Let me say right away that the notion of memory without recollections gathers my full support and that what Cesar Botella introduces in its wake is an interesting outlook on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis today. This being said, there is much to be discussed in Botella’s paper. I will address three main points, more in the hope of clarifying the issues at stake than of reaching any final conclusion. I will start with the very notion of remembering in Freud, then I will address the so-called archaeological model and, finally, I will examine Botella’s claim to a renewal of the method in psychoanalysis.

Memory without recollections and the Freudian idea of ‘remembering’

It is impossible today to deny the existence of memory without recollections. Freud himself had a clear notion of this fact when he wrote that some patients in analysis behave like experimental subjects who obey the post-hypnotic suggestions and act accordingly yet have no recollection of having been given any instruction to that effect. In this category of analysands, he wrote: “We may say that the patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without of course knowing that he is repeating it” (Freud, 1914, p. 150). As Strachey aptly notes, the same idea had been expressed many years earlier in the postscript to the Dora case (Freud, 1905, p. 119). The kind of memory implied in Freud’s notion of ‘repetition’ corresponds, for what regards the neural mechanisms involved, to what is today widely accepted in the field of cognitive neuroscience as implicit or ‘non-declarative’ memory. It was hypothesized, in more general terms, a long time ago by the philosopher Henri Bergson (1896) who remarked that one has the capacity to recite a poem by heart while having no recollection of when the memorizing took place. Much later, another philosopher, Gilbert Ryle, distinguished between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’, and the work of Brenda Milner with ‘H.M.’ demonstrated that, even in the presence of a brain lesion causing an amnesic syndrome, the
patient retained the capacity to acquire new skills albeit with no recollection of having learned anything new (see Milner et al., 1998).

Going back to Freud, the new kind of “remembering” described in 1914 in the form of repetition contrasted with what, in the same paper, Freud calls “remembering in the old manner – reproduction in the psychical field […]” (Freud, 1914, p. 153; italics added). Through this contrast, we get a better idea of what the “old manner of remembering” implied: reproduction in the psychic field is indeed an expression introducing two important terms – ‘reproduction’ and ‘psychic field’ – whose important implications I cannot discuss here but which I addressed in a previous paper (Scarfone, 2011). As for the “new technique” associated with this conception, it is a method “in which the analyst gives up the attempt to bring a particular moment or problem into focus” (p. 147) and which demands of the analyst a “perpetual struggle […] to keep in the psychical sphere all the impulses which the patient would like to direct into the motor sphere” (p. 153).

These notions appear to me as important markers not only of Freud’s conception of the analytic endeavour, but also of his conception of memory and ‘remembering.’ If one considers the many instances in which Freud discussed the latter, one can see that his views were fairly constant. They can be traced as far back as his book On Aphasia (Freud, 1891) and the Project of 1895. It would take too much space here to give a detailed account of what I find relevant in these two important writings for our present discussion. I will simply mention that for Freud – in his book On Aphasia as in every other writing and regardless of the neurological or psychoanalytic vocabulary he used – everything is embodied and in motion, we are always presented with dynamic processes operating between quantity and quality, with many relays between the periphery – exposed to massive external forces – and the centre – where the charting of the embodied experience is ‘projected.’ In On Aphasia, he writes that the nervous fibres yielding such projection “contain the body periphery in the same way […] a poem contains the alphabet” (Freud, 1891, p. 53). That is, whatever was perceived at some point in the external world was necessarily modified and recombined by the cumulative effect of many other inputs and of pre-existing memory traces. He also writes that: “[P]erception and association are terms by which we describe different aspects of the same process” (p. 57). The infidelity of memory is therefore not surprising, nor are its many forms. In the Project, “the work of remembering” [Erinnerungsarbeit] is specifically defined as the capacity to “trace back [what is perceived] to information from one’s own body” (Freud, 1895, p. 331). Add to this the famous letter to Fliess of 6 December 1896, where memory traces are said to be registered more than once and to undergo periodical transcriptions, and you will get a definite sense that for Freud memory was never simply made of memories (or recollections) and that ‘the work of remembering’ is more and something else than being able to produce a narrative of things past. The therapeutic role of the ‘work of remembering’ is such that the recovery or the construction of a significant ‘memory’ entails a restructuring of the whole memory system (Scarfone,
2011). It is not a mere recollection, then, but a transformative process involving the bodily experience of one’s own being, with all its cognitive, historical, affective and moral concomitants.

