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# **Endurance**

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## **Abstract**

This article explores the nature of artistic and psychoanalytic encounters that promote a kind of *endurance*. What is meant here is that such encounters slow time down, reminding us that there is something important about stillness, about remaining with a situation until it organises itself under the pressure of its own desire. The pleasure and pain of endurance is examined with particular reference to the artistic practice of Marina Abramović and the chaotic situation of Jacques Lacan's waiting room.

## Endurance

How do we stay still for long enough to allow something to happen? Is it only me who finds it difficult to follow a thought through to its conclusion, or to remain alert in a conversation when someone is struggling to say something difficult, or to sit and wait for an outcome that might be uncertain? Impatience has its virtues: it gets things done. But it also has its costs. It is one reason for the unfashionable status of psychoanalysis – to be in psychoanalysis demands a seemingly impossible ‘expenditure’ of time, when so much else beckons. Yet it might be claimed that this is precisely what psychoanalysis contributes to the contemporary scene of encounter. Psychoanalysis reminds us that there is something important about stillness, about remaining with a situation until it organises itself under the pressure of its own desire; it reminds us, that is to say, of the virtues of endurance. But how hard it is to manage this, how hard. In this paper, I try to invoke the pleasure and pain of endurance and to consider it in the context of analytic relationships. I start, however, with a more general issue that underpins this paper and much other related work: that of ‘relational ethics’ (Frosh, 2011). What can be learnt from psychoanalysis to inform us of how to engage ‘ethically’ with others? And conversely, how does psychoanalysis itself respond to the challenge of what Judith Butler, for one, has termed ‘ethical violence’, by which she means the temptation to force into practice a version of the other that makes the other something it should not be? Avoiding ethical violence in this sense demands a mode of recognition that has a certain hardness about it; she writes (2005, p.42), ‘one can give and take recognition only on the condition that one becomes disoriented from oneself by something which is not oneself, that one undergoes a de-centring and “fails” to achieve self-identity.’ There seems to be a kind of subjective destitution involved here; or even if we do not want to go down this Lacanian route, we are faced with the question of what it might mean to find ourselves enduring an ethical encounter with another.

## Ethics, gaze, encounter

There is a great deal of talk about ethics nowadays. Perhaps it has genuinely become the ‘first philosophy’ that Levinas (1991) sought, the foundation stone for philosophy but also for a broader range of psychosocial questions. These circulate around issues of violence and nonviolence, but also recognition, acknowledgment, empathy, identification, colonisation and liberation. Ethical concerns spread from the interpersonal and ‘intersubjective’ through to the interethnic and international; they particularly harness themselves to situations in which a group feels itself to have been wronged by another group – which is to say, to every situation of conflict that arises. They may derive from the staking of claims by injured groups, or the taking of responsibility by the injurers or their descendants. They may or may not be rhetorical moves, or have material effects.

The interest in ethics is also an attempt to mobilise a language that can accommodate both the idea of truth and that of relational responsibility. A simple, if arbitrary, distinction from the notion of morality might be useful: to be moral is to hold to the normative values of a society; to be *ethical* is to pursue something else, rooted in an abstract notion of what is good, or right, or truthful. Ethics is an attempt at holding onto something absolute, a kind of encounter with the truth that might be disruptive, even ‘immoral’ in form (miscegenation in racist societies comes to mind); morality remains in the realm of the normative, of what is accepted as appropriate or right behaviour. This is not to pursue the distinction too passionately, as the moral and the ethical map onto each other closely; but we are seeking something else here that cannot be tied down. It might be possible to lecture to someone about the morality or otherwise of their behaviour; but ethics is not something that can be taught. It is, instead, a way of facing things without fear; it is a kind of encounter with the otherness that resides in each one of us, which will not let us alone until we have answered its call.

Philosophy is complicated, and there is an entire sub-discipline of philosophy of ethics that traces some of these concerns. For the transdisciplinary field of psychosocial studies, however, which is where this essay is located, what matters is how ethical relations arise in intersubjective contexts – how it comes about that we live out the conditions of truthfulness, and how we avoid them, in our encounters with our selves and with others. More specifically, how do we mine an ethical relationship out of the sheer rock of being with another? My suggestion here is that an essential element of such relationships is the capacity to endure.

