

SPECIFICITIES OF PSYCHOANALYTIC TREATMENT

Birth of a Method

Edited by

***Yvette Dorey, Serge Frisch,
and Leopoldo Bleger***

Contributors

***Leopoldo Bleger, Catherine Desvignes,
Marie-France Dispaux-Ducloux, Yvette Dorey,
Cláudio Laks Eizirik, Fabienne Fillion, Serge Frisch,
Lila Hoijman, Erika Kittler, Diana Messina Pizzuti,
Luc Michel, Martine Sandor-Buthaud, Andrea Scardovi,
Évelyne Sechaud, and Ronnie Shaw***



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First published in French in 2025 by Les Éditions d'Ithaque as *Spécificités du traitement psychanalytique*

First published in English in 2025 by
Karnac Books Limited
62 Bucknell Road
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 2DS

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80013-378-5 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-381-5 (e-book)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-384-6 (PDF)

Typeset by Medlar Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd, India



www.firingthemind.com

*We extend our recognition and gratitude to Évelyne Sechaud.
Not only did she give birth to our group, but she also managed,
even in trying circumstances, to stay the course through
the challenges of psychoanalysis.*

*Our thanks also go to the European Psychoanalytical Federation.
This work was made possible through the invaluable framework
it provided, as well as its financial support which covered
part of the translation costs and travel expenses for colleagues
attending Research Group meetings.*

Contents

| | |
|---|-------|
| About the editors and contributors | xi |
| Foreword <i>by Cláudio Laks Eizirik</i> | xv |
| Introduction | xxiii |

Part I

Presentation of the “Specificity” method—Psychoanalysts at work

1. The working party on the “specificity of psychoanalytic treatment today”
Serge Frisch and Leopoldo Bleger 3
2. The method within its historical context
Leopoldo Bleger and Serge Frisch 17
3. Construction of the *dispositif*
Serge Frisch and Leopoldo Bleger 31

4. Presentation of a clinical group and its discussion
in the Paris Group, "The Red Blanket" 43
Yvette Dorey
5. Gourmet psychoanalysis, or attempting to describe
the work of a research group 69
Erika Kittler

Part II

Clinical insights—Inter-analytic exchanges

6. Moderating a group of analysts listening to clinical material 81
Catherine Desvignes
7. Specificity of the method from the presenter's perspective 95
Martine Sandor-Buthaud
8. The silent support of the tripod—intersecting views: From
the role of the rapporteur to the function of the observer 113
Marie-France Dispaux-Ducloux and Lila Hoijman
9. The crossing: A psychoanalytic journey into the heart
of a group setting 127
Fabienne Fillion
10. About candidate-group work 145
Ronnie Shaw

Part III

Theoretical insights—Towards a new field of investigation

11. Free association and free discourse 167
Luc Michel
12. Unconscious communication in inter-analytic work 191
Diana Messina Pizzuti

| | |
|---|-----|
| 13. What do Specificity groups teach us about psychoanalytic specificity? <i>Andrea Scardovi</i> | 207 |
| 14. The clinical narrative in the working party on specificity <i>Leopoldo Bleger</i> | 227 |
| 15. The group as infant in front of the primal: Grasping, pointing, free-associating in Specificity groups practice <i>Andrea Scardovi</i> | 241 |
| 16. Outcomes and results <i>Leopoldo Bleger and Serge Frisch</i> | 251 |
| Postscript by <i>Évelyne Sechaud</i> | 267 |
| References | 271 |
| Index | 285 |

About the editors and contributors

Leopoldo Bleger, a training member of the French Psychoanalytical Association (APF), left Argentina in 1976 after completing his studies in medicine and psychiatry and now works in Paris. He has written texts on the work of Melanie Klein, on psychoanalysis in the Río de la Plata region, and on methodological issues in psychoanalysis. His most recent book is *Analyse en présence, analyse à distance*. Paris: PUF, 2024.

Catherine Desvignes is a training psychoanalyst and member of the Société Psychanalytique de Recherche et de Formation (SPRF), Paris. She was a member of the Cercle d'études françaises pour la formation et la recherche: approche psychanalytique du groupe et du psychodrame (CEFFRAP) for more than thirty years, and co-authored with René Kaës *Le travail psychique de la formation: entre aliénation et transformation*. Paris: Dunod, 2011.

Marie-France Dispaux-Ducloux is a psychologist and psychoanalyst, a training member of the Belgian Psychoanalytic Society. She practises privately and has written numerous articles in international journals

focused on borderline states and psychoanalytic training. She has been a member of Specificity since 2009.

