



Light and color in a void: The analysis of a special needs child

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This clinical report comes from the five year, four day a week analysis of a male child. What is special is that this treatment is of a child with marked mental retardation. I have retained this nomenclature because that is how Ricardo's parents described his mental capacity. What they meant was that he was greatly impaired in his cognition and this could be seen in Ricardo's severe cognitive, social, behavioral, and relational improprieties. I have privileged the function of psychoanalytic understanding and the role of transference to bring about modifications in this child's internal world. And I have considered the patient's psychotic mental state to be in need of psychoanalytic treatment notwithstanding his psychosis's connection to his cognitive handicap. I have also added information I have received after the analysis, information that demonstrates continued integration coming from the analytic process. Owing to Ricardo's limited mental capacities, this article advances clinical information that is not often found in analyses of children. There are possibly many other children like him who nonetheless would benefit from dynamic psychoanalytic understanding. On the other hand, I shall not discuss this matter theoretically, even though some theoretic considerations are necessary. Clinical practice and the transference relation are this report's principal material.

Keywords: transference relation, psychoanalytic understanding, mind

We are conceived and we are born. Looked at in this simple way each of us begins life twice. But mankind has always held, with ceremonial ritual, that a third and later birth is the one which really counts. One is then, we say today, born psychologically.

(Nini Herman, 1985)

Melanie Klein's early work with children has been of fundamental importance to the development of her theory because that work provided her with definitive insight into the primitive mind's workings. Within the limits of an incipient and basically corporeal ego, she bestowed on babies a creative emotional autonomy by establishing the initial phases for the Oedipus complex, and for the super-ego's formation. She did this by pointing out the complex mechanisms that initially form symbols. These mechanisms begin with partial objects and eventually incorporate total objects.

¹To our psychoanalytic patients, young and old, with whom we learn our profession

²Translated by Arthur Brakel.

These early achievements are fundamental to the formation of thought. Thus Klein formalized the relational mind in which, from the beginning of life, the internal and the external as well as subject and object are in constant interaction. Hanna Segal (2007) defended child analysis as an important exercise within psychoanalytic institutes and affirmed that this practice requires special devotion, both on the part of its practitioners as well as among those who teach it. For me, Segal is not referring to devotion to a set of beliefs, rather to tenacity and perseverance.

Privileging the mind is an analysis's principle statute – whether it be adult or child analysis. Since intelligence and emotional experience do not always go hand in hand, it is the *mens psicanalitica* that matters because it is independent of the rational and logical mind. And it will always be played out in the same molds, i.e. in primitive relations.

In an analytic process it is possible, through transference, that certain mental states that are unresolved within the vicissitudes of primitive relations can be developed, even when the cognitive processing mind is limited in its intellectual capacities. Klein (1955) affirms that child (and adult) analysis should conform to three conditions: the free association principle, the exploration of the unconscious and the analysis of both negative and positive transferences.

She used toys, the child's natural means of expression, and developed play technique, in which to play is to associate. And, within the transference, this is what child analysts refer to when they base their interpretations on what the child's play demonstrates and reveals.

In child's play the war of identifications, its splittings and conflicts, emerges with intensity, and child analysis demands that analysts work on the verge between acting out and understanding.

Child analysis is not the random activity, the lesser procedure, as many claim it to be. In child analysis one must maintain the technical rigor, the theoretical knowledge, the number of sessions. And child analysts must be aware of their countertransference. Many children are gravely sick and misdirected and could greatly benefit from a well-managed analysis. It is one of those children I shall now discuss.

First contacts

In the child psychiatric department of a public hospital, a colleague interviewed Ricardo and his parents and then sent them to me. When I met them at my office, my colleague had already told me that there might be something organically wrong with Ricardo.

Beginning with our early meetings, I observed and was told by Ricardo's parents that the child evinced alienation concerning interpersonal relations – without being a total recluse. He was totally incapable of formal learning, mainly in the cognitive and pedagogical areas. In addition, he did not clean himself adequately after elimination, nor was he able to judge when he should get out of the shower. He was not sufficiently autonomous even to play on the sidewalk in front of his house. Nearing age 10, he had not managed to learn to read, to write, or to do elementary arithmetic. He did not play with

other children but he was interested in watching them play. He preferred repetitive activities and was drawn to activities that were hardly conventional. He would fill his pockets with hard candy, tennis balls and pieces of broken objects. However, this child liked to smile and was agreeable, even though at times he could be aggressive with his family members and was socially maladapted. All this information came out in our interviews.

Ricardo's parents were technical health professionals in their 30s. The mother was three years older than her husband. They came to their first session half an hour early and, when I received them, the father said: "That's the way it is, doctor. We're all really anxious".

The father was anxious, fat, and extroverted and stood in contrast with the mother, who was tiny, thin, self-contained, a bit aseptic, and kept everything in its proper place – at least apparently. The parents were pleasant and well mannered. The father, Marcelo, was the first to speak, but spoke only of himself: he was an only child who had been overly protected and was born with some abnormalities that had to be corrected surgically.

The mother, on the other hand, was from a large family with seven children. She had nothing to say about herself and only made brief comments and addenda to what the father had to say. Though they wanted a child, they were not at ease with the pregnancy. Indeed it was more than fear, the father was "certain" that they would end up with an abnormal, sick, or even "mongoloid" [*sic*] child. His fears lasted throughout the pregnancy, and the mother affirms that, because of all that, her pregnancy was clinically perfect but emotionally difficult.

During all this, Marcelo's parents separated. They had had many fights in which Marcelo, the only child, was intensely involved, and Tatiana absorbed it all. As a mother Tatiana speaks objectively, but her emotional state is hard to define. She is not aloof but she expresses no affect. She is self-contained but she seems about to explode. As a whole this couple seemed a bit *too* put together, save for the obvious differences between the two.

So I inferred that the pregnancy had not been a happy one. They had anticipated, in their phantasies, an almost unwanted and handicapped child who could be retarded. The future baby produced two anxious parents and drove the grandparents apart: this raw and painful summary was what I perceived in our first interview. What is positive in all this is that, given all those fantasies, a child was born and survived, he was being raised, and, especially, his parents had brought him into treatment. That is, the parents also survived and managed, as best they could, to take care of him and to get him to my office.

Ricardo's birth was Caesarean because, according to Tatiana, he had been "stuck" [*sic*] to the ileum and on top of being small and slight. She added that the obstetrician found it hard to "get him out." He was born with a small depression on his forehead that, according to Tatiana, was of no consequence. He had no external scarring.³

³That depression may have had something to do with Ricardo's retardation. This hypothesis seems to be the most likely. However nothing has been proven though, when Ricardo reached age 14, someone suggested the source may have been undiagnosed phenylketonuria at birth. Both explanations are possible but unproven, so we went on with the analysis.

At the maternity clinic Marcelo became anxious because he thought his son “slept a lot” and “nursed very little”. Tatiana explained that this was because of the glucose they gave him in the maternity ward, since at home he nursed very well. Their account of Ricardo’s birth made me think that this boy, the object of such intense and terrifying projections, could have been protecting himself by adhering to his mother and making his own birth so difficult. On the other hand, once he was born with the sunken forehead and with his apparent social inertia, he could be carrying out his parents’ fantasy of having a child with serious problems.

Until he was 6 weeks old Ricardo slept in his parents’ bedroom, where they watched over him all through the night. The father called home constantly. He bought a cell phone to check up on him at every turn. Tatiana reported that they established an exaggerated and anxious link with their son. She could not stop staring at him, even in the supermarket. She would put the baby seat in front of her in the shopping cart for fear that someone would steal him because he was beautiful, chubby, and rosy cheeked. She did this too because she was anxious owing to her husband’s constant keeping tabs on him.

