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## Countertransference: Our New Royal Road to the Unconscious?

Jeanne Wolff Bernstein, Ph.D.

In this paper I am tracing the history of countertransference and how it has informed the current debate about self-disclosure as a pivotal instrument of analytic work. Now that the analyst's "subjective factor" has been understood as a central influence on the analysand and as a vital source of information about the analysand's intrapsychic life, I argue that certain currents in the relational school of psychoanalysis confuse the analyst's subjectivity with his personality. While becoming more "real" with a patient may enliven a stale analytic dialogue, it ought not be confused with, or take the place of, an analysis of unconscious desires and phantasies. I claim that a two-person psychology can exist only within a tripartite structure in which the analyst does not lose sight of his complex function of being the carrier, observer, and conveyor of the unconscious currents holding both participants in check.

**E**VER SINCE 1910, WHEN FREUD DEFINED THE COUNTERCURRENT TO the transference as what "arises in [the analyst] as a result of the patient's influence on [the analyst's] unconscious feelings" (p. 144), countertransference has witnessed a controversial and at times utterly confusing history. Famous analytic alliances such as Freud and Ferenczi as well as Melanie Klein and Paula Heiman parted over

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the subject of countertransference because their disciples' frank discussion about personal feelings toward their analysands was considered a serious hazard to the analyst's "objective/neutral" stance and henceforth, from their perspective, threatened one of the bedrocks of psychoanalytic principles. Moreover, few could agree on a definition of countertransference and even fewer on its use in the analytic relationship. Should the psychoanalyst "recognize this countertransference in himself and overcome it" (p. 145), as Freud advised his followers, or make it a central source of information about the patient's unconscious phantasy, as Ferenczi (1921), Money-Kyrle (1956), Searles (1975), Ogden (1979, 1990, 1994), Hoffman (1983, 1991), Boyer (1983, 1993), and Greenberg (1991) have recommended? Although once considered the stepchild or unwelcome guest of psychoanalysis—the issue that could potentially undermine the claim to scientific respectability—countertransference has witnessed a surprising turnaround, moving into the forefront of current psychoanalytic discussions. Ten years ago, one could hardly find an article mentioning countertransference in its title; now, it seems that no journal can do without a treatise on countertransference in, as often as not, the use of self-disclosure in the analysis process. How did this stepchild or messy ingredient of analysis turn so suddenly into the desired princess holding out a bowl of gold for psychoanalytic practitioners? Has a real treasure been dug up, or are psychoanalysts partly blinded by what may simply turn out to be nothing more than a pot of fool's gold?

The shift toward using countertransference as a central source of information about the patient's unconscious phantasies has had the most profound implications for the analyst's position—shifting his stance from the archaeologist-alien-sleuth to the coauthor-alien-coparticipant. The site has also changed from the mysterious analytic cabinet in which one mind operates on the other to the intersubjective space within which two subjectivities meet, creating a new intersubjective third between themselves. The unveiling of the analyst's subjectivity has thrust Freud's central image of the analyst as a "blank screen" into the dark corners of psychoanalytic discourse. Admitting that the analyst is also a mere human being with his own feelings, phantasies, and thoughts no longer makes it possible to conceive of him as the neutral, objective observer.<sup>1</sup> In the contemporary relational

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Freud never used the word *neutral*; he used *indifferent* to describe the desired stance of the analyst.

school of psychoanalysis, the analyst is seen as being firmly embedded in a two-person psychology (Ghent, 1989; Aron, 1990; Spezzano, 1996) in which each consciousness is intersubjectively shaped by the other. According to Lewis Aron (1991), countertransference is no longer an appropriate description for the analyst's influence within the analytic relationship, as it presupposes that the analyst only reacts to the patients when he often may just initiate a complex sequence of behaviors:

Thinking of the analyst's experience as "counter" or responsive to the patient's transference encourages the belief that the analyst's experience is reactive rather than subjective, emanating from the center of the analyst's psychic self. . . . The term *countertransference* . . . obscures the recognition that the analyst is often the initiator of the interactional sequences, and therefore the term minimizes the impact of the analyst's behavior on the transference [p. 33].

In contrast to conceptualizing the analytic process as being informed by transference and countertransference, Aron advocates a relational approach that

views the patient-analyst relationship as continually established and reestablished through ongoing mutual influence in which both patient and analyst systematically affect, and are affected by each other. A communication process is established between patient and analyst in which influence flows in both directions. This approach implies a "two-person psychology" or a regulatory-systems conceptualization of the analytic process [p. 33].

Aron's account of the intersubjective structure of the psychoanalytic process echoes Jürgen Habermas's (1971) definition of the psychoanalytic process, in which

the physician makes himself the instrument of knowledge: not however, by bracketing his subjectivity, but precisely by its *controlled* employment. . . . [p. 237] Self reflection is not a solitary movement; it is tied to the intersubjectivity of linguistic communication with an *other*. In the end, self-consciousness is constituted only on the basis of mutual recognition [p. 344, italics added].

