

The Southern Highway: movement and stoppage

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Abstract

In this text, I intend to work symbolically on some intersections between Júlio Florêncio Cortázar's short story "The Southern Highway" and analytical psychology, thereby discussing concepts such as ego and persona. I make some approximations and associations between aspects explored by Cortázar in this short story and the challenges of our contemporary life, which allow for a reflection on the ephemeral yet intense encounters that can define and structure our relationships and the profound need for contact that is becoming increasingly important and challenging. I end the text with an approximation between aspects of the story and the movements of isolation and stoppage that we also compulsorily experienced during the recent pandemic. ■



Keywords
Ego, persona,
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Introduction

This story deals with that which is unusual, magical and unexpected. “The Southern Highway” was published in 1966 in the book “All Fires the Fire”. In this literary work, very current issues are addressed, such as the establishment of strong but ephemeral social ties, their importance in the constitution of both personal identity and “invisible” social networks, as well as the pain or estrangement that arises when their dissolution occurs.

I first came across this short story over 40 years ago, and that unique, real and objective encounter has never left my life. From that first reading, with each new traffic congestion, with each jammed road, I would meet again the girl in the Dauphine, the engineer in the 404 and the two little nuns in the 2HP. I would look – and still look – with curiosity at the occupants of the neighboring automobiles, trying to guess, based on the cars they are driving, where they are from (as evidenced by their license plates), the objects they carry, their traveling companions, who they are, where they are going and how they travel.

And, in a first approach to the theme, I propose that the reading of the story so long ago be already a first, so to speak, ephemeral encounter. Ephemeral in its duration and singularity but also enduring, as it has left deep marks in me, the reader. What impact has this encounter with the story had? A single encounter, a single reading, and – of all the short stories in the book – a single memory. The story mesmerized me; it remained imprinted in me like a spell waiting to be revealed again. And it was indeed revealed with each new traffic congestion, with each new jammed road.

What would it be like if? What life was going on in the neighboring cars? How many stories

would be taking place right at this moment in each of the cars stopped along the highway next to me?

In fact, this same feeling is experienced in any situation that involves a relationship that is, so to speak, compulsory for a given period of time: long flights, hospitalizations, endless lines and long waiting time in public service facilities. Encounters start and end quickly, without us having any control over them.

Are these encounters minor, because they are brief and restricted, because they are routine? Are they doomed to be forgotten? It seems difficult to ascribe substance and importance to the person next to me; it is challenging to get out of my car, my seat, my skin. Cortázar said: “My notion of the fantastic is a notion that ultimately is not different from the notion of realism for me. Because reality is a reality where the fantastic and the real intersect daily (1977)”

The short story and its movements

The short story starts with a collapse. Something out of order has happened and opened a new layer of functioning. The possibility of transformation from the recognition or mobilization of different than usual aspects. Singular, deep experiences constellated from ephemeral encounters. And I propose a poem to enter the story:

Zero Quota

Stop,

Life has stopped

Or was it the automobile? (Andrade, 1978, p. 23).

When the automobile stopped, the life that was contained within it was set in motion. Stop, the automobile stopped and life was never the same again.

At first the girl in the Dauphine had insisted on keeping track of time, though for the engineer in the Peugeot 404 it no longer held any importance. Anyone could look at their watch, but it was as if this time strapped to one's wrist or the bip bip of the radio were a measure of something else entirely, time for those who hadn't been so stupid as to want to return to Paris via the southern highway on a Sunday afternoon... (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 3).

The highway is both a setting and a guiding thread, the very function of the existence of a road. Thinking with Fernando Pessoa, we propose the existence of a "divine process that brings the road into being" (PESSOA, 1981, p. 233). However, the surprising element is the total stoppage, or rather the stoppage of the movement suggested by the road when the traffic congestion occurs. Thus, the question of time arises in the fantastic plot proposed by Cortázar from the very beginning of the short story, and despite its importance, we will see that it is not possible to determine the duration of the traffic jam or the duration of the story. "Time is a reality confined to the instant and suspended between two voids" (BACHELARD, 2009, p. 17).