For her retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2010 (captured in Matthew Akers' 2012 film), Marina Abramović, carrying the sobriquet 'the grandmother of performance art', created a new performance work, which she called *The Artist Is Present*. The emphasis is on the word 'present': the work was organised around Abramović's actual physical presence, and more than that to a quality of 'absolute presence' about her, as she forged herself into the still, concentrated and concentrating point at the centre of an increasingly turbulent gallery that is itself surrounded by one of the most energetic urban environments in the world. The work 'simply' involved Abramović sitting every day on a chair for the entire duration of the exhibition, whilst people – members of the 'public' – came to sit one by one, and for varying lengths of time, on another chair opposite her. As each person approached, Abramović would be looking down, apparently cleansing herself of the presence of the previous person; she would then raise her head, open her eyes, and stare silently at her new partner, who would look back. That was all, yet the performance was so compelling that by the end of the exhibition huge queues had formed of people hoping to have a chance to sit within Abramović's gaze. At the beginning of each day, as the gallery opened, there would be a scramble as people raced to get near the front of the queue; many would camp out overnight in order to increase their chances. Abramović herself was exhausted. 'The hardest thing to do is something which is close to nothing,' is what is stated in the film, but it is clear this was nowhere near 'close to

nothing': the effort of looking, of concentrating, of giving every single individual some kind of recognition so that they took away the sense of having been *seen*, was fully 'something', and profoundly draining. But it is the response of the public – her 'lover' as it is named in the film – that is so remarkable. No doubt some people were unmoved or disappointed, or felt the whole thing to be a charade. But others were deeply touched by the experience; a large number shed tears, incidentally giving rise to a blog called *Marina Abramović made me cry* (see also Anelli, 2012), as did, at some points, Abramović herself.

There are many testimonies to the dynamic of this encounter. Some simply reference Abramović's 'charisma', which explains very little; others note how the slowing down of time that is represented by the duration of sitting and stillness can be a shattering intervention in the hectic environment of city life. Others focus on the significance of silence: in the midst of what by the end was a huge, bustling and noisy crowd, Abramović and each of her partners held onto a quiet space, linked together by an intense and personalised gaze that was clearly experienced as a point of communion even if this might be suspected of having been fantasy or a kind of mass hysteria. Leaving aside for a moment all the obvious doubt – what is a 'performance', after all, but a deliberate artifice, however delicately wrought? – we might claim that the slowness, the stillness, the centredness of the experience, and most of all simply the gaze, the absolutely maintained *presentness* of the artist, offers the most singular constraint (no speech, no movement, no touch, no contact, just a look) and yet *frees* something for so many who are exposed to it. There is an obvious resonance with the psychoanalytic encounter here, the analytic gaze being a key fantasy object for the patient (Frosh, 2013); but Abramović is more radical even than that. She offers no interpretation or reassurance, just a look that has in it the appearance of sympathy but is, in reality, inscrutable yet completely absorbing. And for some at least of the recipients of that gaze in its stripped-down reality, this encounter full of prohibition is more than enough to make a kind of desire break through.

Is this desire one for recognition, a kind of plea to be saved from disappearing into anonymity, or perhaps a statement of shared vulnerability that people can only allow themselves to make under very special, straitened circumstances? It seems at least in part to be an act of mirroring, in which people take their fantasies to the encounter and meet themselves coming back. Abramović's fame and force of personality, and the spreading story of the exhibition as it gathered momentum over several weeks, added potency to the setting; but given that some people began crying within minutes of sitting down opposite her, we might assume that there was some priming going on, that this was specifically what they had set out to do. To look into the face of the artist, who is looking back, is to be touched, but can this happen almost immediately (the shortest times between sitting down and crying seem to have been two or three minutes)? We do not have to assume bad faith (though this might have operated some of the time); nevertheless, transference is not too simple a term to apply to a situation in which, looking out at the other, people encounter themselves and their own fantasies.