In contrast to Habermas or other intersubjective theorists like Jacques Lacan, the American school of intersubjectivity takes or, as Lacan would say, mistakes the *other* as another person instead of the *other* dimension of the unconscious that is linguistically shaped and constituted. From this perspective, a two-person psychology has little to do with two persons but instead is embedded within two subjects who relate to each other through two objects via a third subject—namely, the language of the unconscious that both persons are subjected to in a manner unknown to both of them. A too narrow focus on the two-person psychology instead of the three-subjectivity aspect of the analytic process risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It risks confusing the imaginary and narcissistic nature of the ego with the symbolic and divided nature of the subject. For Lacan, the subject is always divided, always unknown and foreign to itself. As Bruce Fink (1995) states, “A speaking being’s two parts or avatars share no common ground: They are radically separated (the ego or false being requiring a refusal of unconscious thoughts . . . having no concern whatsoever for the ego’s fine opinion of itself)” (p. 45). Although the relational school of psychoanalysis has successfully dismantled the antiquated Freudian notion of the neutral analyst and has shown just how personal and human the analytic encounter is and ought to be, I contend that, in doing so, it ignores the third dimension of the unconscious axis in the analytic encounter. By highlighting the interactive, mutually regulatory nature of the analytic process as a means of correcting the lofty and untouchable authoritarian position that many classical analysts had claimed for themselves over the last decades, the interpersonal/relational school correctly argues against the one-sidedness of the “neutral, objective” stance, but in doing so it erases the crucial difference between conceptualizing the individual as a subject and as a person. A subject, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is one “who is bound to a superior by an obligation, it owes allegiance to a ruling power and is subject to its *laws*” (*italics added*). A person, on the other hand, is defined as “a character sustained or assumed in a *drama*, or in actual life; part played; hence function, office, capacity, guise, semblance, one of the characters in a play or story” (*italics added*). That the contemporary relational school is also interchangeably called the intersubjective or interpersonal school, or that at least their differences remain blurry and ill defined to anybody outside the inner circles of the intersubjectivists, points to a similar problem—that is, the inherent confusion of subject and person in all of these orientations.

Without digressing into a lengthy discussion, I would say that a subject always needs an object to which it can be subjected and by which it can be objected. In this fundamental relationship, it is always subjected to certain ground rules—laws that guarantee its existence. In psychoanalysis, borrowing Lacan's vocabulary, both subject and object are always subjected to and governed by the laws of the unconscious. Hence, the subject always implies a tripartite structure. Conversely, the person is a persona, a role or function one assumes for somebody else; it is more like a costume one puts on for another. There is no inherent triadic structure, but more of a mirroring, reflective, and dyadic relationship with the one for whom one assumes this character. With the current shift away from the patient's intrapsychic drama to the interrelational and mutually unfolding scenario between analysand and analyst, the analytic work shifts to involving itself with the ways the two people affect each other (from ego to ego) instead of immersing itself in the internal divisions of their separate yet mutually influencing subjectivities. By centering on the interpersonal dynamics, the analysis risks being trapped in the blindly illuminating alleys of the imaginary order while neglecting the symbolic, structuring corners of the unconscious.

Within this new interpersonal conception of psychoanalysis, free association is no longer the exclusive production of the patient but a creation that is now shared by both analyst and patient. Christopher Bollas is one of many contemporary analysts advocating the use of the analyst's own free association. Bollas (1990) writes,

When psychoanalysts work with seriously disturbed analysands, they find that they increasingly turn to responsive inner associations of their own rather than to the reception, per se, of the patient's associations, as such communications are often not conveyors of meaning but part-acts that are only sensible (and then of potential meaning) as they affect the analysts' finding their completion in that category of signification that we term object relation [p. 340].

Bollas, primarily influenced by Winnicott's idea that there is no baby without a mother and also by Bion's idea of the container-contained, thinks that the patient projects into the analyst dissociated qualities of himself. It is the analyst's therapeutic task to return these projected-off elements to the patient via his own free association and musings, as they are thought to be the split-off pieces of the patient's

unconscious. Viewing the patient as residing within himself, Bollas provides himself with a greater freedom of focusing on his own free associations, as he conceptualizes them as part-container or -medium of the patient's unthought thoughts. In other words, the active use of countertransference material significantly alters the analyst's role from that of a careful observer/listener of the analysand's unconscious material to that of an active coshaper/coholder of the analytic pair's unconscious processes. Through this altered conception of the analytic situation, the analyst is now actively encouraged to change focus from an exclusive attention on the reception of the patient's intrapsychic productions to the production of his or her internal free associations. At last, so it seems, the masquerade is over. The analyst can no longer hide behind the stiff composure of the all-knowing and all-piercing doctor but finally has to step forward with his very own personality. One gains the impression that the idea of the neutral analyst was just a tease—a decoy to deflect from the intensely personal nature of the psychoanalytic encounter and lend it the aura of scientific respectability. Bryce Boyer was one of the first to argue that the neutral analyst "is all too likely to project into the patient all sorts of far from neutral emotions" (1990, p. 306), and Aron contends that "self-revelation is not an option, it is an inevitability" (1991, p. 40). Owen Renik (1996) advances the debate further by saying that even the striving toward this impossible ideal of neutrality is useless and that the analyst is at his best when he is not neutral. "When we look at what we actually do, *at what works*, we see that the concept of neutrality doesn't really describe the attitude of an effective analytic clinician. In fact, neutrality describes an attitude that gets in the way of productive analysis" (p. 498).

So now that we have come to admit that the psychoanalytic relationship is a more personal and less value-free situation, we encounter a question much less frequently asked: To what extent can the current infatuation with countertransferentially guided interpretations constitute an elegant disguise for an analyst's narcissistic gratifications? With this new literature on the necessity and efficacy of the analyst's personal involvement, a theoretical leverage is provided that allows psychoanalysts to be preoccupied by and enamored with their own musings—listening more to their internal echoes at the expense of their patients' intrapsychic conflicts.

