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A Critical Appraisal of Relational Approaches to Psychoanalysis

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A Critical Appraisal of Relational Approaches to Psychoanalysis

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Dedication

To my family back home, and to Frank Richardson, my family in Texas.

A Critical Appraisal of Relational Approaches to Psychoanalysis

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In the last twenty years, relational psychoanalysis has emerged as an important voice in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Relational approaches operate within the tension between intrapsychic and interpersonal levels of explanation. On the one hand, intrapsychic explanations assume the existence of a private inner life focusing on internal processes such as fantasy, desires, repression, and unconscious motivations. On the other hand, interpersonal explanations focus on transactions with others, the daily give and take of our relationships, and our inextricable participation in the social realm. Schools in the relational movement often struggle to integrate these two poles, but the risk seems to be collapsing one explanatory pole into the other. This work argues that framing this discussion within a wider philosophical horizon can suggest a compelling new way of thinking about these matters. The theoretical psychology of Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman (1999, 2000), the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977, 1994), and Martin Heidegger (1993, 1996), offer a view of selfhood that transcends the problematic internal-external dichotomy pervasive in relational approaches.

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Introduction: Relational Psychoanalysis and the Modern Self

In the last twenty years, relational psychoanalysis has emerged as an important voice in psychoanalytic theory and practice (Beebe & Lachmann, 2003, p. 379). Unlike many other psychoanalytic schools, relational psychoanalysis does not have a single founding theorist who introduced a clearly formulated theoretical model. Instead, a number of diverse and varying positions have coalesced around a unifying concept: the idea that relationships are the basic building blocks of the mind (Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. xiii). The heterogeneity characteristic of the relational movement has understandably created varying views of what this new paradigm entails concretely (Mitchell, 2000, p. xiv). As a result, seemingly inconsistent views, sometimes about core concepts, have emerged within the movement. The underlying premise of this work is that conceptual clarification of these apparent incongruities could be philosophically and clinically enriching. There is, at the moment, a dearth of literature addressing the theoretical diversity within this approach, which underscores a clear need to bring its voices into dialogue to make sense of their differences. The aim of this work is to do so with the hope that it will accomplish greater theoretical lucidity and wider cohesiveness of relational views, without sacrificing their diversity.

There is a notable area of disagreement in the relational movement that seems ripe for this type of exploration. Mitchell and Aron (1999, p. xviii) observed that relational approaches operate within the tension between intrapsychic and interpersonal

levels of explanation. This observation leaves open the issue of whether this tension could prove problematic. On the one hand, intrapsychic explanations assume the existence of a private inner life focusing on internal processes such as fantasy, desires, repression, and unconscious motivations. On the other hand, interpersonal explanations focus on transactions with others, the daily give and take of our relationships, and our inextricable participation in the social realm. Schools in the relational movement often struggle to integrate these two poles. Postmodern relational approaches have appealed primarily to the social level of explanation. In its radical variants, they define--perhaps even dismiss--the concept of the intrapsychic as a culturally constructed discursive practice; in essence, a culturally sanctioned way of talking about reality (Fairfield, Layton, & Stack, 2002, p. 2-3). On the other end of the spectrum, thinkers like Mitchell and Aron (1999) express their concern that the constructed self is incomplete without the contributions of an inner life in the formation of personhood. They aspire to retain a concept of intrapsychic reality as something more than just a way of talking. Although both groups embrace social levels of explanation, they disagree about how all-encompassing this dimension should be considered and about the place of the individual subject in this new picture.

Martin and Sugarman (1998, p. 1) noted that a similar tension between the social and the individual is prevalent in much of contemporary social science. They claim this tension results from social science's response to philosophical critiques of the modern understanding of selfhood. Among those that have taken issue with a modern

construal of the self, Charles Guignon (2004) notes that modernity brought about the birth of a new worldview in which the self came to be seen as “nuclear”, “a self-contained, bounded individual, a center of experience and will, with no essential or defining relations to anything outside oneself” (p. 43). Charles Taylor (1986), a prominent contemporary philosopher, noted that divorced from the influence of anything outside itself, the modern self looks only within itself for guidance and fulfillment. Likewise, the well-known critiques of modernity found in Foucault (1982, 2002) and Derrida (1980, 1997) provide a scathing indictment of the traditional disembodied and detached modern self. These thinkers call for a much-needed contextualization of the self that acknowledges its history and cultural sources.

Relational approaches embrace contemporary critiques of the nuclear self, albeit with some reservations, and are deeply aware of the pressing need to recognize its cultural embeddedness. This is a timely endeavor that opens up theory and clinical practice to considerations of social factors. However, Martin and Sugarman (2000) caution, in the enthusiasm to overcome a nuclear self, we risk privileging cultural factors to the point of eliminating notions of individuality altogether: “Psychologists are interested in how humans develop and learn as experiencing individuals. If there are no such selves to develop and learn, psychological commitments require not just adjustment or even reconfiguration but also radical reconsideration and quite possibly abandonment.” (p. 397). It seems then that contextualizing the mind involves a certain balancing act between the need to recognize the constitutive force of social context and

the reality of individual experience. At the same time, individuality requires a defense that avoids reverting to modern notions of a masterful or bounded self. The risk seems to be collapsing one explanatory pole into the other.

The purpose of this work is to explore this problematic as it presents itself in relational psychoanalysis. In order to do this, relational perspectives must be presented and discussed in their dialogical tensions. In addition, it is argued that bringing this discussion into a wider philosophical horizon can both enrich our understanding of the problem and suggest a compelling new way of thinking about these matters. For this purpose, the theoretical psychology of Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman, and the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977, 1994) and Martin Heidegger (1993, 1996), among others, will be considered as sources.

Important conceptual changes within a field are seldom absolute or abrupt. Instead, they often evidence both continuity and rupture from the tradition that precedes them. Psychoanalysis could be considered emblematic of this phenomenon; theoretical developments are often couched as a continuation of Freud's work in some essential way, while drawing attention to important innovations that redirect the discipline's concerns. There are two risks involved in doing this. Overestimating the continuity of thinking within a tradition can result in presentism, while overemphasizing its originality risks obscuring the sources from which that thinking sprung. However, when theoretical innovation is understood within the right relationship to its historical context, it illuminates both the past and the future of a discipline. In keeping with this aim, this

work attempts to properly understand relational psychoanalysis by examining its influences.

Lastly, asking about the nature of the mind is not just an issue of philosophical accuracy but also of clinical importance. Another working assumption of this effort is that there is a rich, complex, and mutually determinative relationship between theory and practice evident in the psychoanalytic encounter. In order to examine it, this dissertation will look at clinical material to understand the implications of theory in practice. In the process of doing so, a certain view about the relationship between theory and practice in psychoanalysis should become evident. I would like to defend that, ideally, there is a nuanced and reciprocal relationship between them, where theory guides our practice but never fully determines it or exhaustively explains it. In turn, effective psychotherapy practice ought to feedback into our theories. Of course, this ideal relationship is not always the case, and we often find discontinuities and puzzlement in the theory-practice relationship.

This author believes that relational psychoanalysis has something to contribute to psychotherapy at large, and this is why this work has one foot inside and another outside of psychoanalysis. As such, it is neither an introduction to psychoanalytic work, nor a scholarly treatise on psychoanalytic matters. It intends to be more than the former, and less than the latter. In doing so, the hope is that certain ideas become accessible for discussion within and outside of psychoanalytic communities. Some might argue that it

is not only psychoanalysis that requires more dialogic cohesiveness, but the field of psychology as a whole (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999).

Chapter 1: The Influences of Relational Psychoanalysis

Introduction

Mitchell and Greenberg (1983) originally coined the term relational to describe a group of psychoanalytic approaches that believe the mind is constituted by the internalization of interpersonal relationships (Fossage, 2003, p. 411). Arguably, there is no central figure in the relational approach, yet Stephen Mitchell has been proposed as an organizing theorist who defined its loose boundaries and consolidated the unifying themes that helped in the “emergence of a tradition” (Silverman, 2000, p. 146; Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. i). In spite of the spirit of openness and integration that relational approaches claim, Mitchell and Aron (1999) position the school as a competing alternative to traditional models: “Relational concepts do not provide understandings of different phenomena from those explored by the drive/defense model; relational concepts provide alternative understandings of the same phenomena” (p. xii).

This description establishes a division of the psychoanalytic world into two spheres: those who apprehend the central roles of relationships in the formation of the mind, and those who don't. This border between relational and classical psychoanalysis could be construed as somewhat arbitrary, particularly given Mitchell's acknowledgement that Freud himself has important relational strands in his thinking (Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. *vii*; Frank, 1998, p. 141). It seems that there is a degree of continuity in psychoanalytic theorizing in its recognition of the social dimensions of

human existence. At the same time, there are important theoretical differences that cannot be easily overlooked. Indeed, the current theoretical landscape is complex and sometimes murky. As Spezzano (1995) tries to make sense of it he notes that:

One danger is overgeneralization. Not all analysts who think of themselves as classical will see themselves accurately portrayed here, nor have all American analysts who think of themselves as not classical abandoned all the principles I label as classical nor embraced all the ones I have labeled as contemporary.

Even these labels are problematic because what I call contemporary analysis has roots going back 80 years to Ferenczi in Europe and 50 years to Sullivan in the United States, while what I call classical analysis is still evolving as contemporary structural theory. (p. 44)

We can and often do encounter such gray areas when looking at the history and also the current state of psychoanalysis. We can find seeds of future thinking in earlier writings, and reinterpretation of early theory in light of new developments. Many contemporary schools overlap and differ concurrently across different important issues. As a result, there is a risk of overstating the differences between relational and classical approaches. Nevertheless, there are genuine differences across psychoanalytic schools. Acknowledging common threads between them should not amount to a hasty equating or leveling of all positions. Spezzano (1995) reminds us that there is also a danger of “blurring the differences” when conducting “an initial effort to define a school of analysis” (p. 44).

Relational approaches dwell in this theoretical richness and ambiguity because of the variety and wealth of their influences. Understanding them requires placing them in the proper context of the history of ideas in psychoanalysis. In fact, the “relational turn” (Beebe & Lachmann, 2003, p. 379) that has gained such prevalence in psychoanalysis today is rooted in a series of gradual shifts that culminate in the retrospective analysis that Mitchell and his colleagues present. As such, tracing their influences helps understand their theoretical paradigm. In Mitchell and Aron’s own words: “The exploration of history is often helpful in shedding light on current controversies and in generating ideas about where we need to go” (p. xiii). However, it is difficult to provide a succinct and coherent narrative describing the precursors of relational psychoanalysis. The following account intends to do both more and less than that. Less because it will be selective in the psychoanalytic milestones it tackles, but more because it will zero in on these to discuss their relevance to relational approaches.

Mitchell and Black’s (1995) description of the term relational lends itself as a good starting point for inquiry: “The term relational was used ...to highlight the common theoretical framework underlying interpersonal psychoanalysis, British school object relations theories, and self-psychology.” (p. 263). What follows then is a brief examination of the aforementioned sources, object relations, self-psychology, and interpersonal psychoanalysis.

Interpersonal Psychoanalysis

Sullivan was a unique figure in the history of psychoanalysis: "...more identified with the psychiatric community than the psychoanalytic one" (Kuriloff, 2002, p. 306). Levenson (1992) notes that his thinking was not psychoanalytic in itself, but that:

...his essentially open-ended postulates—which he scrupulously defined as Interpersonal Psychiatry —can be, and were, extended into a contemporary interpersonal Psychoanalysis. I really do not believe this was Sullivan's doing per se but rather, was the result of the merging of his American pragmatic psychiatry with European psychoanalysis through the contributions of his colleagues, especially Thompson, Horney and Fromm (p. 451)

And so his thinking came to be associated with the group later dubbed culturalist within psychoanalysis, which included figures like Karen Horney and Erich Fromm (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 259). Clara Thompson (1979) confirms that: "the contributions of Sullivan and Fromm have come to be called the "cultural school, " because of the great emphasis of both on the interpersonal factors in personality formation and personal difficulties and the relative lack of emphasis on the more biologic drives as dynamic factors" (p. 200). This represents a clear departure from Freud's emphasis on biological explanations. However, it is also important to notice that it maintains a significant theoretical distance from object relation approaches. In the development of relational

psychoanalysis, Sullivan's focus on interpersonal interaction will offer the complementary balance to the analysis of interiority presented by object relations.

Although one is pressed to find an outright rejection of an inner-world in Sullivan's theorizing, there certainly is a determinate and almost exclusive focus on interpersonal phenomena. However, it seems helpful to heed Mitchell's (1988) advice that understanding Sullivan involves readjusting our basic concepts of the intrapsychic and the interpersonal:

At first glance, it might seem apparent what is meant by "intrapsychic" and "interpersonal," the former referring to processes within the mind, the latter referring to processes between persons. These are serviceable working definitions, but they don't take us very far if we are trying to distinguish Sullivan's position from classical psychoanalysis, since they clearly do not do justice to either mode of theorizing" (p. 473)

Mitchell (1988) maintains that these concepts have been used as quasi-political banners that obscure similarities and polarize different theoretical positions (p. 473). He notes that he sees no outright rejection of social influence in classical psychoanalysis, just like there is no rejection of intrapsychic dimensions in a Sullivanian approach. Instead, there is a disagreement about how primordial each pole really is in explaining human behavior. So while Sullivan can acknowledge that interpersonal interaction unavoidably involves the subjectivity of the individual, he will not make it a focus in

and of itself. In its place, the starting point for understanding human behavior is not the individual mind but the interpersonal field:

For Sullivan, situations are not outside the individual but inclusive of the subjective and behavioral activities of all participants. The arena of relevance is not behavioral but expanded to include a circuit of continuous interchange, permeating boundaries between the subjective "inner" and behavioral "outer." That intimate connection between them is what makes it possible to draw inferences about the subjective even though it cannot be directly observed... Thus personality is seen as a somewhat open system, inevitably engaged in the more inclusive social fields through which one moves in the course of living, beyond Freud's term of early childhood (Grey, 1988, p. 556).

Commenting on the origin of this concept in Sullivan's approach, Siegel (1987) notes that: "...using Kurt Lewin's (1951) concept of field theory, Sullivan tried to shift the focus in psychiatric and psychoanalytic thinking from the intrapsychic to the interpersonal field." (p274). Lewin, a German exile who eventually led the Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT, introduced field theory as a "corrective to earlier systems of thought" that were too individualistic (Viney, 1993, p. 368). Sullivan appropriated this notion of a field as a basic unit of analysis and introduces it to psychiatry. An interpersonal field can be seen as analogous to the system in family therapy, where the whole has an interactive force that shapes individual participation. The concept of an interpersonal field is central for Sullivan (Bromberg, 1980, p. 240)

and it will take up a central role in relational psychoanalytic approaches as well (Tubert-Oklander, 2007, p. 115).

Sullivan defines the self as: "...a system or organization of interpersonal processes which are an embodiment or reflection ... of selected attitudes of the culture acquired through contact with the significant people" (Thompson, 1978, p. 498). Rather than thinking of the self as a self-contained entity, Sullivan defines it as a structured set of interpersonal processes. Thinking of the self as a co-constituted phenomenon defies traditional definitions that attribute uniqueness and individuality to it. In fact, Sullivan does not leave much room for creative expression and uniqueness as usually understood (Klenbort, 1978). Yet, even though he appears intent on dismantling notions of personal uniqueness, Sullivan acknowledges the role of subjective experience in motivation. However, he departs from Freud's focus on internal phenomena by substituting interpersonal needs in place of libidinal instinct as the motor for behavior:

...while Freud sees the child's development as going on inevitably in terms of the child's sexual development and his libido, Sullivan's child is a product of his interaction with significant people. He assumes that the need for security is even stronger in the human being than the need for instinctual gratification or satisfaction and that these latter become problems only when they conflict with the need for security. Since man is the least instinct-dominated of all the animals, it behooves us according to Sullivan to concern ourselves chiefly with

the forces which do dominate man, and they are the social forces. (Thompson, 1978, p. 495)

Thompson identifies the central difference between their approaches by noting that Sullivan completely dismisses a hedonistic principle in explaining motivation. Sullivan views two sets of motivating factors in humans: needs and anxiety (Grey, 1988, p. 556). Needs are biological urges such as hunger, thirst and the like. Sullivan, like Freud, acknowledges the role of biology in influencing human behavior. However, Sullivan speaks of needs as and their satisfaction as a way of drawing people together and ensuring the survival of the individual and the species. For him, biology sets us up in a sort of collaborative harmony from the starting point. Furthermore, our needs are plastically shaped by culture, which defines the ways in which satisfaction can be met (Grey, 1988, p. 557).

The other pole that explains human behavior for Sullivan is anxiety. He views it as a pathological phenomenon that regulates interpersonal functioning. Anxiety emerges from a threat to the individual's security needs, an intrinsic human desire found in interpersonal approval (Grey, 1988, p. 557). It represents more than just subjective discomfort, but rather "an experience of such catastrophic dimensions, so utterly disorganizing, that the patient will do almost anything to avoid it" (Levenson, 1992, p. 452). In fact, the devastation that anxiety brings about causes us to systematically ignore or disavow those interpersonal experiences that can trigger it. Sullivan calls those instances of systematic inattention, along with other defensive maneuvers that

manage to stay out of awareness, security operations. The experiences associated with anxious affect are so distressing as to become dissociated from our sense of personal identity.

According to Sullivan, people are shaped by the effect of anxiety, which is present and absorbed within an interpersonal field. Indeed, the child comes to understand which experiences should trigger anxiety because affect is contagious in the first place: "...Sullivan termed this contagious spread of mood from caregivers to babies the empathic linkage" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 67). Certainly, therapists sitting next to a very anxious patient for a significant period of time can attest to the infectious nature of the state of mind. As the seed of motivation, anxiety is the affective state that the therapist must be intensely attentive to. But because it spreads within the interpersonal field, they should attend to it not only in their clients but also in themselves. Indeed, Sullivan believes therapists cannot fully extricate themselves from the therapeutic encounter, an idea that finds expression in another of Sullivan's concepts: that of participant-observation.

Interpersonal Psychoanalysis in Practice

Sullivan introduced the concept of participant-observation in psychiatry and it was later incorporated into psychoanalysis:

In 1939, in his first lecture on Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry, Harry Stack Sullivan referred to participant observation as, "the root premise of psychiatric methodology" (Sullivan, 1940), for the theory which had emerged at the

beginning of his career as research psychiatrist. It arose out of thrashing discontent with how psychiatrists were functioning in regard to schizophrenic patients. (Spiegel, 1977, p. 372)

Like other Sullivanian concepts, it seems easier to grasp intellectually than to practice clinically. Green (1977) succinctly captures the essence of his idea when he notes that: “in all his teaching and writing, [Sullivan] assumed that the psychiatrist is inextricably and inescapably involved with all that is going on in the session” (p. 258). Part of Sullivan’s retreat from Freudian theory, which he considered too speculative, involved developing simple concepts that originate from clinical practice instead of speculative reconstruction (Hirsch, 2003, p. 222). This does not mean, however, that Sullivan is purely pragmatic and/or theoretically blank. He developed theoretical contributions that he believed derived from a firm experiential grasp of psychopathology and personhood. The use of participant-observation is an example of this practical simplicity paired with concrete theoretical direction.

Distinguishing Sullivanian from classical models of analytic technique, Bruch (1977) observes that in the traditional model: “...the psychoanalyst was like a blank mirror onto whom the patient transferred his libidinal attachments”, while “...Sullivan's concept of the psychiatrist's role as participant observer stands in opposition to this passive image” (p. 348). In Sullivan’s view, the psychiatrist cannot stand back and offer interpretations at appropriate moments while the transference takes place. On the contrary, he actively engages the client and her perspective in a joint inquiry into the

areas of her interpersonal functioning which stand out as problematic. In one sense, the role of the analyst is actively participative because "...the only way for the analyst to know what the patient is really talking about is to ask detailed questions" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 72). However, the therapist participates in the clinical encounter in a deeper sense by joining and co-creating a new interpersonal field. For Sullivan, the analyst is embroiled with the client so that the analyst's reactions to what is going on in the room, the countertransference in classical terms, becomes an important data point. As a matter of fact, he believes that clients will unavoidably reenact their interpersonal patterns of relatedness in the therapy session, and that the role of the therapist is to understand these and facilitate the development of insight in the patient through careful questioning. This process is mired by complexity and requires careful detail to the moment to moment exchange. Sullivan (1953) writes that "...when we talk professionally with a person—whom I shall now call the patient—the speech behavior occurs in a situation including the two of us and an indefinite and shifting group of illusions and impressions as to each other." (p. 45). He illustrates his point when discussing the treatment approach of a schizophrenic who: "...hated to have people stare at him, so he stayed at home. Why did people stare at him? He does not know—and is obviously and keenly uncomfortable...I comment looking at him that I see no reason to stare at him." (1953, p. 46). In his response to the patient's presentation of his problem, Sullivan engages the patient by communicating to him that he believes there is no reason why the patient should be stared at. Moreover, he phrases the question

directly, allowing the patient to feel trusted in his experience as opposed to challenged or kept at a distance:

Consider in our example the substitution of “Did people stare at you” or “What made you think that people were staring at you.” The first is thoroughly disconcerting, thoroughly disorganizing to the direction of inquiry. Suppose I ask you your age, and, having been told, ask if it is so. The patient has clearly shown his belief—or his intention that I shall understand—that people stared at him. I am in no position to contradict this, even if I wished to do so. (p. 46)

This ability to meeting the patient where he is, taking him at face value, allows him to remain involved in the interpersonal field because he can understand where the conversation is going. It may seem paradoxical when Sullivan states: “The patient is a stranger and is to be treated as a stranger” (p. 46), given his idea that we are always in relation to the other. However, what this statement means is that we should treat the patient as we would any other person that we meet for the first time, without making assumptions about who they are, especially about their capacity for judging a situation accurately. According to Sullivan, this openness to the other in participation and attentive listening establishes the manner of access to the interpersonal patterns of the patient, and with that an opportunity to examine what has remain conspicuously unseen in his retreat from anxiety. Understanding the involvement of the analyst in this sense is congruent with Sullivan’s consideration of the interpersonal field as an indissoluble unit

of analysis. There is a significant degree of consistency between his general theory of personhood and his clinical theory:

This formulation of the therapeutic interaction is closely linked to Sullivan's theoretical considerations. Sullivan was first and foremost a clinician and the need for theoretical reformulation arose from his therapeutic experiences with schizophrenics and obsessives. (Bruch, 1977 p. 348-349)

Arguably, this anticipates a “two-person psychology” (Silverman, 1996, p. 267) in which both members of the therapeutic dyad are seen as having an effect on the other. Mitchell (1988) sees this concept as the sine-qua-non of a relational approach to psychoanalysis. Hirsch (2003) agrees with this noting that: “...the relational turn in psychoanalysis began with Sullivan's (1953) shift in emphasis from a biologically or instinctually dominated theory of the mind to one emphasizing exclusively the study of interpersonal relationships as building blocks of the mind” (p. 224). However, it is important to notice that Sullivan does not focus on the relationship, but on the patient’s functioning. Relational psychoanalysis attempts to articulate what is going on between the therapist and the patient, considering their relative contributions. Although this can be characterized as an extension of Sullivan’s interpersonal psychiatry, is certainly moves beyond its parameters. As such, Sullivan remains an influence that, although shaped relational approaches significantly, cannot be simply equated with them. The emphasis on the exploration of a joint subjective experience in relational psychoanalysis

likely owes to the influence of object relations approaches and their focus on subjective experience.