For some of Abramović's partners, we might speculate that there was something else at stake. As each person approaches, Abramović's head is tilted down; when they sit and settle, she steadies and readies herself, then looks up, maybe blinks, sometimes smiles, once – when it is her own ex-lover in the opposite chair – looks wryly and tearfully out. The gaze itself, when it comes, is not magical, but it is intense, steady, humanly responsive, slightly but not oppressively inscrutable, patient. An artist is assumed to look carefully, and Abramović certainly gazed out of a very possessed state, a state of self-possession and centredness. Whatever she was feeling – we know from the film that it could be a painful struggle at times – she apparently cleansed herself of this and simply *looked*. And for many people, this was more than they could bear.

Can we theorise this, on such little evidence as we have? The exposure to another's full attention, which is given without demand or scruple, without justification or selection, is an unnerving experience. The anonymity of this gaze is part of its ethics. Abramović knew nothing of those who came to look at her and be looked at by her, though they had to obey some simple rules (the film shows one young woman being hauled away after she started to strip off her clothes, an irony given how much nakedness was on display in the retrospective itself; and afterwards this woman said that she had only wanted to make herself as vulnerable as Abramović was, that she hadn't thought what she had planned was not going to be allowed; still, she exhibited herself). Perhaps part of the power of this encounter is also derived from this anonymity: one doesn't have to be or do anything in particular to be entitled to this searching gaze, other than to be a human capable of sitting quietly and being seen, and perhaps being patient and determined enough to get to the head of the queue. This is different from the confessional situation, where some fundamental beliefs have to be shared but more importantly where something has to be articulated, already shaped and formulated so that it makes some kind of narrative sense. Nothing of the kind is required when subjected to the gaze of the really present artist. It also holds parallels with the psychoanalytic situation, though again there are differences. In psychoanalysis the patient does not look at the analyst, and although the patient is subjected to a gaze that can be felt and fantasised about, it is possible to turn away from it, to pretend it does not exist. The analytic situation is also one of speech; even though the patient can choose to remain silent, this silence is itself a form of speech, the simple negative of the usual currency of exchange, the zero that makes the words themselves count. *The Artist is Present* does not even make this demand for speech; it assumes silence, it does not invite speech and presumably would not respond to it; it asks for no effort in putting things together to make sense of them, just something raw, an encounter based on being looked at and looking back. The ethic here is one of justice, in the sense that everyone is subjected to the same gaze without differentiation; it is also, however, one of love, in that everyone is seen as worth looking at, as ripe for singling out, albeit only



for the time that they themselves choose to be there. What is ethical here is that there is no compromise over this universalising, possibly democratising impulse: it is up to anyone to decide that this is what they want to do and that they are worthy of it. If that decision gets made, then Abramović is willing to comply; anyone who wishes to single her or himself out is free to become a silent interlocutor.

This is hard to bear because it is so unusual and so simple and direct. The artist's gaze is one that brooks no evasion: what would be the point of making the effort to gain a place in that sought-after seat, only to precipitate a lie? Perhaps some people sat there to impress their friends or simply to say they had done it, but for many participants this seems to have been a moment of truth. The simple, undemanding gaze that allows you to stay or go as you please, but whilst you are there holds you fully in its grasp: it makes you think. We do not know if these thoughts were formulated in words, but let us suppose for a moment that they were not. All that happens is that the gaze provokes something; it stirs an affective state, or releases a trace of memory or offers an echo of another time in which the person was gazed at (though this could be too psychoanalytically reductive, making everything a reminder of early bliss). It offers a kind of freedom, as despite the constraint on manners one does not have to be or do anything in particular and can leave whenever one wants, but it is also an absolute fixing. I suspect that the sense of time and space was lost, and people were moved by the artist's gaze and her presence because at that moment they became accountable for something central in themselves.