Tatiana may have identified with her mother-in-law, an intense and intrusive but helpful mother unlike Tatiana’s own mother, who was “lighter” [*sic*] and had seven children to raise and no time for “excessive sentimentalism” [*sic*]. Since she was the first born of those seven siblings, Tatiana’s mention of excessive sentimentalism suggests the extent to which she felt robbed of motherly affection. Her mother-in-law was someone who gave birth to defective children needing surgical interventions and constant and absolute maternal care but who could also provide constant and absolute maternal care, perhaps according to Tatiana’s fantasies.

Several times during our interview Marcelo was brought to tears. When this happened Tatiana *remained calm* and told me that in spite of everything she really wanted another child and managed to get pregnant five years after Ricardo’s birth. She had “tricked her husband”,⁴ who had always maintained that “he did not want to share his love for Ricardo with another child”. Tatiana, always pragmatic, explained that Marcelo, since he had had no siblings, “does not understand that love can be multiplied by the number of children.” Their second child, at that time aged 5, was described as extremely intelligent and a truly successful student. They told me that the younger brother was aware of his older brother’s difficulties, and he often assumed a protective role with Ricardo – even though they would fight with one another “like two normal brothers”. Tatiana and Marcelo are of a mind in so far as they agree that because they are quite demanding in academic matters; it was very hard to swallow their older child’s learning problems: “They are a constant frustration”.

Even though he was a beautiful child, Ricardo required tremendous effort on Tatiana’s part. It seems that this baby upset her to a point that may have exceeded her capacity for reverie. Ricardo nursed for his first seven months. At that point Tatiana perceived that “something had changed.” He

⁴That is, unbeknownst to her husband, she stopped taking her birth control pills.

seemed enraged, he would bite her nipple, he screamed. She said: "I think Ricardo was trying to tell me with his eyes 'WHAT YOU'RE GIVING ME IS NOT WHAT I WANT'." Whatever Tatiana's perceptive hypothesis might mean, both for her and for her son, we cannot be sure of. What we know for sure is that something had not been integrated in their relationship. From the Bionian model of container/contained, we know that if the mother's reverie, by using the alpha function, can process whatever anxiety the baby projects, it is likely that good conditions can be created for the baby's mental life, which will develop based on these primitive relationships (Bion, 1962, p. 111). This did not happen in Ricardo's case.

When I say that 'something had not been integrated' in this dyad's relationship, I hypothesized that the possibility that Ricardo's needs far exceeded the mother's capacity as a container. With that information Tatiana clearly stated that her mind emptied out as far as understanding her son was concerned. She understood that this baby needed something more than the formula and the baby bottles the pediatrician had recommended. Meanwhile, what Ricardo got was exactly that: something very concrete and quite likely very different from what he really needed. To take Tatiana's side here, I think that she, in fact, never believed that Ricardo's agitation could come from hunger. But, on the other hand, she went on attempting to solve matters in that concrete manner. It did not occur to her to contemplate the notion that Ricardo's needs were not material.

This is how their life proceeded: Marcelo was excessively vigilant. For him there was nothing more important than Ricardo. He was even fired from his job because of too many absences. Paradoxically, as time went on, Marcelo rejected Ricardo. He kept him out of sight whenever he could and avoided going outdoors with him so as to avoid embarrassment. Only after some time later in the analysis, and Ricardo's improved behavior, did Marcelo's relationship with his son improve.

Something very important happened when Ricardo was 18 months old. According to his parents Ricardo had started to talk in a manner appropriate to his age and similar to how children of his age normally spoke. All of a sudden he stopped talking. His parents could not point to any external happening that might have brought this about. Once again, their pediatrician suggested some help from the outside – a day care center – since Ricardo spent all his time with adults and did not need to speak because they all understood what he needed.

And Ricardo had no trouble adapting to his new environment. He got along well with the other children. He watched them attentively so it seemed. Nonetheless he made none of the progress the others did, and he did not speak; he only emitted sounds. One day, however, Ricardo, who liked to collect the back packs and hang them up (one of his repetitive actions), called out clearly to a little girl who was not paying attention. He used her name and said: "Vanessa, gimme [your back pack]!" How was it that Ricardo had chosen not to speak? Perhaps because we know that 18 month-old children do not normally have sufficient linguistic development to produce complex utterances, Ricardo's parents noticed no discrepancy between him and the other children. But what could Ricardo not say? What

could his parents not hear? Ricardo had certainly not become mute. It may be that early on Ricardo's projective communications had not been supported with understanding and containment. His gestation and birth made his parents fearful and wary, and this fear and wariness were projected onto the baby they had expected. Ricardo was always *taken care of*, but he may not have been *understood*.

As I mentioned above, the relationship formed between Ricardo and his parents, owing to the myriad projections from both sides, never functioned on an integrated plane. It could be that Ricardo's hermetic muteness was merely a symptom of something worse – even within the framework of his cognitive handicap. It could be an infantile psychotic state independent of his organic makeup. I believe that there was no way to tell what came first, but for psychoanalytic understanding clarification in this area was not relevant. When the staff told Ricardo's parents that he had spoken (he was then about 2 and a half years old), they also recommended a speech therapist, which the parents took him to. To speak, however, does not necessarily mean to converse. Ricardo was monosyllabic, imperious, and did not modulate his voice, which was always strident and accompanied by inarticulate sounds. Even though he had started speaking, he did not develop relationships, but the other children did. And, because Ricardo's grades at school suggested huge cognitive deficits, when he was about 3 and a half years old, the school requested that he be given neurological examinations, CT scans, genetic tests, EEGs, therapy.⁵

During our interview Marcelo admitted that he would have preferred there to be “something physical” wrong with Ricardo. That could be dealt with. For Marcelo it was very hard to accept that his child was *emotionally disturbed*. Both parents said that even though the professionals confirmed Ricardo's cognitive deficit, none of their test results was conclusive. They attributed his retardation to some undetermined etiology. Marcelo was wary and also told me that their earlier experience with therapy had not been good. The therapist never spent more than 20 minutes with Ricardo, and after two months she told them he would “never get better precisely because he would not respond to her formal queries”. When this interview took place, Ricardo had been suddenly placed in a literacy class in an open public school. He was 9 years and 10 months old and had not learned to read and write. We now turn to my first contact with the patient himself.

My first meeting with Ricardo

Ricardo's mother brought him to my office. In our interview her husband had told me that if he were to come, Ricardo would get even more upset. By saying this Marcelo clearly demonstrated the amalgamated way he communicated with his son, since as the boy's father he would be very anxious.

Ricardo is an attractive, but overweight, boy, rosy, with straight blond hair. He appears well taken care of and well fed. Along his hairline and his

⁵After two years of analysis, more attempts at finding a reason for Ricardo's retardation were carried out and, notwithstanding the *new technologies*, as Marcelo put it, they learned nothing conclusive.

nostrils he has pronounced eczema, which, according to his mother, comes out whenever he is anxious. I introduced myself and told him my name. "I know," he answered. He came into my consulting room appearing to devour everything in there with his eyes, hands and his entire body. It was not for no reason that he answered "I know" when I told him my name. He was so intense and overwhelming when he met me that he gave me no time to ask him whether he wanted his mother to come along.

He left his mother outside and locked the two of us in my consulting room. Once we were inside, he asked me: "What's up with Tatiana?" (He refers to his mother by her given name.)

I believe that by locking us up like that Ricardo communicated how he would relate to me – we would be locked up together. A more benign hypothesis is that this action could for him be an omnipotent way of keeping us in a separate world and free from his persecutory objects.

I answered his question saying that his mother was in the waiting room, and he could ask her in if he wanted. Of course Ricardo must have known that his mother was in the waiting room. Nevertheless, I answered his question so as to confirm that I had heard it and that I understood what he had asked me. If he does not actually see his mother, he could feel threatened that not only his mother but also everyone else might just disappear. This is a primitive persecutory mental function, and my objective and clear response in that moment of our very first encounter played a containing role. Ricardo shook his head, but it was not clear whether his gesture was affirmative or negative.

