*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# THE USE OF THE ANALYST AND THE SENSE OF BEING REAL: THE CLINICAL MEANING OF WINNICOTT'S "THE USE OF AN OBJECT"

BY PAOLO FABOZZI

*"The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications" (1968) represents Donald Winnicott's theoretical and clinical legacy. The author develops this concept from a clinical point of view, through the analysis of a woman with psychotic functioning. He reflects upon the dramatic quality of risks inherent in the processes linked to the use of the object with seriously disturbed patients. He explores different meanings of the analyst's survival, linking it to the analyst's response. The processes of the use of the object—that is, the encounter between the patient's potential destructiveness and the analyst's capacity to respond through his own judicious subjectivity—let the patient experience the analyst's capacity to keep his own subjectivity, authenticity, and creativity alive. It is starting from the traces of this live object that patients gradually form their own personal sense of being real.*

**Keywords:** Winnicott, use of the analyst, analytic interaction, countertransference, fear of breakdown, dreams, interpretation, analyst's survival, transference, shared mutative experience.

> In the sequence one can say that first there is object-relating, then in the end there is object-use; in be-

Paolo Fabozzi is a Training and Supervising Analyst and member of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI) and an Adjunct Professor at "Sapienza," University of Rome.

Translation by Gina Atkinson.

> tween, however, is *the most difficult thing, perhaps, in human development;* or the most irksome of all the early failures that come for mending. This thing that there is in between relating and use is the subject's placing of the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control.
>
> —Winnicott 1968,[1] p. 89, italics added

## INTRODUCTION

In what way does the analysis manage to modify the core and the psychotic functioning of the borderline, schizoid, and narcissistic patient, if the analyst is experienced by the patient in the realm of his own omnipotence? How can the analyst proceed in a way that the patient can reach the ability to utilize his interpretations? And how can the analyst succeed in modifying the patient's psychotic functioning, constructing together with him the possibility of having experiences that give the patient the feeling his is a life worth being lived, beyond every reassuring denial?

I think that this is a technical, clinical, and theoretical problem of extreme importance, since I maintain that in many situations, it constitutes the central feature of the interminability of analysis, of its therapeutic efficacy, of the transformations that it can accomplish in the treatment of seriously disturbed patients.

*To have emotional experiences and to be influenced by them:* inhering in this—or rather, in the destruction of this potential—is the major portion of the pathological functioning with which we are confronted in our clinical practice. One of the perspectives we can utilize to describe and conceptualize the effects and objectives of the analytic process is precisely that of considering the activation or reactivation of every human being's potential to learn from emotional experience. Very often, in fact, we find ourselves treating patients who have not been able to develop fully, or at all, those psychic functions capable of allowing them the pos-

[1] It should be noted that Winnicott's "The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications," contained in his 1971 book *Playing and Reality,* was based on a paper read to the New York Psychoanalytic Society in 1968 and published as "The Use of an Object" in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1969.

sibility of living emotional experiences, of being influenced by them, and of drawing psychic nourishment from them.[2]

In the pages that follow, I will first briefly illustrate the concept of the use of the object. That concept represents the culmination of Winnicott's deliberations in two areas that invested his clinical and theoretical research for his entire life: the gradual construction of the subject's encounter with the object, and the distinction and construction of the relationship between what is subjective and what is objective. So I will present the analysis of a woman with psychotic functioning, dwelling in particular on some aspects of her clinical history and exploring in depth a sequence that illustrates, in an especially vivid way, the formation of the processes linked to the use of the object. In the third and fourth parts, I will propose my own elaboration of that concept, indicating some possible developments of the Winnicottian point of view. In particular, I will explore the link between the use of the object and the unconscious sense of threat experienced by seriously disturbed patients in relation to the analytic experience. Finally, I will discuss an additional aspect, and a fundamental one, connected to the patient's placing of the analyst outside the area of the patient's omnipotent control: the relationship between the analyst's survival and the patient's construction of the sense of being real.

## WINNICOTT'S POINT OF VIEW

A few months before his death, Winnicott addressed the question of the transformation of the patient's psychotic core in "The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications" (1968), a paper that in my opinion

[2] Such a condition is characterized by, among other aspects, omnipotence, by a *murdering of time* (Green 2002), by a paralysis of the self and of relationships with the object. Suppression of emotions (Bion 1965), cancellation of the object and of desire (Green 1983), *nonrelatedness* (Modell 1990a), psychic retreats (Steiner 1993), and autistic barriers (Tustin 1986) permit the patient to eliminate every intrapsychic and interpsychic tension, and to put himself in a condition of unreachability, which has powerful effects on the atmosphere of the session and on the analyst's mental functioning.

represents his theoretical and clinical legacy, and one that opens up new vistas requiring further elaboration.[3]

According to Winnicott, the breast's survival of the baby's first impulse (that is, of ruthless love, an impulse that mixes aggression with primitive love) constitutes an indispensable condition in order for the baby to establish and maintain a *physiological experience of illusion and merging omnipotence*. Within this space, he will be able to move according to his own rhythms and to establish a relationship of *vital reciprocity* with the mother—that is, he will be able to achieve his first contact with the object on the basis of his own personal needs. Object presentation by the mother, carried out by providing the newborn's immature ego with the necessary holding, does not have the goal of guaranteeing the relationship with external reality; rather, it is one of its preconditions.

When in 1960(a) Winnicott asked himself in what way the baby could abandon this state of physiological merging with the mother and the area of omnipotence, he pointed out the partial failures, the flops, the mother's gradual de-adaptation. Radically different was his response in his writing on the use of an object. It is the potential destruction of the object not accompanied by rage that permits the subject to place the other beyond his own area of omnipotence. More specifically, object relating can also be described by taking only the subject into account since projective phenomena come into play, while in order to understand the phenomenon in which the subject succeeds in using the object, it is nec-

[3] As I have demonstrated in a previous paper (Fabozzi 2012), what distinguishes Winnicott's entire body of work is his constant attention to the issue of the relationship between the subject and the object, but through a model that integrates and transcends that of unconscious object relationships. In fact, in his writing, the idea gradually becomes evident that the subject's unconscious acts on and transforms the object's unconscious (and vice versa). The nature of the child's encounter with the object is one of the themes of his research from the beginning of his work. And in the course of his lifetime, many of his most important and innovative contributions would go on to articulate and define various aspects of that encounter: the concepts of illusion, subjective object, object presentation, transitional object and transitional phenomena, trauma, and the false self. These concepts help us describe the complexity of the normal and pathological psychic processes that accompany and determine the encounter with reality. But it is the concept of the use of an object that marks a turning point, in my opinion. In some way, this is also the opinion of Winnicott himself: "1970. N. B. This is the reason why I could not publish this book [*Human Nature,* 1988]. The matter evolved itself, for me, in 'The Use of an Object'" (1988, p. 79n).

essary to take into consideration the nature and behavior of the object and its independent existence.

The transition from the subjective object to the object objectively perceived—that is, the passage from entering into a relationship on the basis of projective phenomena to the use of the object—is based precisely on the placement of the object beyond the subject's area of omnipotence. That passage (which forms part of the broader transition to the reality principle) is made possible by a process that Winnicott describes in paradoxical terms: it is the potential destruction of the object by the subject that permits the latter to place the object in external reality, and, simultaneously, it is possible to direct that destructiveness toward the object only because the object is in the process of being located outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control.

If the analyst survives such attacks, that is, if he responds without activating a vengeful response, then the patient will be able to approach a *process of gradual transformation of his own unconscious experience of the analyst,* who as the subjective object will come to be felt and treated as an object objectively perceived. Not only can the subject destroy the object because it is about to be located beyond the area of omnipotence, but it is also the potential destruction of the object that places the latter beyond the subject's omnipotent control.

The use of an object "is a sophisticated idea, an achievement of healthy emotional growth, not attained except in health and in the course of time" (Winnicott 1965, p. 231). But what impedes that achievement is the subject's need to protect the object, idealizing it, and, in addition, we are clinical witnesses to "a rendering down of the object from perfection towards some kind of badness. (Denigration, dirtying, tearing, etc.) This protects the object because it is only the perfect object that is worthy of destruction. This is not idealisation but denigration" (p. 231). I idealize the object to protect it from (potential) destruction and to maintain cohesion of the self, but the price I pay is the impossibility of establishing reciprocity and intimacy with it; on the other hand, the oscillation toward denigration is itself resolved in a sort of paradoxical protection of the object, because, as Winnicott says, ruining it renders it imperfect and thus less exposed to attack.

This mode of psychic functioning permits the patient to control the external world and the internal world in the attempt to preserve his own fragile and precarious sense of self. But at the same time it condemns the patient to live in a world of subjective objects, to nourish himself, that is, at a breast that he experiences as part of himself, and to prevent himself from having any form of experience and from emotional development.

In utilizing idealization and denigration the subject precludes himself from the possibility of arriving at that achievement of emotional development that Winnicott identifies, as we have just seen, as the use of the object. That is, the subject will not succeed in placing the object beyond the area of his own omnipotence. With which modalities, then, can the analyst communicate, if the patient locates him in the area of his own (the patient's) omnipotence? What is central, from a clinical point of view, is *the analyst's response*: "The essential feature is the analyst's survival and the intactness of the psychoanalytic technique" (1968, p. 92). The object that gets destroyed is the object that takes revenge.

Furthermore, we must remember the fact that Winnicott pointed out the inadequacy of the term *destruction,* placing it alongside that of *provocation* and underlining that "perhaps the right word has not been found" (1969, p. 245). He explicitly states that the destruction to which he refers is devoid of rage, but he does not focus his attention on those cases in which, by contrast, rage and hatred underlie such attacks.

Personally, I maintain that, from a clinical point of view, it is fundamental and indispensable to be able to distinguish—through the development and analysis of the transference and of countertransferential phenomena—*the nature and quality of the patient's hatred,* and what he is doing with it: whether, that is, it may have its origins in oral sadism, or in a reaction to a frustrated desire, or in a response deriving from a defensive organization that arose from traumatic experiences. Or whether the patient's hatred may draw its origin from the mere existence of the object—that is, from its disturbing effect, from its having been endowed with an autonomous and separate life. In situations in which destruction is accompanied by rage, it seems to me that our task is that of making possible the transformation of this hatred. When we do not succeed in this endeavor, instead of setting out in the direction of the analyst's ob-

jectivization and his use, the patient perpetuates a destructive exploitation of the object—an exploitation with which we risk colluding at times.

## THE CASE OF ANNA

*Between Absence and Presence*

Anna came to me at the age of thirty. She had met her father seven times in her life, on each occasion for a matter of hours, with the exception of a brief vacation of four days—in all, there were ten days, mostly after it had been she who sought him out at the age of thirteen. What had been deposited inside her was an *absence,* even though in reality the experience of absence can assume a psychic meaning only in relation to a presence. What had solidified is perhaps describable in terms of a non-existence: of the paternal body, of a paternal function, of a father in the mother's mind, which in some way could have mitigated that situation. When Anna was eighteen, her father died in an accident, and she reacted with denial and hypomania.

Having an especially brilliant intellect, Anna had early on utilized her own mind, characterized by adultomorphism, to support herself and to fulfill those basic life functions that had been missing in her primary environment. A strong impulse to control the other, and explosions of rage used to extricate herself from a confused and pathologically merging relationship with her mother, formed parts of a clinical picture that proved complicated from the beginning of treatment, which concluded after about ten years at a frequency of three sessions per week. Its beginning was marked by discontinuity, by disorientation in time and space, and by absence; in the first year, Anna frequently got the time or day of her session wrong, arrived very late, skipped a session, or spent a great deal of time in silence.

Absences and lateness made the early phase of the analysis extremely fragmented, accentuating her quality of scatteredness and making an experience of containment more difficult to take shape. It was an absence that countertransferentially put my frame of mind to a difficult test; I felt useless, canceled out, impotent, treated like a thing, like a child who is abandoned and rejected by a parent.

A transferential form that took shape with marked intensity early on concerned the nature of Anna's primary environment. She had to make herself absent, or at any rate she was not capable of bringing in her presence. She had to break her relationship with reality, space, and time so as not to come up against an actual annihilation, so as not to feel herself at the mercy of a crazy and unpredictable environment (Winnicott 1971).

In the first eighteen months of analysis, I had no shape, and once a form was assigned to me, I was experienced as an object who could invade her and colonize her mind with my excessive and unpredictable presence or with my excessive and inexplicable non-existence, since the absence of a temporal orientation also confirmed the absence of a father who could modulate the merging between mother and child. I was equated with the environment of Anna's very early childhood, which was felt to be crazy, and I, too, was unpredictable, unfathomable, and unreachable.

An unreliable and unpredictable maternal object was also overwhelmingly present, one who intruded on her—the same object who had deprived her of her father (the mother had not given her the father's last name due to the conviction that her father might "kidnap" her). Anna felt that my words invaded her, manipulated her, could make her crazy, and if they put her into contact with her needs, this occurred only in the service of my own sadistic and persecutory aims. She commented: "When someone speaks and wants to enter into a relationship with me, I feel that he is overstepping my boundaries; but if he doesn't want to enter into a relationship, then it's okay."

Before coming to see me, Anna had been in therapy for three years at three times a week—managing with her silences, lateness, provocations, and absences to get herself thrown out by her therapist, in a pathological and desperate attempt to disidentify with the primary object. Thus, for some years of treatment with me, a double sense of persecution was concretized in the transference: that of a maternal object who manipulated and colonized her, and that of a paternal object, which in the early period of treatment revealed its effects through its non-existence and then assumed a more openly persecutory configuration.

For Anna, this presence was framed in terms of a colonization: the maternal object had probably reversed the containing functions (Bion 1970), utilizing the daughter in order to displace and deposit her own chaotic emotions. Anna had to be an involuntary container of her mother's unreliability and unpredictability, of her anxieties about fragmentation, of her inconsistence as an individual and separate person. Herein lies an early and constant process of breaking and intruding that was cumulatively traumatic. Probably, a great flood of emotions and maternal anxieties had taken place that the child's mind had had to take in without being able to understand them, much less to symbolize or metabolize them, and that had impeded the construction of a psychic apparatus with which to experience emotions.

To that colonization by the maternal object, Anna had precociously reacted with a splitting of the self—with the mind springing forward to control emotions and external reality, and with an extremely intense and very specific, dissociated fantasy life. When the early childhood environment cannot assure maternal functions in a responsive and vital way, fantasying has the function of holding the self—of performing, that is, what the environment does not perform (Winnicott 1967). This takes shape in terms of a distortion of the maturational processes and of the inappropriate usurping of potential space and creativity. All that was subtly, gradually, and constantly intrusive and colonizing in the relationship that such a patient had as a child with his maternal environment has over the years become the key to a stereotyped and concrete reading of his daily experience.

In contrast to what I have encountered in other clinical situations, Anna's fantasies, of which she spoke rarely and only after some years of analysis, were a kind of work in progress, much like a sort of light fiction in installments—daydreaming fantasies that were revealed over several months, stories that continued day after day, taken up again at the point at which she had left them. Those "productions" organized and put together an actual alternative reality that assumed the form of a dissociated dimension of her personality, and did not constitute a nourishment or a transformation of the mind. Fantasy making contributed, then, to keeping both her internal life and her life in external reality in a sort of suspended animation.

Alongside and interwoven with all this, it must be noted that the relationship with the intrusive object had become for Anna the only possible alternative to disintegration. The various iterations that came to be constructed out of this primary experience were marked by distortion, inversion, and a collapse between inside and outside, between separateness and merging, between the childhood dimension and the adult one, between past and present, reality and fantasy, existence and non-existence. That collapse was amplified by the absence of the father, which among its effects had that of not buffering or modulating maternal anxieties, and of not erecting any boundaries between Anna and her mother. And in particular, it had the paradoxical effect of implanting in the child—through not being there, through an absence—an area of nonrepresentability, a sort of whirlpool, a black hole around which to construct her identity in the negative.

Internal objects that approximated a paternal transference took various forms over the course of the treatment, though all were generally characterized by the idiom of deprivation and lack. Initially marked by persecutory, sly, and corrupted figures, reported by Anna or by whom Anna was reported, this transference would gradually assume the aspect of figures who contained her, valued her, and sustained her in her work, figures whose presence appeared following intensely persecutory vicissitudes. Into this presexual dimension, almost maternal or supportive of a maternal figure in the function of bolstering Anna in difficult moments of transition in her work life, a sexual dimension began to be interwoven, with sporadic acting out or fantasies about men who performed a function of support for her at work.

Two breakdowns, both of brief duration and managed with medications, took place in the early years of analysis. The first, at the beginning of the third year, was marked by a persecutory delusion that had its principal hub at the workplace: people were getting into her computer and changing the numbers on her cell phone, and colleagues were plotting against her. It was a breakdown that could be located in the maternal area: the not-me took shape in an even more intensely persecutory way precisely while Anna was acquiring greater cohesion.

A year later—coinciding with a difficult and torturous romantic situation with a colleague, who was married and lived in another city, which

brought back primitive merging needs, desires, anxieties, and conflicts linked to the paternal figure—Anna headed toward a second breakdown. Here the delusion assumed more definitive connotations: all the "signs" had been changed, but she managed to track down magical indications that the Pope was dead.[4] This breakdown occurred in the city in which she had met her father at about age thirteen, where she had been brought for some days. A prolonged task of "approaching" her father had preceded the breakdown: ten months of very painful contact with the sense of lack, the desperation, the desire, the torment in relation to her father, during which the only thing that the patient did was to come to her sessions, thus taking refuge in her home most of the time, often in bed.

Gradually, in the early years of treatment, Anna began to come to terms with my presence, which was no longer automatically experienced as an attempt to colonize her, and gradually she would feel me to be less crazy, less persecutory, less disruptively absent. Spatio-temporal continuity was "recomposed." I became an object who knew her thoughts, even those that were more difficult to formulate or to think, but that could be experienced with more benign tonality.

In the initial years of Anna's analysis, there were various modalities with which I tried to come into contact with her. As much as possible, I modulated the depth of my interpretations, attempting to formulate phrases that were close to her experience. I worked primarily at trying to grasp the affects present in her associations and in our relationship. In the early years, I did not make transference interpretations, and only when her sense of reality had increased did I begin to point out to her the quality of her relationship with me and the "echoes" that this had with her personal history. I never interpreted in order to try to get her to stop her numerous episodes of acting out. I always tried to adapt to her needs; for example, when she initially got the time or day of sessions wrong, I attempted to arrange a makeup session, and at the same time I tried to defend the integrity of the setting. The latter, in fact, has gradually become a fundamental factor that has allowed the patient to trust in the treatment and to establish more definite spatio-temporal bound-

[4] Translator's Note: In Italian, the words for dad (*papà*) and Pope (*Papa*) are very similar.

aries. We can say that in the early years of the analysis, I privileged the function of holding over the interpretive one.

## *A Clinical Sequence*

Anna seemed to temporarily leave her state of suspended animation primarily through the destructiveness that, in various forms, permeated her life and her treatment. She mobilized a destructiveness that was expressed via arrogance, which attacked the ego's links with emotions, and was caused by the formation of an early and intensely persecutory superego, put together following a lack of the maternal functions of containment and reverie.[5] Sometimes this destructiveness was caused by my deficits in comprehension or timing, but on most occasions it took the form of fierce rage and violent sarcasm when I tried to put Anna in contact with her suffering, her emotional needs, and her difficulties. This rage crushed my words and my person. In these difficult situations, everything was swept away and erased the experience of the work that had been beautifully done up to that moment.

I contained and transformed the patient's destructiveness and the tensions that were created in our relationship, trying to understand their nature and to identify the function of these destructive movements. As previously mentioned, her destructiveness was often expressed through arrogance and a violent sarcasm toward me. In these situations, it helped me countertransferentially to retrace what might have been the experience of impotence and pain that the patient was trying to eliminate through her attacks. On other occasions, her attacks had an oral cast, and I then tried to approach—and to permit her to approach—the emotions of longing and deprivation.

On other occasions, her anger was closely connected to the difficulty of coming into contact with the object's separateness. Finally, at times, her rage was born of my errors. In that event, quite apart from telling the patient, "I made a mistake, I'm sorry," the most important thing in

[5] This primitive and pathological superego is born of very early dissociations, mostly due to repeated deficits in the mother's function of containment with the newborn, and has as its objective the subject's dissociation and an attack on his link to the object, on which the security of the ego depends (Bion 1957, 1959).

recognizing the error was to give it meaning within our relationship and the transference.

At the end of the fifth year of analysis, Anna recounted this dream:

> I dreamed about a famous athlete who had won a medal at the Olympics in Athens. In the dream, he had two bodies, and I was at his house. He showed me a book of photos of his family, and in one photo there was a man, in another an older woman, as though they were his parents. He had two bodies because at home he had polio, while away from home he had the body of an athlete, with arms like Popeye's, and he took part in various competitions. I asked him why he went back home on weekends if his family kept him in that condition of being sick—you know how, years ago, you used to hear talk of families with crazy children? And he told me that he had a son, and he went home for him. There was a close intimacy between us, and then he suggested making love to me, but with illicit drugs, and I told him no. Then he proposed making love in a room where there was a sort of door with glass panes in it, through which we would be seen by a couple who was eager to criticize us and to be scandalized.
>
> The athlete lived a life of sacrifices; he worked out for hours and hours every day. I would never take drugs; I would be afraid—I get anxious if I take a puff of marijuana. He did balance exercises, and I'm looking for balance. He was a father who returned home for his son.

The dream about the athlete in my representation of Anna's clinical story was a sort of landmark, a mythical point of origin and of a "thickening" of representations and mental functions that in reality were the result of an analytic process that, at the time of this session, had a five-year history. Multiple and complex levels of the dream could be traced. There was a split and an unintegrated representation of Anna's damaged part and of the phallic organization that she had built up in order to protect herself from disintegration. In the transference, the athlete expressed the patient's omnipotent fantasy of having to take care of an analyst-child. But the two bodies were also representations of the object: an analyst-father with polio, and an analyst-father who, beyond his relationship with her, had a body that functioned sexually.

Various new psychic facts made their appearance here: representations of a father, even though they were split ones; and the representation of a father with a child—definitely a masculine child, since the patient still could not represent herself in terms of a feminine identity, due partly to the fact that one of the theories she had constructed for herself to account for the paternal absence was that her father would not have rejected her if she had been a boy. The embryonic representation appeared of a couple—or perhaps more accurately, *traces* of a couple characterized by a split (the photo of the mother and the photo of the father). Signs of a primal scene appeared, one of a narcissistic nature: a couple who looks at another couple and for whom a generational difference has not yet been established. In addition, a container (the photo album) appears, a sign of the formation of a mental function capable of taking in these representations *in statu nascendi*. Finally, in the dream, it also became possible to represent the confusion between a father who takes a little girl into his arms and a father with a penis, a confusion that had come to a head in the patient's second breakdown.

The patient finished telling the dream and I thought of nostalgia, of things being missing, of desire—of being able to imagine a father who returns and sacrifices something of himself for her, something vital such as his body, his fame, his balance. I told her that she was experiencing me and representing me precisely through this image of two bodies: on the one hand, she felt a desire to be intimate with me and to be taken into my arms like a child by her daddy, but she also felt the threat that this involved for her, because intimacy made her feel the risk of losing herself and of losing her head, since intimacy—even though it was something extremely vital—could be transformed into something sexual that would suffer the condemnation of a couple (of parents).

At the end of the session, Anna got up to leave the office, and at the door she turned and asked me if she could call Dr. B, the psychiatrist who managed her medications. This surprised me because in the past it had been I, on some occasions, who emphasized the need to consult with Dr. B, the last time having been two days prior to her second breakdown. I did not understand in that moment that she was concretely actualizing the split in her dream: a father who could take her in his arms and a father who, in her experience, could make her lose her head.

The next week, Anna arrived upset and crying, with a desperate air. She said:

> The word doesn't exist—it hasn't been found. On Friday, Carlo [the married colleague in another city with whom she had had a brief and painful affair a few months earlier] wrote some bizarre things on his blog, and then he made a comment in order to respond, and that's something he never does; then I sent him an e-mail. Saturday he e-mailed me, telling me that on Friday he had been downstairs at my apartment building, but he didn't have the courage to come up and see me. While I was writing to him, he was downstairs at my home! Every day I read his blog, and I've never written to him.

Crying and howling, she added, "There's a mystery that is psychic life."

Anna continued to cry, transmitting a tremendous pressure to me, an urgency, a sense of disintegration, pain, and suffering; and the need to receive something that could give her containment and support. Something came to my mind that she had said several days earlier, immediately after an interpretation of mine:

> Now I will tell you something intimate. When I separated from Marco, I could tell you exactly the moments in which I felt it. When he left me I stopped eating, and my mother fed me. I felt the weight of his leg on mine even though it wasn't there; then one day I didn't feel it any more. It was then, I think, that a certain type of man went out of my life and another kind came into it.

What I had said to her about the dream in the previous session came back to my mind: maybe "too much," maybe something that seemed "bizarre" to her. I thought of the painful efforts she was making to separate herself from Carlo and to acquire and defend a sense of separateness, and I began to tell her, "I thought of the fact that you read Carlo's blog every day . . ." But Anna interrupted me and flew into a rage, belittling what I had said, screaming at me that I did not understand and continuing to cry. The situation deteriorated badly. It became a crescendo of aggression, which was not new in Anna's sessions.

The following session was identical: she arrived furious and in a scornful tone told me that I did not understand her. She said that on Monday (that is, the day before the previous session) she had thought of calling me, but she already knew what I would say to her and it would have been useless. I tried to say something, but Anna interrupted me; the tension continued to escalate, and she continued to yell with contempt and rage. In the final minutes of the session, I felt genuine hatred toward her. The termination of her previous therapy came to my mind, and I told her that perhaps she had spoken in this way with her prior therapist years ago.

With the distance of a few hours, I reflected on the need of psychotic patients to feel hatred by the analyst (Winnicott 1947), and I asked myself if that veiled threat of mine might have been a way to halt her destructiveness. Or whether, in doing this, I might have risked communicating to her a veiled threat of revenge against her, which would have given her the feeling of having irreparably destroyed me. My task of working through, carried out *après coup*, helped me to better understand "the mystery of psychic life" for Anna. She was unconsciously referring to the mystery that the relationship between the internal world and the external world represented for her—to the incomprehensible and unfathomable mystery inherent in the difference between reality and fantasy, to the impossibility of differentiating one from the other and then establishing a bridge and a productive osmosis, to her incapacity to block the terrifying impact that the magic of her omnipotent thinking had on her.

### *The Emergence of Processes of the Use of the Object*

In addition to a dismantling and decontamination of the crazy environment, to an interiorization of the analytic functions of holding and containment, and to a relinquishment of the false self that protected her from further colonizations (a renouncement that permitted her to temper the deep split in her self), for Anna, deconstructing the traumatic situation implied a construction—through the experience of the transference—of a paternal figure, whose absence formed a second traumatic point. The father's concrete or psychic absence, in cases in which there has been a pathological merging with the mother, perpetuates that

merging, and overall renders it impossible to construct a dynamic distinction and a productive exchange between reality and fantasy. In this context it cannot be the mother, as Winnicott (1968) seemed to imply, who permits the child to leave the area of omnipotence.

On the basis of the analysis with Anna and with other patients who were characterized by psychotic functioning, I think that the use of the object falls into an area of paternal relevance, an experience rendered possible by the father's indestructability. An experience with the analyst *within a paternal transference* (and not as a breast that nurtures or as a mother who guarantees holding) will have to be actualized, one in which the experience of the analyst's survival ends up being indispensable to the patient's ability to gradually establish the reality of the object. What I am stating here becomes apparent primarily in those contexts in which there is a pathology of maternal functions.

What I would first like to call attention to is not the role of the father in the child's processes of disidentification with the mother, but the process in which the analyst, in the transference, *is available consciously and unconsciously to be first of all the object of a potential destruction devoid of hatred.*[6] And second, the analyst agrees to mobilize his own capacity for survival and for transformation of the patient's provocations, in this way offering him the possibility of renouncing omnipotent and narcissistic functioning, and especially of constructing a sense of being real. That is, I would like to call attention to the *analyst's response* to the transferential and countertransferential vicissitudes that occur when a seriously ill patient, after having begun to repair what relates to a missed adaptation and inadequate reliability of the primary object, faces the construction of separateness, of the reality of the object, and of the sense of being real.

In the sequence that began with Anna's dream of the athlete, two processes were interwoven: the first pertained to my countertransferential reaction of hatred; the second—even though the patient was in

[6] I find insufficient Greenson's (1968) proposal that—with respect to the question of disidentification from the mother (placed, however, in relation to the formation of gender identity)—refers generically to the reasons for which the father invites the boy child to identify with him, and to the fact that the mother must be available to allow the child to identify with the father. On the function of the third, moreover, we have important contributions available that come from theoretical models that are very different from each other (Britton 1989; Green 1984; Hanly 2004).

part suffused with a rage that heavily influenced my reaction (a rage that Winnicott explicitly excluded from the process of the use of the object)—concerned the possibility of arriving at an experience of the object's potential destruction. Through the first process, the patient incited and experienced the hatred of the primary object; the result of this process would be the capacity to tolerate her own hatred, to distinguish it from love, to recognize what she was now receiving from the environment (Winnicott 1947). The intensity of the second process permitted me to retrospectively grasp and assign an *après coup* meaning to the numerous clinical exchanges in which I had contained and transformed the patient's destructiveness, surviving it and maintaining my own subjective characteristics.

Those exchanges laid the foundations that permitted the patient to feel me as more real, to deconstruct the paternal object as a non-existent one, to develop the capacity to traverse the borders between reality and fantasy without losing her own identity. But overall, the patient obligated me, in a certain sense, to live in a situation in which she had established me—in part inside her internal world, in part in the external world—as a paternal figure that became the object of her potential destructiveness. It is useful to remember that this clinical sequence began in the moment in which I approached her difficulty in separating herself from a damaged paternal object—in that she had chosen Carlo, like all the other men in her life, to cure what she considered (probably with good reason) her father's suicide in the accident in which he died. It was at this key point that Anna attempted to establish me as an object in external reality.

The process of *potential* destruction of the object, as well as its survival, will have to be repeated on many occasions over the course of time. In these rhythmic oscillations, in this gradual and repeated achievement, the object is real and at the same time it is not real; it is outside the area of omnipotence and at the same time located within it. In the depths of the oscillations of the process that differentiates the subjective from what is objective—that is, when the other is about to be positioned in external reality—the opposite pole reemerges and takes a new shape, that of pathological merging with the intrusive object.

In the case of Anna, stemming from these oscillations, the patient had the unconscious need in the first place to provoke a countertrans-

ferential reaction in order to be able to distinguish between the self and the primary object—that is, to establish a maternal object that was not invasive or intrusive. But since this achievement did not automatically establish the patient's capacity to locate the object beyond her own area of omnipotence, we can trace her need to find a paternal object that was not only a hallucinatory one. I was no longer constituted as the object of the patient's rage, as the father who did not exist and who had deprived her; paradoxically, I was now the object of her own potential destruction for the opposite reason: and that is because a paternal figure (who survived his destruction) began to live and to take shape in external reality and in her internal world.[7]

## ON THE SENSE OF THREAT

Eigen (1981, 2012) rightly emphasizes a creative dimension in the use of the object, a process that he describes in terms of a *joy-based model*.[8] This is especially true if we refer to the normal developmental process in which the child has the physiological opportunity to discover the reality of the object through an experience of potential destructiveness.[9]

[7] I think it may be legitimate to maintain that the dynamics inherent in the use of the object must be distinguished from the processes that establish the primal scene and oedipal triangularity. Absent from the process of the use of the object, in fact, are both the longing for possession of the libidinal object and the murderous fantasies of the oedipal situation. I have asked myself whether it would be legitimate to affirm that the potential destruction can be directed to the father who is present in the mind of the mother, but it seems to me that such a viewpoint—while it can help us understand the formation of the oedipal situation and the role of the father in the child's separative processes from the mother—does not so much inhere in the processes of the use of the object.

[8] "We are real together, living in the amazing sense of becoming more and more real, where destructiveness makes love real, and love makes destructiveness creative" (Eigen 1981, p. 416). For other contributions on this paper of Winnicott's, see Modell (1990b), Goldman (1998), and Samuels (2001).

[9] What we try to grasp in the clinical situation through the concept of the use of the object is something that includes but goes beyond the separative processes, since it concerns the construction of the capacity to capture the object primarily in its objective reality: "Projective mechanisms assist in the act of *noticing what is there*, but they are not *the reason why the object is there*" (Winnicott 1968, p. 90, italics in original). Of course, this is an achievement that has as its preconditions all the maternal functions that guarantee the processes of integration, and that cannot be reached in the presence of dissociated states of parts of the self or of drive defusion.

Winnicott's paper, however, invites us to "interrogate" this concept from a strictly clinical point of view: what immediately strikes us is then the dramatic and charged quality of risks inherent in these processes when we encounter them clinically with seriously disturbed patients.

Very often, patients who are seriously disturbed unconsciously experience the analysis and the analyst with a deep sense of threat and terror. It is necessary to take into consideration this sense of threat since it makes the achievement of the use of the object more complicated and arduous. Bion described psychic pain by evoking *obscure, unknown,* and *incomprehensible* dimensions.[10] Nameless terrors return to our minds along with the primitive agonies described by Winnicott (1960a, 1962a). Those connotations help us come closer to the sense of *inexpressible and unthinkable* threat that we observe in the patient when in the course of treatment we arrive at the point of exploring and experiencing the areas where psychotic anxieties predominate.

But this deep sense of threat is in reality present from the very beginning of the analysis, even though probably with less intense tonalities. The analyst is unconsciously experienced as a persecutory object since he is potentially capable of altering the patient's crystallized equilibrium. Winnicott clearly states something similar: "Rape, and being eaten by cannibals, these are mere bagatelles as compared with the violation of the self's core, the alteration of the self's central elements by communication seeping through the defences" (1963a, p. 187).

In another famous paper, Winnicott explored the terrible feeling of threat connected to the analytic experience. With the term *breakdown,* Winnicott referred to the breakdown of the formation of the unitary self, emphasizing the "unthinkable state of affairs that underlies the defence organisation" (1963b, p. 88). We witness live in the transference the terror of breakdown and of defenses that the patient deploys in response to such terror. And we take note of a paradox: the fear of breakdown constitutes, on the one hand, one of the strongest motivations

[10] "The central point appears to be the painful nature of change in the direction of maturation. It is probably idle to ask why it should be painful, why intensity of pain bears so little relationship to intensity of recognizable danger, and why pain is so feared. There is no doubt that mental pain in particular is feared in a way that would be appropriate if it corresponded directly with mental danger. The relationship of pain to danger is, however, obscure" (Bion 1970, p. 53).

for seeking analysis, and it is the fear of breakdown and of catastrophic change (Bion 1970), on the other hand, that often impedes the analysis and its possible developments. This clinical paradox is captured with extraordinary efficacy by that famous intuition of Winnicott's according to which "the breakdown, a fear of which destroys his or her life, *has already been*" (Winnicott 1963b, p. 90, italics in original).[11]

Despite the analyst's active and sensitive adaptation to the patient's needs, despite his extreme attention to doling out interpretations at the right moment, and despite the necessary attunement to the level of the patient's psychic functioning and his defensive organizations, the persecutory experience that the patient has in relation to the analyst is activated very early in the analytic relationship and is generated by the terror of losing his own precarious psychic equilibrium and of suffering a breakdown. This terror nurtures the persecutory experience in relation to the analyst and can bring to life various clinical dynamics.

I think that whether the patient aims principally at protecting the self or the object from a potential breakdown, the end result is the same (despite differences based on the characteristics and functioning of each clinical situation): psychic paralysis. For this reason, a relationship with the analyst that is primarily narcissistic becomes established, one that in particular permits the patient to actively avoid the dimension of the use of the analyst. In this way, the patient protects himself from the terror of breakdown and from the anxiety of reliving traumatic situations and/or those of colonization—condemning himself, however, to a situation of isolation and one of complete self-sufficiency, internal emptiness, and a lack of authenticity. The risk is that, precisely to avoid threatening upsets, analyst and patient collude in order to keep emotions and protothoughts dissociated and outside the analytic office—elements that could threaten the "tranquility" of the couple and of the analytic relationship.

A second configuration inheres in situations charged with rage, characterized by intense projective identifications. These situations ex-

[11] This paradox confronts us with a twofold concern: I am referring not only to the technical implications that we must confront in response to the impasse created in treatment in regard to the patient's terror, but also to the analyst's conscious and unconscious efforts aimed at avoiding the risk that the patient will break down, and that his catastrophic change could spark in us an attack on our psychic integrity.

pose the analyst to instances of acting out and the analytic couple to a sort of implosion. It seems to me that such situations are utilized by the patient in trying to create some distance from the object—that is, in an attempt (a failed one) to exit from a condition of pathological and claustrophobic merging. Often, furthermore, in patients who are blockaded in a merged and confused way of functioning with the object, the rage (not necessarily with violent behaviors) is acted out in order to claim for the self the temporary and fictional sensation of existing. I think it may be clear that the central issue cannot be the banal one of interpreting the negative transference, nor can it be reduced to the fundamental necessity of paying attention to and safeguarding the cohesion of the patient's self. And finally, it cannot be settled by making reference to the therapeutic functions of empathic and relational processes.

In these situations—which must be distinguished from processes connected to the use of the object—rage and destructiveness constitute a desperate modality, both in having to do with the object and in giving a certain substance to the self. As I have shown in the case of Anna, the analyst will be called upon first to facilitate the transformation of tension set in motion by the sense of threat to which the patient feels exposed in the analytic situation. Gradually, these transformations will permit the patient to experience and recognize the reliability and security of the analytic situation. From then on, it will be possible—for the patient and for the analytic couple—to initiate the psychic processes that will lead to the capacity to use the object.

## ON SURVIVING AND THE SENSE OF BEING REAL

As often happens in reading Winnicott, one could form the superficial impression that the author is stating something obvious when he writes that the analyst must survive the patient's destructiveness, and when he specifies that survival means that the analyst must not avenge himself:

> (It is important to remember that "survive," in this context, means "not retaliate.") If it is in an analysis that these matters are taking place, then the analyst, the analytic technique, and the analytic setting all come in as surviving or not surviving the

> patient's destructive attacks . . . . These attacks may be very difficult for the analyst to stand, especially when they are expressed in terms of delusion, or through manipulation which makes the analyst actually do things that are technically bad. (I refer to such a thing as being unreliable at moments when reliability is all that matters, as well as to survival in terms of keeping alive and of absence of the quality of retaliation.) [Winnicott 1968, pp. 91-92]

But it would be extremely reductive to understand these statements by thinking that the analyst must tolerate and contain only his own hatred and his own reaction. In the first place, I think that, even before the analyst's response comes into play, other factors intervene, both in clinical situations saturated by rage and especially in those that are devoid of it and that form a part of the use of the object. I think that the patient may be capable of unconsciously grasping the analyst's availability to become involved in these processes of potential destruction and survival. Furthermore—and this is perhaps the most complicated aspect—the patient is able to unconsciously perceive whether the analyst's availability and capacity to offer his own person and to expose his own narcissism even exist. In every moment of the analytic work, in fact, we expose our person, with our limits and our fragilities, and furthermore we are aware of our responsibilities and of the asymmetry of the functions and needs in the field.[12]

It is also on the basis of this unconscious perception by the patient that, in the analytic couple, a sort of joint rhythm is created. This rhythm is of course the result of the coming together of many factors, and contributes to regulating the level of depth of the analytic work, the quality and form of the analytic encounter, and so the possibility (or not) of arriving at the use of the object.

The patient who instigates processes connected to the use of the object and who runs the risk of exposing the object to maximum destructiveness does not have as his unconscious aim that of seeking whether the analyst will survive, or whether instead he will avenge himself. Rage

[12] In this sense, when Winnicott writes, "as analyst one has one's own needs" (1968, p. 92), he is reminding us of the delicate nature of this situation since analysts are not machines. If we were, we would not be usable by the patient.

is no longer the principal ground on which the game is played—as happens, by contrast, when the patient triggers explosive situations in response to the sense of threat he perceives in the encounter with the analyst. In moving in close and activating the processes connected to the use of the object, the patient is trying to renounce his own omnipotence—that is, he tries to actualize an experience in which the object begins to live autonomously.

In order to better understand this point, it is necessary to revisit two Winnicottian areas. The first is his famous comment, "In doing psychoanalysis I aim at keeping alive, keeping well, keeping awake. I aim at being myself and behaving myself" (1962b, p. 166)—a statement that offers us an absolutely unique way of understanding and experiencing the analytic relationship and the objectives of an analysis. Here Winnicott provocatively shifts the center of gravity of the analytic situation in order to call our attention to the fundamental role played by the *quality of the analyst's contribution* in promoting and supporting the therapeutic results of the treatment.

The second area can be discerned in a paper on countertransference in which Winnicott states that the psychoanalyst "must remain vulnerable, and yet retain his professional role in his actual working hours" (1960b, p. 160). In cases in which we engage with the psychotic part of the patient's personality, the latter "gradually breaks through the barriers that I have called the analyst's technique and professional attitude, and forces a direct relationship of a primitive kind, even to the extent of merging" (p. 164). In these situations, we will find ourselves having to investigate the analyst's conscious and unconscious reactions to the impact exerted by the patient over the analyst's self and his psychoanalytic technique.

These two technical reflections delineate an intersubjective area and an intrapsychic dialectic in which the analyst's subjectivity can take shape during the patient's potentially destructive attacks. It is a dialectic that comes to life in the encounter between one's own vulnerability and one's own professional role, and one that is nurtured by the analyst's attempt to continue to be himself. And the area that can be created between analyst and patient disappears if the analyst uses technique defensively due to an ambivalent, idealized, or parasitic relationship with psychoanalysis.

It is an area that likewise disappears if the analyst unconsciously asks the patient to protect and save him. In this case, an unconscious collusion would come to be created in which there is a convergence of the patient's need to preserve his own idealizations and denigrations with the analyst's terror of losing his own integrity and identity.

The analyst's survival must then be articulated according to various meanings. On the most banal level, this means that the analyst must contain his own eventual reaction of rage to the patient's attacks. But the analyst's survival, and that of the setting and the technique, must in my opinion be understood essentially as the analyst's capacity to *keep his own subjectivity alive*. It is as though in the area of maximum destructiveness—that is, in a situation in which *the object is not protected by the subject*—the patient unconsciously uses a probe, and he makes himself available to come close to the instigation of a "direct" relationship with the analyst, an unmediated relationship, or one mediated in only a minor way by his own defensive organizations. It is in this way that the patient can permit himself to discover and to engage with the analyst's subjective response. When this can take place, we find ourselves being called upon to contact the patient's deepest needs in an area that is not only the analyst's and not only the patient's, but is an intermediate area where a *shared mutative experience* can be developed (Giannakoulas 2003).

Much more than on occasions of interpretations formulated in an atmosphere marked by attunement and collaboration, the analyst's response in these situations appropriately highlights the limits of his omnipotence (which, naturally, the patient attributes to him). Then the analyst who is led to commit errors within the delusional transference, like the one that in a certain sense I committed in the session with Anna, as described earlier, can assume a therapeutic valence not only because—as Winnicott (1954) wrote—the patient can unfreeze the trauma and mobilize the rage that on the occasion of the traumatic experience he could not express. These situations can also have an extraordinary therapeutic valence because the analyst is "forced" to engage with a sense of impotence, with his own limits and his own fragilities. That is, he is in contact with internal storms that allow the emergence, *in a transformed form,* of his humanity and his subjectivity.

This is not, then, simply a matter of containing destructiveness, nor is it one of actualizing a sort of symmetry with the patient. And it is not a case of simply placing affective attunement or empathic feeling into the field; it is much more and very different. It is necessary that the analyst be spontaneous and authentic (Heimann 1978), but he must parcel out his spontaneity since this can never be a heavy weight that the patient must bear.[13]

In addition, surviving implies the possibility, in moments of maximum destructiveness, of keeping our creative functions alive. This creativity is born of the analyst's self and is initiated from the intermediate area of experience between analyst and patient. It is a creativity that in a certain sense must be capable of going back to the intermediate area from which it came, in a way that can be utilized by the patient. That is, it must be capable of being expressed while taking well into account that the patient is on the point of beginning to recognize that which originates from the analyst. It is necessary, then, that the analyst be able to construct a sort of bridge that permits the patient to feel that the interpretation, though coming from the analyst, was at the same time born of the meeting between himself and the analyst.

Surviving implies, ultimately, the necessity of restoring and keeping alive our faith in the analytic instrument and in the patient's developmental possibilities. In moments characterized by destructive attacks that take the form of delusional transferences and acting out, the analyst's faith in his instruments is often precisely what comes to be struck down. This faith must not be synonymous with an uncritical or dogmatic adherence to a rigid psychoanalytic model out of defensive aims. Rather, it is a faith nourished by the patient's developmental achievements and by our creativity. This faith resonates with our "keeping well" and "being myself," and with the patient's sense—about to be consolidated—of being real.

Patients who are less seriously ill than Anna at times have the capacity to put into words and to communicate the sense of not being real (that is, the sense of vacuity, of inauthenticity, the futility of living) that

[13] For a different and therefore useful point of view on symmetry and mutuality, see Aron (1996).

derives from the absolute impossibility of having emotional experiences. In Anna's case, as I have tried to describe, the unreality of her own life and her own internal world very often came to be acted out in sessions in a desperate and disruptive way.

## COMING BACK TO ANNA: SOME CLINICAL DEVELOPMENTS

A session that occurred at the beginning of the seventh year of Anna's analysis demonstrates, in my opinion, the meaning of a *shared mutative experience*.

ANNA: [The evening before the session, she leaves a message on my office answering machine saying that she is happy because, for the first time, she has managed to go to a tango lesson.] I am happy because I went to the tango lesson, but I am angry with Salvatore [a man, a government representative, with whom she has been flirting]. I felt sad. Salvatore sent me a message from India saying that the day before, he wanted to come to my house, and that now he was at dinner with the head of the Spanish government. But what do I care if he dines with powerful people? I wrote him to cut it out with those idiotic messages, and he wrote me that he was asking for my help. I ask him for protection, and he writes to ask me for help! The men I've had have always needed help.

I: Maybe you are telling me how difficult it is for you to meet someone who helps you and protects you.

ANNA: You are telling me something really stupid.

I: I tried to tell you that this has to do in part with the situation, and is in part due to your not letting yourself meet a man who protects you.

ANNA: [raising her voice, irritated] Why do you repeat dumb and useless things? [short silence] Yesterday afternoon, I saw your son [age ten] on the street with Francesco [the son of a woman whom Anna

has known for a few months; Francesco has been in the same class as my son for five years]. They were pushing each other and roughhousing. He has beautiful hair and eyes. The day before, Francesco told me, "Tomorrow Fabozzi's coming." I asked him: "Which Fabozzi?!" Three weeks ago, I saw your wife, too, at Francesco's party. I've always thought that I would have liked to have a son.

I: Maybe in some way, you had the fantasy of having a son with me. This explains the sadness. And then the jealousy, perhaps envy, given that you saw my wife.

ANNA: There is sadness because I'm alone, because I don't have a man. The new thing is that I went to the tango lesson. I asked myself whether to leave the message on your answering machine. It was strange. The truth is that I don't have anyone.

I: Today's truth is that you told me about going to tango last night because you feel that I am there in your life.

ANNA: I decided to leave you the message because we had talked about it, and I had complained that you didn't help me go to tango, but then I managed it.

I: You feel that together we have given birth to the possibility of having this experience.

Anna's chance meetings with my wife and son constitute scattered bits of experience that are gathered into the transference. In sessions, we can give life and meaning to feelings of envy and jealousy, and to the idea of a couple, of a primal scene, of an oedipal desire to present the father with a child. In contrast to the past, Anna did not act out any concrete attempts to control me.

Also, the two aggressive movements toward me in the session do not result in a destructiveness that breaks the bond between us. In this session, thanks to the work that took place in preceding years—and, I think, to the way in which I interpreted in the transference the experiences she told me about—Anna could feel me as real and as a nontraumatic

person. In addition, she could feel herself as real, and this allowed her to set in motion the processes of construction and signification of sexual organizers, and to approach the idea of a couple no longer burdened by idealizations or by confused and destructive fantasies.

Another exchange that occurred six months later can perhaps help us better understand the transformation of her psychotic functioning and what I am trying to describe about the sense of being real. On returning from the summer break, Anna told me that she had a wonderful vacation, and that when she felt pensive in the evenings, she lay down and gave herself a massage, applying oil to her feet, her tummy, and around her navel. "One evening," she told me, "closing my eyes, I saw my father's face projected before me, and I saw his expressions that I didn't remember—he looked at you to scrutinize you inside. Even when he laughed or frowned, I didn't remember him. Yesterday I read that, with love, you can't pretend that there are only real things because there are also unreal things. But with Carlo, there were *only* unreal things. When I had these ruminations, I thought, 'The doctor is real.'"

I interpreted:

> I think that for your entire life you've asked yourself if your father was real or only a hallucination. For many years, you have come here saying that your father wasn't there, that he was nothing. In playing with your tummy, with your muscles, your navel, you gave yourself permission to risk having a hallucination, and instead you had a memory of your father. And perhaps every time that I put myself in the middle, as you say—when I suggest something that has to do with me and with you—you have often been afraid that I would become a hallucination, that I wouldn't be real. Or instead that I would be *too* real, to the point that you felt the risk of not feeling real yourself.

Anna said: "On my way here today, I thought of something that has to do with exactly this. If here there wasn't a real thing between me and you, then everything would be hallucinated. The most real thing I can experience here is the two of us, in spite of the fact that I don't get to know you."

The processes of the use of the object—that is, the encounter between the patient's potential destructiveness and the analyst's capacity

to respond through his own judicious subjectivity—permit Anna to undergo a fullness of experience. This fullness contributes to building up the subject's sense of being real, stemming from a state of integration of the subject's own self.

When I speak of fullness of experience, I am also referring to the capacity to live, to tolerate, and to move among various levels of reality. Anna acquired the capacity to tolerate a paradoxical situation and to fully live the richness of the transferential experience, its nature simultaneously real and fantasized. And she was capable of recognizing the "reality" of our relationship, at the same time accepting that she did not omnipotently know my thoughts.

Over the course of the analysis, Anna built up the capacity to feel herself to be real and to feel her own experience as real. This was of course the result of the complex analytic work carried out up to that moment. But in particular, it grew out of the development and solidification of occasions on which she allowed herself to experience my response in situations when my survival and my subjectivity were put to the test.

## CONCLUSION

When we reflect on the use of the object, we find ourselves in a complex psychic area, in my opinion, one characterized by an interweaving of different processes. The patient is dwelling in the neighborhood of the capacity to concern himself with, and to feel a sense of responsibility for, the object. He is on the point of earning and then newly losing the possibility of perceiving and setting up the object in external reality. Furthermore, he is on the outskirts of drive fusion. It is the separative processes set in motion by the analytic work that create the space and the occasion for the patient to direct drive movements of hatred and love toward the analyst—but this hatred is not connected to a sense of threat experienced in relation to the analytic situation, nor to reactive rage at frustration or a narcissistic wound or oedipal jealousy. And hatred, as we have seen, may here be an inaccurate term.

When the patient arrives at the possibility of provoking the analyst, taking the risk of meeting him on potentially destructive ground, we witness and take part in a *movement of environmental discovery and explora-*

*tion by the patient*—a movement that is, however, *charged with tension*. The patient will feel that he is on a tightrope since he does not know—and it is this that simultaneously constitutes the risk—the experience or the process of discovery. He does not know what will happen to the object or how the object will react. For these reasons, it is imperative that the patient have the experience of *the analyst's response.*

*Destructive attacks, survival, retaliation, delusion,* and *manipulation* are neither neutral terms nor rhetorical ones. Winnicott emphasized that he did not include rage in the processes of the use of the object, but these terms evoke with precision the tensions to which the analytic couple can be subjected in these situations. They transmit an intense impact to us and form a scenario in which two different destinies are on the point of taking shape. And it must be emphasized that for the patient the stakes are high; in a certain sense, this is a matter of life or death. If the analyst avenges himself and does not manage to preserve his own subjectivity, he dies for the patient. Perhaps it is more exact to say that he "stays dead" or is suspended in limbo, since he remains trapped in the area of the patient's omnipotence. The patient will be forced to continue to protect him, both idealizing him and denigrating him. And the patient will find himself being pushed back into a dissociated state of the self and of his own experience. If, on the other hand, the analyst is capable of keeping his own subjectivity inviolate, the patient begins to unconsciously accept *running the risk of renouncing his own omnipotence and of recognizing in the analyst a personal and autonomous life.*

It is through the experience of maximum destructiveness that the patient repeatedly tries to engage with the analyst's existence beyond the area of the patient's omnipotence. The analyst who accepts meeting the patient on the terrain of maximum destructiveness is available to offer him his own being alive and being real. I am not thinking of an opposition between an analyst who is the object of the patient's projections and a "real" analyst—a view that is absolutely useless from both a theoretical and a clinical point of view. The aim is instead that of permitting the patient to find an object who draws his vitality from his own sense of being alive and real.

When the analyst's faith, spontaneity, and creativity—that is, his judicious subjectivity—do not take a traumatic form, then the patient will

be able to nourish and enrich himself from what originates from the analyst. "In these ways the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in [sic] to the subject, *according to its own properties*" (Winnicott 1968, p. 90, italics added).

Judicious subjectivity is a subjectivity that does not become traumatic if the analyst does not exploit the patient and does not make illegitimate requests of him. That is, it is a subjectivity with which the analyst does not require the patient to cure his own (the analyst's) depression, nor to be revitalized or contained, nor to be reassured or admired in his own narcissism. It is this subjectivity of the analyst that the patient allows himself to begin to experience.

The patient's encounter with the analyst's judicious subjectivity—and also with transformations the analyst carries out of tensions evoked in the analyst himself by maximum destructiveness—restores to the patient the analyst's aliveness. The patient will then have the experience of the analyst's vitality, of his feeling himself to be real. The patient will be able to experience, that is, an object who comes to be transformed by the subject and who then regains his own identity. This object does not omnipotently suppress his own vulnerability and at the same time transforms it in order not to traumatically bump up against the patient.

It is from the experience of this type of relationship that the patient can extract and meet up with the "traces" of a live object. And it is starting from these traces of a live object that the patient gradually forms his own personal sense of being real.

## REFERENCES

Aron, L. (1996). *A Meeting of Minds: Mutuality in Psychoanalysis*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.

Bion, W. R. (1957). On arrogance. In *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac, 1967, pp. 86-92.

——— (1959). Attacks on linking. In *Second Thoughts, Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac, 1967, pp. 93-109.

——— (1965). *Transformations: Change from Learning to Growth*. London: Heinemann.

——— (1970). *Attention and Interpretation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Britton, R. (1989). The missing link: parental sexuality in the Oedipus complex. In *The Oedipus Complex Today: Clinical Implications,* ed. R. Britton, M. Feldman & E. O'Shaughnessy. London: Karnac, pp. 83-101.

Eigen, M. (1981). The area of faith in Winnicott, Lacan, and Bion. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 62:413-433.

——— (2012). On Winnicott's clinical innovations in the analysis of adults. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 93:1449-1459.

Fabozzi, P., ed. (2003). *Forme dell'interpretare.* Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli.

——— (2012). A silent yet radical future revolution: Winnicott's innovative perspective. *Psychoanal. Q.*, 81:601-626.

Giannakoulas, A. (2003). L'interpretazione e le sue vicissitudini. La tecnica in questione. In *Forme dell'interpretare,* ed. P. Fabozzi. Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli, pp. 53-73.

Goldman, D. (1998). Surviving as scientist and dreamer. *Contemp. Psychoanal.*, 34:359-367.

Green, A. (1983). *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism.* London: Free Association Books, 2001.

——— (1984). *Langages.* Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

——— (2002). *Key Ideas for a Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Misrecognition and Recognition of the Unconscious.* London/New York: Routledge, 2005.

Greenson, R. (1968). Dis-identifying from mother: its special importance for the boy. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 49:370-374.

Hanly, C. (2004). The third: a brief historical analysis of an idea. *Psychoanal. Q.*, 73:267-290.