The so-called ‘archaeological model’

Paradoxically, while in full agreement with Botella’s idea of ‘memory without recollections’, I cannot subscribe to Botella’s approach to the so-called ‘archaeological model’ of psychoanalysis. I am well aware that Freud, on more than one occasion, used archaeology as a metaphor for psychoanalytic exploration, but I also believe that commentators often drew inaccurate conclusions in this regard. The problem here is not to establish whether or not Freud had an archaeological conception of psychoanalysis, but to see what role the reference to archaeology played in understanding the effects and consequences of psychoanalytic investigation.

True, Freud was a passionate collector of archaeological artifacts and he compared himself to Schliemann in search of Troy. In so doing, he adopted a rather limited conception of what archaeologists really do. Limited in the sense that unearthing the ‘object,’ as Jean Laplanche has shown, is presented as the ultimate goal of the research, whereas modern archaeology is servant to historical or prehistorical research (Laplanche, 1991a, p. 146) and that uncovering artifacts is useful inasmuch as they help understand better the historical period in which they were created. This, of course, does not prevent the discoverers from admiring the inherent qualities of the objects that can be found and restored, a fact redolent of the analysand’s quest for – and possible idealization of – the lost object. In this regard the parallel between the unconscious and the archaeological field seems to hold. But, as Laplanche also points out, Freud had just as well a ‘hyper-archaeological’ conception of the psyche, as illustrated in his ‘holographic’ description of all the superimposed strata of the city of Rome in Civilization and its discontents (Freud, 1930). In other words, when Freud really tried to apply the archaeological metaphor to the mind, it is archaeology that came out deformed to the point of becoming surrealistic. In Freud’s own words, if the physical description of Rome was to represent the unconscious mind, the many archaeological epochs had to be so intermingled that they would soon lead “to things that are unimaginable and even absurd” (1930, p. 70). So much, therefore, for the so-called ‘archaeological model’ of the work of psychoanalysis. Whereas archaeology retained its attractiveness for Freud in search of visual metaphors and sometimes – as in the case of the Wolf Man – of a precise dating of past events, it was obviously not a ‘model’ for the whole psychoanalytic endeavour. This becomes even clearer in the other most explicit reference Freud made to archaeology in Constructions in analysis (Freud, 1937). Though he begins by stating that: “[T]he two processes are in fact identical...” (p. 259) he immediately adds: “...except that the analyst works under better conditions and has more material at his command to assist him, since what he is dealing with is not something destroyed but something that is alive...” (ibid.) This apparently simple ‘exception’ will soon show analysis to be completely different from archaeology. In fact, in
the 1937 paper, the archaeological metaphor serves more to illustrate the epistemological problems encountered in both endeavours than to assimilate one discipline to the other. Indeed, Freud concludes his comparison by signalling that: “[T]he main difference between them lies in the fact that for the archaeologist the reconstruction is the aim and end of his endeavours while for analysis the construction is only a preliminary labour” (1937, p. 260).

Preliminary to what? Freud immediately makes it clear that it is not preliminary “in the sense that the whole of it must be completed before the next piece of work can be begun as, for instance, is the case with house building” (ibid.) The constructions are offered to the patient as they come, and their validity is not supported or denied by the analysand’s ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, for reasons that Freud had explained in the opening paragraph of the paper. What is at stake here is the important remark that the work of analysis “consists of two different portions, that it is carried on in two different localities, that it involves two people, to each of whom a distinct task is assigned” (p. 258). Construction, i.e. the “preliminary work,” is the task of the analyst while the task of the analysand is to “remember.”