In literary criticism, this shift has already taken place, and one may say that the results are already in. Privileging the critic's private and often gender-biased reaction over the literary text itself has produced acclaimed works in which the original text becomes a subclause and

the critic's private, situational response becomes the central plot. In D. A. Miller's (1992) *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*, for instance, a literary text analysis takes the shape of an imagined sexual encounter with Roland Barthes; at the end of this book, one knows more about Miller's sexual preferences than about Barthes's text. Influenced by the reader-response school, in which the reception of the text counts for as much as the text itself, a gradual movement has taken place in which the literary text has receded into the background and all the reader is privileged to hear is the critic's intensely personal reflections. I fear that a similar shift has started and will continue if the current focus on interpersonal dynamics is not counterweighted by an intersubjective view to the unconscious perspective. Theodore Jacobs's paper "The Inner Experiences of the Analyst: Their Contribution to the Analytic Process," (1993) is one such example in which the reader learns much detailed information about the analyst's personality and private memories at the expense of gaining much understanding about the analysand's psychical life and conflicts. About six of the paper's eight pages are devoted to Jacobs's private musings and associations; only two are devoted to a portrait of the analysand. At the end of this treatise, one wonders whether the concluding interpretation of the analysand's castration fears as well as "the infantile roots of his anti-Jewish feeling" could not have been attained without learning about Dr. Jacobs's own competitive conflicts with his father and brother, his recollection of a suit in disaccordance, his grandparents' mezuzah, his phantasy of gentrifying his Jewish name and becoming a radio announcer for CBS News, his memory of a bleeding nose at age eight, and his attendance at a recent bris. Even though Jacobs was explicitly invited to produce a paper in which he would write about his personal reflections during any given hour, his stringing together of personal memories does not illustrate the way his experience of the patient's discourse generates conceptualizations that would reveal previously unthought-of material. Because Jacobs does not think of the patient as a subject but instead of a fellow human being with "similar life experiences," he does not proceed to a symbolic move in which he looks upon his memories from an outside, spectator position. On the contrary, Jacobs remains fixed in a dyadic position in which his private associations help him build a bridge to a better understanding of his patients' experiences but rarely a link to their unconscious undercurrents. In an otherwise excessively acerbic critique of Jacobs's paper that questions the depth of the analytic process, André Green (1993) does point to a careful distinction (similar to the one I am trying to draw in this paper) in Jacobs's work:

I believe that theoretical progress will accrue from the combination of two inseparable viewpoints, the intrapsychic and the intersubjective—i.e. what takes place within a single mind and what takes place between two subjects. Two subjects are not two agents but two beings each with his own wishes and thoughts. Psychic reality cannot, in my view, be reduced to the result of the mutual actions of two partners [p. 1135].

In other words, the personalities of analyst and analysand cannot be mistaken with their subjectivities. Unlike Ogden, for instance, who pays similar careful attention to his intuitions, reveries, and fleeting thoughts while sitting with his patients, Jacobs (1991) does not know how to make use of the affects and memories that “rise up to meet those of the patient” (p. 132). Instead of transforming them into intersubjectively generated scripts, Jacobs’s daydreams idly hover side by side with those of his patients without being subjected to a symbolic exchange.

Given the present focus on the analyst as the coconstructor of the analysand’s personal experience, one has to wonder about the fate of the classical analyst as the opaque sleuth single-mindedly pursuing the patient’s multiple traces, which eventually lead him to the so-called scene of the original crime. Indeed, some of Freud’s most famous case histories, such as the Rat Man and the Wolf Man, read like suspense thrillers in which the gradual peeling away of symptoms ultimately unveils the original traumatic scene. In these narratives, Freud acts and writes as a true master sleuth—pursuing every lead and turning over every clue that might hold the mystery’s secret. The point of detective stories is to find out who has done what crime and how. In psychoanalytic terms, the analyst/detective proceeds by gradually tracing the path left behind by the patient’s errors, slips of the tongue, puns, dreams, and symptoms in an effort to reconstruct what symbols were purloined from the subject in the service of the neurosis. The analyst is to discover the words, phrases, and ideas that were robbed from the subject and lodged beyond recognition in the unconscious. Once they are found in the maze of distortions, displacements, and condensations, the analyst’s task is to help the subject recapture and reconnect with the symbols that were repressed in the unconscious and held captive by the neurosis.

In Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Purloined Letter,” Lacan had found a suitable allegory to this more classical depiction of psychoanalysis—in particular with regard to the analytic position

figuratively held by detective Dupin. In Poe's story, a police inspector seeks Dupin's help in solving a delicate matter pertaining to the theft of a letter from the Queen's boudoir. The Queen was perusing a letter but was interrupted by the entrance of the King. Thinking that the safest hiding place was the most obvious, the Queen placed the letter on a table and thereby successfully diverted the King's attention. However, a minister discovered the letter and, quickly comprehending the Queen's compromised situation, stole it and replaced it with a facsimile. The Queen, entrapped in this pact, could not prevent the theft and could only request the police inspector's discreet assistance in retrieving the letter for her in exchange for a hefty sum of money. After tearing up the minister's apartment for an extended period of time, looking for the missing original letter, and not finding it, the police inspector finds himself at Dupin's door, requesting immediate assistance. Unlike the inspector, who searched the suspect's quarters, Dupin stays in his office, in the dark, pondering the underlying rules of this ingenious theft. Eventually, he leaves for the minister's apartment—not during the night, when the minister is absent, but during the day, when the minister is present. Concealing his eyes behind a pair of green glasses that provides him with the necessary shield to "read" the situation from a different perspective, Dupin spots the letter right away. (Paralleling the Queen's surreptitious action, the minister hid the letter, turned inside out, in an equally obvious place.) Seized to repeat the theft, Dupin returns to the minister's apartment, exchanges the purloined letter with the facsimile, and returns the original to the Queen.