Yvette Dorey is a psychopathologist and psychoanalyst certified by the French Psychoanalytical Association (APF). She has been a research psychologist (Val-de-Grâce and Percy—joint publications on criteria for psychical selection) and a senior lecturer (Paris-X University). Her work primarily addresses boundary issues, teaching, and transmission. She has translated several articles from English into French (Éditions Tchou), participated on reading committees, edited a book, and published articles (Dunod, Éditions TDK, *Évolution psychiatrique*, *Revue française de psychanalyse*, *Psychologie clinique*, and others). She has been a member of Specificity since 2010.

Cláudio Laks Eizirik is a training and supervising analyst of the Porto Alegre Psychoanalytic Society; professor emeritus of psychiatry, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil; former president of the IPA (2005–09); recipient of the Sigourney Award (2011), and author of papers, chapters, and books on psychoanalytic practice, training, institutions, and their relationship with culture.

Fabienne Fillion is a psychologist and psychoanalyst, an associate member of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society and an associate member of the Belgian Psychoanalytic Society. Trained in institutional analysis, she worked for several years in the industrial sector in France as part of a multidisciplinary research and intervention team. In this capacity, she helped design numerous intervention strategies aimed at fostering reflection and creativity in both small and large groups. As a psychoanalyst, she has worked privately and within institutions with children, adolescents, and adults in France. Since 2020, she has practised privately in Brussels with adults. For more than ten years she has participated in several research groups within the European Psychoanalytical Federation (EPF).

Serge Frisch is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Luxembourg. He has been a member of Specificity since 2006.

Lila Hoïjman is a psychologist and psychoanalyst, a full member of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society (SPP).

Erika Kittler is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist in private practice, a child psychoanalyst, and a training analyst at the German Psychoanalytic Association (DPV/IPA). Since 2001, she has co-edited the journal *Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Theorie und Praxis*. She is a founding member of the IPA's Sils-Maria Training Week for Child Psychoanalysis and has been a member of Specificity since 2008. She has translated numerous psychoanalytic texts from French, including several works by André Green. Her primary focus is on transgenerational issues, mother-child psychotherapy, trauma transmission, and the question of representing the unrepresentable. Her latest article is "Das Ringen um Darstellbarkeit—die Arbeit der Figurabilität", *Psyche-Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen*, 2022, 76(9/10).

Diana Messina Pizzuti is a child and adult psychoanalyst, a training member of the Belgian Psychoanalytic Society, and a former president of its Education Commission. She was a supervising professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles and a trainer in its Certificate Program in Psychotherapeutic Clinics (Infant-Juvenile Orientation). She has been a member of the editorial boards of *L'Année psychanalytique internationale* and the *Revue belge de psychanalyse*. She has written many articles and translated Bion's *Italian Seminars* into French. She lives and works in Brussels.

Luc Michel is a psychiatrist-psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, and a member of the Swiss Society for Psychoanalysis (SSPsa). He is the author of numerous publications and books on psychotherapy and group dynamics (website: www.drlucmichel.ch).

Martine Sandor-Buthaud is a psychologist and psychoanalyst, a member of the Paris Psychoanalytic Society (SPP). She practises psychoanalysis privately in Paris. She is professor emeritus at the École de Psychologues Praticiens at the Institut catholique de Paris, where she taught psychology from 1978 to 2018. She has been a member of Specificity since 2012. She directs a training session for judges at the École nationale de la magistrature and is currently co-authoring a book with two judges on the psychic aspects of judicial work.

Andrea Scardovi works as a psychoanalyst in Bologna. A psychiatrist and PhD, he is a member of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society. He has

taught psychotherapy courses at the University of Bologna, where he currently supervises psychiatry trainees. He developed a training method to improve general practitioners' interview skills, which has been adopted in several Italian regions. He chairs the Italian group Psychoanalysis and Medicine, and is a member of the British-Italian Psychoanalysis Workshop. He was a member of the editorial board of the *Italian Journal of Psychoanalysis* and has authored articles in national and international journals and books.

Évelyne Sechaud is a psychoanalyst, a full member and trainer of the French Psychoanalytical Association (APF), where she also served as president. She has been president of the European Psychoanalytical Federation (EPF). She founded the international research group on the Specificity of Psychoanalytic Treatment Today. A doctor of psychology, she was a senior lecturer at the University of Paris-V. She practises privately as a psychoanalyst in Paris and has published various articles in French and English in the *Revue française de psychanalyse*, the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, and *Le présent de la psychanalyse*, notably on transference, sublimation, and the analyst's silence.