Ricardo's question shows that the means he employs, such as shutting us away, are not particularly helpful in keeping him safe. In my countertransference I felt dismayed, as if I were tired and desperate. I felt sorry for this boy – a prisoner inside himself, who for several years had been trying to communicate as best he could so his emotional needs could be better understood.

He then turned to a box on the table and asked: "What's that, auntie?" I answered that it was a box that I had put there for him to play with. And since he had said that he already knew my name, he could call me by my name, Maria Inês. He repeated my name: "Maria Inês." This was the first and last time he called me "auntie."⁶ And throughout his treatment, Ricardo frequently used my name. My authorizing him to call me by my name made him happy and conferred some autonomy on him. We were two different people at the same time close to one another, but with each of us in our place.

He anxiously opened the box and dumped everything on the floor without paying particular attention to one thing or another, but then he asked: "What's this?" He was referring to a folder containing pieces of paper. I told him it was paper to draw on. He repeated: "Paper to draw on, I know that". I answered telling him that even though he knows that they are pieces of paper, he needs me to tell him what they are so that the paper

⁶It was common practice at that time to call teachers and adults in general 'aunties' and 'uncles'. It pasteurized relationships without defining adults' different roles.

becomes real paper that he can use. He said: “Yah, yah! Let’s draw.” And he handed me a pen. I said that he wants me to draw to be sure that he too can draw. So then I gave him a pen and I asked him to draw his family. He drew a straight line on the paper and pointed to it. “Who’s that?” I asked. He answered: “Mom.” Another stroke and he said: “Brother”. I asked him: “What about your dad?” He answered: “He’s here” and made a circular gesture with both hands to indicate that his father was there with us. He took another piece of paper and said: “Me! Look!” And he made a picture in which he drew himself in bits and pieces (see Figure 1). Seeing himself as broken up in pieces sent him into a panic. He got anxious and asked me to do the picture over, with my hand steadying his. All of a sudden, without letting me say a word, he got up and said he was going to show his mother those pictures.

He moved so quickly that I got the feeling that he could pass right through the walls or through closed doors. But he left the drawing of himself in the consulting room. He came back in and said: “I want to tie it up.” He grabbed a spool of string off the floor and made a wad of the paper on which he had drawn his mother and brother and asked me to help him tie the string and cut it. Then he quickly jumped up and said: “I want water.” He took off toward the kitchen, which he had already identified without my pointing it out. I followed him and managed to open the refrigerator before he could, and I gave him a glass of water. He took a little sip and poured the rest on the floor and headed toward the bathroom, which I had also not shown him. He told me he was going wee-wee. I told him that he needed to show me what it meant to go wee-wee by pouring water on the floor. Then I told him I would be waiting for him in my consulting room.

He came back with the empty glass in his hands. He shut the door, put the glass on the shelf and avidly began to open doors and drawers as if he were looking for something he could not find, and I told him so. He got upset and groaned: “Uh, oh!” Then he shouted: “What’s up with my mother? Tatiana!” I told him that he must be very afraid that his mother

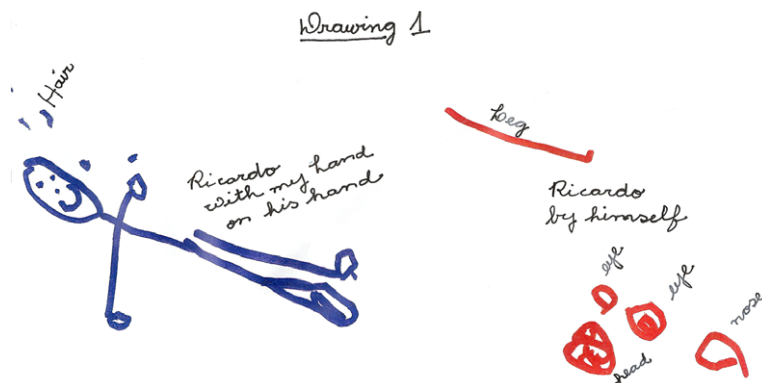


Figure 1. To the left: Ricardo by himself. In red: leg, eye, eye, nose, head. To the right: Ricardo, drawing with my hand on his hand. Points to the left: hair.

left since she is not tied up like his drawing was. Ricardo then headed toward my desk, where he found a little tin containing mints. He turned to me and ordered: "Open it!" And before I could, he got it open and stuck several mints in his mouth. He spat a few onto the floor and chewed the rest. Then he stuck his hand in his pocket and took out a hard candy that he unwrapped, throwing the paper on the floor. He stuck it in my mouth and said: "Swallow!" I told him that by eating my mints he was swallowing me so that I would be inside him. And by giving me one of his candies he wanted me to swallow him so that he would be inside me.⁷ He went back to the box and grabbed a pencil sharpener and put it in his pocket. I told him that, by putting the pencil sharpener in his pocket, he was trying to take me with him in a way that he could hold onto and feel. He did this because the mints had disappeared, and I would disappear as well. Looking at me, he nodded his head. I told him it was time to quit and invited him to help me put things back in the box. He quickly acceded, and I told him we would see one another again tomorrow. He did not wait for me to open the door. He shouted to his mother: "Tatiana, let's go! I'm coming back later."

My second meeting with Ricardo

What came out very clearly in our first session was Ricardo's inability to separate from his objects. He would try to control them, swallow them, mash them up together. This was even clearer in the second meeting, which is described below.

Ricardo came with his father and his paternal grandmother. As soon as I opened the door Marcelo told me: "I came with him so that you could see how he changes. He won't stay still, you'll see. Ah! This is my mother." And in fact Ricardo refused to come in to the consulting room. He shouted: "Marcelo! Marcelo! Here! Come here now! Come!"

The grandmother sat down in an armchair in the waiting room, where all this was taking place. She grabbed a magazine and appeared not to notice what was going on around her. Marcelo was quite perturbed. He ran his hand through his hair and said: "Ciao! I'm going out to take some air, to have a coffee. I'll be back to get Ricardo." Ricardo looked at his father, who was going out the door. He turned to me in expectation, perhaps hoping for some reaction from me. All I did was ask him to come into the consulting room. Once inside Ricardo asked: "What's up with Marcelo? Call him!" I replied that he wants me to make his father appear, and I told Ricardo where he was. Ricardo asked: "What's up with the box?" I replied that, even though he knew where the box was, he wanted me to tell him because when he knew that I knew, he could believe he would find it. He

⁷I have described Ricardo's relationship with eating (Carneiro, 2008). He was scarcely interested in formal eating, even though he ate well. However his pockets were always full of hard candy, sweets, lollipops, and chocolates, as was his mother's purse. At home, according to his mother, his candies had to be in different places, if they were not, Ricardo would get terribly anxious. His atypical eating functioned to keep him constantly glued to objects, but its result was exactly the opposite: he, in fact, had no relationships of quality.

smiled in agreement and said: "I'll get it!" And he began to slam the cupboard doors talking loudly and anxiously: "Oh, this is shit, shit, all I do is make shit."

At that point I could see how Ricardo identifies with his father, who, during our interview, had told me that he is patient with his son – up to a point. Then he gets upset and ends up cursing, shouting, and even whacking Ricardo. By hitting and cursing, Ricardo, from what could be seen, had found a way of acting exactly like his father in our session. He also seemed to expect me to act like that and to reprimand him for, quite likely, what at home was considered to be his failings. I told Ricardo that he believed that he had made his father leave, and he expected me to get mad and hit him. He stared while holding onto the spool of string he had taken out of the box. He gave me the end of the string and opened the door and headed out with the spool in his hands. He ordered me to stay in the consulting room, and from the waiting room he shouted: "Now pull it!" I pulled and he came back in. He smiled and said: "It's your turn now!" I went out and he pulled me back: "Come back, come back, Maria Inês," he repeated anxiously. And when he saw me he shouted: "Ah! You're here? Did you get it, did you?" I told him that he was testing whether people come and go. Since he believed he could make people disappear, he wanted to see if he could make them come back. He shouted anxiously: "What's up with Marcelo? I wanna go! Marcelo, Marcelo!" I told him that he still believed he had made his father go away, and even though he had seen me go and come back, and that he, Ricardo, could go and come back, he was not sure his father would come back.