So, instead of examining the content of the letter or repeating the ineffective methods used by the inspector, Dupin, acting in his own name, first analyzes the trajectory of the purloined letter and the underlying structure holding the Queen, the King, and the minister in their intersubjective matrix and then positions himself within the symbolic structure that recapitulates the original one. As Shoshana Felman (1987) comments:

The analyst's effectiveness, however, does not spring from his intellectual strength—but—insists Lacan—from his position in the repetitive structure. By virtue of occupying the third position—that is, the *locus* of the unconscious of the subject as a place of substitution of letter for letter (of signifier for signifier)—the analyst, through transference, allows at once for a repetition

of the trauma, and for a symbolic substitution, and thus effects the drama's denouement [p. 43].

During the whole investigation, we are not privy to Dupin's private thoughts and reflections, and, indeed, the mystery would lose its suspense were we to eavesdrop on Dupin's internal dialogues. It is only when Dupin eventually gives way to his inward broodings and vents his rage at the minister by including a revengeful note in the facsimile left behind in the minister's boudoir that he loses his symbolic position and becomes part of the imaginary network. From a Lacanian perspective, Dupin compromises himself when he joins the minister in a dyadic, imaginary discourse—the two-person-psychology discourse—because he confuses his personal vendetta with his analytic task. He steps off the stage of transference and joins the minister in the personal encounter of a vexed man taking revenge for a slight. Lacan (1988) writes:

What counts is not that the other sees where I am, but that he sees where I am going, that is to say, quite precisely, that he sees where I am not. In every analysis of intersubjective relation, what is essential is not what is there, what is seen. What structures it, is what is not there [p. 224].

Although most proponents of countertransference would describe Dupin's small vendetta as an enactment within the countertransference, there are increasingly resonant voices, like Darlene Ehrenberg (1992) and Irwin Hirsch (1993), who argue that these enactments must occur before the therapist can gain awareness of the nature of the transference. Moreover, these enactments, often disguised as therapeutic actions, promise (according to Ehrenberg) a more spontaneous and authentic encounter for patients who would otherwise feel empty and disconnected from their therapists. Bruce Smith (1990) constructs a similar argument: "All mutative transference interpretations are first enacted in the countertransference, and it is through these countertransference enactments that we typically become aware of the nature of the transference" (p. 90). In order to understand how we have arrived at a point at which countertransference enactments are sanctioned and encouraged—and Ferenczi's brief experiment with mutual analysis is now viewed with more benign empathy (see Blechner, 1992)—I shall return briefly to the history of psychoanalysis and chart the changing conceptions of

countertransference up until the present-day debate about the advantages and disadvantages of analytic self-disclosure.

After decades of ritualistic worship, it has become a regular practice to engage in some kind of Freud bashing before presenting a thesis. With regard to countertransference, Freud seems to have been subjected to a particularly heavy dose of criticism. This irreverent attitude toward the Father of Psychoanalysis in matters of countertransference is all the more puzzling, as a close reading of the original texts reveals a stance that is not nearly as forbidding as Freud's critics want to make one believe. In "Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis: III" (otherwise entitled "Observations on Transference Love"), Freud (1915) writes only about erotic countertransference and gives the well-heeded advice—that by now has turned into a standard ethical principle—of keeping countertransference in check, because "our control over ourselves is not so complete that we may not suddenly one day go further than we have intended" (p. 164). However, a few lines later, he claims defeat were he to work with the sort of women "of elemental passionateness who tolerate no surrogates. They are children of nature who refuse to accept the psychical in place of the material, who, in the poet's words, are accessible only to the 'logic of soup, with dumplings for arguments'" (pp. 166–167). It is my contention that Freud is describing here the sort of patient whom we would diagnose nowadays as borderline or even psychotic—one who, using actions instead of words to translate her unconscious desire, would eclipse the potential space of the analytic setting. Another way of conceptualizing Freud's woman of elemental passionateness is to think of her as functioning in the paranoid/schizoid mode, which Thomas Ogden (1990) describes as the mode "in which thoughts and feelings are not experienced as personal creations but as facts, things-in-themselves, that simply exist. . . . The patient is trapped in the manifest, since surface and depth are indistinguishable" (p. 76). In other words, for this patient, a soup is just a soup, and the dumplings are just dumplings and not metaphors for the good and bad breasts. Freud (1915) thought that the only two ways of dealing with this sort of person are to return their love or "else bring down upon oneself the full enmity of a woman scorned" (p. 167). Freud's insight constitutes an acutely foretelling realization, given that most of the literature on countertransference was to arise out of the scorn analysts ended up confronting when they accepted more severely disturbed patients into their practice. These patients' outbursts and disrespect for Viennese civility and etiquette,

as well as their persistent undermining of the standard psychoanalytic technique of free association, forced analysts to face unwelcome and unexpected responses and look for new methods of treatment. It was the Kleinian concept of “projective identification” (i.e., the attempt to control another person by projecting into that person split-off parts of himself in order “to take possession of the object”) that provided the theoretical tool to make sense of the analyst’s disturbing responses. Analysts on both sides of the continent—Harold Searles and Bryce Boyer in the United States and Paula Heimann, Margret Little, D. W. Winnicott, and Wilfred Bion in Great Britain—began to translate their responses into a social/textual fabric that gradually assisted these very primitively functioning patients to make use of symbolization and thereby of repression.

