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## **Reuniting The Psychic Couple in Analytic Training and Practice: Theoretical Reflections**

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### **Introduction**

This paper makes use of Dr. Sarnat's (2006) personal account of her difficulties in forging an integrated analytic identity to more closely examine the issues which arise in pluralistic psychoanalytic training programs. These difficulties are highly relevant to several areas which have become critical in the evolution of psychoanalytic theory, practice, and training. My purpose is to extend discussion of the crucial issues involved by contextualizing them theoretically and historically. To do so, I have structured my reflections according to the following themes: the problem of analytic identity in post-modern psychoanalysis; the integration of paternal and maternal function in the analyst's technique; and the use of the unconscious as an ally. My hope is that these reflections will help foster an analytic attitude towards psychoanalysis itself as it moves into its second century in search of common ground amidst its controversies

### **The Problem of Analytic Identity**

Psychoanalytic history is characterized by theoretical differences, which have, at their best, led to debate and development, and at their worst, to the flag waving of institutional factionalism and the familiar slight: 'that's not *real* psychoanalysis'. Mitchell and Black recount the emblematic story of a well-known and innovative psychoanalyst who had taken to placing a gun on the lectern whenever he presented his work at more traditional

institutes. Invariably, someone would be asked about the gun, and he would say pleasantly that it was for use on the first person who, rather than addressing the ideas he was presenting, asked instead whether the ideas were “really psychoanalytic” (1995, p. xxiii).

Looking back, perhaps there was a time when what was ‘really psychoanalytic’ could be clearly defined with respect to theory and technique; and perhaps such times are even preserved today where dogmatism prevails. But undertaking a comparative psychoanalytic education where more than one approach is offered is a much more complex process and entails encountering a broad, sometimes bewildering panorama of theoretical perspectives from which to shape one’s analytic identity. The briefest summary of these would necessarily include drive-structural theory, ego-psychology, Kleinian and Middle School object-relations, the work of Wilfred Bion, the Lacanian reading of Freud, self-psychology control mastery, and, of course, the evolving American interpersonal, intersubjective, and relational perspectives.

For the analyst immersed in this psychoanalytic diversity, theoretical certainty must give way to critical thinking. Furthermore, for the analyst familiar with the thorny problems of psychoanalytic epistemology, certainty must give way not only to skepticism, but also to a degree of ‘not knowing’, a state of mind made possible by the *negative capability* that Bion (1970, p. 73), borrowing from Keats, suggests is essential to an analytic state of mind. As Bion (1962, 1963, 1965, 1970) emphasizes in discussing transformations from O to K, psychoanalytic concepts and theories at this point are better recognized as useful models rather than as scientific truths.

Nonetheless, how does one sort through these diverse and often conflicting psychoanalytic models? The choices, as Pine (1990) has pointed out, are orthodoxy (which is blind), eclecticism (which is insufficiently rigorous), or selective integration (which is extremely difficult). The contemporary analyst striving for an ecumenical position of critical pluralism faces a challenging task. In exploring the implications of the various models for what we ambitiously term ‘technique’, Sarnat joins in taking up the challenge. Her core question concerns itself with the analyst’s emotional position vis-à-vis the patient:

When does one stay ‘close in’, participating, either verbally or silently, in a way that will offer regulation of anxiety; and when does one ‘step back’ and utilize interpretation to offer the patient one’s external perspective, perhaps to contain destructiveness or clarify conflict? (p. 6)

This issue is reflected in shop-worn polarities such as Kohut (1977) vs. Kernberg (1975), Winnicott (1965) vs. Klein (1935), or more broadly, pre-oedipal vs. oedipal dichotomies. But what I want to address and elaborate is the sense of a deeper dialectic structuring these polarities, namely the tension between what are sometimes conceptualized as the maternal and paternal orders or functions (i.e., Bollas, 1999)

### **Paternal and Maternal Function**

I agree with the impression that various aspects of analytic technique are imbued with qualities that may resonate as *maternal* or *paternal*. Concepts such as containment, reverie, mirroring, and holding may be considered maternal, while active interpretation of conflict and defense may be felt as more paternal. It is, of course, important to

emphasize here that in employing the terms paternal and maternal, we are using shorthand, culturally-based expressions for organizing experience. Hopefully the terms themselves may be used as metaphors without implying any essentialist notions concerning the true nature of mother or fathers. Operationally speaking, both parents will naturally provide functions from both registers.