The road and that situation introduce an element of novelty; they provoke a change in those characters' lives: that which was normal and routine has now been deeply shaken. The writer inaugurates here the feeling of estrangement – something different has entered life, which will never be the same again. As if the very notion of ego with its most rational functions has now been called into question: there is an active, conscious ego. An ego that drives a car intent on returning to Paris via the southern highway, an ego that dominates the machine that carries it and that ends up defining it, an ego that, in this movement, automatically exercises its autonomy.

Then there is a traffic jam and with it the contradictory feeling of confinement. And in this

space, trapped in a machine, a modern armor designed to run, this subject/ego is confronted. The isolation experienced in a normal and protected way inside the car moving toward Paris has been forcibly broken by the congestion. A highway full of cars returning from the weekend ceases to be or have its automatic movement and becomes a setting or space for relationships, for transformation.

The August heat was increasing and sticking to the tyres, making the delay all the more frustrating. The air was infused with the smell of gasoline, wild shouting from the young men in the Simca, the glint of sunlight reflected by the glass and chrome edges, and to top it all the contradictory feeling of being enclosed in a thick jungle of machines designed to run free (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 4).

The moment the cars stop, the life that exists and happens inside them is released. Gradually, the drivers and their companions start to move, getting out of their stationary vehicles and becoming protagonists themselves. As if the ego, named after the cars they drive, is then forced to open up, to expand its scope of action now measured not by objective distances, but by subjective approximations.

Choosing a car is always a self-affirmation exercise. We know how much the cars we drive represent aspects of the persona, regarding those characteristics with which we choose to present ourselves to the world. In view of these aspects, the short story introduces the need to leave behind the persona (car, armor) with which each of the egos/subjects in the story identifies, and in a process of assimilation of unconscious aspects, expand their autonomy and reach.

Immobilized cars, protagonists of the movement on the southern highway, give way to their occupants, who, despite being now free, are still named after them. The immobile car goes from being an automaton to being an almost-subject;

it becomes a quality of and point of reference for the subject(s) who inhabit it. And each of the protagonists goes through this process in their own way.

The engineer in the 404, the short story's main character and narrative voice, begins to talk to everyone around him, using at first the usual form of superficial small talk intended to break the ice, establish a first contact, initiate some kind of interaction.

No-one had any doubt that a very serious accident must have occurred in the area, the only explication for such an incredible hold-up. And with that, the government, the heat, taxes, traffic, one topic after another, three meters, another commonplace, five meters, a sententious comment or a muffled curse (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 5).

Then, as always, the conversation with the stranger next to me starts the same way: the weather, the delay, the waiting, what brings you here? They are protocol-like ways of approximation, the establishment of minimal, superficial contact. In truth, I don't want to know anything about the person next to me, at least nothing that might risk or challenge my natural state. The small talk serves the purpose of meeting our need for contact, after all, there is another human being here beside me: I establish some contact, express a little about myself, then break away and move on. There is no need or room for a genuine exchange or transformation.

In the short story, after a long time during the traffic jam, small talk is no longer enough and basic survival needs require another type of contact. What do we do now? Do we have food? How are we going spend the night? And people are almost forced to truly make contact. When one's own existence is at stake, when the usual automatic functioning is disrupted, the establishment of personal rapport, the creation of social networks and the direction of one's

gaze at others emerge as the only way out, the only possibility. Here the occupant of the 404, the protagonist of the short story who identifies with his persona as an engineer, begins to play an organizing, rational role.

The third row towards the outside lane no longer interested him as he would have had to stray dangerously far from the 404; he saw colours, shapes, Mercedes Benz, ID, 4R, Lancia, Skoda, Morris Minor – the whole catalogue. On the left, in the opposite lane, stretched out another unreachable thicket of Renaults, Anglias, Peugeotts, Porches, Volvos... (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 6).

In the story, the affinity groups are formed by chance, which is governed by location in time and space: the 12 cars that "were moving almost in unison, as if an invisible gendarme at the end of the motorway were co-ordinating the advance without letting anyone exert any kind of advantage". And at the same time, from this location, taking as a starting point my car's place on the highway, safety limits begin to be established. How far can I go? What interests me? What is comfortable? I begin to relate to my neighbor, to my group; the distant, the outsider can be threatening. I begin to expand the notion and limits of the ego, of what is mine and what is other and what belongs to others.