I will not discuss here the modalities of analytic work thus described by Freud. What I deem important for our present discussion is to connect the analysand’s task – to remember – with the ‘operational meaning’ of this verb I established in the first part of this discussion. More specifically, I wish to emphasize that, contrary to Botella’s suggestion, the so-called ‘archaeological model’ had but an illustrative role, and even served, to a certain extent, as a counter-example, a backdrop at best, against which the specific features of psychoanalysis could be highlighted. So I find myself once more immersed in the paradox of agreeing with Botella’s proposal that there is a memory without recollections, while disagreeing with the role he attributed to the archaeological model. After many readings, I could not do away with the impression that Botella gave that model a much greater importance than it really had, and this then allowed him to all the more easily dismiss it as “inappropriate.” My contention is that the archaeological model needed not become inappropriate, because it never had the central role Botella gives to it. On the contrary, the metaphor of archaeology served to better underscore the fact that constructions are just preliminary ingredients of the more central struggle towards “remembering.” I would even go as far as saying that the gist of analysis is precisely the “permanent struggle” mentioned by Freud in 1914, between the form of remembering that is expressed in action and repetition and “remembering in the old manner – reproduction in the psychical field.” It is the struggle the analytic dyad must wage in order to go from unrepresented states to the construction of meaning (Levine et al., 2013).

“Reproduction in the psychical field,” indeed, appears to me as the main goal of analysis, and this was perhaps lost of view in the debate held some years ago in this Journal about the role of memory in psychoanalysis (Blum, 2003; Fonagy, 1999, 2003). In a way, Fonagy (1999) was right that remembering, in the banal sense of ‘recollecting,’ can be considered an epiphenomenon. But what he seems to have not considered is the exact meaning of ‘remembering’ in psychoanalysis. He referred in fact to “remem-
bering past events” and to the “the return of such memories” (Fonagy, 1999, p. 218) whereas, as I hope to have shown, the Freudian idea of remembering is much more complex. If what is repeated in action must in the end be reproduced in the psychical field, this implicitly means that it was not psychical at the start. So that the ‘remembering’ that happens in analysis not only is not mere recollection, but implies a decisive change in the very nature and function of what makes a comeback – mainly through the transference, itself a repetition. The role of memory in analysis is therefore multiple because there are multiple kinds of memory, and not all of them deal with memories or recollections.

Freud reports the patient as saying: “As a matter of fact I’ve always known it; only I’ve never thought of it” (1914, p. 148). Clearly, then, the recovery of a memory, a recollection, is not what matters the most since the patient may well have always “known it”; it is rather a question of what it means psychoanalytically to have, or not, “thought of it.” And it would not solve our problem to declare that dissociation and not repression is at stake in this clinical snippet. No matter how we call the mechanism by which the patient knew something but was ‘not thinking of it,’ the emphasis rests on ‘thinking.’ What is the thinking that psychoanalysis is supposed to help the patient become able to do? How does it relate to “reproduction in the psychical field”? The question entails a whole research program where psychoanalysis could make an important contribution in a field today mainly occupied by cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind. In the present context I will only indirectly address this aspect in the next and final part of this comment to Botella.

Renewal or revival?

Let me say that I like the term ‘regredience’ introduced more than ten years ago by the Botellas. Although it is not clearly stated in the present paper, Cesar and Sara Botella had defined “regredience” as the psychical capacity that is at work in the types of regression described by Freud (Botella and Botella, 2001, p. 1178). My understanding is that they wanted to put the emphasis on the general movement or process involved, while avoiding any sense of “going backward.” They give the example of the dream activity which is “neither regressive nor archaic [...] and can be as much a psychic state as a movement in becoming; a transformation potential...” (p. 1179, my translation). I agree that this approach, even when it refers to the hallucinatory modality of experience, is more appropriate than any reference to the archaic. The “hallucinatory” indeed is not limited to hallucinations in the psychopathological sense. It is a way of experiencing the mental states and processes that lie outside of verbal, abstract or symbolic thinking and it provides, in my view, a very useful approach to the question of the ways in which unconscious memory traces can manifest themselves. Freud himself clearly mentions hallucinations and quasi-hallucinatory, “ultra-clear” recollections in his paper on constructions already cited (1937, pp. 266–7). But while Freud spoke of the patient’s experience, the Botellas’ notion of regredience is related to the analyst’s
experience during the session. In both instances it is a notion that frees us from the too simple, if not simplistic, idea that what we look for in analysis is the recovery of memories. ‘Regredience’ rather indicates a shift into another mode of thinking and feeling; a mode that needs not be related to any primitive stage of development but is always at our disposal if only we are able to immerse ourselves in it.