Object Relations Theory

As early as 1981, Stephen Mitchell noted that: “object relations theory has become one of the ubiquitous phrases within contemporary psychoanalytic literature” (p. 374). Along the same lines, Ogden (1985) observed that: “...object relations theory is not comprised of a discrete collection of principles; rather, it represents a diverse collection of contributions that, in my opinion, have been developed in the context of one of the most intense and fruitful of psychoanalytic dialogues” (p. 347). In this regard, the development of relational approaches mirrors this phenomenon. Again, a complete survey of object relations theory is beyond the scope of this work. Given that the purpose is to illustrate the influence of object relations on relational psychoanalysis, this work will follow Mitchell (1981, p. 375), and Mitchell & Black (1995, p. 112) who identify W. R. D. Fairbairn, and D. W. Winnicott as central influences in object relations theory. However, Mitchell and Black (1995) also note that: “...Melanie Klein...provided the conceptual bridge between Freud and modern British object relations theories” (p. 113). As such, a brief introduction to some of her concepts is in order.

Melanie Klein

By most standards, Klein was a controversial figure whose thinking departed considerably from Freud's, yet influenced psychoanalysis substantially. In fact, Mitchell

and Black (1995), note that: “Melanie Klein has had more impact on contemporary psychoanalysis than any other psychoanalytic writer since Freud” (p. 85). Although her contributions are lengthy and complex, her most significant contribution to the development of a relational perspective is her expansion of the role of the object in mental life. In this regard, Green (2000) comments that:

In the history of psychoanalysis, there was a turning point after which the object left behind its status of referential exteriority. From then on, one was no longer dealing simply with a phantasy object as in Freud, but with what Klein called the internal object. It was no longer simply an object that could be seen from the angle of phantasy, but an object forming the basis of the subject's internal world... (p. 13)

Although Klein does not abandon Freudian metapsychology, she reconfigures it in an important way. Green identifies at least two significant moves that take place in Klein's reconfiguration: the first is the internalization of the object. For Freud the object is an external figure towards which the drive aims. Klein (1932), on the other hand, uses the term object with a dual meaning, referring both to an external figure and to its internalized psychic representation: “As far as can be seen, there exists in the small child, side by side with its relations to real objects but on a different plane as it were, relations which are based on its relations to its unreal imagos both as excessively good and excessively bad figures. Ordinarily, these two kinds of object-relations intermingle and colour each other to an ever increasing extent.” (p. 213). Guntrip (1965), concurring

with the importance of this transition, noted that: “It is this conception of human beings living in two worlds at the same time, inner and outer, with mutual interference, that makes Klein's work of such momentous importance...” (p. 258).

However, is it worth remembering, Ogden’s (2002) argument that the seeds of this line of thought, indeed of the school of object relations itself, can be traced to Freud’s developments in “Mourning and Melancholia” (p. 767). Mitchell (1981) lends support to this view when he notes that: “...although he never employed the term "internal object" as such, Freud, from the beginning of his work, had described clinical phenomena involving internal "voices, " images, parental values, etc.” (p. 375). Nevertheless, Klein’s contribution is her utilization of the object as an organizing referent for the individual’s entire psychic life, which is Green’s second point in the quote above. Klein is introducing an object not only as a form of mental content, but as a structuring force in subjective experience. This development served as material for Fairbairn’s work (Mitchel, 1981, p. 385), which nicely illustrates the way in which both continuity and innovation occur as psychoanalytic theory unfolds through history. Fairbairn, of course, would present a more radical challenge to the Freudian metapsychology that Klein would not abandon.

W. R. D. Fairbairn

While Klein herself described her contributions as an extension of Freudian metapsychology, Fairbairn departs from classical thinking more markedly: “...Fairbairn's rejection of Freud's tripartite division of the psyche into ego, id, and

superego, and replacement of it with a theory of endopsychic structure based directly on the vicissitudes of human object relatedness...is the crowning culmination of Fairbairn's thinking” (Rubens, 1984, p. 429). This culmination rests on a general reworking of the theory of the drives, and consequently a departure from Freud’s theory of motivation (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 114). Beattie (2003) describes this theoretical shift by noting that Freud held excitatory discharge motivated our behavior, while Fairbairn believed that our intrinsic need for connection to others motivates us (p. 1172).

To understand this transition it is necessary to grasp Fairbairn and Freud’s different views of the relationship between drives and objects. For Freud, our instinctual life is centered on the pursuit of pleasure, which he defined as the discharge of stimulation. According to Freud, we are organismically designed to discharge the build up of excessive stimulation that creates a sensation of discomfort or pain. The object of the instinct in this picture becomes secondary, acting solely as a means to the end of pleasure seeking. In other words, I seek out other people so that I can regulate the way I feel internally, but seeking out others is not considered an end in itself (Scharff & Birtles, 1997, p. 1086). Fairbairn argues that the reverse is true and that Freud is mistaken because he separates instinctual energy from the object it engages. He claims instead that from the very beginning our instinct is to seek objects rather than pleasure itself:

Fairbairn understood Freud's position to be a direct consequence of his divorcing of energy from structure, for what goal could there be for structureless,

directionless energy other than indiscriminate discharge for the purpose of homeostasis. For Fairbairn, having initially postulated the inseparability of energy and structure, it followed that the goal (or aim) of self-expression could no longer be viewed as mere tension reduction (the discharge of energy, ending the 'unpleasure' of excitation and thereby definitionally resulting in pleasure) with little or no reference to the object by means of which this discharge is accomplished. Rather he completely inverted Freud's position, maintaining that the relationship with the object was itself the goal, and that the pleasure involved was a secondary consequence. (Rubens, 1984, p. 430)

As Mitchell (1981) notes, Fairbairn claims that we are constitutionally designed to seek other people, and that: "...the main characteristic of libidinal energy is its object-seeking quality", adding that "...pleasure is not the end goal of the impulse, but a means to its real end, relations with others." (p. 386). This change speaks to the core of a relational orientation in psychoanalysis in describing the individual as inherently other-directed.

In spite of its significant influence on relational approaches, Fairbairn's view of intrapsychic life is not entirely equivalent with current relational thinking. He believed that internal objects only arise as compensatory structures as a result of faulty parenting (Carveth, 1996, p. 344). The child, in response to frustrating experiences with parents, fantasizes about good objects that she cannot encounter in the real world. These imagined others, or rather re-imagined others, are endopsychic structures split off from

the self that become necessary for maintaining a sense of connection with the frustrating parent. On the other hand, when things are going well the child is outward directed because it has no reason to create an internal replacement for an external object with which she maintains a satisfying connection. However, as Rubens (1984), points out: “...internal structural differentiation is a clearly pathological, albeit unavoidable, schizoid phenomenon which, to varying extents, diminishes the functioning of all human beings” (p. 434). According to Fairbairn, we all develop endopsychic structures because, to one degree or another, we all experience frustration and suffering as part of the human condition. But what about the internalization of good experiences with others? If no endopsychic structure is formed in these cases, how does Fairbairn believe that we internalize those structures? Apparently, Fairbairn did not elaborate on healthy development as much as he did on pathology, but he does argue that the internalization of good objects becomes part of an idealized object that is consciously integrated into the self (Rubens, 1984, p. 435). This dimension of his theory remained somewhat underdeveloped. Nevertheless, experiences with others, whether healthy or not, become the foundation of a person’s internal life and act as the basis for all motivation and behavior. For Fairbairn, relationships with others are the structuring blocks of subjective and interpersonal life.

D. W. Winnicott

Winnicott is widely regarded as a deeply original contributor to psychoanalysis whose clinical style, as Ogden (2001) remarked, was mirrored in his writing style, itself

permeated by paradox and play (p. 299; Modell, 1985, p. 113). It is challenging to present a systematic account of his work because his thinking is elusive at times. As Kwawer (1998) points out: “Winnicott's writing always lends itself, in my experience, to adoption by readers of various persuasions; like ambiguous cloud formations in the summer sky” (p. 389). From the vantage point of examining his influence on relational approaches, there are a number of concepts that become relevant. Among them, Winnicott’s emphasis on subjectivity and the mother-infant dyad appear most relevant because of their direct association with relational ideas.

In many ways prefiguring self-psychology (Bodin, 1994, p. 41), Winnicott utilizes the concept of self as one central axis in his work. In his view, the possibility of developing a healthy self is mediated by an appropriate developmental process, which involves the mother's capacity to establish a responsive attunement to the child’s needs (Bodin, 1994, p. 45). According to Winnicott, the infant initially exists in a space of subjective omnipotence where there is no discontinuity between needs and their satisfaction. For example, when a baby cries in hunger the mother immediately satisfies this need and as a result the baby experiences herself as omnipotent. In order for this to work, the mother renounces her subjectivity to concern herself only, or at least primarily, with her infant’s needs: “In Winnicott’s view, the mother is not in her right mind. The state of primary maternal preoccupation is a constructive kind of temporary madness that enables the mother to suspend her own subjectivity to become the medium for the development of the subjectivity of the infant” (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 126).

As a result, the baby cannot be considered an independent entity with its own mind in this stage of development. Ogden (2001) notes that: “The baby ‘does not mind’ because the mother is there “minding” him (taking care of him)” (p. 309-310). This is the reason behind Winnicott’s (1975) radical assertion that there is no baby in isolation, only a baby-mother dyad (p. *xxxvii*). Of course this assertion presupposes the concept of a relational space or joint subjectivity that a self-other dyad occupies, a concept that will influence relational approaches. However, for Winnicott this initial enmeshment gives place, in healthy development, to a process of individuation that ends when one is able to be alone. As Ogden (1985) notes, this process takes place through the gradual introduction of frustrations that allow the infant to have desires for what is not readily available: “The delaying of the infant's awareness of separateness is achieved in large part by means of the mother's meeting of the infant's need before need becomes desire. The infant without desire is neither a subject nor an object: there is not yet an infant” (p. 350-351). When the infant begins to notice the rupture between need and fulfillment introduced by gradual frustrations, this need becomes a desire and the infant gradually becomes a subject confronted by an object over which it does not have omnipotent control.

Through this process of frustrations, the child learns to inhabit the objective world after passing through a transitional period. Gradually the infant is pushed by the mother’s normal imperfections to acknowledge the reality of others. However, this movement is not merely one “...from dependence to independence, but the transition

between two different patterns of positioning the self in relation to others” (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 128). In spite of this growth towards individuation, the healthy adult never fully abandons a sense of core omnipotence and fantastic fusion with the maternal image. This core sense acts as a reservoir of coping resources to which she returns in period of stress that require creative adaptation to new situations. Within relational approaches, Mitchell shares this view of a core self that anchors identity and underlies the changing self in development across the lifespan. According to Winnicott, however, the healthy self is able to fluctuate between a fused and individuated positions but does not rigidly adheres to either one (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 128).

What remains somewhat unclear in Winnicott is his definition of an internal object and intrapsychic life. Whereas Fairbairn delineates what he means by endopsychic structures and ideal objects, it is not clear in Winnicott whether there is such a precise process of internal formation of the self. Kwawer (1998) suggests that Winnicott’s concept of object use provides a platform to understand his thinking in this area:

Winnicott had written hintingly about this elusive concept of object use several years earlier, offering the provocative and foretelling idea that there is a stage of personal development *beyond* object relating, calling this the stage of “object use”; he notes that the question of what the appropriate environmental provision is during the stage of object usage is not yet clearly understood. In proposing the notion of “object use,” Winnicott is beginning to find his own voice, apart the

focus on an object-relations analysis (or in other words, the analysis of transference as a subjective phenomenon created by the patient). If this sounds like the conceptual shift from thinking about the transference relationship to one that encompasses the real relationship...(p394-395)

If Klawer's suggestion is correct and Winnicott thinks about a stage beyond internal object relating into real object relating, then this would align him more closely to the interpersonal tradition of Harry Stack Sullivan. Kuriloff (1988) argues for such an affinity stating that: "Both Winnicott and Sullivan, if viewed through a particular lens, help the patient to renounce omnipotence, to tolerate subjectivity, to bear what the family has made toxic, unbearable, split off, distorted, because the therapist is willing to act in ways that illustrate and generate tolerance and survival, paving the way for him to be 'used' and used well" (p. 388). However, he adds that there are differences as well between Sullivan and Winnicott's goals wherein the former tries to help the patient gain awareness of interpersonal patterns of relatedness and the latter: "hopes to aid in the creative apperception of the world, so that the place between what is real and illusory becomes a lively and creative experience" (p. 380). The blurred distinction between real and illusion remains an important concept in relational psychoanalysis, particularly its postmodern variants. Indeed, most relational thinking would take issue with Sullivan's concept of an objective world that the analyst helps the patient see. Instead, something like a Winnicottian view of internal subjectivity ends up winning out in relational perspectives.

Winnicott's characterization of a true self that originates in the child's spontaneity helps elucidate how he thinks of intrapsychic experience. He notes that when the mother appropriately meets this spontaneity of gesture, the child is allowed the illusion of omnipotence. In time this illusion is given up, yet it always remains as the basis for a generative creativity that underlies healthy experience. For Winnicott, illusion appears to be the ability to conceive of something as what it is not, without letting go completely of what it is. This core or true self cannot be a composite of internal objects, but rather a way of relating to others and the world at large. Winnicott does not abandon, however, a more classic idea of the intrapsychic as an internal subjective space distinct from an external world. He maintains that there is a private self that we can never fully access:

Winnicott here puts forward the view that in every human being, at the core of every person there is a secret self, an 'incommunicado element' which is for ever silent. He assumes that even in the healthy individual there is a core of personality which never communicates with the objectively perceived objects and, further, that the individual person knows that there can never be a communicating with this core and that it will also have to remain unreachable by external reality. (Schacht, 1988, p. 527)

This private self remains at the core inaccessible to objects and remains a somewhat mysterious element of his theorizing, which seems to be incongruent with a relational approach.

However, Winnicott's dramatic attunement to the needs of the client, his ability to be deeply engrossed and participate in the subjectivity of the client, is an important area of resonance he shares with relational approaches. Additionally, his notion of a position that structures the relationships of the self is consistent with relational notions of internalized relational configurations. Perhaps most importantly, Winnicott designates the ability to truly recognize the other in their objective existence as a marker of healthy development. This is a radical acknowledgement of a two-person approach to psychology that underlies relational views.

Therapeutic dimensions of Fairbairn and Winnicott

Harry Guntrip is another important theorist closely associated with the object relations movement (Sutherland, 1980). In addition to the contributions he made to this psychoanalytic approach, another claim to fame he possessed is having been analyzed by both Winnicott and Fairbairn (Guntrip, 1996; Hazell, 1991). In a paper entitled *My Experience Of Analysis With Fairbairn And Winnicott: (How Complete A Result Does Psychoanalytic Therapy Achieve?)*, Guntrip details his experiences as an analysand with both clinicians: "I had just over 1,000 sessions with Fairbairn in the 1950s and just over 150 with Winnicott in the 1960s. For my own benefit I kept detailed records of every session with both of them, and all their correspondence." (Guntrip, 1996, p. 740). This presents a unique platform from which to explore the therapeutic technique of Fairbairn and Winnicott. In addition, it allows an opportunity to investigate the relationship of their theory and clinical practice. However, given the complexity of these questions,

what follows should be considered an initial direction for research rather than a systematic account.

Guntrip (1996) observes that he came to analysis already knowing Freud's work intimately and having abandoned what he termed Freud's "psychobiology of instincts" (p. 748) to focus on his theory of psychopathology. In spite of his scholarly interest in psychoanalysis, Guntrip's (1996) interest in psychoanalytic treatment was to gain relief from personal suffering rather than to develop new theoretical avenues. From Guntrip's (1996) point of view, however, this distinction might not be valid given his view of the relationship between theory and practice: "...on the difficult question of the sources of theory, it seems that our theory must be rooted in our psychopathology." (p. 753). Furthermore, he notes that: "...theory does not seem to me to be the major concern. It is a useful servant but a bad master, liable to produce orthodox defenders of every variety of the faith." (p. 739). Guntrip is comfortable viewing and presenting himself as a patient because he does not find that this role conflicts with being a therapist.

Guntrip arrives to psychoanalytic treatment complaining of suffering from a recurring debilitating illness that is triggered by experiences of death or abandonment. This, he observes, originated from an early childhood experience:

...at 3½ I walked into a room and saw Percy lying naked and dead on her lap. I rushed up and grabbed him and said: 'Don't let him go. You'll never get him back!' She sent me out of the room and I fell mysteriously ill and was thought to be dying. Her doctor said: 'He's dying of grief for his brother. If your mother wit

can't save him, I can't', so she took me to a maternal aunt who had a family, and there I recovered. (p. 746)

Noting that he is amnesic for these events, he tells us that he learned about this incident from his mother's report. Guntrip also comments that his mother was often aggressive and withdrawn with him. Her relationship with her sons was so problematic that his young brother died because she refused to breast-feed him. Later in life, Guntrip adds, his mother would complain of regretting having had children at all.

These are the themes that Guntrip explores in his therapy with Fairbairn, and his description of their work together is rich and telling. Guntrip often characterizes Fairbairn as intent on providing "his very intellectually precise interpretations" about the dynamics with his mother and brother (p. 744). Contact of a more personal nature, however, was reserved for extra-analytic activities: "...after sessions we could discuss and I could find the natural warm-hearted human being behind the exact interpreting analyst." (p. 745). Guntrip presents Fairbairn as an orthodox therapist who does not work directly on building a relationship. This, Guntrip comments, is incompatible with Fairbairn's theoretical beliefs, as he explicitly stated that the relationship is a central ingredient in treatment. Guntrip writes about Fairbairn that "...on another occasion he said: 'You can go on analysing for ever and get no- where. It's the personal relation that is therapeutic'" and that "...he held that psychoanalytic interpretation is not therapeutic per se, but only as it expresses a personal relationship of genuine understanding." (p. 741). Mitchell and Black (1995) also report that Fairbairn believed developing a new

form of relatedness, not a set of insights, was the motor for change in the patient (p. 122). Yet Guntrip experienced Fairbairn as a technical interpreter, and even though he indicated feeling conceptually understood at times, he complained of lacking a lived sense of an open and personal relationship. His account of their last session certainly gives the impression that their intimacy was restrained: “As I was finally leaving Fairbairn after the last session, I suddenly realized that in all that long period we had never once shaken hands, and he was letting me leave without that friendly gesture. I put out my hand and at once he took it, and I suddenly saw a few tears trickle down his face.” (p. 745). Such a moving account of their termination speaks to a depth of feeling in Fairbairn that was not expressed or acknowledged before. This suggests that there is an incongruity between Fairbairn’s therapeutics and his theory. Indeed, Crastopol (2001) confirms that Guntrip: “...was deeply frustrated and injured by his analyst's communicative style, which was indeed quite restrained and at times somewhat mechanical, notwithstanding the fact that Fairbairn had written about and must have believed in the theoretical importance of the analyst providing the patient with a good, warm personal relationship.” (p. 128).

It is not clear how to resolve this tension between Fairbairn’s writing and his disposition in analysis with Guntrip. Mitchell and Black (1995) suggest a plausible answer when they note that Fairbairn was not specific about the process through which the patient changes the way she experiences the analyst from a bad object to a healthy one (p. 122). Fairbairn’s idea that genuine understanding should be conveyed in the

interpreting process suggests that perhaps he believed interpretation was the primary medium for building relationships with patients. In spite of his emphasis on the relationship as a therapeutic agent, he still resorts to interpretation as a primary tool. Perhaps this illustrates how the pull for continuity with our tradition and influences can sometimes overpower our push for innovation. Undoubtedly, Guntrip's analysis with Fairbairn demonstrates that we don't always find an unproblematic relationship between theory and practice in which one wholly encapsulates and expresses the other. Recognizing the incompleteness in this relationship can provide the clinician with a useful corrective for theoretical dogmatism or pragmatic naiveté.

In addition to complaining about his lack of personal warmth, Guntrip (1996) also took issue with Fairbairn's theoretical approach in their work. Guntrip acknowledged that Fairbairn helped him work through the internalized bad objects that he developed from the trauma with his mother. However, he also felt that beneath these difficulties lay another deeper issue which Winnicott was able to access because of his wider theoretical horizon: "...I had had a radical analysis with Fairbairn of the 'internalised bad-object defences' I had built up against that, but we had not got down to what I felt was my basic problem, not the actively bad-object mother of later childhood, but the earlier mother who failed to relate at all" (p. 747). In this regard, Winnicott's theory opened a therapeutic region that was not available to Fairbairn.

Guntrip credits Winnicott with the theoretical insight that his trauma occurred before his brother's death, dating back to his mother's initial inability to relate to him or

his brother. Guntrip believed that Winnicott's willingness to let him regress to the stage of that trauma allowed him to work through those issues and internalize a good object. According to Guntrip, Winnicott facilitated this experience because he found: "...content and interpretations were nearly irrelevant...what was crucial was experience of the self in relation to the other" (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 134). On this basis, Winnicott attempts to provide an environment in which the patient's subjectivity can be regenerated. As a result, Guntrip can transform his sense of internal deadness through Winnicott's warm and protective relationship, which he had lacked from Fairbairn.