We are compelled to transform ourselves. Aspects of this ego/subject's persona will have to be revised and unknown characteristics embraced. Each of the characters in the story is challenged to review themselves in the face of the unexpected traffic jam. And each does so in their own way, based on their internal possibilities.

The unusual element in this story is introduced as a total reversal of meanings. What was once a highway – the ultimate place of movement possibility – becomes an immense sea of paralyzed cars. And what was once the

immobility of a large traffic congestion now becomes the fluidity of individuals in relation to one another.

Apart from these minor excursions, there was so little they could do that the hours could only pile up one on top of the other, for there was nothing to tell them apart; at one point the engineer thought of scratching this day out of his diary and gave a hollow laugh at the idea, but some time later when the nuns, the men in the Taunus and the girl in the Dauphine started with their contradictory calculations, it became clear that it would have been better to have kept more accurate record (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 9).

A time, so to speak, paralyzed or suspended is accompanied by a feeling of infinity, almost a time capsule. But in the story, as in life, reality sets in and movement can be literally changed. Small movements, in contrast to the dazzling progress of cars on the road, give way to more subtle processes. By leaving the car and exercising their individuality outside of it, the characters are led to establish new relationships and thereby expand their awareness.

A group begins to form based on the survival needs of the occupants of those 12 close-by cars. Interestingly, the group's need for organization arises from the words of the peasants who have provisions and call for a command structure, a superior organization. It is important to trust someone, to hand over power, to submit to a leader, an organizer. Will my responsibility be reduced then? Will I hand over control of my life to someone else? What aspects of the subject are we talking about here? There is an ego/subject identified with the car they drive who is now being challenged to exercise a new type of functioning. This movement happens in a continuous process of coming and going, getting into the car, staying in the persona and getting out, relating to others, expanding the reach

of functioning and increasing awareness. Once again, as in real life, each of the protagonists in the story does it in their own way, based on their own personal equation.

To his surprise the peasants proved themselves to be very friendly; they understood that in such circumstances everyone had to look out for each other, and they thought that if someone took it upon himself to direct the group (the woman made a circular motion with her hand, encompassing the dozen or so surrounding cars) there should be no shortages until they reached Paris (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 9).

Gradually, we learn that just like the group of 12 vehicles, the protagonists of our story, other groups are formed along the road. Each of them has its representative and issues of greater interest are discussed among the commanders of neighboring groups. Small groups within larger groups, within ever-larger groups, on a paralyzed road. And we often lose the notion of totality, of belonging. The life brought about by the traffic congestion offers the possibility of this perspective. From the individual to the collective, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, group life happening at the same time as individual life takes place inside and outside, together and apart.

Attempts at unfair partiality are ruthlessly attacked; the command is sovereign and appealing, favoring survival strategies as it prioritizes the collective. From now on, the motto is: all for one and one for all. The individual at the service of the collective, the self at the service of something greater. "The women improvised some Samaritan work bit by bit, going from car to car taking care of the children so that the men would not be overburdened..." (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 13).

The story is structured from a more patriarchal framework; egos are identified with more typified aspects of male/female behavior. Wom-

en repeat the older and more stereotyped roles of taking care of the offspring, the elderly and the sick – activities that Cortázar calls “Samaritan”. Men, on the other hand, go hunting, search for food, thus securing the order, subsistence and safety of the group. Command relationships are also exercised by men in the story; it is no coincidence that the story’s narrative voice belongs to the engineer in the 404.

Gradually, the group is formed and reproduces social relationships; an ambulance is improvised in the 404 with parts of the camping kit of the young men from the Simca; the old lady who is feeling unwell is placed in this sleeper car to rest. A doctor who belonged to another group is called to check up on her; he visits her the next day and releases her from the “hospital”. At first, the short story’s subjects are named after the cars they occupy. As the stoppage continues and the characters come out of their “armors”, the activities they perform also begin to define them. The engineer, the doctor, the nuns are now identified and recognized.

