Psychological Laboratory Experimentation", in *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, vol.5, 61-85.

⁸ Ashmore, M., Brown, S. D., & Macmillan, K., 2005, "Lost in the Mall with Mesmer and Wundt: Demarcations and Demonstrations in the Psychologies", in *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, vol.30, no.1, 76-110.

⁹ Nathan and Stengers, *Doctors and Healers*, 110.

of imagination emerges as an obstacle because it constitutes a rival counter-power opposing the experimenter's monopoly on the definition of the therapeutic scene»¹⁰. In other words, imagination behaves in a ubiquitous and unpredictable manner that bans it as a controlled experimental variable. But if imagination cannot be understood through scientific means, how else could we elucidate this powerful, yet ambiguous, phenomenon?

The burden of truth; or the excesses of rationalism in psychoanalysis

Reason is the natural organ of truth;
but imagination is the organ of meaning.
Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old,
is not the cause of truth, but its condition.
C.S. Lewis, *Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare*

Imagination is elusive to experimental accounts. Fortunately, in this regard, psychoanalysis presents a curious displacement: from being itself a science of the mind to becoming a singular type of literature¹¹. The ongoing discussion about the disciplinary identity of psychoanalysis – natural science, social science, therapy, aesthetics, ethics, etc. – will probably never end. Some authors are strong partisans of one type of identity¹², while others seem to be indifferent to the matter¹³. Our interest is not to adhere to any particular side, but to explore the frictions between fact and fiction in the foundational writings of Freud. In this section we will explore how psychoanalysis, deeply embedded in modern metaphysics, inherited a physicalist definition of reality that is sympathetic to a vision of truth coupled with the notions of objectivity and factuality. Such perspective not only has been the Achilles heel in the debates on the epistemological status of psychoanalysis, but it also has conditioned – even distorted! – the way psychoanalysis has approached fantasy and art. Hence, if we seek a depiction of imagination from the hybrid framework of science and literature provided by psychoanalysis, we must first emancipate fictionality from the shadow of monolithic factuality.

As Donna Haraway argues, psychoanalysis has crafted a problematic naturalistic account of human subjectivity¹⁴. Physiology and politics are entangled in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where Freud enlisted technological development, religious beliefs and art works as means to counteract the excesses of sex and death drives. “Nature” – either as the external world or as the instinctual life boiling within the subject – ought to be dominated through “Culture”. In those ominous books, the father of psychoanalysis suggested that such struggle is doomed to fail, since the reality principle ultimately bows to natural phenomena. Haraway notices that this asymmetry leads to the tacit assumption that cultural phenomena – whether they be politics, religion or aesthetics – are less

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹ Ogden, T., 2021, “Analytic Writing as a Form of Fiction”, in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol.69, no.1, 221-23.

¹² Grünbaum, A., 1999, “The Hermeneutic Versus the Scientific Conception of Psychoanalysis: An Unsuccessful Effort to Chart a Via Media for the Human Sciences”, in Aerts, D., Broekaert, J. & Mathijs, E. (eds.), *Einstein Meets Magritte*, Brussels, VUB University Press, 237.

¹³ Lacan, J., 1966, “Science and Truth”, in Lacan, J. (comp.) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 2006, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 726-45.

¹⁴ Haraway, D., 1991, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, New York, Routledge, 9.

operative¹⁵. What have been the consequences of this uneven narrative? Drawing from this naturalistic perspective, Robert Stoller and John Money developed in the 1960s the infamous sex/gender split. Genes, hormones and morphology (hard biological facts) dictated the sex of any person without any possible objection, while social imaginary, customs and parental relationships (soft psycho-social processes) tailored the gender identity of a subject, who has the possibility to reshape it to certain extent. This example allows us to corroborate that, even if we move from the issues of the placebo effect or suggestion, it is possible to find the same hierarchy between physical reality and psychic fantasies in numerous claims advanced by psychoanalysis.

Overall, construction of truth in psychoanalysis was influenced by Freud's scientism. Throughout his oeuvre, he insisted upon the scientificity of his theories and techniques. This is more than mere rhetoric. As Stengers indicates, «any discourse about science involves the one who engages in it: this discourse is virtually part of the scientific activity that it seeks to describe»¹⁶. In *A Difficulty on the Path of Psychoanalysis* (1917), Freud remarked that psychoanalysis could not fall back on the people's resistance to accept the existence of the unconscious mind and infantile sexuality. The acceptance of truth might be painful, but mental health resides in the capacity to deal with it without appealing to soothing false ideas. Here we can see imagination as a rather inconvenient issue, both for mental well-being and for any scientific project. In a latter text, *The Question of a Weltanschauung* (1933), we find a breaking point where Freud-as-a-scientist eclipsed Freud-as-a-therapist. Insofar as a science of the mind, psychoanalysis cannot indulge with philosophical, aesthetic or religious worldviews even if they aspire to noble ends. If psychoanalysis were forced to choose between scientific rigor or humanitarian charity, it should choose the former. Here, too, truth is portrayed as an ultimate good only accessible through science, while imagination is seen as entertainment or distraction.