Ricardo, without saying a word, headed toward the box and took out a roll of scotch tape. He pulled the tape as if it were a string and stuck it to himself. Upset and grunting, he pulled it off and stuck it to my wrists then pulled me toward his grandmother in the waiting room. He threw himself on her and wrapped the tape around her head. She was totally distraught. We were tied up, I by my wrists and she by her head. I told Ricardo that he wanted to tie us up so that neither of us could get away. I told him that he was going to have to untie me so he and I could go back to the consulting room since our time was almost up and we needed to straighten things. He immediately acceded. He checked to see if he still had the pencil sharpener in his pocket. I once more told him that he wanted to make sure that I would go home with him, inside his pocket, in the form of the pencil sharpener. When I opened the door to the waiting room, his grandmother, who had been silent up to then, said: "This kid gets me so upset! But when I heard you speak to him, it seemed to make sense." Ricardo looked at the door to the waiting room, which was still closed. He shouted: "Marcelo is at the door!" To my surprise, from outside the door his father answered: "Hello!" I opened the door and, as I was saying goodbye, Ricardo lunged toward my neck and pulled me to him and smashed his lips on my cheek. His father explained: "That's a kiss." Ricardo responded to my saying goodbye with a "Ciao" and asking me: "I'm gonna come back, aren't I, Maria Inês?" I told him he would.

What is going on here?

We psychoanalysts have to offer our treatment to people who seek us out. Our objective is psychic change through our understanding transferences, phantasies, conflicts, and projective identifications. That is, psychoanalysis deals with the inner world and its relationship to reality. After my early contact with Ricardo and his parents, I believed that I could offer him a psychoanalytic treatment within this framework.

So what was going on? Was this a case of a retarded child without a definite diagnosis? Was this some syndrome possibly of genetic origin, but as yet undescribed medically?

Could it be Asperger's? This hypothesis also had occurred to me. Even though it is common knowledge that some Asperger's patients have no cognitive deficit, Attwood (1998) has suggested otherwise. According to him, Asperger's patients suffer a fundamental impediment in what is known as *mind read*, and this comes out in their severe inability to profit from formal learning. Uta Frith *et al.*, whom Attwood cites, have confirmed this.

Still more possibilities: could Ricardo's problems come from *some form of autism*? Álvarez (1992) maintains that children with behavioral problems similar to Ricardo's, who have been this way from early childhood or during the greater part of their life, for all intents and purposes have no concepts of narrative, space, or even time. If this were the case with Ricardo, a Kleinian understanding would be helpful – i.e. in the sense that the dynamic processes such as splitting, identification, and introjection could be used as defenses. These defenses would attempt to construct protection but would fail. And their failure would feed one's destructivity and compromise one's relationship with reality. Tustin (1990), who has had much to contribute to our understanding of autism, recognizes that there are organic hypotheses summed up in terms of a *fragile chromosome*. In addition Tustin does not think that one should treat children who are organically afflicted differently from how one treats patients whose autism is psychogenic. In both cases there must have been an early massive interruption in these patients' cognitive and affective development. Could this apply to Ricardo?

Some minor lesion in the brain was the hypothesis that seemed to me to be the most viable based on the depression in his forehead. Could it really be necessary to have a formal diagnosis for a 9 year-old child? A conclusive diagnosis did not seem at all necessary. I did not think twice about such a possibility. Even if some formal conclusion were advanced, it would have no or very little influence on Ricardo's actual 'retardation' [*sic*].

Owing to my professional obligations I considered all these possibilities as corollary information. Ricardo's situation had been studied for several years. We cannot tell whether or not the studies were done correctly. According to Ricardo's parents, no conclusions had been made in any of these areas. Thus I had to face the fact that Ricardo actually suffered from a cognitive and relational deficit which caused him to be seen as mentally retarded. Even though he did not present the syndrome's classical traits, nor was he unable to handle objects aptly, it was hard for him to let them

go, and he was hardly graceful in how he handled them. He always tried to hold onto all of them.

In addition to what we have already seen, Ricardo also found it hard to get dressed and to tie his shoes. It may have been that his state of affairs stemmed from and was perpetuated by others' denying him much autonomy. Even though I considered factors that could contribute to Ricardo's problems, I hope I have made it clear that I was not particularly concerned with their organic nature. After my initial contact with Ricardo and his family, I did not doubt that his relationship with the world, the way in which he sees and feels both people and things are severely compromised.

As I see it, Ricardo presented himself in a psychotic state independent of whatever organic handicap he may have had. As a psychoanalyst I decided to view him as a very sick child who for that very reason needed treatment. According to Rosenfeld (1968), when dealing with a psychotic state, the analyst must understand the transference phenomena as manifestations of that state. These manifestations may include practical problems in handling such patients in the consulting room since these patients enact gestures and actions that are much more compromised than those of patients with obvious neuroses. On top of that, sometimes these patients are unable to have an ordinary conversation, which obliges us to interpret as if we too were psychotic. Rosenfeld affirms that transference nearness will promote change in these patients – and I agree one hundred percent. I concluded that Ricardo would profit from an analysis carried out in this fashion, and after our initial contact I told his parents my outlook and how I intended to treat him. His four-day-a-week analysis went on uninterrupted for five years, until the family moved to another state because his father had been transferred.

The attempt to communicate accurately our experience with patients is a task that adds to the difficulties of any writing project. What material we choose to write about from all our especially intense and emotive sessions can almost seem like a self-betrayal! And there is a specific difficulty in describing our clinical work: our accounts are written for analysts who are adults. It would sound too infantile to repeat the loose and nimble language that we use with our little patients while we are playing a game. In our written work we may include expressions and understandings that are different from the actual emotional tone in our sessions. But if the reader understands, we have achieved our goal.

What follows are three segments that condense significant steps in Ricardo's analysis.

The marimba

For me a marimba was a musical instrument, but for Ricardo the marimba was his own creation – a yellow plastic toy car tied to a spool of string. Later I found out that a 'marimba' is what kite fliers call a little weight they put on their string so as to capture other kites in the air. For several months Ricardo's marimba was his only toy, and it needed to be kept in his box exactly as he had left it at the end of a session. For Ricardo the marimba was everything: a kite, a means of controlling objects, a weapon, a

repair tool, psychic refuge depending on the type of projective identification he used to communicate with me. We had many marimba sessions. Among them all I have chosen two that seem the most typical.

After more or less a month of sessions, Ricardo sat down on the “sofa” (which is what he called my couch). He looked at me and asked: “That big classmate?” He raised his hand and made an undefined gesture, which he often did when he seemed to have forgotten what he was going to say, which is compatible with his mental state. But he went on: “Does he sit here... on the sofa?” It is then that I understood that he was referring to an adult patient whom he had seen leaving my consulting room the previous day. I answered saying that he wanted to know what I do in the consulting room with his “big classmate”. He slapped his hand on the pillow and shouted: “Here!” I said that he might be upset because he thought I might lie down on the “sofa” with his “big classmate”. Then he asked me: “Do you play marimba with my classmate?” I told him I did not, that we talked to each other, but that he, Ricardo, needed to know if I knew what to do in my consulting room. He grabbed my glasses and gave them back saying: “Otherwise, you can’t see.”