It was Winnicott’s concept of “potential space” and Bion’s revision of “projective identification” as a normal communicative process that “makes it possible for [the infant] to investigate his own feelings in a personality powerful enough to contain them” (Bion, 1961, p. 182) that indirectly brought the analyst’s countertransferential responses to the forefront of the analytic dialogue. By accepting patients who, as Freud described them, could not accept the “psychical in place of the material,” analysts felt compelled to rely more closely on their own intrasubjective and intersubjective responses to supplement their patients’ scarce symbolic abilities. With patients operating in a foreclosed potential space in which no symbolic formation can develop, “the analyst,” according to Ogden (1990),

has no means of understanding the patient except through his own emotionally colored perceptions of and responses to the patient. Of these perceptions and responses, only a small proportion are conscious, and it is therefore imperative that the analyst learn to detect, read, and make use of his own shifting unconscious state as it unfolds in the analytic discourse [p. 73].

Thus, with patients suffering from severe characterological, narcissistic, borderline, psychotic disorders, it was Freud’s (1912) other dictum about countertransference that began to be invoked—the one in which he admonishes the analyst to

turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the trans-

mitting microphone. Just as the receiver converts back into soundwaves the electric oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by the soundwaves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient's free associations [pp. 115–116].

Here Freud implies that several constructions and reconstructions occur within an analytic dialogue—on the one hand, the more conscious (Dupin-like) investigative endeavor and, on the other hand, the unconscious transmission of sounds and echoes that form another language between analysand and analyst, one that is constantly influencing the production of free associations. It was Winnicott who eventually found words to describe the arena in between the telephone microphone and receiver when he conceived of the potential space as that space between mother and infant in which meaning is created—a space that connects and separates. The realization that “there is no such thing as an infant [apart from the maternal provision]” put the mother and infant on equal footing in the constitution of the mother–infant matrix. Consequently, the infant could no longer be separated from the mother but could only be understood within the intersubjective net of the mother–infant unit:

In both the relationship of mother and infant and the relationship of analyst and analysand, the task is not to tease apart the elements constituting the relationship in an effort to determine which qualities belong to each individual participating in it; rather, from the point of view of the dialectical interdependence of subject and object, the analytic task involves an effort to describe as fully as one can the specific nature of the interplay of individual subjectivity and intersubjectivity [Ogden, 1994, p. 64].

Thus, a major shift occurred in the analytic setting: “The analyst's interpretations are now tuned to the *interaction* of patients and analyst at an intrapsychic level” (O'Shaughnessy, 1983, p. 281). Hence, no utterance could be left unturned without examining at the same time the intersubjective vibrations between analyst and analysand. From now on the patient's intrapsychic conflict could no longer be fully understood without analyzing at the same time their effects on the analyst.

The image of the neutral analyst—with his evenly hovering attention, with his equal distance from id, ego, and superego—no longer suited the reality of the analytic situation, regardless of the kind of patient under analysis. Freud's positivistic concept of a scientific setting within which the patient's neurotic conflicts and complexes could be examined in an uncontaminated fashion through the projections on the analyst rapidly faltered as analysts became aware that they were also privy to introjections and projections and thus could not remain the isolated, distanced observer in the analytic examining box. By 1912, Lou Andreas-Salomé had already remarked:

There is an unalterable contradiction in the application of a method derived from science—the logical analysis by which we gain control of the outer world—to the immediate data of our inmost experiences. It is not simply a question of inspecting psychic life from the outside, a matter of “psychology” so to speak, but rather an invasion and a definition of its spontaneous flow in *vivo*; the analyst participates actively, not just by understanding [1964, p. 73].

Thus, how to interweave—how to make use of one's subjective experiences in a supposed objective scientific discourse—constituted a dilemma for psychoanalysis from its inception. Even though Freud rarely comes across in his case histories as the cold, detached analytic observer, that image has survived for many decades and has restricted frank discussions of the analyst's private thoughts and feelings to the closed chambers of analytic institutes.

However, with a diminished investment in proving the scientific status of psychoanalysis and perhaps with an effort to make psychoanalysis more “user-friendly” to the wider public, analysts began to give free reign to their hushed chatter—disclosing their private thoughts to patients, students, and readers. Yet, once the analyst could no longer be held in the same position as a scientific observer, disagreement emerged about how to delineate and classify the hitherto forbidden thoughts. Were all subjective thoughts and ideas manifestations of countertransference—or only some? If only some, which were to be considered manifestations of countertransference (i.e., elicited unconsciously by the patient), and which were harbored separately by the analyst (i.e., were reflective of his own internal desires and conflicts)? Should countertransference be defined as the entire

reaction of the analyst to the analysand, or should just those reactions reminiscent of early infantile libidinal impulses be classified as countertransferential reactions? As long as countertransference was primarily defined as the unanalyzed portions of the therapist's personality that unwittingly interfered with the proper course of treatment, analysts were regularly encouraged to seek further analysis so that, as Edmund Glover (1927) put it, "at least some analytical toilet be a part of the analyst's necessary routine" (p. 507). Yet, what did it mean to be fully analyzed? Did it mean to be fully aware of all of one's blind spots and unconscious desires? Could the conscious control of one's unconscious desires realistically be expected from psychoanalysts?