Some critics might rightly reply that both naturalism and scientism were part of the nineteenth-century zeitgeist and it would be unfair to anachronistically judge the origins of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the crucial “epistemological break” – to use Bachelard's expression – was not Freud's eager self-comparison with Copernicus or Darwin, but rather his abandonment of the seduction theory, which ultimately led to the formulation of the Oedipus complex. In *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896), Freud argued that children who experienced sexual abuse would eventually develop hysteric symptoms. A decade later, in *My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses* (1906), he retracted and offered an alternative explanation based on the incestuous fantasies accompanying infantile masturbation. In a letter to Fliess dated September 21 1897, the father of psychoanalysis wrote: «there was the definite realization that there is no “indication of reality” in the unconscious, so that it is impossible to distinguish between truth and emotionally-charged fiction». In other words, the unconscious mind is indifferent whether the seduction scene was an actual trauma or mere fantasies. This psychological shift greatly influenced the future developments of psychoanalysis. Post-Freudian authors purged their vocabulary from biological terms – such as “phylogeny” or “maturation” – and filled it with mentalistic notions – like “psychic reality” and “symbolization”.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁶ Stengers, I., 1997, “Black Boxes; or, Is Psychoanalysis a Science?”, in Stengers, I. (comp.), *Power and Invention. Situating Science*, 1997, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 82.

From an epistemological perspective, this can be seen as a reversal in the aforementioned hierarchy between fact and fiction: Freud discovered that unconscious fantasies are no less effective than material processes.

This re-articulation of fact and fiction might be more attuned with contemporary thought, but it still presents some problems. First, having relinquished any possible biological anchorage for hysteria, Freud still aimed for a general formulation of incestuous fantasies. While this quest was often advanced by clinical cases (Little Hans, Dora, etc.), the father of psychoanalysis also ventured anthropological speculations like *Totem and Taboo* (1912) to support his ideas. Here we find a glimpse of paradox: if the unconscious mind is equally sensitive to fact and fiction, could it be the case that our theories can also draw upon both means? Second, the schism between ‘objective’ and ‘psychic’ reality only duplicated the notion of truth as something essential and indisputable¹⁷. This can be seen in the post-Freudian landscape: ego psychology being prominent in America and object-relations theory in Britain¹⁸. The former focused on how the subject could attain a more faithful representation of himself, while the latter concentrated on how the subject could adequately perceive its surrounding objects. Moreover, Lacan, skeptic of both trends, devised a negative function of truth – the unknowable ‘Real’ – as the touchstone of his theories¹⁹. In this sense, despite its attempt to vindicate fiction, psychoanalysis remains a clear heir of Enlightenment philosophy which maintains that the search for truth – internal and/or external – is a virtue in itself. Postmodernism taught us that too much light can be blinding. In the same vein, Stengers asks: «[w]ho can guarantee that the intention of not suggesting [i.e., adhering strictly to real cures] is not the most unstoppable force of suggestion, against which the analyst has no protection?»²⁰. In short, to internalize the truth is not necessarily equivalent to propose an entirely different conceptualization of it.

So far we have reviewed the shortcomings of the articulations of truth as something natural, scientific and even psychical. They converge in a detrimental understanding of fiction in psychoanalysis. This might strike oddly at first, since Freud always professed admiration for the poets and was himself a fine writer. His theories even tailored a balance between repression and sublimation as means to deal with unconscious desires. Other concepts like “family romances”, “transience” and “the uncanny” are testaments of how fictions can mobilize emotions and behavior. Still, there is a slight bias in Freud’s writings that reveal that aesthetics itself is the object of admiration and not necessarily the fantasizing subject. Bruno Latour eloquently stated: «[i]f it is true that the beings of fiction have been swamped by honors, they have paid a big price: [...] they have been valued to an extreme, while too hastily denied any objectivity»²¹. In other words, what ultimately matters is the reified piece of art and not the imaginative person. For instance, if we revisit *Delusion and Dream in Jensen’s Gradiva* (1907), *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* (1908) and *Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of his*

¹⁷ Green, A., 2001, *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism*, London, Free Association Books, p.xvii.

¹⁸ “Ego psychology” goes back to Anna Freud’s (1936) *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, but mainly refers to the works of Heinz Hartmann, David Rapaport, René Spitz and Heinz Kohut. For its part, “Object-relations theory” is deeply rooted in the Freudian concepts of “identification”, “internalization”, “somasoschism” and “death drive”; and was developed mainly by authors such as Karl Abraham, Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn and Harry Guntrip.

¹⁹ Lacan, J., 1955, “Variations of the Standard Treatment”, in Lacan, J. (comp.) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 2006, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 296-302.

²⁰ Stengers, “Black Boxes; or, Is Psychoanalysis a Science?”, 104. Elsewhere, the Belgium philosopher refers to this as «the polemical passions of truth». Stengers, I., 2024, *Hypnosis Between Science and Magic*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 95.

²¹ Latour, B., 2013, *An Inquiry into the Modes of Existence*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 239.

Childhood (1910), we find that Freud derives all the creative powers from repression, screen memories and incestuous fantasies. We reckon that we risk overemphasizing the scarce pejorative connotations in those texts, which otherwise widely praise the artists' genius. Yet, let us return to James, Wallas and Wertheimer for a quick comparison. Behind their dissertations of creativity, there are no hidden illness or traumas, just regular men who had refined their talents. In Freud, on the contrary, imagination is a privileged method to deal with psychic suffering, an effective and beautiful form of catharsis, but nothing more...