The enthusiasm, expectancy and unusual power of the encounter with the artist who is 'present' resonate with a very peculiar and particular psychoanalytic situation, that of the waiting room of Jacques Lacan. In the last few years of his life, in declining physical health, increasingly absorbed in

his Borromean 'knots' and 'mathemes' and forgetful and uncertain, Lacan reduced his session lengths so dramatically that they took on the status of 'nonsession' – sessions that hardly existed. One consequence of this, coupled with Lacan's apparent need to be loved by all and his reluctance or inability to turn down a request for analysis, was that his apartment became clogged with patients, sometimes waiting for hours in the hope of getting a few minutes with the Master, and consequently inadvertently participating in a kind of group therapy with all the other waiting patients. Roudinesco (1994, p.387) describes the shambles like this:

Between 1964 and 1979 his sessions became appreciably shorter and shorter. He never refused anyone and set no limit to the adoration anyone chose to lavish on him. He behaved at once like a wilful child and a devoted mother, though this was contrary to his theory; that denounced the omnipotence of the ego in general, though he himself asserted the supremacy of his own. While some veterans of the third generation [of analysts] underwent a kind of endless control [i.e. supervision] by him, in the form of either an interminable or supplementary analysis, masses of the younger generation also flocked to him, so strongly did Lacanianism respond to their own aspirations. He therefore got into the habit of not making fixed appointments, and the apartment in the rue de Lille became a kind of refuge where everyone could stroll about among the books, art magazines and various collections.

Slightly further on, she expands on the increasingly strange way in which the apartment became an asylum, and how patients would devote their lives to it (one has to wonder about these patients, waiting all day for appointments for which they paid more than handsomely – where did all the spare time and money come from?). Seeing the layout of the apartment as itself illustrative of what she calls 'Lacan's doctrine', Roudinesco presents it as follows (1994, p. 391):

The rooms were arranged like the quadripods, the patients moved through them according to a ritual rather like the *pass*, and the spatial hierarchy recalled the labyrinth of initiation. Here every patient found a refuge appropriate to the seriousness of his state. Some might go

into the 'oubliettes' to be alone, stay there for several hours, and then rejoin the rest of the company if they felt like it. Others might apportion their time as they pleased. At peak hours a session lasted a few minutes; in slack periods it lasted around ten.

Slavoj Žižek (Panel at Birkbeck, University of London, July 2013) has quoted a probably apocryphal story of a woman who has the perfect short session – a non-existent one: she enters the room, having waited for hours, and Lacan simply asks her for money ('400 francs, please, if you don't mind...'). Whether or not this exact event ever took place, some similar ones clearly did.

In a more recent account, Roudinesco (2011) describes the final years of Lacan's practice as a disaster: those waiting rooms full of people who saw him for only a few minutes at a time, everyone desperately wanting something. She writes (p.114): 'Dissolution of time, multiplication of analysands, proliferation of sessions – according to some accounts certain people were doing ten a day, one minute very half hour...' Later, Roudinesco explains something of what the patients were looking for, what they thought they might have received – an individualised statement – when in fact they were part of an anonymous ritual. The 'experience of therapy in Lacan's last years' was:

An experience that referred each analysand to the existential nothingness of a broken temporality: that of the session reduced to an instant. Vainly seeking for a hypothetical logical formalization of psychosis, Lacan had transformed the analytical session into an epiphany that simulated the moment of death. And consequently, caught in a maelstrom of constant levitations, all the subjects engaged in sessions believed they were able to inherit a meaningful interpretation in a fraction of a second, whereas they were captured by the frenzy of the neologism. Instead of speech, everyone received its formula, its seal, its mark, its letter. (Roudinesco, 2011, p. 127).

For the patients, hanging on the Master's word was everything; if possible, a single word would sum everything up and make the wait worthwhile. They certainly had an ambiguous relationship to time: all the waiting, and then the absolute moment of stillness, and then waiting again.