As thinking shifted toward seeing the analyst as a fellow human being instead of as a blank screen, as a participant instead of as a neutral spectator, the question of "full analysis" retreated unanswered into the background, and the focus moved to the intersubjective process between analyst and analysand. At this point in psychoanalytic history, there is much enthusiasm for using countertransference as an analytic tool. Earlier questions of what constitutes countertransference and how it differs from self-disclosure, for instance, have been reduced to debating the analyst's personal involvement. In a similar vein, previous prohibitions against the disclosure of personal impressions have rapidly faltered, leading in some cases to postmodern reinterpretations of Ferenczi's early mutual analysis. Mark Blechner's (1992) technique is a case in point. Echoing Ferenczi's mutual analysis is Blechner's recommendation to avoid transference interpretations in favor of inviting the patient to interpret the psychoanalyst's psychodynamics. Although the loosening of analytic rules has converted the analytic setting into a more humane and less regimented place, it has also permitted an abundance of analytic confessions disguised as countertransferentially inspired interpretations—leaving one to wonder whether psychoanalysts have not, as Stuart Schneiderman (1992) argued, finally succeeded in making "a fetish of their own feelings" (p. 24).

Ehrenberg, for instance, is a prominent interactive analyst whose goal is to expand psychoanalytic practice by paying minute attention to the affective interactive forces between the two analytic participants and, in so doing, to deepen the intimate engagement in which both analyst and analysand are involved. Staying closely tuned to her own affective states, as a kind of "countermeasure" of the patient's

emotional conditions, Ehrenberg (1992) often finds herself apologizing for this or that behavior or misunderstanding and at times even demanding rights to her feelings from her patients when she feels mistreated. In one case example, she writes:

In response to a patient's anger over a rescheduled session, I understood how painful this was to her, but I also emphasized how inconsiderate and punitive she was being towards me. I insisted . . . I had at least earned the right for her to consider that my canceling the session might not have been frivolous or uncaring or irresponsible. . . . if she felt she could not . . . even forgive me then I felt I had as much right to be angry at her as she felt she had to be angry at me. At this point I told her that I had actually canceled to go to the funeral of a friend [p. 71].

The patient, reacting benignly, felt "touched" that Ehrenberg was willing to "fight" with her." Although Ehrenberg warns her readers later in her book that "being authentic can burden our patients unnecessarily and . . . can derail rather than advance the analytic process" (p. 84), she is blinded at times, I believe, by her own astute advice—confusing personal emotional confessions with deepening analytic interventions. An analyst's personal or private disclosure can often constitute a golden nugget for which an analysand may respond with much emotional gratitude, but it is precisely this differentiation between a confidential disclosure of anger, vulnerability, or guilt (just to name a few) that sets up a false division between an analytic, distant, or professional posture and an authentic or intimate engagement. Within such a division, the analyst no longer addresses the analysand as a subject but as a character whose loving or irritating behaviors are most usefully addressed by an honest engagement with his or her personality. Ehrenberg's work serves as a powerful example of the strong analytic attraction to be caught in the mirror halls of the imaginary register in which both egos react to each other and in which such reflection is mistaken as an authentic and thus deepening analytic encounter.

Quality control is possible in telephone conversations (we can buy low-static phones), but, in the psychoanalytic encounter, we are on less certain grounds when we try to evaluate the analyst's ability to receive and transmit the patient's soundwaves and convert them

appropriately. Without such quality control, many analytic encounters foreclose the potential space between analyst and analysand, and, instead of playing, analysands (are implicitly trained to) become closely attuned to their analysts' conscious and unconscious musings. Walter Burke (1992) writes, "The mutually-defined stance of frequent self-disclosure can be experienced as a replay of the interaction with narcissistic parents who could not allow the patient's development to proceed without their constant shaping" (p. 254). Although it is crucial to listen carefully to one's countertransference reactions and shape one's interpretations accordingly, it is equally important for the analyst not to confuse countertransference with self-disclosure and thereby give oneself the license of "crowding" the analytic space with an abundance of confessional statements. An ill-crafted use of countertransference, which, as we have seen, can be easily masked as spontaneous, mutually affective responses, may turn the potential space into a "fascistic" or "totalitarian space" in which patients are subtly trained to rest closely attuned to their analysts' emotional reverberations—reacting to them at the expense of silencing their own free-floating thoughts and emotions. In those instances, patients, much like overly parentified children, risk become compliant to gratify their parents' narcissistic demands.