And there is the subject/ego who cannot cope with the forced stoppage. The man in the Caravelle commits suicide, and the doctor is called again to confirm the death. Cause of death – ingestion of poison. We learn that, in addition to his obvious fragility (he did not leave his car and did not establish close interactions with the drivers next to him), he could not bear life without Yvette, who had left him in another city. The pain caused by the breakup and the isolation that followed are the probable causes for the suicide. Did this individual have a fragile ego, which was incapable of dealing with life’s inevitable challenges? The pain of abandonment, exacerbated by the compulsory stoppage, must have brought about something deemed impossible. Inside his car, now stuck in traffic, the absence of his beloved and everything that this represented became unbearable.

In yet another casualty, we learn that the driver of the Floride had deserted during the

night, which made it necessary to redistribute the people responsible for the cars so that the group could continue moving together. And what is to desert if not to abandon, to exit the scene, to give up, to not be able to cope? Desertion is also a form of objective disappearance. The one who has so far been by my side now chooses their own life over me, leaving me alone on the way. And in the group that has been formed, it is imperative that they continue walking together; abandoning that armor/persona is not possible. Another person must be put in charge and that small order must be maintained.

What sets the story in motion is the stoppage. As in a deep paradox: the time of life in motion from the immobilized life. Intimate and profound relationships are constellated in the space occupied by immobilized cars on the motionless highway. It is as if, once they free themselves from the expectations generated by these cars/armors, the human beings “contained” there begin to exercise themselves as protagonists of their own story, able to exist from immobility, beyond any defense, beyond the personas borrowed from the cars that name them in the story.

The men attempt to leave the highway and seek food in nearby farms and villages that are hostile and do not favor any kind of contact. In fact, they throw stones at every attempt of approach by the drivers and, in a gesture of utmost violence, they fling a scythe at the group. Is the life that has been born on the road threatening? The foreigner, the outsider must be denied; they cannot have a place there. The danger of contamination by the other is extreme.

Without being able to determine why exactly, the opposition from the outside world was unbreakable; one had no more than go beyond the limits of the motorway for stones to come raining down. In the middle of the night someone let fly a scythe that bounced on the roof of the

DKW and landed next to the Dauphine (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 20).

What is so threatening about contact with that which is different, which is strange? It is a question of survival. The individuals stuck in the traffic jam need to be fed and have their basic needs met. Nevertheless, they are seen as threats to the locals, who do not recognize them as equals. In addition to the important issues experienced by the individuals paralyzed with their cars on the highway, those who live on the fringes of the road are also affected by the great stoppage. The incident introduces something unusual into their lives as well. Then, with heightened defenses, they attack the drivers, refusing to open up to creative exchange and so defending themselves from the invasion of the other. Could this be a visionary metaphor for the times we live in?

And we are gradually led through the movement of the characters in the story by way of the most everyday activities being reproduced on that jammed road. Porsches and Ford Mercurys appear selling water at exorbitant prices, which double each day. There are food smugglers, disputes and misunderstandings between different groups – a can of condensed milk is enough to almost start a war between tribes.

And time goes by in the paralyzed highway. What was heat and scorching sunlight in the beginning becomes cold and snow as the story progresses, and then there is a return to a milder weather. The passage of time in the story is marked by the change of seasons.

At night the lives of the group took on a stealthy, more private character; the car doors would open silently to let in or out some shivering silhouette; no-one looked at anyone else, their eyes as blind as their very shadow. Beneath dirty anoraks, with overgrown fingernails, smelling of being confined in stale, old clothes, there was still a degree of happiness here and there (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 22).

In the dark of night, in the time of shadows, with blinded eyes, a secretive and private life emerges and with it the possibility of something new growing. Such a fruitful exchange takes place in that space and time that a pregnancy occurs. The new emerging from the dark night, from the relationship between a male, the engineer from the 404, and a female, the young woman from the Dauphine, stripped of their personas, at the mercy of the most brutal happiness.

And the snow ends, the weather improves, relations with other groups are resumed and commercial transactions are reestablished. Porsche has kept on coming and controlling the black market, although Ford Mercury has disappeared. The girl from the Dauphine timidly tells the engineer that she is pregnant by him. Then:

Anything could happen at any given moment, outside any foreseeable time frame; the most important of all occurred when nobody expected it anymore, and it was the person with least responsibility who realised first. ...then there was the rumble of upheaval, something like a heavy yet uncontrollable migratory impulse that was awaking from an interminable lethargy and testing its strength. Taunus shouted them back to their cars (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 24).