Ronnie Shaw is a fellow of the American Board of Psychoanalysis and a child, adolescent, and adult psychoanalyst. She is a training and supervising analyst and faculty member at the psychoanalytic institutes of Denver, San Diego, and St. Louis. She is an associate clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Her memberships include IPA, APsA, and ACP. Her former positions include chair of the Child Psychoanalytic Committee and Program at the Denver Institute, president of the Denver Psychoanalytic Society, and member of the APsA board. She was part of Specificity from 2008 to 2020 and is currently chair and co-chair of the Working Party on the Specificity of Psychoanalytic Treatment Today (WP-SPTT) North America.

Foreword

Cláudio Laks Eizirik

Specificities of Psychoanalytic Treatment: Birth of a Method edited by Yvette Dorey, Serge Frisch, and Leopoldo Bleger is a stimulating and creative journey through some of the more trying challenges psychoanalysis has encountered in recent decades, presented through a lively narrative of the history and evolution of a new research method. The authors, in their handling of clinical material, pair it with theoretical elaborations, examining how analysts work, associate, and reflect together in a group. In doing so, they offer not just a study of the work, but an inquiry into the very fabric of psychoanalytic collaboration.

The book deals with several key challenges, not least among them the so-called crisis of psychoanalysis that arose some decades ago. Issues of analytic training, the perennial debates about what constitutes—or might constitute—research in psychoanalysis, and new approaches to discussing clinical material, and the persistent controversies that seem to endlessly plague psychoanalytic institutions are all addressed.

Reading through the book—a rewarding and pleasurable experience—stirred in me memories of my own institutional and personal encounters. This, I suspect, is one of the book's most notable achievements: the authors invite the reader to accompany them on a

journey—past and present, clinical and theoretical—and to momentarily step into their shoes. One feels part of the group, identifying with presenters, rapporteur-observers or moderators, sharing their doubts, interpretations, and uncertainties. One feels, as one does in the everyday work of a psychoanalyst, in touch with the specificities of psychoanalytic treatment.

The Specificity initiative began as one of the working parties of the European Psychoanalytical Federation's Research Program, launched between 2001 and 2006 under then-EPF president David Tuckett. This ambitious project brought a breath of fresh air to international psychoanalytic meetings, first across Europe and later in other regions. The working parties' proposal shifted the role of congress participants: from silent, passive listeners they became active contributors in clinical discussions conducted in various methods. This created a lively opportunity for research *in* psychoanalysis, rather than merely research on psychoanalysis. As Daniel Widlöcher astutely pointed out, this kind of research in psychoanalysis can only be conducted by psychoanalysts themselves, for it applies the psychoanalytic method to material gathered in the analyst's filing cabinet—a task only an analyst can perform.

My own experience with the working parties began in 2004, in Helsinki, when I participated in Faimberg's "listening to listening" method (1996) for group discussions. From that point onwards, I have taken on roles as presenter, moderator, and regional chair. I have witnessed, congress after congress, the growing involvement of colleagues in these activities.

As Bleger and Frisch describe in detail, Évelyne Sechaud, then President of the EPF, introduced to the Council in 2006 the project for a working party on the Specificity of Psychoanalytic Treatment Today (WP-SPTT). Its reception, as the authors aptly note, was marked by a certain degree of hostility—a "violence of origins", as they put it. At the time, Sechaud's presidency at the EPF overlapped with my own tenure as IPA President (2005–09), which allowed me the opportunity to collaborate with her on various institutional matters. I was able to follow her initiative closely, and I stood in complete solidarity with her creative proposal. This was a period in which the IPA was engaged in heated discussions around analytic training. By 2006, the IPA board succeeded in approving the three models currently in use, which already existed in

practice. This was, on the one hand, a significant accomplishment, and on the other, as always, a fresh source of controversy.

Why do I recall these events here? First, to express my respect and admiration for Évelyne Sechaud and her generative work, which this book so vividly brings to life. Second, to underscore that our analytic work never operates in isolation from the institutions and the world in which we live, with all their attendant conflicts, controversies, violence, and indeed achievements.

In the first three chapters, Serge Frisch and Leopoldo Bleger describe the history and development of the WP-SPTT and outline the construction of its *dispositif* or *modus operandi*. They emphasise that participating in Specificity groups is a very special personal and group experience: the act of suspending judgement and allowing time for reflection—or even embracing uncertainty in a group—can in turn provoke feelings of anxiety and uncertainty in participants. And yet, participants often express that this experience is precisely the stuff of psychoanalysis.

The point is vividly illustrated in the following two chapters: Yvette Dorey's presentation of a clinical group discussion by the Paris Group, "The Red Blanket", and Erika Kittler's "Gourmet psychoanalysis, or attempting to describe the work of a research group". Both authors invite the reader to observe the dynamics between presenter, moderator, and group participants, and to witness how analytic material takes shape: through metaphors of colours and haute cuisine, the texts come alive—indeed, the texts are filled with colours, offering genuine food for both thought and feeling.