I answered that he really needed to know that I could see very well so as to know exactly what to do in my consulting room, since he thought that I would lie down with him on the “sofa”. He yanked my glasses out of my hand and put them on and said: “I’m you, look!” I told him that he needs to be me so that he too can know what to do in the consulting room. He flew into a rage and stamped his feet then grabbed a glass paperweight and threatened to throw it at me asking: “Will you bleed?” I told him that he got scared by what I had said because he believes that he hurts me and makes me bleed when he feels the things I showed him. Then he asked: “Am I bleeding?” I told him that he thinks that if I’m not hurt, he’s the one who’s hurt.

Right after that he took off toward his box and grabbed his marimba. He said: “It’s a kite and I’m going to cut you with the *cerol*.”⁸ He threw the toy car on top of the shelf that I kept my plants on, which was where he had chosen to play kite marimba. The spool of string he left on the ground. He made gestures of kite-flying, pulling the string, and demonstrated a visible pleasure shouting: “Cut it! Cut it! You stupid string! Cut it, *cerol*! Now it’s your turn, Maria Inês!” He handed me the string. Before throwing the car up on the shelf, I told him that he felt great pleasure in cutting the kite string, and he wanted to see if I would feel the same way. Ricardo shouted and grabbed the car out of my hands: “No! Don’t cut it!” Then I told him that he had gotten very frightened thinking that he and I would end up being cut into pieces like the kites cut by *cerol*.

He grabbed my glasses once more and put them on. Then he attacked me and forced me away. I told him that he can get rid of that Maria Inês cut up into pieces and end up with the Maria Inês that sees things better when he puts on my glasses.

⁸This is a mixture of glue and shards of glass that competitive kite-fliers put on kite string so as to cut other kite fliers’ strings and kites.

Then, surprisingly, he sat down on the sofa, took off the glasses and looked at me very curiously. He said: "You're right there, look, you're just the same." I answered that when he feels I understand him he is less afraid and can see all of me.

In this session the marimba was used as a weapon, and, consequently, the threat of the object's counter-attack greatly increased. This facet of Ricardo's mental processes is responsible for much of his panic, which made him feel locked up in an impoverished world. Here one clearly sees the difference between mental retardation and compromised emotion. Ricardo was definitely not mentally retarded. Quite to the contrary, he interacted with me, but in a way that is, indeed, very compromised.

After eleven months of analysis, Ricardo missed a week of sessions because of a bad case of chicken pox. When I opened the door the day he returned, Ricardo drew back when he saw me. Anxiously, he looked for something in his mother's purse and found some hard candy. He could not get them open and his mother tried to help him without success. Ricardo could not stand being without the candy. Once inside the consulting room he said: "I was sick with chicken pox, look!"

He pulled up his shirt and showed me his belly and back, which were full of scabs. I told him he wanted to show me the chicken pox so that I could know how hurt he feels. He asked me: "Do you have chicken pox?" I told him that he thinks he could end up hurting me with chicken pox. He looked at me and told me he would get some paper and write his name for me.⁹ He did ask me to help him. But he began to write alone, with a colored pen, unsuccessfully. He picked up a different colored pen and still could not write his name.

Exasperated, he sighed and said: "Help me!" I told him that he tried to write without my help because he was afraid that I was so battered and bruised that I could no longer help him. He answered: "Can you? Please write, Maria Inês, write 'Ricardo'." I did and he smiled. I told him he smiled because he felt that I was not so battered and helpless, and for that reason he can believe he does not hurt me. He then asked me to write his entire name, which I did. And then he asked me to write his father's, his mother's, and my entire names. He had me write "dear" in front of all the names. After this I showed him that he wanted me to help him keep all the people he liked unhurt and whole. He loved them all and thus he could feel loved and whole.

He looked at me with interest in what I had had to say and nodded affirmatively. He then announced that he was going to get the marimba, but then he stopped in the middle of the consulting room and said: "No, you can draw a kite, the marimba, a kid with the kite. I'll get the paper." He looked at what I drew and said: "What happens if the kite stays on the string? Will the kid die?" I told him that he was afraid that the kite in my drawing wouldn't protect us, not me and not him. We would be in danger. Paying special attention, he looked at me and asked me to draw another one

⁹Ricardo had come into treatment unable to write. His signature at that time was a circle. As he became more integrated, he finally managed, precariously, to write his name.

just like the first, which I did. He looked at the drawing and said: "That kid isn't gonna die, you're not gonna die." I told Ricardo that now he believed that the kid could play with the kite with no fear of dying because I was not afraid that the other kite would kill us. He said: "I think this drawing is pretty. Can I take it home with me?" I told him that he wants to take home a pretty kite, a handsome boy, and Maria Inês, who drew them. They would all be whole and would have no wounds. In this session we can clearly see Ricardo's attempts to repair his objects. Through his highly charged associations with the kite, the transference shows through without a doubt, and the analyst appears as the reliable link between Ricardo and his objects.

Mico¹⁰

Mico is a card game containing pairs of animals. It was in Ricardo's box from the beginning of his analysis. However for a long time he made no use of it. The marimba was all he was interested in for many months. It was extremely important in widening his contact with his objects. Based on our conversations about the marimba, Ricardo gradually began to take an interest in other objects. The interpretations concerning the marimba helped Ricardo to achieve greater integration. The toys became something more than merely objects of his projections.

It is true that when more integrated children play with toys they also project. But in Ricardo's case his concrete thinking made him a captive of his objects. This way of thinking restricted him to repetitive play and impoverished the world around him. The game of Mico clearly appears to be a way for Ricardo to unite couples and make them more in harmony with his inner world – the first of which would be his parents. His Oedipal scenery included his parents' expecting a handicapped child, besides a childish, anxious and obese father and a detached mother.

Pally (1997) reminds us that one's environment influences one's brain development at all developmental stages. Marcelo's and Tatiana's expectations concerning Ricardo's birth went on to one extent or another after his birth. On the one hand, his pragmatic mother could not transform her perceptions of Ricardo's needs into *emotional nourishment*. On the other hand, Marcelo was infantilized, overweight, and anxious. This disharmonious scenario could be clearly seen when Ricardo got terribly upset when he mismatched the couples. And in the countertransference I could perceive his despair.

In the transference he and I became an articulate and creative pair. Ricardo started to alternate the marimba with playing Mico, especially in anxiety-producing situations. But in the beginning the game was beyond him. He had great difficulty handling the cards. The pictures upset him. He wanted to put them together quickly, and he would often pair up a toad with a turtle, or a lion with a bear, and this made him even more anxious. He would hide the monkey so that neither of us would end up without a pair.

¹⁰Translator's note: Literally, 'the capuchin monkey'. This game appears to be a version of Animal Rummy.

Little by little he began to learn how to play the game. He could deal the cards and hold them in his hand properly. Gradually he could tolerate having the monkey in his hand since the monkey no longer meant being alone, which indicated an introjected couple with better functioning.

When I came back from my vacation, which was our first long separation, Ricardo broke into a broad smile and hugged and hung onto me. Tatianna exclaimed: "My heavens! He was right when he told me he missed you. And his longing for you was very weighty!" And we both laughed because she had alluded to Ricardo's obesity.

Ricardo did not let go of me, and this went on for a little while even inside the consulting room. Finally, he sat down on the 'sofa' and said: "Let's play Mico and pair them up." I told him that he wanted us to become a pair once more, because during our break we were separated and he felt like a lonely little monkey, and he felt I was a lonely monkey too. He saw my tin of mints that is always on the table and took one out and swallowed it, which he had not done for some time. I showed him that he once more needed to believe that if he swallowed me, I would be inside him, and we would not be separated again. Once more he hugged me and said: "You are right here, Maria Inês."

I told him that he had now shown me that he can accept that I am separate from him. He looked at me with great affect and calmly declared: "Hey there, Maria Inês! How's things? You're back already?" I told him that now he could see me and feel that I was his partner there in the consulting room. We began to play Mico.