Heimann, P. (1978). On the necessity for the analyst to be natural with his patient. In *About Children and Children-No-Longer.* London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 311-323.

Modell, A. H. (1990a). *Other Times, Other Realities: Toward a Theory of Psychoanalytic Treatment.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

——— (1990b). The roots of creativity and the use of the object. In *Tactics and Techniques in Psychoanalytic Therapy, Vol. 3: The Implications of Winnicott's Contributions,* ed. P. Giovacchini. Northvale, NJ: Aronson, pp. 113-127.

Samuels, L. (2001). The paradox of destruction and survival in D. W. Winnicott's "The Use of an Object." *Fort Da*, 7:38-53.

Steiner, J. (1993). *Psychic Retreats.* London: Routledge.

Tustin, F. (1986). *Autistic Barriers in Neurotic Patients.* London: Karnac.

Winnicott, D. W. (1947). Hate in the countertransference. In *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis.* London: Tavistock, 1958, pp. 194-203.

——— (1954). Metapsychological and clinical aspects of regression within the psycho-analytical set-up. In *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis.* London: Tavistock, 1958, pp. 278-294.

——— (1960a). The theory of the parent–infant relationship. In *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965, pp. 37-55.

——— (1960b). Counter-transference. In *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965, pp. 158-165.

——— (1962a). Ego integration in child development. In *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965, pp. 56-63.

——— (1962b). The aims of psycho-analytical treatment. In *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965, pp. 166-170.

——— (1963a). Communicating and not communicating leading to a study of certain opposites. In *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965, pp. 179-192.

——— (1963b). Fear of breakdown. In *Psycho-Analytic Explorations,* ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989, pp. 87-95.

——— (1965). Development of theme of control. In *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989, pp. 231-233.

——— (1967). Dreaming, fantasying, and living: a case-history describing a primary dissociation. In *Playing and Reality*. New York: Basic Books, 1971, pp. 26-37.

——— (1968). The use of an object and relating through identifications. In *Playing and Reality*. New York: Basic Books, 1971, pp. 86-94.

——— (1969). The use of an object in the context of Moses and Monotheism. In *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989, pp. 240-246.

——— (1971). *Playing and Reality*. New York: Basic Books.

——— (1988). *Human Nature*. New York: Schocken Books.

---

*Via Pescara 2*
*00182 Rome, Italy*

*e-mail: Paolo.fabozzi@uniroma1.it*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# BETWEEN KNOWING AND BELIEVING: SALVAGING ILLUSION'S RIGHTFUL PLACE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

BY RICHARD TUCH

Illusion *has historically received insufficient psychoanalytic attention, even though it plays an indispensable and adaptive role that helps protect individuals from becoming traumatized by the most psychically noxious aspects of reality. Trauma is mitigated by an individual's knowing about the existence of such realities yet simultaneously believing them non-existent, with neither position granted exclusivity. Psychoanalytic theory is surprisingly predicated on the employment of illusions that picture an individual capable of controlling the potentially traumatic actions of others, just so long as the individual effectively manages his own intrapsychic processes (wishes, fantasies, impulses, etc.). The role of illusion in everyday life is highlighted.*

**Keywords:** Illusion, trauma, Winnicott, nameless dread, fear of non-existence, interpersonal control, Freud.

Life is filled with terrifying dangers of many sorts. If one contemplates, really contemplates, all that could go wrong in life—unthinkable torture, anguishing loss, excruciating pain, and the hardest of all to face, non-existence everlasting—one could easily become psychically traumatized by the thought of it all. Thankfully, most individuals find ways to keep them-

---

Richard Tuch is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the New Center for Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles, and a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Psychoanalytic Center of California.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Jim Grotstein, whose intellect and encouragement have served as a personal beacon.

selves from becoming overwhelmed by such possibilities by employing such illusions as the abiding assumption that one is protected from such calamities, or the reassuring belief that one possesses the requisite skills needed to meet whatever challenge might arise. Without such protective illusions, we would all be forced to face the unthinkable—things we intellectually know *could* happen were it not for our convincing illusions that allow us to believe they never will, that such things are avoidable or, if not, are at least within our ability to manage.

This paper is about such illusions—the ways in which and the extent to which humans rely on illusions of various sorts. The psychic device of illusion can help one cope with the aspects of life that are hardest to face and accept. As such, illusion might be regarded as a defense mechanism akin to denial, though it has never been psychoanalytically categorized as such (A. Freud 1936) and has been alternatively likened to an act of creativity (Milner 1950; Mitchell 1988; Winnicott 1951).

Illusion bears a close relationship to other psychic devices, such as selective attention/inattention ("Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain"), magical thinking (sleight of hand: "Now you see it . . . . now you don't!"), and dissociation (a vertical split that allows us to simultaneously know and not know something in particular, supported by primary process thinking that accepts such inconsistencies without requiring that logic prevail). Illusion might be seen as equivalent to *de*lusion save for the fact that illusions are typically built on a grain of truth, whereas delusions are considered to be made up of whole cloth. Illusions are often, though not invariably, unconscious. They cannot stand the light of day and, if exposed, appear to disappear. The illusion of immortality, for example—which Freud (1915) posited as universal—is patently false, though no one will admit to believing such a thing, even though we all do. In this regard, such a belief can only exist so long as it is consciously denied.

This paper endeavors to explore particular aspects of illusion—the way in which individuals indulge a need to believe in illusions while at the same time knowing such things are not factually so. While one may simultaneously know and not know a particular thing, there are times

when *knowing* recedes so far into the background that it seems to be lost altogether, with *believing*—on either a conscious or unconscious level—seeming to occupy the entirety of one's thinking, analogous to the way in which dissociation operates. I will consider the extent to which the concept of illusion has been overlooked by psychoanalysts, by and large, and will hypothesize why this might be.

This paper also strives to illustrate how illusions can disrupt our capacity for empathy when tendencies to "think it so" (i.e., how we believe we would handle a *hypothetical* challenge) interfere with our ability to appreciate how others *in extremis* are handling themselves. I will emphasize the beneficial effects of illusion and the extent to which it proves psychologically indispensable by illustrating what life could be like were we to lose the ability to maintain illusions that keep us believing we are safe, secure, and in no immediate danger. This view of illusion assigns it a positive and/or adaptive function (Turner 2002) that contrasts with Freud's outspoken critique of illusion, found in his writings on death (Freud 1915) and in his famed diatribe against religion (Freud 1927). In fact, the latter suggests that illusion represents a failure to face reality, and as such represents a form of dishonesty.

I will explore the relationship between Winnicott's (1953) concept of transitional phenomena and the subject of illusion, and I will argue that the either/or debate about the legitimacy of the concept of infantile symbiosis, as it relates to Winnicott's transitional space, can lead to difficulties in appreciating states that exist halfway between believing and knowing, with neither granted exclusivity, where debates about objective reality have no place. I will show that privileging one's ability to speak with authority about another's subjectivity may be indicative of an illusion that confuses believing with knowing.

Finally, I will explore how basic psychoanalytic theory rests on an illusion, to the extent that we humans believe we can gain control over externally determined behaviors and events by taking care to closely monitor and control aspects of our psychic life. In so doing, we turn the somewhat random actions of others into things we can do something about.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE SUBJECT OF ILLUSION

Loewald (1988) identifies two ways in which illusion can be defined: either as "a belief about the external world which is subjectively determined" or as equivalent to a delusion: "a form of error when measured against a standard of truth we take as absolute" (p. 70). Illusion need not be limited to an error of perception and may entail, for example, the interpretation of an aspect of reality that is neither clear nor distinct, taking shape only as it becomes invested with assigned meaning. A coat hanging on a standing coat rack in a darkened room suddenly becomes a lurking menace of a man.

Illusion is the basis of magic; the illusionist either creates the appearance of something coming from nothing or the appearance of something disappearing into thin air. In likewise fashion, illusion strives to dispense with disagreeable aspects of reality, just so long as one takes care never to note that an illusion is working behind the scene. The illusionist distracts the audience's attention so that they do not see what is taking place before their very eyes, which are drawn to look elsewhere as the trick unfolds. Illusion requires us to "pay no attention" to the things we wish to wish away—first and foremost, our own nearly unthinkable mortality. We are also required to pay no attention to the device itself—the *way in which* we expeditiously dispose of such disagreeable aspects of reality.

The term *illusion* refers to at least two specific types of phenomena—one involving lived experience, the other entailing a more cognitive phenomenon (e.g., a held belief). Alterations in perception—for example, experiencing oneself floating above a scene in which one is being raped—constitute illusion. An inflated belief in one's capacities to handle adversity or cope with life also constitutes illusion, as in "I can do *anything* I set my mind to." Hence, illusion can be seen as either a convincing experience or a desirable belief that makes it easier to cope with life in a number of different ways—for example, by (1) painting a rosier picture than is factually realistic; (2) granting oneself superhuman

powers that are beyond reason; and (3) limiting the consideration of chance calamities to a psychically manageable handful of possibilities, etc.

The term *illusion* refers to a broad array of phenomena. People harbor illusions about human nature, about how the world works, about why others do the things they do, about the extent they can know for sure what others are thinking or feeling. Not all illusions defy reality; some offer a point of view, a way of thinking, a philosophy. Falling in love, which typically entails a degree of idealization, hinges on illusion. We recognize euphemisms as a type of illusion—one that dresses up and makes respectable the rawest aspects of life that we are loath to call by name. Even the act of naming something contributes to the illusion that to *name* is to *know,* with knowledge affording an illusory sense of control over that which is known.

In these varied ways, we enlist illusion to help us avoid facing the naked truth, whatever that might be. Art is all about illusion—so aptly illustrated in the point Magritte paints into *The Treachery of Images* ("*Ceci n'est pas un pipe*," "This is not a pipe") that addresses the issue of illusion head on. What looks like a pipe is, in fact, nothing more than a rendering—a representation of the real thing. But if the rendering is sufficiently convincing, some viewers may lose themselves in the illusion to such an extent that they temporarily lose track of the fact that it *is* a rendering, evidenced by their confusion as to the caption's meaning. These viewers will then semi-accept the painting (halfway between believing and knowing) for what it is *not* (a real pipe) yet very much appears to be.

One developmental epoch during which illusion plays an important role is adolescence, when we see evidence of the illusion of omnipotentiality (Pumpian-Mindlin 1965)—the belief that one has unlimited abilities to achieve whatever one puts one's mind to. Adolescents notoriously believe in their own immortality and invulnerability—illusions that help them set aside self-doubt so as to be able to act heroically—venturing forth to metaphorically slay dragons when a part of them is filled with underlying doubt about their abilities to meet the world on its terms. On the other hand, believing oneself to be immortal and/or invulnerable

can encourage reckless behavior—illustrating the danger of acting on a belief that one's loss of all sense is but an illusion—as happens in the case of mania, itself a grand illusion.

The aspect of reality that proves hardest of all for humans to handle is that of one's eventual non-existence. Freud (1915) argues that "[one's] whole being revolt[s] against the admission of one's non-existence" (p. 293), which he considered unthinkable. To illustrate how much easier it is to imagine the loss of a loved one than to conceive of one's own demise, Freud relates the joke about the husband who tells his wife: "If one of us dies, I shall move to Paris" (1915, p. 298).

How the raw, unmodulated realization of one's own death can affect one is illustrated in the words of Simone de Beauvoir (1976), who appears to be reacting in the wake of a sudden loss of her ability to sustain an illusion of immortality when she writes:

> One afternoon, in Paris, I realized that I was condemned to death. I was alone in the house and I did not attempt to control my despair: I screamed and tore at the red carpet. And when, dazed, I got to my feet again, I asked myself: "How do other people manage? How shall I manage too?" . . . It seemed to me impossible that I could live all through life with such horror gnawing at my heart. [p. 138]

Facing such a truth brings to mind Bion's concept of O: "a register of existence that lies beyond our capacity to imagine or to conceptualize" (Grotstein 1999, p. 142n).

There are those who insist that they themselves are more than able to stare death squarely in the face—and do so on a regular basis by giving due consideration to their ultimate demise. Such individuals believe this refutes Freud's claim about the impossibility of grasping one's own mortality. What I believe these individuals are describing is more accurately characterized as dealing with death *in the abstract,* which keeps them from having to grasp death on the level that de Beauvoir described having experienced it. I myself experienced just such a realization during my latency years when a sudden realization of my own non-existence plunged

me into an unforgettable, anxiety-ridden state of free fall, during which I experienced myself as if unsupported by anything whatsoever that might catch me from falling into a deep abyss. Such is the experience of suddenly being illusionless in the face of the unthinkable.

## ILLUSION'S PLACE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

While illusions are known to serve an important psychological function, the topic of illusion has more or less been largely marginalized by psychoanalysts. Neither of the two standard dictionaries of psychoanalytic terms (Laplanche and Pontalis 1967; Moore and Fine 1990) make mention of the term. Aside from the work of Winnicott (1953, 1960, 1965, 1971) and Milner (1950, 1952, 1955)—much of which was written a half century ago—and a few more recent works (Klauber 1987; Rycroft 1968), there is a relative dearth of papers that seriously take up the subject.

Why the topic of illusion has received so little attention is a bit unclear, though it may have to do with Freud's strongly expressed feelings about the subject. The concept of *illusion* got off to a bad start in psychoanalysis to the extent indulging in illusions was judged by Freud to be "patently infantile" (1930, p. 74), indicative of a "weakness of intellect" (1927, p. 48). The fact that many human beings rely on religious illusions in particular to get by in life greatly bothered Freud, who dedicated his life to facing reality head on.

Freud did not have much patience for what he saw as the immature human inclination to indulge in such illusions as a belief in God and the hereafter. Freud (1927) strongly believed that man can and should do without illusion, and he anticipated a time when humankind would be able to dispense with what he considered utter nonsense. Freud (1915) regarded religion as a quasi-delusional belief system that helps individuals avoid the harsh reality that man is alone in the universe and ought to face the fact, rather than placing faith in illusions that offer fanciful solutions and encourage unrealistic hopes. Freud (1927) called individuals who believe in religious illusions "the great mass of the uneducated *and oppressed*" (p. 39, italics added). Here his thinking is in line with

that of Karl Marx (1956), who called religion *the opium of the people,* implying that religion results in becoming too accepting of one's circumstances as one surrenders to a God-determined life (i.e., fate).

To whatever extent man refuses to accept personal responsibility for his days on earth and instead turns the matter over to God, argued Freud (1915), his life is impoverished and his ability to make the most of life is greatly diminished. Freud felt that religion insinuated complacency into life, encouraging tendencies to resign oneself to accept the way things are, rather than working to better one's lot or striving to improve the human condition. Better that people accept and face the truth, argued Freud (1927), than live in "the fairy tales of religion" (p. 29).

To whatever extent the weight of Freud's words cooled psychoanalytic interest in the topic, by mid-century, Donald Winnicott (1953, 1960, 1965, 1971) and his analysand Marion Milner (1950, 1952, 1955) were diligently working to retrieve the concept from the waste bin and to honor illusion as an essential feature of development and human nature. "If Freud wished to rule out illusion and destroy it," notes Meissner (1984), "Winnicott wished to foster it and to increase man's capacity for creatively experiencing it" (p. 177).

Sorenson (1994) felt likewise:

> Rather than viewing [illusion] as a flight from reality . . . Winnicott (1971) saw the child's capacity for illusion as one type of transitional phenomenon that is prerequisite for increasing relatedness toward reality. This capacity for illusion, moreover, is not something that is ever outgrown or renounced in the name of emotional maturity. [p. 635]

Further along in this paper, I will return to the topic of Winnicott's thinking as it relates to illusion.

## COMING TO TERMS WITH CATASTROPHE

Unlike the sorts of defenses used to help us cope with intrapsychic tension arising from conflicts within a particular psychic agency or between agencies, as stipulated by psychoanalytic theory, the sorts of illusions I

will address are chiefly—though not exclusively—*outward looking*, to the extent that they are meant to address environmental dangers (including those involving the body, which lies outside the mind) and *forward looking*, anxiously focused on what the future holds. Environmental dangers include a wide array of catastrophes—those imposed by others (assaults such as rape, beheadings, castration, sexual molestation, etc.), natural disasters (e.g., floods, fires, famine), physical accidents, and so on—as well as personal losses of every imaginable sort that result in a diminishment or loss of personal capacity (e.g., loss of cognitive ability, loss of bodily integrity, loss of mobility, and ultimately the loss of the self through death). Illusions designed to address external dangers that may take place in the future include a belief in the ability to foresee such dangers before the fact, and a belief in the eminent ability to handle whatever challenge may arise. A belief in one's capacity to read minds likewise proves oftentimes to be an illusion.

The fact that illusions are often fashioned to address external factors and future possibilities underscores the limit of our control over such matters. The future is notoriously unpredictable. To deal with the anxiety aroused by uncertainty, an individual may rely on the illusion that he is able to foresee the future, which he is actually able to do only on a very limited basis. Knowing as much does not stop certain individuals from dedicating inordinate amounts of time and energy to anticipating the future, which often results in the unfortunate habit of obsessively considering a litany of "what if's," one more bothersome than the next, ostensibly entertained in the service of lessening one's sense of powerlessness as one faces an uncertain future. In this fashion, a process that starts out as an attempt to contain one's anxiety ends up doing just the opposite.[1]

Consider the following everyday example of illusion, drawn from the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* (August 25, 2014), which illustrates how we may simultaneously accept and deny the reality of chance calamities. A California shop owner muses about the 6.0-magnitude earthquake

[1] I am not suggesting this is the sole or even predominant reason why individuals act in this fashion; rather, this theory is offered as one of the many motivations for such behavior.

that rocked his town the day before: "You anticipate the Big One all your life. It's a part of what you expect living in California. *Just not on some Sunday in August.*"

The shop owner is simultaneously acknowledging and negating his acceptance of the reality that big earthquakes can and will occur. He accepts *in theory* the idea that a large earthquake will happen someday, but *someday* and *today* are not at all the same thing. Large earthquakes are in our future, but the future is the future—it is not now! So we are safe for the time being. Such is the logic of illusion, particularly with respect to time—a common element of life that is especially vulnerable to illusion.[2]

One daring proposal suggests that psychoanalysis endeavors to study a wide variety of illusions or myths, collectively held or personally fashioned, that aim to cope with daunting possibilities—external dangers and potential catastrophes—that could occur randomly, save for the fact that we develop a story line/fantasy suggesting the outcome is of our own making, to the extent our thoughts, wishes, actions, intentions are pictured as bringing about the feared outcome. Take, for example, castration anxiety—the possibility of suffering the loss of a prized body part. By tying such a possibility to something he has done, thought, felt, or desired (e.g., daring to challenge the father's rightful position vis-à-vis the mother), the child takes a potentially random occurrence that is out of his control and converts it into one that can be averted—so long as he manages to divert, hide, or otherwise negate what it is he is wanting and scheming to make his own.

The centuries-long durability of the oedipal myth suggests it serves an essential psychological function for humankind. That function, I am proposing, lies in its ability to grant the individual an illusory sense of control over random catastrophe, and while this successfully allays fear to the extent that he imagines himself capable of controlling such a possibility, it burdens him with conflict as he struggles with the need to rein in the acting out of his impulses, turning an external danger into an internally manageable one.

[2] This is the type of illusion that populates the stories of Jorge Luis Borges.

The same principle applies to the frequently noted tendency for children to believe they have only themselves to blame for the mistreatments they suffer at the hands of their parents. Such commonly encountered myths exist in the service of maintaining the illusion that caregivers are essentially benign and would never act in such ways, were it not for the misbehavior of children who cause them to do so. Such a myth helps the child ignore the distinct though unthinkable possibility that parents can harbor hateful feelings toward their children.

## THE ILLUSION OF PERSONAL SAFETY AND EFFICACY

One central task of life is to find ways to avoid getting too close to the unstable edge of the ability to feel safe and in control of one's own life situation. Humans can handle fear just so long as it is reasonably contained and kept from mushrooming into overwhelming shock or terror. Trauma entails the breaking through of a protective (psychic) shield that results when defenses no longer prove sufficient, or when we fail in our ability to continue "buying into" the sorts of illusions needed to psychically encapsulate the situation at hand. When our belief in the illusion of safety is shattered—for example, when we become the sudden victim of an awful occurrence—Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder frequently ensues. One moment we are blithely going along our merry way; the next moment a catastrophe occurs. Since no one can live life constantly contemplating such daunting possibilities, we try to avert our attention with the aid of illusion—convincing ourselves that danger is distant, that "such things happen to others and not me," so that we can sleep at night without tossing and turning, haunted by the "what if's" that occupy the minds of those who cannot make effective use of illusion.

At the core of such trauma is the erosion of the ability to psychically cope with whatever challenges might arise that threaten the continuity of the twin illusions of safety and of having the necessary control to handle whatever comes along. Freud (1926) defined trauma as entailing "the subject's estimation of his own strength compared to the magni-

tude of the danger and in his admission of helplessness in the face of it—physical helplessness if the danger is real and psychical helplessness if it is instinctual" (p. 166).

Bromberg (1993) notes that the experience of shock involves "the real or perceived threat of being overwhelmingly incapacitated by aspects of reality that cannot be processed by existing cognitive schemata without doing violence to one's experience of selfhood, and sometimes to sanity itself" (p. 164). Terror ensues when one exhausts one's ability to psychically cope with overwhelming conditions—for example, when illusions cease to be believable—resulting in psychic trauma and states of dissociation (Bromberg 1993). Like Humpty Dumpty, once shattered, illusions can be hard to piece together again.

While illusions manifest in different ways and serve different functions, my focus here is on those that support either an overriding sense of safety or a sense of personal efficacy. Illusions that provide a sense of being safely protected include a belief in the almighty; a belief that "bad things happen to others, not me"; a belief that one lives a charmed life, etc. Beliefs in having nearly limitless capacities include illusions of utter self-sufficiency,[3] invulnerability, and immortality, as well as the capacity to know what others are thinking or feeling.

Illusions of substantial personal ability picture an individual as capable of actively influencing his fate so long as he remains perennially alert and is willing to give his all should adversity arise. Such illusions include an inflated belief that one can foresee and effectively dodge calamity—or, if adversity cannot be avoided, that one is infinitely able to rise to the occasion if required.

I will somewhat arbitrarily subdivide illusions of power and control into four basic types:

(1) *Heroic illusions,* which picture one's efforts as sufficient to prevail against daunting conditions that require mustering *extraordinary* strength, courage, foresight, etc.;

[3] Since a reliance on others is another externally determined danger, the "illusion of self-sufficiency" (Modell 1975, p. 275) can lead one to believe that one does not require anything from anybody, which seems to mitigate the problem of dependency.

(2) *Magical illusions,* which picture the self as capable of influencing conditions that are not within the self's control—by employing magical maneuvers that are half believed to be capable of saving the day;

(3) *Illusions of power and control,* which picture the outcome of a particular struggle as going just as one had hoped, contrary to the evidence that suggests one had actually wanted to see the situation play out differently in the beginning. By *surrendering to the inevitable,* one employs an illusion that snatches victory from the jaws of defeat by "signing on" to the direction in which things are inevitably heading, even to the point of picturing oneself as having been instrumental in shepherding the course of the process—even to the point of claiming it to have been of one's own making. *Interpersonal control* is a variant of this type of illusion; and

(4) *Illusions of privileged access to the subjectivity of others,* which picture the individual as knowing and claiming to know more than he can possibly know *for sure* about the other's thoughts or feelings.

### *Heroic Illusions*

Heroic illusions are advantageous to the extent that they provide psychic protection by fostering the belief that we have nothing to fear as we make our way through life, sometimes treacherously close to the edge of random calamity. While such illusions oftentimes prove helpful to the extent they quell anxiety about the possibility of chance occurrences that might seriously challenge our ability to cope, such illusions sometimes have the unfortunate effect of impairing our ability to empathize with and think realistically about the actions of those presently confronting extreme adversity. Illusions that picture oneself equipped with extraordinary courage and/or capability, far in excess of what one is likely to be able to muster when put to the test, are easiest to sustain when—metaphorically speaking—the lion is safely ensconced on the other side of the fence.

Occasions on which we imagine ourselves performing laudably in facing a *hypothetical* challenge can lead us to fault the performance of

others who are presently in the midst of such a struggle. In such cases, empathy for others is often sacrificed in favor of our maintenance of the illusion that we are optimally equipped to handle adversity. Only when we ourselves come face to face with actual danger might we discover how limited our own powers may actually turn out to be, as we scramble to scrape together enough presence of mind to cope—exhibiting behavior that is often short of what might be considered heroic. Such sobering moments tend to fracture our abiding illusions about being safe and able.

### *Magical Illusions*

Magical illusions picture an individual as able to influence processes over which he has little, if any, true control. Such magical illusions can be illustrated with the help of a relatively trite example: imagine a bowling ball headed down a lane veering to the left as the bowler, with tremendous intention, leans mightily to the right—believing in the illusion, *but not really*, that his efforts might somehow save the day, *knowing it will not*. Again, illusion positions one halfway between believing and knowing.

Superstitious rituals are of this kind. Consider the anxiety-lessening attempts ("knock on wood") to avert a calamity that one superstitiously believes has been set in motion by the verbalization of optimism about one's present situation—as if outwardly expressed hope is tantamount to hubris and must accordingly be neutralized, lest "the gods" punish those who do not know their place and dare to try to influence fate by imagining a positive outcome. The same can be said of superstitious attempts to avert the realization of a verbalized *negative* outcome ("God forbid!", "bite your tongue!", or the Jewish practice of repeating "*peh, peh, peh*"—as if spitting out the words that have just been spoken in a magical effort to negate the act of having said something that could lead, it is feared, to its actualization). Illusions of this sort are a commonplace occurrence, illustrating the extent to which humans—at least those who are superstitiously inclined—rely on such practices in order to feel safe.

*Illusions of Power and Control*

The third type of illusion includes instances when we implicitly recognize and acknowledge that we are powerless to steer a given process in the direction we wish, leaving but two options: either resist with all our might or surrender to the process, which then runs its course. Consider toilet training. Surrendering to the process involves accepting the fact that, try as one may in the short run, one cannot resist forever, given the fact that one's bowels will have their way in the end. An individual's recognition of the extent to which he is powerless and suffering the narcissistic blow that results when he is forced to face the limits of his ability to effect change sometimes translates into his talking himself into believing he had wished to see the process play out just as it has, which may then support the illusion that the outcome of the process was his idea all along—as in "if you can't beat them, join them."

To understand such situations requires us to consider early psychoanalytic theories that tie the anal phase to the development of the child's sense of autonomy and his will to control.[4] With all its limitations, the anal phase works as a remarkably good metaphor for describing the dialectic of paired psychological processes: of *holding in* (collecting, retaining) and *letting go/letting it happen*. But herein lies the rub: while a child typically considers himself responsible for the creation of his feces—believing he has labored it into existence—this is not at all the case. In actuality, passing feces is a passive act that comes about by surrendering to the process (*relaxing* the anal sphincter), thus permitting ("letting it happen") the involuntary musculature of the colon to "do its thing"—*for which the child may then take credit*. While the end result, the "making" of a fecal bolus, may appear to be the result of one's active effort, this is not so, *though it may appear so*, particularly to a child who struggles against relinquishing control. Hence, taking responsibility for on outcome one did not bring about—and, at best, has "allowed" to

[4] It should be noted that others (notably, Stern [1985]) have argued convincingly that control issues cannot reasonably be seen as limited to the anal phase, and in fact can be shown to operate in each of Freud's psychosexual stages.

happen—illustrates to a T the illusion of control. One knows otherwise, but one is positioned halfway between knowing and believing.

Of the varied ways in which *illusions of power and control* may manifest, none is more relevant to the work of psychoanalysis than the erroneous belief that it is literally possible for one person to capture and subjugate the will of another—the illusion of *interpersonal control*. There are instances when both parties involved become deeply immersed in such a shared illusion—when each "buys into" the concept that it is possible for one person to control another—as *appears* to happen when the hypnotist induces a trance, for example. Seduction is another excellent example of a mutually accepted attempt on the part of one party to make it appear as if he has seized the will of the other in *doer/done to* fashion (Benjamin 2004), with the seducee *pictured* as passively along for the ride, disavowing responsibility for unfolding events. Believing in the illusion allows the seducer to feel particularly powerful while affording the seducee the distinct pleasure of feeling swept up in a powerful process that *appears* to leave him no other option but to submit—a terrifying experience for some, a deeply pleasurable one for others, who feel relieved of the heavy burden of being responsible for their own life and subjectivity.

One often sees the illusion of control in operation when treating couples. One of the partners charges the other with maneuvering in an attempt to control him. The spouse who claims to have succumbed to the control of the other disowns responsibility for his own actions by loudly proclaiming, "Look at what you made me do!"—which is an illusion of *lacking* control. In that moment, that individual may genuinely believe in the illusion that he had no choice in the matter, losing track of reality as he becomes amply convinced by the illusion.

### *Illusions of Privileged Access*

The illusion that one can speak with authority about the thinking or subjectivity of another is a fourth type of illusion, one not infrequently encountered in the clinical setting. The patient claims to know *for sure* something about the inner workings of the analyst's mind and is not open to the possibility that there may be reasons for him to believe what

he believes. One approach to working with such illusions is to explore the patient's personal epistemology by directing his attention not to the content of what he is thinking, not to the affects being experienced, but to his conviction that his beliefs represent truth rather than hypotheses. This *metacognitive* approach (Tuch 2011) involves, for example, highlighting the extent to which the patient confounds *knowing* with *believing,* and, furthermore, disallows for the possibility that he may be mistaken. This is illustrated in the following clinical vignette (Bass 1997) in which a patient insists her analyst accept *her* view of *his* subjectivity as indisputable.

This patient, who had a habit of keeping certain thoughts to herself (fearing her analyst might become critical of her), is late for an early-morning session and asserts that she knows the analyst is mad on account of her lateness. The analysis has recently focused on the patient's tendency to repress any expression of her own aggression, which sets the stage for the analyst to interpret her assertion that it is *he* who is mad as most likely a matter of projection. Such an interpretation may seem in order—save for the fact that, as Bass points out, the patient's communication contains not one but two important bits of information, either of which could profitably be addressed analytically. First is her assertion that she "knows" something to be true, and second, there is the content of what she claims to know—her fantasy.

When the analyst calls into question the patient's "knowledge" by treating it as a projection/fantasy, his intervention backfires. The two are drawn into a distracting power struggle about which of them is right. What gets overlooked in the process is any exploration of

> . . . the patient's desperate *need to know* (the known devil is worse than the unknown devil), her *need to unquestioningly know* (terrified of the alternative of not knowing), and her *plea to be permitted to continue to know* that which she claims to know. [Tuch 2011, pp. 779-780, italics in original]

Bass (1997) notes that reorienting the analytic work toward the question of why the patient needs to know and insists on knowing, rather than the content of what it is she believes she knows, permits therapeutic

progress to resume—which constitutes a *metacognitive* approach insofar as the focus is not on the content of the patient's thinking, but rather on the extent to which she conflates knowing and believing. She fails to appreciate that what she regards as knowledge is, in fact, more a matter of belief—an illusion. In this instance, a metacognitive approach focuses on an exploration of how the patient's insistence on knowing precludes her from keeping an open mind about other possibilities, which is a very different clinical approach than translating the symbolic content of the patient's fantasies.

## WINNICOTT'S THOUGHTS ON ILLUSION

The writings of Winnicott (1953, 1960, 1965, 1971) contribute greatly to our understanding and appreciation of the ways in which illusion functions throughout life. His thoughts on illusion are based on a prototype—the infant's illusion that he "creates the breast" (Winnicott 1953, 1971). Winnicott sketches a developmental line culminating in the child's capacity to tolerate the realization that he is a separate individual, which comes about as he is weaned from the "maternally provided psychological matrix" (Ogden 1985, p. 360) that had protected him from the premature and potentially traumatic realization that he is a separate, *and hence dependent*, entity.[5] Until such a time that he is able to face reality, the infant relies on the illusion that he created the breast, has omnipotent control over it, and is therefore shielded from having to struggle with an idea he is not yet ready to face—the extent of his powerlessness and dependency.[6]

Winnicott (1971) describes the transitional phenomenon as representing "the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being" (p. 11).

[5] This also touches on a shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position.

[6] Ogden (1985) sees the situation a bit differently—as the infant's illusion that he has no needs whatsoever. Ogden proposes that this illusion of needlessness, which keeps the infant from having to directly experience his own needs, is supported by the way in which the mother carefully tends to those needs, thus shielding the infant from realizing *what it would be like to have to do without.*

While the transitional space is one in which the child is thought to experience a *state of oneness*—symbiosis[7]—with the object, to the extent that the object is seen as of the infant's making and under the infant's control, the notion of symbiosis flies in the face of current psychoanalytic thinking. This thinking views the concept of early infantile symbiosis (perceived merger of self and other) as having been disproven by infant researchers, who present experimental evidence demonstrating that infants can and do differentiate self from other at a much earlier age than had once been thought (Lichtenberg 1983; Stern 1985; Zeedyk 1996). Against such questioning of the viability of the notion of normal infantile symbiosis, many analysts continue to think in terms of *states of oneness* (see Silverman's [2003] review of the literature in this regard). Grotstein (1997), for example, talks in terms of oneness, though he is quick to qualify his use of the term by specifying that he is referring only to an *emotional/psychological* merger, and not to the sort of *perceptual/physical* merger that infant researchers have now ruled out.

Freud also believed in the reality of symbiosis. One of the last things he wrote demonstrates his belief that the infant's first way of relating to others is by imagining himself *to be* the other, followed later by the idea of *possessing* the object—which is still viewed as a part-object until it eventually becomes recognized as an entity unto itself. Freud alludes to symbiosis when he writes of the infant's relationship to the breast: "'The breast is a part of me, *I am the breast.*' Only later: 'I have it'—that is, 'I am not it'" (Freud 1941, p. 299).[8]

The point that gets lost in the debate about whether symbiosis is merely a figment of one's imagination—hence an illusion—is the fact that this polemic hinges on an either/or distinction that is unbefitting to analytic thinking. In fact, the momentary loss of a sense of one's existence as a distinct object need not contradict background awareness that one is, in fact, a separate and distinct entity unto oneself, given that one can believe one thing yet know another. Winnicott's transitional phe-

[7] It might be more correct to say that the infant does not see himself as the same as the object, yet he fails to see himself as insufficiently differentiated from the object as well—a true in-between or transitional state.

[8] I want to thank Albert Mason for calling this to my attention.

nomenon represents a psychic state in which one is positioned halfway between believing and knowing, particularly when it comes to *moments of illusion* (Milner 1950) during which the awareness of the distinction between self and other is lost, placed in temporary abeyance.

While Freud expected individuals to see stark reality for what it is no matter how daunting the task, the glare of unfiltered reality may be more than most can bear on anything but an intermittent basis, as suggested in Winnicott's (1971) words:

> It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience (cf. Riviere, 1936) which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). [p. 13]

This transitional space between believing and knowing then becomes the lifelong basis of illusion, which adults can utilize to fend off traumatic realizations that are more than they can psychically bear.

## SUMMARY

Illusion has a way of making things seem just so, or so it seems. While psychoanalysts dutifully dedicate themselves to stripping away facades, illuminating "truth," and facing "reality" head on, sans illusion, we might wonder whether humankind can ever do without the protection that illusion offers—shielding us from harsh realities that sometimes prove too much to bear. Accepting that this is so, rather than *expecting* humans to consistently see reality for what it is, seems to be a more tenable position from which to operate.

Illusion is far from the lie some claim it to be. It need not be characterized as a refusal to grow up and face facts. Winnicott contributed greatly to our appreciation of the utility of illusion—how it helps the infant keep from having to face what he is not ready to face. As humans develop, they remain comparably unready to accept *certain daunting realities* without the help of illusion that, in effect, says it is not so—at least for the time being.

The debate over the illusion of oneness proves spurious. Milner (1950) writes that, in her opinion, it is "a mistake to call an experience only imagination . . . to try to decide which was more 'real,' thoughts or things, imagination or perception, [since doing so] creates a false dichotomy which ignores the true nature of the relation between them" (p. 34). Commenting on Milner's thoughts, Turner (2002) writes: "Her argument is directed against what she calls the puritanism of classical analysis for its excessive reliance upon denotative or objective thinking" (p. 1071).

I will conclude with Winnicott's (1951) response to Milner's ideas:

> What is illusion when seen from outside is not best described as illusion when seen from inside; for that fusion which occurs when the object is felt to be one with the dream, as in falling in love with someone or something, is, when seen from inside, a psychic reality for which the word illusion is inappropriate. For this is the process by which the inner becomes actualised in external form and as such becomes the basis not only of internal perception, but also of all true perception of environment. Thus perception itself is seen as a creative process. [pp. 391-392]

## REFERENCES


Bass, A. (1997). The problem of "concreteness." *Psychoanal. Q.,* 66:642-682.

Benjamin, J. (2004). Beyond doer and done to: an intersubjective view of thirdness. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 1:5-46.

Bromberg, P. (1993). Shadow and substance: a relational perspective on clinical process. *Psychoanal. Psychol.,* 10:147-168.

de Beauvoir, S. (1976). *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* trans. J. Kirkup. Hammondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Freud, A. (1936). *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence.* New York: Int. Univ. Press, 1946.

Freud, S. (1915). Thoughts for the times on war and death. *S. E.,* 14.

——— (1926). *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety. S. E.,* 20.

——— (1927). *The Future of an Illusion. S. E.,* 21.

——— (1930). *Civilization and Its Discontents. S. E.,* 21.

——— (1941). Findings, ideas, problems. *S. E.,* 23.

Grotstein, J. (1997). Integrating one-person and two-person psychologies: autochthony and alterity in counterpoint. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 66:403-430.

——— (1999). Melanie Klein and Heinz Kohut: an odd couple or secretly connected? *Progress in Self Psychol.,* 15:123-146.

Klauber, J. (1987). *Illusion and Spontaneity in Psychoanalysis.* London: Free Association Books.

Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J.-B. (1967). *The Language of Psycho-Analysis,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Norton, 1973.

Lichtenberg, J. (1983). *Psychoanalysis and Infant Research.* Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.

Loewald, H. W. (1988). *Sublimation.* New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

Marx, K. (1956). A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right. In *Marx: Early Writings,* ed. T. B. Tottomore. London: Watts.

Meissner, W. (1984). *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience.* New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

Milner, M. (1950). The necessity of illusion. In *On Not Being Able to Paint.* London: Routledge, pp. 31-38.

——— (1952). Aspects of symbolism in comprehension of the not-self. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 33:181-195.

——— (1955). The role of illusion in symbol formation. In *New Directions in Psycho-Analysis,* ed. M. Klein, P. Heimann & R. E. Money-Kyrle. London: Tavistock.

Mitchell, S. A. (1988). *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Modell, A. (1975). A narcissistic defence against affects and the illusion of self-sufficiency. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 56:275-282.

Moore, B. & Fine, B., eds. (1990). *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts.* New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

Ogden, T. H. (1985). The mother, the infant, and the matrix: interpretations of aspects of the work of Donald Winnicott. *Contemp. Psychoanal.,* 21:346-371.

Pumpian-Mindlin, E. (1965). Omnipotentiality, youth, and commitment. *J. Amer. Acad. Child Psychiat.,* 4:1-18.

Riviere, J. (1936). On the genesis of psychical conflict in earliest infancy. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 17:395-422.

Rycroft, C. (1968). *Imagination and Reality.* London: Hogarth.

Silverman, D. (2003). Mommy nearest: revisiting the idea of infantile symbiosis and its implications for females. *Psychoanal. Psychol.,* 20:261-270.

Sorenson, R. (1994). Ongoing change in psychoanalytic theory: implications for analysis of religious experience. *Psychoanal. Dialogues,* 4:631-660.

Stern, D. (1985). *The Interpersonal World of the Infant.* New York: Basic Books.

Tuch, R. (2011). Thinking outside the box: a metacognitive/theory of mind perspective on concrete thinking. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 59:765-789.

Turner, J. (2002). A brief history of illusion: Milner, Winnicott, and Rycroft. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 83: 1063-1082.

Winnicott, D. W. (1951). Critical notice of *On Not Being Able to Paint.* In *Psycho-Analytic Explorations,* ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis. London: Karnac, 1989.

——— (1953). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 34:89-97.

——— (1960). The theory of the parent–infant relationship. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 41:585-595.

——— (1965). *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. London: Hogarth/Inst. of Psychoanalysis.

——— (1971). *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock.

Zeedyk, M. (1996). Developmental accounts of intentionality: toward integration. *Devel. Rev.,* 16:416-461.

---

*1800 Fairburn Avenue*
*Suite 206*
*Los Angeles, CA 90025*

*e-mail: rtuch@aol.com*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# SCREEN MEMORIES: A NEGLECTED FREUDIAN DISCOVERY?

BY EUGENE J. MAHON

*In 1899, Freud introduced the concept of screen memories. His insights were revolutionary: screen memories do not* emerge *into consciousness at the time of recall, he argued; they are* formed *at that time and, moreover, historical accuracy is not their prime concern. In this article, the author reviews two of Freud's screen memories, as well as two screen memories from a completed analysis of one of his own patients. He argues that, if screen memories are formed, a concept such as* screen work *must be invoked as the agent of their formation. While screen memories may theoretically be formed at any stage of life, adolescence may be a prime time for their formation.*

**Keywords:** Screen memories, Freud, repression, trauma, self-analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

In "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), Freud observed that the mind cannot perceive something and register it in memory at the precise moment of observation. A nanosecond of time is bound to separate the perceptual experience from the memorial record of it. In 1899, Freud would add an even more revolutionary idea: the memorial record is often a most unreliable witness of its own perceptual experience; it frequently focuses on a single aspect of the perceptual experience, highlighting its supposed accuracy and developing a stubborn, uncanny feeling about its historical reality and meaning.

---

Eugene J. Mahon is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, Columbia College of Physicians & Surgeons, and is a member of the New York Freudian Society.

It is often most eye-opening, as analytic investigation deepens and proceeds, to discover that what was highlighted as the most significant feature of memory was indeed just a portion of an elaborate mosaic that could only have been reduced to a single image by doing considerable violence to the total complexity of the entire memorial record. Psychodynamic minimalism would seem to be the defensive, strategic raison d'être of isolating one feature at the expense of a more complex totality. That isolated feature often has a luminous halo around it that seems to stress its importance.

This brings to mind the story of a man who lost his wallet on a dark street, but persistently looked for it a good distance away under a lamppost. When asked why he was looking in the wrong place, he replied: "There's more light here!" With this comic lamppost analogy, I am suggesting that the screen memory exploits the ultraclear halo effect to divert attention away from all that has been repressed. If repression is defined as a stripping of word presentations from thing presentations, certain wordless things seem to gather a luminosity about them as if to compensate for loss in one realm with gain in another.

Dreams demonstrate this almost wordless world of images par excellence, but in a parapraxis a similar phenomenon can be noted: when a person's name cannot be remembered the face is often illuminated in memory, as Freud (1901a) first described in his Signorelli parapraxis (see also Freud 1901b). I am suggesting that a similar compensatory excess of light may indeed be a reflection of all that repression has made off with in the construction of a screen memory.

In a previous contribution (Battin and Mahon 2009), my coauthor and I described in detail how a patient's sensitivity to "excessive" light was indeed a symptom of all that needed to be screened in her traumatic childhood—as if light cannot only be displaced onto screen images, but can also occasionally become a symptom in its own right, in and of itself. The excessive luminosity of a single image that seems symbolic of the whole has often been noted in memories of trauma, as if fright grabs for a shred of light to witness the overwhelming event.

Freud was very excited about his paper on screen memories—an excitement he believed might jinx its reception. This superstition was not to prove correct: the paper was well received and, despite some recent

neglect, has been incorporated into the corpus of analytic ideas. It is an example of how not even memory is spared from compromise and conflict as defensive strategies are set in motion by unconscious anxieties.

But I have introduced my topic without defining it. Let me attempt to construct a brief definition:

> A *screen memory* is a subjective experience of a memorial event that seems to stand out from the flux or continuity of memory in general, as if to bring attention to itself by what Freud called its *uberdeutlich* appearance. Ironically, this show of brightness is meant to conceal more than to reveal.

In English, the word *ultraclear* seems pretty close to Freud's word, *uberdeutlich*. *Deutlich* can be traced back to the proto-Indo European *derke,* which means *to look*. So it would seem that the *ultraclear* of English and the *uberdeutlich* of German both emphasize the visual component in the architecture of the screen. The word *halo* has been given to the screen memory's visual starkness or emphasis. It is as if the memory is making eyes at its audience, seeking attention by its luminous display.

Freud was not seduced by this exhibitionism. He saw beyond the seductive display to what was being concealed by the pseudorevelation. With an *uberdeutlich* scientific acuity of his own, he recognized the show that subjective consciousness was putting on to avoid revealing all that unconscious repression had made off with. And so, if we revisit our earlier definition of screen memories, parsimony might suggest the following revision:

> A *screen memory* is a subjectively experienced memory fragment that makes a luminous display of itself in consciousness, the better to fulfill its unconscious motivation to conceal more than it reveals.

The similarity between the luminosity of a screen memory and the manifest content of a dream seems obvious, and the date of the paper (1899) suggests that, while Freud was intensely engaged with his magnum opus, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the screen memory paper may have afforded him a brief respite from the herculean labors of that extraordinary psychoanalytic masterpiece.

## A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In 1899, Sigmund Freud coined the term *screen memories* to apply to the leftover relics of infantile amnesia. He was fascinated by his discovery that the important elements of the past were omitted from the memory, with the trivial retained. It was as if memory was trying to record itself and conceal itself all at once! Earlier, of course, in letters to Fliess (of October 3, 4, and 15, 1897; see Masson 1986), Freud had discussed his analysis of his own early memories, dealing with impressions of his mother, his nurse, his brother Phillip, and an empty cupboard. It was the analysis of these gaps in his infantile amnesia that led Freud to his momentous discovery of the Oedipus complex (a topic I will return to later in this paper). Freud subsequently revisited this issue a few years later (1900, 1901a). The analysis of screen memories plays a highly significant part in his case histories (1909, 1918) and in his studies of Goethe (1917) and Leonardo da Vinci (1910).

It seems, in fact, that the subject of screen memories was rarely far from Freud's mind. For instance, in a 1920 footnote to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), he compared a screen memory to a fetish; and in 1937, he tackled the issue again. But it was perhaps in 1914 that he made his most definitive and comprehensive statement on the nature of screen memories:

> In some cases I have had an impression that the familiar childhood amnesia, which is theoretically so important to us, is completely counterbalanced by screen memories. Not only *some* but *all* of what is essential from childhood has been retained in these memories. It is simply a question of knowing how to extract it out of them by analysis. They represent the forgotten years of childhood as adequately as the manifest content of a dream represents the dream-thoughts. [p. 148, italics in original]

Interest in screen memories on the part of others besides Freud has been less enthusiastic than one might have imagined. Greenacre (1981) argued that the pervasive shift to ego psychology after Freud's death led to the relative neglect of two concepts that are obviously allied: reconstruction and screen memories. (Greenacre herself did much to redress this balance.)

A review of the literature before and after Freud's death reveals that this topic was approached from a variety of metapsychological points of view. Simmel (1925) and Kennedy (1950) focused on the formation of screen memories. Fenichel (1927) provided new information on their economic function. Kris (1956a, 1956b) was interested in the development of memory and its construction in general, not just its screening function. He argued convincingly that analysis is not just a nostalgic Proustian attempt to recapture the past and wallow in it, but rather a pursuit of the vicissitudes of genetics as they enter the personal myths that human beings construct to make some kind of existential sense out of their life histories.

Abraham (1913) and Glover (1929) described the screening function of traumatic memories. Deutsch (1932) suggested that hysterical fugues are sometimes reactivated screen memories. A later tendency to broaden the concept of screening—Lewin's (1950) *screen affects,* Greenson's (1958) *screen identifications,* Reider's (1953) *screen symptom* and *screen character*—ran the risk of confusing a useful clinical phenomenon with an overinclusiveness that blurs the distinction of the definition: a useful heuristic phenomenon becomes screened by such ecumenical thinking.

It was Greenacre who brought a developmental point of view to the study of screen memories. Her purpose in a series of papers (1947, 1949, 1979, 1980, 1981) would seem to be twofold: (1) to explain the intensity of the screen memory (what Freud had called its *ultraclear* quality) as a stamp of its genetic origin in the preverbal months of life, when sensory traumas in the visual and auditory spheres are ubiquitous human experience. She even suggests that the sharp edges of the screen memory, as contrasted with the vague edges of Lewin's dream screen, can be explained by the latter's less tumultuous sensory birth in the early hours of our oral origins; and (2) to highlight the clinical neglect of reconstruction and analysis of screen memories and to renew clinical interest in these areas.

From the viewpoint of development, it is interesting to note that there seem to be few studies in which the child's subjective experience of his screen memories becomes available to him. Piaget (1945) asked children about their understanding of their dreams—discovering, in his

usual genetic, epistemological way, that it takes maturity of the mental apparatus to identify the dream as being a product of the mind, with very young children experiencing the dream as a foreign body.

At what age a human being begins to reflect on his screen memories is perhaps an unresearchable topic. But it could be speculatively argued that the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and the massive repression that ushers in infantile amnesia leave islands of memory that erupt into the seas of latency with some psychodynamic regularity, whenever the return of the repressed cannot be forestalled. Freud himself, describing his own memory, says: "It is not, I believe, until my sixth or seventh year that the stream of my memories becomes continuous" (1899, p. 309).

Piaget suggests that the child does not possess a sense of time as an orderly sequence, past leading to the present, until age seven or eight (Flavell 1963). This suggests that by that age, the child may have the capacity to reflect a little on his own history, where his memories have gone to, and why only certain pieces of the mosaic of memory remain available to him.

Mahon and Battin (1981, 1983) discussed screen memories in relation to termination and related topics. Battin and Mahon (2003) showed that a symptom, a screen memory, and a dream can all share the same genetic and dynamic conflict. Reichbart (2008) confirmed, among other things, that over the course of a long analysis, a screen memory could lose its highly luminous quality. Battin and Mahon (2009) described a patient with an unusual light sensitivity that was indeed connected to her earliest screen memories, as mentioned earlier. LaFarge (2012) brought attention to two aspects of screening: the content of the screen memory itself and the private act of remembering; she argued that both are significant and durable over time. In a particularly rich volume drawing on the varied perspectives of international contributors, Reed and Levine (2014) compiled a fascinating and scholarly array of commentaries, including their own, on Freud's paper on screen memories (1899).

## CLINICAL MATERIAL

I begin with two examples from Freud and will then present one of my own.

*Freud's Clinical Examples*

Freud was intrigued by the idea that the important elements of the past were omitted from memory, while the trivial was retained. "Two psychical forces are concerned in bringing about memories of this sort," he wrote (Freud 1899, p. 306). Moreover:

> One of these forces takes the importance of the experience as a motive for seeking to remember it, while the other—a resistance—tries to prevent any such preference from being shown . . . . Instead of the mnemic image which would have been justified by the original event, another is produced which has been to some degree associatively displaced from the former one . . . . There is a common saying among us about shams, that they are not made of gold themselves but have lain beside something that is made of gold. The same simile might well be applied to some of the experiences of childhood which have been retained in the memory. [1899, p. 307]

Freud's metaphor is striking: the screen memory is partly a sham, a fake, in the sense that its visual emphasis on only one facet of reality is meant to disguise rather than to reveal the whole. In other words, the real thing is hidden elsewhere. Ironically, the sham can lead the way to the real thing, if it takes the psychoanalytic method as its guide.

Earlier, in letters to Fliess (October 3, 4, and 15, 1897; see Masson 1986), Freud had discussed his analysis of his own early memories dealing with impressions of his mother, his nurse, his brother Phillip, and an empty cupboard. It was in fact the analysis of these gaps in his infantile amnesia that led Freud to his momentous discovery of the Oedipus complex in 1897, which I have discussed in some detail elsewhere (Mahon 2013).

Let us look at Freud's description of the first screen memory ever recorded. He ascribes it to a "man of university education, aged thirty-eight" (1899, p. 309). The man was reportedly not neurotic or only slightly so. But subsequent research has left little doubt that the 38-year-old man of university education was none other than Freud himself. With this mask in place, Freud continues to provide us with the direct words of this man, as follows.

> I have at my disposal a fair number of early memories of childhood, which I can date with great certainty. For at the age of three I left the small place where I was born and moved to a large town; and all these memories of mine relate to my birthplace and therefore date from my second and third years. They are mostly short scenes, but they are very well preserved and furnished with every detail of sense-perception, in complete contrast to my memories of adult years, which are entirely lacking in the visual element. [1899, p. 309]

Freud is emphasizing what has often been confirmed since this first report: that screen memories, like dreams, seem to stress the visual as opposed to the verbal.

Still in disguise as a 38-year-old university-educated man, Freud then describes a scene that has stood out in "the man's" memory for many years:

> Let me describe it to you. I see a rectangular, rather steeply sloping piece of meadow-land, green and thickly grown; in the green there are a great number of yellow flowers—evidently common dandelions. At the top end of the meadow there is a cottage and in front of the cottage door two women are standing chatting busily, a peasant-woman with a handkerchief on her head and a children's nurse. Three children are playing in the grass. One of them is myself (between the age of two and three); the two others are my boy cousin, who is a year older than me, and his sister, who is almost exactly the same age as I am. We are picking the yellow flowers and each of us is holding a bunch of flowers we have already picked. The little girl has the best bunch; and, as though by mutual agreement, we—the two boys—fall on her and snatch away her flowers. She runs up the meadow in tears, and as a consolation the peasant-woman gives her a big piece of black bread. Hardly have we seen this than we throw the flowers away, hurry to the cottage and ask to be given some bread too. And we are in fact given some; the peasant-woman cuts the loaf with a long knife. In my memory the bread tastes quite delicious—and at that point the scene breaks off. [1899, p. 311]

In a great tour de force of self-analysis, Freud shows that this memory, which seems to reflect something that occurred when he was two or

three years old, actually represents events of his adolescence. He demonstrates very convincingly that the flowers of his childhood, described as ultraclear, were really displacements of adolescent wishes about sexual de-flowering, defensively transported back in time to a scene of relative innocence.

At the end of the paper, Freud makes quite a revolutionary statement about memory and childhood:

> It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were, but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge;* they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. [1899, p. 322, italics in original]

What Freud describes here in relation to the formation of screen memories could be applied to the arousal of Freud's unique creative insight itself. The word *arousal* suggests a kind of sexuality in the creative process, not unlike Flaubert's idea that creativity represents the ejaculation of the soul. Insights such as these do not emerge in the same way that all the other thoughts passing through our minds do. Surely, they are the product of some internal alchemy that may be impossible to describe; but it must be acknowledged that Freud's unique way of thinking as he seems to stumble onto this extraordinary insight is not just thinking as usual. Some new product of associative, analytic thought has been *formed* by the mystery of such ingenuity itself. I stress this point since, as we incorporate such revolutionary insights into the corpus of received ideas, the mystery of their unique pedigree tends to get taken for granted, if not ignored altogether.

There is another screen memory of Freud's that he first introduced to Fliess in the letters of October 3, 4, and 15, 1897 (see Masson 1986). He discussed it again in a most significant footnote of 1924 (Freud 1901a). It is perhaps the most momentous screen memory ever recorded, since Freud's analysis of it led him to his discovery of the Oedipus complex.