Among many things, Guntrip's description of his work with Winnicott illustrates that practice is not always the unimpeded expression of theoretical principles. Guntrip notices that Fairbairn was: "...more orthodox in practice than in theory while Winnicott was more revolutionary in practice than in theory." (p. 742). This suggests it is possible to be clinically competent without theoretically lucid. Kwawer (1998) lends support to this view by arguing that Winnicott's originality was not fully captured in his theoretical writing:

'Winnicott', I always find myself wondering, 'why do you have to speak Freud or Klein? You're always more engaging to me and more clinically relevant when you speak in your own voice.' Indeed, I think Winnicott was engaged in a lifelong and largely unsuccessful struggle to free himself from the powerful emotional, political, and probably economic constraints of orthodoxy, both Freudian and Kleinian. (p. 394)

All the richness of a therapeutic encounter can potentially remain inarticulate, or worse, misinterpreted, if there is no appropriate language to express it. However, the reverse is also true given that clinical practice can be misguided without a conceptual framework to organize and understand clinical phenomena. Kohut (1977) argued as much when he introduced theoretical developments that, in his view, responded to a need to appropriately grasp the phenomenon of narcissism.

Self-Psychology

Kernberg (1997) sustains that Kohut's developments provided an important basis for the emergence of a relational approach:

Parallel to what I have characterized as the “mainstream” development, there has been (especially in the United States) a rapprochement between approaches derived from self psychology on one hand and the culturalist psychoanalytic tradition expressed in contemporary interpersonal psychoanalysis on the other.

(p. 99)

Kernberg then argues that the shift away from classical analytic concepts owes much to Kohut's emphasis on the self-object transferences as a focus of treatment (p. 99). In this framework, the function of the analyst becomes providing the right kind of experience, then internalized by the patient, by being carefully emotionally attuned to the patient. Certainly the intersubjective school of relational psychoanalysis headed by Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange (1999), argues the same when they intend to “paint a portrait of Heinz Kohut as a pivotal transitional figure in the development of a post-

Cartesian, fully contextual psychoanalytic psychology that recognizes the constitutive role of relatedness in the making of all experience.” (p. 381). Agreeing with Kernberg, they note that Kohut’s emphasizes on subjective experience led them to a contextual view of treatment and personhood (p. 381). Goldberg (2002) also notes self-psychology in its ongoing evolution has played a role in “other psychoanalytic excursions such as seen in interpersonal and social constructivist concepts” (p. 2).

In spite of the centrality of his role in contemporary psychoanalytic developments, Kohut trained as a traditional psychoanalyst, even presenting his initial findings in the context of official psychoanalytic circles (Meronen, 1999, p. 211). Furthermore, his early work presented empathic observation as an addition to classical approaches, not as a replacement. Kohut did not present empathy as a replacement psychoanalytic methodology, and he noted Freud himself was a pioneer in the use of empathy, thus establishing a sense of continuity with the tradition (Kohut, 1959, p. 463-464). Eventually, Grotstein (1999) argues, Kohut would become the profession’s Luther spearheading a reformation with empathy as its main thesis (p. 123). Indeed, Kohut (1979) presents his approach, which he calls a “psychoanalytic psychology of the self” (p. 3), as an alternative to classical analysis. Ultimately, his later work provided deep theoretical revisions centering on a transfiguration of the role of narcissism in development and of the view of personhood in general.

In his paper *Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage*, Kohut (1972) outlines the basic tenets of his theory. Glassman (1988) states that Kohut viewed childhood narcissism as a normal developmental stage that requires an “affirmative attitude” from the analyst—both clinically and theoretically-- because it grounds the possibility for maturity and growth. When the child—and the also the narcissistic patient—is not provided with experiences of empathic attunement that gratify her narcissistic needs, then the self becomes fragmented leading to experiences of emptiness and impoverished subjectivity. But appropriate empathic responses facilitate healthy development: “In order to relieve feelings of helplessness, the infant requires the parent to serve as a "selfobject," i.e., an object that can perform psychological tasks such as tension management and self-esteem regulation that the infant is unable to perform for itself.” (p. 601).

In this model, caregivers are self-objects, extensions of the child’s self that perform certain functions that the child is unable to do. Self-objects are like appropriate scaffolding on which developmental experiences rests. The primary function of the self-object is to be empathically attuned to the growing infant thus allowing feelings of grandiosity and merger to “ward off the threat of disorganization in the face of helplessness.” (Glassman, 1988, p. 601). Consequently, a child without these developmental experiences remains fragmented and unable to manage distressing and disorganizing affect. The healthy individual has been afforded the opportunity to

internalize good self-object experiences and thus grow into an autonomous maturity. In Kohut's (1972) own words:

...the experiences during the period of the formation of the self become the prototype of the specific forms of our later vulnerability and security in the narcissistic realm: of the ups and downs in our self-esteem; of our lesser or greater need for praise, for merger into idealized figures, and for other forms of narcissistic sustenance; and of the greater or lesser cohesion of our self during periods of transition, whether in the transition to latency, in early or late adolescence, in maturity, or in old age. (p. 369)

These changes eventually led Kohut to reconfigure even the most central of psychoanalytic concepts, the oedipal conflict. First of all, Kohut (1982) diminishes the centrality of the oedipal stage—which he differentiates from oedipal conflict-- as “only a link, and not the deepest one at that, in a causal chain” in development (p. 402). But more importantly, he challenges the idea that the oedipal conflict is normative. He posits instead that: “pathological 'Oedipus complex' (as distinguished from the normal 'oedipal stage' of development) refers not to the essence of man but, that they are deviations from the normal, however frequently they may occur...” (p. 402). Normal experience involves not intergenerational strife but collaborative maturation. For Kohut, the basis of his disagreement with Freud rests on holding radically different concepts of what a human being is. According to Kohut, Freud introduces a “Guilty Man”; an

individual eternally conflicted by tensions between his biology and the limitations of reality, a view grounded in a naturalistic view of personhood. Kohut argues instead that man is a tragic figure, marred by his difficulty fulfilling the promise of early developmental experiences. Kohut (1982) believes that man is a “homo psychologicus”, and not “homo natura” like Freud suggests (p. 402).

Self-Psychology and Clinical Practice

In 1979, Kohut published *The Two analysis of Mr. Z*, a vivid portrayal of the differences that theoretical approaches can have on therapeutic conceptualization, technique, and outcome. This work illustrates the differences between his approach and the traditional psychoanalytic framework. In doing so, he utilizes an underlying view about the relationship between theory and practice in psychoanalysis that is worth articulating. To put it briefly, he believes that a theoretical approach allows us to let relevant material call our attention. In this sense, a theory provides us with the right kind of seeing, and also the corresponding appropriate response to what is manifest. In turn, clinical practice challenges our theoretical framework and can reformulate it, albeit only if we let it. This reciprocal movement is illustrated in Kohut’s description of his analytic work.

Mr. Z is a young graduate student who presents with somatic complaints, feelings of social isolation, and inability to establish relationships with women. In spite of these difficulties, he had managed to achieve a certain balance in his life through his relationship with his mother and a close friend. However, this equilibrium was disrupted

when his friend began a relationship with an older woman, prompting Mr. Z to seek treatment. In addition to his initial presentation, Mr. Z's history is significant because his father left when he was 3 years old to be with another woman, but returned home approximately 2 years later. Lastly, Kohut mentions almost in passing, a camp counselor sexually abused Mr. Z at age 11 and this relationship was maintained for a period of 2 years. It is worth noting that the slight attention this last event receives in Kohut's paper also reveals the effect a theoretical framework has on treatment approach.

Kohut notes that initially during therapy, Mr. Z often brought up feelings of entitlement and moments of palpable rage:

He blew up in rages against me, time after time—indeed the picture he presented during the first year and a half of the analysis was dominated by his rage. These attacks arose either in response to my interpretations concerning his narcissistic demands and his arrogant feelings of 'entitlement' or because of such unavoidable frustrations as weekend interruptions, occasional irregularities in the schedule, or, especially, my vacations. (p. 5)

Kohut interpreted this dynamic as Mr. Z's attempt to return to a pre-oedipal fusion with the mother in which he held and expected her attention exclusively:

“Formulated in the traditional terms of early object relations, we would say that this phase of the analysis revived the conditions of the period when, in early childhood, he had been alone with his mother, who was ready to provide him with the bliss of narcissistic fulfillment at all times.” (p. 14). This childhood experience was a form of

“overgratification” (p. 14) that instilled in Mr. Z a sense of entitlement and a fixation on this stage. In this narrative, the return of the father represents a challenge, and eventually a defeat, from which he defended himself by retreating into the illusion of his narcissism: “. . . I interpreted the persistence of defensive narcissism as it protected him against the painful awareness of the powerful rival who possessed his mother sexually and against the castration anxiety to which an awareness of his own competitive and hostile impulses towards the rival would have exposed him.” (p. 6). As a result of this classic conceptualization, the therapist role is to help the patient relinquish this narcissistic defense by means of insight oriented interpretations and working through the resistance, so that repressed oedipal wishes can come to the fore. Kohut reports that he accomplished this and Mr. Z’s rages diminished while his capacity to sustain relationships with women improved, and this marked the ending of the first analysis of Mr. Z. All the pieces of this analysis fit together with “logical cohesiveness” and “seemed impeccable”, completely consistent with the “precepts that were then firmly established in me as almost unquestionable inner guidelines in conducting my therapeutic work.” (p. 9). But in the face of such rotund clinical-theoretical success, Kohut felt dissatisfied with an aspect of the termination. Mr. Z had failed to show emotional depth through termination, which stood in stark contrast with the rest of his emotional experience through the analysis. Curiously, Kohut found this difficult to articulate at that point: “What was wrong at that time was much harder to

describe than what seemed to be right” (p. 9). It is as if the theory was telling him that they were done yet their experience did not reflect that.

Indeed, Mr. Z contacted Kohut several years later and began the second analysis that would follow a different set of guidelines. Mr. Z returned to analysis complaining of a lack of satisfaction with his life: his relationships were shallow and he could not derive pleasure from his work in spite of his success. Exploring his current situation led to an analysis of Mr. Z’s relationship with his mother, who turned out to have a serious personality disturbance of her own. Mr. Z’s difficult childhood experiences of being dominated and controlled by his mother had left him with a chronic feeling of depression and hopelessness, something the oedipal narrative failed to pick up: “...this traditional pattern of explanations fails to do justice to... an underlying chronic despair which could often be felt side by side with the arrogance of his demandingness” (p. 14). According to Kohut, Mr. Z’s depression resulted from a lack of developmental experiences in which his autonomy was facilitated. Instead, his mother’s need for control turned him into an extension of her, and her love for him was always conditional on his willingness to play this role. However, it wasn’t the desire to perpetuate this pattern that rooted his pathology—as classical psychoanalysis would hold. These experiences, and the developmental arrest that they afforded, were pathological in themselves. The analysis provided a restorative space where these could be discussed and eventually opened up the possibility of Mr. Z identifying with his father through the recollection of positive memories of them. The narrative structuring the analysis is

radically different than the previous one. Whereas the expectation before was to help the patient face a painful reality, Kohut now sees his role as providing empathic attunement as a catalyst for growth:

I relinquished the health- and maturity-morality that had formerly motivated me, and restricted myself to the task of reconstructing the early stages of his experiences, particularly as they concerned his enmeshment with the pathological personality of the mother. And when we now contemplated the patient's self in the rudimentary state in which it came to view in the transference, we no longer saw it as resisting change or as opposing maturation because it did not want to relinquish its childish gratifications, but, on the contrary, as desperately—and often hopelessly—struggling to disentangle itself from the noxious selfobject, to delimit itself, to grow, to become independent. (p. 12)

Furthermore, with the classical theoretical framework came a certain disposition towards Mr. Z: “I can still remember the slightly ironical tone of my voice, meant to assist him in overcoming his childish grandiosity...” (Kohut, 1979, p. 14). In the first analysis, these interventions were met with instances of rage. Yet Mr. Z noted that, during the first analysis itself, he was able to overcome his feelings of rage when Kohut provided the following interpretation: “Of course, it hurts when one is not given what one assumes to be one's due” (p. 5).

Within this different therapeutic horizon, Mr. Z was able to achieve a sense of independence and full self-hood. The marker for therapeutic success in the second analysis became Mr. Z's greater capacity for understanding and compassion, not the logical coherence of the approach from a theoretical perspective.

The preceding paragraphs explore Kohut's self-psychology in clinical practice in contradistinction to a classical approach. We can observe the way in which the therapeutic interaction is guided by a theoretical principle in each analysis, and how they lead to different paths. But Kohut does not articulate explicitly the way theory and practice relate to each other. Nevertheless, he does present useful case information from which to make inferences about this relationship. Upon reflecting on the first analysis, from the vantage point of having finished the second, Kohut recognizes that: "Crucial material...had indeed appeared, but...it had failed to claim our attention" (Kohut, 1979, p. 15). What Kohut appears to be saying is that what counted as crucial was different in the first analysis, and as a result the important material remained unexplored. Thus, having a background understanding of what counts as relevant, and what is peripheral, is what permits clinical phenomena to "claim our attention". It is also telling that he does not speak of the clinician intentionally directing her attention, but rather about the conditions that make it possible for clinicians to be called by the appropriate phenomena. But this begs the question of how we are ever able to shift from one theoretical horizon to the next, if they are so determinative of what appears as

relevant clinical phenomena. Indeed, Kohut claims to have been able to change paradigms, so on what basis was he able to do so?

Kohut's dissatisfaction with the ending of the first analysis provides a telling clue. As mentioned above, even though everything about the analysis made sense from a theoretical perspective, his experience of Mr. Z's emotional thinness during termination left him perplexed. Somehow this datum was claiming his attention, even if his background theoretical understanding was not flagging it as relevant. From this it follows that theory need not exhaust nor determine the interpretive possibilities present before us. The therapeutic encounter, however guided by theory, does not have to remain within its confines, and often it does not. This is precisely what permits Kohut to work beyond classical interpretations by remaining open to the experience of the therapeutic encounter. We can see evidence of this concrete openness in the following paragraph, when he details how he shifts interpretive strategies when the client repeatedly asks personal information about him:

...I did concede that, after listening to him further and watching his reactions, I had to agree with him that the term 'curiosity' that I had been using had not been right—that what he was experiencing now was not a revival of sexual voyeurism of childhood but some different need. And I finally ventured the guess that it was his need for a strong father that lay behind his questions, that he wanted to know whether I, too, was weak—subdued in intercourse by my wife, unable to be the idealizable emotional support of a son” (Kohut, 1979, p. 15).

Only after “listening” and “watching his reactions” was Kohut able to provide an account that made sense to both himself and his client. What Kohut does not seem to grasp is that, because of the openness that permitted this revision, this interpretation itself is subject to further revisions given the right circumstances. Instead, Kohut dismantles classical orthodoxy to quickly assemble his own. But his account of the movement from one to the other helps understand how theory and practice coexist in a dialogical and mutually constitutive relationship.

Chapter 2: Relational Psychoanalysis

Introduction

Ghent (1992) identifies the series of events that shaped the relational perspective and allowed it to emerge concretely from the matrix of its influences. First, he notes that the brewing ground for this thinking occurred in the NYU Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology where: “the academic values of scholarship, diversity of thinking, efforts at integration and synthesis, and, above all, open discourse” were fostered (p. xv). Within this openness, Ghent sees two important works that stimulated integrative discussion around the concept of relationality. One was Merton Gill’s (1983) paper: *The point of view in psychoanalysis: Energy discharge or person?*, in which he introduces the concept of a “person point of view” that incorporates insights from interpersonal and self-psychology traditions (p. xv). The second is Greenberg and Mitchell’s (1983) book: *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, which also attempted to survey and integrate different approaches around ideas of relationality. Finally, Ghent notes, the development of a relational track in the aforementioned postdoctoral program, and the founding of the journal *Psychoanalytic Dialogues: A Journal of Relational Perspective*, gave more institutional substance to the burgeoning movement. However, defining with precision just what relational psychoanalysis is proves more difficult than tracking its development and influences.

As mentioned before, rather than a coherent approach to psychoanalytic theory and practice, relational psychoanalysis is a:

...tradition (that) has emerged within American psychoanalysis with a particular set of concerns, concepts, approaches, and sensibilities. It operates as a shared subculture within the more general psychoanalytic culture, not by design, but because it has struck deep, common chords among current clinical practitioners and theorists in this country (Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. *xii*).

This tradition is composed of various psychoanalytic subgroups that emphasize the importance that relationships and social context have in the constitution of the psyche. In the quote above, Mitchell and Aron suggest that there was no design in the development of this movement, but rather a recognition of similar goals as an organic process throughout various camps (p. *x*). Berman (1997) notes that: "Relational psychoanalysis is not a new school, but rather a broad integrative orientation focusing on Self and Other" (p. 185). This leaves room for ample heterogeneity and disagreement within the relational psychoanalytic movement, which consequently spans various fields including postmodernism, intersubjectivity, and gender theorizing, among others.

As previously mentioned, in spite of the decentralized character of the movement, Stephen Mitchell is generally recognized as its informal leader. In his early work with Greenberg (1983) they first proposed the categorization of psychoanalytic theorizing into two camps: those models that emphasize the drives as the building blocks of the psyche, and those that recognized the primacy of human relationships in

the constitution of mind. Admittedly, there are some limitations with such a dichotomy as it risks falling into simplistic and crass categorizing. Mitchell's success, however, lies in his ability to name a real phenomenon in the unfolding of psychoanalytic theorizing. In this respect, Eagle and Wolitzky (in Freedheim, 1992) comment that:

To a significant extent, the history of theoretical developments in psychoanalysis can be understood as a series of successive reactions to Freudian drive theory, with its emphasis on libidinal and aggressive wishes as the primary motives for behavior. Thus, following Pine (1990), the main foci of theorizing in psychoanalysis subsequent to drive theory—ego, object, and self—can be meaningfully viewed as entailing modification or abandonment of that drive theory. These theoretical developments gave greater primacy to interpersonal and social determinants of personality development and psychopathology (p. 105).

Mitchell's contribution rests in his recognition of this trend, but extends beyond this, because he challenged, developed, and integrated pivotal notions within it. Consequently, an account of relational psychoanalysis requires a presentation of Mitchell's views.

Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of the movement does not allow one to present only Mitchell's views. There are others contributors to a relational perspective, whose views don't always agree with Mitchell's own. As he points out, the term relational "grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments: later

advances of self psychology, particularly intersubjectivity theory; social constructivism in its various forms; certain currents within contemporary psychoanalytic hermeneutics; more recent developments in gender theorizing...” (Mitchell & Aron 1999, p. xi). A systematic exposition of all these views lies well beyond the scope of this work. In order to present shared assumptions and theoretical diversity in the relational approach, two other camps--selected for their potential to widen and pose interesting challenges to Mitchell’s approach--will be explored, following a more lengthy exposition of Mitchell’s own work.

The intersubjective approach of Stolorow (1995) and colleagues stands out as a significant contribution. Trained in the Kohutian School of self-psychology, these theorists have proposed a widening of psychoanalytic conceptions based on the continental philosophy of Martin Heidegger and others. Their main concern resides in overcoming the Cartesian heritage of psychoanalytic conceptions of mind. On another end of the spectrum, psychoanalytic gender theorizing also surfaces as an important subgroup of the relational approach. The social constructionist bent of their specific views at times collides with Mitchell’s position, but the emphasis on the social construction of the self—particularly our notions of gender identity—constitute important examples of relationality in psychoanalysis. Within gender theorists, Nancy Chodorow and Lynne Layton are particularly relevant for their attempt to integrate postmodern thinking with clinical practice and relational theory (Dimen & Goldner, 2002).

All these thinkers share an understanding of the inadequacy of the Freudian drive model. They read Freud as defending that endogenous forces shape the mind almost exclusively. According to them, Freud holds that the determining character of our biological make up pushes from the inside out and finds fulfillment in an external social world. Mitchell (1988) notes relationships are not considered to be direct causative factors of mental structure in Freud's model, being at best a catalyst for the expression of internal drives. Mitchell (1999) sees in this a problematic decontextualization of the nature of desire and the development of the mind. Congruent with this critique, Gender theorists often complain about Freud's essentialism, which reifies socially constructed gender stereotypes into natural categories. Finally, the intersubjectivists argue that Freud's drive model is a direct extension of Cartesian postulates, which brings with it the ensuing problems of presenting the mind as isolated and separate from an external world. Each view is a variation on a common theme: a rejection of Freud's drive model as reductive and distorting of the inextricable social nature of selfhood. However, there are also notable differences between these positions which, if brought into dialogue, can possibly bring about important theoretical cross-fertilization.

What follows then is an exposition of these three views, with some consideration for their origins, points of contacts, and disagreements. This analysis will serve to represent some of the basic contributions of relational psychoanalysis as a group, but also to understand important differences between these positions in order to

open up a dialogue aiming to refine them. Ultimately, it will be argued that their best insights can be properly grasped and integrated by attending to a wider philosophical horizon. Certain points of contact between the work of relational psychoanalysis and the theoretical psychology of Martin and Sugarman constitute helpful and important stepping-stones towards a wider integrating vision.

Mitchell and the Development of Relational Psychoanalysis

As mentioned above, Stephen Mitchell sees his work as an integrative effort to “bridge the traditions” within psychoanalysis that already shared some common ground (Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. *xi*). From these schools Mitchell would derive certain elements of what he later termed the relational matrix, a construct meant to widen the unit of study in psychoanalysis from the individual, to the relationships that constitute him. Mitchell developed the concept in his 1988 book *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration*, and assigned to it three different poles: “The basic relational configurations have, by definition, three dimensions—the self, the other, and the space between the two.” (p. 33). These poles are mutually constitutive, requiring each other for their coming into being: there are no objects without a self that internalizes them, no self without a matrix of relationships, and neither self nor object can exist without the psychic space in which they fulfill their transactions. Mitchell notes that the object dimension in this configuration has been largely explored by the object relations school, while the concept of the self has been developed by other sources, particularly the work of Kohut and Winnicott. Finally, the concept of a psychic

space, a bridge between “subjective experience and psychological world” of objects, has been studied by developmental theorists like Stern, and the interpersonal school of Sullivan, both of whom are concerned with the transactions between self and others (p. 33).

