PRESENCE AND ABSENCE – some semiotic pre-conditions for the psychoanalytic work

Bent Rosenbaum

Abstract

Linking the contradictory terms of ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ is from a clinical perspective a fundamental working condition of the psychoanalyst, and from a scientific perspective a basic assumption for psychoanalysis as science.

Nothing in the psychoanalytic space can be exchanged without the presence-absence dialectics making its mark in the psychic material - be it memories, affective expressions, words, narratives, or moments of silence, ruptures, sighs and overtones beyond tonality.

Psycho-semiotically, at least three forms of “present-absence dynamics” may be functioning. One form concerns oedipally linked representations of signs in which part of the emotional meaning of a conflict is repressed but still with symbolic connections to the spoken narratives. Another form concerns narcissistically linked representations of signifiers (not yet signified) where the dynamics of splitting leads to repetition without gaining a symbolic meaning unless the psychoanalyst introduce link a not-yet-thought-of signifier to the speech of the analysand. The last form concerns the dialectics of the un-represented as a repetition of the memory-traces not yet having any representation, and often remembered only by the psychosomatic body harbouring systems of memory-traces.

Examples from the analytic practice will support the hypothesis that different “present-absence dialectics” are at stake in each of these psycho-semiotic forms.