Even if Freud reckoned the operations of the inner psychic life and displayed veneration for art, by the end imaginations, fantasies and fictions remain thin, shallow and secondary in contrast to the triptych Nature-Science-Truth. No matter how sensitive to literature the father of psychoanalysis happened to be, he still repeated the dictum of the royal commission: one must tell apart the real cures from the false ones! We still have not been able to exit the pharmakon. Imagination is still a balsam which can provide partial relief on the condition that its dosage is strictly monitored by the doctor. Today, despite the fall of popularity of psychoanalysis, plenty of scientists and artists keep operating in this framework. Anytime the dichotomy fact/fiction is invoked the outcome will eventually favor the virtue of truth. Even if factuality is reworked with different types of accents, even if the dichotomy is re-articulated in different ways, the result will always repudiate the chimeras of imagination. Should we sever the tie between factuality and fiction altogether? Unfortunately, this would amount to failing to answer Stenger's epistemological challenge. We must seek a definition of imagination that is simultaneously positive and embedded in the rationality of health sciences. It would be shameful to abandon science and evoke the discourse of therapy as an art or artisan activity. This stance is not even convenient for artists with no scientific pretensions, as we can see in Latour's warning: «it is much too easy for “artists” [or scientists] to take the unreality of their creations for granted and indulge in “real fakery” in the name of the “enduring rights of the imagination and creativity.” “Poetic license”: how much self-indulgence we risk allowing ourselves in your name...»²² Indeed, to suspend the truth/false criterion to praise the healing powers of imagination would lead to a self-indulgent attitude. The inventiveness of the healing cannot be reduced to the compliance of doctors who rely on the “make-believe” of naive patients. No good therapy has ever been born out of such disrespectful stance. And no good science has ever been born out of permissiveness about the haunting questions.

Fiction externalized; or the ontological dignity of phantasy

IMAGINATION, n. A warehouse of facts, with poet and liar in joint ownership.

Ambrose Bierce, *The Cynic's Dictionary*

Despite the apparent defeat, we now are equipped with finer resources to continue with our quest. After becoming aware of the pitfalls of Enlightened truth and the insufficiency of imagination as a suspension of disbelief²³, we can return to the hybrid identity of psychoanaly-

²² *Ibid.*, 240.

²³ *Ibid.*, 241. For Latour, a work of art is not open to any reinvention or interpretation, since it is the folding of the partial subjectivities it engenders throughout its circulation. The truth of a fiction lies in its blooming effects. In this sense, therapies such as the proposed by Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls or Michael White fall short insofar they provide the patient with narratives to ease their symptoms, regardless of the pragmatic adequacy of those stories once imported back to the

sis. If science and literature are not antagonistic at all, as Michel Serres constantly expounded, then might we still profit from the paradoxes of psychoanalysis. The French polymath tried to enable new forms of thought by restoring the continuity between themes and objects usually foreign to each other. His oeuvre is populated by fable animals, archaic etymologies, dusty ruins, math theorems, sacred scriptures and other picturesque characters. One does not find in his books any trace of the frictions between factuality and fiction previously exposed. For Serres, science and literature are different means to organize the chaos of the cosmos and our own ways of comprehending it²⁴. The former tends to propositional knowledge, while the latter prefers metaphorical formulations, but they both work to render intelligible the background noise which is reality itself – ourselves included. Psychoanalysis, in its bi-modality²⁵, deals with such arrangements of chaos in a very particular way. On the one hand, psychoanalysis – not very distant from thermodynamics and information theory – provides detailed explanations of how distinct levels of the mind are hierarchically integrated into a dynamic system. On the other hand, psychoanalysis – as a myth-generating machine – waves narratives where multiple times, intricate spaces and complex actors coexist. Perhaps this symmetrical, more balanced version of psychoanalysis can take us further in our pilgrimage.

From this stance, we can question whether imagination is an exceptionally human faculty at all. Also coming from chaos theory and thermodynamics, Prigogine noted a difference when imagination is said to be locked up within the closed-system of the human mind and when it is construed as an exchange between two or more open-systems²⁶. This latter view is not restricted solely to humans – i.e., brainstorming and other types of social cognition – but it can be extended to human/nonhuman couplings and even to nonhuman/nonhuman pairings. The Nobel prize winner spoke of the way a physicist usually engaged in dialogue with nature itself to tailor his theories. Going back to psychoanalysis, Winnicott's "transitional object" is a clear example of how human children require a particular external object in order to develop their capacities of daydreaming, symbolization, etc.²⁷ Make no mistake, imagination is not latent, prefigured or *in potentia*, patiently waiting for the right time to project itself upon a blank-screen. Rather it is the object – usually a toy, teddy, blanket, etc. – which gives shape and substance²⁸ to the child's mental operations. But what about the imagination occurring in absence of any human subject? What would an imaginative process between two nonhumans look like? Haraway retells the case of the *Ophrys apifea*, a kind of orchid that mimics the genitalia of bees to lure them to pollinate them²⁹. This is not a mechanical copy with deceptive goals, but rather a gesture in which a natural entity interprets – in a completely semiotic and

patient' life. In this sense, they have not moved an inch from the Freudian critique of culture as a repertoire of lenitive discourses.

²⁴ Serres, M., 1982, *Hermes*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press. The French polymath spoke of «chimerical spaces», «temporal vectors» and «homeorhetic systems» to describe both the human and the world he inhabits. Against the Kantian view of time and space as *a priori*, here we find fluctuating entities and processes, which are not very different from the bizarre nature of the unconscious mind.