The “relational matrix” replaces the drive’s role in motivating human behavior, because it presents human beings as perpetually struggling to maintain their relational configurations: “There is a powerful need to preserve an abiding sense of oneself as associated with, positioned in terms of, related to, a matrix of other people, in terms of actual transactions as well as internal presences” (p. 33). According to Mitchell, individuals seek to maintain coherence and continuity in both their interior life and in their relationship to others, creating a dialectic between interpersonal and intrapsychic life that “sometimes enhance each other and sometimes are at odd with each other, forming the basis for powerful conflicts” (p. 35). By definition, the relational matrix includes both interpersonal and intrapsychic elements in its formulation.

With the relational matrix Mitchell presents a new unit of study, inherited from Sullivan, and a new theory of motivation. Mitchell (Mitchell and Aron, 1999) views his theoretical contribution as an attempt to navigate the perceived demise of Freud’s metapsychology: “...we were struggling to break free of a ‘classical’ metapsychology and technique that many of us experienced as extremely deadening, both for the new generation of ideas and in trying to grasp what is at stake in the clinical process” (p. *xii*). This navigation demanded a twofold task: differentiating himself from other positions,

while integrating new burgeoning approaches into a wider framework that acknowledged their best insights.

One of Mitchell's initial attempts to differentiate his position is found in his article: *The Wings of Icarus: Illusion and the Problem of Narcissism* (1986). This is one of Mitchell's early works in which he develops some of the conceptual foundation that would later house his formulated ideas about relational psychoanalysis. In order to advance an understanding of the psyche as constituted by human relationships, Mitchell contrasts three views on the role of illusion in the treatment of narcissistic neurosis: Kernberg's, Kohut's and his own, demonstrating that each therapeutic method grows out of a theory of mind with which the approach is congruent.

Mitchell (1986) notes that Kernberg believes that: "transferential illusions concerning the self or the analyst must be interpreted quickly and vigorously, their unreality pointed out, their defensive purpose defined" (p. 110). Mitchell also observes that "This traditional emphasis on aggressive interpretation of narcissistic phenomena derives in part from the original view of 'narcissistic neurosis' as unanalyzable, and narcissistic defenses as generating the most recalcitrant resistances to the analytic process" (p. 111). As a result, the patient must be rapidly confronted, challenging his narcissistic illusions in order to make way for therapeutic gain. According to Mitchell, this prohibitive view of narcissistic illusion owes much to Freud's drive theory, which sees narcissistic investment as a libidinal cathexis of the ego that must be redirected towards objects again in order to respond to the reality principle.

In contrast to what he deems a draconian view of narcissistic illusion, Mitchell (1986) presents Kohut as an alternative model in which “narcissistic illusion...[is] the core of the self and the deepest source of creativity” (p. 114). The concordant therapeutic approach is to treat kindly “the appearance of narcissistic illusions within the analytic situation”, because they “represent the patient’s attempt to establish crucial developmental opportunities...”(p. 116). As a result, and standing in profound contrast with the previous view, the therapist must respond with complete warmth and empathy: “Anything short of a warm acceptance of narcissistic illusions concerning both the self and the analyst runs the risk of closing off the delicate, pristine narcissistic longings and thereby eliminating the possibility of the reemergence of healthy self-development” (p. 116).

Kohut’s emphasis on pre-oedipal stages of development as foundation for healthy psychological life grounds his project of rebuilding a self through experiences of empathy. Since the aim is no longer a direct accommodation to reality, but rather an authentic engagement with the world based on the creativity of infantile narcissism, this condition in the adult is not an obstacle to be surmounted but rather the path towards growth. The result is that narcissistic illusion needs to be acknowledged and embraced.

However, Mitchell disagrees with both positions and presents a third way beyond these opposing alternatives by using the myth of Icarus as a structuring parable:

Daedalus, the builder of the Labyrinth, constructs wings of feathers and wax, so he and his son can escape their island prison. The use of such

wings requires a true sense of Nietzsche's dialectical balance; flying too high risks a melting of the wings by the sun; flying too low risks a weighing down of the wings from the dampness of the ocean... (p. 122).

According to Mitchell, Narcissistic illusion operates under the same constraints of Icarus: it can be neither fly too high nor too low in order to allow for healthy living. If a person is overrun by narcissistic illusion he lives a restricted life marked by grandiosity, but if he has none then he falls prey to idealization and passivity. Balancing the levels of illusion is the task of the therapist, who should neither aggressively shortstop nor passively embrace the illusion of the narcissistic patient. The therapist must instead view the patient's grandiosity or idealization as an invitation to participate in the analysand's world, an invitation that must be both accepted and questioned:

...the most useful response entails a subtle dialectic between joining the patient in the narcissistic integration and also simultaneously questioning the nature and purpose of that integration, both a playful participation in the patient's illusions and a puzzled curiosity about how and why they came to be the sine qua non of the analysand's sense of security and involvement with others (p. 125).

The acceptance of the patient's illusions allows him to engage with the therapist in his usual way of relating with others. In turn, helped by the therapist's subtle questioning, this allowance reveals the patient's way of relatedness as an option and not the only way of being with others. This is a fundamental point of departure for Mitchell

(1986) because he establishes that narcissism cannot be effectively conceptualized primarily as an internal phenomenon, be it libidinal cathexis or creative flourishing, but rather as “a form of participation with others” (p. 124). Both Kernberg and Kohut think of narcissism as a manifestation of internal pressures and tend to ignore how it functions as a mode of relating to others.

The theoretical revision and the clinical approach presented in this paper established fundamental concepts of Mitchell’s relational psychoanalysis. However, although he continued to differentiate his approach from other systems, his later work was characterized by an impetus to find new integrative schemes that would bring together related but distinct models of human functioning. In *Relationality: From Attachment to Intersubjectivity* (2000), Mitchell presents his final integrating vision based on a reading of Hans Loewald’s work: he introduces a developmental theory of intersubjectivity which he calls an “interactional hierarchy” (p. 53). The theory has four modes or stages that occur sequentially in our development, but that also continue to operate “in dialectical tension with each other throughout the life cycle” (p. 58). Each mode is an “interactional dimension... through which relationality operates” (p. 58).

The first two modes describe phenomena in which the connectedness of the human condition is most evident: our behavior and our affect. Mitchell explains how pre-symbolic and non-reflective behavior shapes the responses of those around us, and vice-versa, creating a mutually regulating interactional field. On a more sophisticated developmental level, human beings also bond over the contagiousness of affect that

permeates through the individuals creating an intense affective connection. What is characteristic of the first two modes, Mitchell notes, is the inability to firmly distinguish between the self and the other. In the case of non-reflective behavior, the interactional behavioral cueing occurs in joint movement, like dance partners whose synchronization allows them to feel a continuity between their bodies marked by a sense of undifferentiation. In the experience of shared affects there is also a similar sense of boundless union that cannot be appropriately traced to the individuality of each participant. In romantic love for example, two people are said to be ‘in’ love precisely because it is an affective experience that transcends them as individuals. In these first two modes of development, behavioral and affective, it is also impossible to firmly distinguish between an *I* and a *you*, it is rather the I-you dyad that is experienced:

powerful emotional experiences are registered in a fashion in which what I am feeling and what you are feeling are not sorted out independently , but rather form a unity, the totality of which I experience as me...[and]...actions and interactions function without an organized conceptualization of self and other. On this level, the question, Who started it? Is meaningless, because the actions of each participant have evolved, through microadaptations, in complementarity to those of others. (p. 62)

Once the individual reaches the third mode of development, he is able to symbolize the other, but this recognition of the other remains predicated on a relationship to the self. Mitchell speaks here of the internalization of self-other

configurations, or internalized representations of my relationships with others. Thus, my relationship with my father leaves me with a sense of who I am that becomes enacted in other moment of my life, consciously or not. But the other continues to be recognized only in relation to the self, revealing an inability for true recognition : “in each of these three modes, others are not organized and experienced as independent subjects in their own right...only in mode 4 are others organized as distinct subjects” (p. 63).

In Mitchell’s framework, the fourth mode constitutes the pinnacle of our development potential for relationality because this is when we are finally able to recognize the subjectivity of the other person. For Mitchell, this is important for cultural reasons given that: “being fully human (in Western culture) entails being recognized as a subject by another human subject” (p. 64). Recognizing the subjectivity of the other involves an understanding of self and others as agents, that is, as individuals with both “self-reflective intentionality” and “dependency”, both the ability to sustain individual intentions, and the necessity of others for their completion (p. 64). Inevitably, according to Mitchell, this creates a tension: “between our efforts to have our own way, as an expression of our own subjectivity, and our dependence on the other, as a subject in her own right, to grant us the recognition we require” (p. 64). But this struggle is reflective of our highest potential for human relatedness fulfilled in an intersubjectivity that requires we mutually acknowledge each other’s humanity. Mitchell illustrates his position through a description of the act of declaring one’s love to a romantic partner. This event takes place in mode 4 because it requires an important level of self-reflection

and self-definition, at the same time that it seeks the recognition from the other partner. Mode 4 events are marked by a reflective intentionality that seeks recognition from the other.

Mitchell notes that, in spite of being developmental stages, all four modes remain operative in our interactions with others. I can simultaneously be influenced by mutually constituted behavioral patterns, intense affective experiences, self-other configurations, and intersubjective relationships. By revealing different dimensions of our relatedness the framework also orients the clinician in the therapeutic process. Sometimes the therapeutic relationship must be addressed on the basis of what behaviors are shaping it, whereas at other times it is more helpful to discuss the nature of the shared affective experience. However, Mitchell's developmental account seems to imply that intersubjectivity remains at the helm of these dimensions by guiding the process with self-reflection, intention, and sought-for recognition. Within this intersubjectivity, we learn "to contain in dialectical tensions different mutually enriching forms of relatedness" (p. 101). The goal of therapy would be to help achieve or sustain an intersubjectivity in which experiences of the other modes, which sometimes challenge a defined and clear sense of self versus other, are contained and understood.

Given that intersubjectivity is a shared process that involves mutual recognition, the analyst's subjectivity is crucial to the therapeutic process because it helps define the subjectivity of the client himself. The formative experiences that occur in therapy

require that the therapist recognize the subjectivity of the client, always from his own subjectivity. But because the therapist is embedded in a relationship, the therapist also seeks the recognition of his subjectivity by the client. As a result, the analytic relationship cuts both way and also defines the therapist in the process. Mitchell (2000) presents a compelling illustration of this phenomenon when narrating an episode of a client who challenged his impersonal way of greeting her when inviting her into the office. Mitchell changed his impersonal demeanor with that client seeing important therapeutic improvement. What's more, he also began changing the way he greeted other patients in the waiting room (p. 97).

In addition to providing a clinical guide, the modes are also intended to be theoretically integrative by accommodating different relational theorists into a typology according to the emphasis each gives to the phenomenon described in each stage:

Thus, for example, Bowlby was most interested in behavior: what mothers and children actually do with each other...Fairbairn was most interested in self-other configurations...Benjamin is most interested in intersubjectivity...(p. 82)

This does not entail that these thinkers operate exclusively within that mode, but rather take it up as an area of emphasis. What is more, Mitchell proposes his developmental model in order to integrate approaches and guide clinical practice, but he “does not claim to carve nature at its joints” (p. 59).

Mitchell's work stands as the foremost proponent of a relational psychoanalysis that attempts to transcend Freud's emphasis on the individual mind. His work rests on the assumption that the mind is thoroughly constituted by interpersonal experience and its internalization, not by the outward expression of internal mechanical forces. The idea of the human being as acorn, naturally developing out of its own internal plan, given certain environmental conditions, is replaced with that of an intersubjectively engaged agent who learns to be who he is in the context of his relationships..

Mitchell (2000), however, suggests at times that culture operates within the possibilities of our bodily condition. He notes that speaking of culture assumes "relationality as universal and fundamental feature of human development", because it is on the basis of our relatedness that we are cultural to begin with (p. *xii*), presenting relationality as a fundamental characteristic of human nature. Although he falls short of grounding it in biology, like Bowlby does, he does speak of what he calls the "materiality of the body and its attributes" and of humans being "constrained by our materiality and the weight imparted by psychodynamic continuity" (Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. *xvi*). Furthermore, Mitchell continues to speak in the language of interiority he sometimes criticizes in Freud by using concepts like inner-world, intrapsychic, and internalization. Stolorow, Orange, and Atwood (2001), primary representatives of an intersubjective approach, have criticized him for retaining Cartesian notions of mind. Social constructivist feminist thinkers on the other hand, criticize him for risking a retreat into essentialist biologism. An outline of these views is presented in what

follows in order to consider theoretical challenges to Mitchell's and their own approaches.

Worlds of Experience: Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange

The term intersubjective has been appropriated by the psychoanalytic tradition in various and sometimes contrasting ways (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002):

...developmentalists such as D.N. Stern (1985) have used the term *intersubjective relatedness* to refer to the developmental capacity to recognize the other person as a separate subject. In a similar vein, Benjamin (1995)...has defined intersubjectivity as mutual recognition. Ogden, by contrast, seems to have equated intersubjectivity with...a domain of shared experience that is prereflective and largely bodily. (p. 85)

Stolorow, Orange, and Atwood (2001), the theorists considered here, define the term intersubjective more inclusively as a "relational context in which all experience...takes form" (p. 474). This relational context is a field in which the personal worlds of subjects come together and mutually influence each other (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002). At least two features are of central import to this view: first the notion that the unit of study must be enlarged from an interactive dyad (Mitchell & Aron 1999), to the very world the subject inhabits. Based on Martin Heidegger's notion of *being-in-the world*, the intersubjective approach sustains that the subject cannot be grasped without understanding the world to which he belongs: "...the experiential

world seems to be both inhabited by and inhabiting of the human being” (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002, p. 34). The complete interpenetrability of self and world renders these poles inseparable and mutually constitutive. In this view, the subject is his world, the context in which his experience takes shape and meaning.

The second feature central to an intersubjective approach, also derived from Heidegger’s philosophy, is the centrality of affective experience: “...affect—that is, subjective emotional experience—has become a centerpiece of our psychoanalytic framework” (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002, p. 10). Shifting the emphasis from drives to the primacy of affective experience allows Stolorow and colleagues to underscore the phenomenology of psychological life, which is deeply intertwined with the world. Affectivity, when properly understood, is a concept that reveals the inextricable relationship between subject and world and obliterates any sharp separation of these two poles.

According to Stolorow and his colleagues, the development of the concept of experiential world, with its emphasis on affective encounter, evolved from a detailed and extensive criticism of the Cartesian heritage. With remarkable succinctness and philosophical breadth, Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange (2002), point out eight assumptions about the mind inherited from the Cartesian tradition and present in most psychoanalytic thinking (pp. 21-38). Many of these concepts require further philosophical elaboration that will be taken up later in this work.

The first assumption is a view of mind as self-enclosed and isolated, separate from any social constitutive context. Second, and underlying this view of mind, is the subject-object split, a belief that reality is composed of two separate kinds of substances: objects—or extended things--, and minds—or thinking things. Third, and also related to the subject object split, is a distinction between an inner and outer reality, where the external is real independently of our perceptions, and the inner is subjectivity acting as a container of representations. The fourth and fifth attributes of the Cartesian mind are the object and method of Cartesian inquiry respectively: a) the search for a certain foundation b) through the rigor of logic and rational thought. The sixth inherited assumption is the view of mind as atemporal, abstracted from the influence of the past and the future and always present as an enduring object in the here-and-now. The seventh assumption is the representational view of mind and the correspondence theory of truth. Finally, the last Cartesian assumption about mental functioning they describe is the view of mind as a substance. This produces a reification and reduction of mental phenomena to the category of a thing, a philosophical mistake that permeates much of Freud's metapsychological postulates.

This detailed critique of a Cartesian view of mind is meant to challenge many of our unspoken assumptions as Western thinkers. It also serves as a prelude and justification for the introduction of a contextualist position that they believe transcends many of these problems and confusions. To what extent their approach is successful, even by their own standards, is an open question which will be analyzed later as part of

my thesis. Nevertheless their appeal to a wider philosophical horizon brings some apparent problems with Mitchell's view into relief.

Stolorow, Orange and Atwood (2001) claim, for example, that the notion of projective identification implicitly used by Mitchell's accounts of therapists enacting the client's maladaptive patterns assumes two separate minds that emit and receive thoughts onto each other (p. 476). Based on Schafer's work (1972), Stolorow, Orange and Atwood (2001) point out that the idea of projecting thoughts involves a confusion of spatial notions of interiority and exteriority with subjective—non-spatial—concepts of mind (p. 476). Minds, they claim, do not have an inside or an outside, they are “pictured as an emergent property of the person-environment system, not as a Cartesian entity located inside the cranium” (p. 480). The phenomenon in which a client evokes affective responses in the therapist which he himself is feeling, would not be understood as a projection of mental content between two separate minds, but as a shared affective experience that emerges as a property of an intersubjective system.

The intersubjectivists challenge an assumption deeply held by Mitchell: his allegiance to a distinction between real interpersonal relations and internalized self-other configurations. According to Stolorow and colleagues, such distinction mirrors a dramatic split between external and internal reality predominant in Cartesian thinking. This separation seems to originate from his attempt to integrate an interpersonal and an object relations perspective, which contain the Cartesian assumption of separate inner/outer realms. Mitchell considers that the integration of intrapsychic and

interpersonal realms provides a full account of human subjectivity that each side alone misses. According to the intersubjectivists, however, any conservative strategy would betray a lack of philosophical sophistication because: “persisting dichotomies between the intrapsychic and the interpersonal, between a one and two-person psychologies, are obsolete—reified, absolutized relics of the Cartesian bifurcation” (Stolorow, Orange, & Atwood, 2001, p. 481). Retaining this dichotomy inevitably presents the mind as separate from the world, as a container within the subject and not as an emergent system between the subject and his environment, as intersubjectivists argue.

The intersubjective approach presents an important challenge to relational psychoanalysis by questioning its Cartesian assumptions. Their challenge pushes relational psychoanalysis to widen its unit of study and become more relational in the process. Stolorow, Orange, and Atwood are able to pose this challenge and provide an interesting answer because they appeal to a wider philosophical horizon that both informs their work and illuminates their clinical practice. Their approach, for example, criticizes the ethic of personal disclosure that relational psychoanalysis foments by their focus on “present moment thinking” (Stolorow, Orange, & Atwood 2001, p. 472). From an intersubjective approach, this atemporal understanding of therapy overlooks the influence of the patient’s history and perception of his future. In addition, by focusing primarily on the therapeutic relationship, the therapist might be oblivious to other contexts of relatedness that the client inhabits most of the time. This is why Stolorow, Orange and Atwood prescribe a widening of the therapeutic dyad as a unit of study to

include the entire world of the subject. In spite of its clinical and theoretical sagacity, the question of how well intersubjectivity lives up to its own philosophical insights remains open and will be considered later.

Intersubjectivity attempts to differentiate itself sharply from postmodern approaches in psychoanalysis noting that: “contextualism in psychoanalysis should not be confused with postmodernist nihilism or relativism” and that “Relativity to context is not the same thing as a relativism” (p. 482). However, what they do share with postmodern gender theorists, who will be considered next, is the belief in the deep interpenetrability, if not the identification, of the mind and its context. To use Mitchell and Aron’s (1999) term, the “radical forms of constructivism” accept as true the complete social construction of the mind following the postmodern thinking of philosophers like Foucault and Derrida (p. xv). But Mitchell and Aron (1999) present an important challenge to theorists that grant an exhaustive priority to the social: “...from our point of view, constructivism in political and gender theory, in its dialectical swing away from essentialism, often becomes too airy and ungrounded, missing the way in which the past, the inner world, developmental continuities, all have claims on our present experience” (p. xvi).

This question also challenges the intersubjective approach by proxy, given its emphasis on abandoning any form of biological grounding or interior private experience. If the mind arises out of a person-environment system, then how does the subjectivity of the individual become differentiated from the world itself? Mitchell

seems to be asking whether we are obliterating the individual and his real corporeal existence if we conceptualize him as completely undistinguishable from his world and its constructions. What follows then is a brief exposition of the constructivist perspective in psychoanalysis with a consideration of Mitchell's criticism of ignoring intrapsychic and bodily dimensions.

Social Constructionist Perspectives in Psychoanalysis

Like the relational tradition itself, postmodern influences within it are varied and complex (Dimen & Goldner, 2002), and a detailed exposition of all its views is beyond the scope of this work. Leffert (2007, p.177) notes that postmodern approaches within psychoanalysis are related to, but should not be entirely conflated with, intersubjective and relational perspectives. Furthermore, he notes that there is ample heterogeneity within postmodern psychoanalytic thinking, and that integrative work is on order. A representative overview of thinkers in this position is offered by Fairfield, Layton and Stack (2002), who note the heterogeneity in the movement but recognize there is important common ground. The dialogue between psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodern philosophy is one crucial shared goal, if not the unifying platform, for many of these theorists (Flax, 1990, Fairfield, 2001, Layton, 1998). From within this interdisciplinary crossroads, several thinkers welcome the philosophical influence of Foucault and Derrida, while others tentatively explore the tensions between their philosophy and the realities of clinical practice.

Derrida and Foucault's influence is most noticeable in several projects that challenge prevailing notions of gender. Butler, Corbett, Dimen, and Goldner (in Dimen & Goldner, 2002) write excellent examples of this line of scholarship, in which cultural understandings of gender are analyzed in light of language and power dynamics. Specifically, they question the customary dichotomizing of gender into opposite poles (male/female), which are usually construed as natural categories. In their view, such an analysis subverts the power structure maintained by those constructs. In the words of Goldner (2002):

I argue that dichotomous gender categories, precisely because they are essentialized, mutually exclusive, and unequally valued, can be used for magical ends in the psyche, in the family, and, as we have already seen, in the culture to carry, solve, or exploit existential oppositions and dilemmas. (p. 75)

Underlying this project we find a set of assumptions about the nature of reality that guides the inquiry. There is, for example, a Foucaultian (1978) view of knowledge, personal and academic, as a form of discourse that is culturally enacted to sustain power relations. In addition, we find Derrida's position on language as an instrument of this polarization and domination (Fairfield, Layton, & Stack, 2002, p. 2). These theorists hold that all our concepts, including our understanding of selfhood, are not natural categories but socio-political constructions sustained by linguistic practices (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 198). As Jones (2003) notes: "the 'intrapsychic' is actually a mode of

the interpersonal or even the cultural” (p. 171) in postmodern views, because, as Fairfield (2001) explains: “They enact it, reiterate it performatively, within a cultural setting that allows for the legibility of that construct” (p. 228).