Here are Freud's own words:

> I should like now to give a single example of the way in which a childhood memory, which previously appeared to have no meaning, can acquire one as a result of being worked over by analysis. When I began in my forty-third year to direct my interest to what was left of my memory of my own childhood, there came back to my mind a scene which had for a long while back (from the remotest past, as it seemed to me) come into consciousness from time to time, and which I had good evidence for assigning to a date before the end of my third year. I saw myself standing in front of a cupboard ("Kasten") demanding something and screaming, while my half-brother, my senior by twenty years, held it open. Then suddenly my mother, looking beautiful and slim, walked into the room, as if she had come in from the street. These were the words in which I described the scene, of which I had a plastic picture, but I did not know what more I could make of it. Whether my brother wanted to open or shut the cupboard—in my first translation of the picture I called it a "wardrobe" (*Schrank*)—why I was crying, and what the arrival of my mother had to do with it—all this was obscure to me. The explanation I was tempted to give myself was that what was in question was a memory of being teased by my elder brother and of my mother putting a stop to it. Such misunderstandings of a childhood scene which is preserved in the memory are by no means rare: a situation is recalled, but it is not clear what its central point is, and one does not know on which of its elements the psychical accent is to be placed. Analytic effort led me to take a quite unexpected view of the picture. I had missed my mother, and had come to suspect that she was shut up in this wardrobe or cupboard; and it was for that reason that I was demanding that my brother should open the cupboard. When he did what I asked and I had made certain that my mother was not in the cupboard, I began to scream. This is the moment that my memory has held fast; and it was followed at once by the appearance of my mother, which allayed my anxiety or longing. But how did the child get the idea of looking for his absent mother in the cupboard? Dreams which I had at the same time (as the analysis of this memory) contained obscure allusions to a nurse of whom I had other recollections, such as, for example, that

she used to insist on my dutifully handing over to her the small coins I received as presents—a detail which can itself claim to have the value of a screen memory for later experiences. I accordingly resolved that this time I would make the problem of interpretation easier for myself and would ask my mother, who was by then grown old, about the nurse. I learned a variety of details, among them that this clever but dishonest person had carried out considerable thefts in the house during my mother's confinement and had been taken to court on a charge preferred [sic] by my half-brother. This information threw a flood of light on the childhood scene, and so enabled me to understand it. The sudden disappearance of the nurse had not been a matter of indifference to me: the reason why I had turned in particular to this brother, and had asked him where she was, was probably because I had noticed that he played a part in her disappearance; and he had answered in the elusive and punning fashion that was characteristic of him: "She's 'boxed up'" (*eingekastelt*). At the time I understood this answer in a child's way (i.e., literally) but I stopped asking any more questions as there was nothing more to learn. When my mother left me a short while later, I suspected that my naughty brother had done the same thing to her that he had done to the nurse, and I forced him to open the cupboard ("Kasten") for me. I now understand, too, why in the translation of this visual childhood scene my mother's slimness was emphasized: it must have struck me as having been just restored to her. I am two and a half years older than my sister who was born at that time, and when I was three years old my half-brother and I ceased living in the same place. [1901a, pp. 49-50]

A footnote added to these comments in 1924 continues:

Anyone who is interested in the mental life of these years of childhood will find it easy to guess the deeper determinant of the demand made on the big brother. The child of not yet three had understood that the little sister who had recently arrived had grown inside his mother. He was very far from approving of this addition to the family, and was full of mistrust and anxiety that his mother's inside might conceal still more children. The wardrobe or cupboard was a symbol for him of his mother's in-

> side. So he insisted on looking into this cupboard, and turned for this to his big brother, who (as is clear from other material) had taken his father's place as the child's rival. Despite the well-founded suspicion that this brother had had the lost nurse "boxed-up," there was a further suspicion against him—namely, that he had in some way introduced the recently born baby into his mother's inside. The affect of disappointment when the cupboard was found to be empty derived, therefore, from the superficial motivation for the child's demand. As regards the *deeper* trend of thought, the affect was in the wrong place. On the other hand, his great satisfaction over his mother's slimness on her return can only be fully understood in the light of this deeper layer. [1901a, p. 51n, italics in original]

It is significant that Freud returned to this memory in 1924 and introduced the concept of *a* superficial motivation in contrast to a "deeper trend of thought." The superficial motivation would seem to be the child's notion that the mother is hidden in the wardrobe, thereby explaining her absence. The "deeper trend of thought" must refer to Freud's wish to impregnate the mother, in the way that he imagines Phillip, his older half-brother, had. When she returns slim, the oedipal fantasist is disappointed and relieved all at once.

Of course, it is surely significant that—although it was this memory that led via associations to Freud's first inklings and eventual discovery of the Oedipus complex, as the letter of October 15, 1897, illustrates so graphically (Masson 1986)—such a momentous conceptual connection is not cited. It could be argued that since Freud had initially arrived at the discovery and had shared his excitement about it with Fliess, later on, when that relationship had soured, Freud did not want to remember the collegial climate from which the discovery had emerged. By 1901, Freud was already beginning to dismiss Fliess as his so-called secret sharer in these momentous discoveries, and by 1924 he had certainly done so—an oedipal flourish in its own right, perhaps!

Another comment on this screen memory: in the letter of October 15, 1897, Freud attributes the retrieval of the memory to the sudden disappearance of his old nurse, "who was my teacher in sexual matters," as he had referred to her in the earlier letter of October 4, 1897. Freud writes as follows.

> I said to myself if the old woman disappeared so suddenly, it must be possible to point to the impression this made on me. Where is that impression, then? A scene then occurred to me which for the last twenty-nine years has occasionally emerged in my conscious memory without my understanding it. [Masson 1986, p. 271]

Then he describes the cupboard memory already related. In 1897, Freud was in his forty-second year, not his forty-third. His allusion to the prior twenty-nine years implies that the first time the scene reached consciousness, therefore, would have been when he was twelve years old. If, as Freud argued, memories do not *emerge* but are *formed,* early adolescence and its sexual reawakenings may have had a significant agency in their formation. Strachey corrects Freud's estimate of his age as forty-three, saying that Freud was in his forty-second year at the time of writing. But if Freud believed he was forty-three, the 29-year differential would make him thirteen going on fourteen, a young libidinal teenager struggling not only with a second individuation, as Blos (1967) characterized adolescence, but also with a second iteration of the postlatency oedipal *risorgimento* as well.

It is clear that Freud continued to analyze the significance of his screen memories throughout his life. Grubrich-Simitis (1997) suggests that Freud's self-analysis never really ended. Jones describes how Freud told him that he set aside some time at the end of each workday for self-analysis. Anzieu's (1986) brilliant book on Freud's self-analysis described it as ending in 1905, but it would be a misreading of that beautifully researched book, I think, to assume that Freud's self-analysis ended at any point before his death in 1939.

### *A Clinical Case of My Own: Mr. Y*

I now want to focus on the fate of screen memories in an analysis brought to a successful termination thirty years ago. It is the fading of the luminosity of the screen memory as the work of analysis extracted all its hidden meanings that I wish to highlight here, and how that fading luminosity (among a host of other factors, to be sure) can alert the clinician to a readiness for termination.

I do not mean to suggest that readiness for termination is not a most complex and overdetermined process, one that no single indicator could exclusively flag. But I do want to suggest that the fate of a screen memory and its fading luminosity as the work of analysis proceeds can be usefully considered by the clinician as he considers all the issues that termination brings to the fore.

Mr. Y was a middle-aged lawyer. A narcissistic character armor could not completely conceal residues of preoedipal pathology and poorly resolved oedipal conflicts. His "success" was often perceived by him as an ambivalent gift to his narcissistic mother, or as a guilt-ridden victory over a "castrated" father, rather than as an achievement of his own individuated growth and development.

Toward the end of his analysis, Mr. Y began to reflect on the process of working through—or "implementation" of analytic insights, as he felicitously phrased it. He became subjectively aware of his own structural changes and developed a new sense of the meaning of his screen memories. He realized that, whereas most of his screen memories had lost their uncanny, fascinating luminosity, one or two others had retained their intensity. The patient felt convinced that the remaining "ultraclear" screens signified unfinished analytic business.

I will focus on two screen memories that illustrate this point very clearly. One screen memory depicted a childhood scene of Mr. Y's separation from his father. The memory contained doubt about whether the father "was coming or going." The whole scene seemed etched as if in the glare of excessive light. Months of analysis made it clear that the doubt was a defense against positive and negative oedipal feelings toward the father; but on another level, it was a depiction of mistrust that originated in a preoedipal rapprochement crisis with both parents. By focusing on the father, the screen obscured the effective repression of a host of feelings about the mother.

The analysis of a poem by the analysand revealed how the screen memory had subtly insinuated itself into his sublimations and into the transference, where it could be examined in detail. The poem, entitled "cummings and goings" (sic), was addressed to the poet e. e. cummings. It achieved its aesthetic effect through parody, irony, and the obvious play on words ("comings" in the screen memory/"cummings" in the

poem). The offer of the poem to the analyst prior to a summer recess was an attempt to undo the comings and goings of the analyst with a magical gift.

Analysis of such issues led to the memory's eventual "revision," such that the "coming and going" screen seemed to have lost its emotional impact on Mr. Y, not to mention its ultraclear quality. The unspoken, unconscious aggression concealed in doubt and ambivalence about the father's stability and reliability was interpreted vigorously, especially when it became manifest in the transference. The affection contained in the gift of the poem was received, along with the hostility in it. As the analysand became more and more comfortable with aggression toward the analyst in the tumult and spontaneities of analytic process, the defensive ambivalence contained in feelings of confusion and doubt became unnecessary.

The analyst had survived the aggression, as Winnicott would put it, and consequently, the object relationship developed a sense of constancy that Mr. Y's childhood experiences lacked. He had learned how to engage emotionally and unambivalently in a relationship—how to come and to go, so to speak—without feeling that he did not know whether he was coming or going. This most significant change in his perception of the stability of object relations was reflected in the subjective experience of the screen memory: "I feel like I don't need it any more," he reported. It was as if it had been a talisman that now lost its magical properties.

But another memory had not lost its illumination, its function as a screen remaining under unconscious obligatory control, it seemed. This memory depicted a childhood scene in which a practical joke had been played on the patient: a weekend guest of the family had sent him upstairs to one of the guest rooms to see "a surprise." What he discovered there was a paper replica of a woman in bed. But what was ostensibly meant as a joke turned out to frighten the child.

In the analytic process, Mr. Y became aware that the inert replication that this memory fixated on was a screen for an entirely different set of memories that lay hidden in deeper folds of the unconscious mind: primal scene fantasies of a dangerous and seductive mother, as well as an endangered species—namely, his passive father. It was this insufficiently

analyzed primal sexual material that endowed the screen memory of the paper replica with its electric charge, so to speak.

The analysand was struck by the differential between the two screen memories. The coming-and-going memory had lost its illumination, whereas the memory of the replica of the woman in bed had not. It still seemed charged with that luminous, uncanny energy it had possessed since memory had first made a note of it.

One of Mr. Y's associations intrigued him, despite its farfetched nature; it had to do with the concept of light itself. His father had once "fixed" some frayed electric wires in the family's home—a makeshift job that his mother often derided as a fire hazard that might burn the house down. This typical maternal devaluation of his father had been a central theme in the analysis. The analysand even wondered if the incident with the electric wires had contributed an additional irony to his interest in the luminosity of his screens, especially the screen memory of the replica of the woman in the bed. What was it about a paper replica? It seemed so strange to be frightened by a lifeless paper image. What kind of sadistic guest of the family would invite a child to go take a look at a woman in bed in the first place?

Mr. Y remembered the humorous atmosphere that preceded his "taking a look," and then his "horror" at not being able to discern whether what he saw was in fact a real woman or a replica. How old could he have been when this event took place? He must have been a teenager, and yet in the memory he saw himself as much younger: a latency boy of eight, nine, or ten, or perhaps he was only five or six? Why was memory so imprecise about dating such pivotal psychological events?

Many years later, in the safety of the analytic setting, Mr. Y could still feel a touch of the uncanny as he tried to force his mind to stay with the image of the paper replica and extract its meanings. He was struck, however, by the tension between reality and fantasy in the uncanny feeling of not being sure what was paper replica and what was not. Didn't that sound like the psychology of a dreamer—or perhaps like that of a much younger child, of three or four?

A memory of a nightmarish dream returned to Mr. Y at this point in the analytic process. He believed the dreamer must have been four years old. He had awakened from the dream quite frightened, as if the dream

were continuing even though he was awake. In the dream, he could see the wallpaper of his bedroom beginning to move, as if it were not paper but more like a movie in which the trees depicted on the wallpaper were able to move. On one branch a bird perched, but the bird seemed to be an extension of the tree rather than a separate entity from it. The bird could fly away only when the portion of the branch to which it was attached died and fell off.

In recounting this dream, Mr. Y asked the analyst, "Do you have to die before I can go free?" This, of course, is one of the major issues typically worked through in the termination phase: is the autonomy, individuation, sexuality, and aggressive ambition of the analysand sufficiently dissociated from magical, murderous neurotic impulses and distortions so that the analysand can relish the powers he has been able to generate through analysis? Or is there still work to be done in accomplishing just that?

Mr. Y continued to be intrigued by the second screen memory's ability to frighten him. He knew it was irrational, but he also knew that uncanny psychological energy was still housed in this residue of childhood. He wondered if the memory's insistence on keeping the woman lifeless, "dead" as an inert paper replica, might not be a statement about death wishes disguised, but not disguised enough to completely isolate or deaden the affect of horror at the deed.

Had he perhaps wanted to kill the sadistic weekend guest for playing such a trick on him, if indeed the incident had happened the way he remembered it? Was the whole memory a concoction, a screen that hid his considerable anger at both parents for making him an unwitting pawn in their neurotic enactments?

I have compressed several sessions of the termination phase of this patient's analysis in which transference, genetic memory, dream recall, and free-associative working through combined seamlessly to further the analytic process. There was an extended period in which the analytic work focusing on the paper replica screen memory seemed to be the days' residue for several dreams, with current days and ancient days quite intermixed in the seemingly timeless process of the past being worked into, and worked through, in the present.

Here is one of Mr. Y's dreams from this extended period: "A child is playing with a piece of paper. He turns it into a kaleidoscope and holds it up to his eye." In his first associations, the analysand imagined that the piece of paper referred to the paper replica that once had the power to frighten him, but that he could now turn into a kaleidoscope whose play with light enchanted rather than intimidated. But he wondered if that association might be too neatly packaged, and he insisted on going deeper. The kaleidoscope could also represent ejaculation; the dream wish would be to turn a lifeless paper replica into kaleidoscopic sexual pleasure.

One of Mr. Y's next associations came in the form of a parapraxis. He had just visited the Noguchi Museum. He found the sculptures fascinating; some were exuberant, phallic, erotic in a most subdued but nevertheless obvious manner. The paper replica's subdued representation of repressed childhood sexuality and anger was impressive as defense in the museum of childhood, so to speak, but now in the museum of analysis, and in an actual museum, he could see beyond defense and relish the actual instinctual power itself. But a parapraxis was about to chasten such hubris and have the last laugh, so to speak.

Just as Mr. Y was celebrating his new capacity to undo repression and to let himself "know" what his unconscious mind sought to withhold from him, the name of the sculptor *Noguchi* escaped him at first. *Vespucci, Carducci, Nagasaki* came to mind. Eventually, when he retrieved the name *Noguchi* from the parapraxis, it seemed clear to him that its first syllable, *No,* had been repressed. He believed that *know* and *No* had been temporarily removed from consciousness. *No* represented aggression, the capacity to disagree with authority in the interest of autonomy—a key consideration developmentally, but also a basic issue when termination is being considered. And of course, *know* represented the analytic work of returning to himself all that he had been deprived of through self-deception. As the sessions proceeded toward termination, the "Noguchi moment" was often reinvoked, as were the two screen memories whose changing luminosities continued to fascinate the patient.

The second dream from this period of analysis that Mr. Y believed was related to the paper replica screen memory seemed almost too manifestly obvious. He recounted it as follows.

> There is a rather large painting that frames white tissue paper with minimal markings on it, as if the subject matter of the piece of art is indeed this very sketchy outline of a most indeterminate scene. But on closer scrutiny, I realize that the tissue paper is merely covering an actual painting that depicts a US president and his family. Earlier in the dream, I saw Richard Nixon in the distance. I was about to criticize him but held back on realizing that I was talking to a member of Nixon's family. The painting depicted Nixon and his family, a young Nixon with wife and children around him, very artistically rendered, impressionistic as opposed to a staid portrait of reality.

Mr. Y's immediate associations were that, while he could see how a paper replica from a childhood memory and paper covering a painting in a current dream could be related aesthetically, he wondered if the analogy was not too forced—a parody that could be a screen in its own right, perhaps. The reluctance to criticize a president for fear of hurting his family—was that screening a fear of criticizing the analyst as termination neared? But he had voiced aggression toward the analyst on many occasions; it was an achievement he had reveled in, a triumph over his earlier reticence. For instance, when the analyst replaced his old chair with a more modern, straight-backed one, Mr. Y had joked: "An electric chair?"—his aggression only minimally concealed by humor.

Mr. Y returned again and again to the image of the paper replica of the woman in bed, trying to channel its uncanny ability to frighten him into the component affects that, once reviewed and analyzed, could be "tamed." This was his hope, and he certainly worked hard to achieve it. "I've come to work," he would often say as he lay down on the couch.

Sensing an almost too-Teutonic work ethic, the analyst once remarked: "You have to be able to relax to work in here." Mr. Y was very taken with this remark and reminded the analyst that, at the very beginning of their analytic collaboration, the analyst had asked, as part of the initial consultation, "Are you able to relax?"—a question that seemed so unanswerable at the time and was therefore so diagnostic.

The paper replica screen memory did not seem to reflect a relaxed childhood. It seemed to represent a woman—a mother, perhaps—an amalgam of intimacy and sexuality that desire must have initially yearned

for, before fear and defense transformed its exuberance into terror. Reviewing its pedigree after all these years, Mr. Y began to feel sad for the little boy who had to "work" so hard at an early age to turn even a paper replica of beauty into an image that was arresting only in an uncanny, frightening manner. He had become aware, of course, that much more was packed into the image than he had at first realized. He remembered seeing a *Playboy* centerfold in high school, and while the other boys giggled with delight, he recalled thinking that the vagina on display looked like a wound.

Returning to the Nixon dream, Mr. Y wondered why he would depict a disgraced president as a young father surrounded by family and children in an idyllic setting. Given how much he hated Nixon, this was a complete reversal of reality—a family romance, so to speak, that obscured the truth about actual family complexities.

By this stage of the analysis, the analysand had developed a delightful sense of humor. Commenting on the idyllic depiction of the family in the Nixon dream, Mr. Y said: "It was a fairy tail—*tail,* not tale. A fairy tail pinned on the ugly donkey of reality." He enjoyed the humor of his pun on *tale* and *tail* and the analyst's laughter. He commented on his acquisition of such a sense of humor: "Question: Where would I be without humor?" "Answer: In bed with the naked truth!" It was clear that the naked truth was becoming more tolerable to him; he no longer needed to "paper it over" with self-deception as he had in childhood.

A third dream from this period of analysis seemed to be a commentary on the topic of screen memories. In the dream, Mr. Y was surprised to see a deer trying to enter through the terrace of a tall building. As he looked at the strange scene, he began to wonder whether the deer was a real animal or just a replica of a deer that adorned the terrace rather than invaded it. His immediate associations were to the invasive climate of his childhood, a confused and confusing time, in which he feared that his boundaries could be invaded at any moment by the seductive mother or the neglectful father. Were the replicas of a woman in a bed and a deer in a dream an adaptive way of dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed, "freezing" them in luminous images—the better to "defrost"

them and deconstruct them later when all their components could be understood, rather than just their exaggerated luminosities?

Much as Mr. Y concentrated on the paper replica screen memory during this period of analysis, he did not do so exclusively, of course, given the unruliness and unpredictability of free-associative process. In fact, he often associated the coming-and-going screen memory with the paper-replica screen at this stage, as if he could no longer keep the two compartmentalized.

Another significant aspect of the paper-replica screen memory was that it allowed the patient to reflect on his inhibition in the sexual transference toward the analyst. If one aspect of the screen memory was a reflection of the analysand's fear that the unavailability and instability of the father could not protect him adequately from his own sexual impulses toward the seductive mother, he also became aware over time that the transference neurosis was a complete recapitulation of his early years: in a sense, he preferred to think of the analyst as a lifeless paper replica, rather than allowing the emergence of the full implications of the reality of his flesh-and-blood contact with the maternal transference.

Thus the analysis of this screen memory allowed Mr. Y to wean himself from a one-dimensional, asexual vision of the analyst and the obvious defensiveness of this transference distortion, and instead to engage in a more multidimensional relationship. This insight permitted oedipal sexual memories to rub shoulders with preoedipal tender memories, and paved the way to a final undoing of the splitting mechanism—an undoing that was essential to ensure that the analysis would reach a most favorable outcome. It is of significance to report that, with the analysis of this aspect of the transference, the corresponding screen memory began to lose its luminosity. As Freud might have put it, the libidinal residues of the infantile amnesia had been extracted from it.

## DISCUSSION

I have organized my discussion around three aspects of screen memory: the formation of screen memories; their uncanny luminosity; and the relative neglect of screen memories in recent psychoanalytic discussion. These points are summarized in what follows.

*Formation of Screen Memories*

Freud's point about the screen memory not *passively emerging* into consciousness, but instead being *actively formed* by it at critical moments in psychological development, reveals Freud at his most provocative, insightful, revolutionary best! If the screen memory does not emerge but is formed, then its formation must be the product of work—an unconscious labor comparable to dream work, which I propose to call *screen work*. If dream work's task is to transform infantile wishes and current days' residues into disguised representations of themselves, screen work's task seems quite similar. If most or all screen memories are formed in adolescence, the screen work's task would be to transform the return of repressed infantile wishes—preoedipal and oedipal—as they collide with current adolescent reformulations of preoedipal and oedipal instinctual demands. To transform them, that is, into a disguised hybrid of both that would address their urgencies while concealing them in defensive displacements.

If dream work uses primary processes of symbolism, displacement, and condensation to change latent dream wishes into disguised representations of themselves, screen work seems to use primary processes to displace the affective emphasis from significant memory content to much less significant imagistic content. It is as if *memory* in toto, not unlike *dream,* regresses from its elaborate thought content to a minimalist image of itself—thereby explaining, perhaps, the unusual luminosity of screen memories (a point I will address in more detail in what follows).

If adolescence is seen as one of the critical times when screens are formed in order to transform the return of repressed infantile thoughts, as well as adolescent "revolutionary" thoughts, into more sober iterations of themselves and their urgent dualities, Freud's "dandelions" (1899, p. 311) would represent a good example of this duality concealed in a screen memory: the deflowering represents not only childhood's initial sense of sexuality, but the more robust sexual transformations of adolescence as well. The screen memory that Freud describes as "a scene"—one that "for the last 29 years has occasionally emerged in my conscious memory without my understanding it" (Masson 1986, p. 271)—did not *emerge,* therefore, but was *formed,* as stated earlier, when Freud was thir-

teen or fourteen. Seen through this new, insightful lens, the whole scene of the cupboard—the child's terror at the absence of the mother, his joy on her returning slim, and so on—can be thought of as the reflection of a young adolescent's struggles with his newly acquired hormonal, sexual, and aggressive growth spurt and all its implications.

If there is a second individuation to be considered in terms of autonomy—eventually leaving home, going to college, etc.—there is a more alarming reengagement with oedipal conflict to be addressed as well, given that body and mind are now anatomically and physiologically equipped to actualize oedipal desire not only in fantasy, but also in action. All childhood sexuality and aggression and all adolescent sexuality and aggression were boxed up in Freud's cupboard, so to speak, with the contents ready to ignite and explode unless the ego's defensive strategies could defuse their intensity—and the capacity to form screen memories was not the least of the ego's repertoire in such a crisis.

The adolescent ego is equipped with what Piaget (1945) called *formal* or *hypothetico-deductive* intelligence, which I believe is what makes the capacity for free association possible in adolescent analyses. I would like to suggest also that it is this playful, free-associative, hypothetico-deductive mental agility that allows screen memories to be formed in adolescence: they highlight the ego's struggle to bring some kind of defensive order to bear on a tumultuous situation at a critical moment in psychological development. Highly defensive and only partially successful, their intense luminosities might well be considered a reflection of the struggle between darkness (repression) and light (insight, enlightenment).

Freud (1931) likened the existence of a preoedipal stratum of mental life beneath the later oedipal period to the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization that antedated the later classical Greek era. Augmenting this archeological metaphor, one could suggest that adolescence is a kind of renaissance that recycles or reworks both previous eras (the preoedipal and oedipal) of the first five years of life into a new synthesis that will stamp later adulthood with its developmental achievements or failures. In that sense, screen memories formed in adolescence seem to reflect this duality: the conflicts of the first five years of life are incorporated

anew into current adolescent iterations of themselves, like palimpsests of past and present, one era screening another even as it also represents it.

The date of formation of Mr. Y's screen memories is not documentable with the same precision revealed by Freud's self-analysis, but one wonders if these memories are not also the product of a young adolescent sexual mind struggling with issues of comings and goings and issues of sexuality, as depicted in a screen memory of the paper replica of a woman in bed. Many of the analysand's dreams toward the end of his analysis seemed to be working on earlier screen memories and their unresolved issues of childhood and adolescence as they echoed throughout his adulthood.

### *The Luminosity of Screen Memories*

The subjective impression of a screen memory's luminosity—the halo effect that surrounds it, giving it an ultraclear appearance—is not easy to explain. With his famous picket fence analogy (Freud 1900), Freud suggested that dreams represent a regression that transforms thoughts into images. In dreams, when the conceptual is put to sleep, so to speak, a regression is triggered and the perceptual phantasmagoria of oneiric experience takes center stage. This regression from thought to perceptual images seems to be a characteristic of the sleeping state that makes dreams possible. It does not seem to be possible in waking life (except in symptoms where the concept of regression must be invoked to explain hallucinations and other phenomena).

As a child analyst, I often attempt to interest children in their dreams by making up a riddle. Question: "What can you see at night with your eyes closed?" Answer: "A dream." To my knowledge, Freud did not invoke the concept of regression to explain the uncannily luminous appearance of a screen memory. But the luminous appearance of the manifest content of a dream and the luminous appearance of the manifest content of a screen memory seem similar to me. I am suggesting that there is an act of regression in screen memory formation similar to what occurs in dream formation; it transforms the complex thought content of memory into a minimalist image of itself. The resultant image

is infused with the energy that the thoughts formerly possessed, thereby becoming *light-ful,* so to speak, rather than thoughtful.

I have here introduced the idea of manifest content to screen memories, which suggests that they also have latent contents. Freud did not use *manifest* and *latent* in his definition of screen memories, but he did imply that the free-associative work of analysis could "extract" the entire contents of infantile amnesia from the screens, so to speak, as the work of uncovering proceeded. If I am correct in conceptualizing the luminosity of a screen memory as evidence that thoughts converted into images produce the *uberdeutlich,* ultraclear visual effect, can the luminosity itself be thought of as defensive—in the sense that memory loss is being "consoled" by a luminous display of memorial retention, not unlike the way in which the manifest content of a dream completely conceals the repressed latent content? In other words, the luminosity may well be a premature declaration of clarity or victory when it is actually repression that continues to control most of the psychic territories.

In parapraxes, one could argue that a similar kind of economic mechanism can be cited. In his celebrated Signorelli parapraxis, when Freud (1901a) could not remember the name *Signorelli,* the image of the painter in his self-portrait was excessively illuminated. It was as if the identity of the painter was a composite of concept and percept, of name and facial image: when one was withdrawn, the other was invested with its psychic energy. This kind of economic, topographic conceptualization is not popular in current psychoanalytic theory, but I invoke it since I know of no other way of approaching the mystery of the uncanny luminosity with which subjectivity is flooded when screen memories are being experienced.

Neubauer (1984) believed that the economic explanation of a screen memory's luminosity should not be relinquished. I became particularly interested in the luminosity of screen memories when, as reported earlier, an analysand expressed his surprise on realizing that the luminosity of one of his screen memories had faded as he neared termination. In other words, it was the work of analysis and the retrieval of repressed memory that made the defensive luminosity of the screen memories unnecessary.

Greenacre (1978) did not believe that luminosity was the sole identifying feature of all screen memories, but she expressed interest in the concept of fading luminosity as a feature of working through, and of its being a possible signal of readiness for termination. Thompson (2014), reviewing Greenacre's seminal contributions, mentions the clinical case of a woman whose screen memory had a *dreary clarity,* rather than the more usual sharp-edged, luminous aura. Greenacre's fascinating observation invites further scrutiny. Could even this dreary clarity have been a reflection, perhaps, of the primal scene the patient had witnessed? Her parents' sexual intercourse had been observed in a dimly lit room. Was *through a glass darkly,* to use a biblical phrase, as much luminosity as could be tolerated by the frightened young girl at such a charged moment of development?

One last point about luminosity: I have referred to it as *uncanny.* I would like to go further and suggest that the formation of the uncanny and the formation of a screen memory have much in common. I believe the uncanny affect of both psychic phenomena is the subjective sense of the repressed, or the return of the repressed in action. When repression is total, there is no subjective sense of its ministry at all. When the repressed leaves some traces of its ministry—as in a screen memory's luminosity, or in the déjà affects of the uncanny itself—it is then that subjectivity registers a frisson of insight into what the unconscious is up to. This affective registration seems to be shared by screen memories and the uncanny proper.

### *Neglect of the Concept of Screen Memories*

The title of this paper suggests that Freud's discovery of screen memories may be suffering from a relative neglect of late. This is an impression, let me hasten to say, rather than the fruit of any scientific research on my part. I offer a few thoughts on the topic rather than an in-depth commentary.

It is my impression that psychoanalytic theory has recently focused on a kind of theoretical reductionism, rather than on the kind of expansionism that was inherent in the classical idea of a complemental series of complexities at the core of the mind. Freud never lost sight of this

complexity. His concept of evenly hovering analytic attention was an attempt to ensure that listening would always be scientific, unprejudiced by "provincial" thinking—despite the ubiquity of such prejudice, given what analytic process stirs up in the countertransference and chaos of the analyst's own unconscious.

A screen memory's luminosity may try to seduce subjectivity into a false certainty about the pedigree of the experience contained in the snapshot of recorded memory, but the essential thrust of Freud's explication of the screen's complexity was his argument that the entire infantile amnesia was hidden behind this emphasis on one illuminated, "Hollywood" version of memorial reality. The memory can be symptomatically reductionistic, but the analyst should not be, lest he fall for a screen theory rather than a theory that engages with the mind's total complexity.

I am suggesting here that theory—rather than being open to engage with all the existential complexity with which experience is always challenging reality—can defensively screen itself from the totality of its scientific potential. "*La thèorie, c'est bon, mais çan'empêche pas d'exister,*" as Freud (1916–1917, p. 145n), echoing Charcot, proclaimed. An analogous point was stressed by Arlow (1981); he argued that a psychoanalyst's favorite theory of pathogenesis might obscure his evenly hovering attention to the full range of developmental possibilities, to the entire complemental series of pathogenetic, determinant psychological events.

This kind of skewed scientific vision could lead to a screen nosology, so to speak, rather than a comprehensive diagnostic assessment in which all relevant factors are considered. In other words, a psychoanalyst whose only focus is on attachment or separation-individuation issues, for example, might lose sight of all the subsequent developmental and conflictual oedipal and postoedipal issues requiring just as much attention. Or, conversely, a psychoanalyst obsessed with oedipal issues alone would be blind to preoedipal determinants.

The concept of screen memories, which insists that the memory may have been formed out of many strata of experience over many years, despite the subjectivity of its temporal convictions, keeps the analyst honest, so to speak, and does not allow what I am calling screen theory to delude him. (By *screen theory,* I mean a theory that has succumbed to

neurosis rather than insisting on explicating it.) If the mind is defined as a constant field of conflict in which instinct and defense are forever squaring off as they search for the most adaptive compromises and resolutions, no psychic agency is totally spared from being dragged into the psychological fray—memory included.

In screen memory, one can see the effect of self-deception on memory as record keeper, as witness to the complexity of its own experience. Partial historical truth seems to lead the witness forward at best, and to lead the witness astray at worst. But psychoanalysis and its free-associative mission are not satisfied until the screens are lifted and what was concealed can be integrated into a new psychological complexity, "where screen memory was, unscreened memory shall be"—its ambitious, memory-revising manifesto.

## REFERENCES


Abraham, K. (1913). A screen memory concerning a childhood event of apparently aetiological significance. In *Clinical Papers and Essays on Psychoanalysis.* New York: Basic Books, 1955, pp. 36-41.

Anzieu, D. (1986). *Freud's Self-Analysis.* London: Hogarth/Inst. of Psychoanalysis.

Arlow, J. A. (1981). Theories of pathogenesis. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 50:488-514.

Battin, D. & Mahon, E. J. (2003). Symptom, screen memory and dream. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 58:246-266.

——— (2009). Seeing the light. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 78:107-122.

Blos, P. (1967). The second individuation process of adolescence. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 22:162-186.

Deutsch, H. (1932). *Psychoanalysis of the Neuroses.* London: Hogarth.

Fenichel, O. (1927). The economic function of screen memories. In *Collected Papers.* New York: Norton, 1953, pp. 113-116.

Flavell, J. H. (1963). *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Freud, S. (1895). Project for a scientific psychology. *S. E.,* 1.

——— (1899). Screen memories. *S. E.,* 3.

——— (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams. S. E.,* 4/5.

——— (1901a). *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. S. E.,* 6.

——— (1901b). The forgetting of proper names. *S. E.,* 6.

——— (1905). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. S. E.,* 7.

——— (1909). Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy ("Little Hans"). *S. E.,* 10.

——— (1910). *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood. S. E.,* 11.

——— (1914). Remembering, repeating and working-through. *S. E.,* 12.
——— (1916–1917). *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. S. E.,* 15-16.
——— (1917). A childhood recollection from *Dichtung und Wahrheit. S. E.,* 17.
——— (1918). From the history of an infantile neurosis ("The Wolf-Man"). *S. E.,* 17.
——— (1931). Female sexuality. *S. E.,* 21.
——— (1937). Constructions in analysis. *S. E.,* 23.
Glover, E. (1929). The screening function of traumatic memories. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 10:90-93.
Greenacre, P. (1947). Vision, headache, and halo. In *Trauma, Growth, and Personality.* New York: Int. Univ. Press, 1969, pp. 132-148.
——— (1949). A contribution to the study of screen memories. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 3/4:73-84.
——— (1978). Personal communication.
——— (1979). Reconstruction and the process of individuation. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 34:121-144.
——— (1980). A historical sketch of the use and disuse of reconstruction. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 35:35-40.
——— (1981). Reconstruction, *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 29:27-46.
Greenson, R. R. (1958). On screen defenses, screen hunger, and screen identity. In *Explorations in Psychoanalysis.* New York: Int. Univ. Press, 1978, pp. 111-132.
Grubrich-Simitis, I. (1997). *Early Freud and Late Freud.* London: Routledge.
Kennedy, H. E. (1950). Cover memories in formation. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 5:275-284.
Kris, E. (1956a). The recovery of childhood memories in psychoanalysis. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 11:54-88.
——— (1956b). The personal myth. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 4:653-681.
LaFarge, L. (2012). The screen memory and the act of remembering. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 93:1249-1265.
Lewin, B. D. (1950). *The Psychoanalysis of Elation.* New York: Norton.
Mahon, E. J. (2013). Mourning, dreaming, and the discovery of the Oedipus complex. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 82:877-895.
Mahon, E. J. & Battin, D. (1981). Screen memories and termination. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 29:939-942.
——— (1983). The fate of screen memories in psychoanalysis. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 38:459-479.
Masson, J. M., ed. (1986). *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
Neubauer, P. (1984). Personal communication.
Piaget, J. (1945). *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood.* London: Heinemann.
Reed, G. S. & Levine, H. B., eds. (2014). *On Freud's Screen Memories.* London: Karnac.

Reichbart, R. (2008). Screen memory: its importance in object relations and transference. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 56:455-481.

Reider, N. (1953). Reconstruction and screen function. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 1:389-405.

Simmel, E. (1925). A screen memory in statu nascendi. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 6:454-467.

Thompson, N. (2014). Phyllis Greenacre: screen memories and reconstruction. In *On Freud's Screen Memories,* ed. G. S. Reed & H. B. Levine. London: Karnac.

---

*6 East 96 Street*
*New York, NY 10128*

*e-mail: Ejmahon@aol.com*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE ARTS: THE SLIPPERY GROUND OF APPLIED ANALYSIS

BY ADELA ABELLA

*The ways in which today's psychoanalysts approach art closely follow the avenues opened by Freud a hundred years ago. Drawing mainly on Freud's studies on Jensen's* Gradiva *(1907) and on Leonardo da Vinci (1910a), the author examines the main paradigms he used in discussing artistic activity, including his doubts and hesitations. Present-day approaches to art are then examined via a discussion of the advantages and pitfalls of psychobiography, of the case study, and of textual approaches. The author makes a case for the type of interdisciplinary dialogue in which the goal is to establish a cross-fertilization between psychoanalysis and other fields of knowledge while striving to avoid hypersaturation of a work of art in order to foster expansion of the mind.*

**Keywords:** Applied analysis, interdisciplinary studies, psychobiography, case study, textual approach, culture, artistic activity, "wild" analysis, archaeology, transformation, hypersaturation, Freud.

> Yet it is evident that there is much slippery ground in many of our applications from psychoanalysis to biography and literature.
>
> —Freud and Jones 1995, p. 408
> (Letter of February 7, 1921)

In a time of crisis when psychoanalysis is searching for its proper meaningful place in a variety of fields of knowledge, it may be important to

---

Adela Abella is a psychiatrist and training member of the Swiss Psychoanalytical Society.

question the ways in which a fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue might be possible. The need for psychoanalysis to come into full contact and to cross-fertilize with other disciplines has often been stressed in at least two opposing directions. On the one hand, authors such as Kandel (2006) urge the psychoanalysis of the twenty-first century to "unify" with biology, neuroscience, and cognitive psychology. On the other hand, the plea is enthusiastically made for psychoanalysis to enrich and revitalize itself through its contact with the fertile treasures of culture, particularly literature (Camden 2009). In both these avenues, Freud may be seen as a pioneer.

This paper focuses on the second of these two directions—that is, the interface between psychoanalysis and culture or, more precisely, that part of culture traditionally called the fine arts.[1] The question posed is twofold. First: in what ways do psychoanalysts approach the artistic field? Second: what for? What is the specific usefulness, and the particular risks, of the different avenues through which art can be considered from the point of view of psychoanalysis?

Among the several books and papers written by Freud on this issue, the most influential are probably *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's "Gradiva"* (1907) and *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910a). Since then, the number of reflections on the interface between psychoanalysis and art provided by several generations of psychoanalysts is impressive. Almost every published psychoanalyst has written about an aspect of art at one moment or another in his career.

Since a comprehensive discussion of this large corpus of variegated contributions is beyond the scope of this paper, I will concentrate on three aspects of the topic: (1) a description of the main paradigms for a psychoanalytic approach of art; (2) a discussion of their advantages

[1] The word *culture* has been used with a wide range of meanings, and much debate has revolved around its rightful contents. Freud's comment that "I scorn to distinguish between culture and civilisation" (1927, p. 6) reflects the way that this question was posed within the German tradition, which differentiated between these two terms (as opposed to the French tradition, which did not distinguish between them in the same way [Elias 1939]). In what follows I will use the word *culture* in its restricted sense—the one conveyed in common language in expressions such as: *a person of wide culture, a cultural activity, the ministry of culture.* More precisely, I will refer specifically to fine arts, including not only the five classical disciplines—painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry—but also theater, film, and conceptual/performance arts.

and the criticisms they have received; and (3) some personal thoughts concerning the advantages and drawbacks of the different ways in which we can approach art today.

Underpinning this reflection is the idea that what might be really useful for us in the present day is to follow Freud not only or mainly in the content of his thinking—his mind's actual realizations—but even more in his spirit. That is, I think we should adopt Freud's tireless questioning of already-known truths and habits in order to refine and deepen our contact with reality, both internal (including our relationship to our theories) and external (considering other disciplines' responses to psychoanalytic applications to their fields).

## THE EVOLUTION OF FREUD'S THINKING FROM *GRADIVA* TO *LEONARDO*

All through his work, Freud stated his great appreciation of cultural realizations and his admiration of artists' deep understanding of human nature.[2] Creative writers were seen by Freud as valuable forerunners of psychoanalysis: "The truly creative writer . . . has from time immemorial been the precursor of science, and so too of scientific psychology" (1907, p. 4). Thus, he suggested, analysts should be familiar not only with biology,

> . . . the science of sexual life, and . . . psychiatry, [but also with] branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine . . . : the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion, and the science of literature. Unless he is well at home in these subjects, an analyst cannot make anything of a large amount of his material. [1926, p. 246]

Still further, Freud suggests that this particular usage, that is, fertilizing other fields of knowledge, might be still more relevant in the long run than the clinical applications of psychoanalysis: "The use of analysis for the treatment of the neuroses is only one of its applications: the future will perhaps show that it is not the most important one" (1926, p. 248).

[2] An exception is Freud's later reservations concerning the visual arts. For a discussion of this topic, see Abella (2010).

The influence of Freud's heritage on current approaches to art is paramount. Therefore, I will try to track the evolution of Freud's thinking. This evolution is particularly illuminating when we follow the path that leads from *Gradiva* (1907) to *Leonardo* (1910a). To sum up, in the short space of around four years that separates these two works, Freud evolved from a defensive position in *Gradiva:* trying to demonstrate the validity of psychoanalysis, to a more offensive one in *Leonardo:* aspiring to penetrate the creative process, thereby indicating a willingness to contribute to a wider general understanding of cultural matters.

### *A Defensive Tactic: Literary Works as Confirmation of Psychoanalytic Principles*

The aim of defending the validity of psychoanalysis is clearly stated by Freud as the motivation for his book on Jensen's *Gradiva*, which gives his writing a polemic and somewhat combative tenor. Thus, in the opening paragraph of its first chapter, Freud bitterly complains of the "reproaches of strict science" (1907, p. 7) and the skepticism of "the majority of educated people [who] smile" at his science of dreams. In fact, an essential part of this book centers on the analysis of the main character's dreams. Freud ruminates: "It is far from being generally believed that dreams have a meaning and can be interpreted" (p. 7). Therefore, he takes advantage of a serendipitous body of material, Jensen's novel, which appears propitious to a psychoanalytic understanding, in order to stage a battle that promises an easy victory. While he makes fruitful suggestions on a number of different issues, what is fundamentally at stake in this essay is the defense of his theory of dreams—and therefore of the science of psychoanalysis.

Freud anticipates certain potential criticisms of his method. The first of these is the nature of dreams that appear in literary works; they are "the class of dreams that have never been dreamt at all—dreams created by imaginative writers and ascribed to invented characters in the course of a story" (1907, p. 7). Freud's "justification" of such a bold method lies in the similarity between creative writers and psychoanalysts: "Creative

writers are valuable allies . . . . In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science" (p. 8). Thus, his view of the writer as a precursor to the field of psychoanalysis allows the gap to be filled: psychoanalysts draw upon the same sources that artists do; the difference is that artists found them first. Therefore, the correspondence between real dreams and invented ones is justified.

The second potential criticism is far more serious: the possibility of "tendentious interpretations" (1907, p. 43). In fact, for Freud, the risk is of "produc[ing] a complete caricature of an interpretation" because it is so "easy . . . to find what one is looking for and what is occupying one's own mind" (p. 91).

Using a device of rhetoric usual to him, Freud forestalls his critics' comments and puts forward a two-step argument. First, he argues, this objection can be removed because of the fundamental similarities between the writer and the analyst: "We probably draw from the same source and work upon the same object, each of us by another method" (p. 92). The difference, Freud suggests, lies in the fact that:

> Our procedure consists in the conscious observation of abnormal mental processes in other people . . . whereas the author directs his attention to the unconscious in his own mind . . . and lends [it] artistic expression . . . . Thus he experiences from himself what we learn from others. [1907, p. 92]

So, to sum up, writers and psychoanalysts work on the same universal experiences: the difference lies in their method—that is, writers work through self-observation, whereas psychoanalysts attempt a conscious exploration of other people's minds.

Second, Freud confronts another hypothetical objection, coming from those who might suspect that "what we pretended was the author's meaning was in fact only our own" (1907, p. 83). The problem, he admits, is that "since access to the sources in the author's mind is not open to us . . . [it] is so easy to draw analogies and to read meanings into things" (p. 43). Nevertheless, Freud resolutely defends the legitimacy of

his procedure, arguing that "we may very tentatively put our own associations in place of his" (p. 73).[3]

In fact, there would be in this modus operandi nothing more than what Freud describes as characteristic of psychoanalytic therapy, and which coincides with young Gradiva's treatment of his beloved Hanold's delusion: "giving (to the patient) back from outside the repressed memories which he could not set free from inside" (1907, p. 88) . . . and this "to some extent forcibly" (p. 89). In other words, what has been lost by repression, in a patient and in a work of art, needs to be properly restored from the outside, even with a degree of force. Here Freud is clearly resorting to the classical archaeological paradigm, which is a fundamental point for this debate. I will return to this later.

### *An Offensive Step: Psychoanalysis as Capable of Explaining the "Nature and Workings of the Mind of the Creative Artist"*[4]

Freud's evolution toward a more offensive stance is best summed up by his own 1912 postscript to the second edition of *Gradiva* (1907), written two years after *Leonardo* (1910a). Freud emphasizes:

> [During the] five years . . . since . . . [Gradiva] was completed, psychoanalytic research has summoned up the courage to approach the creations of imaginative writers with yet another purpose in view. It no longer merely seeks in them for confirmation of the findings it has made . . . . It also demands to know the material of impressions and memories from which the author has built the work, and the methods and processes by which he has converted this material into a work of art. [1907, p. 94]

Thus, the aim is no longer to demonstrate the validity of psychoanalysis: Freud now pursues a more ambitious purpose. He is acting here not as a defender but as a *conquistador*—a term he had used to describe

[3] In fact, at the end of his life, possibly linked with his progressive disillusionment concerning the curative power and general scope of psychoanalysis, Freud held a much more restrictive position on this issue. For example, in 1937 he refused to collaborate with André Breton on his 1938 book *Trajectoire du rêve*, declaring: "A mere collection of dreams without the dreamer's associations, without knowledge of the circumstances in which they occurred, tells me nothing and I can hardly imagine what it could tell anyone" (Freud quoted in Gombrich 1954, p. 402).

[4] See Freud 1910a, p. 62.

his own temperament. The challenging new question is posed in these terms: from which materials and through what processes has a work of art been created?

Three years later, Freud would comment on the pleasure this new avenue can provide to the psychoanalyst: "The connection between the impressions of the artist's childhood and his life history on the one hand and his works, as reactions to those impressions, on the other, is one of the most attractive subjects for analytic examination" (1913, p. 187). Nevertheless, I will suggest later that this pleasure is one of which the analyst should be wary.

One of Freud's convictions all through his work, which he repeatedly stated, concerns the impossibility for psychoanalysis of identifying the essence of artistic creativity: "We must admit that the nature of the artistic function is inaccessible to us along psychoanalytical lines" (1910a, p. 136). Again, later on: "Whence it is that the artist derives his creative capacity is not a question for psychology" (1913, p. 187). What is open to psychoanalysis, though, is to study

> . . . from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable. [1908, p. 143]

Freud compares artistic endeavor to children's play, dreams, daydreaming, neurotic symptoms, and myths—in that a work of art may be understood as a compromise between repressed wishes and the superego's/the outside world's prohibitions. The triggering of artistic creativity may be understood as follows:

> A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory. [1908, p. 151]

The work of art may therefore be viewed according to the very same model that has proved useful for the understanding of dreams. The

scope of the application of psychoanalysis is thus greatly enlarged. Still more important, the discipline broadens its initial boundaries while retaining its specific procedures. Not only can psychoanalysis be applied to extraclinical matters; it can do so while following exactly the same methods employed in the clinical setting.

It is precisely the infantile wish running through Leonardo's works and attitude toward art that Freud (1910a) seeks to identify and explore through the joint examination of several sources, such as Leonardo's drawings and paintings, his writings, and the scant data known about his life. Several devices are available in order to compensate for the frequently sparse information at the analyst's disposal. On the one hand, it is possible to grasp small and apparently trivial details that unveil hidden motivations—such as, in the case of Leonardo, the artist's ledgers of the expenses of his mother's burial. This "method of inquiry, . . . closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis" (1914, p. 222)—which may be viewed as analogous to identifying the return of the repressed in the individual—will again be employed by Freud in subsequent works.

In fact, four years later, in another of his major applications of psychoanalysis to a nonclinical field—anthropology—Freud (1912–1913) restates that it is possible to "divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations" (p. 222). We find the same procedure utilized in another paper connected to art and written slightly later, in which Freud (1914) tackles Michelangelo's *Moses* "by examining certain insignificant details" (p. 235). It is important to point out that this method of inquiry retains a paramount position in contemporary approaches to culture even today.

On the other hand, Freud maintains, a psychoanalyst can rely on what he knows of human universal aspirations, on his familiarity with the functioning of the mind, and on symbolism. Helped both by the wide breadth of his knowledge and by his particular professional expertise, he is able to fill in the gaps. Therefore, in the absence of reliable accounts of Leonardo's childhood, and thus lacking "some picture of his mental development in . . . his first years" (1910a, p. 81), Freud builds his main line of argument on a child's memory reported by Leonardo. This memory—or better, this fantasy—posits a vulture opening a baby's mouth with its tail and placing it against the baby's lips. Borrowing from

Egyptian symbolism in which the vulture is representative of the mother, Freud constructs a fantasy of fellatio involving the mother. However, as has often been pointed out, the documentation available to Freud relied on an erroneous translation of the original *nibbio* as *vulture,* whereas a more appropriate translation might have been *kite.* Thus, an essential part of Freud's argument falls flat.

The important feature here is the fact that, despite Freud's significant error, the theoretical developments based on this mistranslation (which concern narcissism, sublimation, a particular form of homosexual object choice, and the workings and nature of creative work) have proved to be of great heuristic value for psychoanalysis. A valuable theory was thus built on an erroneous interpretation of facts. This suggests that cultural facts may be used to support the argument for a preexisting, vague, and formless intuition; they can furnish a grain of sand to allow the precipitation of a theoretical pearl.

Whereas this usage of culture is legitimate and often fertile, we should acknowledge that, in this case, we learn more about Freud than about Leonardo. More important still, we might wonder if, even in cases where there was no error, we should be on our guard for the same sort of bias. While the act of developing our thinking through a work of art may give us a feeling of greater depth and a more lively truth, we must recognize that certain applications of psychoanalysis to art inform us more about the commentator, or about his theories and fantasies, than about art itself.

In a very suggestive way, despite his ignorance of this mistake, Freud ponders throughout the book the reliability of what he thinks his critics might call a "psychoanalytical novel"—the certainty of whose results, he assures, he is "far from over-estimating" (1910a, p. 134). Thus, postulating a link between Leonardo's vulture fantasy and the absence of his father during his early years, Freud recognizes that "this seems a slender and yet a somewhat daring conclusion" (p. 91).

More precisely, he counsels the need to consider, in what looks like a very modern reflection,

> . . . the profound transformations through which an impression in an artist's life has to pass before it is allowed to make its contribution to a work of art, [so that] one will be bound to

> keep any claim to certainty in one's demonstrations within very modest limits. [1910a, p. 107]

Acknowledgment of the necessity of considering the complexity of these transformations is a crucial warning against attempting the direct translation of cultural content into psychoanalytic terms—a warning that retains its pertinence today.

Finally, it is perhaps worthwhile to point out that, despite the precautionary measures that must be taken in order to shelter the field from the public's skepticism, Freud is convinced of the legitimacy of the application of psychoanalysis to the understanding of such an outstanding artist. The first chapter of *Leonardo* starts with a defense against critics who might accuse Freud of being willing to "blacken the radiant and drag the sublime into the dust" (1910a, p. 63). In the last chapter, Freud again takes up an important criticism aimed at pathologizing (a criticism still current today): that "a pathographical review of a great man never results in an understanding of his importance and his achievements" (p. 130). The argument that psychobiography is merely "a piece of useless impertinence" is ascribed by Freud to the defensive tendency of biographers toward idealization, a tendency that results in the "regrettable . . . sacrifice [of] truth to an illusion" (p. 130).

In fact, the main reason justifying the validity of psychobiography lies, for Freud, in the dual nature of memory, history, and reconstruction. Memories work in the individual in the same way that history is recorded in communities: they are "compiled . . . for tendentious reasons" (1910a, p. 84), for it is "inevitable that . . . [they] are an expression of present beliefs and wishes rather than a true picture of the past" (p. 83).

Nevertheless, this is not, for Freud, a major drawback. On the contrary, Freud puts forward an idea here concerning memories, delusions, myths, and reconstructions that repeatedly emerges throughout his work: "In spite of all the distortions and misunderstandings, they still represent the reality of the past" (1910a, p. 84). A kernel of truth is contained inside the distorted arrangements of the past, which justifies the risk of making "daring" hypotheses and "to some extent forcibly" (1907, p. 89) constructed conclusions.

To summarize, in his subsequent papers, Freud maintains primarily the same line of argument developed in these two major works: *Gradiva* (1907) and *Leonardo* (1910a). One important innovative idea should be noted, however, as it foretells a major trend in current psychoanalytic approaches to artistic activity: the role of the audience's personal feelings. Thus, the countertransferential aspect of the experience of reading/beholding a work of art stands as a key avenue for its understanding. This factor—the revelatory power of the audience's personal reaction—is particularly developed in two of Freud's later works: "The Moses of Michelangelo" (1914) and "The 'Uncanny'" (1919). Its theoretical basis rests on the idea of an unconscious identification between the reader/spectator and the author/artist, expressed by Freud in these terms: "What he [the author or artist] aims at is to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create" (1914, p. 212). Thus, a major component of what constitutes the present-day psychoanalytic approach to art is being advanced here: what the reader/spectator feels and thinks *directly* reveals the author's/artist's feelings and intentions.

## THE DEBATE ON "APPLIED PSYCHOANALYSIS"

In 1921, in a letter to Ernest Jones, Freud opens up what remains an animated debate in the psychoanalytic field today: "Yet it is evident that there is much slippery ground in many of our applications from psychoanalysis to biography and literature" (Freud and Jones 1995, p. 408). Indeed, psychoanalysts' attitudes concerning the possibility of using psychoanalysis to approach artistic productions swing from—on one side—an enthusiastic and sometimes idealizing fascination, to—on the opposite side—a radical depreciation of these exercises, which are considered dubious, frivolous, and ultimately uninteresting.

For the sake of simplicity, I will first describe what I see as the three main, current avenues through which a work of art can be approached from a psychoanalytic vertex: Leonardo's, Gradiva's, and what I will call the *countertransferential avenue* (Abella 2008, 2013; Baudry 1984a). The first aims to reconstruct the author's unconscious fantasies; the second

is centered on the text and aims to identify the fantasies that the text explicitly or implicitly contains (regardless of the author's intentions); and the third draws on the revealing capacity of the commentator's unconscious identification with the author or the text and his personal recreation. In practice, these three are often combined in varying proportions.

The first of these avenues is the one Freud used in *Leonardo* (1910a) and in his study of Dostoevsky (1928). The aim here is to link the literary text to the supposed unconscious conflicts of the author. These unconscious conflicts or fantasies are reconstructed from what is known about the author's life, using all the documents at the analyst's disposal: biographical data, contemporaneous comments, letters, journals, and so on. It is accepted that, in the frequent situations in which substantial data is lacking—in such a way that "access to the sources in the author's mind is not open to us" (1907, p. 43)—it is up to the analyst to complete them "very tentatively," using his "own associations" (p. 73) derived from his theoretical and clinical experience. In the absence of data sustaining any claim to certainty, plausibility is considered a sufficient criterion (Baudry 1984a).

The problem here lies in the status we attribute to the truth of the hypothesis thus constructed. Freud (1912–1913) suggests a distinction between three different sorts of reality: *psychic reality,* which refers to what is presently "felt" (the actual presentation of the internal world); *historical reality,* which applies to what was felt during childhood (what existed in the mind in the past, including the distortions introduced by subjectivity); and finally, *factual reality,* which pertains to "what really did happen" in the past.

The question may be asked: when reconstructing the unconscious fantasies of an author, to what sort of reality are we referring? Are we thinking in terms of a material or factual reality—that is, something that we think really *did* happen? Or are we rather thinking in terms of a historical reality, that is, of a configuration that we suppose was present and evolved *in the mind* of the author? Or are we concerned with the interpreter's psychic reality—with the way that the interpreter *presently* experiences the work of art he is trying to understand? In cases when the choice among these is not clearly stated by the psychoanalyst trying to re-

construct the links between a work of art and the supposed unconscious conflicts of its author, some confusion may arise.