And the traffic jam suddenly clears, breaking up the groups formed by the paralyzed cars. Once again, when the highway is cleared and traffic begins to flow, the life that was constellated in the immobility of the cars is paralyzed.

In the push and pull of the traffic 404 still hoped he could catch up with Dauphine again, but with every passing minute he grew ever more convinced it was impossible, that the group had disbanded irrevocably, that the daily meetings would never come back, nor the little rituals, the war councils in Taunus's car, the childrens'

laughter as they played with their cars, the image of the nun counting off her rosaries (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 26).

The story woven by Cortázar leads us to build relationships of intimate affection with the occupants of the vehicles on the highway. Paralyzed, we are carried away by the movement/stoppage for 20 pages. But just when we have surrendered ourselves and are living the daily lives of the individuals outside their cars in the midst of the traffic jam, when all this seems normal to us, then the cars resume their movement, the speed increases and the relationships that were so strong just moments ago are undone.

And all of this takes place in the final 6 or 7 pages. And we will never know what is to happen to the girl in the Dauphine and the baby she is expecting. How will the old man in the purple Citroën ID, whose wife died, live, and what will become of the young men in the Simca? Close relationships – not really close, just relationships – are undone and everyone goes back to their place. Life goes on in its own rhythm and complexity. How to measure the ephemerality of the encounters proposed by the author in the story? How to evaluate the impact brought about by these encounters on each of the occupants of the stationary cars?

What is real, unique and important is only so in that time and space. Everything else becomes a memory – and what are memories if not marks of transformative events?

The congestion had already lasted long enough to confer a status of normality to the issue. There was no reason to suppose at that moment the need to write down names or phone numbers or even license plates that could easily help identify their owners.

If the characters in this short story were real contemporary people, the story could be modified, and the relationships could be resumed through a simple search or post on Facebook or Instagram: group of drivers of the vehicles paralyzed in the great stoppage on the southern high-

way. Would these relationships, then subjected to the normalcy of daily life, be more real, and wouldn't their impact be due precisely to the paradox of their existence?

Nothing else could be done other than get in step with the march, adapt oneself mechanically to the speed of the surrounding cars, avoid all thought... He clung absurdly to the idea that at half-past nine they would distribute the rations, that they would have to visit the sick, mull over the situation with Taunus and the yokel from the Ariane; later would be night-time, would be Dauphine slipping stealthily into his car; stars or clouds, life. Yes, it had to be like that way, it couldn't have come to an end (CORTÁZAR, 1969, p. 27).

And what about time now?

A time of stoppage, of congestion, an unusual and uncontrollable situation that causes a network of unlikely relationships to be established. On the southern highway (as in life), we establish contact with those who are close to us, with those with whom we share space, with the colleague next to us.

Could our lives be a huge congestion? What kind of mobility are we experiencing? Virtual *versus* real, objective *versus* subjective, symbolic *versus* concrete: in which layer are we circulating?

Enclosed in our cars, protected fish tanks, we are terrified of our actual neighbors, and we desperately try to make virtual contact through our cell phones, tablets and computers, using our social networks. It is necessary to make contact, we really need to make contact – we know that only through relating with others can we know our best and worst selves and so grow and develop.

Virtual relationships grow in an effort to facilitate this contact, to establish new relationships, to get out of social isolation. They can function as a channel of expression, but at the

same time, they favor more protected ways of life. Daily posts, pictures on Instagram, all kinds of narcissistic exposure can isolate us more than facilitate real contact. We desire as much as we fear relationships.

In so-called social media and also in search engines, we often end up finding more of the same, which accentuates the characteristics and ways of functioning that we already know. We walk in circles or rather circulate around roads and cities already known, seeing and revisiting the same spots.

We already know that internet search engines and their algorithms favor the finding of increasingly “suitable” results, which are in tune with the profile of the user, based on their previous searches. There is a specific kind of result for each of us, depending on the kind of search we usually do, the kind of website we usually access, and the kind of words we usually make use of. That is nothing other than the tendency to accentuate walking in circles: the novelties gradually become familiar and we tend to find “more of the same”.