In spite of a general acceptance of these premises, some psychoanalytic gender theorists raise questions about the relationship between feminist psychoanalysis and postmodern philosophy. Nancy Chodorow (1991), for instance, advocates a formulation of postmodern thinking that rejects essentialism but includes the role of individual psychology in the creation of meaning: “gender difference is not absolute, abstract, or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender. Gender differences, and the experience of difference, like differences among women, are socially and *psychologically* created and situated” (p. 100). This appropriation seems to stem from recognizing the problems inherent in ignoring individual psychology in favor of cultural practices:

In this view, meanings are imposed as cultural categories rather than created in contingent individual ways. According to this hegemonic feminist viewpoint, cultural order takes precedence over a more nuanced and variable individual personal meaning, and the psyche is entirely linguistic (Chodorow, 1999, p. 70).

This quote poignantly illustrates Chodorow’s discomfort with cultural explanations completely displacing individual experience. According to her, the linguistic constitution of the psyche cannot explain the profound variability in human

experience without appealing to a psychological dimension. She notes that it is “not only that people create individualized cultural or linguistic versions of meaning by drawing on the cultural or linguistic categories at hand. Rather perception and the creation of meaning are psychologically constituted” (p. 71). In her view, although the self is embedded in social contexts, experiencing them is intensely personal colored through affectivity and fantasy, such that cultural categories can neither exhaust nor determine the possibilities of individual life.

Lynne Layton (1998), another gender theorist who recognizes the role of individual psychology in the creation of meaning, places Chodorow’s protest within a general “tension between individual specificity and cultural processes [that] has been much discussed among clinicians who are also gender theorists” (p. 9). She attributes this dialectic to the philosophical blindness of defenders of individuality on one hand and social construction on the other, who both miss each others claims. Her recipe for the successful integration of individual and postmodern approaches is the recognition that “the cultural is psychologically constructed, and the psychological is cultural” (p. 10). She argues that understanding would permit retaining a sensitivity to the reality of individual experience as well as its interconnectedness with the social contexts to which it belongs. As a result: “the way a black middle-class girl construes a gender identity at any particular historical moment , the way she puts together the possibilities that circulate in her family and culture, in turn contributes to constructing the set of cultural practices that will define ‘black middle-class female’” (p. 10).

It seems, however, that both Layton's and Chodorow's strategies raise many questions about the interaction between personal and social reality. For example, we are left wondering on what basis the individual can "put together...the possibilities that circulate" (Layton, 1998, p. 63) in her context, without appealing to cultural values and ideas that inform those choices. This is problematic because if the criterion for personal choice is itself cultural, then individuality seems to become undistinguishable from culture. Chodorow suggests that our psychology differentiates us from culture and allows us to appropriate it individually. She rejects the notion that culture simply provides meaning, positing instead that meaning and perception are actively constructed through affect and fantasy. However, in attributing such constitutive strength to the psyche she displaces the role of culture. We are left wondering again on what basis affective and fantasy create individual meaning if not from cultural constructs. An appeal to naturalistic view of affective life is, of course, also precluded if Chodorow wants to avoid charges of retreating into essentialism.

Chodorow and Layton both navigate what Dimen and Goldner (2002) describe as "ensuring that we neither essentialize gender nor dematerialize it" (p. *xvii*). On the one hand, postmodernists who emphasize the role of social forces in constructing the self escape naturalism and essentialism with all its trappings. By contrast, thinkers who retain notions of psychological experience as co-constructor of selfhood avoid the "dematerialization" of the individual into social structures. But this dialectic places either position into an uneasy theoretical tension.

Mitchell and Aron (1999) effectively identified the “dematerialization” of individuality that radical social constructivists face. He criticizes them for ignoring the claims that the intrapsychic and the “materiality of the body” make on an individual’s life (p. *xvi*). According to him, even though the self is socially constructed, the elements out of which it is built must count. Discursive practices risk being too “airy and ungrounded” as the self’s only building blocks, so we need to acknowledge the impact of body and psyche as particular realities in the construction of the self (p. *xvi*). This is a challenging critique that resonates with Chodorow and Layton’s defense of individual meaning making. Like them, Mitchell embraces the intrapsychic role in the formation of meaning. Also like them, it is not clear that he succeeds in retaining a notion of individuality that does not fade into the cultural practices that constitute it. Mitchell’s intrapsychic life is ultimately constituted by interpersonal transactions, which again raises the question of what this psychology is based on if it is not equivalent to culture. Mitchell appeals to the reality of the body as a grounding principle in the social construction of the individual, yet “any ways in which those bodily attributes are described are themselves social constructions” (1999). If the body also must be interpreted in and through culture, it is not clear that it can ground any sense of selfhood above and beyond the cultural practices that constitute it.

These theorists embody a profound tension between privileging individuality or social construction in understanding selfhood. If they hold on to a personal psychology then they must explain how it develops as something different than culture, and if they

embrace the cultural constitution of the self then they must face the risk of “dematerializing” our phenomenological sense of personhood. This is a dilemma that Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman have identified as confronting a “Hobson’s choice between scientism or relativism” (1999, p. 41), “between modern foundationalism and postmodern radical arbitrariness” (2000, p. 402) and between “modern essentialism and postmodern antisubjectivism” (2000, p. 403). Their work attempts to provide a solution from the perspective of theoretical psychology. Understanding how they frame this difficulty that plagues modern psychology, including relational psychoanalysis, should clarify the issues at stake in and facilitate a path towards a better answer.

Relational Psychoanalysis in Clinical Practice

Having explored the theoretical underpinnings of these three schools of relational psychoanalysis, it is important to also note how their theoretical departure from classical precepts informs their clinical practice. Just like in theory, there are both differences and shared ground between these approaches in clinical practice. Possibly the characteristic these approaches share most clearly is their belief in never privileging the subjectivity of the analyst over that of the client. This view derives from the assumption that the therapist is an active participant in a shared relational process. As a result, she is never in a position to somehow stand outside of the therapeutic relationship to provide neutral—and thus more objectively real—interpretations.

In an early work entitled *The Psychoanalytic Treatment of Homosexuality: Some Technical Considerations* (1981), Mitchell illustrates the insidious way in which

unrecognized analytic authority can be abused to distort what is happening between the patient and the analyst. He brings up the now outdated issue, at least in psychoanalytic circles, of considering homosexuality as an illness that needs to be treated by suggestive techniques (p. 65). The oppressive dimensions of this approach are now readily apparent to the contemporary reader, but what is more interesting and still relevant for current practice is Mitchell's discussion of the use of interpretation as a way to conceal the influence of the analyst. Mitchell references the following clinical vignette originally presented by Ovesey (1969):

This example involves patient 2, who, after much pressure from the analyst, goes to bed with a prostitute and that night dreams: 'He was in the woods. He was a male fox among many others and one of the foxes inserted anally into him. Then all the foxes, including the patient, changed into men' (p. 140). This dream is interpreted as a flight from heterosexuality to a 'magical repair through homosexual contacts' (p. 141). Ovesey doesn't consider the possibility that the dream represents the patient's experience of being dominated and overpowered by the therapist, who had pressured the patient into the heterosexual situation. The therapist's interpretation of the dream, in fact, seems to have been experienced as a further domination and control. (p. 69)

The analyst couches his suggestion—perhaps unconsciously—in a plausible interpretation. This has the double effect of concealing the real message being transmitted—avoid homosexual behavior—and disassociating it from its author by

appealing to its neutrality and theoretical correctness. The subjectivity of the analyst, the guiding set of concerns, expectations, and dispositions that structure this intervention remains wholly unacknowledged and anonymously dominant.

In a relational model all interaction must account for the participation of the therapist. Interpretations of their process are not accounts of something the patient does independently over there, but rather an account of what the therapist-patient dyad participate in together. In postmodern perspectives that approach is accompanied by refined sensibility towards the workings of power in theoretical constructs. Stack (1999) notes that:

As long as psychoanalysis promulgates the concept of “penis envy,” as long as we use this image no matter how we understand its symbolic meaning, we reify the phallogentric narrative that men have/ are the desired object that women lack. This heterosexist trope of desire rambles through our personal lives, our work with patients, and our professional relations, reinforcing and reenacting its belief in itself each time it shows up (p. 77).

As such, when she listens to repeated presentations at a conference of male analysts struggling with the erotic transference of a female patient, she sees both the enactment and reinforcement of this narrative. For Stack it isn't only the thoughts and feelings of the analysts we need to worry about, but also how these are structured—and sometimes concealed—by theoretical constructions grounded in dominant forms of discourse. Postmodern relationalists introduce the social shared background, with its

concomitant power differentials, into the room along with the subjectivity of the analyst and patient. They see these practices as deeply constitutive of subjectivity to begin with, and as such they will unavoidably inform the therapeutic interaction. But, if “all of the content that arises in the analytic situation is generated from the mind of the patient” (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 234) as classical theory would have it, then whatever role the analyst has in bringing about an erotic transference or in enacting cultural constructs remains completely concealed. Postmodern clinical practice expects the analyst to always question their stance in the room instead, to “put their own assumptions into question” as a sine qua non for belonging to the “postmodern episteme.” (Fairfield, Layton, & Stack, 2002, p. 4).

But admitting that the analyst has an active role in the room and that her subjectivity needs to be recognized is not enough; these factors should be considered constitutive for an analytic relationship to take place. In other words, it is not that recognizing the influence of subjectivity places us in a better position to achieve neutrality, but rather the criticism places subjectivity at the core of a therapeutic relationship. In classical models, for example, countertransference needs to be neutralized, while in relational approaches it is often meant to be disclosed: “What is it to be done with the therapists feelings? Probably the most important dividing line in current approaches to using countertransference is around the question of whether the analyst’s reactions ought to be in any way divulged to the patient.” (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 247). And even though, as Stepansky (2002) suggests, the “surgical metaphor”

of cold detachment and acting upon the patient was questioned by Freud himself, certainly the idea of analytic neutrality remains a viable construct in many circles, one that urges restraint on the part of the therapist (p. 500).

For the intersubjectivists (Orange & Stolorow, 1998) the issue of disclosure is not whether one discloses or not, but rather how one chooses to do so: “Intersubjectivity theory is even more radical on this topic. It recognizes that within any particular psychoanalytic situation or intersubjective field, two subjective worlds are continually self-revealing and attempting to hide. Even withholding is a form of communication.” (p. 532). From this perspective, the dilemma of communicating or withholding is a pseudo issue because we are always conveying a message in the process whether we do so or not. The more interesting question becomes how and when do we speak. Orange and Stolorow (1998) present a clinical vignette in which disclosure played an important role in advancing towards significant material:

Once Erica settled into treatment and began to feel understood, a curious pattern developed. At the beginning of each session she would ask how the analyst's weekend had been, or how she was...Erica would ask more, or wait for more response, before she seemed able to move on...She was reluctant to point the pattern out, imagining Erica would feel shamed. Yet the merely polite responses were evidently also problematic...Perhaps, the analyst thought, Erica needed her analyst to talk about herself. So, one Monday, when asked what she had done on the weekend, the analyst responded that she'd mostly done chores, had done

some reading, and had been to a concert. Since then, they have tended to “chat” for about three minutes at the beginning of each session. Erica has come to know a fair number of details about her analyst's interests and activities. (p. 536).

Eventually, while discussing the meaning of this changed interaction, the patient discovered that the function of this initial dialogue had been first to test the authenticity of the analyst, and then to also check her emotional state to see if she was healthy enough to trust her with her own psychological burden. One can imagine this same issue being address in a more restrictive frame and also being resolved. But without the accessibility of the therapist in that act of self-disclosure, it is also possible that the patient will leave with a different message about how to negotiate relationships outside the session.

Chapter 3: Beyond the Intrapsychic vs. Interpersonal Dualism

Differing Concepts of Personhood

So far this work has had three aims: 1) to highlight a point of theoretical tension within relational psychoanalysis regarding concepts of selfhood by bringing some of its variants into dialogue, 2) to present these relational schools in the context of their influences, and 3) to present ideas about the relationship between theory and practice in psychoanalysis. A more careful presentation of the praxis/theory relationship requires reviewing concepts that will be presented in the following chapter, and thus that line of investigation will be held until then. However, in order to address the problematic tension within relational schools introduced earlier, it would be helpful to articulate it in more detail.

As mentioned before, relational psychoanalysis is unified by a series of critiques of traditional concepts of self in psychoanalysis. The three positions outlined above-- Mitchell, the intersubjective school, and postmodern psychoanalysis—all present related but subtly different critiques of traditional psychoanalytic notions of selfhood. Mitchell contends that classical psychoanalysis conceptualizes human beings too narrowly by viewing interpersonal relationships as merely epiphenomenal and innate drives as constitutional. In this view, intrapsychic conflict determines our behavior while other people and the world we occupy are the actors and stage that instantiate an internal script. This represents a one-person view of psychological life, according to Mitchell, which fails to consider the constitutive role of relationships in personhood.

Mitchell could be described as criticizing the individualistic tendencies of Freudian theory.

The intersubjective approach criticizes traditional psychoanalysis from a different front by questioning the very concept of an internal private world. This constitutes a direct attack on notions of personal intrapsychic life. They propose instead that people have experiential-worlds, webs of meanings and relationships with others that constitute their identity. In this framework, subjectivity is constituted by the relationship with other subjectivities and their corresponding matrix of meanings, each from their own perspective. According to Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange (2002), the self is inherently intersubjective because there is no self without the subjectivity of the other. Intersubjectivists can be seen as primarily criticizing the cartesianism of Freudian theory—its notion of a private and separate subjectivity. Postmodern psychoanalysts focus their critique on Freud's essentialism, the idea that human beings have an unchanging underlying core. They present instead a radically different view of selfhood, derived from poststructuralist philosophy, that denies it is possible to understand any phenomena in terms of unchanging and universal structures, like those provided by natural science. In its place, human beings are seen as constituted by language, which is itself always constrained by historical context. In this view, psychological life is constructed socially as a form of discourse, a consensual way of speaking about reality. As a result, the subject becomes de-centered, there is no core or center of selfhood but rather a multiplicity of selves that we enact in everyday life through our different roles.

All three critical themes, individualism, cartesianism, and essentialism, reflect similar concerns with the decontextualization of the self from the world. However, while Mitchell is sympathetic to the importance of contextualizing the self, he wants to retain notions of interiority and biological givens, and this puts him at odds with intersubjectivists and postmodern psychoanalysts. But if the other two groups are correct, retaining ideas of a private subjectivity and/or biological givens results in decontextualizing the self from social reality. Conversely, Mitchell poignantly asks if the self disappears into thin air if it is so thoroughly contextualized, wondering what happens to our mind and our body when it is so indistinguishable from that of others. As Ghent (in Skolnick & Warshaw, 1992) so lucidly articulates, it is possible that “The self as a center of activity and agency has somehow been neglected by placing the emphasis so firmly on a two-person psychology.” (p. *xxi*).

It seems then that relational approaches defend what could be described as *thin* accounts of personhood: theories that emphasize the self’s constitutive engagement with a social realm, plural and discontinuous character, discursive structure, and perspectival access to reality. These characteristics are prominently found in postmodern critiques of selfhood. On the other hand, some voices within relational psychoanalysis want to preserve aspects of what could be termed *thick* accounts of personhood: those that present the self as unitary and continuous, with a substantive and unchanging core, primarily engaged with mental contents, and biologically grounded. These are characteristics usually associated with a modern view of selfhood. Relational

psychoanalysis seems to occupy a tense space between these two positions, often oscillating between them. When one of its voices thins out personhood, another asks about the disappearance of a substantive self.

Martin and Sugarman

Martin and Sugarman (1999, 2000) tackle the problematic introduced in this work in a related yet different context. Their aim is wider in that they target the social sciences at large and tackle philosophical questions about agency and the capacity for choice. However, the phenomenon they describe is quite similar to the one present in relational psychoanalysis--this push and pull between thin and thick accounts of personhood—thus making their thinking potentially beneficial for the issues at hand. From their wider optic, Martin and Sugarman note that in recent decades the social sciences and psychology have come under heavy attack for presupposing and operating within characteristically modern views of human agency and the self. Cushman (1990, p. 604) notes that the social sciences operate under a modern view of selfhood as a "bounded, masterful self," that "is expected to function in a highly autonomous, isolated way" and "to be self-soothing, self-loving, and self-sufficient." Regrettably, Cushman argues, this inflated and overly autonomous modern self transforms into an "empty self," characterized by feelings of fragility, emptiness, and an emotional that oscillates between feelings of grandiosity and worthlessness (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). Likewise, Gergen (2001), takes psychology to task for being “essentially a by-product of what is often called cultural modernism”, characterized by “three modernist

themes—emphasis on the individual mind, an objectively knowable world, and language as carrier of truth” (p. 803). Instead, Gergen argues, we should move “from individual reason to communal rhetoric”, “from an objective to a socially constructed world”, and in language “from truthful picture to pragmatic practice” (p. 805).

Like in psychoanalysis, many influential postmodern thinkers in contemporary psychology (Gergen, 1985, 1994; Slife & Williams, 1997; Giorgi, 1970) have sharply critiqued the modern overly atomistic conception of the self, one that seems abstracted or detached from any meaningful social context. In its radical variants, these criticisms insist on the social construction of the self and human identity and usually argue for an epistemological perspectivism that appears to be potentially liberating for postmodern selves (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). Although a minority standpoint in psychology and psychoanalysis, the postmodern/social constructionist influence has grown considerably in recent years. However, it has sustained a number of criticisms. Smith (1994) contends that the postmodern “flow of discourse leaves us bereft of anchors to stabilize a view of self and world”, leaving psychology with an “extreme version of antiscientific relativism” that “is gaining prominence at the margins of mainstream psychology.” (p. 408). Parker (1998) noted that reactions to postmodernism in psychology have centered on defenses of realism and scientific explanation, adding that postmodernism is “particularly pernicious in its embrace of relativism and amoralism” (p. 622). Eagle (2003) expresses his concern over the excesses of postmodernism, noting that:

...legitimate criticisms of some traditional psychoanalytic views have been transformed into untenable philosophical positions that do not constitute an adequate basis for psychoanalytic theory or practice. For example, skepticism toward the therapeutic value of insight and self-knowledge has been transformed into a philosophical position that rules out the very possibility of discovering truths about the mind. (p. 411)

A number of voices within psychology find considerable fault with both modern scientific and relativistic postmodern approaches to understanding human life. These critics speak in various ways of a need to move beyond the dualism of scientism and constructionism (Zeddies & Richardson, 1999; Richardson, et al., 1999). These critiques owe much to the work of Richard Bernstein, who in his book *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (1983) notes that:

There is an uneasiness that has spread throughout intellectual and cultural life. It affects almost every discipline and every aspect of our lives. This uneasiness is expressed by the opposition between objectivism and relativism, but there are a variety of other contrasts that indicate the same underlying anxiety: rationality vs. irrationality, objectivity vs. subjectivity, realism vs. antirealism.

Contemporary thinking has moved between these and other related extremes. Even the attempts that some have made to break out of this framework of thinking have all too frequently been assimilated to these standard oppositions. (p. 1)

Bernstein's recognition of this academic and cultural malaise is now over 20 years old yet thinkers who continue to point out this problematic are anything but anachronistic. This phenomenon certainly speaks to the force and endurance of these opposing contrasts, which Bernstein acknowledges. Certainly Martin and Sugarman are deeply aligned with such a critique and articulate its problematic very lucidly as it pertains to social science. What follows then is a preliminary analysis of their account of human agency and selfhood. Stating their view of the current problematic facing the social sciences will help frame the dilemma facing relational psychoanalysis in a new light.

Beyond Modern and Postmodern Selves

In their book *The Psychology of Human Possibility and Constraint* (1999), Martin and Sugarman begin their investigation by responding to what they consider an important limitation of some variants of postmodern thought: the eradication of personhood as an ontological category. Against postmodern criticism they ask: "Is there nothing of value to be gained by retaining something of the individual psychology against the ever-present sociocultural fabric of human existence?" (1999, p. 3). However, their question does not represent a complete rejection of postmodernism, the authors claim, for it has provided useful critiques of atomistic views of selfhood. Martin and Sugarman acknowledge that challenging the idea that people can be understood separated from their history and surroundings, is a timely and invaluable notion which helps us understand personhood in a richer light. They also recognize that there is

important heterogeneity within social constructionist approaches, and that some place significant emphasis on the reality of individual experience. Nevertheless, they note, “more radical versions of postmodern social constructionism seem to us...to erase both the psychological agent and the possibility of warranted psychological understanding.” (Martin & Sugarman, 2000, p. 399). In other words, radical postmodernists usually take their claims further than the phenomena requires. Martin and Sugarman also qualify this claim about radical postmodernists saying that: “it may be possible to interpret the strong version of postmodern social constructionism as advocating only a social relational constitution of the psychological agent”, although they do find indications that these radical perspectives tend to be reductive (p. 399). Although this is a topic worthy of discussion in itself, it is not important whether Martin and Sugarman accurately depict all variants of constructionist approaches but rather that they clearly delimit the positions they are arguing against. If it turns out that some postmodern variants can successfully defend a socially constructed self that does not lose its personhood, then that would be a type of postmodernism that Martin and Sugarman would likely embrace.

In sum, the problem as Martin and Sugarman (1999) see it is that a radical social constructionist view collapses psychological individuality with the social background from which it develops: “we believe that there is an important sense in which these various proposals conflate individual psychological experience with plausible sociocultural explanations for such experience.” (p.3). According to them, the

sociocultural level of explanation is not incorrect, but taken as the sole perspective it occludes the individual experience that a psychology of personhood tries to capture. Furthermore, when selfhood is understood solely from a social perspective a number of philosophical, and ultimately practical, problems ensue. For example, in such a system there is no room for the phenomenal experience of ourselves as individuals making meaningful choices within a social and cultural context. The social context becomes undifferentiated from the individual in such a way that making choices is impossible. However important the re-embedding of the subject in a historical and cultural life-world might be, we are throwing the baby with the bath water when we weave them into the world to the point of virtual extinction. Martin and Sugarman respond to this problem by providing a fresh account--one that in its own way tries to move beyond tired and rigid dualisms--of how we develop and function as human agents in our social universe.