As we gather from the book, these groups are forums for clinical exchanges among analysts, and over the past twenty years various inter-analytic groups have grown significantly, constituting a territory of psychoanalysis itself and establishing a new field of inquiry within it. Inter-clinical exchanges are seen as spaces where contemporary issues in psychoanalysis can be studied independently of any notion of supervision or group dynamics. The inter-analytic groups have evolved into a kind of laboratory—both a place of research and an object of study in and of themselves.

The workings of these inter-analytic exchanges are brought to life in two chapters: "Moderating a group of analysts listening to clinical material" by Catherine Desvignes and "Specificity of the method from

the presenter's perspective" by Martine Sandor-Buthaud. Desvignes describes the distinct phases of the moderating process, focusing on its specificities and aims: to sustain associative work, point out key words, to specify the various transference spaces. She then illustrates each of these stages, drawing on the ideas of René Kaës as a foundation for her approach. Sandor-Buthaud, on the other hand, recounts her own experience as a presenter, reflecting on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours she observed in herself during the process. She highlights several important concepts, such as gaps and isomorphism, the weaving and diffraction of thoughts, and enactment.

In their chapter, "The silent support of the tripod", Marie-France Dispaux-Ducloux and Lila Hoïjman offer a succinct summary of the work discussed throughout the book:

The *specificity* of our clinical groups and our permanent research group *is* its methodology: it is fundamentally based on the analytic method. Free association, evenly suspended attention, and "the absence of scientific hypotheses of an academic type as the basis of the project and the absence of clearly defined purposive ideas" (Frisch et al., 2010, p. 97) allow for the emergence of new "*points of urgency*", to use the terminology of Pichon-Rivière.

The authors go on to describe their own experiences, moving from the role of rapporteur to that of observer, and summarise their observations under three key headings: "From rapporteur-scribe to observer-container", "The function of the observer: Transference effects in the group", and "Passivity and silence". Their points are vividly illustrated with a clinical vignette that brings the theoretical concepts to life.

In her psychoanalytic journey into the heart of a group *dispositif*, Fabienne Fillion offers a detailed clinical account of the movements between group participants and moderators. The reader feels the emotional atmosphere as well as the author's own feelings and impressions throughout her interventions. Fillion describes this experiential laboratory as a setting animated by the analysts' desire to activate their analytic listening and capacity for reflection, and to take pleasure in thinking together. She describes how her group's experience

highlighted two key aspects of this research *dispositif*: the analysis of the analytic setting it enables and the function of the observer's silence.

Ronnie Shaw traces the history and characteristics of work groups that include candidate analysts, as well as groups composed solely of candidates, discussing their impact on the development of analytic identity. It is fascinating to follow these experiences and compare them to those in Latin America, where analysts-in-training (as we prefer calling them, rather than "candidates") have participated in all working parties since they began in their regions. Shaw notes that several institutes have since incorporated these experiences into their training programmes. There is a clear discussion on diffraction, free association, the role of moderators, and the differences between mixed groups and groups exclusively reserved for candidates. This, too, underscores the generative value of the Specificity method as well as other working parties.

The next chapters explore the theoretical perspectives underlying the new field of psychoanalytic research introduced by the Specificity method.

Luc Michel discusses free association and free discourse, beginning with a scholarly dialogue with Freud and other thinkers who developed or reflected on the rule of free association. He then considers the fundamental rule within groups, proposing a broadening of the concept of group unconscious. Michel examines whether what we encounter in such settings is truly free association, or more accurately free discourse, by illustrating various forms of discourse: free-floating listening in both small and large groups, the role of associative discourse in both specificity and intervision groups. One of his ideas that seemed particularly stimulating to me was that

The group of analysts serves as a sounding board for the presenter's narrative. In other words, they offer containers of thoughts used to think about and dream of the formless or unconscious elements of the transference-countertransference of the analyst-analysand dyad.

This in turn produces a "chain of transformations that extends from the patient to the 'group representation of the patient'. This is

a chain that formulates the formless,” whose different stages Michel describes clearly.

Diana Messina Pizzuti turns her attention to unconscious communication in inter-analytical work, drawing on the contributions of Melanie Klein, Wilfred R. Bion, and post-Bionian theorists. Beginning with observations from clinical practice and her own experience with Specificity groups, she reflects on concepts such as negative capability, reverie, projective identification, unconscious transference, and working-through. She concludes that working with groups allows us to observe directly, in an atmosphere of safety and mutual respect, the receptivity of the unconscious, its capacity for elaboration and transformation, highlighting the generative qualities of the analytic method.