There is a growing relationship with people who are like myself. Similarities are increasingly valued and differences excluded. Affinity groups are defined and internet users then gravitate around themselves. Increasingly perfect and safe microcosms are created.

It is also interesting to think that much of our use of the internet and social media is for “diversion”, and we forget the actual meaning of the word, which stems from the verb *divertere*, to turn aside from a course of action.

And so it seems that what we call diversion is not a deviation from the path. Social media sell diversion and do not deliver it; they distract us from our emptiness, our boredom, and fill them with what could be new but is not. In fact, when we think about our everyday choices, we are always occupying our lives with topics that are similar to what we have already experienced. The latest update may be just a simple

update, the latest model may be only slightly different from the previous one – nothing that changes the order of things. Do we just always want more of the same, and in doing so keep ourselves within a bubble of belonging?

We need to live in an ordered world, a world that has and makes sense. We need to learn to think about what it means to walk in circles and what the circumambulation that Jung talked about is. In our omnipotent narcissism, we believe we are outliers while all we do is desperately try to belong – to a group, an idea, a school, a society. Finding our true place and making contact with others from that place is very difficult.

With his short story, Cortázar puts us in deviation, in the true possibility of diversion: the fantastic, which, as he says, is in everyday reality, places us in the subjective space where anything can happen, and only then there is the possibility of being different, or rather, diverse. The road stoppage on the way back from a summer weekend – the intended diversion – causes a deviation, whence diversity and difference emerge.

Where is difference and the possibility of transformation in virtual life? Are hackers the “evil agents” of this attempt at rupture? And are we analysts also special types of hackers? Is it not our role to steal the passwords to these systems, taking advantage of the gaps in security protocols and promoting a breakdown in our patients’ operational systems? A true diversion?

Is the project of a real and lasting bond false? Are we doomed to have increasingly virtual relationships? And what will be real? Is there anything like reality outside of time and space?

This short story can be understood as a metaphor for the discussion of the paradox between ephemerality and enduringness. As in Drummond’s poem, the desire is still to find a friend: “those silent, distant types, who read Horace’s verses but secretly influence life, love, the flesh” (ANDRADE, 1978, p. 63; my translation).

The relationship in the flesh between the girl from the Dauphine and the engineer from the 404 bore fruit – a pregnancy. Something was made in the flesh. And beyond all the transience of the congestion experience, a new being was engendered: something enduring and real.

And is it not our desire as analysts to also bring about something enduring? To transform the inner world of our patients, helping them to find what could be the real, revealing moment? One capable of provoking changes “in the flesh”. And won’t that which is real be revealed from estrangement?

One of the functions of literature, and I dare say also of analytical work, is precisely to provoke estrangement, to ask questions, to raise issues that can break the known thread and allow the entry of something new. To diverge.

The real and the fantastic: Cortázar starts from the real and leads the reader to an extreme situation in which the fantastic becomes the real. And we get used to it, only to suddenly have the real introduced again and through this movement draw us out of place, leaving us drifting. In an elastic-like movement, Cortázar stretches the story to the breaking point and then suddenly releases it, forcing us to suddenly reposition ourselves.

The search for encounter and meaning is universal and timeless. The path goes through both what is ephemeral and what is enduring. Through what is fixed and what is fluid, what is immediate and what is definitive. Sometimes we are in the individual, sometimes in the collective; in the pole of the spirit and in the pole of the flesh. Traffic, mobility is the only way out – to be able to walk, to come and go, and ultimately to experience, uncover, explore.

Final considerations

Life “outside” suddenly stopped and we were forced to “stay at home”; our daily flow of movement was paralyzed. We had to look at our neighbors in a different way, using other resources, establishing exchanges that in a normal movement would be “impossible”.

Our experience of social isolation during the pandemic also happened abruptly. Although news about the virus was already reaching us, it was all of a sudden that we withdrew to our spaces of isolation. Each of us was “forced” to stay in our own homes, having to come up with new ways of relating to work, home, our close companions and our distant loved ones who were also with us virtually. As if in a fantastic time, we can once again repeat with Cortázar: “Reality is a reality where the fantastic and the real intersect daily”.