Social Constructionism and Cognitive Constructivism

According to Martin and Sugarman (1999) the entire discussion about the nature of the self and its relation to society in the human sciences, and elsewhere, is deeply affected by a problematic dualism. At one pole of this dualism we find social constructionists, who claim that the self is constructed out of or largely the product of social interactions. The individual, through its immersion in conversational practices, learns to organize thought and experience into a meaningful framework. Society provides individuals with both the cognitive tools and the symbolic content that

constitutes their identity. The primary focus of explanation is at the social level. On the other pole, cognitive constructivism holds a more traditional conception of the self. This view posits that learning occurs through a series of innate mechanisms triggered in the individual through its interaction with the environment. As a child grows, he passes through several stages of cognitive development that regulate his thinking and experience of the world. The focus of explanation is at the individual level.

Each of these opposing views, according to Martin and Sugarman (1999), say something illuminating about personhood and society. Social constructionists point out how identity originates from society by means of the internalization of pre-existing social orders. But they have great difficulty explaining two phenomena. The first is the existence of novelty or originality. The second is the phenomenological experience of individuality and choice. If individuals are constituted by the social through and through, where do new ideas come from? In addition, if the category of the social suffices to explain psychological phenomena, what do we make of our rich individual experience of the world as we make choices and, often arduously, sort through a plurality of meanings in the process?

Cognitive constructivists, on the other hand, are able to account for at least some of the generation of novelty by the individual as well as the experience of meaningful encounter that each individual has with the world. Nevertheless, they have a difficult time explaining how is it that we manage to communicate and cooperate so well with other people. It seems then that both poles reveal aspects of human existence that are

truthful: one emphasizes our personal encounter with the world while the other illuminates the shared nature of our identity. And so Martin and Sugarman (1999) observe that:

With social constructionists such as Vygotsky (1934/1986), Mead (1934), Gergen (1985), and Shotter (1993), we contend that the individual arises from the sociocultural. However, concurring partially with the contrasting view, as represented by cognitive constructivists such as Bartlett (1932), Piaget (1954), Kelly (1955), and Mahoney (1990), we also contend that the individual is not isomorphic with, nor educible to, the sociocultural. (p. 5)

However, they don't consider this statement to be a conclusion, but rather the starting point of an integrative effort that needs to justify how to bridge concretely these apparently discrepant perspectives. The reason why this has been difficult, Martin and Sugarman tell us, does not reside in some important difference between these views, but rather in an important assumption they actually share. Both treat their central categories as closed fixed entities. What is required, the authors say, is a conceptualization that understands the social and the individual as mutable and mutually constitutive processes: "...the real problem with sociocultural-psychological dualism has less to do with the drawing of a divide between societal-cultural phenomena and individual-psychological phenomena, than it has to do with treating that which is on either side of this divide, and the divide itself, as fixed and immutable." (1999, p. 6).

The Metaphysics of Dynamic Interactionism

For Martin and Sugarman, if we operate under the assumption that the social and the individual are fixed and immutable entities, then we are forced to see them as mutually exclusive explanatory frameworks. If we consider the category of the social as something closed, fixed, and thus complete unto itself, then by necessity this category co-opts any explanatory power that we could find at the individual level. Of course, the reverse is also true. If cognitive constructivists assume that individuality is a closed category, they are forced to consider the social as nothing more than a derivative phenomenon. This underlying assumption of fixedness prevents each pole from understanding its relationship to the other. Martin and Sugarman argue that this assumption blocks each side from being receptive to the partly valid claims of the other. For the cognitive constructivist, it displaces the centrality of social contributions in the formation of individuality. In the case of social constructionists, it leads them to downplay—or outright ignore—the experience of agency and the individual’s encounter with the world.

Clearly, rejecting one pole in order to favor the other is an incomplete solution, but simply adding them together creates more questions than answers. How is it that we are constituted by social forces yet not determined by them? If individuality is something more than its sociocultural origins, from where does it get it? To answer these questions, Martin and Sugarman argue, we need to first challenge the assumption of fixedness that frames this dualism. Once we allow ourselves to think about alternatives to this assumption, we can begin to work out a better account of

personhood, culture, and their relationship: “the key to this bridging of atomism and holism is to treat societies and cultures not as things with effective causal powers, but as dynamic interrelational processes through which social and psychological practices are ordered over time.” (1999, p. 13).

Martin and Sugarman utilize Giddens’s (1984) theory of structuration to explain the interrelated process of individuals and social co-constitution. In this view, social structures have a regulatory function in the lives of individuals; they dictate parameters for action and meaning in societies. For example, the organization of the US government stipulates that no one should take hold of office by force. The democratic process gives its members a degree of power over the collective norms that rule their lives. However, this political structure requires the participation of individuals to breath life into it. In other words, there can be no democracy without a group of democratic individuals, but we cannot be democratic individuals without a democracy to constitute us as such. Society and individuals need each other to exist. Additionally, this relationship is not static. The structures do not rigidly determine individual behavior any more than the reverse occurs. Once within a structure, individuals re-work their beliefs and values in light of new situations and experiences. As a result, individuals have a historical effect on shaping the form and nature of these institutions as much as the institutions have an effect on shaping its members. Society and individuals are dynamically interactive and mutable.

Martin and Sugarman hold that change in societies arises through psychological individuality, yet they are enabled and constrained by the sociohistorical structures that they inhabit. In their discussion of dynamic interactionism, the theory they propose as a bridge between social and individual explanatory frameworks, they state that:

An ineluctable condition of human existence is that at birth, humans are thrown into already existing societies and cultures that have evolved in a real physical world. As biological organisms equipped with rudimentary physical and perceptual activity, human infants are capable of prereflective embodied experience. (p. 17)

In their view, before we develop reflexive agency our capacity to understand is grounded in a precarious sensory and perceptual apparatus. This embodiment is an existential given that predates the existence of anything like a mind. However, as we become exposed to language and other symbolic mediation processes present in culture, we learn to organize our experience in a way that makes reflexivity emerge. We shift from an unmediated direct perception of the world as biological entities to a reflexive understanding of the world mediated by what these authors call theories of ourselves and the world. Once we develop the cognitive capacities of imagination and memory, we have the ability to hold such theories about ourselves and the world. This capacity to cognitively theorize about the world, the authors argue, is what gives us enough distance from the sociocultural and biological to make innovative decisions. Theories of

self and the world create enough of a separation between the individual and society to create new imagined possibilities:

In our ontology of human existential givens, we rejected the idea of an initial separation of human psychology from its sociocultural context, but subsequently we argued strongly for possibilities of sociocultural innovation and change resident in an emergent, dynamic dualism, one that acknowledges a gradual and graduated separation of individual psychology from its largely sociocultural determinant. (pp. 130-131)

Without this separation and emergent reflexivity, Martin and Sugarman tell us, there is no change and there certainly is no agency. People are initially originated by sociocultural structures and biological conditions, but at a given point individuals develop the capacity to transcend their sociocultural and biological origins. They are able to do so when they have become psychologically constituted. After internalizing societies interpretive practices, individuals develop the capacity to interpret themselves as meaningful actors in a social context. They form personal theories about themselves and the world, which allows them to influence their surroundings in a self-reflexive way. When this occurs, Martin and Sugarman tell us, the psychological has emerged. Once we are constituted as psychological beings, we develop the capacity to make choices, we become agents.

Free Will and Determinism

Martin and Sugarman note that an important philosophical consequence of accepting radical social-constructionism, is the idea that we are fully determined by our environment. Society both originates and regulates the individual in its totality. As a result, the individual is never in a position to diverge from a given social structure, he is determined by it. Within the philosophical debate about freedom and determinism, radical social constructionists fall under the category of hard determinists. In stark contrast to this position, those who hold we possess free will believe we are able to make choices that transcend the situations that they are made in. People in this camp sustain that the individual is completely free to choose his own fate, regardless of the environment. There is also a third alternative to these two positions called compatibilism., which holds that an individual can be both determined and free.

There are a variety of forms that compatibilism can take, but Martin and Sugarman identify one which in their view provides part of the basis for a sound theory of embedded agency. Their form of compatibilism states that individuals are both determined and free because their beliefs and desires are included as a variable in the causal process. If my desires and beliefs are also taken into account in the explanation of the causal chain, then I have made a free choice. For example, imagine you have been socialized to become a civil member of society and you hold civility as a belief and desire. Whenever you act from this belief, you are making a free choice even if the belief itself originates from your upbringing. Freedom in this sense requires congruence between your beliefs and your actions. In essence, once the self becomes part of the

determinant of behavior, then the individual is both determined and free. The trick is that the self, according to Martin and Sugarman, is “underdetermined” by social forces.

Underdetermination is a thesis that Martin and Sugarman’s propose in their new metaphysics of the self. It holds that fundamental dimensions of human existence, such as biology and society, have an impact in determining the self but cannot wholly shape it. These forces underdetermine the self, which in turn opens up a space for self-determination. This self-determination does not occur in a vacuum, however, like many free will defenders claim. According to Martin and Sugarman, it is conditioned by social and biological realities. So, for example, as a member of modern society I can choose to be employed in a variety of professions, but I cannot choose to be a sixteenth century Italian poet, or a phrenologist. To put it another way, I can choose to run instead of walk, but I can’t choose to fly.

Limitations of Martin and Sugarman’s approach

Martin and Sugarman present a persuasive account of how an individual psychology emerges from the social, and how subsequently these two forces in turn shape or constitute each other. In the process, they also take a compatibilist position on the question of free will and human agency, which attempts to integrate our biological and social embeddedness with our experience of ourselves as the agents of our lives. Their view is compelling in many ways, and I take it to be more theoretically sophisticated than the conventional alternatives they discuss.

However, their account of what it means to be an individual that remains embedded in culture contains unexamined assumptions that need to be brought to light and critically examined. Ultimately, their solution invokes notions that run counter to some of its own tenets. For example, when they speak of the internalization of socio-cultural practices they assume an idea of the mind as an inner-space that contains mental representations that mediate our experience with an external world. Additionally, they locate the source of individuality and free choice in cognitive faculties that allows the self to create a theoretical sphere of distance from the world. Lastly, they assume that psychology must be explained within the framework of a natural scientific paradigm. From a Heideggerian (1962) perspective, a source that these authors claim as an influence, their view of selfhood does not transcend the individual/society dualism that it attempts to move beyond. It seems that in their effort to retain an idea of selfhood they revert to the modern Cartesian self that they so thoroughly criticize.

I am suggesting that Martin and Sugarman might want to develop the hermeneutic (Gadamer, 1977, 1984, 2000) dimension of their thought more fully, in order to better accomplish their aim of finding a way that truly goes beyond postmodernism and cognitive constructivism. Such development may be required if Martin and Sugarman's account of selfhood and agency is to escape the theoretical dead ends and untoward practical consequences of postmodernism and cognitive constructivism that they so richly document for us.

Consider, for example, the question of free will and embeddedness touched upon briefly earlier in this work. Martin and Sugarman adopt a version of compatibilism, but Kane (1996) and Richardson and Bishop (2002) present strong arguments against this view. They point out that a careful analysis of compatibilism shows that it dissolves rather than preserves genuine freedom and agency. If our desires and choices are really just links in law-governed chains of efficient causes and their effects, they do not represent genuine freedom or agency but are quite determined by past or current events. If they do represent genuine freedom or agency, it would appear they can do so only as mysterious, unexplainable interventions from beyond the ordinary world and the events in it. The implication of their criticism is that when human beings are seen as another entity in the natural world of physics, the determinism in this perspective does not leave any room for the phenomenon of freedom as experiences in everyday life. However, according to Richardson and Bishop (2002), the pursuit of science relies on the ability to detach from the values and meanings of everyday life. That position "regards the world as it is independently of the meanings it might have for human subjects, or of how it figures in their experience" (p. 438).

It seems that the problems with the individual/social dualism is not that we need to find a novel way to recombine these poles; we need to examine first how each of these categories are defined from the beginning as they carry over assumptions that render any kind of theorizing problematic. Their inability to provide a sustainable solution is didactic. It tells us that without a critical consideration of the concepts we

inherit we run the risk of repeating the problems we attempt to overcome in our theories. By that light, any additive solution of internal and external poles proposed in relational psychoanalysis that does not first engage directly the problems with individuality as defined by Freud—and ultimately by the Western tradition—will likely repeat the individualism that it criticizes. Of course, the issues discussed here about Martin and Sugarman also apply to the problems faced by relational psychoanalysis. To the extent that relational approaches continue to appeal to biology, as Mitchell does in response to postmodern approaches, or to the active role of the mind in constructing reality, as Chodorow does when supporting an individuated process of social construction, they revert to ideas of a separate subject.

Chapter 4: Rethinking Selfhood

Introduction

Throughout this work, relational psychoanalysis has been characterized as an amalgamation of interpersonal and intrapsychic views that can sometimes be at odds with each other. Postmodern psychoanalysis, for example, views the individual as an expression of a socially constructed reality. Instead of a singular self, there are multiple selves constituted by socially dictated roles. Mitchell (2000), though agreeing that we are essentially relational and socially constructed, suggests that an authentic core must remain beneath all social participation as the condition for the possibility of genuine expression of selfhood. According to him, a multiple self can't explain the continuity of self-experience that is manifested in everyday life. As a result, Reis (2005) notes:

“relational psychoanalysis shows itself to be rather tentative in its embrace of postmodernism...there is no fragmented incoherence of subjectivity here, no slip into merged mindlessness where one can no longer tell who is who” (p. 88). In appealing to an underlying core, an essence that is subjacent to all transformation, Mitchell has been criticized for falling back into an individualism that resists being shaped by cultural forces. In this light, Reis (2005) points out that Mitchell's project remains at least in part “modernist”, in spite of his allegiance to a social construction paradigm (p. 88).

This modern vs. postmodern dialectic in relational approaches reveals a problem: how

do we explain both the contextual and the individual character of human experience? How can the self be characterized as fundamentally relational while acknowledging uniqueness and individuality? Stern (2000) aptly summarizes the dilemma relational psychoanalysis faces in the following way: “The problem is to maintain some kernel of psychic life that cannot be completely dissolved in social relations, and to accomplish that without having to posit essences” (p. 762). Pressing for answers, these issues are not just academic given that clinicians, at least in part, rely on theoretical frameworks to structure and direct the therapeutic encounter.

To make matters worse, attempts to overcome this dualism are fraught with conceptual difficulties that appear deeply problematic, if not completely insurmountable. Martin and Sugarman (1999, 2000) proposed a metaphysics of dynamic interactionism, in which individual psychology emerges from sociocultural and biological origins but then transcends its constraints by means of cognitive faculties like memory and imagination. Although it stands as a sophisticated proposal, their appeal to a cognitive distance that frees the individual from the impingement of a tradition is characteristically modern. It is worrisome that even after attempting to critically look at their assumptions, refined theorists like Martin and Sugarman fall back into positions they try to avoid. Taylor (2003) recognizes the perniciously adhesive quality of these ideas we struggle to bring into question. He notes that we have been spellbound by a set of assumptions about the nature of the self, and that “just saying you've abandoned them, and then not giving them any further thought...is a sure recipe

for remaining in their thrall” (p. 158). The reason for this, Taylor argues, is that “just saying that you reject a concept is not necessarily climbing out of the picture that embeds it. You also have to explore and bring to awareness how that picture holds you captive. Just walking away avoids doing this” (p. 168). Martin Heidegger (1993, 1996, 2001) spent most of his life trying to spell out the “picture that embeds” (Taylor, 2003, p. 168) the dualism of intrapsychic vs. interpersonal, which he identified as Cartesian dualism. Heidegger’s philosophy provides a fertile ground to explore our tendency to remain engrossed in this picture.

Martin Heidegger’s influence has extended beyond the confines of philosophy. Hubert Dreyfus (2002) writes that: “his work has been appropriated by scholars in fields as diverse as philosophy, classics, psychology, literature, history, sociology, anthropology, political science, religious studies, and cultural studies” (p. *vii*). This far-reaching influence owes much to his innovative way of thinking about the nature of selfhood and its relationship to the world. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989, 1993, 2000), a student of Heidegger, incisively explored the phenomenon of human understanding as it presents itself in art and history, offering concrete insight into how human beings can be both relational and individual. Charles Guignon (2002, 2004), a contemporary continental philosopher, approaches these questions considering how they intersect with psychotherapy and modern culture. Together, these sources frame the aforementioned theoretical problems in a new light, suggesting plausible ways to rethink the dualism that Martin and Sugarman identify and that pervades relational psychoanalysis.

Martin and Sugarman (1999, 2000) already draw extensively on the ideas of hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger, 1996, 1993, 1996; Gadamer, 1974, 1989) in outlining their theory. Relational approaches, particularly those of the intersubjective school (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002), also draw on Heidegger and hermeneutics to articulate aspects of their position. However, I would like to argue that these approaches do not do full justice to their sources. From a Heideggerian perspective, the risk of dematerializing the self in the process of contextualizing it only presents itself because the definitions of self and culture we utilize are not engaged critically enough. As a result, the question of the relationship between the individual and culture arrives too late and with too much baggage. What is required is a careful exploration of the underlying assumptions given in these concepts and how we could move beyond them.

Martin Heidegger: Theory and Everyday life

Heidegger is well known, among many reasons, for his relentless criticism of the influence of the Cartesian heritage in modern thought. Although his primary area of philosophical research was ontology, the branch of philosophy that inquires about the meaning of being, he developed useful insights about the nature of selfhood in the process of addressing those wider questions. Throughout his work, Heidegger claims that the Western tradition provided us with a misleading way of thinking about who we are that obscures some essential aspects of our day-to-day experience. Under the

influence of Descartes, the “revered father of modern philosophy” (Cottingham, 1998, p. 1), we have learned to interpret ourselves as a “thinking, non-extended thing” (Descartes, 1988, p. 116), minds divorced from an external world of meaningless objects onto which we project meaning. Guignon (2004) argues that to be a person in this view: “...is to be a self-contained, bounded individual, a center of experience and will, with no essential or defining relations to anything or anyone outside oneself” (p. 108). He adds that contemporary philosophers called this view of selfhood the “modern subject” (Guignon, 2004, p. 108), which is characterized by a number of defining features.

Perhaps the most significant is that the subject is endowed with a mind, an internal region that holds the sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that inform our experience of an external world. Heil (2003, p. 16) explains that the Cartesian mind is a non-spatial center of experience to which we have unmediated and private access. Although it seems like we experience things in space, in the Cartesian model of mind all of our experiences are non-spatial, as illustrated by the following:

Consider the phenomenon of 'phantom pain', a phenomenon well known to Descartes and his contemporaries. Amputees often seem to undergo experiences of pains in their amputated limbs. Your big toe could be amputated, yet you still might continue to experience the very same kind of throbbing pain you experienced prior to its amputation, and this pain might seem to you to be in a region at the end of your foot formerly occupied by your big toe. This suggests

that although we experience pains and other sensations as occurring in various bodily locations, it need not follow that experiences occur at those locations.

(Heil, 2003, p. 17)

A consequence of this view is that we don't actually experience external events, but only our representation of them. Of course, Descartes (1988) does not think that the mind arbitrarily formulates our experience without any correspondence to outside events. Its function is to represent what goes on externally. Rorty (1979) explains that this picture presents the "mind as a great mirror containing various representations" (p. 12), of an external world composed of objects. Blackburn (1994) defines this position, called representationalism, as "the doctrine that the mind works on representations of the things and features of things that we perceive or think about", acting as a "container for ideas" (pp. 328-329). Although the Cartesian mind is what makes us different from other types of entities in the universe, we also have an extended body that is a part of the extended world of objects. Cartesian dualism assumes this mechanistic worldview that gained prominence during the enlightenment (Taylor, 1995). Taylor (1995) notes that there is a "link between this representational conception and the new, mechanistic science of the seventeenth century", which "undermined the previously dominant understanding of knowledge and thus paved the way for the modern view" (p. 1). Richardson, Fowers, and Guignon (1999), note that "the early scientists could describe the world as a vast collection of objects on hand for our theorizing and technological control", and "from this perspective, humans are seen as knowing subjects registering

input from the external world, processing the data according to rational procedures, and striving to devise a correct representation of reality” (p. 240). This mechanistic view of the world continues to animate the project of modern natural science as the most basic description of the world (Matthews, 1989, p. 133).

But even if Descartes project fit well with the emergence of a mechanistic worldview, his aim was more ambitious. Bernstein (1983) tells us that Descartes was seeking a unyielding ground for new knowledge “...that could serve as a foundation upon which we could construct a ‘firm and permanent structure in the sciences’...”, one that...“should not rely on unfounded opinions, prejudices, tradition, or external authority, but only upon the authority of reason itself” (p. 17). However, radical doubt deprives Descartes of an external departure point for reasoning, for he can trust none, and thus he is only left with the certainty of self-reflective clarity. Taylor (1995) explains that Descartes undertakes a “reflexive turn, where instead of simply trusting the opinions one has acquired through one’s upbringing, one examines their foundation, which is ultimately to be found in one’s own mind. “ (p. 3). Furthermore, Descartes does not only intend to find a secure foundation for the sciences, his project is also “the quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us” (Bernstein. 1983, p. 18). According to Descartes, disengaged and self-reflective reason provides a foundation for a life that liberates individuals from the errors of prejudice.

Many of these characteristics may sound intuitively correct to a contemporary reader. Yet Heidegger (1996) believes that their obviousness obscures our ability to see the ways in which we are most unlike a Cartesian subject in everyday life. In short, Heidegger thinks that this story about who we are keeps us from seeing how our identity is defined by the relationship we hold to the world, not by our ability to rationally detach from it. Relational psychoanalysis is clearly sympathetic to the Heideggerian critique of the subject given their emphasis on the embedded nature of selfhood. However, I would like to argue that ultimately, relational approaches do not understand it properly and successfully incorporate it.

In an attempt to shake the tight hold that traditional thinking has on us, Heidegger introduces a radically different view of human existence, which he terms Dasein. His work offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between self and world that transcends the internal/external dualism that plagues modern thought, including the work of Martin and Sugarman (1999) and relational psychoanalysis.