²⁵ Cfr. Modell, A., 1978, "The Nature of Psychoanalytic Knowledge", in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol.26, no.3, 651; and also Green, A., 2001, *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism*, London, Free Association Books, p.xxii.

²⁶ Prigogine, I., 1999, "Einstein and Magritte. A Study of Creativity", in Aerts, D., Broekaert, J. & Mathijs, E. (eds.), *Einstein Meets Magritte*, Brussels: VUB University Press, 101.

²⁷ Winnicott, D., 1971, *Playing and Reality*, London, Tavistock Publications.

²⁸ Serres, Latour, Stengers and Haraway are sympathetic to Deleuzian philosophy, which prioritizes becoming over being. These metaphysics are frequently at odds with terms such as "potential" or "substance", heritage of Aristotle.

²⁹ Haraway, D., 2016, *Staying with the Trouble*, Durham, Duke University Press, 69.

aesthetic sense – another. The *Ophrys apifea* is particularly interesting since it has adopted the colors and shapes of an insect that no longer exists. The very flower is, in itself, a re-imagination of the extinct bug. In other words, the longing for its dead lover is more important for the orchid's than the urge of finding new suitors. In a similar vein, the recent book by Jaap de Roode³⁰ collects several cases of animals that interpret vegetables and engage in healing practices with them. Thus, neither imagination nor medicine are monopolized by humans.

Nonetheless, we do not want to fall (like Giordano Bruno) into the hermetic tenet that imagination is somewhat of an autonomous cosmic force traversing all living things, which can be mastered given the proper training³¹. Under the light of modern metaphysics, fantasies – or better, “phantasies” echoing its archaic spelling and rendering it closer to “pharmakon” and “phantom” – are immaterial, ineffable, evanescent, elusive, and so forth. Wishing to step outside this narrow framework, Latour has woven a list of specifications or “felicity conditions” for imaginative processes. This perspective offers the advantage of conceptualizing fiction without opposing it to facticity, nor to surrendering it. Instead of a “suspension of disbelief”, we should explore the conditions in which an imaginative act or an operative fiction is well-fabricated, with consistency and durable effects. The false causes of healing were described as polluted by subjective influence and as transitory, in contrast with the everlasting healing of real objective causes. We are no longer entangled by the pernicious subject/object and fact/fiction dichotomies, so there is no reason to fear the seemingly absolute difference between the ephemeral and the eternal. After all, we do not want to purify imagination, but to gain a deeper understanding of its role in the healing processes. Hence, in the remainder of this section we will review some key points of this Latourian view of imagination, trying to keep a close dialogue with our already decanted version of psychoanalysis.

First, just like anything else, imagination requires material support. However, this does not allude to the way neurologists remind psychologists that there would not be any mental activity without brains. To grasp this point, let us take for instance works of art, which are never rigid objects fixed upon a static stage, but rather constantly evolving products that circulate in networks far wider than the scheme emitter-message-receptor. In words of Latour: History and sociology have made themselves capable of deploying the trajectories of a work [or art] without skipping a single segment of these arrangements, as always heterogeneous, in which one has to take the whims of princes and sponsors into account as well as the quality of a key-stroke on a piano, the critical fortune of a score, the reactions of a public to an opening night performance, the scratches on a vinyl recording, or the heartaches of a diva³².

These networks are both tangible and thriving in the same way individual imaginations are concrete and colorful. We could start speaking of oneiric locations and artifacts without fear of being denounced for reifying metaphors. Going back to *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva*, the imaginative process is not only contained in Hanold's dreaming, but it is also present in Pompeii, where antique ruins merge with countless romances. In the case of

³⁰ de Roode, J., 2025, *Doctors by Nature*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

³¹ I fear Stengers herself ended up close to this eccentric position. While the training of imagination in clinical settings might sound reasonable, the Belgium philosopher discussed the suggestion technique developed by maverick psychoanalysis François Roustang in the following terms: «[suggestion] has in fact inherited from hypnosis its claim to organize under a single category the products of a parasitic imagination, hallucinations, beings that, for other peoples, what we call trance is thought to connect to. Roustang's potentiality may well reconnect humans to the cosmos». Stengers, *Hypnosis Between Science and Magic*, 132.

³² Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 242.

Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of His Childhood, the credit of the imaginative process should not be limited to Leonardo's capacity to deal with early traumatic experiences. Instead, we should also take into account the resurgence of Christian imagery by the end of the Renaissance, the development of a subtler chiaroscuro technique and the constant wars between France and Italy. In short, psychoanalysis would benefit immensely if it unleashed imagination from the cage of the "psychic reality" or "inner world".

