ABSTRACT: As psychoanalysts, we have to be constantly aware of the impact of external reality upon the analytic process, whether this comes from the world outside the consulting room or from within it. In particular, I am concerned with the disturbing influence that may come from the analyst's devotion to new theoretical positions and ways of working. Also we cannot prescribe 'good experience' for any patient. We can only follow the process, and this may require of us that we survive being used by the patient to represent all that has been worst in the patient's life. We should never deflect that.

KEY WORDS: psychoanalytic technique; analytic space; influence of new theory; corrective emotional experience; working with trauma; negative transference.

Psychoanalysis can no longer afford to be shut off from the external world, as once it often seemed to be. We should no longer be able to carry on in our consulting rooms as if the only world that counts is the internal world of the patient. The external world has always had its impact upon our lives and the lives of our patients, and in these present times that is even more unavoidably evident. How then do we adapt our technique to allow for the external realities that impinge ever more pressingly upon the world of the psychoanalytic consulting room?

I heard recently a courageous and impressively honest presentation of an analyst's clinical work conducted under the constant threat

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and almost daily experience of terrorist attacks in Israel. The analyst had felt that she needed to preserve the analytic work at all costs, rather than allow even this to be held ransom to terrorism. So, when her patient was seeking refuge from the dangers to himself and his family, wanting to move to a safer country to get away from the persistent dangers all around, she found herself interpreting this as a flight from the analysis. It was only some time later, when a baby was born into her own close family, that this analyst more fully allowed herself to feel the very real threats to the safety of her family, such as her patient had been feeling and trying to communicate to her in speaking of his wish to leave Israel for the sake of his family. Only then could she acknowledge that she too had been in flight, taking flight into analysis as a protection from the unbearable tensions in the world outside. With this radical shift in herself she became better able to be attuned to her patient’s anxieties. The patient then began to feel better heard and better understood. I think this is a telling example of how we have to re-think our priorities in our clinical work, so that we do not insulate ourselves from the external realities that increasingly impinge upon us.

But how do we adjust to a changing view of the world, and changing techniques in analysis, without interfering with or contaminating the analytic space? When new developments in clinical work are being advocated, it nearly always happens that the analytic space is liable to become contaminated by the enthusiasm of new thinking and the growing loyalty to new schools of analysis. By such means as these, what used to be psychoanalytic in the sense of seeking to follow the gradual emerging of the patient’s individual mind can devolve into therapies of suggestion or influence. One form of this influencing of patients can be through such techniques as re-parenting or whatever else it might be called. There can then be a risk that patients may find less and less freedom for a truly psychoanalytic experience.

Even though there is much that needs to be said about the impact of the external world upon the work we aim to do in our consulting rooms, I wish to focus mainly upon how we ourselves as analysts may impinge upon the analytic process, affecting how our patients are with us and what is subsequently brought into an analysis. We should note that some of what is brought into a session is brought by the analyst, not the patient.

I see no clear answer to this problem. However, I do think we may be helped to see what can reduce this danger of contamination of the analytic space if we regularly monitor the state of the analytic space for what may threaten to disturb it or interfere with it. In particular, we may need to be alert to the non-analytic influence that new theory