And yet, these patients who one can only say were abused, or at best were self-deluding, reading into Lacan's wayward actions and forgetful comments some deep meaning addressed only to themselves, seem in many cases to have adored him, to have regarded their few precious moments with him not only as worth the wait, but as potentially life changing. How could this be? Is this moment – the tiny short session that means everything – similar to the gaze of *The Artist is Present*? As with Abramović's interlocutors, one assumes that Lacan's patients brought a lot of their own transference baggage with them – indeed, Roudinesco refers to it explicitly: Lacan's 'inextinguishable curiosity,' she writes (1994, p.387), 'led him to explore every possible permutation and combination of the transference bond.' But whereas the Abramović encounter consists of a radical slowing down of time, so that the participant is suddenly in a new time-space plane in which the rush around seems to be stilled, the meeting with Lacan seems breathless, a speeding up. *Everything is concentrated into one point*: there is a long wait, as with *The Artist is Present*, but then a fleeting moment of encounter and it is all over, and one has to start waiting again if one wants more. How can this be an encounter of love, of fulfilment, of anything but frustration? Perhaps it is precisely this collapse of time and space into one point that matters: duration, stillness, silence, gaze, knowledge, insight; it is a kind of black hole into which everything, every desire, is sucked, and its energy pulsates through the universe. Or this might be too romantic, too 'Imaginary' to use Lacan's own terms, a phantasmagorical fictionalising of an experience, a kind of 'cognitive dissonance' or rationalisation in which the horrible reality – 'I waited all day and was seen for less than two minutes' – is made meaningful retrospectively, so that the encounter becomes real in memory to cover over the pain of its unreality as an event. But even if this is the case, is this not exactly what

psychoanalysis proposes through its notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, *après coup* or 'afterwardsness'? That is to say, psychoanalysis is in part the science concerned with how we 'distort' the past in order to make sense of it, and how that distortion becomes real and governs our thinking as a consequence. So maybe there was something in Lacan's quality of listening and being present that meant that the concentrated moment of his attention was worth the wait and all the money spent on it. And even if this was not so, even if it is totally mythologised consciously to serve the interests of the Lacanian movement, or unconsciously to help people make sense of an unruly experience, there can be little doubt that the experience of being in the presence of someone who is, in one way or another, *present* can be one that shakes people up and makes them think and feel anew.

### **Moments of stillness, openness to change**

A generation ago, In *Women's Time*, Julia Kristeva (1979) articulated in psychoanalytic terms a familiar distinction between 'masculine time', pressing forwards and demanding action, and feminine time. From amongst the 'multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilisations,' she claimed, female subjectivity essentially retains two forms: 'repetition' and 'eternity' (p.191). The former is seen in those aspects of femininity which have a cyclical and rhythmic quality and hence a relationship with nature which is both regular and exhilarating – both pleasurable in its stereotyped patterning and subversive in its link with 'what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time.' Women's time as 'eternity' takes a different form: 'the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape' – something sombre, unscalable, unmoveable in its solidity, something always present. For a later feminist, Lisa Baraitser (2012), time has moved on, but the challenge remains of what she terms 'redundancy', a time given over to slowness, waiting and a kind of non-productivity that subverts capitalist urgency. She links this to 'maternal time' as follows (p. 237):

What I am proposing is an appreciation of the multiple modalities of maternal time that includes the time of waiting for childhood to unfold – the time, that is, of duration. This aspect of maternal time is distinct from its cyclical or monumental forms (from repetition and eternity). Rather, maternal time retains a Bergsonian sense of time as radical heterogeneity, time as force, as material rather than spatial. ... The universe *endures*, according to Bergson, because of an ‘ascending movement’ that ‘corresponds to an inner work of ripening or creating.’

One of the things that might be going on in the face-to-face encounter with the artist is this kind of enduring that provokes a mode of maternal time; but as Baraitser points out elsewhere in her paper, the parallel with the sort of redundancy that psychoanalysis enforces is also noticeable.

Psychoanalysis is a practice of repetition, of momentary rushing ahead only to be hauled back again, of recognition and perhaps if one is lucky, a slowly dawning understanding of what could be newly inserted into the old story that one repeats. This new twist, or new frame, is the product of the analytic work itself; but what it seems to depend on is a particular capacity held – one hopes – by the analyst and then mimicked by the patient. This capacity is a kind of staying still; Bion (1962, p.36) calls it ‘reverie’, again making the link with the maternal – ‘that state of mind which is open to the reception of any “objects” from the loved object and is therefore capable of the reception of the infant’s projective identifications whether they are felt by the infant to be good or bad.’ Endurance is clearly part of what is required here on the part of the analyst, as aggression and hostility fly around as much as love and dependence. Being ‘receptive’ means setting aside the uneasy qualms one may have, the wish for instance to get on with things or to retaliate or to explain. This is hard enough and results in a lot of defensive behaviour from analysts themselves, for example by fetishising Bion’s (1970) axiomatic advice to enter each analytic session ‘without memory or desire’ until that initially liberating proposal becomes a matter of orthodoxy and critical judgement. It is harder still for the patient, whose wish might be to get on with things – to ‘get better soon’ – or to prove that nothing makes a difference, because, after all, one’s symptoms serve self-protective purposes. Staying still,

