

IPA Webinar on J. Bleger's paper on the setting, October 2022.

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It is a pleasure to participate in a panel on José Bleger's paper on the setting and in the book that Carlos Mogueillansky and Howard Levine have edited.

John Churcher indicates very well in his paper the vicissitudes of the translation of the text and the problems this entailed. Under the appearance of purely formal questions or simply anecdotes, many important things are at stake, including the political orientations of our (small) psychoanalytic world.

In Latin America, we know this very well. Although Spanish is the second most spoken language in the world, far behind Chinese of course, IPA psychoanalysis still speaks mainly if not only in English. It should be remembered that during the first decades of the psychoanalytic movement, the reigning language was German.

What is politics in psychoanalysis?

John is an exception in this English-speaking world where Spanish, and even any other language than English, does not exist. He speaks Spanish (and French) with a Spanish accent, the Spanish of the Civil War in Spain.

It was John who contacted me to suggest that we translate *Symbiosis and Ambiguity* into English after an aborted attempt many years before.

It was a long work (of several years). We produced what is called a "critical edition", that is to say one with a detailed introduction and footnotes regarding translation problems and we even corrected some typos in the original edition. Those who can appreciate the quality of the English, will notice the enormous work done by John to make the text "sound English" without being unfaithful to the content.

Of course, the work of translation, particularly the chapter on the setting, took us some time, and our first problem was how to translate the word *encuadre* in English ('setting', or 'frame'). We comment on this in our Editorial Introduction to *Symbiosis and Ambiguity*, and John discusses it in his contribution to this collection of papers.

A consequence of undertaking that work was that it led us to read a good part of José Bleger's *oeuvre* and that of some other *Rioplantense* analysts whom he cites or who later worked on the subject. As a result, the two of us, together and separately, have had an opportunity to write several texts arising out of this work of translation.

Translating is sometimes a laborious exercise, but it allows us to "enter" the text in a unique way. It makes me think of the book on German Romanticism by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (*L'Absolu littéraire*), which shows very well the essential place that translation occupied in this literary movement. I think also of Antoine Berman's book, *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (1984).

To "enter" the text! Because what is "reading" in psychoanalysis? This is a question that has preoccupied me for some time now. First of all, it concerns me as a reader of psychoanalytic papers. Roughly speaking, I think I read in two different ways: either in a quick way to try to

get an idea of what the text is about... or not. Another thing is to "study" a text. For that I need to take notes as I read, trying to catch how the text is constructed.

Being on the editorial board of a journal for more than fifteen years taught me a few things, not least because every text was discussed in detail even though it took a long time.

I recently read a text by Ogden about a seminar that he organises in which each text is read aloud during the seminar itself.

Two examples come to mind: Alvarez de Toledo's paper on what we do with words and the Barangers' paper on the field.

In both cases it took me some time to realise what makes them so difficult to access. And how misleading it can be to read them in haste. Since I (too) have to go quickly, I will say it briefly: I am thinking of the way Italian colleagues (Ferro and Civitarese in particular) use the Barangers' notion of the field to construct an inter-subjectivist version of the analytic situation. To my taste, "it doesn't quite fit", as they used to say. But that's how it is.

In the first instance, it is not a question of agreeing or disagreeing with the content of a text. It's about understanding what the author is trying to say or "pass off".

The best example is when one feels "shocked", annoyed by what a text says. I think of many of Freud's propositions. For a start, consider the place in his theoretical edifice of the question of remembering and the place of the traumatic event.

Perhaps there is no other way to get some kind of working through of one's readings. Only afterwards is it really possible to realize agreements, disagreements, misunderstandings. I'm thinking about some papers by Laplanche I have been working on recently. Perhaps the situation is even more interesting for a colleague in "*formation*" (or training). Recently a colleague told me that when he read Freud in courses at the University, he had no difficulties in understanding. But when he came back to Freud's paper in the seminars during his *formation*, he used to get confused, and not understand them... It really is a process of working through.

Of course, the reader has every right to appropriate the text that he or she reads, to make it his or her own, to wrestle with the text or to seek inspiration for his or her own ideas. I am not going to become a "*gardien du temple*", as they say in French. But I must say that certain readings end up irritating me when they "make" the author say something that goes in a very different direction. But, of course, one could say to me that everyone is free, etc. Yes, but voluntary or involuntary bad faith seems to me to be something different. It is "twisting" the text to make it say what one thinks.

The most usual situation, mainly with Freud papers, is to consider one's own reading of the paper as the "right" one and then showing Freud's mistakes or misunderstandings. But after all, I suppose all of us, including psychoanalysts, need to fabricate for ourselves an enemy to fight against.

It is not a question of developing a reading model. Everyone has their own and I suppose it is part of the way of being a psychoanalyst.

José Bleger's paper on the setting is, beginning with its title, an "inspired" paper. One has the impression of seeing the author's pen glide over the page, as if the ideas were being strung together without necessarily following an impeccable line of argument or striving for good writing. It is a question of making something "happen", of making the reader feel that there is

something there that has gone unnoticed. I suppose this is the reason why there are so many footnotes. In a certain sense, the paper on the setting could be read as a long and fruitful footnote to the chapter on ambiguity. Bleger wrote that it was while elaborating and writing the long chapter on ambiguity that the paper on the setting was written.

Some small examples taken from the text: Bleger's insistence on being interested in situations where the setting is not a problem and not when the setting appears as a difficulty. Or when he suddenly adds a footnote saying that the question of the setting is not a technical question but a strategic one. It is almost as if Bleger only realised the enormous significance of the question of the setting while he was writing the text or during a re-reading of it.

Another example: when Bleger writes that sometimes the patient has to be hospitalised in order to maintain what is left of the setting. This is a quite shocking idea.

It is interesting because one can wonder if Bleger really thinks of the setting as an invariant.

One last thing I want to underline. Bleger did not "invent" the term or the concept of "setting", something that can be read in some commentaries. But it is true that he "problematized" it, he showed its problematic nature. In other words, it is not a doctrinal text which dictates a particular reading. It is an open text in which a psychoanalyst questions himself about what he actually does, and without closing-off the question with answers.

Maurice Blanchot, a French essayist, wrote: "*la réponse est le malheur de la question*" (the answer is the misfortune of the question).