Therefore, despite Freud's advocacy of the use of some "forcible" speculations as legitimate, general consensus supports the greatest caution in this practice. In fact, this avenue is often felt to lead dangerously close to "wild" analysis (Blum 2001; Freud 1910b). Consequently, although it is indisputable that a work of art is necessarily grounded in its author's unconscious, psychobiography has been severely criticized (Abella 2013; Baudry 1984a, 1984b; Esman 1998; Lieberman 2011; Reed 1982; Rosenwald 2012). One of the major risks is the failure to recognize what Freud describes as "the profound transformations through which an impression in an artist's life has to pass before it is allowed to make its contribution to a work of art" (Freud 1910a, p. 107). Ignoring these transformations may result in a simplistic, term-to-term translation—and even, in extreme cases, to a direct and impoverishing application of psychoanalytic theories. This leads one to forget Freud's warning that it "is so easy to draw analogies and to read meanings into things" (1907, p. 43), in such a way that one finishes by "find[ing] what one is looking for and what is occupying one's own mind" (1907, p. 91).

Rosenwald (2012) discusses two charges raised against psychobiography. The first is reductionism—when the critic relies exclusively on analytic concepts, ignoring essential contributions made by other disciplines, such as history. The second is the tendency toward casual overreach with exaggerated interpretive claims while ignoring the complexity of the creative transformations that lead to a work of art. More precisely, Rosenwald warns against the risk of making extravagant, simplistic, and/or decontextualized interpretations, and he posits the need to differentiate personal traits from the normative peculiarities of another age and culture. Helpfully, he gives some illuminating examples of this kind of error. In any case, he adds, conjectures should be given with a "remnant of legitimate doubt and uncertainty" (p. 394).

The risk of a perilously simplistic interpretation appears mainly along two different levels of analysis. The first is the ideational contents of the work of art and the fantasies it is believed to convey. Thus, any triangular configuration may be understood as referring to an oedipal conflict; a character willing/fearing to penetrate into a deep, dark cave

might suggest genital anxieties; two beautiful birds flying in a stormy and menacing sky may evoke a primal scene fantasy, etc.

The second level is the defensive mechanisms conveyed by the work of art and the particular symbolization it reveals. At this level, a symphony beginning with an enthusiastic *allegro appassionato,* followed by an oppressive *lento assai,* may suggest a depressive breakdown—whereas if the *allegro* is followed by a calming *adagio,* we might hypothesize the successful resolution of a manic movement. Or to give additional examples, a very austere and "bare" performance on the stage, or a repetitive and prosaic passage in a novel, may suggest a temporary failure in the author's capacity to symbolize.

The temptation is often difficult to resist and can draw us into simplifications that are particularly dangerous when they occur in a field whose tenets have limited possibilities for verification. Indeed, the same procedures carry different risks depending on whether they are applied in the clinical or the extraclinical situation. Thus, for instance, if the patient tells his analyst about his mother having lost a baby prior to his birth, or that he suffered from a particular childhood illness, the analyst might feel driven to postulate a link between these events and the patient's current difficulties. There is little harm in this: the clinical situation offers corrective, evolving possibilities that are absent in the analysis of a work of art. We may expect that the tentative hypothesis that the analyst has constructed in the clinical setting, as speculative as it might be, can be harmlessly rectified and productively transformed through the evolution of the transference relationship. This is not the case with a work of art. This point will be elaborated later.

Some of these problems are equally present in the second current approach to cultural works, that is, the one Freud first introduced in his *Gradiva* (1907). Here the analyst's aim is no longer to link the work of art to its author's presumed conflicts and fantasies, but to consider the work in itself. This avenue offers diverse possibilities. Freud's choice in *Gradiva* was to take Jensen's work as a case study.

Freud had emphasized the proximity between a wholly fabricated character and a living person as early as 1895, although the other way around: Freud stated that his case studies might be read as novels (Freud and Breuer 1895). This assimilation between a literary character and

a case study has also been strongly criticized (Baudry 1984a; Esman 1998; Gabbard 1997; Reed 1982). One of the main arguments calls into question the implicit assumption of the unity and continuity of a given character: in order to obtain a theatrical or poetic effect, for example, a writer may need to split different aspects of a complex internal world into different characters.

Conversely, the writer may, for the same reasons, choose to gather heterogeneous aspects within one unique character through condensation. Freud (1908) had earlier identified these distorting formal requirements; he commented on the "inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes" (p. 150). Therefore, the comparison of a heterogeneous, composite character to a living person can be highly problematic.

In fact, despite Freud's advice, the illusion of the reality of a literary character may be so convincing as to push an analyst to reconstruct the childhood of an entirely fabricated character (Baudry 1984a; Tarantelli 2010). Nevertheless, the major objection to this particular approach rests—as it does for psychobiography—on the absence of the corrective effect of a living patient able to establish a transferential relationship and to free-associate. Following Freud's suggestion that "only the further course of the analysis enables us to decide whether our constructions are correct or unserviceable" (1937, p. 265), it is customary to expect that the patient's response to the analyst's intervention will give some clues concerning its validity, guiding the analyst into a deeper understanding that will inform her comprehension and her next intervention. Obviously, a response from a work of art is by definition impossible.

It has been suggested that the absence of a transferential relationship or of the patient's free association might be compensated through two strategies. First, the transference might be replaced by the repetition of the same patterns of thinking and behavior in published works or other productions (letters, etc.) by a given author (Volkan 2001) or by the uniformity of critics' reactions, which would reveal universal unconscious fantasies (Reed 1982).

Second, we might expect that the reactions of peers to a given communication might, in the long run, correct its errors (Esman 1998). In-

teraction among colleagues would thus replace interaction between the patient and her analyst. Yet in my opinion, the abyss between these corrective procedures and the vitality and richness of the interaction with a real person is immeasurable.

Confronted with these drawbacks, and in order to avoid oversimplification, reductionism, and anachronism, a sort of safety guideline has been suggested that includes the careful gathering of all available data and a thorough knowledge of the social and cultural conventions of the time (Baudry 1984a; Esman 1998; Rosenwald 2012). Where objective data is lacking, extrapolation from clinical or theoretical sources is justifiable, provided that the bounds of plausibility are respected. The intrinsic difficulty of this task means that extreme caution is required. In my opinion, even with the greatest caution, the ground here remains extremely slippery.

More recently, under the influence of contemporary trends in literary criticism, another approach has been suggested in order to bypass a number of the unavoidable pitfalls of the case-study approach. The aim is to consider the text as a self-contained structure and to seek its unconscious organizers and patterns. Implicit in this approach is the idea that a text contains a variety of potential meanings that depend partly on the author's conscious intentions and partly on his unconscious fantasies, but that also stem from two other important factors: the nature of language and the variety of potential contexts. The basic assumption here is that language provides a set of predetermined references, implications, and meanings that are independent of a particular author and that open up a variety of possible readings, potentially exceeding the author's conscious or unconscious intentions. As for the variety of contexts, a text can be approached from a number of vertexes, each having its own rules and values; thus, a single text may be read from various vantage points: e.g., literary, historical, philosophical, political, ethical, or psychoanalytic. Each of these different readings is to be assessed according to its coherence, richness, and usefulness.

However, Reed (1982) warns of two major and opposite risks of the textual psychoanalytic approach: (1) drawing on the manifest content may lead to a form of reification; and (2) speculating about the latent content may end in wild analysis. The apparent solution to these draw-

backs—that is, "relying on the critic's countertransference-like reactions to the text"—is nevertheless "open to charges of subjectivity" (p. 22).

To sum up, following this line of thought, the analyst searches for derivatives of universal fantasies. The decisive weight of the analyst's personal position is here undisputed. In its extreme form, this line of thinking leads to a relativistic, postmodernist view supporting any approach to a text, including a psychoanalytic approach. In the end, what we may find is a set of personal re-creations through projection onto the text of the individual's conflicts and unconscious fantasies. No claim to any sort of objective truth or legitimacy is to be made; all that matters is whether it works.

## A FURTHER STEP: "BUT WHAT IF WE HAVE STRAYED ONTO A WRONG PATH?"

The relativistic position was not Freud's. Following the modernist scientific aspirations of his time, he continually pondered the fairness and degree of truth in his interpretations. Thus, in the last pages of "Moses," he wondered:

> But what if . . . [we] have strayed onto a wrong path? What if we have taken too serious and profound a view of details which were nothing to the artist, details which he had introduced quite arbitrarily or for some purely formal reasons with no hidden intention behind? What if we have shared the fate of so many interpreters who have thought they saw quite clearly things which the artist did not intend either consciously or unconsciously? I cannot tell. [Freud 1914, pp. 235-236]

The beginning of an answer to these complex questions might be found in a paper published by Freud in the same year as *Leonardo* (1910a). It has often been said that one of the major risks of applied analysis is the occurrence of "wild" interpretations. Interestingly, in his paper on this issue, Freud comes to the conclusion that: "As a matter of fact, 'wild' analysts . . . do more harm to the cause of psychoanalysis than to individual patients" (1910b, p. 227).

We might be afraid of the same phenomenon occurring in our dialogue with culture: the feared harm is mainly to the reputation of psy-

choanalysis. What a psychoanalyst accepts in the clinical encounter as a provisional hypothesis that will be refined through the evolving relationship sometimes evokes an irritated skepticism when too boldly asserted in an interdisciplinary frame. Of course, commentators are subject to their own internal resistances, but this is not the whole picture. We can understand the active protests of those who bemoan the fact that a beautiful, poignant work of art ends up translated into a technical language, without the addition of anything essential to its comprehension. Indeed, this reproach is occasionally made to certain psychoanalytic readings of a work of culture; what we produce may be only a trivializing reformulation of a cultural work that offers little more than common sense. The result is that the charm of the initial piece is lost, leaving an impoverished, jargonized version in its stead.

## A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS: WHAT DO WE GAIN AND WHAT DO WE LOSE?

What are the general trends in today's psychoanalytic literature concerning the interface between psychoanalysis and art? Very often, a given paper draws on a combination of approaches, the usage of countertransference being a frequent ingredient.

### *The Psychobiographical Option*

Papers following mainly the path of psychobiography—that is, whose fundamental aim is to link the content of a work to the supposed unconscious conflicts of its author—are rare today. The Leonardo paradigm seems to have fallen out of favor. However, a psychobiographical touch is still sometimes integrated with other approaches into thoughtful and scholarly papers.

As examples, let us consider Tutter's recent papers on the French painter Poussin (2011, 2014a, 2014b). Tutter interprets Poussin's renditions of some of the myths described by the Greek poet Ovid in his famous *Metamorphoses*. The structure of these papers is made up of three interconnected layers. The first stands as a thick, scholarly, historical

canvas on which Tutter paints specifically psychoanalytic comments. She provides an impressive amount of descriptive data concerning what we know about both Ovid and Poussin: analysis of literary contents, biographical data, past and contemporary influences, stylistic and thematic preferences, and so on. Tutter explicitly admits that she "draws . . . on literary, biographical, and art-historical methodology" in order to avoid the pitfall of reductionism (2014a, p. 636). However, it is difficult for a psychoanalyst to estimate the appropriateness and depth of such historical data. This is the reason why we often prefer to collaborate with a scholar from another field, rather than stepping alone onto alien, slippery ground.

The second and third layers are appropriately psychoanalytic. The second consists in the reading of the explicit contents of Ovid's words and Poussin's paintings, drawing on a broad range of psychoanalytic constructs, expanding from Freud to contemporary authors (Ferro, Ogden) and passing through ego psychology (Greenacre, Loewald), the Kleinian school (Klein, Segal), and the French tradition (Chasseguet-Smirgel, Green) (Tutter 2014a, pp. 637-638). On these grounds, Tutter posits a particular link between creativity and loss (2011) or speculates on the constitution of narcissism (2014b).

Curiously, and unlike many contemporary authors, Tutter does not draw on her countertransference. This gives a speculative, hypertheoretical, and quasi-encyclopedic flavor to her papers. As an example, while linking metamorphosis with change and loss, she reads the myth of Daphne and Apollo as a metaphor for the transitions of adolescence. In this context, several meanings are suggested for Daphne's transformation into a tree, as described in the myth: a tree may be seen as a metaphor for a man, a family, the cycle of life, virility, knowledge, or the mother, or it can work as a fetish, etc. (Tutter 2011).

The third level is of a *pathobiographical* nature. Tutter attempts to link Poussin's paintings to what we know of his life—namely, his suffering from syphilis and his wife's death. Whereas it is indisputable that such links exist (between an artist's life events and his work), we are often driven to make daring hypotheses when trying to figure out the nature of the link. This happens all the more when we speculate about unconscious fantasies, feelings, and defense mechanisms conveyed by

the work of art. Thus, it is interesting to read Tutter as she wonders about Poussin's mental state at the end of his life, the point at which he sets out to paint his second version of Apollo and Daphne. The writing becomes hesitant and tentative; the use of the conditional tense and of grammatical forms conveying a sense of doubt is striking.

Tutter muses on the fact that Poussin "must have at least suspected—if not acknowledged—[that this] would be his last work" (2011, p. 442). "Tertiary syphilis would eventually take Poussin's ability to hold a brush, and soon after this, his life; it is unclear whether it also deprived him of his virility, or his fertility"; "Poussin would have known that . . ." (p. 443); "we do not know . . ." (p. 439); "Poussin may very well have blamed himself for . . ." (p. 444); "what disapproval—and what understanding!—might Poussin have had"; "could his virginal Daphne represent a young Anna Marie [Poussin's wife]?" (p. 444).

A sense of uncertainty may be traced in the syntactic forms that fill the paragraphs in which Tutter discusses the way that Poussin might have experienced life events and their consequences on his mind and on his art. A question might be raised here: do these speculations add something fundamental to the understanding of Poussin's work, or do they instead inform us more about Tutter's theoretical assumptions and personal views? In other words, what does this psychobiographical reflection provide to the viewer or the reader? What does it provide to psychoanalysis? I will come back to these questions.

### *The Character as a Patient*

Freud's other main paradigm, the one he developed in *Gradiva* (1907), seems much more tenacious. The case-study approach is fairly common: the character is taken as a real person whose unconscious conflicts and motives may be recognized and explored. This approach is particularly common in essays about the cinema. The frequently narrative structure of films and their strong emotional impact probably favor the illusion of a real, living, whole person whose feelings, motives, and fantasies we can identify with.

Most often, commentators rely strongly and explicitly on their countertransferential reactions. This occurs to such an extent that watching a film, for instance, may come to be equated with listening in on an

analytic session. This parallel is very often made. Thus, certain authors explicitly posit that "film analysis is something similar to what happens in an analytic session" (Cañizares 2010), or they may suggest reading a literary classic—such as, for example Dante's *Divine Comedy*—"as if we were listening to an analysand coming for help" (Szajnberg 2010, p. 187).

Although some similarities exist, particularly in terms of the revealing power of the personal reactions of the analyst/viewer, I find this equation puzzling. The main problem for me is that this analogy obscures a fundamental difference between clinical and extraclinical psychoanalysis. There is a long tradition starting with Freud's quotation of Nestroy's responses in "Constructions" (1937)[5] and continuing on to Bion's recognition of the patient as the analyst's best supervisor, which highlights the importance of the patient's response. The basic analytic unit is no longer: patient's material → countertransference → interpretation, but rather: patient's material → countertransference → interpretation → *patient's response.*

The obligatory absence of response from the work of art cannot be dismissed as a meaningless difference. In my opinion, it is a central factor that introduces a radical difference between the analyst's experience in relation to a work of art and the analyst in dialogue with her patient. Failing to acknowledge the implications of this fundamental difference may drive us toward oversimplification and may become the cause of confusion.

As a consequence of the primacy given to the commentator's personal experience, it is paramount to keep in mind the diversity of possible readings of any example of culture (Cañizares 2010; Schafer 2010; Shustorovich and Weinstein 2010; Tarantelli 2010). The importance ascribed to the personal reaction of the viewer/reader runs parallel to the degree to which countertransference is taken into account in psychoanalytic clinical practice. This supports Green's suggestion that "the interpretation of the text . . . is, ultimately, the interpretation that [the

[5] "In short, we conduct ourselves on the model of a familiar figure in one of Nestroy's farces—the man-servant who has a single answer on his lips to every question or objection: 'In the course of future developments everything will become clear'" (Freud 1937, p. 384).

analyst] must give to himself about the effects of the text on his own unconscious" (1992, p. 20; my translation).

### *Illustrating the Theory*

In their theoretical constructs, some authors explicitly diverge from Freud's two main paradigms while retaining his basic wish: to defend and/or develop psychoanalytic theories. This goal may be maintained alongside a variety of different avenues that range from the systematic and thorough demonstration of a psychoanalytic construct, on the one hand, to a more open exploration and investigation of a given question, on the other.

Thus, sometimes the theoretical constructs of the analyst are clearly emphasized, and the discussion looks like an illustration of these theoretical constructs that uses a cultural work to support the argument (Fenster 2010; Gammelgaard 2011; Lane 2011; Sander 2001; Schafer 2010; Vives 2011). This intention is often explicitly stated: the author may explain that she chose a certain work of art because it gives her the possibility of exploring and developing a certain construct. The author thereby clearly settles the scope and limits of her paper.

Legitimate as this approach may be, "the use of art as exemplifications of theory" runs the risk of leading to what Kuspit (1991) described as "simultaneously all too speculative and all too dogmatic" (p. 2). In fact, for some authors (Kuspit 1991; Reed 1982), the unique quality of a work of art, its ineffable and irreducible character, should be respected. Speaking in particular about the visual arts, Kuspit suggested that the specific contribution of an individual work lies precisely in its ambiguous (due to being unsymbolized) images. Thus, the work's suggestive power stems from its repressed, corporeal/sensuous material. This leads Kuspit to advocate a more poetic, open approach, a less theory-laden view, which might preserve the ineffable and magical qualities that are consubstantial with art.

From my point of view, an important question is the following: what do we gain and what do we lose when following this avenue? We certainly gain the possibility of enlivening an abstract and dry concept through its contact with a fresh and captivating piece of art. Art can allow an

enriching exploration and a vivid illustration of our theories. In addition, as Freud showed, it can arouse inspiration. Previously vague and formless intuitions can be fleshed out and given a degree of expression and clarity while retaining their complexity. A literary character or a visual production provides a net of potential meanings and emotions that can stimulate new thinking, not only in the commentator but also in his readers. Using a metaphor, I would say that psychoanalysis is penetrated by a current of fresh air carrying a variety of seeds that may grow on its fertile ground. Finally, we might include among the gains that this avenue provides the rewards gleaned by the individual commentator in using socially sanctioned support to develop her thinking—a pleasure already recognized by Freud.

As for what we lose, the answer depends on our vision of the psychic function of art (Abella 2010). Do we think, following Freud, that art allows the disguised satisfaction of repressed wishes through identification with the artist? Or do we instead believe, as Segal suggested, that aesthetic pleasure stems from the reparative processes conveyed through formal beauty? A third possibility, following a more recent theoretical trend, would be to postulate that art allows a process of fresh thinking, personal re-creation, and transformation. Fresh thinking is to be taken here in a Bionian sense—that is, as not only rational, conscious thinking, but a deep kind of thinking permanently embedded in a stream of unconscious feelings and fantasies, in such a way that it provides the possibility of subjective appropriation and personal growth (Abella 2012, 2014).

In my opinion, and along the lines of this third avenue, some forms of applied analysis may be feared because they can saturate a work of art through the injection of the commentator's personal fantasies or theoretical constructs. As a consequence of this hypersaturation, the individual reader's/viewer's personal re-creation may be stifled, killing the specific contribution of art to mental growth. Paraphrasing Freud, we might summarize the result to be: "where art was, theory is," or "where an open space of thinking was, a saturated filling-in is."

For personal mental work to be done, we probably need some empty space with a degree of silence and solitude. As Kuspit (1991) puts it, we should respect the zones of opacity, density, and impenetrability that are

essential in a work of art. In my opinion, a psychoanalyst may do well to acknowledge this need both in the clinical and the extraclinical space.

### *A More Unsaturated Approach*

Central questions for me are the following: Is this possible? Can psychoanalysis contribute to a deeper understanding of art while avoiding saturation in order to permit the mental work that art is meant to allow? How can we prevent loss (in the possibility of personal re-creation) from outstripping gain (in rational understanding)? Is it possible to cross-fertilize psychoanalysis and the arts in such a way as to stimulate fresh development and learning on both sides?

In my view, some papers, written from a more or less open and unsaturated stance, follow this line of exploring the various ways in which different disciplines respond to common fundamental questions. Some of the shared preoccupations these papers deal with are: memory, history, and reconstruction; experiences of loss, mental growth, and creativity; facts linked with the passage of time—childhood, youth, maturity, and old age, as well as the inevitability of death; perception, desire, pleasure, and love; intimacy, identity, individuality, and difference; dialectics between inside/outside, language/action, individual/society, and reality/illusion; the experience of listening, reading, or beholding; the value of thinking, relating, and helping; the consequences of new technologies for our ways of thinking and relating; and the complexities of violence, destructiveness, fundamentalism, and trauma. (See Abella 2008, 2010; Anderson 2009; Ashur 2009; Baudry 2001; Blum 2001; Civitarese 2010; Diena 2009; Frosch 2009; Goldstein 1975; Golinelli 2003; Jones 1999; Mandelbaum 2011; Minerbo 2008; Paul 2011; Petrella 2008; Poland 2003; Sabbadini 2009, 2011; Schaub 2008; Schiller 2008; Schwartz 2009; Szajnberg 2010; Tylim 2010; and West-Leuer 2009.)

The style adopted by these papers comes nearer to what we usually call a dialogue: listening to the way others tackle the same questions with which we ourselves are dealing; confronting models and exploring different answers; receiving/learning instead of only giving/teaching; trying not to demonstrate but to listen to the way that others use our suggestions and their echoes on our own thinking; putting to work our

constructs and questioning our ideas; accepting that we may be destabilized in our certainties and being willing to deconstruct our truths in order to allow them to grow and be enriched. Of course, the author's personal fantasies or theoretical choices often permeate his way of tackling his subject, but their weight is less all-pervasive. These authors generate an atmosphere of inquiry and openness and allow greater freedom to the reader.

What does this mean, in practice? I will take as an example the nature of mental work and the modalities by which both psychoanalysis and artistic productions stimulate thinking in the patient/viewer/reader. This approach may be particularly fruitful given the fact that contemporary psychoanalysis and contemporary art converge in their attempt to allow the deconstruction of old ideas and relational paradigms in order to stimulate new thinking (Abella 2010, 2012). One possible avenue is to consider the nature of psychic work that a given piece of art demands of the audience, while comparing this psychic work with what is required by the psychoanalytic encounter.

I will discuss two recent papers on this particular issue. In analyzing a film, Sabbadini (2011) suggests placing two phenomena side by side: on the one hand, the special disposition required by the analyst to meet in the other what is foreign in herself; and on the other hand, the way in which the viewer is driven to look at reality from the other's point of view, reconsidering her own view in the light of this process. Thus, similarly to psychoanalysis, art may require the spectator/participant to perform a considerable amount of psychic work in order to "integrate in their own minds the disparate elements presented [in the work of art] . . . and to hold their complexity together" (Sabbadini 2011, p. 752).

Galgut (2010) develops these same issues in an essay on Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion*. The author compares the way in which "we engage with a text—or, more specifically, with the implied author or narrator—and the way we engage with the mind of another" (pp. 915-916). Having summed up the notion of mentalization as "the ability to recognize that other people have mental states" (p. 917), the author shows how good literature requires and perhaps facilitates mentalization—in contrast to escapist literature, which does not demand such a complex type of thinking.

The reader is invited to consider the inner life of characters and to identify with them from a particular point of view. In fact, Galgut does not ask us to guess about the unconscious feelings or motives of the characters, and even less about those of the author. On the contrary, she calls our attention to the way in which Austen makes the reader consider the many simultaneous layers of a given interaction or situation. Through the use of free indirect discourse, through irony and metaphor, Austen pushes the reader to change his point of view, to reflect critically on the actions and minds of the characters and the narrator in such a way that the reader's unconscious thought is stimulated. Several questions are raised by Galgut's essay: among them are those about different types of thinking that may occur in life and in psychoanalysis, and the various ways in which mentalization can be promoted or impeded—once again, both in daily life and on the couch.

Of course, these authors inevitably draw on their particular theoretical backgrounds, which are sometimes made explicit. Nevertheless, a dialogue is initiated that opens up the reader to novel ways of pursuing the same goals that psychoanalysis strives to attain. Both the understanding of a literary work and the scope of view of the psychoanalyst are widened. The way in which we understand our clinical work gains in complexity. Moreover, we might expect that nonpsychoanalysts may find the process equally understandable and enriching. This is what I see as a true interdisciplinary encounter—that is, an exchange and cross-fertilization between psychoanalysis and literature, meant to widen our mental space.

## CONCLUSIONS

Some questions can be asked that might help psychoanalysts improve interdisciplinary dialogues with the arts. The first concerns the type of approach to be used. In which ways, and with what safeguards, are psychobiography or the case-study approaches still valuable? What about the more recent, textual approach? Which sort of reality are we constructing: factual, historical, or psychic? Last but not least, how can we contribute to a deeper understanding of a work of art without saturating it, in order to foster personal re-creation and new thinking? In my opinion, in all cases, it would be useful to specify the adopted epistemological point of view, its scope and shortcomings.

A related question points to implicit paradigms concerning a psychoanalytic approach to any type of reality, whether clinical or artistic. As mentioned earlier, Freud maintained a high degree of consistence between his clinical and extraclinical approaches: the theoretical frame he used for the understanding of his patients' dreams and symptoms was the same as the one he applied to the understanding of works of art—namely, Jensen's *Gradiva* (1907), Leonardo's works (1910a), and Michelangelo's *Moses* (1914). Surprisingly, a number of contemporary psychoanalysts adopt a much more discontinuous outlook: while the archaeological paradigm may be less prominent in their clinical work, they may resort to it in the effort to understand a work of art.

Trying to guess the author's unconscious conflicts, or to identify the hidden fantasies contained in a work of art, strongly evokes the image of an exterior, mirrorlike analyst aiming to decipher the secrets of the patient's internal world. The fact that we include the interpreter's countertransferential reactions, the reader's/viewer's feelings, moderates this external approach but does not really modify its fundamental nature. The paradigm is still the archaeological one. The fundamental goal of excavation remains unchanged; what is added is simply another excavating tool: the analyst's countertransference.

As I see it, in contemporary practice throughout various analytic cultures, the accent is placed more and more on the transformative value of the complex interaction between analyst and patient.[6] We suppose that it is precisely through the attention addressed to this constantly evolving relationship that the contents of the internal world of the patient may be revealed, understood, and transformed. An analyst considering her work from this viewpoint might need to juxtapose that view with the archaeological, one-way approach to artistic productions and may find herself splitting her mind to accommodate both. For such an analyst,

[6] The dialectic between an archaeological paradigm (searching the past) and a transformative one (aiming to change the patient's present mental functioning with a view toward the future) is one of the important debates of contemporary psychoanalysis. Many papers have addressed this issue during the last twenty years. An example is Enckell's (2010) contribution, in which he contrasts the "hermeneutics of suspicion" with the "hermeneutics of faith" (p. 1095). The particular terms chosen by Enckell are drawn from Ricoeur and applied to the dialectic between what is more usually called the archaeological and the transformative paradigms.

the archaeological stance might be perceived as an anachronism that offers only a frustrating and devalued substitute for the richness of actual practice.

An additional question is: what for? Psychoanalysis has now acquired its own place inside culture. Indeed, it has become part of the culture: psychoanalytic constructs and sensibilities inform and shape the way in which we see the world (Homans and Jonte-Pace 2005). We do not need to demonstrate its validity in the same way that Freud did a hundred years ago. What we do need to do is to reach out to other disciplines in a meaningful and productive way, both from the point of view of psychoanalysis and from that of other disciplines—that is, in a way likely to be exciting and productive both for psychoanalysis and for other fields of knowledge. Psychoanalysis can certainly provide valuable contributions to culture, but at the same time, we have much to learn from an exchange with diverse cultural fields.

This type of dialogue may lack the thrilling excitement of more ambitious and speculative endeavors. Indeed, the analyst engaged in this line of inquiry may need to renounce the reassuring pleasure of "teaching" other disciplines and feeling confirmed in what he already knows. Thus, he may regret the loss of some of the intellectual excitement derived from what Freud called "one of the most attractive subjects of analytic examination" (1913, p. 187). Basically, what this approach demands of the analyst is to be ready for the disturbing effects of openness and self-questioning—an absolute requirement if there is to be a disposition to learn through dialogue with other fields of knowledge. Although this avenue may appear at first glance to be humble and painstaking, I believe that it is often deeply satisfying and may reveal itself, in the long run, to be both rewarding and productive.

## REFERENCES

Abella, A. (2008). Christian Boltanski: un artiste contemporain vu et pensé par une psychanalyste. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse,* 72:1113-1136.

——— (2010). Contemporary art and Hanna Segal's thinking on aesthetics. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:163-181.

——— (2012). John Cage and W. R. Bion: an exercise in interdisciplinary dialogue. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 93:473-487.

——— (2013). Psychoanalysis and art: from applied analysis to interdisciplinary dialogue. In *Art in Psychoanalysis,* ed. G. Goldstein. London: Karnac.

——— (2014). En lisant Jacqueline Harpman: psychanalyse et écriture. *Revue Belge de Psychanalyse,* 64:115-126.

Anderson, D. (2009). Love and hate in dementia: the depressive position in the film *Iris. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:1289-87.

Ashur, D. (2009). "The healing power of love": the literary/analytic bond of marriage in Freud's essay on *Gradiva. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 50:595-612.

Baudry, F. (1984a). An essay on method in applied psychoanalysis. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 53:551-581.

——— (1984b). [Review of] *La plume sur le divan. Psychanalyse et littérature en France* [*The Pen on the Couch: Psychoanalysis and Literature in France*], by Pamela Tytell. Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 53:606-609.

——— (2001). [Review of] *Essays on Otherness: Jean Laplanche,* ed. J. Fletcher. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 49:696-700.

Blum, H. P. (2001). Psychoanalysis and art, Freud and Leonardo. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 49:1409-1425.

Camden, V. (2009). "My capital secret": literature and the psychoanalytic agon. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:1123-1137.

Cañizares, J. (2010). The strange case of Dr. Mantle and Dr. Mantle: David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:203-218.

Civitarese, C. ( 2010). Do cyborgs dream? Post-human landscapes in Shinya Tsukamoto's *Nightmare Detective* (2006). *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:1005-1016.

Diena, S. (2009). The skin house: a psychoanalytical reading of 3-Iron. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:647-660.

Elias, N. (1939). *The History of Manners.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1969.

Enckell, H. (2010). Reflection in psychoanalysis: on symbols and metaphors. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:1093-1114.

Esman, A. H. (1998). What is "applied" in applied psychoanalysis? *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 79:741-752.

Fenster, S. (2010). The curious case of Benjamin Button: regression and the angel of death. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:643-650.

Freud, S. (1907). *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's "Gradiva." S. E.,* 9.

——— (1908). Creative writers and day-dreaming. *S. E.,* 9.

——— (1910a). *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood. S. E.,* 11.

——— (1910b). "Wild" psycho-analysis. *S. E.,* 11.

——— (1912–1913). *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics. S. E.,* 13.

——— (1913). The claims of psycho-analysis to scientific interest. *S. E.,* 13.

——— (1914). The Moses of Michelangelo. *S. E.,* 13.

——— (1919). The "uncanny." *S. E.,* 17.

——— (1926). *The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person. S. E.,* 20.

——— (1927). The future of an illusion. *S. E.,* 21.

——— (1928). Dostoevsky and parricide. *S. E.,* 21.

——— (1937). Constructions in analysis. *S. E.,* 23.

Freud, S. & Breuer, J. (1895). *Studies on Hysteria. S. E.,* 2.

Freud, S. & Jones, E. (1995). *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones,* 1908–1939, ed. R. A. Paskauskas. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Frosch, J. P. (2009). A note on Mafia movies. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:661-664.

Gabbard, G. O. (1997). The psychoanalyst at the movies. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 78:429-434.

Galgut, E. (2010). Reading minds: mentalisation, irony, and literary engagement. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:915-935.

Gammelgaard, J. (2011). Love, drive, and desire in the works of Freud, Lacan, and Proust. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:963-983.

Goldstein, M. (1975). Antonioni's blow-up: from crib to camera. *Amer. Imago,* 32:240-263.

Golinelli, P. (2003). The castaway self: a psychoanalytic reading of *Castaway* (2000). *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 84:169-172.

Gombrich, E. H. (1954). Psychoanalysis and the history of art. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 35:401-411.

Green, A. (1992). *La déliaison.* Paris: Les belles lettres.

Homans, P. & Jonte-Pace, D. (2005). Tracking the emotion in the stone: an essay on psychoanalysis and architecture. *Ann. Psychoanal.,* 33:261-284.

Jones, A. A. (1999). Linking lost voices: reading "The Dead." *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 80:133-142.

Kandel, E. R. (2006). *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind.* New York: Norton.

Kuspit, D. (1991). Visual art and criticism: the role of psychoanalysis. *Ann. Psychoanal.,* 19:1-16.

Lane, C. (2011). Lewis Carroll and psychoanalysis: why nothing adds up in Wonderland. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:1029-1045.

Lieberman, J. S. (2011). [Review of] *Psychoanalytic Aesthetics: An Introduction to the British School,* by Nicky Grover. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:1067-1070.

Mandelbaum, G. (2011). Some observations on value and greatness in drama. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:411-425.

Minerbo, M. (2008). Reality game: contemporary violence and denaturation of language. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 89:1047-1055.

Paul, R. A. (2011). Cultural narratives and the succession scenario: *Slumdog Millionaire* and other popular films and fictions. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:451-470.

Petrella, F. (2008). The mother in the text: metapsychology and phantasy in the work of interpretation. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 89:621-636.

Poland, W. S. (2003). Reading fiction and the psychoanalytic experience: Proust on reading and on reading Proust. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 51:1263-1281.

Reed, G. S. (1982). Towards a methodology for applying psychoanalysis to literature. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 51:19-42.

Rosenwald, G. (2012). The psychobiographer's authority: questions of interpretive scope and logic. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 81:357-400.

Sabbadini, A. (2009). Between physical desire and emotional involvement: reflections on Frédéric Fonteyne's film *Une liason porographique. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:1441-1447.

——— (2011). A camera inside a monastery: reflections on *Of Gods and Men (Des dieux et des homes). Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:745-754.

Sander, F. M. (2001). Psychoanalysis, drama, and the family: the ever-widening scope. *Ann. Psychoanal.,* 29:279-299.

Schafer, R. (2010). Curse and consequence: King Lear's destructive narcissism. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:1503-1521.

Schaub, D. (2008). Michel Delville's *La lectrice:* honouring or deriding Freud's theories through bibliotherapy. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 89:1237-1250.

Schiller, B.-M. (2008). Saying yes to dirt, desire and difference: *Yes* (2004). *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 89:1225-1235.

Schwartz, H. (2009). Temporal transformations in cinema and psychoanalysis. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:909-915.

Shustorovich, E. & Weinstein, L. (2010). Universal fantasy in latency: separation, attachment and sexuality in Julio Cortazar's *Bestiary. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:1465-1482.

Szajnberg, N. M. (2010). Dante's *Comedy*: precursors of psychoanalytic technique and psyche. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:183-197.

Tarantelli, C. B. (2010). "Till destruction sickens": the catastrophe of mind in *Macbeth. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 91:1483-1501.

Tutter, A. (2011). Metamorphosis ant the aesthetics of loss, I. Mourning Daphne—the Apollo and Daphne paintings of Nicolas Poussin. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92: 427-449.

——— (2014a). The blossoms of loss: Ovid's floral metamorphosis and Poussin's *Realm of Flora. Psychoanal. Q.,* 83:633-679.

——— (2014b). Under the mirror of the sleeping water: Poussin's *Narcissus. Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 95:1235-1264.

Tylim, I. (2010). Tales of the therapist's passion on the screen. *Contemp. Psychoanal.,* 46:207-214.

Vives, J.-M. (2011). Catharsis: psychoanalysis and the theatre. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 92:1009-1027.

Volkan, V. (2001). Muhammad and the rise of Islam: the creation of group identity. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 83:1207-1210.

West-Leuer, B. (2009). Colonial aggression and collective aggressor trauma. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:1157-1168.

---

*217 rte. d'Annecy*
*1257 Croix-de-Rozon, Switzerland*

*e-mail: adela.abella@bluewin.ch*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# A CROSSWORD PUZZLE: INTRODUCTION TO TWO PAPERS ON GEORGES PEREC AND JEAN-BERTRAND PONTALIS

BY HENRY P. SCHWARTZ

**Keywords:** Georges Perec, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, autobiography, trauma, dreams, creative writing.

The novelist, filmmaker, and essayist Georges Perec (1936–1982) was a master of wordplay and experimental writing. His tragic childhood finds hidden expression in works haunted by absence and loss. These themes are explored in the following two papers: "On the Analyst's Identification with the Patient: The Case of J.-B. Pontalis and G. Perec" (Schwartz 2016a) and "The Oneiric Autobiography of Georges Perec" (Schwartz 2016b).

Perec was in psychoanalysis with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis for four years in the early 1970s. Pontalis's written descriptions of his analysis with Perec (in which the patient is only thinly disguised) offer a unique window into Perec's psyche and the ways in which his life experiences informed his creative output. Taken together, Perec's own descriptions of his analysis and Pontalis's writing about the treatment also allow us to glimpse an uncommon and multilayered analytic relationship.

Drawing as well on Perec's autobiographical novel (1975) and other key Perecquian works (e.g., 1978), the first of the two papers that follow examines the relationship between this exceptional analytic couple and, in particular, the analyst's identification with the patient, touching on how this phenomenon may manifest in other analytic dyads. The second paper takes as its starting point Perec's published collection of 124 of his dreams, *La Boutique Obscure* (1973), which was translated into English only in 2012.

---

Henry P. Schwartz is on the faculty of the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, New York.

A first reading of Perec's dream book left me puzzled. It read like raw dream material that was strangely inhuman. There was nothing beyond Perec's brief introduction to connect the reader to the writer at a rational level or to serve as a doorway to understanding. And yet this harsh austerity also conveyed something authentic. It is, after all, the secondary revision, along with the analyst's personal interaction with the patient, that allows entry to dreams, and these dreams seem stripped of that piece of the dream work. My confusion became curiosity and I fell deeper into an exploration of Perec's work.

I read the dream book first, but upon learning of the author's analysis with Pontalis, I wanted to find out more. Pontalis left a record of his work with Perec in an array of publications. As mentioned, his derisory efforts at disguising Perec's identity meant that there was a remarkable opportunity to get an inside look at the analysis, and also impressed me as a symptomatic act. My curiosity about Perec broadened to include Pontalis, although my interest in the latter leaned in a direction as negative as my tilt toward Perec was positive.

Reading those papers on Perec's analysis did not improve my attitude toward Pontalis much. His portrait of this patient is not generous. Perec comes across as a deeply damaged man, and there is little hint of his extraordinary talents. The interpretations tend to have a critical edge. Though some readers may be inclined to see Perec as a victim of Pontalis's analytic abuse, Perec himself never seems to object, and even writes about obtaining significant benefit from the analysis. Perec does eventually counterattack after the analysis has ended, but in a highly disguised and strictly literary manner. A reader would not know an attempt at retaliation is there without looking for it.

There are occasions when one senses an empathic bond between Pontalis and his patient, which Perec presumably noticed as well. That bond becomes magnified in Pontalis's nonanalytic work. There is something peculiarly Perecquian in those books. Clear as it is that Pontalis has kept his relationship with Perec alive in his later writing, it is impossible to know how conscious he was of this.

Both analyst and analysand refer to Perec's dreams being "stolen" from the analysis, but it seems that Pontalis was more the thief—in a different sense. It would be a mistake to infer that this comment about

Perec means he did not present his dreams in the analysis. The dreams were stolen in the sense that they were presented in a manner that felt predigested and unanalyzable, i.e., *stolen away*. A colleague once told me that he had wasted his analysis because he had planned out everything he was going to say before each session, and Pontalis's protest against Perec's dreams seems based on a similar notion.

Perec says, "I have realized that it was not long before I began having dreams only in order to write them" (1973, p. 1), suggesting premeditation (if a dream can be planned in advance) and the sense that he was more interested in their value for writing than for his analysis. Pontalis writes that he tried to interpret these dreams, but after a while decided there was no point to it: he saw the dreams as another defensive strategy that had to be overcome.

Here, too, we find Perec agreeing with his analyst, yet he publishes a collection of his dreams while the analysis is still in progress. Why? Is it an act of revenge? A challenge to Pontalis's dismissive view of the dreams? Perhaps there is an element of that, but first and foremost the dream book must be read as an Oulipian undertaking—that is, as a literary exercise intended to explore and expand writing. Perec was one of many writers interested in charting new territory for literature, and just as listening to a piece of 12-tone music can be jarring, reading a collection of raw dreams is, too, as will be elaborated in the second of the papers that follow.

REFERENCES

Perec, G. (1973). *La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams,* trans. D. L. Becker. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2012.

——— (1975). *W, or The Memory of Childhood,* trans. D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 2010.

——— (1978). *Life A User's Manual,* trans. D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 1987.

Schwartz, H. P. (2016a). On the analyst's identification with the patient: the case of J.-B. Pontalis and G. Perec. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 85:125-154.

——— (2016b). The oneiric autobiography of Georges Perec. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 85:155-178.

*41 Union Square West, Room 402*
*New York, NY 10003*

*e-mail: hps3@verizon.net*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# ON THE ANALYST'S IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PATIENT: THE CASE OF J.-B. PONTALIS AND G. PEREC

BY HENRY P. SCHWARTZ

*The writer Georges Perec was in psychoanalysis with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis for four years in the early 1970s. In this essay, the author presents the exceptional interest this analyst took in this patient and the ways in which that interest manifested itself in his work, psychoanalytic and otherwise. Many correlative factors suggest that identificatory processes persisted beyond the treatment and were maintained into Pontalis's later life. While this paper is primarily intended to provide evidence to support this view of a specific case, the author closes by reflecting that this may be a more general phenomenon and the reasons for this.*

**Keywords:** J.-B. Pontalis, G. Perec, French literature, identification, postanalytic influence, countertransference, confidentiality, Holocaust survivors, Oulipo, immixture.

> [All] poets are born orphans.
>
> —Roberto Bolaño (2007, p. 213)

## INTRODUCTION

That patients can have powerful effects on their analysts is widely acknowledged, but despite the ubiquitous presence of countertransference in our literature over the last fifty years, there has been very little discussion of the *long-term* effects our patients have on us—that is to say, how

Henry P. Schwartz is on the faculty of the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, New York.

they continue to affect us after the analysis has ended. This influence is most readily recognized in the ways we refine our practice or develop our theories. It is far more difficult to identify the deeply personal ways these experiences change us, affecting who we are in ways that, it seems to me, are not so different from the ways analysands are changed by analysis. It happens out of sight, without the direct discussion of what is taking place, largely through a self-analytic process that is driven by the interactions we have with our patients, through the relationships we form with them. The unusual circumstances of the case I will present allow for such effects to be discerned.

It is rare to have the opportunity to note such effects. Patients commonly report the influence their analysts have on them, and this is particularly so with analysts and their training analysts, but few analysts have written on how their analysands have changed them. Coen (2000) wrote about regressive identifications analysts have toward their patients during the analysis, and Racker (1957) wrote about concordant and complementary identifications, which also are limited to the period of the treatment.

Jacobs (2008), on the other hand, writes about how his work with a homosexual man led him to revise his understanding of homosexuality and to serve more generally as a model for love in the analytic relationship. Perhaps coming closest to the idea of ongoing identification, McLaughlin (1993) wrote about how our work with patients induces self-analytic processes that lead to lasting changes in us. He commented, "Analytic work with patients is *the* major impetus for self-analytic endeavor and adaptive change over an analyst's lifetime" (p. 366, italics in original). We find among field theorists a similar view. Bezoari and Ferro (1991), for example, wrote that "a successful analysis will have transformative and liberating effects not only on the patient, but on the analyst, too" (p. 39). However, ongoing identifications after the analysis has ended have not, to my knowledge, been addressed.

I will examine one such relationship, that between the writer Georges Perec (1936–1982) and the analyst Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (1924–2013). Two factors make such an examination possible for this

pair: (1) Both wrote quite a bit, about the analysis and otherwise, and (2) Pontalis poorly disguised the identity of Perec in his clinical papers, making references to him recognizable.

Before entering analysis with Pontalis, Perec had been in two previous treatments, first as a child, and then again as a young adult in an abbreviated analysis with Michel de M'Uzan. He returned to analysis in his thirties at a difficult period in his life. Pontalis was well known in France as one of the coauthors of *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (Laplanche and Pontalis 1967), as well as being a former protégé of Jean-Paul Sartre's. Thus, Pontalis had the reputation of being a particularly literate psychoanalyst, and this must have figured in Perec's decision to seek him out.

Both Perec and Pontalis wrote about the analysis in direct and indirect ways. In an essay, "The Scene of a Stratagem," Perec (1977) wrote about it directly, but he also alluded to it in disguised ways in a novel, *Life A User's Manual* (1978a), in an autobiographical novel, *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975a), and in his book of dreams, *La Boutique Obscure* (1973).

Pontalis began writing about his analytic work with Perec during the course of the analysis, and he continued to do so well after it had ended. These clinical examples served as material with which Pontalis illustrated and developed theoretical ideas. Interestingly, we also find Perec's influence appearing in his nonanalytic writing. Pontalis began a wide-ranging career as a writer a few years after completing his analysis of Perec, producing a number of very personal books that combine memoir, criticism, and clinical reflection, as well as at least three novels. By mixing genres in this manner, he was engaging in a mode of writing that Perec had begun prior to the analysis and continued throughout his life, and it is in those writings that we can observe Perec's most personal influence on Pontalis.

Taken together, this paper and "The Oneiric Autobiography of Georges Perec" (Schwartz 2016) constitute an example of how analysts work—moving between the individual, the dyad, and the social surround in an endless search for understanding.

## WHO WAS GEORGES PEREC?

He was born in Paris in 1936 to Polish Jewish émigrés. In 1940, when France made its short-lived attempt to defend itself from German invasion, Perec's father enlisted and was then killed at the front. The following year, under German occupation, his mother was able to place five-year-old Georges on a Red Cross train to Grenoble to join relatives who had fled Paris earlier. In January 1943, his mother was seized in a roundup of Jews and sent to Drancy, the transit camp outside Paris. The last record of her existence occurred a month later when she was placed on a train to Auschwitz; she is presumed to have been killed in the gas chambers upon arrival.

At the time, southeastern France was under relatively lax Italian control, and there were some relatives from Georges's father's side who lived in and around the alpine village of Villard de Lans. For the remaining years of the war, Georges moved among these various homes and a Catholic boarding school. As the war ended, he was taken in by his father's sister, Esther, and her husband, David Bienenfeld, and returned to Paris with them. He remained with them and his older cousin Ela until moving out on his own.

Sometime between the ages of ten and twelve, Georges was sent to the prominent child analyst Françoise Dolto. Though Georges had not caused any problems at school, his cousin Ela had consulted with the school about drawings he was making that had raised some concern. The school's staff had an interest in art therapy and referred Georges to Dolto (Bellos 1995).

In that therapy, Perec is believed to have elaborated a fantasy accompanying his drawings, a fantasy he reported forgetting after the treatment ended, only to recall it in 1967 on a trip to Venice (Perec 1975b; Coppel-Basch 1999). In the late 1960s, he serialized this fantasy for a magazine, and then incorporated it into an autobiographical novel, *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975a).

In 1955, Perec returned to treatment for analysis, this time with de M'Uzan. Little is known of this treatment and de M'Uzan has not written about it, as far as is known. The treatment occurred at a time

when Perec was struggling to define himself as a writer. He had decided a few years earlier that he wanted to be a writer, but this did not sit well with his family, who encouraged him to follow a more conventional route and obtain a graduate degree. The analysis with de M'Uzan came to an abrupt end a year later when Perec was drafted.

Perec received recognition for his first book, *Things: A Story of the Sixties* (1965), which won the Renaudot prize. It is a fictional account of a couple of modest means but immodest appetites. They work as market researchers, interviewing people on the street to learn their material preferences. The book was widely understood as an indictment of the materialism of the West, though Perec had intended nothing of the sort. Like most of his writing, it drew extensively on aspects of his own life, and rather than provide a critique of it, the book was meant to show his own foibles, which were presumably shared by most.

Despite the attention the prize gained him, Perec did not profit much financially, and he had to continue his work as the archivist/librarian for a neurophysiology lab for many years to come. He married Paulette Petras in 1960, and in 1968 began an affair with Suzanne Lipinska, an heiress who had turned her country home into an artists' retreat. Perec did a great deal of writing there and met many people who became important in his life. That affair was ended by her three years later.

The treatment with Pontalis began in 1971, soon after Perec had lost Suzanne and made subsequent superficial cuts to his wrist in an apparent suicide gesture. Some believe his turn to analysis had more to do with a writing block (Perruche 2008), however. Indeed, Perec had interrupted the serial installments of his W fantasy (1975a), and was trying to integrate it into a book that would include memories of his childhood. Though he was at an impasse with this work and with most other independent projects, he was continuing to write and publish other things in collaboration. He finally completed *W, or The Memory of Childhood* in the fall of 1974 and ended the analysis in the spring of 1975, soon after its publication.

Perec's writing is filled with puzzles, conundrums, codes, and games. In fact, during the last six years of his life, he wrote the weekly crossword puzzle for the French magazine *Le Point*. In 1968, he was invited

to join the literary group Oulipo, which specialized in the kind of work Perec was becoming known for. The word *Oulipo* stands for *Ou(vroir) (de) Li(ttérature) Po(tentielle)*, or *Workshop of Potential Literature*, and its members meant to create new forms of writing that adhered to new sets of rules, usually referred to as "constraints." Two examples of such work are Perec's novel *A Void* (1969a), which is a lipogram written entirely without the use of the letter *e,* and his "Le Grand Palindrome" (1969b), reputed to be the longest palindrome ever written.

His novel *Life A User's Manual* was published in 1978 and won him considerable fame. Only with the success of this book was he finally able to quit his job at the lab and devote himself full time to writing. Unfortunately, he had just a few years left. In January 1982, on a lecture tour in Australia, he developed a bad cough. He had always been a heavy smoker, and upon his return to France he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He died in March of that year.

## WHO WAS JEAN-BERTRAND PONTALIS?

Born in 1924, Pontalis was the great-nephew of the founder of the Renault automobile company and the great-grandson of a prominent 19th-century politician, Antonin Lefèvre-Pontalis. His father died when he was nine. He later attended the Lycée Pasteur, where Jean-Paul Sartre was teaching and with whom he studied. After obtaining a graduate degree in philosophy, he was enlisted by Sartre to write regularly for his new journal, *Les Temps Modernes*. For over twenty years, Pontalis worked with Sartre on the journal, joining the editorial board in 1964, before finally splitting from him in 1969 after Sartre's critique of psychoanalysis.

In 1953, Pontalis began an analysis with Jacques Lacan and then entered psychoanalytic training. Though an early adherent, he split with Lacan in 1963. He co-wrote a seminal book, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, with Jean Laplanche, first published in France in 1967. Over subsequent years, he divided his time among three different careers: clinical work as an analyst, editorial work, and his own writing. As an editor, he founded the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* in 1970, and in 1979 joined the editorial staff of Gallimard, a well-known publishing house, and was

responsible for overseeing two collections of psychoanalytic books. As a writer, he continued to publish in psychoanalysis, but developed an independent career as a writer of fiction and books of personal reflection as well, from 1980 on. He wrote at least eleven such books and received the Prix Femina Vacaresco for his autobiography *Love of Beginnings* (1986). He died on his birthday in 2013.

## SOURCES OF INTEREST

After presenting the ways in which Pontalis discusses Perec in his psychoanalytic writing, I will turn to some of his later, nonanalytic work in which Perec is not discussed. Apart from the recurring interest that Pontalis showed in Perec as a vehicle for developing his analytic theories, I will argue that in outlook, style, and approach, Perec is very much present in the nonanalytic work as well. To what should we attribute this? Is it mere coincidence, an intentional emulation, or the manifestation of deep identifications that affected Pontalis at unconscious levels?

In *Windows* (2000), Pontalis discusses his decision to disband his journal, the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse:* "We said goodbye to one another, this journal and myself, like an analyst and a patient after a long journey, not caring to know which one had changed the other" (p. 9). Though not specifically addressing the mechanism of identification, he was well aware of the long-term impact that patients could have on him. Perec's influence may have begun with Pontalis's decision to shift the focus of his writing from psychoanalysis to literature.

Perec wrote overtly about his analysis with Pontalis two years after termination in his essay "The Scene of a Stratagem" (1977). His interest there is not in describing his analyst or the content of the analysis, but in portraying the experience of being in analysis. In 1978, three years after completing his analysis, *Life A User's Manual* was published. Frequently cited as one of the great works of 20th-century French literature, it is a book that can be read on many levels, and one of these is as a reworking of his analysis.[1]

[1] Both Burgelin (1998) and Perruche (2008) wrote at length on this issue, and Coppel-Basch (1999) observed that Perec's analysis is encoded into *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (Perec 1975a).

While in analysis, Perec finished writing *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975a), as well as *La Boutique Obscure* (1973), and all three books contain disguised references to the analysis. Unlike what we find in Pontalis's work, there is less sense of the analytic partner's influence on Perec in these writings. Pontalis is present as a character and some insights from the analysis can be found, but the analyst does not affect the form or style of the writing. Perec seems to be reacting to the analysis not through emulation or identification, but in a consciously displaced, creative manner.

## PONTALIS: ANALYTIC WRITING

There were at least eight occasions on which Pontalis discussed Perec in recognizable ways in his analytic writings (Burgelin 1998). These reports began while Perec was still in analysis, and were either published in journals or presented at conferences. The major themes of Pontalis's analytic writings are all present in these reports: dreams, loss, and psychic pain. These also happen to match many of the central themes of Perec's writing, and perhaps it is this concordance of concerns that made Perec such a significant figure for Pontalis.

Space limitations do not allow a complete account of these references. I will discuss four of them. He first presents the case one year into the treatment (Pontalis 1972). In 1974, he describes a type of patient that causes a deficit in countertransference:

> [There is] a feeling of exclusion and, in the patient, . . . an excess of representations. We are alluding here to those analysands in whom the thinking activity is predominant . . . . [These analysands are] endlessly producing meaning while evacuating it all along . . . . *It must be given meaning so as not to be given a body* . . . . This, in my opinion, is what Winnicott had in mind when he spoke of a "false self". . . an often precocious form of subject dissociation, destined to operate as a closed system . . . organized to prevent the "non-form," the precursor of chaos—to circumscribe the void. In this case, countertransference seems to me to be nourished by the following imaginary aim: to bring this survivor to life, to have come to life, for good, for himself. [1974, p. 163, italics in original]

Pontalis adds that "the work-of-mourning of the primordial object has not been carried out: too much representative activity indefinitely marks the loss of the object, reproducing its absence in a lifeless renouncement" and leaving a "quasi-hallucinatory presence of the object" (p. 164).