not immediately agreeing or disagreeing, not 'acting in' or 'acting out', learning to be full of reverie oneself – these are difficult tasks for any of us when faced with the possibility that what we might then encounter is embarrassment and pain.

Endurance is not in this way about staying the same. It is instead about the conditions necessary for something new to occur. This might be a way around the conundrum posed by Slavoj Žižek (2006) and others, more or less sympathetically, that as psychoanalysis always deals with repetition, it is hard to imagine how anything can ever change. It all goes back to the past; more than that, psychoanalysis is a process of circulating ideas and feelings in words, which by their very nature – the nature of the symbolic – is an endless process of deferral. One signifier slips over another, free association maps outwards and inwards, what we say is reflected back to us in the form of an interpretation. It is very hard not to know already what is coming, especially in a culture saturated by psychoanalysis, in which people come to analysis understanding their difficulties in psychoanalytic terms. Confirming their worst fears might be the limit of analytic efficacy under such circumstances. In response, these Lacanians assert the primacy of the Real, of the order standing outside language and the symbolic, which has the possibility of breaking through it to create a radical, revolutionary shift. Stavrakakis (2007, p. 53) comments,

From a Lacanian point of view, the fact that the imposition of the symbolic is never total can only mean that the real, being ultimately incommensurable with the symbolic, resists symbolisation and persists alongside our socio-symbolic identifications. ... First of all... it persists through the continuous resurfacing of negativity, through the dislocation of subjective and social identities. By encircling these encounters with the real, Lacan seems to register the importance of a moment that, in social and political theory, could only be described as the moment of the political *par excellence*.

This seems to me a pessimistic outlook: all one can do is smash the symbolic system. The everyday practice of art has sometimes aimed at this, and very occasionally it has been true too of psychoanalysis (Reich comes to mind – see Frosh, 1999), but on the whole something else has been held onto: the possibility that change might occur, perhaps exactly when one is not looking for it. This is where endurance comes in, not in the sense of quietist acceptance, but in the sense of waiting, of opening out oneself to the possibility that really looking into the gaze of the other might alert one to something one did not already know, something radically new.

It is, however, not that easy to endure or show the maternal aspect, whether as patient or analyst. Lacan himself clearly struggled with it. Whatever the testimony to the quality of his gaze, one is left with the uneasy sense that there might have been an idealisation going on, and that Lacan's short sessions – vanishingly short, as he got to the end of his life – were products not so much of an epiphanous total concentration, but of an inability to stay with anything for very long. It is possible that his instantaneous analyses were all of a piece, or just an exaggeration, of a lifelong and childish inability to wait, to stay with anything for long – despite the interminable seminars, the slow speech, the sighs and mumbles, the going round and round the same point *ad nauseam*. None of this is to deny the real mastery and innovation of the Lacanian system, but to see it as produced by, with and in spite of this particular inability to wait. Lacan, writes Roudinesco,

Behaved like a temperamental child, refusing to accept that reality did not conform to his wishes. A particular kind of cigar, a particular brand of whisky, some object, certain confectionary, a certain food: everything had to be brought to him that instant, wherever he was. And in fact he nearly always managed to persuade his hosts to yield to his requirements... An implacable, unforgettably amusing logic. (2011, p.80)



Lacan was always 'slow', yet always impatiently 'fast'. He wanted to be beloved by all and demanded everything; yet somehow he had the capacity actually to inspire love and a willingness on behalf of all and sundry to give him what he wanted. Endurance was something he demonstrated yet could not manage; and in a way, who could blame him or anyone else? Staying present in the face of the one who wants something from you is no easy task, any more than it is straightforward for the patient – for anyone – to endure the gaze of the one who (seems to) know.