Secondly, fiction beings «impose themselves on us after imposing themselves on those responsible [authors] for their instauration [...]. They come to our imagination – no, they offer us an imagination that we would not have had without them»³³. This is related to the effects of the aforementioned transitional objects. Another analogous phenomenon would be the aesthetic reciprocity, proposed by Meltzer as the process by which children assimilate – being careful of not turning overwhelmed – the aesthetic impact of the external world incarnated in the mother as the primal object³⁴. The mind is not inherently sensitive to beauty, for it must be first aestheticized by the seductive beings of fiction embodied in the aforementioned artistic networks. In the words of Latour: «[i]magination is never the source but rather the receptacle of beings of fiction. [...] one becomes imaginative when one is gathered in by works of fiction»³⁵. What is remarkable about Meltzer's proposal is that interiority is not taken for granted in the development of the child, but earned through laborious games in which the patient depicts herself in different artistic media (drawings, sculptures, customs, etc.). We cannot overstate that imagination is "anthropogenic". Furthermore, here we can observe once more the conjunction of imagination as the object of study and as part of the research subject. Like Freud's incursions in archaeological speculations, Meltzer ventured into the imaginative scenario of intrauterine life in an attempt to understand the proto-thought of fetuses – and he employed films, novels and poetry to gather a vocabulary to express such almost indescribable sensations. That is our glimpse of paradox: the scientific inquiry of imagination demands for imaginative tools and methods.

A final point: «the beings of fiction [...] come to us and impose themselves, but with a particular wrinkle: [...] they need our solicitude»³⁶. Unlike the image offered by Lévi-Strauss of the quasi-divine myths that speak themselves throughout the subject's mouth, fiction remains virtual and only becomes actualized once a subject voluntarily summons it. Note a telling parallel with psychoanalysis: it cannot not exist, self-sufficiently, as a science interested in the unconscious mind, but rather as a therapy activated when a patient is willing to explore his own unconscious in order to achieve a cure. Freud-the-neurologist needed the solicitude of his patients with persistent hysterical symptoms to become Freud-the-psychoanalyst. Latour continues: «if we don't take in these beings, if we don't appreciate them, they risk disappearing altogether [...] their objectivity depends on their being reprised»³⁷. Certainly, repetition is pivotal in psychoanalysis. Shall the psychoanalyst reiterate the *ethos* of the royal commission when a disobedient patient explores other forms of therapy? Or will the psychoanalyst allow himself to be surprised by the conceptual formulation and observed phenomena that he might have taken for granted? My fellow therapists and I know very well about the painful situation

³³ *Ibid.*, 240.

³⁴ Meltzer, D., 1987, "On aesthetic reciprocity", in *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, vol.3, no.2, 3–14.

³⁵ Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 246.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

of being alone in the consulting room, waiting for the appointed patient to arrive, waiting for future patients to reach out asking for help. It is not enough for a subject to be mentally ill, he must be ready to solicit therapy. If patients do not express their desire of being assisted, then there is no point in being an always-available therapist. Another way to express this peculiar situation would be:

A terrible obligation, Péguy called it, the one that makes every reader responsible for Homer: the absence of Homer's reader swallows up the word; the negligence of Homer's reader reduces it to rubble. If we call the beings of fiction fictive or fictional, it is not because they are false, unreliable, or imaginary; it is, on the contrary, because they ask so very much from us and from those to whom we have the obligation to pass them along so they can prolong their existence. No other type of being imposes such fragility, such responsibility³⁸.

Imagining together; or how psychotherapy advances through mutual figurations

Imagination is the beginning of creation.
You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine;
and at last you create what you will.
Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*

To finally define imagination we ought to return to psychotherapy to observe the ecology of practices in which this phenomenon is embedded. By now it should be clear that neither the patient's pathology nor the therapist's technique are fixed. In other words, the patient's diagnosis does not refer to an underlying, preexisting disease anymore than the therapist's method is derived from an already established theory. To put it yet another way, the therapist is not the representative of the unquestionable knowledge of modern medicine which will assist the helpless patient³⁹. We are already familiarized with the transversality of imagination. It permeates semiological categories; it informs clinical hypotheses; it produces anthropogenic effects; it triggers transformations in the subjectivity; and so forth. Since we are not dealing with the excavation of an archaic truth responsible for the illness, we should delineate therapy in a prospective fashion: it does not reveal prior meanings, it fabricates novel ones⁴⁰. In this section we shall consider imagination not as an individual process or as a bilateral situation. Imagination must be tamed, enacted and sustained in a very particular manner – which eerily surpasses local interactions – to produce the desired outcome. Once strengthened with the ontology of fiction, leaps of imagination can be characterized as the action that permits a being to embrace his becoming⁴¹. In this sense, “false cures” will no longer refer to blind faith or make-believe that pollutes scientific research. A cure would be unsuccessful or ineffective if it does not enable the subject to engage in the networks where his psychic life can be metamorphosed⁴². Thus, if a patient remains sick after receiving medicine or therapy, we should ask

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁹ Nathan & Stengers, *Doctors and Healers*, 119.

⁴⁰ Stengers, “Black Boxes; or, Is Psychoanalysis a Science?”, 102.

⁴¹ Stengers, *Hypnosis Between Science and Magic*, 116.

⁴² See chap. 7 and chap. 9 of Latour's *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* to have an account of psychotherapy where architecture, polytheism, witchcraft, magazines and videogames are crossed.

whether those procedures were imaginative enough. Lastly, we will venture that the principal reason behind those shortcomings is the therapist's resistance to submitting himself⁴³ to the touch of fiction.