The current endearment with the interpersonal schools of thought, the rediscovery of Ferenczi's work, and the rapidly growing fascination with body language and countertransference affects represent a potential lure for psychoanalysts to position themselves in the stance of an imaginary Other who relates to his patients just as another fellow human being. Although the American relational school has contributed much to humanize the analytic encounter, which had grown into a rather stale and sterile meeting of minds, an overly democratic use of "working in the countertransference" risks trapping the analyst in the glass cabinets of what Lacan calls the imaginary order. The imaginary is the register that encompasses the dual relations between the ego and the specular image and accounts for our attractions, fascinations, and seductions—in particular, our need to synthesize and unify essentially fragmentary experiences. According to Lacan, the relationship between the ego and its specular counterpart is essentially narcissistic, rooted in the early encounter of the ego with its ego-ideal. In essence, the imaginary is the realm that structures our need for likeness and our desire for identification with an other. In contrast, the symbolic is the realm of differentiation and separation

in which our most intimate desires unmask themselves to be structured and guided by language, the unconscious, and the social order, which place us in kinship relationships, sex roles, and preinscribed social obligations. It is the order of triadic structures—of the language and culture in which the person is unknowingly inscribed in his or her most private longings and is “spoken by.” In *The Subject and the Self: Lacan and American Psychoanalysis*, Judith Feher Gurewich (1997) compares the imaginary “to what American psychoanalysis has labeled the interpersonal realm, while the symbolic accounts for the intersubjective nature of our unconscious, which is, according to Lacan, structured like a language” (p. 28). By emphasizing the “two-person” (Aron, 1991), social constructivist (Hoffman, 1991), and mutually influencing nature of psychoanalysis, the relational school of psychoanalysis risks neglecting the role of the analyst as the representative of the third dimension (i.e., the Symbolic).<sup>2</sup> By confusing the individual with the subject, the relational/intersubjective school of psychoanalysis ventures on reducing a subjective/tripartite encounter into a two-person meeting and, in doing so, loses sight of the alienating and disruptive nature of the unconscious. Freud never spoke of a two-person psychology; his theories were always embedded within a tripartite structure. The best example for the triadic dimension of any personal encounter is Freud’s (1905) subtle analysis of the joke in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*; no joke can be understood without analyzing the intersubjective relationship between the joker, the object of the joke, and the listener. Locating the psychoanalytic situation within a two-person psychology with two individuals engaged in an analytic dialogue cannot be equated with two persons, but instead has to be conceptualized as two split subjects, mediated and spoken by the language of the unconscious (i.e., a structure that is foreign to both of them). In 1953, Lacan already argued that no “two-body psychology exists without the intervention of a third element. If, as we must, take speech as the central feature of our perspective, then it is within a three—rather than two-term relation that we have to formulate the analytic experience in its totality” (p. 11). Elsewhere, Lacan (1977) writes:

For Freud’s discovery was that of the field of the effects in the nature of man of his relations to the symbolic order and the tracing

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the imaginary and symbolic register, see Benvenuto and Kennedy (1986), Evans (1996), Muller (1996), and Gurewich (1997).

of their meaning right back to the most radical agencies of symbolization in being. To ignore this symbolic order is to condemn the discovery to oblivion, and the experience to ruin [p. 64].

Being the bearer of speech, the analyst—in the Lacanian framework—stands in the place of the Other, who is listening beyond the dimension of the spoken words, always looking beyond the I–Thou analytic relationship, pointing toward the Otherness of the unconscious discourse as it is determining and interrupting the dual drama of the psychoanalytic relationship. If the analytic relationship is conceptualized as being situated in the theater of a transference–countertransference dynamic, one could conceive of the analyst as a stage producer (instead of a coactor), whose primary task is to keep the show running. In order to acquaint himself thoroughly with the production, he needs to let himself be used a coparticipant in order to understand the diverse roles/texts the actors perform and are spoken by and, as Loewald (1980) writes, “make himself available for the development of a new ‘object-relationship’” (p. 224). It is his task to listen carefully to the texts recited and of paying close attention to the subjects that lie beyond the official version. Although getting into the different roles, the seasoned stage producer has sufficient discipline not to confuse his actors’ texts with his own. He is not the author or the actor but the listener and the interpreter of his actors’ performances and recitals. Aware of the effect he has on his ensemble and mindful of the influence he exerts on their performance, he uses those effects within the relationship to comprehend the play, but he does not mistake himself for one of its prime actors. He knows when to get off the stage. If he does not know that, the performers will feel cast aside, because it is no longer their text that is being impersonated. Moreover, both actor and stage director are held to a text that neither knows about, and hence both are held captive by the Otherness of a language that is simultaneously foreign and intimate to them.<sup>3</sup>

Ogden’s use of countertransference experiences for psychoanalytic work represents a remarkable exception to the current predominant

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<sup>3</sup> After reading a draft of this paper, Daniel Shapiro, M.D. directed me to Hans Loewald’s (1980) paper *Psychoanalysis as an Art and the Fantasy Character of the Psychoanalytic Situation*, in which Loewald also characterizes the analyst as the director of the play who “must relive, re-create the action of the play” and the patient as “the direct participant, as well as the initially unwitting co-author” (pp. 354–355).

use of countertransference within a two-person-psychology model. In 1982, he wrote:

Countertransference analysis is the means by which the therapist attempts to understand and make therapeutic use of his response to the patient. This is not an effort to “get through”, “filter out”, or “overcome” what the therapist recognizes as reflection of his own personality; rather the therapist makes use of his self-understanding to determine how his feelings and thoughts have been uniquely shaped and colored by his present experience with this patient at this point in the therapy, and in particular by the specific qualities of the patient’s predominant transference to the therapist [pp. 72–73].