The contrast between paternal and maternal function in our theories may be usefully considered in an historical context (Rather, 2001a). Freud considered psychoanalysis to be a form of work undertaken by two adults (Lipton, 1977; Losher & Newton, 1996) and presumed that it involved a “division of labor” (Losher & Newton, 1996) in which the analyst’s work is to interpret, and the analysand’s work is to free associate and respond to the analyst’s interpretations thoughtfully and truthfully (Thompson, 1994). Freud assumed that the analysand was capable of getting down to this analytic work, and did not hesitate in insisting they do so. The original German text (i.e., Freud, 1982/1914, p. 214-215) even suggests that Freud believed many resistances could be ‘overcome’ (‘überwinden’) by conscious efforts at candor, courage, and perseverance. In short, Freud seems to have expected his analysands to conduct themselves as thoughtful, disciplined adults at work, an expectation which, I suggest, reflects paternal order and function.

However, in the post-Freudian era, under the sway of theories emphasizing primitive mental states and pre-oedipal dynamics, we have seen a gradual shift toward a mother-infant model. This “developmental tilt” (Mitchell, 1988) in our practices has led to an increasing acceptance of the mother-infant relationship as the prototype of the analytic

situation. Thus, the paternal concept of ‘work’ has lost traction in some theories and has given way to maternal metaphors of containing, holding, mirroring, digesting, and so on. Within the matrix of so-called Oedipal vs. pre-oedipal dynamics, this issue has holding vs. interpretation as one set of coordinates, and conflict vs. deficit as another. To the extent that these may be conceived as either paternal or maternal, the candidate may indeed have a sense of being caught in theoretical gender gap.

This theoretical gender gap can be considered in terms of a dialectic between *doing* and *being* as contrasting dimensions of the analytic process (Rather 2000a). When we discuss clinical work in terms of interpreting, acquiring insight, working-through, renouncing infantile strivings, and so on, we are acknowledging the need for analyst and analysand to *do something*. On the other hand, when we consider the clinical process in terms of containing, holding, reverie, empathy, and the like, we are recognizing the importance of allowing *states of being* to flourish without undue pressure to *do* anything about them.

These contrasts can also be discerned in the familiar concepts of the *therapeutic alliance* (Zetzel, 1956) and the *working alliance* (Greenson, 1965). Although the terms tend to be used interchangeably, they designate distinctly different, though not mutually exclusive, dimensions of the analytic relationship. The therapeutic alliance refers to that dimension of the relationship which emphasizes basic acceptance, understanding, and safety, resembling the mother-infant relationship, and requiring a reciprocal process of identification and empathy. This is reminiscent of what Sarnat refers to as the “close in” position. By contrast, the working alliance refers to that dimension of the relationship in

which the analysand identifies with the work ego of the analyst and gradually becomes an analytic collaborator. This is closer to the “step-back” stance Sarnat discusses. I would suggest that the therapeutic alliance encompasses the vicissitudes of *being together* in the analytic couple, and may be considered an aspect of maternal function. The working alliance, by contrast, refers to a mode of *doing together*, and may be considered an aspect of paternal function.

To summarize thus far, the prototypic analyst grounded in paternal function operates from a “step-back” position, emphasizes a working alliance with the rational adult part of the patient, and appropriately confronts the patient with the task of renouncing infantile desire and defense in the service of coming to reasonable terms with objective reality. The prototypic analyst grounded in maternal function, by contrast, operates from a “close in” position, emphasizes the therapeutic alliance with the “once-and-forever infant” (Grotstein, 2000), and acts as an infant advocate (Grotstein, 1990) by providing a holding environment in the service of allowing subjective reality to unfold and evolve.