The fantastic entered our daily lives without us realizing it. And the external movement in our lives, like the traffic on the southern highway, stopped. The isolation experienced normally inside the car moving toward Paris was forcibly broken by the traffic jam. The moment the cars stop, the life that exists and happens inside them is released.

Then, when one’s own existence is at stake, when the usual automatic functioning is disrupted, the establishment of new relationship ties, the creation of other social networks and the possibility of looking at others in a different way emerge as the only way out. In search of a collective, national and – why not – global response, we are led to individual attitudes of isolation and care. In the name of alterity, we must be increasingly responsible for ourselves and our relationships. Thus, a time that has been paralyzed or suspended is accompanied by the feeling of infinity, almost a time capsule. But in the story, as in life, reality sets in and movement can be literally changed.

Paradoxically, is it not also the perception of stoppage that can give movement to life? Is this not also the motto for profound transformations? As Jung told us long ago, fixity is the problem (JUNG, 1989, par. 925). And are we not so accustomed to and reliant on automatic movement that it becomes stoppage? What movement are we actually in?

As in the short story, we live the paradox of movement arising from stoppage. We can think

about the different relationships that were established during this period of social isolation, among us and within us, the many discoveries that were made and the possibility of dealing with time from a different standpoint. We can also think about the work that we were able to carry out virtually, the life that was able to flow without the usual congestions, the energy released for other ways of enjoying time and space.

And then, with the lifting of compulsory isolation, many of us have experienced discomfort in returning to our so-called “normal” lives. How do we not lose the gains accumulated in this period, how do we maintain the rich connections and discoveries made during the period of stoppage? And when the road starts flowing again, how will we move forward?

Life returns to normal and with it its maddening, intense flow and unrestrained movement once again promote an acceleration that separates us from others, “breaking” the connections we have established. Relationships that are so subtle and ephemeral that they cannot sustain

themselves, leaving us with the bitter taste of the perception of absence.

And where is the fantastic, where is the encounter in the midst of compulsory confinement? The road to Paris has found its flow, its speed. Contact with others so long confined by my side is lost. And what do I take from this? Will the girl from the Dauphine see her pregnancy through?

I end with Cortázar:

And on the radio antenna the Red Cross flag was flapping wildly, and he was charging at eighty kilometres an hour towards the lights that were growing ever larger without anyone knowing for sure why such a rush, why this race in the night amongst so many unfamiliar cars where no-one knew anything about anyone else, where everyone was staring dead ahead, exclusively dead ahead (1969, p. 28). ■

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Resumo

“A Autoestrada do Sul”: movimento e paralisção

Procuro neste texto trabalhar de forma simbólica algumas intersecções entre o conto de Júlio Florêncio Cortázar “A Autoestrada do Sul” e a psicologia analítica, discutindo conceitos como ego e persona. Faço algumas aproximações e associações entre os aspectos explorados por Cortázar neste conto e os desafios de nossa vida contemporânea, discutindo os

encontros efêmeros, mas fortes, que podem definir e estruturar nossas relações e a profunda necessidade de contato, cada vez mais importante e desafiadora. Termino o texto com uma aproximação entre aspectos do conto e os movimentos de isolamento e paralisção que vivemos de forma também compulsória durante o período recente de pandemia. ■

Palavras-chave: ego, persona, individual e coletivo, psicologia analítica.

Resumen

La carretera del sur: movimiento y paralización

Busco en este texto trabajar simbólicamente algunas intersecciones entre el cuento de Julio Florencio Cortázar “La carretera del sur” y la psicología analítica, discutiendo conceptos como el ego y la persona. Hago algunas aproximaciones y asociaciones entre aspectos explotados por Cortázar en este cuento y los desafíos de nuestra vida contemporánea, discutiendo encuen-

tros efímeros pero fuertes que pueden definir y estructurar nuestras relaciones y la profunda necesidad de contacto, cada vez más importante y desafiante. Termino el texto con una aproximación entre los aspectos del cuento y los movimientos de aislamiento y paralización que vivimos de manera obligatoria durante el reciente período de pandemia. ■

Palabras clave: ego, persona, individual y colectivo, psicología analítica

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