Andrea Scardovi contributes two chapters, the first of which poses the question: “What do Specificity groups teach us about psychoanalytic specificity?” He begins with Freud’s concept of specificity before moving on to discuss specificity and quality, communication between intrapsychic and intersubjective elements, and the notion of “proximity” in inter-analytic practice. Scardovi then characterises Specificity groups, reflecting on their method, their relationship to clinical knowledge, and how repetition compulsion plays out in both analytic and inter-analytic contexts. He examines the diffraction of transference within Specificity groups and illustrates his points with a case study on gender diffraction. From this clinical situation, Scardovi explores the tension between specificity and a-specificity in inter-analytic work, ultimately proposing a psychoanalytic understanding of specificity and concluding with what he calls an “intimate equivalence”.

In his second contribution, Andrea Scardovi develops an intriguing hypothesis under the title of “The group as infant of the primal: Grasping, pointing, free-associating in Specificity groups practice”. Drawing from Giambattista Vico’s *La Scienza Nuova* on the origins of humanity, Scardovi reflects on Bion’s thoughts on our ancient past and the problem of diffraction. He explores the gap between theory and practice as an intrapsychic issue, eventually leading to his hypothesis that the group functions like an infant, illustrated through clinical material presented in a Specificity group. Scardovi then conceptualises the group as a “temporary scientific community”, using another clinical fragment to demonstrate the act of “pointing”. He examines the processes of

grasping, pointing, and free association as “pro-social practices”, linking them to the analytic concept of “inter-reach”. Scardovi suggests that inter-analytic practices enable the various parts of our complex psychoanalytic community to reach out to one another, fostering an ability to tolerate the diversity of languages, and of theoretical idioms, present in the field.

In his chapter entitled “The clinical narrative in the working party on specificity”, Bleger traces the evolution of how clinical material has been presented and reflects on the challenges—both cultural and analytical—that have arisen over time. After documenting numerous hurdles, Bleger outlines the specific instructions that were developed and shared with presenters, carefully explaining the rationale behind them. He concludes by noting that the questions surrounding the clinical presentation of a session or process open up a vast field of research. These issues, with all their complexities and uncertainties, are themselves subjects for further elaboration.

In their conclusions and presentation of results, Bleger and Frisch offer epistemological reflections on the method itself and its evolution, underscoring the significance of the working parties, as well as on certain seminal insights from Freud that underpin the specificity of analytic treatment. They focus on three key aspects of their research: the processes of decondensation and diffraction, the acting force, and reduplication, each examined in detail. They also discuss the role of the analyst within the group, giving particular attention to clinical inter-analytic exchanges as a newly emerging field of psychoanalytic research. After exploring various aspects, difficulties, and challenges, Frisch and Bleger, true to the spirit of their analytic inquiry, conclude with two provocative questions that encapsulate both their hypothesis and one of the book’s most notable achievements:

To what extent can we systematically and “scientifically” study the work of analysts with one another, not merely as an organisational issue but as a territory of psychoanalysis itself? Could we not assert that inter-analytic exchange, especially clinical inter-analytic exchange, which has significantly expanded over the past twenty years, constitutes a new field of psychoanalytic investigation?

The book concludes with an elegantly composed postscript by Sechaud, where she reflects on the history and circumstances surrounding the creation of the Specificity of Psychoanalytic Treatment Today working party. Sechaud emphasises that, despite the multitude of theories that have developed since Freud, the analytic method remains the single unifying thread among all analysts. This method involves the patient's free association and the analyst's evenly suspended attention, which enables the analyst's thoughts to move freely through the representations evoked by the patient's discourse, linking the present with the repressed, whether from the recent or distant past. As with all sciences, it is the method that defines psychoanalysis as a distinct field. Sechaud stresses the crucial roles of transformation, condensation, repression, displacement, metaphor, and transference, arguing that the chapters in this book paint a vivid and convincing picture of the specific characteristics of analytic work in Specificity groups. The book offers valuable insights into the clinical and theoretical dimensions of this approach, contributing to a deeper understanding of this particular modality of group psychoanalytic work.

In conclusion, *Specificities of Psychoanalytic Treatment: Birth of a Method* stands as a remarkable achievement by all its authors and a testament to the ongoing vitality and creativity of psychoanalysis and its practitioners. Reading this book, and experiencing the emotions and thoughts evoked by this two-decade-long work in progress, I can only hope that many other readers, analysts and non-analysts alike, will derive the same pleasure as I have.