When Pontalis returns to discussing the problem posed by an absence of countertransference, he says:

> To a certain extent, it was one of my patients who dictated part of what I suggested about certain analysands and their dreams: I said that on hearing them one sometimes wondered whether they really experienced their dreams or whether they directly dreamt them as dreams to be told. [1975, p. 178]

It is Perec whom Pontalis is crediting with this idea, but Perec, as we shall see, seems to attribute it to the analyst. Pontalis writes:

> I realized after a while that I did not "buy" his dreams . . . . Because the dreams had no body, because they were immediately put into a flow of words, unbroken by silences, affectless, as if anxiety were dissolved by these words and only transpired through the tension of a session. They were . . . registered, recorded and treated like a text to be decoded . . . . I gradually understood the whole of this patient's discourse as a compulsive *substitution* activity. [pp. 178-179, italics in original]

Pontalis calls this "the inverse and symmetrical process to that of conversion" and a situation of "day-time insomniacs" (p. 179). There is a split, according to Pontalis, "between ideas and affects, between the body and the 'thinker,' between presence and absence." The analyst wants to "have the other give birth to himself, a birth requiring recognition of what is absent" (pp. 180-181). The patient has had "to enclose himself in a psychical sphere that is, for lack of anything better, a substitute for the mother–child relationship; *a substitute and not a metaphor* . . . . It is the work of mourning which has not been accomplished" (p. 181, italics in original).

In 1976, Pontalis described his patient "Simon" as remarkable for his lack of psychic pain. Simon was thirty-five years old when the analysis began, after the woman in whose house he was living had left him. (This

must be Suzanne, though Perec stayed with her for only a part of each week. In Paris, he lived with Paulette in a rented apartment.) Simon had "attempted suicide," wrote Pontalis, but "was not dramatic about it, neither about the gesture nor the abandonment" (p. 200).

The description continues:

> He drank a lot. His sexual relationships "didn't work" as they should have done . . . . As a child he had been in psychotherapy, as a young man in analysis. But, like Little Hans, he had "forgotten everything." Both his parents died when he was still a small child: deported, disappeared. [p. 200]

Simon says of his inability to recall his childhood, "I cannot have any childhood memories because I was so small when I became an orphan" (p. 200). Pontalis remarks that, instead,

> . . . what survived in the sessions was an extraordinary machine to produce dreams (not to experience dreaming), to play with words (rather than letting them play), to register daily life (on condition that it remain petrified). He had built himself a closed system of enclosures and separations—a sort of mental concentration camp. [1976, pp. 200-201]

In the transference, Pontalis sees Simon as wanting him to be an "'automatic answering system' (an expert interpreter of his dreams, for instance)," and expecting that "I should be completely devoted to him" (p. 201). The purpose of this was to "keep hidden, intact in himself and untouched, the tie between his mother and the little battered child" (p. 201).

Simon begins to experience his psychic pain only after he develops toothaches (Perec had notoriously bad teeth). He cannot afford both the dental work and the analysis, so he chooses the analysis. In the following sessions, he has

> . . . a patient rediscovery, alternately pained and serene, of the mother . . . a mother idealized to begin with, through some photographs and relics that had been kept, then the object of anger and jealousy. This woman about whom I knew nothing, apart

> from her tragic death, became present and, in exactly the same movement, Simon took shape and life for me. [p. 201]

Both patient and analyst can feel the pain, and it is through the experience of this pain that Simon had long avoided that his own "psyche . . . could be born" (p. 202). It was Simon, Pontalis says, who "made me realize just what the experience of pain and the organized refusal to encounter it could signify" (p. 200).

In discussing the significant influence that Winnicott had on him in an interview (Clancier 1984), Pontalis provided a clinical example. He described an unnamed patient who produced a constant flow of dreams and ideas that gave an impression of free association. Pontalis said that he himself, in turn, never had a shortage of interpretations until he came to feel detached from what this patient brought in. He said he felt more in touch with what was not present, as if he were speaking over a phone line to someone so far away that he could hear only *ne coupez pas* ("hold on").

During one session, Pontalis's phone rang repeatedly and the patient, inconsistent with his usual "docile" character, recommended that he get an answering machine. Pontalis, under what he called the influence of Winnicott, replied, "No doubt this is what you'd like, that I become an answering machine, but that is certainly not what you need" (1976, p. 211). He felt he had been asked to become a machine, as the patient must have felt himself to be ("a dream machine, an association machine, a mentalizing machine," p. 211). He realized that the patient had never felt he had the right to have someone for himself alone, and had not felt he could ask, since he never believed he would get a response. For the first time, Pontalis felt a connection to the patient. The patient, he concluded, had been using a stream of words to replace his parents, whom he had lost as a child.

The theoretical ideas promoted by Pontalis in these discussions of Perec are not unique to this case. Nevertheless, the treatment of Perec stands out in Pontalis's work, both because of the number of references to this patient and because of the centrality of the issues. The idea of profound loss that is unrepresentable, leaving only a hole or absence, is key to the work of both Perec and Pontalis. That hole cannot be filled,

but its presence can be discerned by its surround, in the words and fantasies that provide distractions rather than substitutes (or, as Pontalis noted, as a "substitute and not a metaphor" [1975, p. 181]). This is the device around which Perec structures many of his books (like the missing *e* in *A Void* [1969a]).

Most of the references Pontalis makes to Perec occur in papers prior to 1983, when Green published "The Dead Mother." Green's concept refers to mothers who are lost emotionally, not physically, but some of what he says sounds quite similar:

> The category of "blankness". . . is the result of one of the components of primary repression: massive decathexis, both radical and temporary, which leaves traces in the unconscious in the form of "psychical holes." These will be filled in by recathexes, which are the expression of destructiveness. [Green 1983, p. 146][2]

There is a loss of meaning for these children that

> . . . *structures the early development of the fantasmatic and the intellectual capacities of the ego* . . . . [There is] the development of a frantic need for play which does not come about as in the freedom for playing, but under the *compulsion to imagine*, just as intellectual development is inscribed in a *compulsion to think*. [Green, p. 152, italics in original]

Of course, prior to Perec's actual loss of his mother, she had suffered the loss of her husband. Perhaps for those months before their final separation, Perec was being raised by a dead mother.

There is a certain correspondence of situations with Pontalis: he also lost a father, and his mother lost her husband. Though at nine years old, he was beyond the structuring reach of Green's syndrome, Pontalis makes clear in his later writings how profound that loss was for him. It is surely the loss of his father, perhaps along with the effects this had on his mother, that engendered the theme of unrepresentable loss for Pontalis in his theoretical work. Remarkably, with respect to Perec, Pontalis does

[2] Whether the holes are "filled in" or surrounded, as Pontalis states, in both cases it is a process to obscure the hole.

not refer to the father. He usually writes about the loss of the mother—or, rarely, the "parents." That Pontalis did not include the father in his discussions of Perec is telling in itself, suggestive of a countertransference blind spot.

Another area of possible countertransference concerns Perec's dreams. Despite his frequent reference to Perec as a prolific dream producer, Pontalis never presents a single dream. (Perruche [2008] has remarked on this as well.) Part of the point Pontalis makes about Perec's dreams is that they were irrelevant, or were merely used defensively in the analysis, and that the analysis should allow the patient to come to a living experience of his dreams, giving them a bodily (i.e., emotional) substance, rather than their remaining abstract and purely linguistic (a somewhat surprising idea coming from a former follower of Lacan and a self-avowed lover of language[3]). However, Perec's dreams may well have had a greater impact on Pontalis than he acknowledged, upsetting him—as we suspect the poorly disguised case reports upset Perec. While the analysis was still in progress, Perec published a collection of his dreams, *La Boutique Obscure* (1973). Perec makes no mention of his analyst in this book, but one wonders if its publication had an effect on Pontalis.

## PEREC'S EXPERIENCE OF ANALYSIS

In "The Scene of a Stratagem" (1977), Perec offers his own very different perspective on the analysis, without identifying the analyst. His treatment with Pontalis began in May 1971, when he was thirty-five, and continued until June 1975. In addition to his heartbreak over the loss of Suzanne and his possible writer's block, there were other concerns that may have led him to analysis. Although he was an established and respected author at the time, he was still unable to make a living from his writing. That sense of failure was reinforced by the belief that his future with women was hopeless. Because he has so little to say about his analyst, Perec's feelings must be teased out of a complex—and, at times, contradictory—text.

[3] Pontalis's relation to language is complex and serves as one of the leitmotifs of his autobiography. That book opens with his remark that language is the "starting point of my torments . . . [that is,] the love and hatred of language" (1986, p. 1).

He opens the essay with a description of his 15-month struggle to write about the analysis, one "in which I had the unspeakable sensation of being a machine for grinding out words without weight" (1977, p. 165). *Machine* is a descriptor Pontalis had used (1976; see the foregoing) and would use again (1986).

Perec compares this struggle to the struggle of being in analysis:

> There as here, it was almost reassuring to tell yourself that one day the words would come . . . that talking will find meaning . . . . But no . . . talking is talking only, merely talking, writing is only writing, tracing characters on a blank sheet of paper. [1977, p. 166]

Perec imagines his four years of analysis as existing in a single present moment, the hours of his sessions marking out a separate period of existence from the rest of his life. This world apart was defined for him by the rituals that repeated themselves each session, allowing him to recognize that "something was going to be said that perhaps would come from me, would be mine, would be for me" (p. 169). The rituals were "like the limits—polished, civilized, a little austere, a little cold, a shade stilted—within which there would explode the muffled, sealed-in violence of the analytical dialogue" (p. 169).

"Speaking wasn't hard in any case. I had a need to speak, and I had a whole arsenal of stories, problems, questions, associations, phantasms, plays on words, memories, hypotheses, explanations, theories, points of reference, hiding places" (1977, p. 170).[4] But Perec infers the analyst's tepid reaction to his verbal flourishes through the silences that follow.

Perec wrote:

> Everything meant something . . . . My voice met only its own emptiness . . . the threadbare Daddy/Mummy, prick/pussy routine; not my emotion, nor my fear, nor my desire, nor my body, but responses that were ready-made, an anonymous ironmongery, and all the exaltation of a ride on a scenic railway. [1977, p. 170]

[4] Although *La Boutique Obscure* (1973) has no page numbers in the French edition, it ends with an index that Perec titled with these same words: "Points of Reference" or "Hiding Places" (*Repères et Repaires*).

This harsh self-description is close to those by Pontalis (1975, 1976). The two seem to be in agreement, but where does this self-assessment originate, and does it matter? The language and meaning of one mirrors the other—what Lacan called an "immixing of subjects" (1966, p. 346).

Perec continues: "I was watching for an acknowledgement from the analyst which never came . . . . I was convinced he was hiding something from me . . . . From then on, everything became mistrust" (1977, p. 170). Was this the origin of the violence of the dialogue, or perhaps the emergence of a destructiveness that was already there to hide a dead mother?

Perec develops a fear of forgetting, "as if, unless I noted everything down, I wasn't going to be able to retain anything of the life that was escaping from me" (p. 171). He starts a journal to address that fear, but he writes only "'objective' things" (p. 171)—i.e., his activities, the kind of dry reportage he had already been doing for a couple of years with his dreams. When he writes of those dreams, we again hear echoes of Pontalis:

> I'd very soon become so practiced at it that my dreams came to me already written out, their titles included . . . . I have finally come to admit that these dreams weren't lived in order to be dreamt, but dreamt in order to become texts, that they weren't the royal road I thought they would be, but tortuous paths that led me ever further away from self-recognition. [1977, pp. 171-172]

Did Perec "finally come to admit" this because of interpretations by Pontalis, or only after reading accounts by Pontalis? Pontalis indicated that Perec found his way there on his own, and brought it to his attention when he wrote that this idea was "dictated" by his patient (mentioned earlier; 1975, p. 178).

As far as the content of the sessions is concerned, Perec recorded in his journal only terse, "generally pessimistic—adjective[s]: 'sad,' 'drab,' 'long-winded,' 'not much fun,' 'a pain in the arse,' 'crap,' 'pretty dim,' 'pretty shitty,' 'depressing,' 'laughable,' 'anodyne,' 'nostalgisome' [sic], 'feeble and forgettable,' etc." (p. 172). The very limited depiction of the analyst is primarily of his silence—along with what is Perec's presumably

sarcastic engagement with the molding around the ceiling, as if he had more of a relationship with it than with the analyst. He can remember little more of the analysis, apart from what he considers made it a success:

> The carapace of writing behind which I had concealed my desire to write had to crumble, the great wall of ready-made memories to erode, the rationalizations I had taken refuge in to fall into dust. I had to retrace my steps, to remake the journey I had already made, all of whose threads I had broken. [1977, p. 172]

He will not reveal what he discovered but says:

> It was given to me one day, violently, to my surprise and amazement, like a memory restored to its space, like a gesture, like a warmth I had rediscovered. On that day, the analyst heard what I had to say to him, what for four years he had listened to without hearing, for the simple reason that I wasn't telling it to him, because I wasn't telling it to myself. [pp. 172-173]

With the end of analysis coinciding with the publication of *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975a), Perec inscribed a copy of the book for Pontalis. He wrote, "For J.-B. Pontalis, beyond the here and now, these traces which he helped me to recover, with my friendship" (Bellos 1995, p. 561). And in the month before his termination, he wrote in his diary: "J.-B. P's 'gratitude' for my dedication. The paradox of *W*, a book not written for other people" (Bellos, p. 562). And then, after his final session: "Simple and obvious end of the analysis. Except that I make a mistake of 100 francs paying" (p. 562).

This seems an odd way to phrase it. Though I am inclined to assume that he accidentally paid too much, it could just as well have been too little. Rather than applying a positive or negative coda to the analysis, this conveys ambivalence more than anything else. And why would Pontalis's gratitude lead him to think that the book was not written for others?

"The Scene of a Stratagem" (Perec 1977) presents a patient who is pleased with the outcome of his analysis, but ambivalent about the way he got there. These journal entries are consistent with Perec's other writings in which a circumspect hostility toward his analyst predominates. While competing and contradictory feelings about one's analyst are

probably more the rule than the exception, the broader story of their relationship, that is to say, the ways in which it reached beyond the consulting room, raises questions about how much of a role that played.

It is not known to what extent Perec was aware of Pontalis's writings about him. Perec's bookcases contained a number of psychoanalytic books, some by Pontalis, and one of those included discussions of him.[5] Like many French intellectuals at the time, Perec read psychoanalytic journals, including *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, where many of those clinical reports were first published. Perec is disguised by name only in these reports; anyone who knew him reasonably well would have been able to identify him, and these indiscretions could well have driven much of the anger that seems to motivate Perec's literary allusions to his analyst.

## PEREC: OTHER WORK

In order to grasp Perec's influence on Pontalis's nonanalytic writing, it helps to know a bit more about Perec's writing. This will also provide a sense of how Perec conveys his antagonism toward Pontalis.

Like *A Void* (1969a), in which the letter *e* is absent, Perec's other writing tends to work off a missing element. In his autobiographical novel *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975a), the chapters alternate between the W fantasy and a memoir of whatever he can call up from childhood—from birth until his return to Paris with his aunt, uncle, and cousin. The W fantasy concerns a mysterious island in Tierra del Fuego, inhabited by a society devoted to athletic competition. Gaspard Winkler is enlisted to search for a missing child, presumably shipwrecked on that island, who possesses the same name. As the fantasy unfolds, we learn that this society is ruthlessly cruel and filled with horror. In the chapters with which the fantasy alternates, we read about Perec's parents and how they were lost, his own departure for Lans, and the life he had there. His parents remain the missing element.

Also missing from those autobiographical chapters is the horror of the German death camps for which the W fantasy serves as a metaphor,

[5] The book was *Entre les rêves et la douleur* (Pontalis 1977). See: www.association-georgesperec.fr.

while the shipwrecked child and searching adult stand in for Perec himself. And along with the alternation of genres, there is another division in the book. About midway through, the reader comes upon a page that is blank except for an ellipsis enclosed within parentheses. It falls after the child's final parting with his mother in the autobiographical chapters and, in the fantasy chapters, after all traces of both Winklers are lost and we learn only of life on the island. This "(. . .)" seems to stand for all that cannot be said.

As in English, where the letter *w* is a pun (i.e., *double you*), in French, the letter *w* has a pronunciation that is quite similar to that of the words *double life* (phonetically, *doobla vay* and *doobla vee*). The double life depicted in the narrative is that of the two Winklers, but there is another double life: the implied one of Perec himself in the rotation between his fantasy and his real life, as well as between his life before the loss of his parents and his life after that. The divisions of the book evoke the divisions in the author.

*Life A User's Manual* (1978a) uses missing elements as well, but in very different ways. This book consists of ninety-nine chapters, each addressing the contents and inhabitants of one of the rooms in an apartment house. At ten stories in height and ten rooms in width, there should be one hundred chapters. Why is one missing?

Although the book comprises a vast collection of tales about the building's occupants, it is organized around two particular characters, Percival Bartlebooth (an amalgam of Melville's Bartleby and Larbaud's Barnabooth) and (again) Gaspard Winkler. Bartlebooth is a wealthy Englishman who decides to set himself a lifelong task that seems to be founded on the ideas of futility and disappearance. He hires Winkler to assist him in an elaborate project that will occupy fifty years and, in the end, will leave no trace of its existence.

This project is that Bartlebooth will spend ten years learning how to paint watercolors, and then twenty more years traveling around the world painting pictures of 500 different ports. Those paintings will be mailed to Winkler, who will turn them into jigsaw puzzles. When Bartlebooth returns after his twenty years of travel, there will be 500 puzzles waiting for him to assemble, which he will try to do over the next twenty years, in the order that they were painted. With the completion of each

puzzle, the unity of the original watercolor will be restored, and he will then have it sent back to its port of origin, where it will be bleached clean, returning the paper to its original blank condition. It is a life that is meant to add up to nothing, leaving nothing behind and concretizing a cold view of the pointlessness of existence.

In an early chapter, we learn that Winkler is plotting against Bartlebooth, but no mention is made of this again. As Bartlebooth is nearing completion of his project, about to insert the final piece into the 439th puzzle of the 500 he has set out to do, he has a heart attack and dies. In his hand is a *w*-shaped puzzle piece, but the final gap in the puzzle has the shape of an *x*. This must be Winkler's plot! But why would Winkler want to plot against him?

There are hints within the book suggesting various possibilities, and among them are indications that Winkler and Bartlebooth represent Perec and Pontalis. Winkler's revenge is Perec's as well. But nothing is ever so simple in Perec, and at times it seems that it is Bartlebooth more than Winkler who represents him. We might say that *Life A User's Manual* (1978a) is like analysis in that it concerns an immixing of subjects. Winkler and Bartlebooth are caught up in an interactive system of doing and done to, each the beneficiary of, the victim of, and the aggressor toward the other.

For Perec and Pontalis, a similar dynamic may be perceived: Perec, who acknowledges the benefit he received from Pontalis, is also his victim through the latter's lack of "discretion." Pontalis, who also clearly benefited in both his analytic and nonanalytic writing from his work with Perec, was Perec's victim as well—through the "violence" of the transference, and through whatever fictional revenge Perec could mete out in his writing.

## PONTALIS: NONANALYTIC WRITING

What, then, is the style of writing of Pontalis's nonanalytic work? As Perec did in *W*, Pontalis combines genres. As in Perec's work, we always sense the author's presence in the narrator. Like Perec (as well as Roland Barthes, for example), Pontalis structures his books into short, fragmentary chapters, one chapter not necessarily having much to do with the one it follows.

Pontalis's nonanalytic writing includes an autobiography and a number of other quasi-autobiographical works. He felt all his writing should be considered of a piece, and, certainly, there is a literary quality to his analytic writings and an analytic quality to his literary writings. Among his analytic predecessors, it was Winnicott whom he came to admire most, and this must have been due in part to a writing style that had similarities to his own analytic writing: it was imprecise, evocative, lyrical, and personal. For his nonanalytic writings, there was a different influence, and that was his former patient Georges Perec.

Perec published a short book called *I Remember* (1978b) in which he listed 479 memories that came to his mind randomly but were not so particular that others could not share the same memories. Each memory begins *je me souviens* . . . ("I remember . . ."). It is a work that is both personal, because these memories are what came to *his* mind, but also impersonal, because they are memories in the public sphere, so to speak. This sets up an intimacy between the writer and the reader (a quality possessed by much of Perec's writing), along with a certain ambivalence toward memory and nostalgia. The book was a success, and to this day remains popular in France, so much so that the everyday phrase *je me souviens* is commonly associated with Perec.

In 2012, we find Pontalis using a remarkably similar trope. His book is called *Avant* (*Before*), and it consists of a list of memories that begin, *C'était mieux avant* . . . ("It was better before . . ."). The book plays on the same edge of the personal and impersonal that Perec's does, also always risking a cloying nostalgia, yet somehow being saved from that by the cool reflections on lost time and absence. The similarity to Perec's book is so obvious as to make it unimaginable that Pontalis was unaware of it. Rather than our viewing this as some kind of unconscious emulation, it makes more sense to regard it as a conscious—even if unacknowledged—homage to his former patient. Coming so late in his life (one year before his death), it suggests an enduring bond that Pontalis felt with Perec.

*Love of Beginnings* (1986) is Pontalis's most autobiographical work, but *Brother of the Above* (2006)—almost as personal—is about his complex feelings toward his older brother. In *Windows* (2000), he writes about the private languages that develop between analytic partners and

the close relation between literature and psychoanalysis. None of these books adheres to any straightforward elaboration of its theme, but each instead comprises a set of wide-ranging associations with which Pontalis paints a rather abstract portrait of his subject.

The reader senses Perec's influence from the very beginning of *Love of Beginnings* (1986). In the preface to the English edition, Pontalis writes about his childhood summer vacations from school, "when the time-table with its precise and constraining schedule (but perhaps we like this constraint all the more when we fear the void, the *vacancy* of intervals, of dead times) stops regulating our days" (p. xi).

Constraint was the modality under which Perec wrote as a member of Oulipo, and was something he was frequently called upon to discuss in interviews. Of course, *constraint* is not such an uncommon word, but when we find it used in the same breath with what could have been taken from one of his clinical discussions of Perec, something more seems to be going on. Constraint, he writes, is something that he, Pontalis, used to defend against the void. It is a void we recognize as more than just that of vacation, but of his father as well. It is also a void we know from his reports of Perec's analysis—that of the loss of his parents. It is difficult to know how conscious Pontalis was of this connection to Perec, but a powerful kinship is evoked here.

A little further on, discussing how he wrote this book, Pontalis says:

> At no time in its writing did I wonder whether I was speaking as a psychoanalyst or not; I obeyed only one imperative, which, moreover, wasn't formulated—that of allowing my voice to be heard, and, if I may put it like this, heard by my own ears: *my* voice, as if I feared, after so many years spent listening to the voices of others, that I might lose my own! [1986, p. xiii, italics in original]

Compare this to the closing sentence of Perec's (1977) account of his analysis, quoted earlier:

> On that day, the analyst heard what I had to say to him, what for four years he had listened to without hearing, for the simple reason that I wasn't telling it to him, because I wasn't telling it to myself. [p. 173]

It is as if Pontalis has tried to incorporate what Perec observed. Connections like these between Pontalis and Perec convey shared attitudes, outlooks, and sensibilities. Pontalis seems to have taken in what Perec wrote and made it his own.

Later in the same paragraph, Pontalis adds, "I believe we are, fortunately, never done with appropriating others, never done with becoming *one's self's other*, but, at least as far as I'm concerned, the voices are always linked to a place" (1986, p. xiv). In this way, in addition to acknowledging his (unnamed) appropriations, he brings in the additional idea of *place* as a marker of identity and meaning. Here, too, there is a resonance with Perec.

In a psychoanalytic piece, Pontalis states that, for his patient Simon (i.e., Perec), "Places were strongly cathected, places, and not people" (1976, p. 200). And in writing of his patient Pierre G. (whose initials reverse Perec's) in his autobiography, he says that this patient "got me to see what the passion for places can mean" (1986, p. 143). He notes that Pierre claimed to lack memories of his childhood, despite the remarkable memory he showed for other things: "He wanted me to accept the fact but, for my part, I had the feeling that, while making it possible for him to survive, it prevented him from living, without knowing exactly what I meant by that" (p. 143).

Pierre would use his memory to try to "capture" places, "grab them like a photographer on the look-out." In order to describe this, Pontalis provides a list of items, much as Perec often did, in his own emulation of Jules Verne. He notes that Pierre

> . . . would describe to me the streets where he had lived, the rooms he had stayed in, the patterns on the wallpaper, he would specify the dimensions of the bed, of the window, the position of each piece of furniture, the shape of the door-handle, and from that punctilious inventory . . . there would be born in me a poignant feeling of absence. Pierre's rooms: the more I saw them fill with objects, the more empty they seemed to me . . . . There were only relics, there was no one there. And in me, bizarrely, a hole, hollowing itself out, deepened. Never had I felt so appallingly abandoned [though we know he must have felt it even more appallingly as a child]. [1986, p. 144]

Pontalis then presents Pierre's unmistakable history: his

> . . . mother had disappeared in a gas chamber. Beneath all those empty rooms which he was never done with filling, there was that room. Beneath all those names, that which has no name. Beneath all those relics, a lost mother who had left not the slightest trace. One day, when was it then?, Pierre and I managed to find words that were not remains, words that, by a miracle, reached their unknown addressee. [p. 144]

Here again, Pontalis echoes Perec's closing words in his account of the analysis (1977, pp. 172-173).

*Place-ness* was a particular interest of Perec's, and if this interest began, as Pontalis asserts, as a way to hide what had no place, it becomes something much more over time. *Life A User's Manual* (1978a) is about the various characters who inhabit the same place, i.e., a particular apartment building. The building itself becomes character-like as the narrator moves from room to room and person to person within it, as if exploring different aspects of a single person. The systematic exploration of this living space comes to resemble the exploration of a life, with its teeming network of internal complexity.

Place is also the subject of two other works: "Species of Spaces" (1974) and *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975b). These are investigations into what Perec called the *infraordinary,* or the wonders of the everyday.

In the same passage about his patient Pierre G. that I mentioned earlier, Pontalis makes this curious comment that he places in parentheses: "(I shan't mention his name, less out of discretion than because the bond that for a time linked us remained secret and could only be forged, intense yet tenuous, in that shared secrecy)" (1986, p. 143). Why shouldn't discretion—otherwise known as confidentiality—suffice as a cause for withholding the patient's real name?

By the time Pontalis published this book in 1986, Perec had been dead four years, and the bond he mentions was no longer there to preserve. Instead, it is professional ethics that should restrain Pontalis. His use of the past tense of *remain* suggests an awareness that their bond is no longer a secret, but what follows provides little in the way of explana-

tion. Yes, the bond required secrecy to be forged, but what has that got to do with the present, when he is writing the book?

Pontalis seems to be saying that their personal relationship is even more important than professional ethics, but the wide recognition of Pierre G.'s true identity through Pontalis's inadequate masking makes us wonder about both the relationship and the ethics. There is also a vague suggestion that their bond may have been broken for reasons other than the termination of the analysis. Claude Burgelin (1998), a friend and biographer of Perec, believes it had to do with Perec's anger at the loss of his confidentiality.

In *Love of Beginnings* (1986), Pontalis discusses his elective mutism at age nine, in reaction to the death of his father:

> I was rescuing a father from oblivion, I was rescuing a son from abandonment. Only a closed mouth can preserve the treasure in the hermetic depths of a body-soul . . . . The living exchange which I pursued with him couldn't be achieved through words: rather through dreams. [p. 24]

In his analytic writing, Pontalis theorized the dream in carnal terms, as a means to rejoin the mother's body, but here the dream is what gives him access to his father. His interpretations to Perec—that he used his dreams to preserve his lost parents—presumably came from personal experience. Later, he wonders "if my childhood was marked by death more than other people's" (1986, p. 69), yet it clearly does feel that way to him: "Not a year without a funeral service" (p. 69). "Hence, I came to have the idea that there was no other real relationship with death than an intimate, constant, silent one" (p. 70). He adds:

> I wasn't far from transposing life and death . . . . There was something infinitely less fragile than life: the bond with the person I had lost and, later, the bond with absence, with what doesn't directly occupy the field of vision. Suddenly, all human beings appeared as survivors. [1986, p. 71]

That bond with absence is also something he identifies in Perec, where he sees it as having similar effects. They are both survivors.

*Brother of the Above* (2006) begins as a book about Pontalis's older brother, but quickly becomes a book about brothers in general. It was

written after his brother's death in 1999, and is a working through of sorts of that loss, but also a displaced working through of the loss of his father.[6] In the first chapter, Pontalis talks about earlier generations of brothers in his family and his wish to differentiate himself from them, and then he gets to his father:

> I longed above all to be my father's son, but at no price to be descended from his family. It was probably in order to keep the image—no, not the image, but the very presence—of this beloved and loving father, who died young, alive in me and me alone, that I was obliged to flee all the family members who had committed the unpardonable sin of not being him. [p. 7]

Perec had no siblings and he lost both parents, not just one, but the struggles of both Perec and Pontalis are presented as alike—i.e., each man strives to preserve the lost object for himself alone.

Pontalis writes that, when he has been deeply immersed in his writing,

> . . . when I've taken part for too long in the endless production, the great consumption of words and my voice comes from my head, when I've lost all contact with what there is *before*, I think of myself as a daytime insomniac. [1986, p. 52, italics in original]

*Daytime insomniac* is the same characterization he made of Perec (Pontalis 1975, p. 179). In Perec's case, it appeared to indicate a person whose words had lost their connection to the unconscious—a person who had no dreamlike elements in waking life, or at least who could make no use of night dreams in waking life. When Pontalis refers to himself in the same way, it is less clear what he means. His voice coming from his head suggests that it is not coming from his heart or his body, and so perhaps he means the same thing. Losing connection to "what there is before" leaves the reader wondering whether he means *before words, before that moment,* or perhaps *before wakefulness.* In all likelihood, Pontalis is assuming some awareness of his analytic writing in which he

[6] Pontalis alludes to this when he wonders if his rivalry with his brother came from "that oedipal conflict . . . a displacement of the figure of the father onto that of the brother?" (2006, p. 19).

argues for the importance of what exists beyond words, of what can be accessed only through the body and through affect—the very same notion he interpreted to Perec.

*Windows* (Pontalis 2000) offers some explanation: "How I suffer with insomniacs, both the nighttime and daytime kinds. Daytime insomniacs do exist. They are entirely focused on their agendas, incapable of dreaming and panicked by what they cannot control" (p. 13). Later in the same book, he goes further when discussing memory: "Forgetting is necessary to give thickness to time . . . . A living memory demands forgetting . . . . Hypermnesia, insomnia: they are sisters" (p. 69). This conveys yet another area of identification that Pontalis had with Perec, seeing himself as possessing a similar defensive strategy—clinging to information and memory through obsessive inclinations as a way to forget what he preferred not to know.

## CONCLUSION

I have been emphasizing certain similarities between Perec and Pontalis, but it is important to recognize that there are also significant differences. Pontalis was a writer who said what he meant. Though at times one senses a certain irony in his work, and he can be quite digressive, the reader generally knows where this author stands on whatever topic he is discussing. There is an earnest, romantic quality to his nonanalytic writing that provides direct and ongoing access to his emotional outlook and his internal world.

Perec is at virtually the opposite end of the spectrum. The reader gains access to his affects only through elaborate, circuitous paths, since there is no direct access to his inner world. Reading Perec is absorbing, but it is also like entering a maze: one often feels lost in a confusing landscape. Only with effort does one arrive at the center: a center that is nameless. That central question mark can only be suggestive of emotions that are beyond words. Pontalis says what he means, while Perec evokes it through form and process. Pontalis is serious and candid; Perec is playful and elusive.

What are we to make of the echoes of Perec found in Pontalis? On the one hand, what I am claiming is absurd: that his work with this pa-

tient altered him in ways that made him more like his patient through the rest of his life. His writings suggest that he learned much from this patient, adopted some of his approaches to writing, and wrote about many of the same concerns as if they were his own.

On the other hand, this should not come as a surprise to us. We know psychoanalysis is intense and deeply affecting, and we know it requires a deep immersion on the part of both participants. An analyst who cannot empathize with, identify with, or be pulled into the world of his/her analysand is one who is not reaching that analysand. That such intimate work can have lasting effects is to be expected. Psychoanalytic treatment is asymmetrical: the analyst sets the frame; the analysand opens up him-/herself. But analysis also has symmetrical aspects, and the ways in which there is symmetry are more difficult to define. We may acknowledge the presence of certain symmetries, but the details of those symmetries remain obscure. I have tried to present one of these: identificatory processes in the analyst that extend beyond the treatment.

I would not say that psychoanalysis does this in every case. For Pontalis and Perec, there were a number of conditions that contributed to such an occurrence: both lost a parent during childhood; both incorporated the meanings and effects of that loss into their work as adults; both were interested in writing and psychoanalysis and respected the work the other was doing; both were immersed in the contemporary intellectual milieu of Paris; and both lived through the traumatic experience of World War II in France. They had much in common.

Perhaps it is because of those commonalities that this analytic relationship had such a reflective quality. By this I mean that it was not just Pontalis who was analyzing Perec, but Perec was also, in a sense, analyzing Pontalis. As Perec responded to the interventions made by Pontalis, his responses, however unintentional, served as interpretations of Pontalis's interpretations.

From another perspective, we could say that in analyzing Perec, Pontalis was also analyzing himself. Pontalis not only tried to understand Perec's responses; he also could not help but internalize them, allowing them to interact with his own inner world, with his own personal history. Through his processing of this immixture, he produced, among other things, interpretations for Perec and identifications for himself.

Whatever love this may have engendered between Perec and Pontalis, it is clear that their feelings were complex, and this is most apparent in the compromised manner with which Pontalis disguised Perec's identity. He seemed to want the world to know whom he was treating at the same time that he exposed and betrayed him. By identifying with and emulating his patient in ways that were probably conscious and unconscious, Pontalis was doing what we all do as we grow. In the experience that is analysis, it makes sense that this will happen to both parties. Pontalis openly acknowledged his indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Lacan, and Winnicott. He did not, and could not, do so with Perec in any explicit way, but he did let his readers know in more subtle ways. This was his way to acknowledge his debt to this patient, a debt we can all appreciate from the work we do with our own patients.

*Acknowledgments:* The author thanks Christine Anzieu-Premmereur and Joan Retallak.

REFERENCES

Bellos, D. (1995). *Georges Perec: A Life in Words.* London: Harvill Press.

Bezoari, A. & Ferro, A. (1991). A journey through the bipersonal field of analysis: from role playing to transformation in the couple. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi,* 37:4-46.

Bolaño, R. (2007). *Last Evenings on Earth,* trans. C. Andrews. New York: New Directions.

Burgelin, C. (1998). *Les Parties de Dominos chez Monsieur Lefèvre: Perec avec Freud, Perec contre Freud.* Paris: Circé.

Clancier, A. (1984). Paradoxes de l'effet Winnicott. In *Perdre de vue,* ed. J.-B. Pontalis. Paris: Gallimard, 1988.

Coen, S. J. (2000). The wish to regress in patient and analyst. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 48:785-810.

Coppel-Basch, M. (1999). Georges Perec, romancier de la psychanalyse. *Temps Modernes,* 604:190-203.

Green, A. (1983). The dead mother. In *On Private Madness.* Madison, CT: Int. Univ. Press, 1986, pp. 142-175.

Jacobs, T. J. (2008). On courage. *Psychoanal. Psychol.,* 25:550-555.

Lacan, J. (1966). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English,* trans. B. Fink. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.

Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J.-B. (1967). *The Language of Psychoanalysis,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: W. W. Norton, 1973.

McLaughlin, J. T. (1993). Work with patients: the impetus for self-analysis. *Psychoanal. Inquiry,* 13:365-389.

Perec, G. (1965). *Things: A Story of the Sixties; A Man Asleep,* trans. D. Bellos & A. Leak. Boston, MA: Godine, 1990.

——— (1969a). *A Void,* trans. G. Adair. Jaffrey, NH: Godine, 2005.

——— (1969b). Le grand palindrome. http://homepage.urbanet.ch/cruci.com/lexique/palindrome.htm.

——— (1973). *La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams,* trans. D. L. Becker. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2012.

——— (1974). Species of spaces. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* ed. & trans. J. Sturrock. New York: Penguin, 2008, pp. 1-4.

——— (1975a). *W, or The Memory of Childhood,* trans. D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 2010.

——— (1975b). *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris,* trans. M. Lowenthal. Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2010.

——— (1977). The scene of a stratagem. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* ed. & trans. J. Sturrock. New York: Penguin, 2008, pp. 165-173.

——— (1978a). *Life A User's Manual,* trans. D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 1987.

——— (1978b). *I Remember,* trans. P. Terry & D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 2014.

Perruche, M. (2008). *J.-B. Pontalis: Une Oeuvre, Trois Rencontres: Sartre, Lacan, Perec.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

Pontalis, J.-B. (1972). Penetrating the dream. In *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain,* trans. C. Cullen & P. Cullen. London: Hogarth, 1981, pp. 23-38.

——— (1974). Boundaries or confines? In *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain,* trans. C. Cullen & P. Cullen. London: Hogarth, 1981, pp. 155-166.

——— (1975). From countertransference: the quick and the dead interlaced. In *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain,* trans. C. Cullen & P. Cullen. London: Hogarth, 1981, pp. 170-184.

——— (1976). On psychic pain. In *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain,* trans. C. Cullen & P. Cullen. London: Hogarth, 1981, pp. 194-206.

——— (1977). *Entre les rêves et la douleur.* Paris: Gallimard.

——— (1986). *Love of Beginnings,* trans. M.-C. Requis & J. Greene. London: Free Association Books, 1993.

——— (2000). *Windows,* trans. A. Quinney. Lincoln, NB: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2003.

——— (2006). *Brother of the Above,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Unconscious in Translation/Int. Psychoanal. Books, 2012.

——— (2012). *Avant.* Paris: Gallimard.

Racker, H. (1957). The meanings and uses of countertransference. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 26:306-357.

Schwartz, H. P. (2016). The oneiric autobiography of Georges Perec. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 85:155-178.

---

*41 Union Square West, Room 402*
*New York, NY 10003*

*e-mail: hps3@verizon.net*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# THE ONEIRIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GEORGES PEREC

BY HENRY P. SCHWARTZ

*Georges Perec's book* La Boutique Obscure *(1973; translated into English in 2012) serves as the basis for this paper. The book is a collection of dreams that its author dreamed from May 1968 to August 1972. The present author treats these dreams as chapters in a bizarre autobiography, elaborating Perec's life through a discussion of those dreams and using them as a starting point with which to discuss his views of dream interpretation and the role of dreams in psychoanalysis.*

**Keywords:** G. Perec, dreams/dreaming, *La Boutique Obscure,* Oulipo, J.-B. Pontalis.

## INTRODUCTION

As an analyst, one cannot help but look for meaning in the dreams described in *La Boutique Obscure* (1973), and that has meant my learning more about its author, Georges Perec. As I came to understand more about him, meaning emerged from those dreams and the idea occurred to me to sketch the autobiography I saw in them. Like all applied analysis, this is a personal construction based on my understanding of this author. That, along with my own musings about dream interpretation, serves as the basis for this paper. Taken together, this paper and "On the Analyst's Identification with the Patient: The Case of J.-B. Pontalis and G. Perec" (Schwartz 2016) constitute an example of how analysts work—moving between the individual, the dyad, and the social surround in an endless search for understanding.

---

Henry P. Schwartz is on the faculty of the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, New York.

## DREAMING, ANALYZING, WRITING

Dream interpretation is a tendentious affair. Without a preestablished system for how to approach a dream, the analyst is lost. This means we interpret from a position of bias. The bias extends beyond whatever model of dream interpretation one may subscribe to, given that analysts are inclined to think in terms of transference and recent issues in the analysis. Who is to say there is any truth or accuracy to this? We do it because it has practical value for the analysis; it leads to useful discussions.

Dreams, where the rules of logic and sense are suspended, offer an open field, a playground for the dreamer's creativity. When the patient reports a dream to the analyst, reality intrudes and access to that playground may appear unreachable. Yet our theories maintain that dreams have a logic and sense of their own, and that the playground for one person can become a playground for two as the analytic couple works together in the construction of understanding.

Our work when discussing dreams is to impose limits and establish sense. The dream makes sense in its nonsensical way, and in analysis, the sense we collaboratively construct tends to link the patient's world to the analyst's. Perec's *La Boutique Obscure*, originally published in 1973 but translated into English only in 2012, invites tendentious readings. The book is a collection of 124 dreams dreamt from May 1968 to August 1972. Perec died in 1982 and so is not available to discuss his life or associate to his dreams; hence we must rely on what is known about him from other sources.

Interpretation without direct interaction with the patient and an inability to explore resistances is wild analysis (Freud 1910), but it is a situation the analyst interested in applied analysis is inevitably stuck with. By publishing these dreams, Perec encourages the reader to follow such an approach and to impose his/her biases on any interpretation. To some extent, this means projecting our transferences onto Perec, but Perec had his own transferences, too. He entered into an analysis with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis during the course of these dreams,[1] and so we can also

[1] The analysis lasted from May 1971 to June 1975.

speculate on how his transference to Pontalis is manifested. *La Boutique Obscure* is a bizarre text—reality based (the dreams are real, after all) but ruled by primary process. The reader must rewrite the text in order to find a way in, but is then left without any authorial response to provide confidence in that new reading.

Even in the best of circumstances, dream interpretation is provisional. The patient recounts a dream, the analyst attends to particular elements, and a meaning is developed based on their best efforts at sorting it out. On occasion there is a sense of conviction that yes, this is what it must mean. Yet on another day, one suspects the couple could well have come up with a different meaning for the same dream since so much depends on the nature of that relationship at the moment. Dream interpretation is a dream about a dream that starts in the mind of one and is then shared as a single dream possessed by two. The interpretation becomes part of that joint dream while also stepping beyond it, commenting on the joint dream: a dream about a dream about a dream?

And so, in thinking about Perec's *La Boutique Obscure,* we must forgive our own wild analyses. Ultimately, one's enjoyment of the book depends on a willingness to indulge that impulse and not fret about its correctness. Like so much of Perec's work, it offers us an author in hiding, obscure.

Two years after ending his analysis with Pontalis, Perec wrote about that experience in an essay titled "Les Lieux d'une Ruse," translated as "The Scene of a Stratagem" (1977). That essay ends as follows:

> All I can say of the actual process that allowed me to escape from these repetitive and burdensome acrobatics and gave me access to my own story and to my own voice is that it was infinitely slow . . . . It took the time that it took for my story to come together: a story that offered itself to me one day, surprised, bewildered, forceful, like a memory restored to its own space, like a gesture or a tenderness resurrected. On that day the analyst heard what I had to say to him, what for four years he had listened to without hearing, for the simple reason that I wasn't telling it to him, because I wasn't telling it to myself. [pp. 172-173]

Without revealing any content, the description indicates that Perec had something of a revelation in an analysis that served him well.[2] The passage presents three components affecting analytic understanding: what the patient says, what the analyst hears, and how the patient processes it. With the reader in the role of analyst, *La Boutique Obscure* (1973) keeps us planted in the first two of these factors while depriving us of the last.

Before discussing some of the dreams and the autobiography that lies hidden within them, some qualifications concerning this essay should be mentioned.

1. Since the original text was in French, and Perec's descriptions of his dreams are usually considerably longer than what I will present, any discussion of the operation of wordplay, allusion, and the significance of apparent irrelevancies will be limited. Dreams translated from another language necessarily magnify the conundrums of that other translation from primary to secondary process.

2. The length of the dreams makes the inclusion of the entire text for all but a very few of them impractical. I include the full text when the dream is short. Otherwise, as any analyst does, I present the elements of each dream that strike me as useful. A similar approach is necessary in the dream selection. There are 124 dreams in this book; I discuss a fraction of them, and my particular selection is based on my interest in revealing Perec's story.

3. A written dream takes the reader a step away from a spoken dream, which is a step away from the dream as experienced. Should we call this tertiary revision? We have no choice but to find a way to deal with it, and that means accepting each account as the dream itself while maintaining the healthy skepticism of the analyst—i.e., Ricoeur's (1977) *hermeneutics of suspicion*. At the same time, these dreams as written seem unfiltered, as if the secondary revision is barely there.

[2] Less explicit is the contentious atmosphere of the analysis that his friend, Claude Burgelin, elaborates on in his book *Les Parties de Dominos chez Monsieur Lefèvre: Perec avec Freud, Perec contre Freud* (1998). Of interest, *Lefèvre* was a part of his analyst's full name: Jean-Bertrand Lefèvre-Pontalis.

There are two main themes that assert themselves throughout the text of *La Boutique Obscure*, both concerned with loss. Without knowing much of Perec's background, it would be difficult to discern these themes, but having even a limited awareness of it opens a door to a very personal autobiography—one unlike others because, rather than presenting a history, its aim is to present the author's unconscious. This makes it both more revealing and less revealing at the same time.

In an interview six years after the book's publication, Perec said:

> *La Boutique Obscure* is an autobiographical text in a very precise sense: it tells the story of a separation. These dreams tell that story in a completely buried manner . . . . That was part of the book's design; it arose as a refusal of psychoanalysis—that is to say, I did not take my dreams to my analyst but stole them so as to put them in a book. There was an aggressive relationship that comes across in *La Boutique Obscure*. [Perec quoted in Bellos 1995, p. 505]

Although this comment refers to only one "separation," we shall see that there is a second one that the author is unable to keep out. Pontalis, for his part, clearly agreed that the dreams expressed a "refusal of psychoanalysis." Referring to his patient Stéphane, one of the widely acknowledged pseudonyms he used for Perec, he says, "I was not confronted with a psychic reality, with the force and weight that presumes, but with a pseudo-psychic reality, with a 'I think, I produce,' with a 'I am not, therefore I think'" (Pontalis 1975a, p. 82, my translation; see also Pontalis 1975b). He refers to Stéphane's manner of dream analysis as being like the inverse of conversion, dissociating drive contents into a process of "endless linking" and calling him a "daytime insomniac" (1975a, p. 82).

In all the writing Pontalis did about Perec (on at least eight occasions), he never discussed a single dream. Despite these votes of no confidence by both patient and analyst, Perec decided to publish them, and he asserted that they tell a story. That is the story most readers of *La Boutique Obscure* will seek to unveil.

From 1967 onward, Perec belonged to the literary group *Oulipo*. Oulipo, which still exists, was started by Raymond Queneau and some

colleagues in 1960. Its object was to develop new forms of writing. They called the strange forms of writing they were interested in *potential literature,* as announced in their name, *Ou(vroir) (de) Li(ttérature) Po(tentielle)*, or *Workshop of Potential Literature.* By *potential,* they meant creating systems of writing that could be expanded beyond a given work (Roubaud 2004). David Bellos, Perec's biographer, calls Oulipo a "research team that aimed to fashion new tools for writing and to refurbish old and forgotten ones" (1995, p. 349).

Perec created one of the most notorious examples with his book *A Void* (1969). It was written as a lipogram, which is to say that one letter is entirely missing. In the whole book, no word with the letter *e* is ever used. Such an enterprise may be dismissed as mere cleverness, and these texts can feel cold and mechanical. However, the missing letter in *A Void* represents far more than just an exercise, coming to stand for a much greater void, one that is easily neglected, just as the absent *e* was missed by one of the book's reviewers. *A Void* conveys a fundamental absence that reigns in both story and author.

Furthermore, while the book suffers from that absence, at the same time it is a story *about* that very absence—the absence "generates" the story (Roubaud 2004, p. 102). Rosenblum (2009) considers this novel a manifestation of "disappearance trauma" (p. 1321), by which she means the condition of those who had no direct trauma but rather were orphaned by the Shoah, and were thus "condemned to the lingering absence of parents or siblings" (p. 1321).

Oulipian writing is based on *constraints*, and the most obvious constraint Perec imposed on *La Boutique Obscure* (1973) was that the text had to derive from the sleeping state. Perec's constraints have a paradoxical effect: rather than limiting him, they set him free. In forcing himself to comply with strict laws, he must struggle to express himself, and that struggle produces something more—more than would have been there without the constraints. In a 1981 interview, he says:

> Sometimes we were astonished by the way that through this apparently conscious process, the unconscious appears more likely and it's very obvious in some of our works. It's like when we

> try to decipher our own unconscious—through conscious patterning. I think it, for instance, it reinforces it, for instance [sic], when I was working without the letter *e* in my novel, the missing of the *e* was like a pump for me. All I had to invent was opening a lot of doors. [Perec and Mortley 2009, p. 97]

Scholar Daphne Schnitzer (2004), in her analysis of one of the chapters in Perec's great novel, *Life A User's Manual* (1978), draws a similar conclusion, pointing out how "Perec's writing techniques . . . simulate [the] syntax of the unconscious" (Schnitzer 2004, p. 110). Dream work is an operation of constraints, too. To get to the more that is there, the latent, one must contend with the constraints of the manifest, which masquerades as something else. It is as if freedom requires restrictions—as if the freedoms available when restrictions do not exist are relatively superficial, as if the truths of the unconscious can only be perceived through the falsity of consciousness.

We see this in the analytic frame where the constraints are substantial but essential. Perec was a shy man, and although most of his work is autobiographical in one way or another, the most personal elements in those autobiographies can only be grasped indirectly, hidden behind the puzzles and games the reader confronts. The circuitous route the reader must take to reach the author endows him with a very particular vitality.

Some readers may not wish to concern themselves with Perec's personal history and instead choose to enter his text naively. These dreams will read as surreal stories for them, bits of literature that fall outside usual narrative conventions. Such an approach reminds us of how much we depend on the conventions of storytelling to maintain coherence. It throws us into an alternative universe of literature where we have to choose between imposing meaning without adequate basis or letting ourselves be caught up in a vortex of fragmented ideas. The dream text becomes a form of fiction, and the author of this most personal of texts recedes into anonymity, creating a dissociation between dreamer and dream. This seems to be at least a part of Perec's intention: to explore a strange form of writing that he appropriately names an *obscure boutique*.

## A NOCTURNAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY[3]

*Dream 1 (pp. 3-5)*

There is a "height gauge" under which the dreamer must stand, causing him to be "extremely uncomfortable." He adds, "I know that I am dreaming, naturally, that I am in a prison camp . . . as though I never dreamed of anything else." He is saved from the height gauge only by the "indifference of the torturer," who holds an "arbitrary power."

The dream has a second part. In an armoire are two hiding spots "crammed with deportees' valuables." One contains "woolens, old and moth-eaten." The other contains money. As he is about to take the money, an "officer" arrives, and "it also becomes clear that dying and leaving this room are one and the same." In a third part, he thinks of names for the camp, names of concentration camps, and then the "moral": "We can save ourselves (sometimes) by playing."

With the imagery of concentration camps and the atmosphere of cruel indifference to humanity, Perec chooses to begin the book with an introduction to his first loss, that of his mother, Cécile. Perec's parents were Polish Jews who immigrated separately to France before meeting in the Belleville neighborhood of Paris. In the autumn of 1941, soon after the Nazi occupation of Paris and the death of Perec's father during France's brief war with Germany, his mother (originally named "Cyrla") managed to place the five-year-old Georges on a Red Cross train for children. It was to take him to Grenoble, in the Italian occupation zone, where he had relatives on his father's side. These relatives had escaped Paris during the summer and were living in the village of Villard-de-Lans. But Cécile never managed to escape Paris; in January 1943, she was imprisoned at Drancy with other Jews who had been rounded up, and records show that, nineteen days later, she was transported to Auschwitz. Of the 1,000 persons placed on that train, 804 were sent directly to the "showers," and it would seem that she was among them. This information was not discovered until after the family returned to Paris in the fall of 1944.

[3] This was Perec's description of *La Boutique Obscure* (1973, p. 260). Each dream is given a number and title and is dated by month and year.

During the war years, Perec moved among families and among boarding schools around Lans. In his autobiographical novel,[4] *W, or the Memory of Childhood* (1975), he describes it thus: "There was no past, and for very many years there was no future either; things simply went on. You were there . . . . From time to time you changed places, went to another boarding house or another family . . . . It wasn't very nice, the way aunties appeared and disappeared any old time" (p. 69).

Esther Bienenfeld, his father's sister, and her husband, David, became his guardians upon their return with Georges to Paris, and he remained with them until moving out on his own. They never adopted him in order to allow him to collect reparations that the French government distributed to children orphaned during the war, yet they treated Georges as if he were their own son.

Despite documentation of his mother's transportation, there was no definitive record of her death, leaving Georges, like so many other children, uncertain of his mother's fate. As we come to realize through these dreams, Perec unendingly mourned her loss. Perhaps, as in Dream 1, it was as though he had "never dreamed of anything else." The height gauge evokes a growing child, but one who is tortured by the burden of this knowledge (or lack of knowledge). And yet the dream ends with a motto we could say that Perec lived by—"We can save ourselves (sometimes) by playing"—since he made play an ever-present part of his work and life. Play, the dream suggests, was Perec's way to live with loss.

*Dream 2 (pp. 6)*

This dream is titled "Tiles."[5] It is short enough to include in its entirety:

> With a laugh that can only be described as "sardonic," she began to make passes at a stranger, in my presence. I said nothing. She kept it up, so I eventually left the room.
>
> I am in my room with A. and a casual acquaintance, whom I am teaching to play Go. He seems to understand the game, until I realize he thinks he is learning to play bridge. The game actu-

[4] This book alternates between chapters of autobiography and chapters of imagination, the latter based on a childhood fantasy that he recalled many years later.

[5] *Plateaux*, which can also be translated as *trays*.

ally consists of distributing *letter tiles*[6] (more like a kind of lotto than a kind of Scrabble).

The six-month gap since the first dream suggests that Perec was waiting to present us with the other central theme of this collection: his emotional turmoil over the loss of his lover, Suzanne. Perec was married to a woman named Paulette who appears in these dreams as "P." According to Bellos (1995), although the two were good friends, there was little passion between them. His affair with Suzanne began soon after he started spending weekends at her country home in Andé in December 1965 and continued for three years. Le Moulin d'Andé was an estate she opened to invited artists as a retreat or commune. Eventually, Suzanne lost interest in remaining exclusively tied to Perec, and he fell into despair. As in Dream 2, he "left the room," which meant terminating his visits to Andé the following month. Perec's misery over this loss shows up repeatedly in these dreams, and *La Boutique Obscure* is a disguised account of the loss of his mother and of Suzanne.

In writing down a dream, we tend to become separated from the feelings of the dream. The emotions in *La Boutique Obscure* are at a remove, hidden behind the constraint of writing the dream. Thus we read the "she" of the dream as Suzanne, and the first part of the dream presents what had become Perec's silent, sad experience of being at Andé. The second part is more ambiguous. Go was a game Perec loved and was one of his pastimes at Andé. The game can be thought of as a puzzle or maze, a conundrum with an infinite number of variations. Although he could have been a teacher of Go, he was relatively inexperienced romantically, and it is likely that Suzanne was his teacher in those matters. The student in the dream believes they are playing bridge, suggesting a link (the word is the same in French). It is not a bridge; it is a game of easily exchangeable pieces.

### *Dream 15 (pp. 22-25)*

Here Perec is in one of the apartments where he lived with Paulette, at Rue des Quatrefages, but in the dream the space is divided and they are living there separately. A neighbor is sharing the space with Paulette. Images of water overflowing a pot in a sink and then a bathtub begin the

[6] An alternative translation would be *trays of letters.*

dream. He discovers "for the first time in my life" that his apartment has two doors. Paulette and the neighbor are in the "first room," which is divided by "a heap of books." The neighbor, an old woman, hands him a book that makes him "quiver with joy." It is called *LUNGS,* "a classic of respiratory physiology . . . . It is written in German." Her husband enters. "He looks like the actor André Julien, or maybe like André R., the father of one of my old classmates." He and Paulette are then lying in separate beds, the neighbor and her husband positioned elsewhere in the room. It ends with a memory of him and Paulette "wandering in a lovely park."

His quiver with joy and the lovely park suggest sadness more than happiness. This reading is supported by Perec's separation from his wife, something she demanded, and also by the German book, since his mother likely died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Perec himself was a heavy smoker and died from lung cancer at age forty-six, very shortly after its diagnosis.

His father also makes an appearance in Dream 15. Originally named Icek (the Polish equivalent of Isaac), he was called Izie after arriving in Paris and was eventually known by some as André. Georges's survival as a Jew in France during the war was aided by his father's name change. Until September 1943, Villard-de-Lans was under the control of the Italian military, who were relatively lax in their imposition of anti-Jewish laws; they did little to seek out and deport Jews. But when the Nazis took over, conditions became far more dangerous. For part of that time, Perec lived at a boarding school that came under the scrutiny of the Nazis. Perec's survival there is undoubtedly due, at least in part, to the good luck of his family name. In changing names from *Peretz* to *Perec* on arrival from Poland, his father acquired a name that appeared Breton (though it is more typically spelled with an acute accent over the first *e* or with a double *r*). Additionally, Georges's papers listed his father's name as André, further obscuring his family's origins. Thus the dream situates Perec in a world of separations from wife, mother, and father, overflowing with tears.