It is interesting to note how these contrasting stances parallel broad philosophical and intellectual tensions in Western thought. Strenger (1987, 1989), borrowing from the turn-of-the-century philosopher, T.E. Hulme, refers to the *classic* and *romantic* visions of human reality which play out in psychoanalysis. In the classic vision (grounded in Kant), reason is privileged above all else, and true value in human life lies in the ability to submit one’s idiosyncratic subjective side to scrutiny in order to transcend one’s inherent animal nature. The value of an individual life lies not in its particular uniqueness, but in the way it embodies transcendence of the individual and idiosyncratic (1989, p. 595).

While Freud has his romantic moments, he is primarily classical in vision. Freud's neurotic is governed by the subjectivity of the pleasure principle rather than the objectivity of the reality principle. Freud takes the side of reason as opposed to the instinctual, infantile, or subjective. Whereas the patient comes to analysis and expects his fantasies to come true, the classic analyst leads him to renounce fantasy and its neurotic miseries for reality and its everyday unhappiness. "The ethic is stoic: maturity and mental health depend on the extent to which a person can acknowledge reality as it is and be rational and wise" (1989, p. 601). The classic vision in psychoanalysis would include Freud, the American ego-psychology of Hartmann (1964), and the French school exemplified by Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984). It also includes, perhaps paradoxically, the work of the Kleinians whose developmental theory emphasizes the mother-infant relation, but whose technique nonetheless emphasizes interpretation and transcendence of subjective phantasy.

By contrast, the romantic vision (grounded in Rousseau) holds that the supreme value is not reason, but rather the on-going development of what is individual and subjective. Each person is a unique self, with a unique perspective. The value of an individual life lies not in reason and adaptation, but in the development and expression of one's own evolving subjective experience of a vital, cohesive, true self. "The ethic is romantic: maturity and mental health consist in the ability to sustain enthusiasm and a sense of meaning". (1989, p. 601) The romantic vision in psychoanalysis begins with Ferenczi (1926) , then Balint (1935), and was later exemplified by the British middle school particularly by Winnicott (1972) , and in the US by Kohut (1977).

In any case, to return to my theme of integration, I am proposing that the analyst needs to be both romantic mother and classic father, and this appears to be difficult. For example, in exploring their interaction, Sarnat and her supervisor recognized mutual difficulties in bringing this primal couple together and became aware that they sometimes projected the paternal or the maternal into each other. In fact, a benefit of designating these differing analytic postures with the experience-near terms ‘maternal’ and ‘paternal’ is the power these terms have to evoke the analysts’ self-reflection on the way differing theoretical approaches interlock with our own personal conflicts of what it means to be a father and a mother. This may help us to recognize and manage countertransference tendencies which may lead us to consciously embrace certain aspects of theory and technique more readily than others.

The tension between maternal and paternal enacted in Sarnat's supervision is also acted out across psychoanalytic schools. In a footnote, Sarnat recounts the symptomatic tale of a respected visiting analyst responding to a candidate's efforts to integrate elements of neo-Kleinian and Middle School technique with the comment: “You are unwilling to make a choice between the two approaches because making a choice would mean choosing between your father and mother--and you want to stay in bed with both!”(p. 10). Taken unfairly out of context, the remark is bound to come off as a bit of wild analysis (Freud 1910/1958), but its implication is nonetheless disturbing. Must it all come down to this after one hundred years of psychoanalysis? Must we really choose between mother and father, even in phantasy? Can we not hold in mind that it takes both members of the primal couple to come together to create and conceive something new? Our difficulties in putting together the primal couple (Britten 1989, 1999; Klein, 1929,



1945; Rather, 2002) resonate at the level of theory and technique, and are enacted through teaching, supervision, and, historically, institutional factionalism.