Aesthetic networks are helpful in rendering visible the quasi-ineffable operations of imagination. Psychotherapy is neither a disembodied dialogue between patient and therapist nor the standardized application of techniques informed by abstract theories⁴⁴. On the one hand, there is the patient's suffering body alongside the therapist's supposedly healthy body. On the other hand, there are nonhuman entities such as the couch, the clock, soundproof walls, warm lighting, etc. How are these heterogeneous actors arranged? The couch is pivotal, since the horizontal lying of the patient emulates the oneiric feeling. A window or a painting might help in letting her mind wander. Free-association – a non-rhythmic dance between patient's utterances and analyst's interpretations – is a phonetic device oriented to the same goal. The absence of recording devices indicates that precise recollection is not a priority in the session. Actually, sometimes it feels like silence is more significant than verbalized discourse. This assemblage is not as intricate as the labs and factories where antidepressants are manufactured, yet it is a propitious setting to foster the intimate and imaginative encounter between the patient and her therapist. In the words of contemporary psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden:

There is a particular form of significance generated in the analytic context that is unique to that setting. For the analysand, the consulting room is a profoundly quiet place as he realizes that he must find a voice with which to tell his story. This voice is the sound of his thoughts, which he may never have heard before. The analysand may find he does not have a voice that feels like his own. This discovery may then serve as the starting point of the analysis⁴⁵.

Note also that, in this scenario, the patient does not only retell a dream from previous nights, she is also encouraged to co-design with her therapist new dream-like materials. This *in situ* fabrication and interpretation of material, unlike the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Habermas, does not signal a correspondence between a cryptic symbol and a repressed desire. Rather, associations are translated first into metaphors and then into narrative constructions that compose new knowledge for all the parties involved⁴⁶. In these narratives other human and nonhuman actors emerge indirectly. The patient tells stories about her husband, house or pet. Such allusions are not referential, neither to real objects nor to internal objects intertwined in the fabric of unconscious fantasies. The beings inhabiting the patient's discourse have, to borrow Alva Noë's expression⁴⁷, a fragile variety of presence which is more experiential than intellectual. In the peculiar ambiance of the session, narratives and dreams behave similarly

⁴³ In the following section, we shall speak of the therapist in masculine and of the patient in feminine. Stengers, somewhat ironically, employs such formula to denounce the gender asymmetry in psy-sciences and to stress the limitations of the scientific rationale that privileges rationalism and standardization over affection, care and healing.

⁴⁴ Slife, B., Ghelfi, E. & Fox, S., 2018, "Psychotherapy and Scientism", in Grant, E. & Williams, R. (eds.), *On Hijacking Science*, New York, Routledge.

⁴⁵ Ogden, T., 1992, "Comments on transference and countertransference in the initial analytic meeting", in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, vol.12, no.2, 226.

⁴⁶ Modell, A., 1978, "The Nature of Psychoanalytic Knowledge", in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol.26, no.3, 645.

⁴⁷ Noë, A., 2012, *Varieties of Presence*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

in the fabrication of meaning. Incidentally echoing the kaleidoscopic philosophy of Serres, Ogden explains:

It is essential to keep in mind that a patient's history is not a static entity that is gradually unearthed; rather it is an aspect of the patient's conscious and unconscious conception of himself, which is in a continual state of evolution and flux. In a sense, the patient's history is continually being created and re-created in the course of the analysis. Moreover, it is by no means to be assumed that the patient has a history (i.e., a sense of historicity) at the beginning of analysis. In other words, we cannot take for granted the idea that the patient has achieved a sense of continuity of self over time such that his past feels as if it is connected to his experience of himself in the present⁴⁸.

We can further apply this constructivist perspective and claim that even transference, the cornerstone of classic psychoanalysis, is invented rather than discovered. Precisely because Freud could not find any «indication of reality» in the unconscious mind, he had to abandon the idea of healing the actual trauma and its neuro-psychological sequels. This means that psychoanalysis, albeit capable of diagnosing and explaining neurosis, does not intervene upon them. Transference neurosis, on the contrary, is the artificial phenomenon where numerous symptoms and patterns of behavior can be reconfigured. In this regard, Stengers comments:

Just as the eighteenth-century chemist no longer deals with the materials that he will use in the natural world, no longer studies the unpurified primary materials that the artisan transformed, but “creates his object,” the psychoanalyst institutes a state that has all the aspects of an “artificial illness,” whose only arena is the “circumscribed domain” of the analytic scene. “Morbid symptoms,” the primary material of the former technique [i.e., hypnosis, talking-cure], must themselves be transformed, finding themselves given the signification of transference. By reorganizing the patient's neurosis around the analyst, transference renders it intelligible, accessible, as Freud says, to the intervention of the analyst since the analyst is supposed to have remained “neutral,” not responsible for the roles that are ascribed to him, and therefore able to decipher these roles and demonstrate their meaning to his patient⁴⁹.

The quotations within the passage above are extracted from the technical paper *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* (1914). The Belgian philosopher argues that there are glimpses of constructivism in Freud's thought, so we are not committing heresy by stressing the artificiality of psychoanalysis. However, we are more interested in pointing out that the dissolution of transference neurosis indirectly impacts the “original” neurosis, not by changing historical events, but by emancipating the patient from the past. Analysis, recall its etymology (ἀνάλυσις), means “to break up” or “untie” something. Therefore, to analyze the

⁴⁸ Ogden, “Comments on transference and countertransference in the initial analytic meeting”, 243, ff4.