*Dream 28 (pp. 45-46)*

This dream brings out some of the oddness of an impersonal approach to dreams, an approach we might take if we knew nothing about

Perec. It dates from October 1970, and in parentheses next to the date, Perec writes, "(Neuweiler)," indicating that he had stayed in this German town that night, and directing us to think personally (i.e., what was he doing there, and what might it have to do with the dream?).

However, the account of the dream points us in the opposite direction. It begins, "The dreamer [this whole story is like a novel in the third person] has sat down at a little bistro." The dream continues in the third person, and although this is not such an unusual perspective for dreams, this third person is not "myself" (e.g., "I see myself doing . . ."), but rather a character named "the dreamer." How can this character in the dream be anyone other than Perec if he is "the dreamer," but how can he be Perec if he is this other person? The dissociation is total.

The dream is about some people in a restaurant during an epidemic of cholera, but it is the way Perec jousts with identity—more than the narrative—that I want to look at. He writes, "The dreamer understands that he is no longer a stranger at some table and that he is now the 'central character.'" This begs the question of who is the central character for us—Perec or the so-called dreamer? The dream ends with him picking up "a piece of earth" and then finding a friend dead, "turned into earth, turned into a block of earth that is missing the piece the dreamer just picked up."

As in a science fiction story, there is an eerie confusion of realities. Body, identity, and earth—perhaps time as well—are muddled. Before he reaches his dead friend, he has already removed a piece of his body, removed it from something his friend was not. It is as if by picking up a piece of earth, he turned his friend into earth. An example of how primary process can work in dreams, this also challenges our notions of dream authorship. We know Perec dreamed it, but the dream makes us wonder who or what Perec is: is he a character in a dream or is he real, of material substance, like the earth?

*Dream 37 (pp. 60-63)*

This dream pulls us back to Perec as dreaming an autobiography available for interpretation. Over the three and a half pages of description, one marvels at how much he has been able to remember. The dream describes him with "Z.," at a place he calls "Dampierre." It is

clear from the many other dreams in which both appear that Z. is his lover Suzanne and that Dampierre is her estate at Andé.[7] In the dream, Perec seems to be constantly looking for her among others, never sure whether she is there or not. As a crowd builds in the house, he realizes that "there's not enough food for everyone."

And then a new character enters the dream: "Did I see C.? Did I see S.? Did they tell me their mother was waiting for me? Her room is dark." Who can this be but his own mother, Cécile? Later, a "small child" appears, a "thin and puny being with an elongated head and skinny little limbs," a description that would have fit Perec himself during his days in Lans. But this child is more like an animal, and Perec becomes increasingly rough with him, eventually deciding to kill him:

> I lay it across my lap; I squeeze its neck, it fights back, but weakly. It looks harmless (frightened, resigned, big sad eyes); its slender paws twitch in furtive little jolts. I squeeze harder. I realize I'm killing it, and soon it's a small, motionless child.

That same night, he goes on to dream about "a woman with grey hair and wearing a long dress [who] comes and goes." It reminds him of "that character in [the film] *Psycho* (a young madman dressed like his elderly mother)." He is horrified and recalls how disturbed he was when he first saw the film, unable to sleep, believing he was hearing "noises made by an imaginary animal."

Here we have Perec's mother and his former lover Suzanne together in the same dream, leaving him terrified and searching for them before violently killing that desperate part of himself. The violence must also be directed at them for abandoning him. Perhaps his horror and fear echo feelings from childhood after losing his mother, feelings that are reawakened with the loss of Suzanne.

### *Dreams 55–64 (pp. 88-110)*

Perec stopped going to Andé after the end of his affair with Suzanne in December 1968, but by the following spring he had resumed his visits. Now he merely observed Suzanne in her new relationships from a dis-

[7] Replacing S. with Z. had its source in Roland Barthes, who had published his book on Balzac, *S/Z*, three years earlier.

tance. He was miserable and tormented, but he continued to make these visits until December 1970, when he finally moved out of Andé for good. In the wake of that, he began seeing a new woman, eventually suggesting a more serious involvement with her, but she later turned him down.[8]

In a typical Perecquian move, *La Boutique Obscure* (1973) seems to mark the end of the author's stays at Andé by inserting an interruption in the logical order of what precedes it. Three brief dreams are included after the December entries, but they are dreamed by "J. L."[9] and dated 1966, 1968, and 1972. Perec then returns to chronological order with a dream from January 1971.

Why this disruption? Perhaps to signal that he has been disrupted, yanked out of himself and into an alternative time and identity—though these dreams follow the same theme of loss. In doing this, he was also obeying the logic of the *clinamen*. A clinamen[10] is an error in a system, and for Perec that meant disobeying whatever Oulipian constraint prevailed. By breaking the absoluteness of the rules, he breathes the human into the mechanical; imperfection is given a place.

In March 1971, his sadness over Suzanne persisting, Perec cut his wrists. The cuts were superficial enough that he did not require treatment beyond his own ministrations. It was perhaps this more than anything else that led him to enter analytic treatment with Pontalis some two months later. His suicide gesture was discovered by his friend, Philippe Drogoz, when he came to pick him up for a working trip to Germany and found Perec with his wrists bandaged. Perec explained that he had cut his wrists but had not wanted to die, and that he had bandaged himself as soon as he realized what he was doing. They continued on to Germany.

There are ten dreams from that month, more than any other month, including the longest one in the book at seven and one-half pages. These dreams include two from Germany, and most of them can be read as related to his depression and suicide gesture.

[8] The timing of this is not clear from Bellos's (1995) biography, but her decline of his proposal seems to have happened some months later.

[9] This is presumably Jacques Lederer, one of Perec's oldest, closest friends, whom he had known since his school days.

[10] The word derives from Lucretius, who in defending the atomistic theory of Epicurus, used it to describe the indeterminacy of atoms as they move from high to low; their paths could take an unpredictable swerve on the way down.

*Dream 57 (pp. 90-97)*

Called "The Return," this is the longest dream and is about Suzanne. She is in a house being built by a wealthy Maharajah, "living with two men whom she does not love." The dream is a series of partings and reunions with Suzanne against a backdrop of various frustrated appetites. It ends with his losing Suzanne, in despair, and caught up in trying to calculate the payment and change for a pack of cigarettes.

*Dream 58 (pp. 98-101)*

Perec writes that this dream occurred the morning after Dream 57. The woman in the dream is identified as "M." He writes, "I realize bit by bit that M. loves me." His joy over this is lost when he sees that she is so tall that he has to "crane my neck up to see her face," and that "her eyes are not exactly her eyes, but they're still pretty eyes." She caresses him, he hardens, they continue walking, she tells him "she sent her children to boarding school; she tried to kill herself but doesn't tell me how."

Later, they "climb up a narrow, sinuous street," (perhaps like Rue Vilin, where Perec had lived with his mother) and see two cars pass: "In one there is a mourning woman." The street becomes snowy, then icy, and finally an ice ax is necessary for them to advance up an ice cliff. "M. goes for it. I want to follow her but I can't." Then he finds himself in Villard-de-Lans. "Did we cross a mountain pass?" Someone goes by carrying a chalkboard saying, "There are not two passes [*cols*]/They meet/ There is only one pass/There is no pass/There is nothing"—and the account of the dream ends without a period to complete this sentence.

In addition to *pass,* as in *mountain pass, col* can mean neck. There is a sense of foreboding in the dream, of Perec's lost mother, of his passage to Lans, of his childhood in the Alps, and of joining his mother in death. It seems his loss of Suzanne and the death of his mother have merged.

*Dream 60 (pp. 103-105)*

This dream is titled "Bread Liberation." It makes little sense until one realizes that Perec was quite comfortable in the English language, and so the French title, "La liberation du pain," suggests *freedom from*

*pain*. The dream has a manic quality and is about Marines in a musical comedy, on their way to war. They sing, "Don't shut away the bread/The bread must be free." It ends with Perec caressing the wife of a friend, "and, finally, naked on top of her and, though she crossed her legs at first, planted [*installé*] strong and deep inside of her." His freedom from pain comes with a return to Suzanne, or perhaps through a replacement with someone else.

*Dream 72 (pp. 122-123)*

This dream seems to be about Perec's suicide gesture and dates from May 1971, the month that he begins his analysis with Pontalis. He boards a bus with a female co-worker. Z. is the only other passenger. The bus passes a carnival with "painted backdrops" and a "battle reenactment," which is taking place where he lived in Paris with his aunt and uncle. "A young boy is lying in a pool of (fake) blood with a grimace of feigned agony; . . . he seems disappointed that I didn't appreciate his performance."

Then he's back in Dampierre with Z. There is a knife and a cheese plate, and he notices that "I've made a tiny cut on my index finger . . . . I have to press down hard to see a drop of blood form." There is a distrust of the various wounds depicted and of the entire environment, while Z. remains in the background.

*Dreams 73–79 (pp. 124-137)*

There is a notable shift in the dreams that follow. The prevailing sense of doom lessens, and themes of transformation, other women, and Perec's analysis come to predominate. Dream 73 concerns his speed and the recommendation to "arrive slower" (a sexual reference?). In Dream 74, after fires burn, he makes love to three women. In 75 and 76, homes are being repainted or renovated. In 77, he has killed his wife, chopped her up, and is getting rid of her. In 79, after a loss of money, he makes love to an actress.

*Dream 81 (pp. 139-142)*

A psychoanalyst appears in this dream. It begins with a poor test performance by his niece and her boyfriend and continues on to a hos-

tile reception he gets from three men when he returns home. Scheduling problems arise—one of them involving an analyst, a Mr. Bezu of rue Daru. When he goes to the analyst, the neighborhood is being torn down: "All the remains of the quarter are on display." He steals something, returns home, and is invisible. He sees a friend carrying a dog and then "a man disguised as a dog."

Finally, in his "immense, sumptuous apartment," he is "followed by F., who is telling me about his problems. I scold him for seeming to always wind up in situations like these, almost intentionally." He finds a little boy who takes to him. The boy wants to give him $1,000, and Perec says he will take it only if it is a contribution to the construction of a "projection hall."

Beginning with disappointment and conflict, this dream turns comical and, finally, sad but hopeful. The analyst's name, *Bezu,* is a homonym for *bisou,* an affectionate word for kiss in French, usually used for small children. Stealing is reminiscent of the dreams that he said he had stolen from his analyst (in an interview quoted earlier in this paper), thus making himself more invisible to the analyst.

The analyst's location in rue Daru is interesting when one recalls that, in French, *rude* means rough, hard, or abrupt, though the English meaning would not have escaped Perec. The destroyed neighborhood is Perec's inner world, while the dog—could it be Perec himself or Pontalis? F. also seems to be Perec, discussing his problems, but in the dream, Perec is the one doing the scolding, though we suspect he is the one who feels scolded. The dream seems to end with Perec as the child and Pontalis as Perec, trying to create a place for projecting things. Omitted from the translation is a reference to the walls of the room they are in: *aux murs de pierre noir,* or black stone walls suggestive of a tomb.

Perec's dreams have shifted from an oppressive sense of loss of his mother and Suzanne to a situation in which loss remains present but is now part of a broader scene. Emotions are extended to others, and we get a sense of movement and change. This dream, dated two months after beginning his analysis, shows Perec in various positions of childhood and expresses a feeling of being infantilized but also transformed. The ending suggests that he seeks to externalize ghosts that have haunted him.

Perec's feelings of being infantilized may not have been entirely transferential; in most of the papers in which Pontalis discusses Perec, he uses the pseudonym Stéphane, the name of Suzanne's son.

### *Dreams 83–85 (pp. 149-162)*

Dreams 83 and 84 also give hints of the analysis, with their references to an "Oedipus-Express" in the former and a "refusal to testify" in the latter. In 85, we again perceive Perec's analysis in an absurd game of tennis, a game in which his tennis partner is "Bernard L." Presumably, this is Bernard Lamblin, the husband of his older cousin Bianca with whom he was raised. Like Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, Bernard was a philosopher and played something of a paternal role in Perec's life.

At one point during this dream, Perec makes an interpretation of the way that money can be won or lost during a gambling game: "This seems to mean: *We can make you win but we can also make you lose when we want and don't you forget it*" (italics in original). This recalls the arbitrary oppressor of Dream 1, in which "the only thing that saves me is the indifference of the torturer, his liberty to do or not to do" (p. 4). Thus, in Dream 85, Perec is equating his analyst with the Nazis, reflecting another aspect of his relationship with Pontalis that would become increasingly prominent.

### *Dream 95 (pp. 176-177)*

The dream begins as something of a nightmare in which Perec's lipogram novel, *A Void* (1969), is discovered to contain "several *e*'s . . . . First one, then two, then twenty, then thousands!" And then, still while dreaming, he decides to "call this dream 'the hypothalamus' because 'thus is my desire structured.' I should (in that case) have called it 'the limbic system,' which is a more pertinent term for all that refers to emotional behaviors." A relatively simple dream for this collection, it suggests a loss of control over his emotions that find their way into his book in spite of himself. The dream calls up all that is missing in his life, in his mind, in his feelings.

In titling this dream "the hypothalamus," Perec raises the topic of his employment. He worked in a neurophysiology lab from 1961 to

1978. He was the lab archivist and established various systems for organizing specific bits of information into a searchable database from the vast troves of literature put out by his lab and others. Perec was something of a mad genius at this job and became renowned for the systems he developed, entirely apart from his writing. He kept this second career to maintain a steady income, something he could not count on from his writing, and he was so proficient with it that he often inserted puns, puzzles, and other oddities into the indices he made. It was his way to entertain himself and the lab staff with what was otherwise a rather tedious job.

Perec's knowledge of cataloging and of neuroscience creeps into much of his writing. Among his earlier works is *The Art of Asking Your Boss for a Raise* (1968), a farcical book that alludes to his long and frustrating battle to obtain a raise for his work at the lab. At eighty pages, the entire book is written as one sentence describing every permutation of everything that could possibly go wrong on the quest for a raise. It is a story of a flow chart, a narrative of a digital reality. Its repetitive, circular elements give it musical and poetic qualities. Perec said he adopted this trope from Jules Verne, one of his literary heroes.

One of his most remarkable displays of this is in his novel *Life A User's Manual* (1978), in which he devotes two dense pages (pp. 153-155) to a list of everything that is to be found in a basement storage room. It is easy to skip over this flight into what he called the *infraordinary,* but if one takes the time to read it through, something magical begins to happen in which common objects start to sing with beauty.

### *Dream 124 (pp. 237-239)*

The book's last dream is titled "The Denunciation." It is 1941, and a merchant who owes his father money denounces him to the SS, along with "his own son." When they are about to be arrested, the boss lifts Perec's head to reveal a small scar under his chin. They move to various locations before arriving at a train station. "I know what's waiting for us. I have no hope. Get it over with. Or maybe a miracle . . . . One day, learn to survive?" His father is concerned about "an old wound."

And then they are in a cabin with mutilated children, "wriggling like worms. Myself, I have become a young snake (or was it a fish?)." They go

to a camp, then back to town where they attend a memorial service. "I attend, sickened, scandalized, and finally moved . . . . I burst into tears." It ends with him as a child asking a motorist to retrieve a ball from the other side of a wall for him—"the return of a real memory."

This dream about his father provides a bookend to the first, which was about his mother. In *W, or the Memory of Childhood* (1975), Perec begins the first historical chapter as follows:

> I have no childhood memories. Up to my twelfth year or thereabouts, my story comes to barely a couple of lines: I lost my father at four, my mother at six; I spent the war in various boarding houses at Villard-de-Lans. In 1945, my father's sister and her husband adopted me. [p. 6]

Perec is not being entirely honest here. As mentioned, he was never formally adopted by his aunt and uncle. Furthermore, he did have some childhood memories. His first is from age three. He writes that he was among family, and "everyone is in raptures over the fact that I have pointed to a Hebrew character and called it by its name" (p. 13)—except that both the character and the name are inaccurate. His second memory is "more like a dream . . . . My father comes home from work; he gives me a key" (pp. 13-14). This, he says, is his sole memory of his father.

Although in the dream the son who is denounced seems to be the merchant's, he immediately becomes Perec. Perhaps this is an expression of anger at his father for abandoning him, of his feeling denounced by him—but it may have something to do with his analysis as well. The denunciation could be the way he feels treated by Pontalis, who inspects his old wounds. Perec must learn to survive analysis as well as life as an orphan. Or perhaps the miracle is a fantasy of his mother's survival. His self-perception as some kind of awful creature returns (see Dream 37) before he is transformed from a distant observer to a feeling human: a child who has lost his ball and can ask for help.

### *The Index (pp. 241-258)*

The warm, rather endearing ending of the last dream is nice, but it is not the way Perec would end a book. Instead, he follows it with an

index, returning us to what—a system of constraints? It is titled "*Repères et Repaires*" in French, which is translated as "Layers and Lairs" in the English edition. This conveys the French punning but is not an accurate translation. More literal would be "Landmarks and Dens," which we might think of as something like *hiding places and the ways into them.*

And so the book ends with a 14-page list of searchable terms from the dreams, conveniently allowing us to cross-reference dreams containing the same elements, and twisting this factual account of dream fantasies into a fantasy of facts, a make-believe work of nonfiction.

## TWO POINTS TO MAKE A CIRCLE

If dream interpretation is a playground for the analytic dyad, then a book like *La Boutique Obscure* (1973) becomes a playground for the reader–writer couple. It is a game played in successive turns: as a dream on the page is digested, the reader engages in his own dreaming, forming associations as s/he takes a turn at interpreting. The next dream then comments on the reader's interpretation, throwing the ball back into his/her court for a revised understanding.

The idea of dream-to-dream relationships can be immediately appreciated in the three dreams Perec attributes to J. L.[11]: 38, 39, and 40. Placed chronologically in the book after his break-up with Suzanne, they are given the dates of 1966 (before he met her), 1968 (during the relationship), and 1972 (after it ended). I include them here in their entirety:

> 38: *The Palais de la Défense, I*: I am in the Palais de la Défense. It is crumbling. I rush down a staircase with my wife.
>
> 39: *The stone bridge*: A stone bridge at the crossing of a road and a river. A signal indicates the name of the place: (YOU)—in parentheses.
>
> 40: *The Palais de la Défense, II*: I am in the Palais de la Défense. Its enormous vault seems to be opening, then closing. Later: I am still in the Palais de la Défense. There is no longer a vault, or rather, the vault, the palace, are everywhere. [pp. 66-68]

[11] It is unknown whether Perec is assuming his friend Jacques Lederer's identity here or incorporating dreams recounted to him by Lederer.

This triad takes us from a disintegrating world to the notion of a solid bond and meeting, to a sense of access being granted and denied. I read these dreams as a progression from Perec's unhappy marriage to his finding hope in the relationship with Suzanne, to his return to a confusing situation in which he is unsure whether he has been freed or imprisoned. These are nested stories that operate like a hermeneutic circle: from individual dream to a set of three dreams, to their position within the larger set of dreams across the entire book, and then back to each individual dream for our understanding to evolve.

## CONCLUSION

*La Boutique Obscure* is a text that hides its meaning within 124 stories written in another language, the language of dreams. Once we know something about Perec's biography, we have a key to deciphering them. Without that key, we are left to make either a naive reading in which we consider each dream as a short story, as if it contains all we need to know, or a presumptive reading, in which we impose interpretations naively. The former approach can leave one feeling lost—perhaps as Perec himself felt—without a basis from which to get oriented or to hold the disparate elements together. The latter is a form of wild analysis that says more about the reader than the writer.

Conversely, by starting from Perec's biography and using it opportunistically to understand the dreams, I have done what analysts routinely do with their analysands. Such an approach provides grounds with which to engage in a conversation but does not ensure an accurate interpretation. The biographical knowledge we have of our patients and their fantasies, along with our direct experience with them and our personal predispositions, establishes certain constraints to the game of analysis. All games have rules. Without them there could be no game. But as in any game, there is enough freedom for the game to proceed differently with different players, as well as to go along differently on another day with the same players. And so other readers with Perec's biographical information may understand these dreams differently or may use a different theory of dream interpretation, perhaps interpreting the imagery as a rebus (which translation prevents) or viewing the latent content in terms of wish fulfillment.

The approach I have used to understand Perec's dreams is akin to that of Bion. If dreams are a way to transform raw emotion into something thinkable, i.e., beta into alpha (Bion 1992), then these texts allow that process to occur again at another level. This set of constraints has led me to the following story: Perec mourns; Perec falls apart; Perec transfers his anger onto his analyst; Perec begins to pull himself back together with the help of the analyst; nevertheless, Perec retains an underlying grief. Many readers with knowledge of Perec's biography will arrive at this same story, yet we must remain open to the possibility of others.

Recognizing that there is nothing final about dream interpretation does not mean there is nothing to be gained by it. Through this process, we are cast into another realm where we can only grope our way forward. When the patient accompanies us there, we have a rich opportunity for exploration and collaboration. Making sense of a dream with a companion brings pleasure, strengthens bonds, and can provide the kind of truth Lacan called "fictive" (1972, p. 46).

When there is no companion, when all we have is a book, we may feel abandoned, lost, and left to find our way alone. Is that how Georges Perec felt through his life? Stories and dreams may be able to convey something about what that feels like, but Perec seeks to convey it in another sense as well:

> I do not know whether I have anything to say, I know that I am saying nothing; I do not know if what I might have to say is unsaid because it is unsayable (the unsayable is not buried inside writing, it is what prompted it in the first place); I know that what I say is blank, is neutral, is a sign, once and for all, of a once-and-for-all annihilation. [1975, p. 42]

This is the navel of his collection of dreams: the unsayable we are left with after dream interpretation ends.

## REFERENCES

Bellos, D. (1995). *Georges Perec: A Life in Words.* London: Harvill Press.

Bion, W. (1992). *Cogitations.* London: Karnac.

Burgelin, C. (1998). *Les Parties de Dominos chez Monsieur Lefèvre: Perec avec Freud, Perec contre Freud.* Paris: Circé.

Freud, S. (1910). "Wild" psycho-analysis. *S. E.,* 11.

Lacan, J. (1972). Le séminaire sur "La Lettre volée" [Seminar on "The purloined letter"], trans. J. Mehlman. *Yale French Studies,* 48:39-72.

Perec, G. (1968). *The Art of Asking Your Boss for a Raise,* trans. D. Bellos. New York: Verso, 2011.

——— (1969). *A Void,* trans. G. Adair. Jaffrey, NH: Godine, 2005.

——— (1973). *La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams,* trans. D. L. Becker. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2012.

——— (1975). *W, or The Memory of Childhood,* trans. D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 2010.

——— (1977). The scene of a stratagem. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* ed. & trans. J. Sturrock. New York: Penguin, 2008, pp. 165-173.

——— (1978). *Life A User's Manual,* trans. D. Bellos. Boston, MA: Godine, 1987.

Perec, F. & Mortley, K. (2009). The doing of fiction. *Rev. Contemp. Fiction,* 29:94-101.

Pontalis, J.-B. (1975a). A partir du contre-transfert: le mort et le vif entrelacés. *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse,* 12:73-87.

——— (1975b). From countertransference: the quick and the dead interlaced. In *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain,* trans. C. Cullen & P. Cullen. London: Hogarth, 1981, pp. 170-184.

Ricoeur, P. (1977). *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation,* trans. D. Savage. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

Rosenblum, R. (2009). Postponing trauma: the dangers of telling. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 90:1319-1340.

Roubaud, J. (2004). Perecquian OULIPO. *Yale French Studies,* 105:99-109.

Schnitzer, D. (2004). A drop in numbers: deciphering Georges Perec's postanalytic narratives. *Yale French Studies,* 105:110-126.

Schwartz, H. P. (2016). On the analyst's identification with the patient: the case of J.-B. Pontalis and G. Perec. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 85:125-154.

---

*41 Union Square West, Room 402*
*New York, NY 10003*

*e-mail: hps3@verizon.net*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# THE VARIETIES OF NOTHINGNESS: COMMENTARY ON HENRY P. SCHWARTZ'S PAPERS ON PEREC AND PONTALIS

BY ALFRED S. MARGULIES

**Keywords:** G. Perec, J.-B. Pontalis, nothingness, analytic relationship, trauma, uncanny, language, fort-da, creativity.

> For the listener, who listens in the snow,
> And, nothing himself, beholds
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.
>
> —Wallace Stevens [1921, p. 11]

## WOUNDED INTO (. . .)

*Wounded into art:* this is how the poet W. H. Auden described the haunted obsession to create (Sacks 2015). As analysts, we understand: we see those wounded into treatment. But as Freud observed, the mystery of the artist will always be beyond us. Still, Georges Perec's and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's intersecting paths to creativity, rooted in the soil of loss and grief, are of great interest to us. And Henry P. Schwartz has shown us this with exemplary sensitivity and scholarly thoroughness.

When I was invited to comment on Schwartz's papers, I was unsure if his subject was something I wanted to spend time with; but once I read them, I was immediately won over. I was taken with the elegance of Schwartz's writing and thinking, his sculpting a vast amount of material, choosing what to include and highlight, what to take out, creating a

---

Alfred S. Margulies is a Training and Supervising Analyst, Boston Psychoanalytic Institute, and Associate Chair, Cambridge Health Alliance Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School.

This article began as a discussion given by the author on November 3, 2015, at the Association for Psychoanalytic Medicine in New York City.

work of art in itself. Filled with admiration for Schwartz's work, I signed on. But I did not quite know what I was getting into.

It is not easy to immerse oneself in this material, into the "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (referred to in my epigraph). Perec's writing is saturated with emptiness and yet has a strange playfulness: he dances at the edge of deadness. I could empathize with Pontalis's fascination and repulsion. Here is a gifted artist who presents as a word machine: is anyone home? And yet Pontalis is no picnic either. A protégé of Jean-Paul Sartre and an ambivalent, disillusioned analysand and student of Jacques Lacan, Pontalis lived with an existential acuity, an awareness of the edges of life and meaning, a preoccupation with death.

Over and over I had this question: what kinds of emptiness were Perec and Pontalis up against? My recurring question started branching to different varieties of emptiness because I realized that Perec and Pontalis were both making lists, creating taxonomies of nothingness, as if they were connoisseurs of nothingness. And so the title of my commentary, "The Varieties of Nothingness." That this echoes William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) is no accident: when God goes missing, as he did with the Holocaust, a hole opens up within overarching meaning, and we are faced with the biblical void of Genesis once again. How do we begin?

But this is the genesis of existential meaning and human connection in the face of unspeakable loss. It is a miracle for God to create something out of nothing, to create a whole universe—but it is the human condition to lose that universe, to fall out of the world. The gods create and mortals grieve. Indeed, there seems to be an infinity of varieties of human loss—presence and absence—and so a parallel infinity of theories to understand.

As a child, I first encountered the varieties of infinity in a popular book, *One, Two, Three . . . Infinity* (Gamow 1947). Some infinities, it turns out, are bigger than others—astonishing! And so one can rank-order them in their magnitudes, and the names have biblical resonance: there is an Aleph infinity, a Bet infinity, a Gimmel infinity . . . . I wonder, could we also describe parallel aleph, bet, Gimmel universes of nothingness? Some emptinesses, I submit, are bigger than others in their import.

Some of these nothings will be close by and experience-near, and we feel that in magnitude they overwhelm everything else.

There is the nothing that defies even talking about, indeed asks for a respectful, ethical silence. Genocide, the mass murder of a whole people, of their time and space and *worlding,* is perhaps the biggest void of all, because it not only outstrips human understanding; it also unravels all illusions. Not only can we not explain it, but it rips apart explanation. In the face of heartbreaking and mind-destroying loss, Shakespeare has King Lear revert to an animal howl, something beyond language. This is no doubt the biggest emptiness facing Perec, whose father died in war and whose mother was exterminated.

## ANATOMY OF NOTHINGNESS: VARIATIONS ON A THEME

There are, however, varieties of nothingness that saturate our theorizing—some implicit, some explicit. Here are just a few:

1 (or Aleph). *The Gap:* In linguistics, this is the gap between signifier and signified. The symbolic is not the thing itself. There is a constitutive gap in the symbolizing process.

2. *The Lack:* For Lacan (1966), the absence of the mother—that is, when her gaze, her desire, is no longer with the child but is elsewhere, setting up the child's quest to fill this absence. The experience of lack is indeed the birth of the Symbolic Order: we fill the lack with words.

3. *The Name of the Father* (or the overarching Symbolic Order): Part of this term in French, *Le Nom* in *Le Nom du Pere,* is a pun on the *Non du Pere,* the "no" of the father—the prohibition, the limit, the given structure of what must be (Lacan 1966).

4. *The Real:* That is, that which is beyond the reach of words—for example, our own deaths.

5. And then, in a different register, consider Pontalis's mentor Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of ontological, constitutive nothingness, as in his book *Being and Nothingness* (1943): pre-

> cisely, the recursive inability of the for-itself ever to merge completely with the in-itself—an essential lack, a nothingness. Further, because we have choices, we are doomed to be free; we are always on the cusp of the possible. When we choose one direction, other possibilities are thereby not realized. For example, as the late psychoanalyst Elvin Semrad humbly observed: "Every choice to marry is a loss experience." Other lives, other futures, slip away.

I could go on in my lists, but let me here mark an ellipsis, that is, a pause and a gap, and turn to Perec's symbol of the nothing. Perec liked to play with the visual images of words and symbols, how they appeared on the page, and so he would write an ellipsis—". . ."—a kind of bookmark or placeholder for the unverbalized, and then he would frame it with parentheses—"(. . .)"—creating multiple spaces or holes in the text as concretized on the page. How about that: a placeholder holding yet another placeholder for something beyond words. Gaps within gaps.

My point in these lists is that the very idea of *nothing* is itself complex, pervasive, everywhere, nowhere, and yet up close and personal to the human condition. And Perec and Pontalis were at the same time masters, slaves, and connoisseurs to the varieties of nothingness.

Let us now turn to our subjects and let me reframe this emptiness.

## STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND

Perec, I submit, is a man in perpetual shock; he dwells in strangeness. The crisis that brings him to Pontalis is his abandonment by a lover. Life seems meaningless; he has fallen out of the world. But indeed, he had already fallen out of the world as a young child when his parents were ripped from him and killed. The boy was moved around and, sadly, he never again found his way back home, his place in the world. He remains a stranger in a strange land. And though Perec has survived a symbolic suicide—that is, a gesture—it is not at all clear to Pontalis that Perec is fully alive. Uncannily, Perec seems to be a machine spewing words.

Freud's (1919) paper on the uncanny begins with the in-between states of entities that confound us, like zombies or automatons—beings that are situated somewhere between life and death. The uncanny in

German is the *Unheimlichkeit,* which means quite literally *not at-homeness*—and this seems to capture something essential about Perec: he is both uncanny and lost in the world. Pontalis could resonate: he, too, suffered the death of his father at an early age, and death and mourning constantly surrounded him.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Pontalis was drawn to Sartre and the existentialists. For Heidegger, the *Unheimlichkeit,* the uncanny, is a hallmark of authentic states of being, by which he meant moments when we become aware of the strangeness of our absorption in the mindless pursuits of everyday life. And here we apprehend the stakes of being more fully present—or not—to our singular lives. But uncanny existential authenticity is fleeting, and then we return to our quotidian routines. Such a return to at-homeness was not given to Perec, who fell out of the world continually. Or—more to the point—after age four, he was never really back in.

Perec is probably best known in the United States for the ambitious absurdity of his authorial undertakings—especially a novel (*A Void*, 1969a) written entirely without the letter *e*, which is of course the most common letter, and so its omission presents the biggest technical challenge. And then there is "Le Grand Palindrome" (1969b), still the longest palindrome ever written. These merit inclusion in *The Guinness Book of World Records* or in Ripley's "Believe It or Not," inducing a jaw-dropping "what the hell?"

Perec thereby becomes a kind of human oddity, and so achieves an absurdity that rivals that of Kafka. But why did he do this? Surely, because he could—he was a man of word-crafting genius, a theorist of words. But as both Pontalis and Schwartz realize, he was filling the void with empty words, empty signifiers. Language for Perec is a kind of cosmic joke; there is no firm grounding. Now this presents a very real problem to a psychoanalyst.

One of Perec's books (1974) includes an illustration captioned "Map of the Ocean" (p. 2). The frame, though, contains nothing; it is an empty, elliptical frame. Absurdly, Perec sets off the immensity of the ocean by putting a frame around an empty space and labeling it "Ocean." Though outlandish, he is astute about the phenomenology of looking at the sea.

When I look out at the ocean, I first experience something like vastness, awe, and even monotony. And then I have to tame this vastness, bring it into scale and presence by noting waves or buoys or birds or boats. If I am about to launch my kayak and so need to operationalize the sea as something very real and potentially dangerous, I note white caps and wave and wind patterns. But Perec, with a simple line drawing of a frame, brings me to the anxious, exciting vastness of the ocean—its fathomlessness, the emptiness I must fill every time I get into a boat. And in seeing his frame of emptiness, I fill it, too, with a kind of laughter of absurdity. The sea can be a metaphor for many things—indeed, for life itself. We need anchor points but the gap, the void, remains before us.

As a psychoanalyst, one wonders: although Perec was traumatized, certainly, he was also a savant and schizoid. How much of Perec's worlding, as it were, was reactive to unspeakable trauma, and how much was constitutional or wired in? Of course, a biological predisposition could be sealed in once exposed to trauma. And how absurd is this: when I say *constitutional,* we might speak of a structural deficit, an absence, something missing or undeveloped. But we do know this for certain: Perec consulted Pontalis. That is, Perec was in pain, up against something, some emptiness that he could not discern. But he was not hopeless . . . .

We wonder, did Perec pick the right analyst? In many ways, they were a match: both writers, creative, fascinated with language, its possibilities and limits. But—another area of match and a potential problem—Pontalis, too, was haunted by nothingness; it is everywhere in his writings. As I read Pontalis's *Windows* (2000), I started scribbling down his varieties of nothingness, from which I will quote just a few: *forgetting, caesura* (the cut), *fort-da, death, meaninglessness, goodbyes, stolen, lack of a name, omega, erasure, repression, hiding, deceptions, alienation, lost, lose oneself, a center that cannot be found, invisible, unknown in the known,* and "Genesis, a succession of separations" (as in *light from darkness, day from night, man from woman*, etc.), and so on and on . . . one gap after another into infinity.

And so these creative wordsmiths, Perec and Pontalis, infected one another. That is, they got under each other's skin, taking hold like an obsession. Pontalis seemed possessed by an urgency to transform this emp-

tiness so that he could sit with this man who was so draining, hollowing out, and emotionally reaming. At times they must have hated each other.

But they also envied and admired one another, sparking mutual creativity. They impregnated one another, giving rise to new ideas and new directions. And then there was a more oedipal-like competition. One thinks of Picasso and Braque, who also got under each other's skin in a kind of obsessive love affair, spurring one another to new heights of creativity. Regarding artistic thievery, the important thing, Picasso recommended, is to steal from the best. And yes, Erikson, in his paper on the Irma dream (1954), made this very same point about Freud and his obsession with Fliess: the two mutually impregnated one another; they took seeds from one another.

Infecting, stealing, impregnating, inmixing: Perec and Pontalis were both infatuated and at war. Schwartz does not shrink from the ethics of the situation—Pontalis did not protect Perec's confidentiality. Is this how he acted out his countertransference rage? And yet Pontalis became like Perec; he absorbed him—and this Schwartz reveals in his meticulous readings of both of them.

## FULL CIRCLE: GENESIS

In the beginning was nothingness. And into the void God spoke the word, creating the world. I wonder: was God playing at *fort-da*? When Freud (1920) observed his grandchild playing *fort-da* (gone-there), he realized that the child was mastering absence—that, is, object permanence, which is helpful when mothers go missing. Freud's libidinal stages, of course, are really stages of desire; each stage is gratified or deprived in its own way, and each stage thereby creates and responds to its own nothingness, its own lack. The varieties of nothingness are really the other side of the varieties of desire.

But we are all children playing fort-da, mastering absence, and as adults we are confronted with something new, an unsymbolizable nothingness, the ultimate fort-da. We cannot settle this being toward death; it is what makes us human. Perec and Pontalis are liminal, on the edge—and now, caught in print, they are forever playing in a fort-da universe that will break your heart and leave you mystified. Perec infected, im-

pregnated, inmixed his despair, rage, and nothingness into Pontalis, and vice versa. Ironically, it is all preserved now on the electronic page, in my iPhone, in the ether, everywhere and nowhere.

Pontalis the psychoanalyst tried to bring Perec back from the edge of emptiness, looking for meaning within an analytic relationship. The name *Pontalis* literally contains the word *bridge* (*pont*)—and this, indeed, is what he did. *Perec,* from the Polish transliterated into Hebrew, literally means a *breach* or *gap* (Bellos 1999). Pontalis bridged the gulf to his patient and reached across the Gap, the Lack, the Chaos, the Loss, the Void—that is, across the unspeakable. For long stretches, they connected precisely through their disconnection: in Pontalis's resonant words about his missing father, *the bond with absence.* This was their transference-countertransference enactment or, as Perec put it, the "sealed-in violence of the analytical dialogue" (1977, p. 169).

And then, both exhausted, Perec and Pontalis finally find ways to connect, to be present, and to find words to hear one another. To quote Perec:

> On that day the analyst heard what I had to say to him, what for four years he had listened to without hearing, for the simple reason that I wasn't telling it to him, because I wasn't telling it to myself. [1977, pp. 172-173]

Simply put, for the first time the words now mean something; the stakes of hearing and presence now matter. The two are finally in the same room—together, talking (. . .)

## REFERENCES


Bellos, D. (1999). *George Perec: A Life in Words.* London: Harvill Press.

Erikson, E. (1954). The dream specimen of psychoanalysis. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 2:5-56.

Freud, S. (1919). The "uncanny." *S. E.,* 17.

——— (1920). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle. S. E.,* 18.

Gamow, G. (1947). *One, Two, Three . . . Infinity: Facts and Speculations of Science.* New York: Viking Press, 1961.

James, W. (1902). *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.* Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012.

Lacan, J. (1966). *Écrits,* trans. A. Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1977.

Perec, G. (1969a). *A Void,* trans. G. Adair. Jaffrey, NH: Godine, 2005.

——— (1969b). Le grand palindrome. http://homepage.urbanet.ch/cruci.com/lexique/palindrome.htm.

——— (1974). Species of spaces. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* ed. & trans. J. Sturrock. New York: Penguin, 2008.

——— (1977). The scene of a stratagem. In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* ed. & trans. J. Sturrock. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Pontalis, J.-B. (2000). *Windows,* trans. A. Quinney. Lincoln, NB: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2003.

Sacks, O. (2015). Oliver Sacks: a neurologist at the "intersection of fact and fable": Shots—Health News: NPR (Interview retrospective with T. Gross). http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=436289763.

Sartre, J.-P. (1943). *Being and Nothingness.* New York: Washington Square Press, 1993.

Schwartz, H. P. (2016a). On the analyst's identification with the patient: the case of J.-B. Pontalis and G. Perec. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 85:125-154.

——— (2016b). The oneiric autobiography of Georges Perec. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 85:155-178.

Stevens, W. (1921). The snow man. In *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens.* New York: Vintage Books, 2015.

———

*10 Bonmar Circle*
*Auburndale, MA 02466-2708*

*e-mail: alfred_margulies@hms.harvard.edu*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# OUR CRYING PLANET: AN APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL

BY DONALD MOSS

**Keywords:** Climate change, environmental protection, denial, helplessness, interpretation, Enlightenment, appeal, identification.

> All they had to do was pick off a mammoth or a giant ground sloth every so often . . . and keep this up for several centuries. This would have been enough to drive the populations of slow-reproducing species first into decline and then all the way down to zero . . . . For the people involved in it, the decline of the megafauna would have been so slow as to be imperceptible. The megafauna extinction was a geologically instantaneous ecological catastrophe too gradual to be perceived by the people who unleashed it . . . . Humans are capable of driving any large mammal species instinct, even though they are also capable of going to great lengths to guarantee that they do not.
>
> —Kolbert 2014, p. 233

Life on our planet possesses intrinsic capacities for adaptation. Those adaptations depend on a relatively constant physical and chemical environment. Humans have now radically disrupted that environment, placing the adaptive capacities of life on the planet under severe strain. We are surrounded by evidence of that strain: extinctions—those just past and those pending—give dramatic and brutal expression to the increasingly precarious baseline status of much of the planet's life forms. The mea-

---

Donald Moss is on the faculty of the New York University Psychoanalytic Institute.

surably accelerating corruption of our ground, our air, and our water foretells future deformations of everything that depends on them.

My claim above that "we are surrounded by evidence" is, in fact, the product of an interpretation. Put more starkly, the claim might have been: "We are surrounded by information." Information—about our planet or about anything else—means nothing until it is interpreted.

The accumulating information about our planet, for instance, can be treated as mere data to be organized—number and quantity arriving by happenstance from distant objects and a distant elsewhere, more found than sent, more catalogued than received. Such treatment would constitute an interpretive act, defining a basically emptied relation between the information's source and the information's recipients.

Alternatively, the information can be treated/interpreted as a signal, a communication, and even, in effect, an appeal—sent from intimate objects, from intimate places. Such an interpretation would define a relation in which the source, via this appeal, possesses the power to impinge, disrupt, and demand. The recipient, then, once the information is interpreted as appeal, must in effect decide how to respond. The meanings given to the information will depend entirely on the quality and character of the relationship between us—the potential recipients of the information—and them—the life forms, the air, water, and ground, that can be experienced as sending it.

The situation is beautifully portrayed in the 1991 film *Proof,* about a blind man. Growing up, the boy was almost always accompanied by his extremely attentive mother. She would describe the world to him. There, she would say, is a brown dog, there a gray house, etc. This went on for years, an apparently loving ritual. One autumn morning the mother points to a tree and tells the boy that there, there is a red leaf. To this the boy says, "The leaf is not red." The mother, of course, is shocked to hear this. It cannot mean that her son can suddenly see. Baffled and frightened, she repeats her description. Again, the boy says, "It is not red." The mother is horrified; her sincere, devoted acts of love, the ground on which she stands, is being repudiated. She plaintively says to her son, "Why would I do that—why would I lie to you? Why would I tell you it was one thing when it was another?"

The boy responds: "Because you could."

In essence, the boy's response communicates his newfound sense that his mother—his interpreter—is under no external/material obligation to him. Her only obligation, if it exists, is an internally located one. As such, in principle, she has unlimited "power" to interpret his world. And we, too, like the mother, have unlimited power to interpret our world and the information it sends—unlimited, that is, because we can.

Such unlimited power has a name: *dominion,* the biblical privilege granted to the Judeo-Christian West. This privilege, of course, also constitutes an interpretation, defining a relationship begun in Genesis and reasserted in an era known as the Enlightenment: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1987, p. 1).

In this notion, then, the pertinent terms are fear, liberation, and mastery. We aim to master now what frightened us then. This aim claims as its proper name *liberation.* Liberation here, though, maintains disidentification throughout. Then, disidentified from our object, we feared it; and now, still disidentified from our object, we have mastered it. To master an object is also to interpret it.

From its beginnings, psychoanalysis has been a discipline focused on disturbances generated from within and between subjects and objects—the mind disturbed by the body's demands; the adult disturbed by the infant's demands; people disturbed by their own and each other's demands. We now have the opportunity to attend to a new potential source of disturbance: the planet itself.

If we hear these transmissions—the planet's signals—as constituting an appeal, we can easily interpret the signal as emanating from an object in need, or as Freud (1911) put it regarding a distressed infant, an object "screaming and beating about with its arms and legs" (p. 219) in a state of distress—an object, in fact, in need of us. I mean here to outline some of the difficulties presented to us when we experience these transmissions as an appeal—an appeal that, as Freud (1915) wrote of the drive, makes a "demand for work" (p. 122).

> When the attention of an experienced person is drawn to the child's state by this path of discharge, [the path of discharge] . . . acquires a secondary function of the highest im-

> portance, that of communication, and the initial helplessness of human beings is the *primal source* of all *moral motives.* [Freud 1895, p. 318, italics in original]

Here I will treat the information as a message—the planet's "path of discharge," a kind of "screaming and beating about." As such, the meaning of the message can be thought congruent to an infant's cry—not only a communication but, more importantly, an appeal.

But unlike Freud's simple communication of distress, this message contains not only a demand but also an accusation. Sensing the planet's message, feeling its combined force of demand and accusation, we are necessarily pushed back toward what Freud (1895) called the "*primal source* of all *moral motives*" (p. 318). We have been there before. With the help of others, obviously, we escaped from our own moments of abject helplessness. We are all of us, of course, deeply reluctant to return.

Hearing the cry, sensing the screaming beating about, not only are we called upon to ameliorate the disturbing condition, but we are also accused of causing it. This lurking accusation complicates the communication and severely complicates its reception.

To grant the planet the status of a needy object runs the risk of anthropomorphizing it—diminishing or eliminating the hard-won distinction between the human and the nonhuman. That distinction, though, warrants scrutiny. Grounded in material "fact," the distinction is also the product of psychic work—establishing a boundary. While the boundary between any self and any object may seem "factual," that "fact" is psychically disregarded, for example, by any identificatory process. Identification makes the boundary porous, undermining the "factual" difference between ourselves and our objects. When we cry in pain at the sight of a gutted mountainside or smile in gratitude at a sunrise, we are inadvertently confessing to a porous boundary between ourselves and our nonhuman surround—confessing, that is, to an object relation between "it" and "us." This identificatory relation persists in parallel to another—material—relation to that same mountainside and same sunrise. Neither of these two relations can reasonably claim priority over the other.

The anthropomorphizing move I propose here, then, simply accentuates the irreducible identifications that bind us to our nonhuman

surround. I mean to take those identifications seriously, in fact, to use them to expose the limited and limiting notion that the line between the human and the nonhuman is now fixed—the treasured product of triumphant Enlightenment. This move—stressing the porosity of boundaries infiltrated by identifications—is continuous with our founding psychoanalytic moves: conceptually binding zones separated by apparently fixed boundaries (i.e., dream life to waking life, neurotic exterior to perverse interior). These founding psychoanalytic moves should permanently alert us to the necessarily arbitrary and porous structure of all psychically produced boundaries, and perhaps leave us reluctant to pronounce any such boundary as fixed and factual.

As clinical psychoanalysts, we are bombarded with direct and indirect signals of need, indicators of disturbance and helplessness. Clinical theory allows us to locate the appeal hidden in those signals. We are well prepared to hear, interpret, and address such signals in our offices. However, we have almost no preparation to hear, interpret, and address them outside our offices. Our lack of preparation is particularly marked when the source of the signals is not human.

We who are psychoanalysts in our offices, mere humans outside of them—in both places, only after a signal is interpreted as an appeal, only after, in effect, the signal is sensed as addressed directly to us and experienced, that is, as transferential—only then do we become aware that we, to whom the signal is addressed, are the only caretakers capable of an effective response. We can think here of the clinical frame, the border inside of which we alone have the capacity, and the burden, to transpose mere information into urgent appeal.

One point of this text, then, is to argue that the planet's signals, once framed as an appeal, constitute something akin to a transference message; and our response—humans' response—to that message will be grounded in something like our/their countertransferences. The message sent to all of us by the planet's kicking and crying is clear: the object under our care is now helpless, reduced as a result of our systematic indifference from self-sufficiency to dependency, from abundance to abjection. "Resolve then, that on this very ground, with small flags waving and tinny blast on tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us. *Forward!*" (Kelly 1953).

What is it like for us—"experienced persons"—to first frame and to then hear this complex appeal, an appeal that combines helplessness with accusation? What kinds of responses are mobilized when we are forced to return to the site of "the *primal source* of all *moral motives*" (Freud 1895, p. 318)? But this time, in this return, we will likely find none of the comfort provided by innocence. If we return this time, we probably return not only to take up the appeal and repair the damage, but also to take up the implicit demand to repair ourselves, the damagers—to make amends.

Here is Adorno (1951) writing of what seems to be an analogous situation:

> In early childhood I saw the first snow-shovellers in thin shabby clothes. Asking about them, I was told they were men without work who were given this job so that they could earn their bread. Then they get what they deserve, having to shovel snow, I cried out in rage, bursting uncontrollably into tears. [p. 190]

"They get what they deserve"; "I cried out in rage"; "bursting uncontrollably into tears"—I think of the demands made upon Adorno by the sight of those snow shovelers in thin shabby clothes as congruent with the demands made upon us when we interpret climate change information as an appeal.

I think this unstable mix resembles one that many of us contend with whenever we see any incarnation of the snow shovelers in their thin shabby clothes. When we reflexively map ourselves in relation to that helplessness, we likely imagine merciless forces at work. Whether mercilessly just or mercilessly unjust—this determination is ours to make.

So, yes, with Adorno, we might respond to helplessness as the outcome of merciless justice. We then might say, or feel, or try not to say and not to feel that they get what they deserve. With this interpretation, we would situate helplessness—theirs now, perhaps ours at some other point—as lawful and proper, the net effect of reasonable determinants working in a reasonable universe. Given dominion, law, and order, helplessness might simply be a collateral necessity—a kind of punishment, maybe, or pedagogical signal.

There are many other possibilities: helplessness as a blunt fact, a lesson in limits, or as a reminder to the rest of us—a warning or a lesson in gratitude. No matter the particular reading we give it, as long as helplessness is deserved, of course, it will be a sign of an ordering force, an indirect indicator of inexorable reality in action, a marginal expression of a central order.

We can parse out the young Adorno's complex response, "I cried out in rage," as indicating that helplessness in others enrages us. We, seeing them, feel ourselves as the falsely accused, the innocent. It is not our fault; leave us be. Or it *is* our fault, but we can do nothing about it. We are as helpless as you are.

Reminded of our helplessness, we easily become enraged at the reminders. "Bursting uncontrollably into tears"—helplessness is unbearable, ours or theirs, anyone's. We burst; we lose control; we weep. Helplessness presents us with what we might consider more than the mind can endure. An encounter with helplessness brings us into contact with the limits on what we can bear and do. We want no contact with such limits. We prefer instead to reside far from them, in a zone that feels natural and limitless, the zone of "how things are." Helplessness disturbs that zone by forcing us to question both how things got this way and whether they might be different. Banish the helpless and we banish such questions.

Helplessness spotted in others, strangely, makes us aware that we feel helplessly positioned behind warm protective glass—helpless to join them. We have been placed where we are by the same merciless forces that placed them where they are. We have not orchestrated the encounter between the snow shovelers and the warm ones. No matter our pain, no matter theirs, we can no more join them than they can us. If they are getting what they deserve, so, when we suffer at the sight of them, are we. We can neither accept such justice nor refuse it. As such the encounter through the glass presents us with more than the mind can endure, more than can be thought. Here at this point of excess, we, like Adorno, burst uncontrollably into tears.

Glasser (1998) addresses a similar point of emotional excess when he writes of a patient who had recently murdered someone, as follows.

> If we consider his account of the violent incident more carefully, we note that what his murderous attack on the man was prompted by was "the man pleading to be spared and turning out his pockets to give them all he had," which was followed by his hitting the man with such ferocity . . . . We see his identification with the man in his being moved to tears when talking of the man's "pleading to be spared" so that he hit him so violently . . . . This enables us to recognise how the actual trigger of his violence was the victim's helpless, pathetic pleading, that it was this that he had to negate. [p. 900]

I think of the planet and its life forms as occupying a position similar to the one occupied here by "the man pleading to be spared and turning out his pockets to give them all he had." That plea can easily overwhelm an unprepared and excessively open ear, generating something akin to murderous ferocity. It can also go completely unheeded by an overly prepared and permanently closed ear, generating absolutely nothing. We psychoanalysts occupy a privileged position. We have been taught to bear the sound of such pleading, to treat it as a manageable appeal, and to respond interpretively and effectively.

So I return now to my opening paragraph in which I interpreted contemporary information about the planet as "evidence." I conclude with an elaboration of that interpretation. The evidence, beyond a reasonable doubt, is the product of an object "pleading to be spared" and turning out its pockets to give all that it has.

## REFERENCES


Adorno, T. (1951). *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. M. Jephcott. London/New York: Verso, 2011.

Freud, S. (1895). *Project for a Scientific Psychology. S. E.,* 1.

——— (1911). Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning. *S. E.,* 12.

——— (1915). *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes. S. E.,* 14.

Glasser, M. (1998). On violence: a preliminary communication. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 79:887-902.

Horkheimer, M. & Adorno, T. (1987). *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* trans. Bd. of Trustees, Stanford University. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002.

Kelly, W. (1953). A word to the fore. In *The Pogo Papers.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

KOLBERT, E. (2014). *The Sixth Extinction*. New York: Henry Holt.
*Proof* (1991). A film written and directed by J. Moorhouse; House and Moorhouse Films.

---

*80 University Place*
*Fifth Floor*
*New York, NY 10003*

*e-mail: donaldbmoss@mindspring.com*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# *THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER* AND GOETHE'S UNDERSTANDING OF MELANCHOLIA

BY MARTIN A. SILVERMAN

*The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). By Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translated by Elizabeth Mayer and Louise Bogan. 167 pp. In *The Sorrows of Young Werther, and Novella.* New York: Random House, 1971.

**Keywords:** Major Depressive Disorder, Freud, love, passion, narcissism, death, melancholia, ambivalence, youth, self-worth, suicide.

*The Sorrows of Young Werther* was published in 1774, when Goethe (1749–1832) was just twenty-five years old.[1] A product of true literary genius, it not only represents one of the greatest works of literature ever written, but it also offers keenly intuitive insight into one of the most terrible and mystifying emotional disorders that plague humankind. Well before Sigmund Freud, and most probably destined to become an important source of Freud's understanding of melancholic depression, Goethe was able to peer into the soul of those afflicted with what is now termed Major Depressive Disorder (and some forms of Bipolar Disorder)

[1] Goethe wrote the novel as he was recovering from his own experience of an extremely depressing, hopeless infatuation with Charlotte Buff ("Lotte"), who was betrothed to Johann Christian Kaestner. Furthermore, Goethe's close friend, Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem, had recently committed suicide.

---

Martin A. Silverman is a Training and Supervising Analyst and Supervising Child Analyst at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Education at New York University School of Medicine; a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Center for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis of New Jersey; and an emeritus Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine.

and see what is taking place within those who are suffering from it.[2] It is impressive how clearly Goethe grasped the twin roles played in melancholia of narcissistic object choice and extreme ambivalence toward a love object.

As the story begins, Werther, a young man who is about the same age as the author, has found a little valley in a somewhat remote area that impresses him as wonderfully idyllic. As a still unformed and floundering entity who has not yet discovered either his direction or his purpose in life, he idealizes his surroundings in the village of Wahlheim and falls in love, in an inchoately gushing and all-embracing manner, with the local inhabitants of the area. He interacts, with adolescent eagerness and naiveté, with one person after another (especially very young ones, with whom he quickly and easily resonates), while he dabbles at painting and writing and is sustained financially by subsidies from his mother.

When he meets Lotte, a pretty, engaging, charming young woman who has lost her mother and has replaced her as the designated maternal figure of a brood of adoring younger siblings, he *instantly* falls in love with her—*madly* in love with her. He knows that she is unattainable, as she is engaged to be married soon to a very suitable young man, but he cannot stop himself from tumbling head over heels for her. He cannot hold back from increasingly centering his existence on her or from increasingly tormenting himself over his inability to do without her. His pain and anguish grow deeper and deeper until they take over his entire existence, blotting out all else as they *become him.*

Goethe designs the first two-thirds of the book as a series of letters Werther has written to his "dearest friend" (1774, p. 3), Wilhelm, from whom he has recently taken leave (as well as from his mother and from the young woman whose heart he has just broken by turning his attentions to her sister). He provides Wilhelm with a running account of his

[2] Among the nineteen references to Goethe's works in Freud's letters to Fliess (Masson 1985) is the following: "The mechanism of fiction is the same as that of hysterical fantasies. For his *Werther* Goethe combined something he had experienced, his love for Lotte Kaestner, and something he had heard, the fate of young Jerusalem, who died by committing suicide. He was probably toying with the idea of killing himself and found a point of contact in that and identified himself with Jerusalem, to whom he had lent a motive from his own love story. By means of this fantasy he protected himself from the consequences of his experience" (p. 251).

experiences in Wahlheim and its environs. He informs Wilhelm in the first letter, dated May 4, 1771, that he regrets having abandoned him and having hurt the young lady whom he encouraged but then betrayed. Werther asks Wilhelm to inform his mother that he *will* eventually attend to some business with which she has entrusted him and that upon meeting his maternal aunt he has *not* found her to be as terrible as his mother has depicted her to be (for allegedly cheating his mother out of her proper share of an inheritance).