Dasein as human existence

Polt (1999) writes that the word Dasein is a German expression that “parallels our word ‘existence’” (p. 29). Heidegger (1996) uses the term to “denote...this entity which each of us is himself” (p. 27), meaning that he intends to discuss human beings. Why choose a new term for such an old subject? Polt (1999) explains that “Heidegger

doubtlessly wants to avoid the tired old term “man” and invent a new usage, in order to get to look at ourselves with fresh eyes” (p. 29). Perhaps because of its departure from previous thought, Heidegger’s subtle vision of selfhood can lend itself to misinterpretation. As a result, it is useful to consider in a preliminary way how his understanding of Dasein can be misconstrued. One of the most common errors is to think of Dasein as a conscious subject. As Dreyfus (1991) explains, Dasein is not a replacement for the term consciousness, but instead “must be understood to be more basic than mental states” (p. 13). Dasein is not a mind that contains internal representations, but, conversely, it is nothing like an object we can encounter in the world: a kind of thing-like entity with properties. It is very important for Heidegger that we avoid interpreting Dasein as a mind or a thing, a subject or an object. In fact, Heidegger introduces the term Dasein precisely to stimulate reflection about who we are beyond these alternatives presented by the Western tradition.

But if we are neither mind nor thing, what are we from Heidegger’s perspective? According to him, that question is loaded because it seeks a ‘what’ in terms of which to define our nature. Unfortunately, the bias of this question is deep-seated since we have interpreted human nature as a type of persisting substance, a core that lies beneath all changes, from the beginnings of Western thought (Guignon, 2004, p. 119). Simply stated, Heidegger’s solution is to shift the question from a ‘what’ to a ‘how’, from asking about what type of substance we are, to pondering about our way of being. His answer to this question comprises most of his major work *Being and Time* (1996), and

although an in-depth analysis of it lies beyond the scope of this work, it is possible to present briefly some of its major concepts.

Heidegger (1993) claims that Dasein has two defining features that make it different from minds and objects; the first is that Dasein cares about its own being: “Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is...distinguished by the fact that in its Being this being is concerned about its very Being” (p. 54). Unlike rocks, computers, or even dogs, we are capable of caring about who we are and what happens to us. Heidegger does not mean by this that we are concerned with our survival, or that we are driven to avoid pain and seek pleasure. He means that we have the possibility of caring about what kind of person we are and about the choices we make in our lives. As Melchert (2006) explains:

This feature of Dasein is so central that Heidegger points to it as the essence of Dasein. In each case—yours, mine—Dasein “has its Being to be” (BT, 33). It is as though Dasein can’t just be (the way spiders are, for example); Dasein has to decide about its Being. How it will be is an issue; its Being, for Dasein, is a problem to be solved; but it cannot be solved in a disinterested way; it is solved only by living—by existing. (p. 599).

Because being is an issue for Dasein, it is always faced with the task of taking a stand for what he or she values in life, even if those choices are not thought about explicitly. For Heidegger, this is an ineludible aspect of our existence: the possibilities

we seize or avoid define who we become. As Polt (1999) explains: “...my own existence is an issue for me: I am assigned the task of being someone, and the way in which I deal with the possibilities open to me will determine who I am” (p. 78).

The second defining characteristic of Dasein, closely related to the first, is that: “The being which this being is concerned about in its being is always my own” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 40). In other words, Dasein needs to be understood in the first-person, not as an abstract speculation about human nature but as the living out of one’s life. Dasein is always concretely you or me: “In accordance with the character of always-being-my-own-being, when we speak of Dasein, we must always use the personal pronoun along with whatever we say” (p. 40). In other words, as I am involved in the process of making decisions and sorting out the meanings in my life, I cannot talk about my existence as an abstract category. Heidegger seems to point out that there is an inescapable *mineness* to our existence, what he calls *Jemeinigkeit*, which makes it possible for us to be concerned about our being. Whether we like it or not, we always have ourselves to be, always remain accompanied by ourselves, even when we attempt to escape or avoid who we are:

Because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only ‘seem’ to do so. But only insofar as it is essentially something which can be authentic - that is, something of its own - can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. As modes of Being, authenticity and inauthenticity. . . are both

grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness.
(Heidegger, 1996, p. 68)

In this passage Heidegger introduces the notion of authenticity, a concept that explains in his view how human beings are deeply embedded in traditions and a shared world of practices, yet are also able to achieve a form of individuation on the basis of this context. In the original German, the term authenticity, *eigentlichkeit*, is etymologically related to the word “own”, much in the way that the English word “authentic” derives from the Greek term *authentēs*, which means “one who acted for himself” (Shipley, 1945, p. 34). In both languages the word points towards the idea of owning up to the choices we make and how they define who we are. Authenticity is a central concept for Heidegger, on the basis of which he explains how one can lead a truly individuated life that (Guignon, 2004). But before exploring its implications, it is necessary to understand Heidegger’s notion of Dasein more fully.

Dreyfus (1991) points out that mineness needs to be clearly distinguished from the Cartesian self: “...it cannot mean that each Dasein has a private world of experience” (p. 25). Mineness does not refer back to a private “I” that is distinct from the world. Mineness means always having a personal stake regarding what happens because of one’s participation in a shared world. In fact, Heidegger strongly argues that Dasein always dwells in a public world of shared meanings and actions. Dasein, Heidegger (1996) argues, is “being-in-the-world” (p. 12). The hyphenation of the term emphasizes that our being, our engaged activity of sorting through our possibilities and

commitments in everyday living, only makes sense in the context of the world in which we make those choices. In Heidegger's (1996) words: "the compound expression 'being-in-the-world' indicates...that it stands for a unified phenomenon" (p. 49). Dasein cannot be understood separately from the world in which it acts. Its relationship to the world is constitutive of its identity such that there is no Dasein without a world in which it dwells.

However, Dreyfus (1991) remarks, Dasein is in the world in an entirely different way than a stone is in the river: "in English we...distinguish between two senses of 'in': a spatial sense ('in the box') and an existential sense ('in the army', 'in love'). The first use expresses inclusion, the second conveys involvement...Being-in as being involved is definitive of Dasein" (p. 43). Dasein relates to its "there" in an entirely different way than objects occupy space. Dreyfus' use of the word involvement indicates that Dasein maintains an open relationship to places, not merely occupying space but belonging, or failing to belong, to them. When we ask someone where they are from, for example, we are not merely curious about the physical location of their birth, but rather about the influences that define at least part of their identity. The reader might wonder whether there is anything special or noteworthy about this observation, because obviously people are different than objects by virtue of being conscious. From Heidegger's perspective, this rebuttal entirely misses the experience of what it is like to be involved in the world. The dominant scientific interpretation of the self as physical organisms with minds entirely passes over this phenomenon. As a result, being-in-the-world is

reduced to having internal ideas about external objects. If Heidegger is right, being involved is nothing like holding internal representations, but more like having an inarticulate sense of how and why things matter to us, which he calls having an understanding of being.

Polt notes (1999) that: "...we have a 'there' as no other entity does, because for us, the world is understandable" (p. 30). For Heidegger, our having a "there" relies on a background intelligibility that he calls a "vague and average understanding of being" (1996, p. 4). But for Heidegger, this type of understanding is not an intellectual grasp of a fact, but rather an ability to cope practically with a situation. Grodin (2002) observes that:

In this regard, one who "understands" something is not so much someone endowed with a specific knowledge, but someone who can exercise a practical skill. A good cook, a good teacher, a good soccer player is not necessarily an apt theoretician of his trade, but he "knows" his trade, as the English locution puts it. This "knowing" is, of course, less cognitive than practical, as one "knows" how to swim. So it is with the basic understanding on which we thrive and by way of which we sort our way through life. (p. 38)

Understanding for Heidegger, is first and foremost a lived grasp of a situation on the basis of concrete possibilities of Dasein. As we go about our daily business, we have a lived understanding of what things mean and how we have to deal with them. For example, responsible driving requires knowing how to seamlessly operate the

vehicle, understanding the rules that govern being on a shared road, and maintaining a vigilant awareness of changing conditions in the environment. But driving expertise is not a cognitively explicit grasp of these realities, but rather a situated and lived understanding that allows someone to respond appropriately and skillfully to a given situation. We rely on this background familiarity and coping ability, for example, when we have to break to avoid an accident. An intellectual grasp of the car's manual and traffic rules does not make an expert driver. When we need to break in a mere instant, there is no time to form mental representations that serve as a directive for action. If we had to become cognitively aware of the situation before making the decision to break, it would get in the way of our ability to cope skillfully with a potential accident. Before we engage in any act of thematic cognitive reflection, we already have an inarticulate sense of what things are and how they matter in the world. According to Heidegger, this background sense of what is real precedes any thought process and provides the condition for the very possibility for its existence. To oversimplify, Heidegger is saying that being precedes and grounds thinking, thus deliberately reversing the well-known Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum*.

Clearly, there are times when we can and do abstract away from our lived understanding of the world for certain purposes, as in the case of scientific experimentation. Scientists keep the object they study at a personal distance in order to develop theories that describe it a way that is detached from everyday opinions and attitudes. They are trained to conduct randomized clinical trials, for example, to

eliminate the possibility of affecting the results through experimenter bias. Certainly this is appropriate when evaluating the effectiveness of a new drug in cancer treatment. How the physician feels about the drug, whether she has a family member who is in the late stages of the disease, or whether a pharmaceutical company whose success depends on a positive outcome funds her, cannot enter into the equation. But that attitude of neutrality and indifference is only a modification, a temporary one, of an engaged understanding we maintain in our everyday dealings with things. This becomes evident, for example, when the results of the research provide a favorable outcome and the researcher meets this with marked enthusiasm. As Mulhall (1996) notes, Heidegger:

...begins by pointing out that our dealings with the world typically absorb or fascinate us; our tasks, and so the various entities we employ in carrying them out, preoccupy us. Theoretical cognition of entities...should therefore be understood as a modification of such concern, as an emergence from this familiar absorption into a very different sort of attitude. (p. 43)

Heidegger is saying that explicit theoretical representation is not the most basic way in which we relate to the world. The average and most familiar way in which we are in the world, he tells us, is concerned involvement. By being engrossed and occupied in the activities of daily living we take up certain possibilities that define who we are. We are always engaged in practical coping, dealing with this or that possibility, in a shared context of significance. Even when we choose to turn away from our everyday dealings with things to become an objective observer, the attitude of

indifferent detachment is itself a mode of relating to things for certain purposes in a determinate context.

In this light, the idea that our individuality might arise from cognitive abilities, or from an internal psychological space, becomes suspect. Rather, this idea seems very close to the Cartesian view of personhood that Heidegger, and often Martin and Sugarman themselves, criticize. The Cartesian subject comes into its own precisely by separating itself from its surroundings and traditions, seeking always to represent them in neutral and objective ways. Charles Taylor (1993) explains that such a “disengaged perspective” is actually “a rare and regional achievement of a knowing agent whose normal stance [is] engaged” (p. 323). Our more fundamental “implicit understanding” or what Heidegger calls “pre-understanding is “not a matter of representation” It involves a “background sense of reality” that is “nonrepresentational, because it is something we possess in--that is inseparable from--our actual dealings with things” (p. 327). Only occasionally and for a time do we actually hold explicit theories about the world, and then only in the context of a lived understanding of the possibilities that our culture and traditions offer us as participants in them.

Likewise, the idea that we relate to others by reenacting internalized representations of relational patterns also becomes suspect. It seems more appropriate to speak of our way of being with others, where relationships are neither inside a mind nor objectively present in an external reality, like a fully formed object waiting to be discovered. Relationships, and cultural participation for that matter, carry us forward

through shared practices and common meanings in a way that is not captured by talk of subjective or even intersubjective experience. That way of interpreting who we are presupposes that meaning resides in the subject and then becomes outwardly projected onto a neutral reality. If Heidegger is right, the relational matrix that relational psychoanalysts describe cannot originate from a mind or even from a communion of minds. Relationships would precede any kind of mental representation of them. Furthermore, locating them in the individual as a projection of meaning, even if it is mutual, interactive, and negotiated, attributes to people an unreasonable level of control over their relationships' direction and shape. Intersubjective space cannot be appropriately grasped as a combination of separate individuals, however egalitarian.

Vessey (2005), addressing Gadamer's (2000) ideas on dialogue, comments that current discussions of intersubjectivity derive, or at least parallel, Martin Buber's concept of an I-Thou relationship. According to Vessey this is problematic because: "I-Thou relations embody a mystifying substantialization", and we should look instead at "dialogical approaches", which "invoke "the between" as the space of the encounter between I and Thou; a space that cannot be grasped intellectually" (p. 62). This in-betweenness, for lack of a better term, cannot be grasped as a mixture of two positions, but rather as a space within which positions come to be expressed and understood. In other words, I can share my point of view with someone only because there is a prior shared engagement that makes this possible and intelligible.

Here, Gadamer's (1975) reflections on our participation in history are applicable to our participation in relationships as well:

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. (p. 278).

Gadamer is indirectly referring here to a feature of human existence that Heidegger (1996) calls our "thrownness" (p. 174), the fact that we always find ourselves in a situation with its set of constraints and available meanings, inherited from our past. In its most radical sense, Heidegger means that we are thrown into the world, without having chosen our gender, race, religion, place of origin, and all other constitutive conditions that we are born into. But also in everyday life, as we navigate the challenges of any given moment, being thrown means that we arrive at that moment from a past that gives it a determinate shape with its set of conditions and possibilities. In other words, Heidegger is saying that at any given moment, we never have the option of jumping out of our own skins. As Dreyfus (1991) puts it: "I am always already surrounded by objects that matter in some specific way. Dasein is thus always already given and then needs to take a stand on what it is. It is a self-interpreting foundness. Heidegger calls this foundness or givenness thrownness" (p. 173).

Our thrownness becomes intelligible to us, according to Heidegger, through our moods. However, far from being an intrapsychic phenomenon, he thinks that moods are a way of being attuned to our situation. Again, Heidegger cleverly uses his native language to make his point, as the German word for mood, *Stimmung*, also means to tune an instrument (Inwood, 2000, p. 41). Instead of a type of mental content, Heidegger sees in moods a disclosive relationship to our situation. Moods bring our involvement in situations into relief. In contrast to emotions, that have a specific object towards which they are directed, moods reflect the whole of our experience at a given time. For example, when one is in a depressed mood everything appears as negative or defeating. As Beck (1979) has persuasively argued in his approach, a depressive state colors the whole structure of our thinking. For Heidegger, however, a depressed mood does not represent a failing or distortion on our part, but rather it reflects our ongoing attunement to our situation. And situations, according to Heidegger, are always already meaningfully given to us from a past from which we are thrown. We always arrive to situations as having already been somewhere before. Hence, when we come across an acquaintance that is visibly upset, we immediately ask what happened to them to cause them to feel that way.

Although our relationship to a past informs the meanings that are available at a given time, Heidegger (1996) finds that having a future is a more important dimension of human existence. As Inwood (2000) explains: “Dasein's potentiality or possibility is prior to its actuality: Dasein is not a definite actual thing, but the possibility of various

ways of being” (p. 23). Because Dasein is its agentic involvement in the world, and not a fully formed thing located in the present, having future possibilities is its defining characteristic. As initially stated, being concerned with its own being is what makes Dasein different than other entities. For Heidegger, being human entails that we are always confronted with the need to make a choice and projecting ourselves towards a future. Of course, the range of one’s possibilities is always constrained by the past. Heidegger does not believe we are pure choice detached from our history. As Warnke (1987) explains: “the way in which we have understood the past and the way our ancestors have projected the future determines our own range of possibilities” (p. 39). At the same time, Warnke (1987) notes that “the way in which we anticipate the future defines the meaning the past can have for us” (p. 39). This indicates that we are not constituted by the accruing weight of past circumstances; rather the very meaning of our past events depends on the possibilities that I am pursuing. For example, a person training to become a professional violinist who loses a pinky finger might be more affected than another individual who loses a hand.

As a result of having both a past and a future, Dasein is always already ahead of itself and being carried forward by projects, explicit or implicitly pursued, that become possible by drawing on its past. Dasein is not only thrown into a past, but also throws itself into a future; he or she is not only embedded in a tradition but is also being carried forward by motives and projects. As Dreyfus (1991) notes: “Dasein is thus *already in, ahead of itself, and amidst*” (p. 244). Dasein always finds itself always caught in this

ongoing embedded projecting within which the meaning of a situation becomes apparent. In other words, things matter to us because we have a past and a future, and of course a present in which their significance opens up to us. For Heidegger, time is the basis on which things matter for us, the ground upon which we are concernfully involved in the world. However, when Heidegger identifies Dasein with its situated involvement, he is not saying that it needs to be reduced to the actualities that surround him at the present time. Quite the opposite, Dasein can only be present in a situation insofar as it is already pressing forward into a future on the basis of a past. Guignon (2002) explains that, for Heidegger: “to be in a situation...is to be part of an unfolding story with a distinctive temporal structure”, and as a result “the I is historical” (p. 83). Consequently, the Heideggerian self needs to be grasped as an unfolding event rather than a kind of enduring substance, like the tradition has typically defined it. Guignon (2002) fleshes out this embedded view of selfhood, so inextricably tied to situations, by exploring Heidegger’s account of a climber reaching the summit of a mountain:

...watching the sunrise at the top of the mountain, I experience myself not as a subject having experiences, and certainly not as an organism functioning in a geographical location. Instead, I experience myself as the climber who prepared for days, who rose before sunrise, who braved the cold, who reached the summit after a difficult climb, and who is now in touch with the beauty of nature. Far from being one item among others in this scene, my identity as a human is

constituted by the entire lived context that makes up my dwelling in the world.

(p. 84).

Guignon (2002) illustrates how the self is, in its very essence, defined by its lived relationship to the situation in which it participates. Looking for an underlying substantial self that is separate from its situation, that then somehow internalizes it, misses the way we actually live through those experiences. Additionally, Guignon (2002) also explains Heidegger's (1996) point that our ability to be engaged and open to the world is only possible on the basis of our relationship to time. In other words, we can be part of the world because we have a past where we come from, a future towards which we head, and a present with which we are concerned. As Mulhall (1996) explains: "for Dasein to disclose entities is for it to manifest a present concern for them, that grows from its having taken on a project and being oriented towards its future realization" (p. 155). Heidegger holds that having this relationship to the three temporal structures, what he calls being historical, allows us to be involved in the world.

However, Heidegger (1996) criticizes our usual definition of time for being too focused on the present, claiming that we understand it as "a continuous stream of nows" (p. 463). Scharff (1971) notes that, according to Heidegger, "everyday common sense is perfectly well satisfied to think of time as an objective structure through whose phases things, others, and oneself 'pass,' moment by moment" (p. 28). In contrast, Heidegger proposes that we reverse our focus on the present to recognize that our moment-to-moment involvements are only possible on the basis of having a relationship to the past

and the future. In other words, my being concerned with an ongoing activity at a given time point is dependent on having already been engaged on a preceding activity that continues to be directed on the basis of a concrete possibility. As a result, time is understood as an unfolding event or trajectory, which has a ‘from’, a ‘towards’, and a ‘here’—past, future, and present—as opposed to a series of linear time points that stretch infinitely and homogeneously backward and forward. Existential time, as Heidegger (1996) calls it, is what makes it possible to be engaged actors in an unfolding meaningful life drama, because it allows us to have a temporal orientation: a specific relationship to our tradition, our future possibilities, and our present involvement. In turn, this constitutes the basis of our identity that, according to Heidegger, is itself the unfolding plot of our life.

Ultimately, Heidegger (1996) can be seen as radicalizing the insights of a relational approach by stating that Dasein is an unfolding relationship to the world. However, he contextualizes a relational insight within a critique of traditional Western philosophy, allowing him to understand the self as an ongoing unfolding event rather than an enduring fixed core. In this picture, the “core” of Dasein has the unity of a story unfolding from birth to death. Although selfhood has a narrative structure, it is not a text like postmodernists claim at times. Rather, selfhood is a happening that has the structure of a story as an unfolding occurrence with meaning and continuity. We can and often do stop to articulate our life trajectory explicitly, enriching its meaning and

clarifying its direction. At these times we confront ourselves, and often reevaluate who we are, as we articulate our experiences on the basis of who we want to be.

Psychotherapy is a specific form of that explicit articulation of one's aims and participation in life, an activity that can be seen as an exercise in self-understanding. This type of reflective activity is not circumscribed to psychological self-examination; one often takes stock of one's life in several contexts, like civic engagement, religion, and more pervasively in open dialogue with our immediate family and friends. What is common to all these experiences is the act of self-examination, so well captured in the expression taking stock of one's life, which refers to a careful assessment of the cumulative meaning of life in light of what needs renewal, replenishing, or change.

Unfortunately, Heidegger (1996) claims, in modern times our ability to pause to take stock of one's life has become increasingly difficult for a number of reasons. First of all, we often find ourselves having no time because of the endless stream of ongoing engagements that claim our attention and dispose us in constant hurried busyness. Ironically, the very engrossing business of everyday living prevents us from reflecting on the ultimate aims of our activities in light of our life as a whole. Equally perplexing, Heidegger notes, is that the cultural meanings on the basis of which we need to evaluate our life as a whole have been de-legitimized by enlightenment critiques and scientific thinking. In the current cultural ethos, meaning and values are seen as either objectively real or subjectively created (Taylor, 1989). As a result, we are left with no recourse but to either accept the traditional values as given or to reject them as arbitrary and create

our own. Of course, either option is problematic, especially in the context of psychoanalysis where the explicit aim of treatment is to achieve change that is grounded in a reworking of meanings rather than passive acceptance or wholesale rejection of them.

Yet the modern condition leaves little room for a middle road, because as a series of fully formed moments in a deterministic chain of cause and effects, “the role of culture and language always threatens either to engulf life in simple determinism, as in Western science, or else leave us with little to do except continually engage in a vigilant ‘decentering’ or ‘deferring’ of whatever is just now being said” (Scharff, 1997, p. 4). The second alternative references postmodern appeals to embrace a vigilant and ironic detachment from our traditions, which become materials for a project of individualistic self-construction. The problem with this approach, Zimmerman (2000) tells us, is that it leaves us feeling empty once the exhilarating openness of boundless possibilities turns into disorientation and shallow overstimulation: “many people find themselves confronted with captivating, seductive, and expansive options that allow people readily to exchange one identity for another, such as Internet chat rooms...despite all the excitement, some people report feeling disintegrated, superficial, even dehumanized” (p. 123).