⁴⁹ Stengers, “Black Boxes; or, Is Psychoanalysis a Science?”, 97.

transference neurosis amounts to unknitting the amalgamation of the patient's past and present. When the analyst carefully convinces the patient that he will not act in the same fashion as her earlier caretakers, fact and fiction cease to be ill-articulated. In this point we can prefer object-relation theory over the Freudian adagio "to make the unconscious conscious", considering instead that once the patient is released from the enclosed system of his private fantasies and internal object relationships, she can re-enter the world of external objects – quite imaginative themselves, for sure – and allow her to be surprised by them.

Until now we might get the impression that only the patient performs the imaginative process, while the analyst limits himself to organizing the material. Yet psychotherapy is a far more entangled experience. In transference, the therapist becomes a content of imagination, an object melting with other representations inhabiting the patient's inner world. At some point these fantasies will be contrasted with the therapeutic relationship itself, but this does not mean the therapist condescendingly allows those fabulations to emerge only to correct them afterwards. Again the words of Ogden:

the analyst must allow himself to be created/molded by his patient in reality as well as in fantasy. Since the infant has a role in creating his mother, no two infants ever have the same mother. Similarly, no two patients ever have the same analyst. The analyst experiences himself and behaves in a subtly different manner in each analysis. Moreover, this is not at all a static phenomenon: in the course of each analysis the analyst undergoes psychological change, which in turn is reflected in the way he conducts the analysis⁵⁰.

The irreplicability of the situation is twofold. On the one hand, despite the claims of orthodox psychoanalysts, the subjective uniqueness of each therapist eventually overcomes any pretension of technical standardization. «[B]ecoming an analyst involves developing an "analytic style" that is uniquely one's own, as opposed to adopting "a technique" handed down from previous generations of analysts. In so doing, we invent psychoanalysis for each patient»⁵¹. On the other hand, in the analysis of countertransference, the therapist reacts to the idiosyncrasies of each patient. In doing so, he reflects about his emotional responses and deploys interpretations that help him to elaborate such reactions. It bears repeating that interpretations involve both patient and therapist: the former seeks clarity about her life, while the latter pursues lucidity about the relationship with each of his patients.

We can outline the analysis of transference and countertransference as a process of mutual figuration. Figurability, a common topic of semiotics and psychoanalysis⁵², is the ultimate goal of imagination. Let us return to the ontology of fiction developed by Latour to further elaborate this point. As we saw, the works of art widely exceed the exchange between an

⁵⁰ Ogden, "Comments on transference and countertransference in the initial analytic meeting", 241.

⁵¹ Ogden, T., 2019, "Ontological Psychoanalysis or 'What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?'" in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, vol. 88, no.4, 671.

⁵² Latour, *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence*, 243. Latour, deeply opposed to mathematical formalism and conventional materialism, prefers to speak of "raw materials" and "figures". The former are not limited to cold, solid, inert objects, while the latter are not elusive of anything structural, precise or static. Hence, "figurability" would be the art of rearranging raw materials to produce wider networks connected to innovative audiences, a process in which the silhouette of a fictional being gets sharper and easier to identify.

emissor and receptor. In the domains of aesthetics and fiction there is a crafty orchestration of the context of production, the context of reception, the solicitation of the audience, the reprises and commentaries, the networks of material techniques and artefacts, the beings conjured by the content of the discourse and the diverse perlocutionary acts derived from the re-enactment of the piece of art. Latour (2013, p.247) proposes a way to hierarchically ordering such gathering of elements:

As soon as the raw materials begin to vibrate toward figures that cannot, however, be detached from them, and toward whose peculiarities they never cease to refer, two new levels are immediately generated, the one beyond, what is expressed, level $n+1$, and the other, beneath, level $n-1$, that of the addressment⁵³.

The material frames (arranged upon solicitation) which support the operations of fiction would be “level n ”. The semantic dimension of discourse (beings with an indirect and fragile presence) would be “level $n+1$ ”. And the choreography between transference and counter-transference (often existing beneath the surface in the shape of non-verbal gestures, hesitations, Freudian slips, etc.) would be “level $n-1$ ”. Perhaps some sophisticated literary critics might disagree with Latour’s rough philosophy of fiction. Yet it is astonishing that his template – unlike the Procrustean bed of scientism – can be used to adequately describe the kind of exchanges occurring within the consulting room. Also, by taking into account the three levels of figuration, it is possible to comprehend our previous claim about imagination being more-than-bilateral and even more-than-human.

Psychoanalysis is fiction through and through. Therapy is the technical manipulation of the imaginative processes emerging in a complex scenario, aiming to release the patient from her past in order to welcome her future. These propositions might strike as overly poetic for any other practitioner in the field of health sciences. Have we abandoned along the path the pursuit of “health” and “science”? Not quite. At this point we reach the heart of Stenger’s challenge to psychoanalysis. Let us consider this provocative passage:

Moreover, it is perhaps the analyst much more than his “analysand” who pays the price for his capture in an apparatus linking “truth” and the discovery of a blind and obstinate indifference, dismissing as fiction everything that analysis charges itself with undoing. For the analyst is exposed by “modern” (but not scientific) psychotherapeutic techniques to ply his trade as “impossible,” to borrow Freud’s expression, and to dedicate himself to the service of this impossibility. As for the patients, they remain free to circulate⁵⁴.