Then he writes:

> Otherwise I am happy here. The solitude in this heavenly place is sweet balm to my soul, and the youthful time of year warms with its abundance my often shuddering heart. Every tree, every hedge is a nosegay of blossoms; and one would wish to be turned into a cockchafer, to float about in that sea of fragrance and find in it all the nourishment one needs. [1774, p. 4]

The all-consuming, love-at-first-sight passion aroused in Werther when he meets Lotte, however, sweeps away all the peace, contentment, and sense of fulfillment he has been experiencing in Wahlheim (literally, "Chosen or Ideal Home," which, we can speculate, might very well be a reference to the womb or the maternal bosom). He now races inexorably and inextricably toward disaster. What has happened to him?

About halfway through the story, we come upon a passage that reflects Goethe's intuitive grasp of the centrality of narcissistic object choice in the generation of melancholia. In his letter of October 20, 1771, we find the following:

> It is true that we are so made that we compare everything with ourselves and ourselves with everything. Therefore, our fortune or misfortune depends on the objects and persons to which we compare ourselves; and for that reason nothing is more dangerous than solitude. Our imagination, by its nature inclined to exalt itself, and nourished by the fantastic imaging of poetry, creates a series of beings of which we are the lowest, so that everything appears more wonderful, everyone else more perfect. And that is completely natural. We so frequently feel that we are lacking in many qualities which another person apparently possesses; and we then furnish such a person with everything

> we ourselves possess and with a certain idealistic complacency in addition. And in this fashion a Happy Being is finished to perfection—the creature of our imagination.
>
> If, on the other hand, we just continue to do our best in spite of weakness and hard work, we very often find that, with all our delaying and tacking about, we achieve more than others with their sailing and rowing—and it gives a true feeling of our worth if we keep pace with others or even overtake them. [pp. 78-79]

Goethe, in this brief passage, encompasses the manner in which narcissistic object choice, with its attendant depletion of the store of self-regard and self-worth that is so necessary for emotional well-being, plays a central role in an individual's fall into deep, melancholic depression, if the love object so invested disappoints or appears to be taking leave. He also recognizes that when someone invests deeply and thoroughly in the all-importance of the other, this empties the person of self-regard and subjects him or her to an intolerable sense of aloneness and loneliness in the absence or threatened absence of the other.

Goethe also addresses in *Young Werther* the intensely ambivalent attitude toward the object of one's affection and desire that is the other hallmark of the disposition to melancholia. Very early in the book, Goethe has young Werther meet a peasant who is deeply despondent over his dismissal by the widowed mistress he was serving after he professed undying love for her. Werther understands and feels for this hapless young man, and he talks him out of committing suicide. He and Werther quickly become friends.

Later on, after Werther has descended into a deep funk in which he is ready to surrender Lotte to Albert, whom she has just married—at the same time that he wishes Albert were gone—he hears that a murder has taken place, disrupting the peaceful calm that usually reigns in Wahlheim. When he is told that a peasant formerly in the employ of a local widow has killed the man who replaced him in her service, Werther instantly knows who has perpetrated the horrific deed. Like a man possessed, he throws himself, albeit in vain, into trying to have this person set free, even though he knows quite clearly that the culprit must be put to death for having committed such a terrible crime. The "editor" of the book explains Werther's actions as follows.

> He considered him, even as a criminal, to be free of real guilt, and identified himself so completely with him that he was certain to be able to convince others. He could not wait to plead for him; the most persuasive arguments rose to his lips; he walked quickly back to the hunting lodge and could not keep himself from rehearsing, in an undertone, as he went along, the defense he wanted to present to the bailiff. [p. 130]

When Werther finds that he cannot possibly save the unfortunate peasant who succumbed to his murderous rage toward the man who replaced him at the bosom of his love, Werther writes a note to himself that is eventually found among his papers. It reads: "There is no help for you, unfortunate man! I see only too well that there is no help for *us*!" (p. 131, italics added).

Werther decides that he, too, has to die. In a letter to Lotte to be given to her after his death, he writes that, in "a decided fashion," he has come to the conclusion that he must give up his life:

> It is not despair; it is the certainty that I have suffered enough, and that I am sacrificing myself for you. Yes, Lotte! Why should I hide it from you? One of us three must go, and I am to be that one! O my dearest, my wounded heart has been haunted by a terrible demon—often. To murder your husband! Or you! Or myself! Well, so be it. [p. 141]

He goes one last time to Lotte, in order to tell her that he is leaving—although he hopes against hope that she will leave Albert for him. She offers to remain fast friends with him, but he cannot accept such a lesser relationship with her. He impulsively throws himself toward her and showers her with kisses—just as the young murderer whom he befriended told him he had done with the widow with whom he was enamored. And like the widow with her servant, Lotte pushes Werther away. She runs into another room, locks the door, and insists that he leave. Werther tells her that she will never see him again and departs.

He subsequently requests of Albert, Lotte's husband, that he lend him his pair of pistols for his journey. Albert quickly assents, indicating that he never believed Werther would actually carry out the suicidal intent of which he had spoken, and Lotte herself hands them over to

Werther's messenger, despite her qualms about so doing. Werther receives the pistols in his rooms, writes Lotte a note informing her that he has showered the pistols with kisses, is enraptured by having been given the opportunity to kill himself with the weapons that came to him from *her* hands, and looks forward to ultimately being together with her for all eternity. When the shot is heard, people rush to his side and find him bleeding to death, with brain matter extruding from his shattered skull!

Goethe includes, earlier in his story, an episode that dramatically highlights Werther's narcissistic fragility—a fragility that is illustrated in his enormous need to receive external validation of his worth and value and in the intense, narcissistic rage that erupts within him when this affirmation is lost to or withheld from him.[3] Werther accommodates Lotte's father by carrying a message to Count C., a high-ranking member of the king's administrative structure. The count is quite taken with Werther's affable demeanor and quick intelligence, and he invites him to accept a clerical position with him. Both his mother and his close friend Wilhelm have been urging Werther for some time to end his aesthetically pleasing, dilettantish idyll and engage in some form of gainful employment that might lead him onto a meaningful career path. Werther is flattered by Count C.'s high estimation of him, and he accepts the invitation to assist the count as he carries out the responsibilities the king has given to him. For a while, things appear to go rather well. Werther finds the work easy, even too easy, and enjoys how well he is able to outshine others in the count's employ.

Then something occurs that wrecks everything. He reports it to Wilhelm in a letter dated March 15:

> Something has so humiliated me that I shall be forced to leave this place, and I gnash my teeth! The devil! The harm is done, and it is *your* fault alone—*you* spurred me on, pushed and tormented me into accepting a position that was not congenial to

[3] W. H. Auden, in the foreword he wrote for the 1971 Random House version of this book, focuses intently on this episode, as he—ungenerously and without Goethe's compassionate understanding of human psychology—castigates Werther as being anything but admirable or heroic: "To us it reads not as a tragic love story, but as a masterly and devastating portrait of a complete egoist, a spoiled brat, incapable of love because he cares for nobody and nothing but himself and having his way whatever the cost to others" (p. xi).

> me. Well, here I am! And you have had your way! And in order to prevent you from telling me that it was my eccentric ideas which ruined everything, I here recount, dear sir, the story, plain and simple, as a chronicler would put it down.
>
> Count C. is very fond of me and singles me out, as is well known, and as I have written you many times. He had invited me for dinner at his house yesterday, on the very day when the whole aristocratic set, ladies and gentlemen, are accustomed to meet there late in the evening I had completely forgotten this fact; and it also did not occur to me that subordinate officials like myself are not welcome on such occasions. [p. 88, italics in original]

Werther goes on to explain to Wilhelm that when Count C.'s aristocratic guests arrived and saw him there, "they opened their eyes wide and turned up their noses in the traditional highly aristocratic manner. As that clique [was] entirely repulsive to [him]" (p. 88), he decided to leave—but he did not leave. Instead, he stayed on and amused himself by internally disparaging their shallowness, vacuity, ugliness, garishly ostentatious display of tonsorial finery, and demonstration of no more ambition than that of ingratiating themselves to the count so that they might move another chair closer to him at his table.

The arriving guests demonstrate, unmistakably, their great displeasure at having a mere commoner—a mere functionary who works for a living—in their exalted company. Even the one young woman who had been friendly with Werther in the past, herself a member of the aristocratic clique, allowed him to see how embarrassed she was to be seen speaking with him. The next day, she would tell him that she had been roundly chastised for having had a friendship with him, and that he could expect "punishment . . . for [his] arrogance and haughty contempt toward others" (p. 92).

The count, finally recognizing what was happening that evening, took Werther aside and politely asked him to leave. Werther apologized for his social faux pas and departed, much chagrined. "Crushed" and "furious" the next day, he wrote to Wilhelm that he wanted to "open one of [his] veins and gain eternal freedom for [him]self" (p. 92). Within a week, he handed in his resignation to the court and left the count's em-

ploy. This experience only accelerated Werther's headlong descent into utter melancholic despair.

We have to appreciate Goethe's intuitive grasp of human psychology, and we can only admire his enormous literary skill. Reading this book is quite an emotional experience. A number of vulnerable young men in Germany and its environs committed suicide, in fact, after reading the book at the time of its publication. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is a powerful work in more ways than one.[4]

We know that Freud read Goethe. We also know that Freud learned from what he read. Almost 150 years after the original publication of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, he published "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud 1917). Here Freud examined melancholia, or deep depression, by contrasting it with ordinary mourning. Unlike the situation of mourning, in which a love object who was cherished has been lost, a melancholic depression occurs when one is reacting to the loss of, or the experience of significant disappointment from, an other or others from whom the individual has vitally needed appreciation, love, and affirmation of his or her worth or value.

To put it succinctly, in *mourning* there is loss of a largely *anaclitic* love object, while in *melancholia* there is a highly *ambivalent* attachment to a lost and/or disappointing, *narcissistically cathected* object from whom rejection or abandonment cannot be accepted. That object is retained unconsciously by regressively identifying with the object, apparently on the model of oral incorporation of food, to prevent it from getting away. Recovery from mourning is characterized, furthermore, by gradual *acceptance* of the loss of the loved object, while in melancholia there is gradual *destruction* of the ambivalently loved and hated object with whom the individual has identified. The core issues in melancholia that are emphasized by Freud are narcissistic object choice and an ex-

[4] Coupled with *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in the Random House version (1971) is Goethe's *Novella* (1828), which reads as a moving, literary portrayal of power in its various forms—sociological, marital, political, financial, natural (fire, lions, and tigers), and familial—as a constructive or as a destructive force. Interestingly, it is love and art (in the form of music and poetry) that are depicted as having the capacity to tame raw power when it gets out of control and becomes destructive or potentially destructive. The success in this story of love and art contrasts starkly with their failure in the story of the unfortunate Werther. Melancholia is a terrible disorder indeed!

treme degree of ambivalence, precisely what bursts out of the pages of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

To quote Freud:

> The melancholic displays something . . . that is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself, and expects to be cast out and punished. [1917, p. 246]

> There is no correspondence, so far as we can judge, between the degree of self-abasement and its real justification. A good, capable, conscientious woman will speak no better of herself after she develops melancholia than one who is in fact worthless; indeed the former is perhaps more likely to fall ill of the disease than the latter, of whom we too should have nothing good to say. [p. 247]

> If one listens patiently to a melancholic's many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else whom the patient loves or has loved, or should love . . . . The woman who loudly pities her husband for being tied to such an incapable wife as herself is really accusing her *husband* as being incapable, in whatever sense she may mean this. There is no need to be greatly surprised that a few genuine self-reproaches are scattered among those that have been transposed back. These are allowed to obtrude themselves, since they help to mask the others and make recognition of the true state of affairs impossible. Moreover, they derive from the *pros* and *cons* of the conflict of love that has led to the loss of love. [p. 248, italics in original]

Freud states further that:

> The object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that . . . narcissistic identification with the object . . . becomes

> a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love relation need not be given up. [1917, p. 249]

> The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love relationships to make itself effective and come into the open. In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected, or disappointed which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence. [p. 251]

> No neurotic harbors thoughts of suicide which he has not turned back upon himself from murderous impulses against others . . . . The ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object—if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world. [p. 252]

The correspondence between Freud's depiction of melancholic depression and Goethe's story is striking. Freud's observations about melancholia also remain valid to the present time. In the melancholic patients I have treated and am currently treating, the prominent features include intolerable, exquisitely painful loss of an idealized but ambivalently regarded love object or love objects (past and present); an extreme sense of having been "rejected" and/or abandoned; terrible feelings of being valueless and/or unvalued by others; wrenching loneliness and aloneness; visceral manifestations of pain and suffering (severely disturbed eating and sleeping; gastrointestinal symptoms, such as abdominal pains, constipation, diarrhea, "irritable bowel"); and extreme guilt and need for punishment (e.g., thoughts of deserving to be "in jail" or even "on death row"), as well as indications of feeling helpless and usually hopeless. Generally, there are plentiful indications of extremely ambivalent attitudes toward those to whom the person is attached, usually accompanied by vigorous denial of rage harbored toward those who appear to have disappointed, rejected, and betrayed him or her.

Freud's perspicacity about severe depression is impressive. Goethe's literary depiction of it is astounding. We owe each of them a debt of gratitude for elucidating this terrible affliction.

REFERENCES

Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. *S. E.*, 14.

Masson, J. M., ed. (1985). *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*. Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap Press.

Von Goethe, J. W. (1828). *Novella,* trans. E. Mayer & L. Bogan. In *The Sorrows of Young Werther, and Novella*. New York: Random House, 1971, pp. 169-201.

---

*551 Ridgewood Road*
*Maplewood, NJ 07040*

*e-mail: martinsilverman31@gmail.com*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# THE PAST IS IN THE PRESENT: READING THE WORK OF EDNA O'SHAUGHNESSY

BY LYNNE ZEAVIN

*Inquiries in Psychoanalysis: Collected Papers of Edna O'Shaughnessy.*
By Edna O'Shaughnessy; edited by Richard Rusbridger.
London/New York: Routledge, 2014. 342 pp.

**Keywords:** Melanie Klein, Edna O'Shaughnessy, British Kleinians, psychic retreats, analytic interaction, analyst's stance, interpretation, transference-countertransference, gratitude, clinical facts, internalization, here and now, time.

Many years ago, I attended a conference in London to honor the work of Betty Joseph, called "Here and Now." It was a wonderful and lively gathering featuring several papers, one given by Edna "Red" O'Shaughnessy, which is included in this volume. As part of the discussion, four outstanding British women psychoanalysts spontaneously relayed various memories of their work with Wilfred Bion: Betty Joseph, Hanna Segal, Irma Brenman Pick, and O'Shaughnessy. They discussed their recollections of how Bion supervised, the kinds of things he might and might not address. I felt pleased and excited to be a witness to this discussion—a moment that was at once so vividly rooted in the present and yet so filled with the impact of history.

The life—the vitality of centrally important psychoanalytic figures—was present in these recollections. It is also present in this book, a collection of O'Shaughnessy's essays and papers written over the past forty-five years. O'Shaughnessy writes the Kleinian tradition; the lessons of Rosenfeld, Bion, Klein, and Joseph are written into her thinking and into her work.

---

Lynne Zeavin is a faculty member at New York Psychoanalytic Institute and Society.

O'Shaughnessy's papers are distinguished by a rich clarity and an exquisite clinical sensitivity that set them apart from other psychoanalytic writing. She is able to depict fragile states of mind where psychotic anxieties predominate while at the same time holding the reader, guiding the reader, with her careful clinical and theoretical expertise.

O'Shaughnessy's work is intensely rich at the same time that it is systematic. And by *systematic,* I mean simply that one senses her working in accord with deeply held psychoanalytic principles. She does not assume a universal language among psychoanalysts—far from it. She knows very well where she stands and the difference between hers and other perspectives.

All this is present in her paper entitled "What Is a Clinical Fact?" Here she investigates the factualness of the *clinical fact*—an idea that is of clear significance to her, for we hear its echoes elsewhere in the book. For O'Shaughnessy, a clinical fact arises and is made manifest by the unusual conditions of the analytic session in which it is perceived. Those conditions give the analyst unique access to the patient's inner world—and become evident as a result of the communication between patient and analyst that reveals specific psychological realities. These realities, unique to the analytic situation, are what she calls clinical facts.

In this paper, she describes her work with Leon, a boy of twelve. Various clinical facts about Leon become evident—and there is a further discussion of the analyst's anxieties about stating a clinical fact to her patient. The work with Leon gives us a vivid picture of O'Shaughnessy's thinking about the press of the inner world and psychic reality.

Notice the following episode: Leon arrives at his hour drinking a children's drink—from what Americans would likely call a juice box—and he looks tense and fearful. O'Shaughnessy describes how he sucks fervently on his straw and drains the carton, leaving the container in a grotesque and collapsed shape. We can see in this clinical example, particularly as O'Shaughnessy describes it, how the inner world infuses the experience of external reality and here quite literally gives it its shape: the collapsed and grotesque container is shown to represent Leon's experience of his object's inability to hold him or to tolerate his hunger or his need.

This session comes just before the ending of his analysis. O'Shaughnessy interprets that her patient's inner terror is that she is like the collapsed carton, and that this fear is so great that he cannot see how she actually is. In response to this terror, Leon starts to wheeze, and his labored breathing conveys to the analyst a most anxious and fearful state of psychic distress and pain. The patient then falls asleep, so intolerable is it for him to exist in this state.

This marks the first of three clinical sessions that O'Shaughnessy summarizes in this paper, her training as a philosopher evident in her lucid tracking of what constitutes a *fact* versus a *clinical fact*. This distinction, as well as what allows a patient to accept or use an interpretation, is the emotional reality *of the session*. When the analyst correctly perceives and interprets, she is working from and with clinical facts.

Clinical fact finding is what O'Shaughnessy's work is—that is, she is always seeking the emotional reality of the session, the lived internal reality of the patient as expressed in the transference and countertransference, in the patient's experience of what is around him. O'Shaughnessy plants herself there in the patient's world, her mind alert and responsive to the deeper resonances of the patient's communications, and she is particularly attuned to the ways in which she registers as an object in the patient's mind. She then describes all this in such a way as to illuminate intricate and complex internalized object relationships.

In so doing, O'Shaughnessy demonstrates Klein's finding that the ego is first and foremost formed in relation to its primary objects, and that the child's primary experiences of her object (along with the unconscious phantasies that attend those experiences) are central to the clinical situations and concepts elaborated by O'Shaughnessy in this volume: among them are the ego-destructive superego, the invisible oedipal complex, intrusions, enclaves and excursions, the absent object, lying, and gratitude. Her expositions of the work of Bion are exemplary.

Throughout the volume, O'Shaughnessy comes through as a steady presence, open to her patient and to using herself, indeed trusting herself to see and to interpret directly and sensitively what she perceives. She is tough when necessary but deeply sympathetic to the innermost painful struggles that patients may bring.

I found especially poignant a clinical example given in her paper, "Where Is Here? When Is Now?" In this paper, O'Shaughnessy notes that time and place have a particular meaning in the realm of psychoanalytic work; they are the "here and now of psychic reality" (p. 260). She describes a terribly lonely and unsettled man who came to treatment quite anxious and disconnected. O'Shaughnessy thought the patient knew he was intentionally presenting himself in this way, yet he believed the analyst was so caught up and cut off that she would be incapable of really noticing either his distress or his capacity to present himself like this. Instead, she would find him nonthreatening and pleasing; in other words, she would be fooled in part because it suited her to be appeased in this way.

O'Shaughnessy tells us that, in contrast, she found this presentation a bit "irritating, confusing, and disabling" (p. 261). Often, she could not decide where to direct her attention in the whole mix of what the patient presented and what he described as going on. Then she would feel she became like him—unable to think, to function; like him, she felt she "didn't know what to do" (p. 261). During this phase, the patient brought in no dreams, but then one day he brought the analyst an image. This is the image that O'Shaughnessy recounts: There was a "garden that had been swept bare, except that in a corner, there was a plant with two blue, delicate flowers" (p. 13).

O'Shaughnessy was initially struck that her patient noticed the garden and was able to bring it to her as a communication. For her it was a moment of new life, a tiny shoot of symbolic capacity where previously his communications had been utterly concrete and without resonance.

O'Shaughnessy uses this bit of material to elaborate the meaning for her of the here and now in psychoanalysis. She asks, "where is here?" and she says that in material reality, the patient is in her consulting room, lying on the couch, while she is in the corner, sitting on her chair. But in his psychic reality (and this is a distinction she is always attending to), he is in a corner of a garden "outside the house of analysis." She interprets to the patient his effort to get her to join him "outside the ordinary frame of analysis and be with him in a special tender way, that is perhaps a little blue, too—seduced and sexualized together" (p. 262).

From this she extrapolates a mode of object relating and a mode of defense: the patient manages psychic pressures by pairing "closely with someone in the firm" and tries "to feel they are then in a place apart from the ordinary work-place that is free from the anxieties of, rivalry difference, hostility" (p. 262), and so on. She is slowly able to engage her patient's interest in seeing how he sweeps out his sessions—particularly of his fears and doubts about his analyst, along with his belief that his analyst has no place for him.

Written into this essay is O'Shaughnessy's concern with time—the here and now, an area she feels is crucial for analysts to think about. She emphasizes the presence of time in analysis, the passing of time and how time is used, the avoidance of the reality of time, and so on. In her paper on mental connectedness, written very much in relation to the work of Richard Wollheim, she links the concept of time to the idea of mental connectedness. The latter is itself an important concept, one that O'Shaughnessy says has to do with the degree to which people are able to give their lives a pattern—in Wollheim's expression, an "overallness" (p. 229).

The capacity to be connected to oneself is of course linked with a relationship to time, to being in time, and O'Shaughnessy uses this as an occasion to reflect again on the here and now—is it a way of bypassing the patient's history or the compulsion to repeat, as some critics maintain? Or should this be considered more as a philosophical point, given that both the past and the future can be part of the human present?

With questions such as these, she finds Wollheim's work illuminating. She states: "Every clinician needs to reflect on how time occurs, or is absent from, an analysis" (p. 229). She wants to know whether a patient and an analysis have a past, a present, and a future. She points to the atmosphere of timelessness present in a stuck analysis—or in a patient, for that matter, who cannot confront loss or limit. These situations represent a lack of mental connectedness for Wollheim and also for O'Shaughnessy. She writes here of Freud's contribution to our understanding of mental suffering and the role of common unhappiness as we struggle in ordinary ways between love and hate, between "our criminal tendencies and our wishes for civilization" (p. 229). The hope

is that our egos can deal with these conflicts not by disconnecting from them, but by maintaining a connection to pain, guilt, and loss.

In this regard, we see that Klein's work is both a continuation and an amplification of Freud's work, since Klein describes the mental disconnections of the paranoid schizoid position and the psychic work that must be carried out in order to arrive at the more integrated state of mind that is the depressive position. This work must be ongoing throughout a lifetime; it is never achieved once and for all, and in fact the movement itself is part of what must be tolerated and known. It is in the repetitions and the conscious registration of that experience that mental connectedness comes into being.

*Inquiries in Psychoanalysis* is filled with important clinical papers, ones to return to again and again. A classic is "Enclaves and Excursions," in which O'Shaughnessy depicts two hazards for the psychoanalyst, specified in the paper's title, each with its own specific characteristics. The enclave is interesting: one can imagine an overly close feeling with a patient who, despite a very agreeable and warm exterior, seems to give little expression to her unconscious phantasies or to the analyst as a transference object.

O'Shaughnessy deduces that a patient of hers mistook overcloseness for closeness, just as she herself had been tempted to do in the transference. The patient seemed to have a way of relating to the object that was actually quite restricted, despite the appreciative tone in which it was carried out. Such patients are confusing, at least initially; the analyst can feel very drawn into the apparent contact and can unwittingly enact with the patient the overcloseness itself, becoming a nonanalyst figure rather than an analyst offering interpretation. Once this is recognized, however, the analyst is in a position to see and interpret the patient's control of the analyst, her way of denuding analytic interpretations, and the anxieties that lie behind such a limited and limiting mode of making contact. The enclave the patient creates is a form of psychic retreat that requires acknowledgment and respect from the analyst, while necessitating careful interpretive work. It provides a way of limiting what is looked at and faced.

The excursion has a different valence altogether; it is a way of evading contact due to a "terror of knowing" (p. 137). Quite literally,

it is a flitting from one topic to another, changing course—piling detail upon detail, sometimes with various explanations offered as a kind of pseudosense. O'Shaughnessy's patient appeared to be absent from what she was talking about. Things shifted quite suddenly, and there was a feeling of clutter and confusion in the sessions. O'Shaughnessy felt it was nearly impossible to keep things straight—to distinguish inside from outside, phantasy from reality. This mode of being is not only a communication of anxiety and mental confusion; it also conveys the patient's need to keep out of contact with her analyst and to keep her analyst out of touch with her. This paper beautifully describes situations that are ubiquitous in analysis—and it is a great help to the reader to be able to conceptualize these trends in clinical work. O'Shaughnessy's particular sensitivity to what goes on in analytic work and her capacity to think very carefully, even in the face of difficult presentations, is very much in evidence in this volume.

This is particularly true in two other clinical papers, "Can a Liar Be Psychoanalysed?" and "A Clinical Study of a Defensive Organization." Though these two papers concentrate on very different aspects of a challenging presentation, what they have in common is the author's rigorous determination to understand and bear up under the weight of an assault on the analytic process (and on the analyst). A liar, it turns out, can be psychoanalyzed, but only if he has an analyst who is willing to take him on and not to dilute her analytic efforts, despite enormous pressure to do so. A liar is often in identification with a false object, one who has seemed to love or seemed to want to be a parent while harboring feelings of a very different kind. O'Shaughnessy's patient taunted her with lies—fundamental lies—starting with his contact information. She often could not determine what was true, and of course this confusing state of affairs tremendously undermined her role and function. Still, she shows us how she steadfastly persevered. In the end, one has to conclude that, if the analyst can hold onto her analytic mind, she will indeed be able to analyze even a liar.

These papers have something else quite special about them. For example, in the paper on defensive organization, one can follow the shifts in an analysis over time. O'Shaughnessy gives us examples from four different phases of a long treatment, allowing the reader to trace its

unfolding and to focus on shifts in the patient's defensive organization over a prolonged period. A defensive organization is a kind of fixation. Unlike other defenses that might shift with development, a defensive organization is a pathological one that arises when overwhelming and intolerable levels of anxiety are aroused by development itself. A defensive organization is a form of psychic retreat. Some patients enter analysis to shore up such an organization rather than to actually address it.

O'Shaughnessy's patient discussed in this paper was a man who entered treatment in a desperate state. She gives detailed material both about him and about her interventions. The latter are remarkable for their clarity and for the presence of mind of the analyst at work. Her interpretations weave together external and internal realities, transference, and personal history. O'Shaughnessy demonstrates an important Kleinian tenet, which is not only to interpret, but to listen for how an interpretation is taken up and responded to in the ensuing material. With these descriptions, she allows the reader to join her in a nuanced look at the subtle movement within a session.

This is true of every essay in the book in one way or another. Her first paper, "The Absent Object," is a beautiful description of the analysis of a 12-year-old boy who could not tolerate the absence of his object. The notion of the *absent object* is drawn from Bion, and as is true elsewhere in this volume, O'Shaughnessy describes Bion's work and his theoretical contributions with unusual lucidity. The absent object is integral to the baby's development; every baby must come to terms with it. In addition, as O'Shaughnessy tells us, the child's emotional growth gained through the experience of the absent object

> . . . will help him oppose the forces that make him cling to his object . . . . It will be concern for the object in its own right, rather than as an accessory for himself, which makes him give it freedom for a life of its own. [p. 31]

This stage is reached in treatment when a patient can mobilize his own self-understanding.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on O'Shaughnessy's paper entitled "On Gratitude." As many times as I have read it, I am always touched again by its great sensitivity (and indeed, I feel a welling of my own grati-

tude for its description of the ending of an analysis). As with the paper on the absent object, O'Shaughnessy is describing here what allows a patient to feel gratitude for her object and what can impede this emotional experience. The paper is situated in relation to Klein's seminal work, "Envy and Gratitude" (1957). O'Shaughnessy addresses what Klein herself paid less attention to—the vicissitudes of gratitude, what allows for it, and its implications in the human mind. Gratitude is essential for the "building up of the good object and underlies the appreciation of goodness in others and in oneself" (p. 246).

The paper commences with a vignette from the treatment of Leon, the little boy whom we met in "What Is a Clinical Fact?" Leon concludes his session by looking his analyst squarely in the eye and saying, "Thanks. Thanks. Thank you" (p. 247). O'Shaughnessy—as perhaps we might expect by now—wonders what he is thanking her for. She comes to the conclusion that what Leon is thanking her for, what he can feel gratitude about, is his analyst's willingness and capacity to address his psychic reality; he is grateful for her "attention and interpretation, and for withholding from acting in . . . with him" (p. 248). His gratitude was possible in spite of an experience of hatred, which at times could also be present in the sessions. O'Shaughnessy reminds us that for Klein, hate and love are present from the beginning of life. According to Klein, gratitude has at its roots a satisfying feed; the infant feels that she has been given something she wants to keep.

Like the other papers in this book, this one has many wonderful insights. One specific insight has to do with the patient's scrutiny of the analyst—the patient's ordinary alertness to and watchfulness of the analyst's mode of interpretation and capacities. O'Shaughnessy writes:

> Under the patient's scrutiny will come our capacity or our incapacity to do analytic work, our narcissism, coldness, undue warmth, rectitude, whether we speak with or without conviction, from on high to a patient down below, and so on. The nature of the patient's internal objects, his love and hate, affect these perceptions of the analyst. [p. 252]

From here, she proceeds to what she calls the *no-go* areas of the analyst: those areas of the analyst's own personality or mode of working that

do not admit of the patient's dimensions. These no-go areas interfere with gratitude.

She then goes on to explore the comings and goings of gratitude in the final portion of a long analysis with a patient whom she calls Dr. Y. Here the patient falls into a presumably old state of mind wherein she attacks herself and feels lonely and somewhat desperate. Her analyst senses her state and puts words to it, saying that the patient had "lost her analyst," who, though ending with her, was "still here" (p. 254). The patient began to cry, saying that this interpretation made all the difference. Her contact with a good object who knew her was restored.

O'Shaughnessy leaves us with Freud's words regarding transience (1916), which, she notes, "depict the difficulties of gratitude in the face of the pain involved in mourning its loss" (p. 258).

## REFERENCES

Freud, S. (1916). On transience. *S. E.,* 14.

Klein, M. (1957). Envy and gratitude. In *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946–1963,* ed. M. M. R. Khan. London: Hogarth, 1975.

---

*80 University Place*
*Fifth Floor*
*New York, NY 10003*

*lynnezeavin@mindspring.com*

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# BOOK REVIEWS

HOW TALKING CURES. By Lee Jaffe. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. 114 pp.

On November 29, 1993, *Time* magazine ran a picture of Freud on its cover, asking, "Is Freud Dead?" On November 13, 2013, *Psychology Today* ran an article entitled "Is Freud Still Dead?" These are but two examples of the passionate bashing and resurrecting of Freud that goes on all the time, both in well-regarded publications (such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Review of Books*) and in private blogs—and even on the couches of today's psychoanalysts.

It is refreshing to see the way that Lee Jaffe settles the question in *How Talking Cures*. Freud's technique is alive and well, as Jaffe's book illustrates in detail. This book explains how Freud's legacy has informed psychotherapists of all persuasions—whether they know it or not.

*How Talking Cures* is a real how-to book, valuable to all psychotherapists—whether they work with children, adolescents, adults, or couples, whether they practice behavioral techniques or insight-oriented therapy, including transference interpretation. It is also an invaluable aid to teachers. In fact, Jaffe's talent for explaining and extending Freud's basic ideas shines through.

Jaffe begins by carefully explaining what he sees as Freud's six generic modes of therapeutic action: direct support, introjection, catharsis, insight, identification, and working through. Drawing on case material, he illustrates how, when, and why these modes are employed. He also shows the reader that it was Freud who invented cognitive behavioral therapy.

As a psychologist, Jaffe is an expert in connecting modes of action to results measured by a battery of psychological tests, including the Wechsler (revised for children and adults), the Babcock Story Recall test, the Rorschach, and the Thematic Apperception Test, which he uses in order to arrive at a unique, conscious and unconscious view of the individual's psychological makeup.

Examples of Jaffe's use of these test results are clearly outlined in chapter 3, "Diagnosis and Therapeutic Action." Detailed case material from clinical work with adolescents and adults is discussed to link test results with appropriate and necessary modes of action. As someone who does not use diagnostic testing except in extremely baffling cases, I was impressed at how such information can be utilized to determine a course of treatment. Psychoanalysts, in my experience, use these modes of action naturally, but therapists trained in areas other than psychoanalysis will find this book very useful, for it provides not only a road map but also the means of arriving at an appropriate destination.

Employment of each of the six modes of action is well illustrated in chapter 4, "Individual Treatment Illustration." Mary, a mid-adolescent with five siblings, a fairly absent father, and a controlling mother, began a two-year, three-times-per-week therapy due to poor functioning at school and ambivalence about leaving home for college. At first, Mary was compliant in treatment and unaware of her feelings, but the work deepened, resulting in her increased awareness of her problems around college preparation, sexual feelings, and sibling rivalry. The case report gives the reader a good sense of how the therapist intervenes by naming in brackets which of the six modalities is being used, and we watch Mary respond. The author also explains his countertransference reactions, so the work feels experience-near. Mary's therapy helped her begin to look inside, to gain insight, to experience catharsis, and to continue her adolescent development as she went off to college.

In chapter 6, "Deconstructing Psychoanalytic Concepts of Cure," Jaffe compares and contrasts many of today's theories of therapeutic action, taking up the challenge to develop a strategy with which to evaluate these different theories. Using his deep understanding of Freud, Jaffe provides a toolkit of treatment modalities for therapists of all persuasions, with instructions on how and when to use each tool according to the individual. Most important is the author's ability to give condensed points of view of major theoreticians and clinicians.

My main question is about Jaffe's stress on ego building and insight over internalization/introjection of the analyst and the analytic process. He states that "introjection is typically minimized as a mode of therapeutic action due to psychoanalytic goals of insight and independence"

(p. 18). It has been my experience that the relationship with the analyst as a new object encourages an internalization of both the analyst and the analytic process, thereby allowing for both insight and true independence.[1] Connection with the therapist, whether positive or negative, is necessary for growth, in my mind. Insight alone is never enough. How many times do we therapists hear "okay, I realize that my mother's illness left me depressed—now what?"

I think Jaffe plays down his personal effect on his patients. Autonomy is always the goal, but long-term relationships cannot help but include degrees of internalization of a new object (à la Loewald). It has been my experience, both in treating patients and in supervising/consulting, that unless a deep connection between patient and therapist evolves, the work is an intellectual exercise that may help solve some surface problems but does not promote the patient's taking over of the therapist's way of making sense of life. It is this ability that fosters true and lasting autonomy.

I especially recommend *How Talking Cures* to beginning therapists and to those therapists who use behavioral techniques, for I think it will entice them to want more. It is also an excellent resource for teaching purposes.

**JANE HALL (NEW YORK)**

THE INTERPERSONAL TRADITION: THE ORIGINS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC SUBJECTIVITY. By Irwin Hirsch. London/New York: Routledge, 2015. 222 pp.

The study of subjectivity in the analytic interaction is arguably the sine qua non of contemporary psychoanalysis, though of course that has not always been the case. The larger realm of psychoanalysis—for much of its history and for many reasons, including theoretical, cultural, and political ones—has privileged an allegiance to an objectivist stance.

In this series of penetrating essays, many of which have been previously published but are meaningfully contextualized herein by each

[1] See Loewald, H. W. (1960). On the therapeutic action of psycho-analysis. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 41:16-33.

(p. 18). It has been my experience that the relationship with the analyst as a new object encourages an internalization of both the analyst and the analytic process, thereby allowing for both insight and true independence.[1] Connection with the therapist, whether positive or negative, is necessary for growth, in my mind. Insight alone is never enough. How many times do we therapists hear "okay, I realize that my mother's illness left me depressed—now what?"

I think Jaffe plays down his personal effect on his patients. Autonomy is always the goal, but long-term relationships cannot help but include degrees of internalization of a new object (à la Loewald). It has been my experience, both in treating patients and in supervising/consulting, that unless a deep connection between patient and therapist evolves, the work is an intellectual exercise that may help solve some surface problems but does not promote the patient's taking over of the therapist's way of making sense of life. It is this ability that fosters true and lasting autonomy.

I especially recommend *How Talking Cures* to beginning therapists and to those therapists who use behavioral techniques, for I think it will entice them to want more. It is also an excellent resource for teaching purposes.

**JANE HALL (NEW YORK)**

THE INTERPERSONAL TRADITION: THE ORIGINS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC SUBJECTIVITY. By Irwin Hirsch. London/New York: Routledge, 2015. 222 pp.

The study of subjectivity in the analytic interaction is arguably the sine qua non of contemporary psychoanalysis, though of course that has not always been the case. The larger realm of psychoanalysis—for much of its history and for many reasons, including theoretical, cultural, and political ones—has privileged an allegiance to an objectivist stance.

In this series of penetrating essays, many of which have been previously published but are meaningfully contextualized herein by each

[1] See Loewald, H. W. (1960). On the therapeutic action of psycho-analysis. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 41:16-33.

chapter's newly written prologue, Irwin Hirsch, one of the preeminent spokespersons for the interpersonal position in psychoanalysis, provides a compelling argument and overview of how an in-depth consideration of the felt experience of both participants in the analytic dyad in the here and now has become the central focus of contemporary psychoanalytic theory and praxis. He writes:

> Interpersonal ideas, far more than any other, have been responsible, albeit very belatedly, for the Relational and the postmodern turn in the broader realm of psychoanalysis [and] the fundamental shift from a one-person objectivist psychology to a two-person intersubjective one. [p. 4]

This emphasis on clinical inquiry into idiosyncratic subjectivity, what some have termed *singularity,*[1] has always been a fundamental guiding principle for an interpersonal approach originating in Harry Stack Sullivan's central considerations of participant-observation.[2] This point of view holds that the clinician's observations of his/her patient cannot be meaningfully separated from the effects of his/her clinical participation, and that the vagaries of that clinical participation are equally comingled with the effects of what the clinician observes in the patient.

Hirsch contends that Sullivan's introduction of the concept of participant-observation signaled the death knell for psychoanalysis's claims to objectivity and heralded the trend toward the more personal and pluralistic conceptions that embody much of contemporary psychoanalysis, and have been foundational in the interpersonal tradition. Indeed, one aspect of this book might be viewed as an attempt to articulate the still largely formally unacknowledged importance of Sullivan's contributions to contemporary psychoanalysis, perhaps with an eye toward rehabilitating him in the wider courts of psychoanalytic thinking. There, despite the claim that Sullivan has secretly dominated American psychodynamic thinking (a widely circulated view for some time now[3]), resistance per-

[1] Fiscalini, J. (1994). Narcissism and coparticipant inquiry. *Contemp. Psychoanal.,* 30: 747-776.

[2] Sullivan, H. S. (1954). *The Psychiatric Interview.* New York: Norton.

[3] See the following sources: (1) Greenberg, J. & Mitchell, S. A. (1983). *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory.* Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard Univ. Press. (2) Fiscalini, J.

sists to the formal recognition of his pioneering significance for contemporary psychoanalytic theory and praxis.

In a scholarly and erudite manner, with clear exposition and illuminating clinical examples, Hirsch takes the reader through an overview of the interpersonal tradition in psychoanalysis, tracing its evolution from its origins with Sullivan and Erich Fromm through its development and elaborations in the more radical thinking of Benjamin Wolstein and Edgar Levenson and their influences on contemporary interpersonal thinking. At the same time, he draws out and compares these ideas to other points of view in psychoanalysis, both where they converge and where they differ, in ways that have sometimes been acknowledged and sometimes not. One of the real joys of the book is the way that Hirsch is able to so clearly delineate comparative psychoanalysis to the reader in the service of clarifying his ideas.

Taking Sullivan's one-genus postulate—that we are all more simply human than otherwise[4]—as a point of departure, and his field theory premises regarding the analysis of the psychoanalytic *dyad* rather than simply the psychology of the patient as the appropriate focus of analytic study and inquiry, Hirsch demonstrates that what has been more recently termed *intersubjectivity* has been the central focus of the interpersonal orientation to psychoanalysis since its inception. He explores the ways in which the analyst's subjectivity, not qualitatively or hierarchically differentiated from that of the patient, is fully implicated in the interpersonal situation that inheres in psychoanalytic treatment. To use a metaphor, the tea of the psychoanalytic field may be made up of the two participants' individual tea bags, so to speak, but the transference-countertransference matrix that they brew together is essentially indivisible in this way of thinking.

Focusing these considerations on the issue of so-called analyzability, for example, Hirsch critiques the notion of this being considered a patient variable, instead placing the experiential responsibility for such a conclusion *ipso facto* in the subjectivity of the analyst. People who engage

---

(1995). Introduction to H. S. Sullivan's "The Data of Psychiatry." In *Pioneers of Interpersonal Psychoanalysis*, ed. D. B. Stern, C. Mann, S. Kantor & G. Schlessinger. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.

[4] Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry.* New York: Norton.

psychoanalysts in the most difficult and off-putting interpersonal integrations may be the ones who need psychoanalysis the most—the difficulties in living they create for their clinical "others" in the interpersonal relations of the psychoanalytic situation being simply a here-and-now manifestation of their difficulties in the world at large. Hirsch writes:

> Among the many entrenched psychoanalytic shibboleths that . . . [have been] deconstructed by the Interpersonalists' introduction of analysts' inherent and pervasive subjectivity was the theretofore belief that there existed a singular and ideal way to understand character development and treat it psychoanalytically. [p. 163]

> Sullivan's alternative theory situating the analyst as a second subjectivity in a two-person psychological field was the first truly American alternative to Freudian hegemony. [p. 163]

> Over time the point of view that [an] analyst's theory was a reflection of the person of the analyst . . . became a central feature of American psychoanalysis and a reflection of Interpersonal thinking on the wider body of what is now known as Relational perspectives. [p. 164]

From an interpersonal viewpoint, metapsychology has always taken a back seat to clinical utility and a commitment toward open inquiry into the interpersonal field—the confluence of transferential-countertransferential factors that need to be constructively attended to and worked with. Hirsch argues that the analyst has a responsibility to find a way to meet the consulting patient where s/he is, and to use his/her own subjective experience—say, of wishing to "reject" the patient from the clinical encounter as unanalyzable—in the service of being psychoanalytically useful to the patient.

Of course, this is as true of ongoing psychoanalytic work as it is of initial consultations for analysis, and Hirsch makes the point throughout that "psychoanalysis is decidedly not a relationship between a sick patient and a well analyst" (p. 13). "Analysts' deeply personal reactions to each unique patient exert profound influence in every element of the analytic process" (p. 13).

Hirsch demonstrates throughout the book that the interpersonal view has always had a type of anti-metapsychological predisposition in favor of clinical inquiry into the vagaries of the clinical situation. Interpersonal thinking has valued explicating praxis or the analyst's participation over theorizing, privileging attending more to the particulars of the psychoanalytic participants' subjectivities rather than generalizing from this toward theory building and related notions of psychoanalytic technique. As Hirsch puts it, "each Interpersonal innovation to analytic practice may be seen as an effort to eliminate the power of theory" (p. 167). This orientation aims to focus the analyst's attention and inquiry into the patient's experience and the analyst's own; there is a fundamental focus on the transferential-countertransferential realms of subjective experience in the here and now.

Hirsch describes and compares the evolution of analytic participation and encounter in interpersonal psychoanalytic conceptions at some length, as well as explicating some of the shortcomings of its innovators. Sullivan, for all his claims about attending to the clinician's participation, remained more comfortable at a type of clinical remove from his patients. Fromm, for all his written emphases on the necessity of the analyst's continued working toward openness in the here-and-now, immediate encounter, retained a type of prophetic and insistent presence with his patients; although clinically sensitive and astute, he could be closed to his patients' subjective experiences, particularly of him, once he had decided that he understood what the patient's difficulties were.

Psychoanalytic writers often write about areas of living that they struggle with, and a careful reading of their texts often gives evidence of these not having been fully resolved.[5] Of course, we do well to be reminded of Freud's original conception of countertransference as potential impediment to the treatment,[6] in concert with Sullivan's view of our being all more simply human than otherwise.

Wolstein attempted to articulate the existential essence of the psychic reality of the clinical situation, stripped of whatever our preferred metapsychological commitments may be, as follows.

[5] Wilner, W. (1996). Personal communication.

[6] Freud, S. (1910). The future prospects of psychoanalytic therapy. *S. E.,* 11.

> "Doctor" and "patient" designate the, so to speak, extra-psychic activities that derive from the hierarchical aspects of societal roles and all that playing them entails—but are not, as such, indigenous to the psychic reality of the experience they both undergo together. For the clinical psychoanalytic inquiry into transference and countertransference, as well as both resistance and counterresistance, and anxiety and counteranxiety, also brings the two coparticipants face-to-face with the sense of self. An autogenerative point of origin from within the psyche, this sense of self is uniquely individual. With it, the two may, in their separate ways, each establish ownership of, responsibility for, choice among these processes and patterns as these emerge for possible reconstructive change.[7]

This captures some of the other emphases that Hirsch makes in his book, highlighting the interpersonal tradition's view of the clinical situation in terms of its essentially nonhierarchical and egalitarian existential capacities. Both participants are conceived of as people who have, at least in theory, a coequal capacity for will, agency, and responsibility; and the analyst's participation, both intended and unintended, may be viewed as potentially essentially coequal to his/her patients.' Hirsch highlights the evolution of Sullivan's participant-observation, distinct from Freud's objectivist surgeon and mirror stance, into Fromm's clinical sensibility of observant-participation, with its emphasis on encounter and immediate engagement, and on to more contemporary theorists such as Levenson and Wolstein, who paved the way for a fuller conception of what Wolstein ultimately referred to as *coparticipant inquiry and experience,*[8] a focus on the existential realm of psychic realism. Hirsch and other interpersonal writers have continued to elaborate more fully on these themes (cf. Ehrenberg, Fiscalini, Wilner).

Hirsch also spends a considerable amount of time focused on the conceptions of dissociation and enactment, and the ways in which they inform each other in the clinical situation. Again, it is worth noting that

[7] Wolstein, B. (1983). The pluralism of perspectives on countertransference. *Contemp. Psychoanal.,* 19:506-521. Quotation is from p. 519.

[8] Wolstein, B. (1977). From mirror to participant observation, to coparticipant inquiry and experience. *Contemp. Psychoanal.,* 13:381-386.

those contemporary psychoanalytic emphases that favor the concept of dissociation over that of repression owe an intellectual debt of gratitude to Sullivan's originating conceptions on the subject.[9]

Regarding enactments, Hirsch is emphatic in his view that, in addition to the importance of their being recognized and understood by the analyst, they must also ultimately be verbally articulated as such to the patient for their essential mutative impact to be fully realized. The classical and mainstream charge that interpersonal psychoanalysis was interested in behavior was correct, in fact, but the consequent implication of its shallowness was not, for interpersonal psychoanalysis was interested in behavior and its impact on others, including the analyst, in order to gain access to the patient's internal world and its configurations that could not be sufficiently verbalized by the patient due to inattention or dissociation. Hirsch emphasizes the central significance of examining dissociated interaction in the here and now of the analytic encounter as a type of royal road into internalized and foundational patterns of attachment and relatedness and their warp and woof. In his radically humanist bent, Hirsch positions dissociation in a manner similar to the way he views narcissism—that is, not as a type of person or pathology, but as a ubiquitous human dimension existing along a continuum.

In the remainder of the book, Hirsch offers the reader an interesting treatise on the vagaries of love and lust and their negotiation in long-term relationships, noting that clinical work with these issues may benefit from the analyst's attention to the differences between analytic aims and analytic ideals; details a firsthand account of a New York analyst's experience of living through 9/11 with his patients; and presents his views on the relationship between interpersonal and relational psychoanalytic perspectives.

Hirsch has written an important book, one that traces the evolution of interpersonal conceptions in psychoanalysis and the way in which these ideas have come to represent a significant core of the pluralistic sensibilities that pervade much of contemporary psychoanalysis. He wants those ideas that have emanated from the interpersonal tradition

[9] Sullivan, H. S. (1956). Dissociative processes. In *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*. New York: Norton.

to be acknowledged as such, and he takes great pains to draw these out clearly and succinctly. He is sure and articulate in teaching the reader in a scholarly fashion, while at the same time openly acknowledging his own highly personalized viewpoints, with the aim of bringing his and others' interpersonal ideas to a wider readership. His book gives one a great deal to think about and consider regarding one's own participation in analytic work and process, whether one identifies with the interpersonal tradition or not.

The question remains, however, for interpersonal psychoanalysis—with its tradition ever more fully embraced, if not explicitly acknowledged, within contemporary psychoanalytic thinking—as to whether or not this particular school of psychoanalytic thought can continue to, as Hirsch puts it in discussing his own life's journey in the book's final chapter, "emerge from the oppositional and the negative" (p. 201), and continue to contribute its singularly stamped view of psychoanalytic encounter and process. Relational perspectives in psychoanalysis, though originated almost exclusively by interpersonalists, have become much more widely and popularly subscribed to than the interpersonal tradition on which they are largely founded.

In a chapter entitled "The Interpersonal Roots of Relational Thinking," Hirsch asserts: "The single most significant influence on what is currently the dominant psychoanalytic thinking in the United States and some other countries (Relational perspectives) comes from the Interpersonal psychoanalytic tradition." He suggests that "this is not sufficiently appreciated nor referenced in much of the literature identified as Relational" (p. 181). Many more analysts self-identify as relational than interpersonal, perhaps feeling that the former is more welcoming of an integration of other influences, such as object relations, contemporary Freudian, and self psychology; or perhaps relational perspectives somehow have more cachet or sex appeal, having been cast as a set of putatively new and contemporary innovations in psychoanalysis.

However, Hirsch goes on to suggest that "a considerable majority of analysts self-identified as relational, especially the ones most influential in the literature, *are indistinguishable from a majority of those self-identified as Interpersonal"* (p. 181, italics added). Indeed, many interpersonalists likewise self-identify with other schools of thought, including object rela-

tions, contemporary Freudian, or self psychological. To paraphrase Levenson, with tongue only slightly in cheek, there are interpersonalists who can out-Freudian the Freudians.[10]

Even among those analysts who identify solely with the designation *interpersonal,* significant distinctions may be made on the basis of where one falls in terms of the Sullivan–Fromm foundational dialectic and the currents that flow from these originating tributaries. Fiscalini went so far as to specify four discrete categories of interpersonal analysts: traditional interpersonalists or classical Sullivanians; radical preservationists; radical empiricists or experientialists; and eclectic integrationists or relationists.[11] While a further elaboration of these designations is beyond the scope of this review, suffice it to say that the interpersonal tradition, with its privileging of singularity and pluralism of metapsychology and praxis, offers a tremendous amount of flexibility for inclusiveness.

Interpersonal psychoanalysis grew out of and thrived in opposition to the marginalizing mainstream of American psychoanalysis. It is worth noting that Hirsch's book was published in the same year that New York's William Alanson White Institute, founded by Sullivan and Fromm, among others, and generally recognized as the home of the interpersonal tradition, accepted an invitation from the American Psychoanalytic Association to join the latter as an accredited training institute. The White Institute's training model is now endorsed by the American as a functionally equivalent model for training—this after a long history of parochial bias and exclusion from membership.

Can interpersonal psychoanalysis, once marginalized and now officially accepted into the mainstream, individuate from its opposition to it and continue its maturation and creative evolution, absent opposition to its conventional protagonist? Hirsch's book ends with a personal description of his own continuing evolution as a person along a similar vein. Given his emphasis on the importance of idiosyncratic individuality for psychoanalysis and for living, my wish for both, in the immortal words of singer/songwriter Neil Young is: "Long may you run." Or, to paraphrase the villain Hannibal Lecter's words as to why the FBI agent Clarice Star-

[10] Levenson, E. A. (1972). *The Fallacy of Understanding.* New York: Basic Books.

[11] Fiscalini, J. (2004). *Coparticipant Psychoanalysis: Toward a New Theory of Clinical Inquiry.* New York: Columbia Univ. Press.

ling need not worry about her safety from him at the story's close[12]: the psychoanalytic world is a much more interesting place with both Hirsch and the interpersonal tradition in it.

**STEFAN R. ZICHT (NEW YORK)**

THE THERAPIST IN MOURNING: FROM THE FARAWAY NEARBY. Edited by Anne J. Adelman and Kerry L. Malawista. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 289 pp.

This volume is a collection of papers by mental health professionals, both psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, on the topic of loss and mourning in the therapist's life and mind. The book is structured in four parts. The first part deals with "The Therapist's Experience of Loss" and is composed of three chapters. The second part, containing four chapters, is titled "When a Patient Dies." Part III, "At the Crossroads of the Therapist's Personal and Professional Worlds," has four chapters, as does the fourth and last part of the book, "When Disaster Strikes a Community."

One of the book's co-editors, Kerry L. Malawista, coauthored the first chapter, while her co-editor, Anne J. Adelman, wrote a chapter about mourning the death of a patient. She also wrote the book's preface. In addition, the introduction to the book and a brief conclusion were authored by the two co-editors.

Adelman and Malawista have compiled a volume that I believe has been desperately needed by the psychoanalytic community on a topic that is often minimized: the therapist's/analyst's mourning. In their introduction, they write:

> When someone we love dies, such rituals—the funeral, the wake, family visits, mourners' prayers—serve as scaffolding for our grief. Amid the circle of grievers, these funeral rituals provide a way to contain and temper overwhelming feelings of loss and grief . . . and to help the mourner feel held, supported, and able to put words to powerful and destabilizing emotions. [pp. 3-4]

[12] *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). A film directed by J. Demme, from a novel by T. Harris. A Strong Heart/Demme production distributed by Orion Pictures.

ling need not worry about her safety from him at the story's close[12]: the psychoanalytic world is a much more interesting place with both Hirsch and the interpersonal tradition in it.

**STEFAN R. ZICHT (NEW YORK)**

THE THERAPIST IN MOURNING: FROM THE FARAWAY NEARBY. Edited by Anne J. Adelman and Kerry L. Malawista. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 289 pp.

This volume is a collection of papers by mental health professionals, both psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, on the topic of loss and mourning in the therapist's life and mind. The book is structured in four parts. The first part deals with "The Therapist's Experience of Loss" and is composed of three chapters. The second part, containing four chapters, is titled "When a Patient Dies." Part III, "At the Crossroads of the Therapist's Personal and Professional Worlds," has four chapters, as does the fourth and last part of the book, "When Disaster Strikes a Community."

One of the book's co-editors, Kerry L. Malawista, coauthored the first chapter, while her co-editor, Anne J. Adelman, wrote a chapter about mourning the death of a patient. She also wrote the book's preface. In addition, the introduction to the book and a brief conclusion were authored by the two co-editors.