He dealt the cards correctly, found the pairs in his cards and asked me if I had any pairs. We traded pairs, and in the end he was left with the monkey. He said: "Let's play again!" and dealt the cards. This time I ended up with the monkey. He stared at me expecting something, and I told him that he and I are a pair of monkeys.

He said he wanted to write and got the folder. "I'm gonna do my writing sitting on your lap," he told me as he threw himself onto my lap. I told him that he needed to write from my lap so as to keep me close to him because only close by me could he be certain that he would know how to write his own name. He got up and said: "Will you help me?" With ease he began to write. But then he stopped and looked sideways at me and declared: "I don't know how..." I told him that even though he knows how to write, he wants me to show him so as to be sure that I can still help.

We wrote his name a few times and he said: "Look at that! Look at that! Look how pretty my name is." And I told him that he had once more managed to feel that we are a pair. The game of Mico clearly demonstrated repairing movements and was instrumental in opening Ricardo's box once and for all. He went on to use almost everything in it.

To the extent possible, given Ricardo's difficulties, he could cut, pour out glue, dirty his hands, wash them, and go back to playing... His retardation became less and less weighty and became part of his reality without overpowering it. It was very evident that Ricardo's rationality, which in the past was so lacking, was expanding based on the transference.

Ricardo's first and only dream

In most cases a psychotic state implies that a greater number of primitive mechanisms are functioning without totally abolishing other, more integrated mechanisms. This was how I saw Ricardo's mental state when I accepted him as a patient. In the following session a breach clearly appears and shows aspects of Ricardo's greater integration.

Ricardo had missed his Monday session, and on Tuesday when I opened the door, he was all smiles and said to his mother: "See? There she is, see for yourself!" I told him that even though he had not come the day before, he trusted both me and himself to meet today. His mother said: "Ah! That's what he told me yesterday. He said: 'It's all right, Mom. You can't take me, but she'll be there tomorrow'." Right after that Ricardo made a gesture with his hand. He said to his mother: "Let me pay, give me the check." His mother complied, and Ricardo happily handed me the check.

Ricardo was carrying a replica of the national football team's jersey number 9, which he normally brings to our sessions. He quite often takes off his own t-shirt and puts on number 9. Jersey number 9 for him means being smart and capable.

One curious datum, which surprised Ricardo's parents: Ricardo knew the name of all the goalkeepers on Brazil's football teams, without anyone's teaching him. And inversely proportional to the defending goalkeeper's skill is that of the striker who scores a goal. It may be that Ricardo's defenses were giving way to his new abilities. Their purpose of maintaining the inertial state had brought him scant benefits. On that day he told me that he was not going to put the shirt on, and he left it on the shelf. I told him that when he feels full of good things, such as when he got together with me again, he does not need jersey number 9 to feel he is smart.

Then he glanced at the check that I had placed under a paperweight and said: "Tell me, Maria Inês: does my mother have enough money to go back home? Am I gonna stay here? What about the money?" I told him that he had felt that I was very powerful and important when he missed me on Monday. This was because he thought I had stolen all the good things he had, and now he and his mother would end up with nothing. He eyed me with interest and asked: "Is it yours? I paid, didn't I, Maria Inês?" I told him he had paid for my work, which he thinks is good and worthwhile. But he was still afraid I would want everything he had and that I would leave him with nothing. Ricardo opened the cupboard and took out the Mico game, cards in hand. He sat down on the sofa still holding onto the cards. He leaned back on the pillows and, timidly hiding his face he said: "Carral-ist, . . . canalist, that's what you are, Maria Inês." I told him that's right, I am a psychoanalyst and that now he could recognize it.

He covered eyes with his hands and said loudly and clearly: "I dreamed that *I was my brother*." I told him that with this dream he was telling me how much he would like to be his brother, whom he considered to be very smart. But when he showed me he could dream and tell me about it, he was also very smart. Ricardo agreed, but then he answered back: "I don't like the monkey. Look at him. He's ugly, stupid, and he doesn't have a

mother.” I answered saying that, when he feels like the monkey, he also feels that his mother is only his brother’s mother. And he gets scared that I might not want to be only *his* psychoanalyst. He then asked: “Do you want to play Mico with me, Maria Inês?” I pointed out that when we play together and form our couples, he does not feel dumb, all alone and motherless. He dealt the cards and we played. Ricardo made no mistake in pairing up the animals. He played attentively and with more involvement than usual. He smiled at the end of the game when he ended up with the monkey. He eyed the card and said to me: “This guy’s the stupid monkey. I’m Ricardo, right, Maria Inês?”

What I have just described is not a typical session. More evolved content emerged, which I believe came from his stronger relationship with me. And our relationship also contributed to his parental objects’ becoming more harmonious within Ricardo. In his simple telling of this dream, the first and only in the entire analysis, Ricardo brought forth all his hopes and possibilities: He wanted to be different, to be smart, to be able to count on his mother’s being whole and caring, to recognize his limitations, and to express his desire for all that. In the way he told me his dream, one could see his intrinsic sorrow. I supposed that Ricardo was struggling with mourning his handicaps, of which his brother had none. Who knows whether he might, some day, manage to understand his competitiveness and envy? Earlier in the session he demonstrated how he projected his greed into me when he paid me and believed that I would be taking all his mother’s money. He projected his greed into the food that he would stuff himself with indiscriminately. Even though his over-eating had been his attempt to sort out his anxiety, it wound up creating a lack of mental appetite, which he showed to others, and which they confused with mere mental retardation. No one had gone so far as to consider Ricardo’s inner world. If they only thought of him as retarded, it is possible that Ricardo would never have gotten beyond being that monkey: with no mate, ugly, stupid, and motherless.

A possible continuity

From its very beginning psychoanalysis has dealt with the dynamic mind. Constituted in clinical practice, analysis is reaffirmed in every psychoanalyst’s consulting room. With transference being the dynamic mind’s chief expression, any search for predetermined findings should not be what guides our work. When the analytic process is introjected, it tends to expand – that is the nature of psychoanalysis. Of course I am not referring to the false power of omnipotence, rather to the acquisition of greater internal resources.

Meltzer (1967) emphasizes that scientific curiosity and devotion to our method reinforce one another and achieve their full potential. In the analyst curiosity and devotion produce a force and determination that transcend each factor alone. I believe all analysts need that determination. An analysis like Ricardo’s also contains its dose of derring-do.

This was not an easy analysis since it required the analyst to offer an internal availability much greater than normal. I believe that this involvement is what Segal refers to, which complements what Meltzer postulates

when he speaks of devotion to our method. A child like Ricardo constantly challenges us. Even though I do not consider psychoanalysis a remedy for all problems, I believed that it would be a feasible project for one obvious reason: I have no doubt about psychoanalysis's efficacy – if it is done right.

Ricardo was stuck in the pavement, and the stigma of retardation gave him some benefits: everything was done for him, he did not need to put any effort into being helped. Owing to this, his life was impoverished and uncreative. For five years he was treated as one treats anyone who chooses to be psychoanalyzed. That made all the difference because the reality of his intellectual deficit did not stop him from growing toward achievable psychic changes.

I once came face-to-face with the crest of a well-known university whose motto appeared in Latin: *Alis grave nil*, which one can translate as 'For those with wings, nothing is heavy'. This seems to me to be the essence of psychoanalysis. Since our task is never conclusive because analyzing someone does not entail so much a full stop as it does a series of punctuation marks, it behooves us to believe in our patients' ability to introject the process so as to make the burden of reality less weighty.

When Ricardo left his analysis and moved with his family to a different state, he displayed a surprisingly integrated upward climb. When he first came into treatment his notion of self was practically non-existent, as the fragmented picture he drew of himself clearly demonstrated (Figure 1). His ability to separate subject and object was terrifying, his absorption with persons and things was desperate and required so much control that it almost always failed. Ricardo's drawing of me and him, with his name's initial R joined to my head (see Figure 2), is a faithful portrayal of that state.