And also this penetrating excerpt:

It is not in the name of an abstract image of science that I am defining this obviously heavy price to pay [truth over fiction] (but, allow me to ask, who more than analysts, given what they demand of their analysands,

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁵⁴ Stengers, *Hypnosis Between Science and Magic*, 143.

should be able to put into suspense the certitudes at the heart of their life?). And neither is it solely because this price is historically logical: it is in fact logical that the possibilities eliminated [i.e., hypnosis, suggestion, imagination] in the name of an apparently adequate and sufficient solution reappear when this solution has demonstrated its limits; [...] it is logical to again raise the question of knowing what suggestion can do in its many diverse modalities from the moment it is stripped of the illusion that the one who suggests knows [beforehand] what he is doing and can control the meaning and consequences of his suggestions with regard to the one he is addressing; and finally, it is logical that it is analysts who are intellectually and affectively among the best qualified to take these new risks⁵⁵.

Indeed, if a therapist demands his patient to question even the most basic assumptions about her life, he should reciprocate. Could he question the apparent scientificity of psychoanalysis based on the exclusion of imagination? Could he question the supposed neutrality required for the analysis of transference? Could he include his counter-transference, not as an extension of an already stabilized technique, but rather as an unpredictable phenomenon? Could he embrace the re-articulation of fact and fiction that is required for both the well-being of the patient and for psychoanalysis itself? We are tempted to argue that while this sharp criticism is pertinent to some portions of psychoanalysis (Freudian, Lacanian, ego-psychology, etc.), other schools are more sensitive to these issues (object-relation theory, inter-subjectivism, etc.). But perhaps it is better to leave those questions open...

To end this section, let us briefly return to Haraway, whose writings are especially concerned with the political and ethical implications of scientific rhetoric and practice. Insofar psychoanalysis entails the mutual figuration of the therapist and his patient, we could qualify it as a “sympoietic” enterprise⁵⁶. Or, as Winnicott used to say: «[p]sychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist»⁵⁷. Another concept particularly important in Haraway’s philosophy is “holobiont”, first coined by evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis. Against the modern obsession with individuality, Haraway speaks of critters who are engaged in becoming-with processes of hospitality and parasitism. This «intimacy of strangers»⁵⁸ is psychoanalysis in a nutshell. We can rely in Ogden’s loquacity one last time: «the analytic relationship is one of the most formal and at the same time one of the most intimate of human relationships»⁵⁹.

If we take seriously this emphasis in collective becoming, we should redefine our understanding of health. Is it the goal of therapy to produce rational subjects committed with the anti-fetichist mission of debunking illusions? Or is it the manufacture of docile subjects with a smooth functionality inscribed in a dangerous economical system? Haraway is skeptical of any grandiloquent discourse about the higher quality of life promised by science. What she names «staying in the trouble» consists of:

the recuperation in complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as

⁵⁵ Stengers, “Black Boxes; or, Is Psychoanalysis a Science?”, 106.

⁵⁶ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 58.

⁵⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 38.

⁵⁸ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 60.

⁵⁹ Ogden, “Comments on transference and countertransference in the initial analytic meeting”, 230.

full of endings, as beginnings. [...] I am not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. So I look for real stories that are also speculative fabulations and speculative realisms. These are stories in which multispecies players, who are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference, redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation⁶⁰.

Realism and fabulation, rationalism and fiction can work together in the struggle for survival. Imagination is not only an indispensable part of therapy, but also an end in itself. Healthy is the one who can master his imagination and use it to keep on living. A similar view was anticipated, more than fifty years ago, by maverick psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft, who claimed:

the aim of psycho-analytical treatment is not primarily to make the unconscious conscious, nor to widen or strengthen the ego, but to re-establish the connexion between dissociated psychic functions, so that the patient ceases to feel that there is an inherent antagonism between his imaginative and adaptive capacities⁶¹.

Perhaps imagination has never been a *pharmakon* after all, but our critical misunderstandings of the nature of truth and fiction, science and art, sickness and health, had misguided us to believe so. Hopefully we can start to undo this path and sail in another direction.

Conclusion

Stenger's epistemological challenge to health sciences served us like Ariadne's thread throughout this article. We first took distance from the *modus operandi* of the royal commission: to disqualify charlatans and to reduce imagination to an experimental variable. Then we revisited some seminal texts of psychoanalysis, trying to liberate them from the excesses of rationalism and insisting on the hybrid disciplinary nature of psychoanalysis. Afterwards we explored the ontological dimension of fiction: from the material vessels than render it possible to the anthropogenic effects of the works of art. By this point, the question was no longer to demarcate "real" from "false" cures, but to inquire into the methods than strengthen imagination and extend their effects. Lastly, we offered a detailed account of psychotherapy as a practice that surpasses the bilateral relationship between patient and therapist. In this prospective depiction, psychotherapy is the art of engaging in imaginative processes which transform the figurability of all the parties involved. This, in turn, obliged us to reconsider the very notions of "health" and "sciences" as something beyond functionality and rationality. After all these journey, we can safely assert that imagination is not an obstacle to treatment, but – quite the contrary! – its means and its end! A century ago, in a letter to Jung, Freud claimed that «psychoanalysis in essence is a cure through love». Today, we can modify his formula as: «psychoanalysis is a cure through imagination».

⁶⁰ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 10.

⁶¹ Rycroft, C., 1968, *Imagination and Reality*, London, Maresfield Library, 113.

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