Adelman and Malawista have compiled a volume that I believe has been desperately needed by the psychoanalytic community on a topic that is often minimized: the therapist's/analyst's mourning. In their introduction, they write:

> When someone we love dies, such rituals—the funeral, the wake, family visits, mourners' prayers—serve as scaffolding for our grief. Amid the circle of grievers, these funeral rituals provide a way to contain and temper overwhelming feelings of loss and grief . . . and to help the mourner feel held, supported, and able to put words to powerful and destabilizing emotions. [pp. 3-4]

[12] *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). A film directed by J. Demme, from a novel by T. Harris. A Strong Heart/Demme production distributed by Orion Pictures.

They go on:

> For therapists grieving a loss, these familiar rites of grief and mourning are often not available. Because of the intricacies of our working selves and the complex nature of our ties to our patients, we process our grief on multiple levels. Our mourning is complicated by the idiosyncrasies of our work. [p. 4]

Malawista and Adelman point out two other problems: (1) therapists/analysts are trained to monitor their internal feelings and function in such a way that their feeling states do not "intrude" into the analytic work and affect the patient; and (2) when therapists write about losses that have affected their lives and work, the general trend has been to write in such a way that "not too much" (p. 4) is revealed about the therapist, her feelings, or her life. For a long time in analytic circles, a therapist's open descriptions of her struggles were seen as exhibitionistic and viewed with disapproval.

This artificial dichotomy turns the therapist's efforts to feel, express, and work through loss and mourning into a highly isolated and constricted effort, which in my view is good neither for the therapist nor for the therapeutic process, and certainly not good for the patients she is working with. As I noted repeatedly in my own recent book,[1] I have come to view this injunction for the therapist/analyst to keep as much of her reality as possible *out* of the analytic setting as artificial, idealized, inauthentic, and erroneous. It is not only impossible but in fact is unhelpful on both sides of the couch—for the patient and the analyst.

I therefore particularly welcome Adelman and Malawista's beautiful description of this dilemma in their edited volume. They have indeed accomplished what they set out to do. They have highlighted the various ways in which therapists and analysts suffer losses—whether in their personal or professional lives, and whether these have to do with illness or death of the analyst, or the loss of an institution with which analysts have been connected. They have included a discussion of the effects of the

[1] Abbasi, A. (2014). *The Rupture of Serenity: External Intrusions and Psychoanalytic Technique*. London: Karnac.

loss of a patient through death, losses related to termination of the therapist's own analysis or that of one of her patients, and losses connected to natural catastrophes—e.g., hurricanes, acts of terrorism, termination of work in a particular field, or losses related to aging.

I was particularly moved by Adelman's chapter titled "The Hand of Fate: On Mourning the Death of a Patient." So as not to have to issue a spoiler alert, I will not share with the readers of this review how or why Adelman's patient suddenly died. The book's readers will definitely find this a useful and very touching chapter. Many of us have been where Adelman was in terms of what she went through after the death of her patient. She reminds us that "even when we terminate with patients, we say, 'The door is always open.' There is an implicit promise that there will always be an hour made available for the returning patient" (p. 90). She adds poignantly that "when a patient dies suddenly, the hour remains as if suspended in time" (p. 91).

Adelman describes her realization that, with the sudden death of her patient, the usual routine of holding an hour for an absent patient, or of being able to talk about the absence when the patient returns, was lost. She points out that when we attend a patient's funeral as that person's therapist, we are in the odd position of hearing a lot of information about the patient without being able to share what we know. We are mourners, but different from the other mourners present.

Adelman wondered if she belonged at the funeral of her patient, and who might have benefited from her being there (which the patient's spouse had asked her to do). She concluded that her presence may have provided solace for the family, and she acknowledges that she felt the patient would have wanted her to be there. At the same time, she was also aware that

> . . . I was there because it was necessary for me, in seeking meaning, to be among those who knew her and were mourning her death. As her therapist, I could not mourn in public, but I could be present and hold her in my thoughts. The universal rituals surrounding her death could serve the function of making her death real and begin to dissipate the feeling I had had in my office, that she was there one day and then not the next. [p. 90]

Each and every chapter in this book is excellent and useful. Another example is Richard Waugaman's contribution, "The Loss of an Institution: Mourning Chestnut Lodge," in which he describes a particular kind of mourning. He tells us that he spent thirteen years working at Chestnut Lodge, which was famous for its long-term work with patients and particularly for providing a milieu in which they could be treated with intensive psychotherapy. Waugaman left Chestnut Lodge in 1999; the hospital closed two years later. He shares his mourning process in relation to the work of the lodge and the colleagues and interactions he had there. Some of the work of this mourning was done through correspondence with Harold Searles, which he quotes. Of one such letter, Waugaman writes:

> This letter illustrates the benefit of conversations, whether in person or through letters, in helping us deepen our self-understanding as we are coping with loss . . . . When I imagined Searles reading my letter, it brought to mind a fresh perspective on my thoughts. [p. 167]

Another powerful chapter, this one by Sylvia J. Schneller, describes a traumatic life situation: "[With] Hurricane Katrina and the levee rupture that inundated the City of New Orleans in late August 2005, all members of the community, patient and therapist alike, experienced a shared trauma, a trauma some researchers described as apocalyptic" (p. 219). Reading this chapter made me aware of how little I really knew about the aftereffects of this disaster on the local psychoanalytic community, or about the displacement and disruption suffered both by our analytic colleagues and by their patients.

A chapter about 9/11 and its aftermath, by Billie A. Pivnick, is especially worth reading. Pivnick connects her early childhood traumatic experience of her mother's repeated falls due to seizures to "another great fall" (p. 251)—the one she experienced on September 11, 2001. She tells us that, in retrospect, she feels that even though she had been able to move past her parents' limitations, many old issues and feelings deep inside her were reactivated as a result of this catastrophe. With the help of her family and friends as well as professionals, she feels that she

gained a new scaffolding for her inner self during this period of great uncertainty and terror. She describes the process of writing this chapter:

> By sharing my experience in an imaginary dialogue with you as my witness, I have intended to stimulate a communal remembering of my triumphs of spirit as well as of our tragic moments of mutual helplessness and sorrow. This is the work of mourning traumatic loss. [pp. 251-252]

In short, I recommend this book highly to all mental health clinicians, since all of us are constantly dealing with our own losses in life by mourning them in a deep and meaningful way, in order that we may help our patients deal with their losses. I relate the following personal information to illustrate how strikingly this was made clear to me.

*The Psychoanalytic Quarterly's* Book Review Editor, Dr. Martin Silverman, kindly asked me to review this book in late 2014, and our agreement was that I would do so by July 2015. However, in April 2015, my husband was diagnosed with cancer during a routine test. This was followed by his undergoing two surgeries over the next few months, and even though we were told that his prognosis was extremely good, the surgeries themselves were not free from complications. In fact, after the second surgery, which should have brought us to the closure of his treatment, new complications developed that necessitated planning for a third surgery later in 2015.

As I was dealing with the fear of losing my husband, I found myself unable to write anything that required sustained concentration. I was in the middle of my three-year term as president of the Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute. I was seeing patients in a full-time psychoanalytic practice. And my husband and I were engaged in the sustained, loving, and pleasurable work of raising our almost-13-year-old daughter, who had just started her first year of high school, while enjoying time with our young adult son and his wife. So certain things felt possible for me to continue doing, even in the midst of intense concern about my husband's health and worry about the eventual outcome of his treatments.

What I noticed, however, was that work that required a certain freedom and space in the mind, work that was more creative in nature (such as writing), became very difficult to do during this period. I was aware that the fear of losing my husband had stirred up old losses and feelings around those. I was also aware that now, at the age of fifty-four, after I had gone through what I felt had been a very useful analysis, my sources of inner sustenance and nurturance were greater than they had ever been. The shock of discovering that my seemingly healthy, very active husband had a serious illness—which, had it been left undetected for a few more months, could have resulted in terminal illness—was certainly easier to deal with than it might have been five or ten years earlier. But it felt traumatic nonetheless.

At such a time, writing a review of a book dealing with the therapist's mourning felt impossible. I let Martin know that I was not going to be able to write the review on time, and not once but twice we had to extend the deadline, until I felt I had reached something of an emotional clearing and could write what needed to be written. To me this seems to be an example of a period of time when an analyst's personal and professional lives intersect so vividly and powerfully that it would be silly and inauthentic not to acknowledge the impact of one on the other. Ultimately, this is the message of Adelman and Malawista's *The Therapist in Mourning*.

Even the best of lives is always full of losses; none of us is spared from loss. The only questions are when previous losses have occurred and when others will occur next. In between and during periods of loss, we need to figure out *how to continue to function in the best possible way*—which, in my mind, means *acknowledging that there are going to be times when we are not functioning very well*. This is an important lesson not only for our patients, but also for all of us therapists and analysts; it is something we must truly believe within ourselves. Such understanding leads to a deep and truthful recognition of our vulnerabilities and protects us from misusing our patients during periods of loss in our own lives.

**AISHA ABBASI (WEST BLOOMFIELD, MI)**

THE UNCONSCIOUS WITHOUT FREUD. By Rosemarie Sponner Sand. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. 184 pp.

The aim of the author (identified as a psychoanalyst of twenty-five years' standing) of this well-written, if somewhat contentious, book is to reveal to the reader a "venerable" theory of the "unconscious" that preceded Freud, and that was "better than the one [with which he] replaced it" (p. xi). In pursuit of that objective, Sand has surveyed in considerable detail the work of those philosophers, beginning with Plato, who have concerned themselves with the nature of the mind (or the "soul") and addressed themselves to the question of thought and impulse arising and operating outside the realm of consciousness.

It was the German master Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), the author contends, who first formulated a concept of the unconscious mind and developed a theory of psychodynamics. Unlike Descartes ("I think, therefore I am") and Locke, who insisted that all mental activity occurred in the realm of consciousness, "Leibniz proposed that not only memories, but mental contents of all kinds—thoughts, emotions, and desires—could continue to exert power outside of consciousness" (p. 4). He and his followers conceived of levels of "insensible perception" and "apperception," as well as a distinction between "light" and "dark" ideas.

Later on, Kant, the Romantic philosophers, and especially Schopenhauer offered reflections on the unconscious, often from a metaphysical point of view; it was Schopenhauer whose conception of the *unconscious will* came closest to Freud's theory of drives and later the id. Following him, Eduard von Hartmann published a *Philosophy of the Unconscious* that assigned to it extensive powers and that became a bestseller in multiple editions.[1] "One cannot know," Sand writes, "whether Freud actually quarried Hartmann or whether he and Hartmann simply drew from the same sources" (p. 128).

The author devotes three idealizing chapters to the contributions of Johann Friedrich Herbart, the first of which is entitled "The Ghost in the

[1] Hartmann, E. von (1869). *Philosophy of the Unconscious,* trans. W. C. Coupland. Abingdon, UK/New York: Routledge, 2014.

Freudian Mansion." His work, published in the early to mid-nineteenth century, postulated three levels of consciousness interacting dynamically, with constant upward pressure from below and repression from above. He earned praise from such scholars as William James and Bertrand Russell; nonetheless, Freud never mentioned Herbart and, we are told, his "psychoanalytic defenders . . . had to insist on the irrelevance of Herbartian theory" (p. 153).

Essential to the author's argument is the question of the influence of these earlier theories, especially those of his countrymen, on Freud's own thinking and his theoretical formulations. Despite his tendency to minimize or deny such influence—or even knowledge—of much of this work, it is certain that he was exposed to some of it in his studies in secondary school, and it is known that he was a devoted student of philosopher Franz Brentano in his university days. And, the author maintains, "The consequences of the Herbartian features of the unconscious wish were enormous, not only for psychoanalytic theory but also for clinical practice" (p. 158).

Sand appears to consider, then, that her revelations, based on impressive scholarship and forceful argument, will bring these issues to the field for consideration and, ideally, resolve them. But in fact the questions she raises have been thoroughly addressed by others in times past. In his widely praised history of psychoanalysis, George Makari dealt extensively with the influences of Kant, Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Herbart, among others, on Freud's thinking; specifically, he noted that "Freud knew the work of Herbart, since he had studied . . . Lindner's Herbartian textbook of psychology while in the Gymnasium."[2] Much earlier, Henri Ellenberger, in a classic text, not only considered Schopenhauer and Hartmann, but noted in particular that "one of the main sources of psychoanalysis was the psychology of Herbart."[3]

Thus the present book takes its place among the persistent controversies that surround Freud's theories: to what degree they were thoroughly original, deriving from his personal and clinical experiences, and

[2] Makari, G. (2008). *Revolution in Mind.* New York: Harpers. Quotation is from p. 69.

[3] Ellenberger, H. F. (1970). *The Discovery of the Unconscious.* New York: Basic Books. Quotation is from p. 536.

to what extent they borrowed from or were dependent on the uncredited work of philosophers and scientists—a topic that will, no doubt, continue to be argued. What Sand does not address, let alone account for, is the depth and power of Freud's ideas that, beyond those of his predecessors, have in W. H. Auden's words (quoted by Sand, p. 129) become and remained a "whole climate of opinion" over much of the world.

**AARON H. ESMAN (NEW YORK)**

UNCERTAINTIES, MYSTERIES, DOUBTS: ROMANTICISM AND THE ANALYTIC ATTITUDE. By Robert Snell. East Sussex, UK/New York: Routledge, 2012. 232 pp.

Romanticism emerged in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century in the context of the changing social and emotional landscape and political crisis that arose in the wake of the French Revolution. The latter was initially seen as the apotheosis of Reason and the Age of Enlightenment, but as its promise gave way to the Reign of Terror and the massive upheavals produced by the Napoleonic wars, man's reason alone no longer seemed adequate as a guide for understanding the world. This failure of the progressive march of rationality and intellect ushered in a "time of immense uncertainty and unforeseeable possibility" (p. 3), out of which emerged a new sensibility "founded in a respect for the elusiveness of meanings and for 'the hermeneutic principle according to which mystery and incomprehensibility foster understanding' [Calhoun 1992]"[1] (p. 4).

Romanticism privileged the Dionysian over the Apollonian; valorized the ineffable and the inevitable chaos of experience over finitude, organization, and mankind's attempted imposition of rational order; and encouraged the cultivation and tolerance of an attitude of *receptive incomprehension* in the face of the inevitable mysteries of existence. It was "not so much a movement . . . as a state of mind, a form of engagement" (p. 9), a "radically open-minded" (p. 1) engagement with one's world

[1] Calhoun, K. (1992). *Fatherland: Novalis, Freud, and the Discipline of Romance*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State Univ. Press.

to what extent they borrowed from or were dependent on the uncredited work of philosophers and scientists—a topic that will, no doubt, continue to be argued. What Sand does not address, let alone account for, is the depth and power of Freud's ideas that, beyond those of his predecessors, have in W. H. Auden's words (quoted by Sand, p. 129) become and remained a "whole climate of opinion" over much of the world.

**AARON H. ESMAN (NEW YORK)**

UNCERTAINTIES, MYSTERIES, DOUBTS: ROMANTICISM AND THE ANALYTIC ATTITUDE. By Robert Snell. East Sussex, UK/New York: Routledge, 2012. 232 pp.

Romanticism emerged in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century in the context of the changing social and emotional landscape and political crisis that arose in the wake of the French Revolution. The latter was initially seen as the apotheosis of Reason and the Age of Enlightenment, but as its promise gave way to the Reign of Terror and the massive upheavals produced by the Napoleonic wars, man's reason alone no longer seemed adequate as a guide for understanding the world. This failure of the progressive march of rationality and intellect ushered in a "time of immense uncertainty and unforeseeable possibility" (p. 3), out of which emerged a new sensibility "founded in a respect for the elusiveness of meanings and for 'the hermeneutic principle according to which mystery and incomprehensibility foster understanding' [Calhoun 1992]"[1] (p. 4).

Romanticism privileged the Dionysian over the Apollonian; valorized the ineffable and the inevitable chaos of experience over finitude, organization, and mankind's attempted imposition of rational order; and encouraged the cultivation and tolerance of an attitude of *receptive incomprehension* in the face of the inevitable mysteries of existence. It was "not so much a movement . . . as a state of mind, a form of engagement" (p. 9), a "radically open-minded" (p. 1) engagement with one's world

[1] Calhoun, K. (1992). *Fatherland: Novalis, Freud, and the Discipline of Romance*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State Univ. Press.

and experience based on the assumption that the conversation with oneself, the unknown, and the other would be unending.

Like psychoanalysis, Romanticism, with its "openness to surprise and the unknown" (p. 4), operates at the boundaries of that which is comprehensible and the very process of what it is to make sense. It therefore evokes all the anxieties—of senselessness, chaos, the strange, and the novel—that one is apt to encounter at the limits of one's comprehension.

It is Robert Snell's contention that a Romantic sensibility prefigured and informed Freud's formulations of *free association, evenly hovering attention,* and the *unconscious,* and was therefore essential for the formulation and exercise of what today we call the *analytic attitude.* (Readers may also consider it foundational for Bion's *reverie,* Winnicott's *transitional phenomena,* Kristeva's *semiotic,* and other psychoanalytic formulations of intersubjective connectedness and relating.) According to Snell, "in its concern with self-exploration, relationship, Eros, anxiety, terror and mystery" (p. 4), "Romanticism *was* psychoanalysis, *avant la lettre*" (p. 4, italics in original).

It is the convergence between the Romantic sensibility and the analytic attitude that is the subject of this beautifully written, historically fascinating, and aesthetically framed treatise. Both mind states share an open receptiveness marked by a freedom and playfulness of thought that can—and in psychoanalysis, must—complement and even supplant a fixed and often premature intellectual judgment or sense of certainty. Indeed, Snell argues, there is a "cultural precedence" (p. 2) in the Romantic "listening, responsive, 'not-knowing' state" (p. 2) of mind, which serves as "the historical underpinning, without which it is hard to see how . . . [the analytic attitude] could have developed as a therapeutic resource" (pp. 2-3).

Like the psychoanalytic process itself, Romantic works of art and literature "do (and did not) so much reward attempts to explain them as require us to feel, react, and try to find new ways to describe and reflect upon . . . experience. They set up new, dynamic, and 'dialogic' relationships between themselves" (p. 3) and their audience.

In fact, we learn that the very term *psycho-analytical* was coined not by Freud, but by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1805, as the latter struggled with trying to understand

> . . . how the classical, pagan gods had survived as living presences in medieval Christian minds. He concluded that the modern reader would need "a strong imagination as well as an accurate psycho-analytical understanding" in order to get a real sense of this; it was an "anonymous hidden life," active "in the ordinary unchecked stream of Thought" of the times like a kind of "Contraband" (Coleridge 1961).[2] [Snell, p. 1]

"An 'anonymous hidden life,' active 'in the ordinary . . . stream of Thought,'" stowing away or hidden like a "Contraband"! Could we imagine a more evocative description of "that which refuses to be assimilated, to become abstract or mere theory, to 'speak' to us as allegory or even in *confuses paroles"* (Snell, p. 137), or of what in psychoanalysis was to be formulated as the hidden and disguised elements of the repressed unconscious?

Snell's argument is presented in a series of chapters that contrast psychoanalysis and Romanticism, summarize the analytic attitude, and then go on to look closely at major Romantic figures, such as Goya, Holderlin, and Novalis, Baudelaire and de Vigny, Poe and Keats. The work of each artist or writer is examined in his own right with an eye toward the problems with which each was confronted, his responses to those problems, and their implications for and potential contributions to our understanding of an analytic attitude.

For example, Snell notes that in regard to Goya's famous etching of the dream of reason (*Los Caprichos*), the word Goya chooses for the title, *sueños,* can mean *sleep, drowsiness,* or *dream.* Snell asks:

> Is it that this is what happens when Reason falls asleep? Or is it that Reason itself is a sort of dream? A dream that produces

[2] Coleridge, S. T. (1961). *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. K. Coburn. New York: Pantheon, 1961.

> monsters like the revolution of the [French] intellectuals, which devours both its progenitors and its children? [p. 81][3]

In speaking of Holderlin, Snell comments that:

> In Freud's Cartesian reversal, we are who we are because we are barely intelligible to ourselves; it is this intelligibility that defines and distinguishes us as human. The Romantic discovery, especially in Germany, was of the need to seek a language for this predicament: for the unknowability, unpredictability, and "otherness" of the individual and the collective "us," and the problematic relation of the human to the natural world and the divine. [p. 99]

And in describing Baudelaire, Snell says that:

> He was determined "to find a way of translating the exceptional and the alien, not in order to reduce its quintessential strangeness, but to make that strangeness more approachable" (Lloyd 2002,[4] p. 192). It is an induction into an analytic attitude. [p. 144]

Perhaps even more remarkable—and relevant to practicing analysts—Snell asks the rhetorical question, "What would supervision with Baudelaire be like?" (p. 145). Noting that Baudelaire believed that the "world works only through misunderstanding," that "each person's sensibility is their genius" (p. 145), and that meanings and understanding are constantly evolving, accruing, and remain in need of constant emendation, Snell imagines Baudelaire cautioning supervisees that:

> Meanings in an analysis are fluid, provisional, and open to constant revision. One has to accept this, and listen, constantly. If "the best response to a picture might be a sonnet or an elegy," so might a response to a patient be a quotation, or a joke, anything that responds to and *meets* the other on a level which is not discursive or evaluative. [p. 145, italics in original]

[3] Think here of another great work by Goya: *Saturn Devouring His Children.*

[4] Lloyd, R. (2002). *Baudelaire's World.* Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell Univ. Press.

Thus, when Lacan asserts that "there is something originally, inaugurally, profoundly wounded in the human relation to the world," and that "life does not want to be healed,"[5] Snell has us see him "speaking in a distinctively French idiom which Baudelaire helped shape" (p. 146).

Coming away from this book, psychoanalyst readers will have had the opportunity not only to appreciate the cultural, historical degree to which certain trends within Freudian and contemporary psychoanalytic thinking and theorizing rest upon attitudes rooted in the Romantic tradition, but also to recognize that many of the field's current theoretical battles and controversies, the psychoanalytic "culture wars," are being fought in familiar terms of the possibilities versus the limits of human reason. Think, for example, of the positivism and scientism of ego psychology versus various relational or intersubjective views; early Bion versus late Bion; the relevance of infant observation, developmental theory, and neuroscience versus the uniqueness of psychic reality; etc.

One suspects that the Romantic sensibility is not only something that Snell has identified within the tradition and practice of psychoanalysis, but also, as a preferred vertex of observation, something that has informed and even shaped his understanding of our field as well. This observation should not be misconstrued as a criticism of his contribution, but rather an inevitable application of its author's reasoning, one with which this reviewer is in strong agreement. As Snell says in conclusion to his discussion of Keats—comments that might serve as a coda for his book and an apt warning to practitioners:

> To regard immersion in the radical poetry and painting of the post-Enlightenment as interesting but somehow marginal to the serious, "scientific" practice of psychotherapy might be to deprive ourselves of a vital resource in the struggle against all that which, including from within psychotherapy itself, does violence to the complexity of the human . . . . Mechanistic representations of each other under the banner of therapeutic certainty can work to make us iller and madder. [pp. 174-175]

[5] Lacan, J. (1988). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, the Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955,* trans. S. Tomaselli & J. Forrester. New York: W. W. Norton. Quotations are from pp. 167 and 233.

Or, as Wordsworth (1798) put it:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.
>
> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
> We murder to dissect.
>
> Enough of Science and of Art;
> Close up those barren leaves;
> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receives.[6]

**HOWARD B. LEVINE (CAMBRIDGE, MA)**

[6] Wordsworth, W. (1798). The tables turned (lines 21-32). See: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174826 (2015).

*Volume LXXXV, Number 1*

# ABSTRACTS

## PSYCHE–ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR PSYCHOANALYSE UND IHRE ANWENDUNGEN

### Translated and Abstracted by Rita Teusch

### Volume 66, Number 9/10 (2012)

**Der träumende Analytiker. [The Analyst as Dreamer.]** By Ralf Zwiebel, pp. 776-802.

Zwiebel is interested in the basic processes, attitudes, and functions of becoming and remaining an analyst. He postulates three dimensions: (1) It is a lifelong task to work on one's professionalism; (2) This process must be individualized with each analytic patient; and (3) The process is further developed in each individual analytic session.

The author is especially interested in how the analyst manages to achieve a balance between his personal empathy for the patient and his conceptualization of the analytic process, which requires a greater emotional distance. Elsewhere, Zwiebel (2013) described essential processes in the analytic situation from the perspective of an analyst who wishes, dreams, relates, reflects, and interprets.

In the present paper, Zwiebel focuses on the significance of the function of dreaming for the process of becoming and remaining an analyst. He posits that this dream function varies with the kind of working model regarding dreams that a particular analyst employs. He cites Moser (2005, 2013), who stated that analyst and patient sometimes have different dream theories or models, which can be quite contradictory; the analyst's model determines what he will hear and how he will approach the patient's dream. The analyst's private theory of dreams is often a combination of his everyday ideas about dreams and what he has learned about established dream theories.

Zwiebel notes that Moser outlined six different dream models in the literature:

1. The dream as a window into the internal world, especially the unconscious and infantile sexual wish fulfillments (Freud 1900).
2. The dream as a message from inside or outside. There is an emphasis on the therapeutic function of the dream (Fiss 2000).
3. The dream as a theater with many actors, participants, an audience, and a stage director (Morgenthaler 1986).
4. The dream space (Lewin 1954).
5. The dream as a container and creative process (Bion 1962a; Ferro 2002).
6. The dream as an object (Pontalis 1974).

Moser presented his own dream theory, which views the dream as a simulated microworld in which the dreamer attempts to solve a specific problem, both affectively and cognitively. Moser stated that the organization of the dream reveals the dreamer's readiness to work on a psychic problem. In this model, the manifest dream is considered most important and the associations to the dream lose significance.

Zwiebel adds his own dream model to Moser's overview: the dream as a safeguard of the dreamer's identity—that is, the dream deals with an emotional crisis and/or processes a traumatic experience. He hypothesizes that the analyst's dream theory determines how the analyst experiences and judges his own dreams as well as the patient's (Zwiebel 1978).

Zwiebel proceeds to discuss the so-called countertransference dream. He states that for a long time, countertransference dreams were taboo in the literature because they were considered an expression of a loss or failure of the analyst's analytic function. However, Zwiebel reminds us, early in the history of psychoanalysis, Freud's famous Irma dream (1900) revolved around the question of who was at fault in a difficult analysis.

Zwiebel posits that the understanding of a countertransference dream leads to an enhanced understanding of the patient and also to unconscious aspects of the analytic process, including unconscious trans-

ference and countertransference dynamics between analyst and patient. On a deeper level, the countertransference dream reveals an unconscious conflict in the analyst regarding how the analyst experiences his professionalism, his role as an analyst, the interventions he makes, and boundaries he sets. Zwiebel posits that it can be helpful and even healing for the analyst if the anxieties and insecurities revealed in a dream can be interpreted.

The author shares two dreams of his own that point to his anxieties and conflicts about his role as an analyst. In Dream 1, he was in a session with a female patient. He performed a gynecological examination of her. Upon inserting his finger into her vagina, he was surprised to find that the vaginal wall was thick and hard; other than this feeling of surprise, there were no other emotions in the dream.

In Dream 2, the author was in a car with his patient, who was driving, while he sat behind her, giving "interpretations" as they drove through a mountainous landscape. She drove very fast around a dangerous curve and lost control, and the car careened down a steep slope. In the dream, the analyst thought that he was falling and in a moment would hit the ground; then he would know what it was like to die. He awoke from the dream terrified.

Zwiebel states that both these dreams show unconscious aspects of the actual transference-countertransference dynamic between him and his patient. In the first dream, he struggled with the problem of empathy and experienced too much affective distance. The second dream revealed his fear of a dangerous entanglement with his patient and consequent emotional flooding. He states that these dreams hint at a personal conflict around avoiding empathic engagement for fear of experiencing a dangerous merger with the patient. If the analyst can allow himself to remember his dreams and let his free associations unfold, he may be able to interpret the dreams and experience substantial emotional benefit.

Zwiebel believes that the analyst's ability to be self-reflective, introspective, and open to dreaming is an important factor in his analytic competence and in the process of becoming and remaining an analyst. If the analyst is able to dream an analytic session, or to digest a session through dreaming about it, this will help him regain his analytic atti-

tude because dreaming has the function of affect regulation. Through being in touch with and open to their dreams, analysts can process the affective pressures of the analytic situation—its deprivations and temptations—and become able to transform these into insights that will further their personal development. The importance of the analyst's dreams cannot be overestimated because dreaming means experiencing, and being in touch with his dreams prevents the analyst from escaping into thinking without experiencing, which can be an indication of a failure in analytic competence.

## Volume 67, Number 1 (2013)

**Das Schweigen der Polyglotten: Über Muttersprache, ihren Verlust und fremde Mütter. [The Silence of the Polyglots: The Mother Tongue, Its Loss, and "Stranger" Mothers.]** By Elisabeth Pelzl, pp. 1-22.

This article discusses the role of the mother tongue in early libidinal cathexis and attachment. Pelzl begins by stating that psychoanalysis, from its inception, was polyglot. Both analysts and analysands often work in foreign languages, but the loss of the mother tongue and feelings of alienation in a new country have rarely been discussed. The author is concerned with questions such as: Under what circumstances does the loss of the mother tongue have traumatic consequences? How does the new language present an enrichment of expression and an extension of thinking? Does the new language change the symbolic content of words?

Pelzl observes that there are basically two views on whether it is possible to translate infants' earliest primitive and preverbal processes into symbolic language. On the one hand, authors such as Kristeva claim maximum heterogeneity between the libidinal cathexis of infantile significations and the acquisition of symbolic language in the older child. On the other hand, some psychoanalytic models, such as Freud's, understand words as containing the symbolic expression of archaic fantasies and somatic symptoms. In the process of an analysis, these can be reawakened, named, and symbolized as the result of a *vertical process*—i.e., through chains of associations that connect the conscious and unconscious.

Pelzl references a letter that Freud wrote to Fliess on December 6, 1896 (Masson 1985), in which he described a hypothetical mental appa-

ratus as a system containing many simultaneous and successive imprints that are transcribed and reorganized. Because of repression, these leave memory traces that cannot immediately be translated. In this model, past experiences and feelings survive because they are bound up in a web of phonetic and phonologic associations, even if they were not symbolized before becoming repressed. Freud (1900) presents many examples of this.

Pelzl then draws on Anzieu's (1993) concept of a protective and holding *sound cocoon* to understand the earliest interpersonal processes between infant and mother. Anzieu described the importance of the infant's very early acoustic world and of the infant's experience with her mother's words, which are seen as crucial for the development of ego/self functions. He also saw the development of language as deeply rooted in bodily experience. He posited an auditory-acoustic mirror that precedes the (visual) mirror stage of Lacan and the maternal gaze of Winnicott.

Bion (1962b) showed that the transition from not thinking to thinking and from beta elements to alpha function rests on the ability of the mother's psyche (breast) to contain the emerging psychological world of the infant's sensations, affects, and memory traces. Thus the containing function of the mother is realized through the communication of acoustic signals and her language. Pelzl states that the sound cocoon that develops from the phonemes and words of the mother tongue allows an initial symbolization of the earliest sensory experiences and representations; this cocoon is the precondition for infants to become able to experience things as meaningful. Kristeva (2008) contends that a new language also creates a new body. If the acoustic-tactile connection is not successful, the child grows up with the feeling that the mother (and later the analyst) speaks a foreign language.

Anzieu speaks of an *infra-linguistic* basis that is established through the mother's physical care and body play with the infant. A prelinguistic basis is established through hearing the verbal sounds and phonemes of the mother. The good enough mother speaks with the child in a language in which the child can recognize himself. She presents the infant with a melodic bath (through her voice, songs, and music), a mirror of sounds rooted in the body that becomes internalized and strengthens

the infant's and child's ego/self. For experiences to be felt as meaningful, it is necessary that the mother's words feel authentic to the infant, that there is a connection to her internal experience. Pelzl posits that such a meaningful connection may become compromised if the mother does not speak in her mother tongue to the infant, or if she has not adequately processed her experience of being exiled from her native land.

Kristeva (2008), writing about Klein, states that leaving one's mother tongue behind (which happened repeatedly in Klein's family because of immigration) is felt in fantasy as matricide. The loss of the mother becomes the death of the mother for the Imaginary. Only if the loss of the mother (breast, mother tongue) is adequately mourned and feelings of guilt and loss are integrated will there be a nontraumatic outcome.

Pelzl references the novel *The Stranger* (Camu 1942), in which the protagonist, who has lost his mother, associates with friends whose language he does not speak or understand, and he eventually becomes a different person. He is a stranger to himself, loses control over his aggression, and becomes a criminal. One might say that the protagonist has not found a language with which to express the mourning of his lost mother. The symbolic matricide miscarries and becomes an actual murder when he is confronted with strangers and their foreign language and must therefore face his own lack of speech. The foreign language is equated with the loss of his mother and the fantasized matricide, and the way to the symbolic is blocked. Having been dazzled by bright sunlight was the protagonist's explanation for the murder he committed.

In the final part of her paper, Pelzl discusses patients from her practice who were born in a country that was not the home country of their parents. Often the parents did not speak to their children in their native language because they did not want to hinder the children's adjustment to the new country and the new language.

Pelzl presents the case example of a patient she calls Tereza, whose parents were originally from Poland. Her mother did not feel comfortable in the new country and seems to have felt sad, possibly even traumatized, and was largely emotionally unavailable to her children because, as Pelzl surmises, the mother, by changing languages, had become cut off

from her own earlier inner experiences. She never learned to speak the new language well.[1]

Tereza's mother had spoken to the patient in her mother tongue only when she was happy, very upset, or especially angry. Rarely, when the patient was quite little, had the mother recited poetry or sung songs from her childhood, and these moments seemed to have happened when the mother was in a dissociated state of mind. These early memories surfaced late in the therapy when Tereza had increasingly become able to feel connected and understood by her analyst in the transference. Tereza then remembered that she had felt very connected to her mother, close to her, and emotionally safe (in a tactile way) in these moments, when she had felt that her mother was authentic. She had also seen her mother come alive when she visited her home country.

Over time, the analyst began to pay attention to the times (which occurred frequently) when the patient could not find a specific word she was looking for. Upon reflection, she realized that Tereza would forget a word in the context of experiencing difficult transference feelings; for example, she felt envious of the analyst and had the fantasy that her analyst had an immeasurable fund of words (her analytic knowledge) that Tereza had no access to, similar to the early language of her mother that she could not understand. The patient also constantly reenacted her conflict-laden, libidinal preoedipal relationship with her mother in her relationships, seeking out those who were foreign and able to speak the mother's native language.

The analyst had difficulty placing Tereza diagnostically: there was a sharp discrepancy between Tereza's high level of functioning in the real world in her work and friendships, without significant depression, and her experience of the analyst as empty, absent, and incapable of understanding her. Tereza also had significant sexual difficulties. Pelzl concluded that her patient lived with two different internal systems, existing side by side.

The author ends by noting that loss of the mother tongue can become psychopathological for the second generation as well, if the loss

[1] Interestingly, Karatza-Meents (2010) speaks of an emotional *petrification* in many immigrant parents.

happens under external pressure or for defensive reasons. In such situations, the words of a mother (or father) who feels estranged when speaking in a foreign language will feel to a child like half-empty capsules—devoid of a past, of early object relations, and of bodily experiences. The missing authenticity of words in the foreign language can lead to ruptures and discontinuities in the self, as was the case with Tereza's two internal systems. The fact that Tereza was able to eventually recall an image of a good enough mother was perhaps the reason that she was spared more serious depression, as would have ensued if she had had only the memory of a *dead mother,* to use Green's expression (Kohon 1999).

**Verstehen und Nicht-Verstehen—Über Fremdheit in analytischen Behandlungen. [Understanding and Not Understanding—Feeling Foreign in the Analytic Situation.]** By Anna Leszczynska-Koenen, pp. 23-32.

Dealing with something foreign is a constitutive element of the analytic situation. If an analysis goes well, the patient will have the opportunity to change a rigidly felt "this is how it is" into a more fluid "what is the meaning of this?" Analysis offers the patient a space in which she can confront the foreign parts within herself and begin the process of reconciliation. Not knowing opens up access to meanings that were formerly defended against.

The author asks: what happens in both patient and analyst if there is too much foreignness, and if the feeling of unfamiliarity goes beyond what might be culturally accepted and expected? In such a case, the analyst may react with a deep insecurity, which may result in her handling the perceived foreignness in the patient in a concrete way; and the analyst may see such difference as an obstacle to the possibility of understanding. Conversely, some patients present with a deep longing for cultural sameness in the analyst, which in the patient's fantasy is the precondition for any real healing and understanding.

Leszczynska-Koenen posits that these kinds of defenses on either side block the triangular space in the analytic treatment. She points out that, while cultures deal with psychic conflicts in different ways, the analyst needs to be aware of a tendency to develop a countertransference

resistance in the face of cultural anxiety. Such a resistance may be experienced consciously as a special sensitivity and acceptance of the foreign culture, and may result in a belief that patients are best treated by analysts from their own culture.

The author believes that such an attitude reveals a blockage in empathy and neglects the fact that psychoanalysis is not a cultural theory, but a theory of subjectivity that is influenced by cultural factors and cultural defenses. The author maintains that gaining psychoanalytic access to a person means gaining access to her inner world. Indeed, the inner world is not a direct consequence or representation of biographical, social, and cultural factors, but is more an outcome of the individual's unique instinctual vicissitudes.

Freud was convinced that the psychoanalytic method does not require cultural or social commonality in order for the analyst to gain access to the patient's personal unconscious. In a speech before the Budapest Congress in 1918, he stated that he had helped people with whom he had nothing in common in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, education, or social standing, without disturbing their particular idiosyncrasies.

Leszczynska-Koenen discusses a case example that shows how important it is not to foreclose the analytic space with culturally based interpretations. The patient was a young woman from Turkey who suffered from pathological jealousy in relation to her husband. She had fantasies of locking him in the house and forbidding him to watch television so that he would not see other women. This was interpreted to her as her effort to control her husband in the way that she herself had been controlled by her family of origin, but the patient was not able to change. When she was subsequently referred to the author for treatment, she was helped to explore her inner world in a deeper way.

It turned out that a significantly insecure attachment lay behind her jealousy. As a child, the patient had been shuttled back and forth between two cultures, and when she was reunited at age six with her parents, they had become strangers to her; now she had a little brother who took up all the parents' attention, and she felt worthless. Her anxiety about her self-worth and her deep jealousy and envy of her little brother were managed with a regressive phallic-narcissistic defense, which led her to compulsively wish to control her husband's source of excitation.

This defense also made her feel worthless and desperate, as she felt herself to be disposable. She was gradually able to develop more mature forms of self-esteem and attachment, and she found a way to channel her impulse to control through temporarily becoming more religious.

Leszczynska-Koenen ends by stating that it is the task of psychoanalysis to provide a space in which rigid conceptions of foreignness versus belonging can become more fluid. It is important to provide an in-between space that maintains a balance between the patient's inner world and her external reality, and in which both analyst and patient are more than mere representatives of their cultures. Only then are patients able to develop a personally meaningful self-understanding that does not hide behind cultural clichés, but instead offers a new and alive connection to the factor of culture. Such a process includes mourning and the realization that it is impossible to return to one's lost childhood home, which sometimes, in fantasy, is experienced as an undisturbed possession of an idealized object or as belonging to an unbroken "home country."

## Volume 68, Number 1 (2014)

**Emotionale Aneignungsprozesse beim Lernen psychoanalytischer Theorie. [Emotional Factors in the Acquisition of Psychoanalytic Theory.]** By Gisela Grünewald-Zemsch, pp. 31-46.

Starting from the observation that most publications discussing psychoanalytic education have focused on the complexities and ambivalence involved in a candidate's training analysis and the supervisory process, the author sets out to illuminate the third aspect of psychoanalytic education: the teaching of psychoanalytic theory. She begins by citing a review article by Target (2003), who concluded that most writers view the teaching of psychoanalytic theory as an invaluable component of analytic training but also emphasize that it is necessarily characterized by anxiety, both because of the evaluative component and because of the tension between the candidate's knowing and not knowing. Target reported that the integration of theory and practice is often not considered a priority at analytic institutes, which she suspected has been the result of a covert anti-intellectual attitude. The focus in many institutes is rather on *experi-*

*ence,* i.e., teaching psychoanalytic technique by a "master" to a student, *without* a background of diverse psychoanalytic theories.

Perhaps, Grünewald-Zemsch suggests, it is considered difficult by some to promote a candidate's curiosity and creativity when teaching theory, and it may be that candidates' negative feedback about theory courses has had a discouraging effect on those who want to improve the curriculum. Grünewald-Zemsch postulates that these considerations reveal that the nature of the psychoanalytic curriculum, as well as certain institutional taboos and the individual learning histories of both faculty and candidates, are strongly influenced by emotional factors.

The author proceeds to explore these emotional factors and the psychodynamics involved in teaching and learning analytic theory. She states that it is important to recognize that learning analytic theory involves not simply learning new facts, but also requires the candidate to emotionally repeat and master his own history of learning, which makes the learning process quite complex.

Grünewald-Zemsch references Ogden (2009), who posited that psychoanalytic learning is *bi-phasic*—i.e., the candidate has to learn about psychoanalytic theory, which, he suggests, is best accomplished when instructors and candidates read texts aloud together. Ogden believes that this allows the learner to better empathize with the author's thoughts and experience. Then, in a second phase of analytic learning, the newly acquired material needs to be forgotten so that the candidate can recreate it for herself in the process of doing psychoanalysis.

Grünewald-Zemsch identifies a variety of emotional, mostly unconscious, factors involved in the learning process for both faculty and candidates:

(A) *Emotional factors in candidates:*

1. The candidate's relationship to the instructor(s) reveals her internalized representation of authority figures. The candidate may wish the instructors to be all-knowing teachers with whom she can identify, who can provide comfort to her, and who can further her development. There are also fears of embarrassment, failure, and even of being destroyed.

2. The candidate's relationship to her own internal world, in that there is a wish to internalize the new content and the instructor, but there are also fears of the unknown, new concepts, the uncanny, and even of being persecuted by the unknown. Anxieties about feeling impotent and losing a previously unconscious feeling of omnipotence can be present. There is also curiosity and excitement about new learning, however.

3. The candidate's relationship to her cohort can revive old feelings of disappointment and rejection when her contributions are not received with the expected enthusiasm. Also, feelings typical in a group arise—i.e. frustration with the slowness of the group, or the candidate's feeling of shame that she is the "slow" one, or anger that others can make a simple concept much too complicated.

(B) *Emotional factors on the part of the faculty:*

1. Instructors identify with students based on their own experiences as candidates. Naturally, instructors have wishes, anxieties, and feelings of love and hate about the content they teach, all of which are further elaborated by fantasies. Instructors wish to be the candidates' friends, especially with candidates who are roughly the same age that they are. Instructors want to be loved and appreciated and are afraid of being devalued and criticized or simply of not succeeding, especially if candidates seem bored—or, in the worst case, do not say anything at all.

2. An instructor's relationship to her own internal world may lead her to be afraid of her aggression and to fear that her negative impulses will break through—i.e., a tendency to judge and devalue. An instructor may react against her own negative experience as a candidate, or she may attempt to emulate her positive experience as a candidate. She may have a strong wish to transmit her own view of psychoanalysis to the next generation.

3. An instructor's relationships to other faculty members—including all the suppressed and open rivalries with and jealousies toward analytic siblings—may manifest as a

fear of criticism or a hesitancy to reveal her own analytic thinking. There are also fantasies of what candidates may say about the instructor in their training analyses.

Grünewald-Zemsch suggests that there is a relationship between the instructor's resistances and those of the candidate in regard to what can be taught and learned. She cites Freud's (1937) statement that the goal of a training analysis and psychoanalytic education is a firm conviction about the existence of the unconscious. The challenge is to teach theory in such a way that the unconscious becomes apparent in the reading of the text. She discusses Freud's writing style and understands his approach to writing as taking his reader's emotional resistances into account. He frequently wrote in the style of one engaged in a contentious conversation with his reader or listener, which allowed him to help his reader become aware of the reader's resistances to the new material. Thus, in his writing, he addressed resistances and provided help in overcoming them.

The author ends with a careful description of the hypothetical emotional learning process of a fictional candidate called Ms. O, who is taking a seminar based on Bion titled "Misconceptions, Bizarre Objects, and K." The assigned readings are Bion's *Learning from Experience* (1962a) and a paper by Money-Kyrle on "normal" countertransference (1956). Ms. O is taking the seminar because she needs a course, and because she is interested in learning more about K, –K, and bizarre objects, which she is largely unfamiliar with. She has also noticed that she often does not understand what exactly is happening between herself and a particular patient. She has felt in supervision that she does not get answers that would help her feel more comfortable with this patient. When reading Bion's text, she understands very little at first, but she feels he is conveying something new; what he writes about is at the same time familiar and unfamiliar to Ms. O.

It is important, according to the author, that the material presented not be too unfamiliar, because then it will surely be rejected once the anxiety about it has risen too high. If it is not new enough, by contrast, Ms. O will feel no excitement at the new discovery but instead will feel that she knows the material already, and she will not pay adequate attention to it.

The author states that the new text must be integrated by Ms. O based on her own personal tolerance for uncertainty, i.e., her *negative capability*. What she had been certain of needs to become weakened for a while and made uncertain as a result of her exposure to new material, which is likely to be somewhat uncomfortable.

Ms. O begins to realize that her wish to get answers from her supervisor regarding her patient is really a misconception, as described by Money-Kyrle. She becomes aware that her wish to become an analyst has been partly motivated by the hope of being able to cope with bizarre objects and object relations, and she now realizes that she becomes highly anxious whenever she is confronted with such objects.

Hopefully, reflecting on her own process, and also listening to her classmates' anxious and perhaps angry struggles to understand the new material, will lead Ms. O, over time, to integrate the new knowledge with what she is already familiar with. But it is likely that the new knowledge will remain unfamiliar for quite some time, and she will need to struggle with it again and again. It will help Ms. O to see her instructors struggling with uncomfortable new realizations as well.

In summary, teaching psychoanalytic theory, according to Grünewald-Zemsch, means that one learns from experience in the sense that the candidate experiences a personal crisis not unlike a paranoid-schizoid process as her resistances become weakened. If she has the sense that she can survive her crisis, she will enter the depressive position for a while before she can truly integrate the new material and make it her own. Successful teaching and acquisition of theory involves instructors paying attention to their own mental blockages and processes, as well as observing those of their candidates, so that they can titrate the candidates' learning processes.

## Volume 68, Number 7 (2014)

**Strafträume und Unbewusste Schuldgefühle. Zur Klinischen Basis von Freud's "Strukturmodell." [Punishment Dreams and Unconscious Guilt: The Clinical Basis for Freud's "Structural Model."]** By Ulrike May, pp. 604-632.

The author begins by observing that the model of the mind introduced by Freud in 1923 in *The Ego and The Id* underwent a change in

meaning in North American psychoanalysis, mostly as a result of how it was interpreted by Rapaport (1967), Hartmann, Kris, and Loewenstein (1946), and Gill (1963). These analysts called it Freud's *structural model,* a term Freud himself never used (as has been observed by many psychoanalysts). May states that the North American ego psychological "structural model" was subsequently reimported to Germany after World War II and has influenced psychoanalytic thinking in Germany since then.

May carefully outlines several changes in meaning that Freud's ideas underwent in the ego psychological interpretation. She focuses on three major points:

1. The ego was defined as a structure that regulates the drives (and no longer the demands of the superego). Everything that was not *drive* was *ego* (Rapaport 1967, p. 418): "The totality of such structures is conceptualized as the ego, while the congeries of immediately discharge-directed drives is conceptualized as the id." In this sense, ego development became equal to structural development—or, one could say that early psychological development consists of the building of psychic structures. The ego was no longer a part of the mind that had to interact with and mediate the demands of the superego and the id, and that stood in a specific dynamic relation to the latter two; rather, the task of the ego had become drive regulation. The author observes that in French psychoanalysis, Freud's 1923 model is called his *second topographical model*, following on from his *first topography* (also a term that Freud himself did not use to describe his theories). Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), in their influential text, reference Freud's 1923 model with the descriptive labels *topographical* or *ego.* There is no reference to *structure* or *structural model,* and the entry for *metapsychology* does not inform the reader that it was Rapaport and Gill who introduced the structural aspect.

2. The system *superego* largely disappeared in ego psychology because, in Rapaport's drive-regulation model, the superego became merely another drive-regulating structure. May points out that Rapaport (1967), in his posthumously published work on the superego, recognized that his theory had failed to integrate the concept of the superego.

3. There was an assumption that the "structural model" replaced the earlier topographic model (and was incompatible with it)—rather than, as was customary with Freud, that he added on and modified his theories to address the insufficiencies of earlier models. May points out that Freud continued to use the topographic distinctions between the systems *Unconscious, Preconscious,* and *Conscious* in his later writings. In fact, Freud often equated *structural* with *topographical,* as described by Gill (1963) and by Arlow and Brenner (1964).

The main thesis of May's paper addresses the clinical reasons that prompted Freud—according to her reading of his texts authored between 1915 and 1923—to revise his topographical and economic theory of the mind and to introduce the model consisting of the ego, superego, and id. May recounts that these reasons were primarily based on his emerging clinical understanding that the ego is not unitary but split, and that there is an unconscious part of the ego, a significant portion of which is the superego. Freud had discovered that the unconscious part of the ego was often the motivating force for the construction of dreams (earlier, he had assumed it was exclusively id forces). He realized more and more clearly the importance of an unconscious wish/need for punishment, which was associated with severe forms of depression, the negative therapeutic reaction, and the so-called destructive wishes of the superego.

In 1920, Freud mentioned punishment dreams for the first time, and he described them as an exception to his previously held theory of dreams as distorted libidinal wish fulfillments. He revised his theory of dreams in this text, a revision that was maintained in his later writings; for example, in 1933, he stated that punishment dreams are an expression of the death drive, and that they satisfy the sadistic and destructive wishes of a pathological superego, or the masochistic needs of an ego that has come under the dominance of a destructive superego.

Dreams fulfill not only the ego's unconscious libidinal wishes, but also the punitive wishes of a *second/foreign ego*—i.e., the superego. The question arose of whether these punitive wishes and needs could still be subsumed under the category of *wish fulfillment.* Freud struggled with

this for a long time. May shows how Freud then revised his drive theory (1920) so that his clinical findings about the importance of unconscious aggression turned against the ego (and unconscious guilt over it) could be addressed. Freud introduced the (biologically based) death drive into his theory, which he associated with the superego. In a paper he presented at the Berlin Congress in 1922, he had already spoken about the main thesis laid out in 1923—namely, that the unconscious wishes of the ego and unconscious guilt from the superego acted dynamically like the repressed unconscious. They were not simply preconscious (as he had previously assumed), but unconscious, just as repressed libidinal wishes were unconscious.

This is explicit in Freud's (1923) statement that self-criticism and guilt in many neurotic conditions are unconscious, and as such produce the most serious effects. Toward the end of this work, he stated that unconscious guilt was by no means a novel discovery; it was only the theoretical integration of it that was new. May mentions that in 1922, while working on *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud had taken over the analysis of Joan Riviere (after Jones's failed treatment of her). On June 4, 1922, he wrote to Jones that he understood the stalemate in the analysis and the analysand's resistance as stemming from her unconscious guilt about success:

> She cannot tolerate praise, triumph or success, not any better than failure, blame and repudiation. She gets unhappy in both cases, in the second directly, in the first by reaction. So she has arranged for herself what we call "*eine Zwickmühle*" [a dilemma] . . . . Whenever she has got a recognition, a favour or a present, she is sure to become unpleasant and aggressive and to lose respect for the analyst. You know what that means, it is an infallible sign of a deep sense of guilt. [Freud and Jones 1995, p. 484]

May notes that the German *Standard Edition* of Freud's works includes his introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), which was omitted in the English *Standard Edition*. In this introduction, Freud stated that the superego is the psychological equivalent of the biologically based death drive, and that the forces of the death drive are not subject to the pleasure principle but rather are beyond the pleasure principle.

May ends her paper by stating that Freud's introduction of the death drive in 1920 was thus the consequence of his changing understanding of the mind: the biological, self-destructive power of the death drive had a psychological corollary in the wish and need for self-punishment and the resistance to psychoanalytic change. In this sense, *The Ego and the Id* (1923) is the psychological and clinical counterpart of and the sequel to the more biologically based *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). The superego as the potential location of the death drive connects the two texts.

The clinical motivation for both monographs was Freud's emerging awareness and recognition in his analytic work that some important psychic phenomena, such as punishment dreams and the negative therapeutic reaction, could not be satisfactorily addressed by the existing theoretical model. This is why he introduced what came to be called the structural model, with the reservation that was typical of Freud—that the new model did not repudiate the older one.

REFERENCES

Anzieu, D. (1993). Autistic phenomena and the skin ego. *Psychoanal. Inquiry,* 13:42-48.

Arlow, J. A. & Brenner, C. (1964). *Psychoanalytic Concepts and the Structural Theory.* New York: Int. Univ. Press.

Bion, W. R. (1962a). *Learning from Experience.* London: Tavistock.

——— (1962b). The psycho-analytic study of thinking. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 43:306-310.

Camu, A. (1942). *The Stranger,* trans. & ed. P. McCarthy. Cambridge, UK/New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988.

Ferro, A. (2002). Superego transformations through the analyst's capacity for reverie. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 71:477-501.

Fiss, H. (2000). A 21st-century look at Freud's dream theory. *J. Amer. Acad. Psychoanal.,* 28:321-340.

Freud, S. (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams. S. E.,* 4/5.

——— (1920). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle. S. E.,* 18.

——— (1923). *The Ego and the Id. S. E.,* 19.

——— (1933). *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. S. E.,* 22.

——— (1937). Analysis terminable and interminable. *S. E.,* 23.

Freud, S. & Jones, E. (1995). *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones, 1908–1939.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Gill, M. M. (1963). *Topography and Systems in Psychoanalytic Theory.* New York: Int. Univ. Press.

Hartmann, H., Kris, E. & Loewenstein, R. M. (1946). Comments on the formation of psychic structure. *Psychoanal. Study Child,* 2:11-38.

Karatza-Meents, A. (2010). Zwischen Zwei Welten: Kinder von Gastarbeitern und die Verarbeitung von traumatischen Migrationserfahrungen. *Psyche—Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse,* 64:316-335.

Kohon, G., ed. (1999). *The Dead Mother: The Work of André Green*. London: Routledge.

Kristeva, J. (2008). *The Female Genius, Melanie Klein: Her Life, Delusion, Words,* trans. J. Naumann. Giessen, Germany: Psychosozial Verlag.

Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J.-B. (1973). *The Language of Psychoanalysis,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith. London: Karnac, 1988.

Lewin, B. D. (1954). Sleep, narcissistic neurosis, and the analytic situation. *Psychoanal. Q.,* 23:487-510.

Masson, J. M., ed. (1985). *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*. Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap Press.

Money-Kyrle, R. (1956). Normal counter-transference and some of its deviations. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 37:360-366.

Morgenthaler, F. (1986). *Der Traum*. Frankfurt, Germany: Qumran.

Moser, U. (2005). *Psychische Mikrowelten. Neuere Aufsätze,* ed. M. Leuzinger-Bohleber & I. von Zeppelin. Göttingen, Germany: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht.

——— (2013). Was ist eine Mikrowelt? *Psyche—Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen,* 67:401-431.

Ogden, T. H. (2009). *Rediscovering Psychoanalysis: Thinking and Dreaming, Learning and Forgetting*. London/New York: Routledge.

Pontalis, J.-B. (1974). Dream as an object. *Int. Rev. Psychoanal.,* 1:125-133.

Rapaport, D. (1967). *The Collected Papers of David Rapaport,* ed. M. M. Gill. New York: Basic Books.

Target, M. (2003). Über psychoanalytische Ausbildung. Literaturübersicht und Beobachtungen. *Forum Psychoanalyse,* 19:193-210.

Zwiebel, R. (1978). The changing use of dreams in psychoanalytic practice. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 57:315-354.

——— (2013). *Was macht einen guten Psychoanalytiker aus? Grundelemente professioneller Psychotherapie*. Stuttgart, Germany: Klett-Cotta.

---

*129 Mount Auburn Street*
*Cambridge, MA 02138*

*e-mail: ritateusch@verizon.net*