In the dream presented, Sarnat re-discovers that the analyst must function as an integrated or combined parent figure (cf. Klein, 1929, 1945). What does this mean and how is it done? In response to her patient's plan to steal, and in response to the pressure to disavow the seriousness of this act, Sarnat first invokes paternal function and the law of the father by confronting the patient with *what* she is doing. Subsequently however, she realizes (with a sense of remorse which I will comment on later) that she had not included in her interpretation any understanding of *why* the patient was doing what she was doing, that is, how the patient's stealing was an effort to cope with the pain and anxiety caused by her analyst's absence. Another way of saying this is that Sarnat's dreaming self realizes that she has made an incomplete interpretation: she has confronted an enactment and the disavowal of its consequences, without responding to the anxiety that has given rise to the enactment in the first place. In the dream, she recognizes this as falling short of complete empathy. In terms of the central question i.e., where to locate oneself, near or distant? inside or outside? 'close in' or 'step back?', the answer offered by the dream is that both positions are essential. The complete interpretation implicitly recommended by her dreaming self invokes paternal function in confronting the patient with the corrosive aspects of the enactment, and invokes maternal function by empathically comprehending and respecting the anxiety that stimulated the enactment. I am not suggesting that this can be done in every interpretive moment, but it must be characteristic of the overall analytic atmosphere. The good-enough interpretation, one that integrates maternal and paternal function, will optimally call attention to defensive organizations and enactments from the outside, and will address anxieties that give rise to

them from the inside. In this way the analyst represents and integrates the law of the father and the love of the mother.

### **The Unconscious as an Ally**

Conceptions of the unconscious have shifted and evolved over the history of psychoanalysis. Freud's earliest point of view emphasized a conception of the unconscious as a seething cauldron of instinctual drives that must be tamed and sublimated. With addition of the structural model (1923) to the topographic (1900), a more complex picture evolved. While id functioning could continue to be characterized in such a fashion in the structural model, the unconscious now also included aspects of ego and superego functioning which involved highly complex processing. Nonetheless, consciousness was privileged as desirable, and unconscious processing was implicitly viewed as problematic. Important shifts in this perspective may be detected in the work of theorists such as Lewin (1954) and Loewald (1960), both of whom emphasized the importance of unconscious processes in supplying intensity and vitality to conscious, lived experience. More recently, there has been a move toward conceptualizing the unconscious as a potential ally, as a source of *perception* offering a second opinion to the conscious mind. This point of view has been particularly articulated by theorists such as Bion (1962a, 1962b, 1963, 1965, 1970, 1976), Grotstein (1990, 2000), Langs (1976, 2005), Matte-Blanco (1975, 1988) and Ferro (1999, 2002).

In considering this shift in perspective, Grotstein (1990) points to Freud's difficulty appreciating the distinction between straight-forward static conflict which is inherently problematic, and dialectical opposition which is constantly evolving and therefore

fundamentally creative. In a useful metaphor, he (personal communication, 2005) points out that it is precisely the opposable thumb, operating in concert with the forefinger, which allow us to grasp things. In this sense, the unconscious is more sympathetically understood as ‘opposable’ rather than ‘oppositional’ with regard to consciousness. In dialectical interaction, conscious and unconscious mentation inform each other by triangulating the object of emotional perception with what Bion termed “binocular vision” (1965, p.74). Bion went further to propose the concept of a necessary *contact barrier* (1962), a semi-permeable membrane separating conscious and unconscious processing, but permitting a weaving of conscious and unconscious elements which provide emotional comprehension of depth and resonance. Of particular importance is Bion’s idea that the contact barrier serves not only to protect conscious from unconscious processes, but also protects unconscious process from the intrusions of too much reality-based consciousness. Similarly, Matte-Blanco’s (1975, 1988, also Rayner, 1995) theory of bi-logic proposes that a graduated barrier between operating systems is necessary to allow conscious mentation to categorize according to the logic of asymmetry, and unconscious mentation to categorize according to the logic of symmetry. The graduated separation maintains the integrity of both systems at the extremes, while allowing unconscious processes to enrich conscious processes in the intermediate realms where they flow together. As Matte-Blanco puts it: “A dam represents a protection against flood but is also useful for purposes of irrigation” (1940, quoted in Rayner, 1995, p. 174). The concept of dialectical interaction does not imply that a final, ideal integration of conscious and unconscious or paternal and maternal function is achievable, but rather that ever-evolving forms of integration are necessary to develop a more comprehensive picture with ever-increasing depth of field.