Presumably there is a point at which endless time and the infinitesimal moment meet. This point is where the experience of time dissolves, so that there is no distinction between past, present and future: as time does not move (it is constantly there; it disappears completely) and has no meaningful durability, then everything is gathered together in the same moment. We wait and wait for something to happen; then it is all over without a blink of the eye being possible. The waiting room, with its chairs and books and coffee-tables and sullen faces and withdrawn gazes, is a place that is itself purgatory, with no beginning or end. Then in and out and wondering what happened, if anything; and poring over it to understand and incorporate it, to know what one has received. Waiting is a strange business; it is the thing before, yet also a thing in itself; it is out of time, frustrating because we might want to get on with something, part of the process of achieving what we want, but also abstract and empty.

Waiting requires another iteration of endurance. The demand for endurance faces us with exposure to something that we cannot avoid; we just have to stay with it until it comes to an end. This end is not usually within our control; that is why we have to endure. This is true even if we seem to be making the choices: do we sit down or do we get up, do we stay or do we go? Endurance is required when someone else is calling the shots, or when something is acting through us that compels us to

stay on and keep trying; or when we want something so badly that we have to wait and wait until the opportunity comes to get it. Endurance, then, is required when we need to make sense of what is unconsciously speaking through us and cannot be impatiently shunted to one side to let us through. Waiting is a part of this: those who can wait can possibly pounce at the right moment, so it can be a strategic act; but it depends too on the kind of waiting. Waiting tensely, frantically, desperately is not the same as waiting calmly, reflectively, observantly. Waiting in anticipation of a specific event is not the same as waiting to see what will happen.

In psychoanalysis, there is an odd kind of waiting. With the exception of Lacan's late practice, psychoanalytic waiting rooms are not full; they are indeed calculated to be empty, so that each patient can seem to be the only one, so no-one has to be embarrassed by an encounter with a 'sibling' who is also caught up in the transference with the analyst. Yet in the psychoanalytic session itself, it sometimes seems like nothing but waiting is going on: 'what shall I say, why can't I think of anything, when will you speak, why does nothing ever happen?' This is yet another of psychoanalysis' engagements with expandable and collapsible time: it is all, as Žižek might say, 'blah, blah, blah,' filling in time until the right time, and then that moment comes and is gone, and what was it? Something that slipped by, that we could not process adequately, because it was too quick and fleetingly present, because there was no substance to it, it was not in the time of 'blah, blah, blah,' but outside it. The thing itself, which we wait for, does not exist, yet it bodies forth and is inserted into us without us ever realising, only to become a kind of irritation, an unnerving feature of our life, something new if we can see it, an irritant if we cannot. The time of endurance in psychoanalysis is consequently not only the kind that is obvious to see: a process that goes on repetitively for years, very slowly picking over the same old stories, taking them up, dropping them, returning to them, finding them lacking or strange, filling them in, uncovering their contours, placing them very slowly and provisionally, session after tortoise-like session, into a new narrative frame. This very slow

process certainly demands endurance, as well as patience, spare time and a decent bank balance; but it is not the only kind of endurance at stake. The second, more subtle and ephemeral sort, is when one waits through all this long process and then finds that something has happened without being recognised and without necessarily being articulable; it is just a shift, if we are lucky, into a new kind of space. How could we have waited so long for the train to come, and then found ourselves leaving it without even knowing we had been on it at all?

The language of the 'event' has become popular to deal with this, with Alain Badiou and Žižek as star turns on what it means. In a public panel at Birkbeck, University of London in July 2013, Žižek offered a criticism of the Lacanian short session and told a story about his own experience of waiting in psychoanalysis, an unusually (for Žižek) emotive story, that whether true or not (one has to remember that there are often doubts about Lacanian memories) has considerable potency. He was reflecting on the idea that 'the space of truth is also curved; if you go directly at it, you miss it.'