What Cesar Botella does not say, however – in the present paper nor, to my knowledge in the study published in 2001 – is what the analyst must do to put himself in a state of regredience. In the rather detailed and very interesting clinical example presented here, Botella tells us more than once that: “[His] listening became regredient,” but without any explanation of why or how that happened. Now, this seems to me a rather important point, for if, as I believe, he considers regredience a decisive aspect of the ‘renewal of the psychoanalytic method,’ then one has to know how to recur to it methodically.

Before going any further in discussing this question, I must also mention that I found Botella’s case presentation very convincing and his analytic method rather familiar. It is therefore not obvious for me where the ‘renewal of the method’ lies. The reader might at this point imagine that Botella’s method is not new to me because I was trained in the French tradition, and there is certainly some truth in this. But I think there is more in Botella’s claim than just the ‘French’ way of analysing. Yet, again, Botella does not say how nor why his listening becomes ‘regredient.’ This made me think it is so because his analytic stance is really not as ‘new’ as he seems to suggest. I wonder indeed to what extent it differs, for instance, from Freud’s listening with an ‘evenly suspended attention’ (a more accurate translation of ‘gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit’ than ‘freely hovering attention’) or, to stay in the French domain, from the “pensée rêvante” [“dreaming-thinking”] invoked by Pontalis (2000, pp. 38–40). C. and S. Botella cited this notion in their work of 2001 without explicitly linking it with regredience. Laplanche’s (1991b) advice to analysts that they should actively “refuse to know” could also be enlisted among the precursors, since by blocking, bracketing or temporarily suspending positive knowledge one opens the way to other modalities of thinking and feeling during the session. Looking outside the French tradition, one may also find Botella’s description of his way of listening redolent of Bion’s (1962) ‘reverie,’ of Theodor Reik’s (1948) ‘listening with the third ear’ or of Ernst Kris’s (1934) ‘regression in the service of the Ego.’ By this I only mean to say that in the psychoanalytic tradition there are other names for phenomena not unlike what Botella describes in his paper. In all these instances, one could say that the common denominator is the analyst’s paradoxical ‘effort’ towards not actively seeking, i.e. to putting the ego aside, not expecting and not wanting anything specific, thereby becoming available for the unpredictable. These are all ways of eliciting material not yet thinkable and which, in Freud’s words, the analytic dyad must ‘struggle’ to reproduce in the psychical domain. Indeed, what images, sounds or other sensory phenomena occurring through regredience have in common is that they present themselves, i.e. they are not yet representations (Scarfone,
2011, 2013), and, when they present themselves, the task of analysis is to bring them to the state where they can be represented, symbolized or, if one prefers, ‘mentalized.’

In spite of my stated familiarity with his method, I think I understand why Botella speaks of a “renewal of the method.” Regardless of my divergence about the so-called archaeological model, I believe that what Botella means to go against here is a way of doing analysis where the analyst’s ego remains highly cathected and secondary process thinking stays on the front line. But, in my opinion, what he proposes is more a revival than a renewal. A revival in the sense that, as I hope to have shown, there are many precedents in that regard, starting with Freud’s own recommendations about how to listen psychoanalytically. A revival that must be periodically carried out for the simple reason that the analysts’ modes of listening are subjected to the same kind of resistance as the patients’ ways of associating: the ‘reasonable’ stance takes over with time and both members of the dyad progressively and repeatedly let go of the rule that asks them to put their judgment to rest for the time of the session and to let thoughts, images and other material ‘fall’ on them like unexpected rain. Even within a single session, in spite of our best intentions, our disposition towards ‘regredience,’ ‘reverie’ or ‘listening with the third ear’ waxes and wanes, so that the revival is a task that must always be taken up anew. The unconscious is something that must be continually rediscovered. I believe that in this thought-provoking paper Cesar Botella invites us to perform one such rediscovery for ourselves.

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