

December 8th 2021

Dear colleagues,

Thank you very much for your report on “remote analysis in training” which was carried out under very difficult conditions, due to the pandemic. This report gave rise to fruitful discussions among the members of our society and we would like to share our conclusions with you.

Of course, we understand the difficulties tied to the IPA’s initial goal, i.e. to harmonize practices around the world in order to preserve the specificity of psychoanalysis. And in that respect, we feel that it is both necessary and courageous on the part of the IPA to “tackle” the issue of remote analysis. The report highlights the fact that this practice is already quite widespread in some countries, particularly in North America, South America and Asia, although little was known as to its extent. Europe, where the practice of remote analysis remains exceptional and of short duration, stands apart.

What we take issue with is that your report seems to *de facto* endorse remote analysis. Moreover, the question of remote analysis is not treated from an analytic point of view but it is instead approached from a technocratic, "pragmatic" standpoint. Although the report does attempt to flush out inconsistencies and ambiguities in the IPA’s procedural code, this attempt seems to reach a stumbling block insofar as it does not resolve its own ambiguities, in particular the shift from “exceptional circumstances” (whose vagueness you rightly denounce) to the trivialization of remote practice under the term of “reasonable access”.

But what is the meaning of “reasonable” in a psychoanalytic context? Isn’t there a certain degree of “unreason” in psychoanalysis itself, and consequently in psychoanalytic training?

You provide a list of “reasons” or rationalizations (medical, political, financial) justifying the practice of remote analysis. However, these rationalizations completely short-circuit the process of working through the resistances, i.e. the conflict, the negative transference that arise whenever the issue of obstacles (often material) interferes with the possibility of conducting an analysis.

During the first lockdown, here in France, in the spring of 2020, we were also faced with the necessity of organizing phone or skype sessions. This situation provided us with the opportunity to gain some experience in handling remote sessions. We were thus in a position to appreciate how analytic work suffered from the lack of bodily presence and we became acutely aware of its crucial importance for analytic treatment.

During your meeting with the PEC, the issue of the presence or absence of the body was mentioned, but it strikes us that nothing was said about the importance of the drive body.

Indeed, what is put to work in an analytic session is the interaction between the psychic and the somatic; physical distance on the other hand bypasses the difficulty of working through psychic conflict due to drive impulses, and tends to leave aside the sensory, bodily experience resulting from the presence of two bodies in the same room – the very root of transference and its unconscious underpinnings. One of the consequences of remote analysis is the primacy of conscious verbal communication and secondary content.

If remote analysis were to become a “standard” practice, psychoanalysis as invented by Freud would suffer a major amputation, becoming more “Lacanian” in its insistence on the “signifier”. Furthermore, this amputation does not stop at the drive body but insidiously affects the very “flesh” of words themselves – a denial reflected in the coining of the term “teleanalysis”.

Another concern of ours is the question of whether the abundance of economic and quantitative considerations (pertaining to financial difficulties, but also the number of sessions, distance, etc.) does not actually mask the essential issue, that of the psychic investment of a candidate or future candidate. Under the cover of an egalitarian ideology, the unconscious, psychic dimension of economic investment is at risk of disappearing under the pressure of material obstacles and the demands of external reality. Yet, as we all know, the struggle against resistances – the task of every analyst – requires a very high level of initial investment.

We are a society based on the French model, and as such the issue of personal analysis does not occupy the same place as it does in societies based on the Eitingon model. However, we are unanimously opposed to the idea of the IPA endorsing remote analysis, either for personal or training analyses.

Nevertheless, we feel that a distinction should be made between analysis and training, a distinction which does not clearly appear in the report. Indeed, the question of physical distance does not carry the same weight for supervision as it does for analysis, even though we remain very skeptical as to the possibility of conducting an entire supervision in an exclusively remote setting.

Both in the French or the Eitingon model, the question of the candidates’ physical presence or absence in their place of analysis or supervision must be treated analytically, in terms of investment in the training process and the value given to it. In both analysis and supervision, obstacles and difficulties trigger resistances, often in the form of requests for special exceptions or adjustments. The training process also involves the process of working through the resistances tied to the development of the candidate’s “internal frame” in relation to the external frame. The more one adjusts to a patient’s demands, the higher the risk of “covering up” something that will remain unattended to, unanalyzed. By accepting such adjustments, do we not run the risk of confiscating the patient’s or the candidate’s ability to make a choice?

The training process of a candidate includes participation in workshops, seminars, lectures... During lockdown, when we could only meet on screen, our members and candidates often spoke of a feeling of loneliness when they turned off the computer. As regards group dynamics, one cannot deny the sense of community that arises from the personal interactions,

the private exchanges and discussions after a meeting or lecture. How can true, authentic relationships between the members of a society possibly be created via internet?

Remote consultations have taken over the medical world, and perhaps the movement towards remote work in the psychoanalytic world reflects a sense of anxiety, that psychoanalysis could disappear given the increasing popularity of other “brief” forms of therapy, in particular cognitive behavioral therapy.

It goes without saying that we cannot dismiss the cultural factors and societal changes that are affecting our relationship to space and time, and deeply transforming civilization as we know it. Your report can be commended for bringing these changes to our attention, and indeed it would be a show of denial to refuse to see them, to refuse to recognize that the internet and digital revolution are revolutionizing our understanding of the world.

But does this mean that to preserve psychoanalysis, we must make compromises that would lead to the loss of the very specificity of psychoanalysis, its flesh and soul?

How can we preserve and protect the specificity of psychoanalysis, which lies in the permanence of the Freudian unconscious, while at the same time remaining open to contemporary trends that are deeply modifying our relation to time and space? Is it even possible?

This report forces us to confront these questions, and our goal is to encourage further discussion and debate among all the members of the IPA, along with the submission of proposals. Indeed, remote analysis is a very serious issue, and what is at stake is our ability to uphold the founding values of the IPA and of Freudian psychoanalysis.

As things now stand, the SPRF cannot consent to proposals supporting the practice of remote analysis.

Yours sincerely,

The Members of the French Psychoanalytic Society for Research and Training (SPRF)

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