Let me give you a personal confession; it saved almost some 40 years, 30 years ago, my life. I was in, I will not go into why, in really deep shit, I was seriously considering suicide. And then I went to Miller, who accepted me as his patient, and I remember what saved me, not what Miller did... in the first weeks of total despair, my reasoning was like this: 'of course I will kill myself, but wait a minute not before tomorrow afternoon because I have to see Miller.' And this literally saved me, this pure bureaucratic – I wouldn't underestimate this, why should this be something bad and so on?

This is a familiar story, nothing arrestingly Žižekian about it, seemingly told with an undercurrent of sincerity despite the laughter it induced in the audience (as an aside, it no longer seems possible for people to distinguish when Žižek is joking and when he is not). What happens in psychoanalysis is less important than the fact of the analysis itself; waiting for Miller, punctuating the turmoil of one's

life with the regular heartbeat of the sessions – I cannot kill myself until tomorrow afternoon, and then there is another afternoon to wait for, and on and on until the impulse is past. This is a kind of endurance and waiting, a way of facing something that is otherwise very difficult to manage – the ongoing presence of the analyst, however empty or full the practice of speech in the sessions might be; the simple ongoing presence, *The Analyst is Present*. The ethical situation here is not only in the truthfulness of the gaze or the demandingness of the listening that the analyst offers, the refusal to back away and so on – though these are indeed key ethical acts. It is also in the willingness to endure, to keep on being regardless of what temptation there might be to blow everything apart.

There is a passage concerned with temptation of this kind in Levinas' *Talmudic Readings*, which I have used before (Frosh, 2013) but calls out for more treatment. The passage relates to the giving of the Law (the Torah) on Mount Sinai and discusses a midrashic story that God made the mountain itself hover over the heads of the Jewish people whilst they decided whether or not to accept the Law. Should they refuse, it would have dropped down on them to crush them and the whole of creation. Levinas comments on the apparent lack of free choice embedded in the threat, *existence or chaos*.

The mountain turned upside down like a tub above the Israelites thus threatened the universe. God, therefore, did not create without concerning himself with the meaning of creation. Being has a meaning. The meaning of being, the meaning of creation, is to realise the Torah. The world is here so that the ethical order has the possibility of being fulfilled. The act by which the Israelites accept the Torah is the act which gives meaning to reality. To refuse the Torah is to bring being back to nothingness. ... The unfortunate universe also had to accept its subordination to the ethical order, and Mount Sinai was for it the moment in which its 'to be' or 'not to be' was being decided. The refusal of the Israelites would have been the signal for the annihilation of the entire universe. (Levinas, 1968, p.41).

There is a tremendous temptation to indulge in refusal and bring everything to an end; there can be little doubt about this, even Žižek acknowledges it. Sometimes, in order to communicate the consequences of such an indulgence, one might have to threaten people with a mountain over their head (or at least, to paraphrase Woody Allen in *Annie Hall*, with the problem of paying for missed sessions if they commit suicide whilst in analysis). But Levinas is also emphasising something about the purpose of creation: 'The world is here so that the ethical order has the possibility of being fulfilled... The unfortunate universe also had to accept its subordination to the ethical order.' We might expect this from him, after all he is known for his emphasis on how ethics is 'first philosophy', responsibility for the other, and so on. One thing that is noticeable in this example, however, is the way in which the threat of violent destruction is used to insist on this primacy of ethics – without it everything falls apart. If we cannot hold onto the meaning that ethical encounters offer, then the universe falls back into nothingness. Should we believe this? Žižek's story relates to it, because his is also a story about law and regulation – it is the ordered necessity of the psychoanalytic sessions, their position in the diary (tomorrow afternoon), their lack of flexibility – not now, just because you demand it, after which you can kill yourself, but insisting on keeping to your side of the bargain, on turning up at the right time on the right day. After that you can leave, but that time never comes; we are never, it seems, exempt, we always have to endure. Is this an ethical stance? Surely it is, and it is not necessarily quite as pessimistic a stance as it might at first sight seem. The time of waiting and of enduring is also a time of being and becoming; psychoanalysis insists on this, on an absolutely basic requirement that to manage the world, we have to find ourselves staying as fully as we can inside it, even if this means from time to time being stared at until we weep.

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