Upon leaving analysis, Ricardo's progress can be summed up as follows:

- 1 *Separation of subject and object.* Ricardo's distinction between 'me' and 'not-me' was quite precarious, as was his notion of self (Figure 1). He fused with people and things and tried as hard as he could to control matters – and almost always failed. The marimba and the use he made of it were his most explicit attempt at control. Still, the marimba allowed me to make interpretations that contributed to his ability to differentiate; they enabled him to both feel and tolerate that people and things could exist outside his control. Ricardo gradually acquired notions of space, time and distance. He could formulate complex sentences such as "I'm going to leave here and get my brother at school with my mother; Bruno's mother is going to pick him up at school and after I change¹¹ my shirt, I'm gonna play football with both of them." Also, pointing to the pens I had put in a new pen holder he said: "It's pretty, it's new, it's yours."
- 2 *Normal social behavior.* This acquisition was also important for his parents. Even though they accepted Ricardo's limitations functionally and affectively, they avoided getting together with people outside their home since their son would become "inconvenient" [*sic*]. What they meant by

¹¹Translator's note: Ricardo correctly managed the future subjunctive in this sentence. No small feat!



Figure 2. Maria Inês “psychoanalyst”

this was that they needed to restrain him constantly so that he would not “latch onto” [*sic*] people and things and become the “party pooper” [*sic*]. Since Ricardo could not communicate clearly, his anguished grunts turned any social situation into an endless torment and created a tense and vicious circle. This situation changed so much that Tatiana, tickled pink, told me that her neighbors and relatives would approach her to let her know that her son had become very different.

- 3 *Organization in verbal expression.* As a direct consequence of his improved mental organization, Ricardo’s vocabulary increased, and this allowed him to express himself more clearly and intricately. His inarticulate sounds would come back when he was upset, but an important change had come about: Ricardo managed to make a link between his grunts and being upset. One time in the consulting room, he got dismayed fumbling with the scissors and a spool of ribbons. After grunting, he said to me: “EEE! I’m clumsy again.”
- 4 *Physical change.* Once he saw himself as a more cohesive being, Ricardo also changed from being the enormous and greedy mouth he was in the beginning of his treatment. At that time it seemed he urgently needed to swallow the world so as to keep it inside him. In treatment he lost weight and no longer ate like a glutton. And he would accept limitations on his hard candies, sweets, cookies, whose wanton consumption had made him fat. Thus food began to assume its proper function rather than working to glue the world to him.
- 5 *Schoolwork.* Even though he continued going to an open school, Ricardo, in effect, never achieved to the extent his contemporaries did. However, when he first came to me he was considered to be uneducable, but his gradual internal reorganization allowed him to make some advancement, which surprised everyone. He could write his name. He could recognize

simple, two syllable words such as *cama* 'bed', *sapo* 'toad', *mico* 'monkey', *casa* 'home, house'. He would pick books up and examine the pictures and become interested in the stories. Whereas these are tiny steps, given his earlier state of affairs, these steps were significant.

- 6 *Acknowledgement of the analytic function.* The "sofa" [*sic*] intrigued Ricardo from the very beginning: "What do you do here? Why is there a pillow?" Whenever possible I interpreted his interest in the couch. Little by little Ricardo integrated the couch into his daily routine in the consulting room, and it became his favorite place for games and conversations. He drew a picture of me (see Figure 3) and asked me to caption it: "Maria Inês psychoanalyst."

At his last session, two days before they moved, he grabbed the paper folder and said: "It's hard." He was having a difficult time opening it. I told him that it is hard to leave and not come back tomorrow. He pushed me out of the consulting room and shut the door on me. From the waiting room I told him that he feels that I'm the one who no longer wants him to come. And that is why he shut me out. He opened the door and hugged me. This was a wordless moment of great emotion for both of us.

When Tatiana said good-bye, she cried openly as she thanked me for all those years of work, because "she now sees light and color where before there was only a void." Ricardo asked me if he could take the Mico game, the spool of string, and the marimba with him. To my surprise he took a tennis ball out of his pocket and gave it to me. I told him that he wanted to take something that would remind him of me and to leave something that would remind me of him.

Tatiana called me two months after they had left and said she was very happy with their new life. She feels more at ease, and she let me know that Ricardo is more independent, and he can play outside by himself. He can also take the city bus to his school. He was 15 years old at the time. She also told me that Ricardo kept the Mico and will not let his brother play

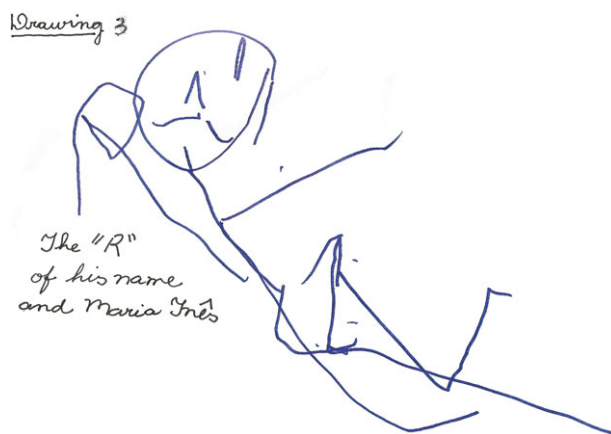


Figure 3. The "R" of Ricardo's name and Maria Inês. Maria Inês Neuenschwander Escosteguy Carneiro

with it. When Ricardo's brother made a fuss about this, Tatiana, sensibly, explained that the Mico was part of Ricardo's relationship with me and that if he were to insist on playing with it, he would be intruding on our relationship.

For several years, at least during Christmas time, when they returned to Rio to be with their family, they would call me up with news. The last time Tatiana called, some five years ago, she told me that Ricardo had taken the spool of string out of his cupboard, and that she, at the beginning, worried that "he might be turning into a little boy again." But Ricardo surprised her saying: "This is a different spool." She then brought up the marimba, and he told her it too "was different." Once more Tatiana's newly acquired sensitivity showed through. She told me she had understood that he wanted to tell her something, and she had an idea: she asked her son if he would like her to crochet a rug for him with that string. She would put it at the foot of his bed. And he agreed. When she gave him the rug Ricardo said: "Now I'll never have to stand on the cold floor again."

Quite likely Ricardo's simple words sum up the essence of what should be possible in an analytic treatment. Even though the cold floor will still be there, it is always possible to find new resources so as not to go barefoot.

Translations of summary

Licht und Farbe im Vakuum: Die Analyse eines Jungen mit geistiger Behinderung. Diese klinische Mitteilung stellt die im traditionellen Setting der vier Wochenstunden durchgeführte fünfjährige Analyse eines geistig unterentwickelten Jungen (Ricardo) vor. Die Autorin präsentiert Informationen, die sie von Ricardos Mutter erhielt und die bestätigen, dass sich der analytische Prozess in den Integrations- und Beziehungsfähigkeiten, die der Junge in seiner Analyse erwarb, *fortsetzte*. Die Autorin vermutete, dass es möglich sein würde, einen geistig behinderten Jungen zu analysieren, wenn sich die Analyse auf sein Gefühlsleben konzentrierte. Ricardo litt unter zahllosen Einschränkungen. Die Übertragung erwies sich als wichtiger Bündnispartner für die Autorin wie auch für den Jungen selbst.