## **Collaborating with The Unconscious Other**

It is this coupling of conscious and unconscious mentation that I sought to elaborate in developing what I term the *creative collaboration with the Unconscious Other* (Rather, 2001b). The term *Unconscious Other* may be formally defined as the total of the system Ucs. (Freud, 1958/1900) that reaches consciousness. On a more experience-near level, the term is meant to signify our subjective experience of a foreign presence, a 'not me' or 'it' which exists in relationship with 'me', and from which various phenomena are felt to emanate. These phenomena include a wide variety of experiences such as parapraxes, unexpected associative links, unintentional puns, double-entendre, spontaneous somatic sensations, and of course, our dreams. These phenomena emerge from the mysterious depths of the psyche in an unbidden manner, independent of conscious desire. Like artistic inspiration, they cannot be willed into existence. That they arrive involuntarily imbues them with a quality of otherness which leads us to experience them as if they emanated from an internal presence: the Unconscious Other.

As analysands in treatment, as analytic candidates in training, and as analysts in our consulting rooms, we are called upon to cultivate an analytic state of mind which involves collaborating with this Unconscious Other which offers up raw material to be worked with by the conscious deliberate part of the personality. In this sense, the Unconscious Other stands as analytic muse to analytic creativity. Our capacity to form a collaborative internal relationship with the Unconscious Other is the foundation for the "psychoanalytic function of the personality" (Bion, 1962a), that is, the capacity to perceive and make use of psychic reality for the purpose of emotional growth. A dialogue

between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality must develop in order to form this creative collaborative couple.

In the context of analytic training, we could say that creative thinking in analytic learning emerges from the interaction of two aspects of the candidate's psyche: the Unconscious Other as muse, generating inspiration in the form of spontaneous analytic phenomena, and the conscious candidate processing these deliberately to create understanding and emotional growth as an analyst. From this perspective, one of the primary goals of analytic training ought to be to strengthen the candidate's experience of and faith in the usefulness of reverie toward the Unconscious Other. This is an important objective of one's own personal analysis, but might also be extended to other arenas, particularly supervision and the case conference. To do so requires members of these work groups to accept the narcissistic blow inherent in Freud's discovery that "the ego is not master in its own house" (1917, p. 143) in order to collaborate creatively with other intrapsychic inhabitants. In this respect, it has been a pleasure to see a culture of case conferences begin to develop at our institute in which candidates may feel free not only to comment on case material in the usual thoughtful ways, but also to playfully free associate to it, and even report dreams arising in response. This state of mind, when facilitated by supervisor or case conference leader, issues an open invitation to the Unconscious Other to join in and contribute something new or unexpected. A excellent example of this possibility is exemplified in Dr. Sarnat's use of her dream in supervision to process her thoughts and feelings about how to position herself with her patients.

## **The Remorse and Pain Registered by the Dream**

In her dream, Sarnat realizes with distress that her interpretation has been painful and has not included understanding of how the patient's destructive actions were an effort to cope with anxiety. For this she feels remorse. While on one level the dream is specific to a particular analyst and analysand, I think there may be yet another dimension to this dream. In reconsidering the nature of dreaming, Ogden (1996) suggests that a dream is not simply the creation of the patient, but also an intersubjective analytic event:

A dream created in the course of analysis is a dream arising in 'the analytic dream space' and might therefore be thought of as a dream of the analytic third. Once again, we must not insist on an answer to the question 'is the dream the analysand's dream, the analyst's dream, or the dream of the analytic third?' The three must be held in an unresolved tension with one another (p. 893).

If I may be allowed to extend this line of creative thought, I will propose that a dream arising in the course of training within a psychoanalytic institute and community might also be conceived of as an intersubjective event reflecting an institutional analytic third. We might then say that this is not only the dream, of an individual analyst, but our communal dream as well. In particular, I am reflecting on the fact that after making the paternal interpretation, Sarnat notices that the maternal part of her feels remorse. What is this remorse and how might it relate to analysts as a group?