In stark contrast to Ehrenberg, for instance, who seems to confuse countertransference expressions with confessional, self-revelatory statements under the guise of greater authenticity, Ogden makes every effort to translate and shift the affective echoes resonating within himself onto a third/symbolic plane, where they can be examined by both analyst and analysand within a symbolic matrix. Ogden (1994) writes:

I shall discuss the analyst’s task of using verbal symbols to speak with a voice that has lived within the intersubjective analytic third, has been changed by that experience, and is able to speak *about it* in his own voice, as analyst to the analysand (who has also been a part of the experience of the third) [p. 65].

Ogden’s interventions encompass carefully constructed intercessions that take hold of the analyst’s unconscious experiences, forcing him to speak “*about* the analytic third from a position (as analyst) outside of it” (p. 79).

In “Reverie and Interpretation,” Ogden (1997a), elaborates on this point by clearly demarcating reverie as, at one and the same time, an intensely

personal/private event and an intersubjective one. . . . Paradoxically, as personal and private as the analysts’s reveries feel to him, it is misleading to view the analysts’s reveries as “his” personal creations since reverie is at the same time a jointly (but

asymmetrically) created unconscious intersubjective construction [p. 569].

Instead of revealing his personal reveries to the patient, Ogden allows for them to accrue meaning over time, restraining himself from forcing them into a premature symbolic elaboration. When he eventually makes use of the reverie, he places it within the intersubjective matrix without crowding the analytic space with personalized references and revelations. In his most recent essay, on “Reverie and Metaphor” Ogden (1997b), clarifies his technique even further: “When I speak to a patient about what I think is going on between us, I attempt to speak *from* my experience in (and of) my reverie as opposed to speaking to the patient *about* my reverie experience” (p. 729). Although some intersubjectivists may criticize Ogden for not working within the full intersubjective realm—as he maintains his focus on the patient and does not speak about himself as a person—I would argue that he truly uses his subjectivity and not his personality within the countertransference–transference relationship and places it at the service of the analytic endeavor. In other words, he makes every attempt to place his countertransference experiences onto a symbolic plane from which he both speaks and is spoken by—where he is both subject and object to his own material before he introduces it back into the analytic matrix.<sup>4</sup> Steven H. Cooper’s (1996, 1998) redefinition of self-disclosure as “analyst-disclosure” also attempts to solve the riddle of translating the analyst’s subjective experiences into an “objective” discourse without tantalizing the analysand with a self-confessional statement but instead with the provision of an interpretation that is fully informed by the analyst’s subjectivity.

Although the work in the countertransference can be the royal road into the unconscious, it is not as straightforward as some representatives of the interpersonal school make it out to be. It is an indirect road full of tricky curves, abysses, and many dead-ends—a road that

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Loewald’s (1980) description of the analyst’s therapeutic art when he writes that “the analyst’s skill does not merely consist in detached spectatorship and interpretation but in the analyst’s capacity and skill of conveying to the patient how he, the analyst, uses his own emotional experiences and resources for understanding the patient and for advancing the patient’s access to his, the patient’s inner resources” (p. 356).

necessitates a steady compass and an avoidance of alluring and colorful shortcuts. The best guide for such a journey is not necessarily one who shares with his fellow passengers his personal impressions of the scenery but one who points out and illustrates the landscape ahead while keeping a sure foot on the common pathway. The careful and detailed examination of a given countertransference reaction, phantasy, or thought—which is characteristic of the work of Ogden and Boyer, for instance—is pointing toward another, more fundamental change in our psychoanalytic practice. Analytic work is no longer just an examination of the grand, traumatic moments in a patient's life (as if only these were solely constitutive of the psyche) but has come to include a more moment-to-moment focus on the patient's prosaic and mundane experiences (as being equally formative and telling about the patient's internal world). In this sense, analysts's careful descriptions of their internal dialogues have the potential to lead the discipline of psychoanalysis away from privileging the search for fundamental synthesizing master schemes to a practice defined by Michael André Bernstein (1994) as "side-shadowing," which

rejects the conviction that a particular code, law or pattern exists, waiting to be uncovered beneath the heterogeneity of human existence . . . side-shadowing stresses the significance of random, haphazard and inassimilable contingencies, and instead of the power of a system to uncover an otherwise unfathomable truth, it expresses the ever-changing nature of that truth and the absence of any predictive certainties in human affairs [p. 4].

I believe that interpersonal intersubjectivism has functioned as a welcome corrective to an overly stale practice of American classical psychoanalysis in which analysts impersonated mere caricatures of themselves as unmovable, humorless, and often pompously knowledgeable automatons for too many years. Patients left analysis with much dissatisfaction, because little had changed within a human exchange that had taken place between a person and a robot hiding behind a mask. Yet, as has happened before in the history of psychoanalysis, the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction, where the literature on countertransference has been used to open up the analytic arena for the disclosure of confessional testimonies. Although classical analysts have shied away from appreciating the full extent of intersubjectivity and have held onto a more positivistic and one-dimensional view of the analyst, the

relational intersubjectivists have gone too far in their attempt to personalize the analytic encounter and, in so doing, have risked demystifying the Otherness of the unconscious dimension of this intersubjective dialogue. By collapsing the paradox of the analytic encounter into a meeting of authentically related souls, the analyst risks becoming just another fellow person—jettisoning his special function of speaking to the analysand about the analysand within a three-dimensional discourse in which the analyst speaks as a carrier, observer, and reminder of Otherness. Analysts are not there to express their different opinions and to become real with their patients; they continue to face the delicate and difficult task of working in the strange paradox of intense intimacy and respectful formality.

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