Ricardo war das erste Kind seiner Eltern, die beide in den Dreißiger waren. Der Vater war ein sehr ängstlicher Mann, während die Mutter überhaupt keine Emotionen zeigte, sondern sich von der Situation ihres Sohnes eher zu distanzieren schien. Der Vater war ein Einzelkind, die Mutter hatte sechs Geschwister. Während der Schwangerschaft hatte der Vater eine alles beherrschende Phantasie: sie würden ein Kind mit Down-Syndrom bekommen. Im Alter von 18 Monaten hörte Ricardo plötzlich auf zu sprechen. Bis zu diesem Zeitpunkt hatte er altersgemäß kommunizieren können. Er besuchte eine Krabbelstube, und die Erzieher rieten den Eltern, sich professionelle Hilfe zu suchen. So geschah es. Ricardo wurde auf verschiedene Pathologien untersucht (neurologisch und genetisch). Laut Aussagen seiner Eltern gab es keine Befunde, die die Schwierigkeiten ihres Sohnes plausibel zu erklären vermochten. Nach fünf Jahren der Analyse musste die Familie aufgrund beruflicher Verpflichtungen des Vaters in einen anderen Bundesstaat ziehen. Ricardo war zu diesem Zeitpunkt 15 Jahre alt. Die Autorin erhielt anschließend viele Jahre lang zu Weihnachten, Ostern usw. Anrufe von seiner Mutter. In all diesen Gesprächen brachte die Mutter ihre Dankbarkeit dafür zum Ausdruck, *in den Augen ihres Sohnes Licht und Farbe sehen zu können*. Der Beitrag schildert ausführlich die Geschichte dieser staunen machenden Erfahrung.

Luz y color en un vacío. El análisis de un niño con necesidades especiales. Esta comunicación clínica presenta el tratamiento de cinco años de duración, con el *setting* tradicional de un análisis de cuatro veces por semana, de Ricardo, un niño que presentaba un evidente retraso mental. La autora aporta información, brindada por la madre de Ricardo, que confirma el *continuum* del proceso analítico más allá del análisis. Dicho *continuum* fue posible gracias a la capacidad de integrarse y relacionarse que el niño desarrolló durante ese proceso. Se especula que sería posible analizar a un niño con una discapacidad mental si el análisis se centrara en su vida afectiva. Las limitaciones de Ricardo eran incontables. La transferencia fue una aliada importante, tanto para la analista como para el niño.

Ricardo fue el primer hijo de una pareja de treinta y tantos años de edad. El padre era un hombre muy ansioso, mientras que la madre, por el contrario, no mostraba ninguna emoción, aunque sí un cierto distanciamiento respecto de la situación de su hijo. El padre era hijo único; la madre tenía seis hermanos. Una fantasía había dominado la mente del padre durante el embarazo de su esposa: la de un hijo con síndrome de Down. Al año y medio, Ricardo dejó de hablar repentinamente, si bien hasta ese momento había podido comunicarse de la misma manera que otros niños de su edad. En el jardín de infantes al que concurría, las maestras sugirieron que los padres consultaran un profesional, y ellos así lo hicieron. Además, se inició una investigación para descartar distintas patologías, tanto neurológicas como genéticas. Según los padres de Ricardo, ninguno de los resultados había brindado un diagnóstico concluyente respecto de las dificultades de su hijo.

Cuando Ricardo llevaba cinco años de análisis, su familia tuvo que mudarse a otro estado debido al trabajo del padre. El paciente tenía entonces 15 años. Durante mucho tiempo, la autora recibió llamados telefónicos de la madre de Ricardo para distintas fiestas, y en cada llamado la mujer le expresaba su gratitud por poder ver *luz y color en los ojos de su hijo*. Este texto es un relato detallado de esa increíble experiencia.

Lumière et couleur dans le vide: l'analyse d'un garçon aux besoins spécifiques. S'inscrivant dans le cadre classique d'une analyse à quatre séances par semaine, cet article clinique traite du déroulement sur cinq ans de l'analyse d'un garçon (Ricardo) présentant un retard mental manifeste. L'auteure complète sa description par des informations fournies par la mère de Ricardo, qui attestent d'un *continuum* du processus analytique à l'aune de l'intégration et des capacités relationnelles acquises par le garçon au cours de l'analyse. L'auteure était partie du postulat qu'il serait possible d'analyser ce garçon souffrant d'une déficience mentale à condition d'axer l'analyse sur sa vie émotionnelle. Ricardo présentait une kyrielle de handicaps. Le transfert fut un allié important aussi bien pour l'analyste que pour le garçon.

Ricardo était l'enfant aîné d'un couple de trentenaires. Le père était un homme très anxieux et la mère, au contraire, une femme qui n'exprimait pas d'émotions, mais qui manifestait un certain détachement par rapport à l'état de son fils. Le père était enfant unique, alors que la mère avait six frères et sœurs. Pendant la grossesse de sa femme, le père avait nourri le fantasme que leur enfant serait atteint du syndrome de Down. A l'âge d'un an et demi, Ricardo cessa brusquement de parler, alors qu'il s'était montré capable jusque là de communiquer comme tout autre enfant de son âge. Il fréquentait un jardin d'enfants et les enseignants avaient suggéré aux parents de consulter. Ce qu'ils firent. Ce fut le début d'une longue série d'examen médicaux (dans les domaines neurologiques et génétiques, par exemple) orientés vers la recherche d'une pathologie ou d'une autre. Selon les parents de Ricardo, aucun de ces examens n'avait été concluant quant à la nature des difficultés de leur fils.

Au bout de cinq ans, la famille de Ricardo dut déménager dans un autre pays en raison du travail du père. Ricardo avait quinze ans à l'époque. Dès lors, l'auteure reçut chaque année des appels téléphoniques de la mère de Ricardo, au moment de Noël, de Pâques, etc. En chacune de ces occasions, la mère exprimait leur gratitude de voir de *la lumière et de la couleur dans les yeux de leur fils*. Cet article raconte l'histoire détaillée de cette expérience extraordinaire.

Luce e colore nel vuoto: l'analisi di un bambino con problemi di apprendimento. Questa comunicazione clinica è il resoconto dell'analisi di un bambino (Ricardo), che presentava un quadro di evidente ritardo mentale. L'analisi si è svolta entro un quadro tradizionale di quattro sedute settimanali, per la durata di cinque anni. Al resoconto clinico l'autore aggiunge informazioni fornite dalla madre, che conferma il *continuum* del processo analitico nel conseguimento dell'integrazione e delle competenze relazionali apprese nel corso dell'analisi. L'autore è partito dall'ipotesi che fosse possibile analizzare un bambino con un ritardo mentale, mettendo al centro dell'analisi la sua vita emozionale. Ricardo aveva una miriade di limitazioni. Il transfert è stato un alleato importante sia per l'autore che per il bambino.

Ricardo era il primogenito di una coppia sulla trentina. Il padre era un uomo molto ansioso, al contrario della madre, piuttosto affettiva e distaccata dalla situazione del figlio. Il padre era figlio unico, la madre una di sette. Durante la gravidanza, la fantasia dominante nella mente del padre era quella di avere un figlio con la sindrome di Down. Quando aveva un anno e mezzo, Ricardo smise di parlare. Precedentemente era capace di comunicare come i suoi coetanei. Frequentava il nido e le maestre consigliarono ai genitori di cercare aiuto specialistico. I genitori così fecero, contestualmente all'avviare indagini per accertare la presenza di altre patologie (per esempio neurologiche e genetiche). Secondo i genitori di Ricardo, tutti i risultati si rivelarono inconclusivi.

Cinque anni dopo, il lavoro del padre ha necessitato il trasferimento della famiglia in un altro stato. All'epoca Ricardo aveva 15 anni. Successivamente, per molti anni, l'autore ha ricevuto telefonate dalla madre di Ricardo a Natale, Pasqua, ecc. Nel corso di queste telefonate, la madre si dichiarava grata perché ora poteva vedere *la luce e il colore negli occhi del figlio*. Questo manoscritto narra in dettaglio la storia di questa meravigliosa esperienza.

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