Racker (1957/1968), in one of the seminal papers on countertransference, noted that: "The first distortion of truth in 'the myth of the analytic situation' is that analysis is an

interaction between a sick person and a healthy one” (p. 132). Racker reminds us that it is actually an interaction between two personalities, in both of which pathological phantasies, anxieties, and defenses are at work. Is there any sort of shared psychological organization among those who choose psychoanalysis, the ‘impossible profession’ (Freud, 1958/1937), as their life work? I think there is. Guilt over harm done and the need to make reparation seem to be heightened emotional concerns among therapists, when compared, let us say, to corporate CEO’s or prosecuting attorneys. That this is so, according to Racker, begins “one might say, with the plate on the front door that says ‘Psychoanalyst’ or ‘Doctor’. What motive (in terms of the unconscious) would the analyst have for wanting to cure if it were not he that made the patient ill?” (p. 146). That is to say, the analyst announces his or her sense of guilt and the need to make reparation by choosing psychoanalysis as a profession in the first place. The analyst appears to be unconsciously invested in an ego ideal of reparation through benevolence.

The point I wish to make is that the analyst’s need to feel benevolent may be more easily supported when operating from within the maternal register, in so far as maternal function brings the analyst into a ‘close in’ position that which seeks harmony with the patient. In this state, analyst and analysand may be felt to be as one, united in love and goodness, especially when the analyst succeeds in enacting a ‘good-mother’ phantasy and avoiding a ‘bad-mother phantasy’ with the patient (Klein 1946). However, when the analyst takes up paternal function, merger is left behind, a boundary is created, and ‘otherness’ enters what is now depressive position emotional reality (Klein, 1935). The bliss of union with the mother is interrupted by the arrival of the law of the father from a position *outside* the maternal orbit. A paternal order interpretation or confrontation is

inevitably dissonant with the illusions of the analysand's world, and in this sense may indeed induce "discontent, pain, or a sense of endangerment". In response, the analyst may then have a closer encounter with the guilt which Racker suggests is part of the unconscious motivation to become a healer in the first place. Bringing mother and father together is difficult on many levels, and Dr. Sarnat's dream symbolizes the working-through of pain and remorse registered by analysts in bringing the primal couple together in an analytic state of mind. Interpretations 'dare to disturb the universe' (Eliot, 1930) of the patient and, in this sense, induce a measure of suffering, or a 'dosage of sorrow' (Grotstein, 2000) in both members of the analytic dyad. What I am suggesting is that maternal functions such as holding, reverie, empathy, and containment lend themselves to be internally organized by the analyst according to paranoid-schizoid phantasies of pure goodness emanating from the love of the mother. By contrast, paternal function with its disturbing, limit-setting, interpretive and confrontational aspects, lends itself well to be internally organized by the analyst along depressive position concerns of harm to the other. (Lest it be misunderstood, I am not suggesting that mothers are paranoid-schizoid or that fathers are privy to the depressive position!)

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I would like to return briefly to the wisdom proffered by dream under discussion as it relates to the evolution of one's analytic identity. One reading of the dream is that an optimal interpretation needs to integrate maternal and paternal function, and that there will be a degree of remorse in providing paternal function. Technically speaking, an optimal interpretation should address the defensive organization in question, as well as the anxiety that gives rise to it. I realize that, as analysts, we already 'know'



this before the dream arises. That is, if you ask an analyst whether defense and anxiety should both be named in an interpretation, most will readily agree. But knowing something in that way is not necessarily the same as ‘knowing it in your bones’. Knowing it in one’s bones is a matter of integrating multiple levels of experience, and working through unconscious implications that touch upon one’s own conflicts, and triangulating with binocular vision. In this sense, the activity of the Unconscious Other was one of consolidation, of pulling together the pieces of the parental couple at the deepest level. In this way, flat psychoanalytic slogans such as ‘always address defense *and* anxiety’ move up the evolutionary ladder acquiring a personal meaningfulness, richness and vitality that would otherwise be lacking as we continue the never-ending process of ‘becoming’ psychoanalysts.

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