Gilles Lipovetsky (2005), echoing Heidegger, notes that postmodernism brought “the concomitant triumph of consumerist norms centered on living in the present”, which “indicated the advent of an unprecedented social temporality marked by the

primacy of the here-and-now” (p. 29). This presentism promotes an asphyxiating absorption into the tasks of the modern moment, leaving no time for reflections about origins and purposes. In this light, Heidegger’s appeal to open up to a different temporal orientation, one in which there is a sense of unfolding continuity with a tradition that is meaningfully retrieved in light of current concerns, becomes poignantly appealing. Heidegger will call this type of historical orientation an authentic one, which leads to the emergence of an authentic self.

Authentic selfhood

According to Guignon (2004), Heidegger (1962) views selfhood as “an unfolding event or happening that is so thoroughly enmeshed in a shared lifeworld that there is no way to draw a sharp line between either self and world or self and others” (p. 120). However, Guignon observes that Heidegger also speaks of an authentic self that provides cohesiveness to the multiplicity of our social and worldly involvements, which seems to clash with his other account of a socially enmeshed self. Guignon’s examination reveals a tension between individual and social accounts of selfhood that echoes the conceptual problems of relational approaches. However, unlike relational psychoanalysis, Heidegger is not concerned with defending some form of intrapsychic reality as the basis for individuality. Heidegger’s (1962) authentic self is not a psychological substance but nevertheless has the “constancy” (p. 166) and “selfsameness” (p. 168) of individual identity while remaining part of a shared world. In

Heidegger's view, authentic individuality is not a way of transcending our ties to society in the name of self-realization, but a way of existing within it.

Everyday life is only possible, Heidegger (1996) tells us, because of public meanings and activities. Even being alone is possible only because we are temporarily withdrawing from a shared world, and even when we are unaccompanied we can't escape into a private language or culture. As Guignon (2004) notes, the "ongoing happening of our lives never exists in isolation from the wider context of the world" (p. 123). Daily interaction requires this public horizon of conventions and interlocking goals through which we can reach an understanding. However, as noted before, Heidegger is critical of the way in which our engrossed participation in the modern world engenders a presentism that prevents us from reflecting on life purposes and the basis for our decisions. In this sense, the social world is a double-edged sword because: "in the complacency of worldly existence we become so absorbed in the things that show up on the current scene" that we become "assured that everything has already been worked out and nothing really calls for a decision" (Guignon, 1993, p. 30).

Heidegger (1962) holds that certain experiences help us break out of our quotidian contentment. Although he initially identified anxiety in the face of death as the most important of those experiences, in his later thinking he gave equal weight to other ones such as profound dissatisfaction, joyous elation, and serene reflection (Pattison, 2000). The importance of those moments rests on their power to shift our attention from the things in the world to our responsibility for our existence. Heidegger

(1962) calls that change in focus a “moment of vision” (p. 376) in which we face up to the task of living, because we grasp our existence as a “story unfolding ‘between life and death’” (Guignon, 1993, p. 8) in which decisions must be made and not everything is possible. Within this orientation, “the overall shape our lives take is an issue for us” (Guignon, 2004, p. 127) and what really matters stands in sharp relief, granting a degree of clarity to our choices without rendering them easy or simplistic. Heidegger argues that this committed examination of our life as a whole builds an enduring selfhood that is based on how we live, not on what we are.

Heidegger’s authentic selfhood rests on understanding our mortality as the contour within which life can be grasped as a whole thus making our choices meaningful. Yet according to Gadamer (2000), Heidegger’s appeal to mortality personalizes our experience of finitude at the expense of minimizing the inherently dialogical nature of self-understanding. For Gadamer, the unfolding story that constitutes selfhood is not a monologue but a conversation within which we understand what is most important and make our decisions. In his view, our being comes into relief only in dialogue because “I experience my own limitation through the encounter with the Other” (Gadamer, 2000, p. 285). As a result, dialogue provides the contours within which our life gains coherence. As Vessey (2002) argues:

For Gadamer we exist in conversation or in dialogue with one another and it is through these conversations that we fully come to realize our limitations.

Dialogue is an irreplaceable means for self-understanding. There are insights about ourselves attainable through dialogue that we would not be able to attain any other way. This view, if true, would undermine Heidegger's argument that authenticity is attained only by turning away from others and finding the one thing that will definitively individuate us. Instead authenticity requires turning toward others and engaging others in dialogue. (para. 3)

In this light, selfhood is understood as inescapably relational because it emerges and endures by participating in an ongoing cultural conversation (Taylor, 1994, p. 32). Gadamer enriches Heidegger's authentic individual by making its struggle to define its identity a shared pursuit rather than the individual commitment prevalent in Heidegger's early thought (Pattison, 2000). Later in his work, Heidegger (1968, 1971) would focus on the role of language and our participation in history in taking up our existence authentically. Gadamer's account of dialogical understanding can be construed in part as a continuation of this thinking.

Gadamer and understanding

Within academic circles, Gadamer (1975) is well known for his development of philosophical hermeneutics, an approach aimed in part at challenging prevailing ideas about the role of method in the humanities and social sciences. As Warnke (1987) notes: "his ideas on understanding and interpretation have been applied to a wide-

ranging series of discussions: to questions of interpretation in the study of art and literature, to issues of knowledge and objectivity in the social sciences; to related debates in such disciplines as theology and jurisprudence; and even to re-evaluations of the project of philosophy itself” (p. *ix*).

Gadamer’s principal aim, however, was to develop a philosophy of human understanding that builds on Heidegger’s insights regarding the inevitable influence of tradition and its impact and self-understanding. Blackburn (1994) defines hermeneutics as “the method of interpretation first of texts, and secondly of the whole social, historical, and psychological world” (p. 172). This definition is faithful to the origins of hermeneutics as a method for the interpretation of biblical writings, and later as a general theory of interpretation that rests on correct utilization of methodology (Warnke, 1987, p. 1-6). But for Gadamer, hermeneutics is not a methodological discipline but a philosophical exploration into the conditions for the possibility of understanding in general.

The heart of Gadamer’s (1975) hermeneutics is reflected in his effort to subvert the modern meaning of the term prejudice as an undesirable bias: “...if we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices” (p. 277). For Gadamer, prejudice is the condition for the possibility of any understanding, because in order to make sense of our experiences we need to have a certain ground from which to begin to grasp what addresses us. In other words,

understanding is not the imprinting of an external piece of information into a mental blank slate, but the dialogue between our background sense of reality and the matter that addresses us in the foreground. Heidegger's (1996) thinking is a clear point of departure for Gadamer, noting that: "interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given... what is initially "there" is nothing else than the self-evident, undisputed prejudice of the interpreter, which is necessarily there in each point of departure" (p. 141). Thus, we are always relying on pre-judgment in order to make sense of our experience because we need a working stance from which to make sense of what we encounter. According to Gadamer, if we really had to suspend belief for anything that we had not explicitly judged, then it would be impossible to get along in the world. In this light, Bernstein (2002) portrays Gadamer's project as an attempt to correct the Enlightenment's view of understanding, in which authority and tradition were seen as dogma that required the emancipatory power of critical reason. From Gadamer's perspective, grounding our understanding on critical rationality that aims to be free from assumptions fails to grasp that "all understanding requires prejudices or prejudgments—prejudgments that are inherited from tradition" (p. 272).

However conditioned and prejudiced, understanding in Gadamer's sense does not have to become provincial. First of all, prejudices are rooted in cultures that are composed by various heterogeneous voices. While some may remain dominant, it is always possible to retrieve less prominent ones in light of changing circumstances. More importantly, although we begin to understand from our prejudices, we do not need

to remain stuck in them but are capable of revising them in light of new situations and experiences. For example, the civic dialogue that unfolded profoundly challenged the prejudices present before the civil rights movement. In the hermeneutic view, such transformation does not come about by escaping prejudice, but by critically engaging it on the basis of a better understanding. This better understanding itself does not arise from some enlightened rationality that transcends the limits of cultural prejudice. It is itself an understanding developed by reworking already existing possibilities within the tradition. The ideal of equality was already available as part of the civic discourse in the 1950's. However, this idea had to be appropriated and reinterpreted in light of current needs and concerns for it to open up the political possibilities that it did. This engagement with a possibility inherent in the tradition, in the form of critical appropriation, allowed members of society to change their social standing. Such possibilities would only be marginally available in other periods, or perhaps not be available for appropriation at all.

However, Gadamer (1975) recognizes that critical appropriation, and in fact all dialogue, requires an openness that grants us the freedom to think critically and confront perspectives. Gadamer characterizes this freedom as a distinctively human phenomenon: "other creatures do not have a relationship to the world, but are, as it were, embedded in their environment...man's relationship to the world is characterized by freedom from environment" (p. 444). Echoing Heidegger, he reminds us that Dasein holds an open relationship to a world rather than being instinctually determined by an

environment. According to Gadamer (1975), this openness is realized in language, which grants us a “free, distanced orientation” (p. 445) in the process of “coming to an understanding” (p. 446) with others. In other words, having a shared language opens up a space of meanings and concerns that allows us to consider different perspectives. By enacting language in dialogue, we try to reach an understanding about a common matter giving ourselves over to the conversation itself. As Guignon (2004) explains: “in his description of authentic conversation, Gadamer shows how the participants in the conversation can leave behind their self-preoccupation”, letting the “ongoing play of ideas...carry the matter forward” (p. 165). Clearly this open engagement is not a distance from meaning, as in objective detachment, but rather a meaningful distance in which we are able to let what we encounter address us in its otherness. In this sense, it represents an example of what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit*, or releasement, which Dreyfus (1992) describes as “a serene openness to a possible change in our understanding of being” (p. 339). This releasement, requires “letting beings be” as an active process of receptive and engaged understanding (Heidegger, 1993, p. 125). However, understanding in this sense is not just an intellectual exchange of ideas, but a “ life process in which a community of life is lived out” (Gadamer 1975, p. 446).

From a hermeneutic perspective, coming to an understanding in treatment does not mean avoiding oppression and maintaining equality, but actively engaging with the patient by quieting our expectations and giving ourselves over to the matter at hand. This kind of active listening, which should be familiar to a practicing therapist, has a

binding force that has nothing to do with being free in the modern sense. Nor can this listening be free from assumption or prejudice, given the situated nature of understanding. To be sure, there is a risk of becoming too one-sided in our prejudices, but Gadamer believes there is always a corrective in dialogue, in letting the other's claim show us our limits. Of course, this presupposes that we enter into dialogue authentically, meaning that we are always seriously open to the truth value of what our partner says. Seen from this light, the self is this ongoing authentic conversation that reminds us of our limits and effectively shapes the meaning of our life. If for Heidegger the self is an unfolding story, for Gadamer it is better understood as an unfolding conversation.

Personhood and Embeddedness

Martin and Sugarman (1999) are right in attempting to transcend the either/or of modern and postmodern approaches to selfhood. Both fail to address important aspects of our existence: our capacity for agency and our belonging to a social structure. After all, we are all people whose identity depends on social frameworks of meaning, but who are also capable of innovation and agency. However, recognizing these two realities does not necessitate that we posit a theoretical or psychological distancing from our traditions. Doing so entails at least partly assuming a Cartesian view of personhood, one that fails to see that originality and agency arise mainly from engaged interpretations of

our historical possibilities rather than mainly from neutralizing and objectifying our world in order to obtain the distance needed to exercise our distinctive human agency.

In relational approaches, Mitchell's (2000) appeal to an enduring core ends up betraying a retreat into the individualism that it tries to escape. Whatever core remains through and behind social construction must be unaffected by it, and thus at least partially solipsistic. But beyond this, Mitchell wants to retain the concept of an intrapsychic life, and from Heidegger's perspective this proves problematic in many ways. The most important of these problems is that doing so places meaning inside a subject rather than in the unfolding of a storied or conversational self.

On the other hand, postmodern critiques of this notion of interiority involve a total dissolution of the self, which brings about problems of its own. Even if we acknowledge that there are multiple selves, it is hard for postmodernists to explain how we maintain a sense of enduring identity. Clearly, thinking of the self as singular and enduring can be limiting, rigid, and oppressive. But living in constant fragmentation and ambiguity does not seem like an appealing alternative. Postmodernists readily accept that there is no longer an absolutely secure foundation for our identity, and in the face of this they often retreat into a pragmatic relativism. But their position betrays an underlying belief that absolute knowledge is the only type of knowledge, and in the absence of this we are left with nothing but individual subjectivity. Their resulting ironic detachment is not too different from scientific indifference. A socially constituted self is never in the position to arbitrarily pick and choose his or her beliefs. As Gadamer

notes, our prejudices set the playing field for the possibility for understanding. Even though we can challenge them, improve them, or embrace them upon further examination, what we can never do is to think that we can detach from them in such a way that we are in the position to merely reject them.

The psychoanalytic intersubjectivists (Stolorow, Orange, and Atwood, 2001) present a more nuanced approach. They recognize that appealing to intrapsychic experience is problematic in many fronts. In fact, they often criticize their relational colleagues for remaining enthralled by modernism. But their discussion of individual worlds is inconsistent with Heidegger's and Gadamer's philosophy. For them, the world is never something that is individually constituted. It certainly depends on the participation of individuals, but it is not contained within them or carried along with them as personal structures of meanings. Even though we can have many different experiences in the world, we are still part of the same social reality. Of course, this does not mean that everyone's experience is the same. Differences and conflict in our experience of the world based on gender and race are real, but they always presuppose a common arena of social engagement within which we have our disagreements and conflict. After all, if we were all truly inhabiting our own worlds, we would not have so much to disagree on because we would not be relating to each other to begin with.

Many of these conflicting views do a good job of exposing the shortcomings and problems with the other side of the argument, and in doing so they may intimate a fresh approach of a third way beyond these extremes in the mind of a sensitive reader.

However, they say very little about what that third way or genuine path would be. I believe the hermeneutic view I have discussed here sketches such a view in a broad but credible way. Although there are many details to be filled in and many questions to be answered, it seems to me hermeneutics offers a fresh point beyond these clashing perspectives. In the end, it seems best to understand hermeneutics not as offering a theoretical replacement to relational approaches, but rather as providing a wider context within which their best insights can be incorporated and some of their limitations transcended. Construed as an authentic conversation that is always open to revision through partnering dialogue, the self can be understood as both essentially relational yet also capable of agency and responsibility.

Chapter 5: Clinical implications

Introduction

As previously stated, an inquiry into our understanding of selfhood is limited if it does not inform the realities of clinical practice. Unfortunately, according to several prominent psychoanalytic theorists, the relationship between theoretical innovation and clinical practice in psychoanalysis is far from being understood with clarity. Loewald (1970) warns us that “an investigation of the relationship of psychoanalytic theory to the psychoanalytic process and method is fraught with difficulties and pitfalls” (p. 45), and Greenberg (1986) notes that “few issues in psychoanalysis are quite so muddled, or tend to generate quite so much confusion in the mind of the clinician, as the relationship between theory and technique” (p. 87), while Ornstein and Ornstein (2003) note “there is a high degree of ambiguity in the psychoanalytic literature about the precise role and function of theory in the psychoanalytic treatment process” (p. 157).

Nevertheless, many psychoanalytic thinkers also argue that even if we can't properly grasp their relationship, theory and practice are inextricably tied. For example, Smith (2003) makes the case that “theory ‘thinks’ in the analyst” (p. 1) by providing a framework for the selection of relevant information in what would otherwise be an overwhelming amount of possible interpretations. Conversely, while theory frames the clinical encounter, Loewald (1970) reminds us that it needs to “keep faith with our work as analysts”, such that its abstractions are valuable only insofar as they respond to the

particulars of the session (p. 45). In other words, theories must helpfully address the here-and-now reality of the session. This need to make the theory relevant to the particulars of the encounter requires the analyst to apply it in specific ways. According to Greenberg (1986):

Theory applied is, inevitably, theory interpreted. Personal predilection gives the application an idiosyncratic, and decisive, cast. By the time it is run through the analyst's particular vision of human life, not to mention his personality, the impact of theory is difficult to trace. (p. 87)

The interconnectedness of personal and theoretical positions does not amount, according to Greenberg (1986), to a subordination of “theory to intuition, empathy, and pragmatism” (p. 87). Even if the application of theory requires adopting a first-person perspective, the substance of those theoretical principles still compels the analyst to pursue certain directions in treatment, even if it cannot prescribe action directly and unequivocally. For example, the classical dictum to avoid gratifying the patient stands in stark contrast to the relational emphasis on participative disclosure.

On the other hand, Fonagy (2003) is right in qualifying the influence of theory on practice by noting that “it has been impossible to achieve any kind of one-to-one mapping between therapeutic technique and theoretical frameworks” (p. 25). Additionally, Fonagy (2003) argues, psychoanalytic theory has often been driven by clinical discoveries, which casts doubt on the traditional image of technique organically flowing from a refined theoretical position. Fonagy’s (2003) observation certainly gains

support from Kohut's (1979) and Guntrip's (1996) clinical grounding for their theoretical shift. It seems then that there is an interplay of theoretical and practical dimensions in the clinical encounter and in the development of theory. Ornstein and Ornstein's (2003) reflections on the influence of theory on practice are particularly relevant here:

Each clinical presentation we listen to quickly reveals the existence of two artificially separable, but in reality thoroughly intertwined, layers of experience in the analytic situation. The first layer of experience consists of the clinical atmosphere created by the analytic dyad: for example, how patient and analyst greet each other; how the issues regarding the fee are negotiated; how silences are tolerated by each; and so on. The experiences in the first layer are affected by the experiences in the second layer. The impact of the analyst's particular public theory can be more readily discerned in the second layer, based on what the analyst selects to comment on— what areas he or she chooses to investigate and to interpret” (p. 159)

Ornstein and Ornstein (2003) present theory and practice as interrelated layers of psychoanalytic experience that mutually inform each other, arguing that personal, interpersonal, and theoretical positions all influence the therapeutic encounter. In spite of their acute observations, we are left wondering just how this interrelatedness unfolds in the consulting room. How is it that theory affects practice and vice versa?

Greenberg's (1986) observation that "theory applied is, inevitably, theory interpreted" suggests that utilizing theory is like following the assembling instructions for a new piece of furniture. Clinical judgment enables a therapist to respond at the right time and for the right purpose rather than follow rule-based behavior. In fact, we read manuals when we lack the expertise to do something. Dreyfus (2000) notes that the mark of a novice is precisely this need for rules, while expertise is characterized by knowing "how to perform the appropriate action without calculating and comparing alternatives" (p. 159). At the point of expertise "theory 'thinks' in the analyst" (Smith, 2003, p. 1) organically informing the ongoing dialogue. However, as a context bound interpretive process, the voice of theory in practice must respond to the realities of the analyst-patient relationship rather than dictating the direction of treatment. For that reason, effective practice involves listening to the voice of theory as much as developing useful clinical theory involves listening to the unfolding relationship between analyst and patient. Yet, once more, it is far from entirely clear how this process unfolds, or should unfold, in treatment.

Theory and practice reconsidered

Part of what obscures the concrete relationship between theory and practice is a working definition of theory that is based on the natural scientific model of understanding. As mentioned before, theory in this sense as the dispassionate

contemplation of objects independent of human meanings and practices, serves an essential purpose when pursuing natural science. Desirable advancements in medicine, agricultural production, and communication, to name only a few areas, have been achieved as a result. But Guignon (1993) notes that in psychology :“many therapists and mental health professionals continue to feel that the mainstream ‘scientific’ theories designed to explain and guide psychotherapy fail to capture much of what actually goes on in the practice of therapy”, adding that “standard theories fail to make sense of the rich and complex forms of moral discourse that characterize therapeutic dialogue” (p. 216) . Psychoanalysis itself is already deeply involved in the process of debating its identity as a natural science or a culture-bound interpretive discipline (Gedo, 1999). The work of Strenge (1991), Schafer (1992), and Stern (2003) stand as examples of theorists who reject the framework of the natural sciences as inadequate for capturing the psychoanalytic process. The reason for this, according to Taylor (2002), is that the very object of psychology is essentially different from that of the natural sciences:

in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer shows how understanding a text or event, which comes to us out of our history, has to be construed, not on the model of the “scientific” grasp of an object, but rather on that of speech-partners who come to an understanding (Verständigung). If we follow Gadamer's argument here, we come to see that this is probably true of human science as such. That is, it is not simply knowledge of our own past that needs to be understood on the “conversation” model, but knowledge of the other as such. (pp. 126-127)

Taylor (2002) goes on to argue that the inadequacies of a natural scientific model emerge when contrasting human beings to physical objects or processes. First, and particularly relevant for psychology, unlike objects, human beings talk back thus making any kind of theory development a bilateral endeavor. Second, the goal of enquiry in the human sciences is different because it does not seek “attaining some finally adequate explanatory language, which can...exclude all future surprises” (Taylor, 2002, p. 127). Third, and most important, because we are asking questions about human beings:

The end of the operation is not control, or else I am engaging in a sham, designed to manipulate my partner while pretending to negotiate. The end is being able in some way to function together with the partner, and this means listening as well as talking, and hence may require that I redefine what I am aiming at. (Taylor, 2002, p. 127).

As a result of having a radically different object of study, a theory in the social sciences, particularly one as practically concerned as psychology, needs to reflect and respond to the realities of human relationships. Doing so would lead to a permeable integration of theoretical and practical dimensions of social scientific practice.

The theory-practice relationship articulated in this sense can be captured, and potentially enriched, by Gadamer’s (1975) account of dialogical understanding. From this perspective, theory speaks in practice as much as it listens to it; both inform but cannot dictate the other. The domination of theory risks dogmatism, while its

abolishment risks foreclosing the possibility of reflecting on our practices. Theory has the potential to let crucial material stand as relevant and thus become part of the discussion. Conversely, it cannot exhaust the issues that become relevant in treatment. Furthermore, from a hermeneutic perspective, treatment is embedded in a larger cultural horizon suffused by rich meanings and possibilities that make the theory-praxis relationship possible in the first place. In Gadamer's (1974) language, theory and practice are part of this wider cultural horizon within which analyst and patient strive to understand each other.

Hermeneutic dialogue as a model for the theory-practice relationship

As previously noted, Gadamer (1975) holds that all understanding is historically situated and conditioned by the prejudices that we bring along to the situation: "we started by saying that a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present, for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see" (p. 306). Such a statement could lead the reader to believe that all understanding blinds us to anything that stands outside our prejudice, but Warnke (1987) explains that Gadamer strongly rejects the idea that "because we are prejudiced, or, otherwise put, because we speak a certain language and use certain categories we are cut off from their languages, other cultures, and even our own past" (p. 81). As Taylor (2002) points out, for Gadamer "the road to understanding

others passes through the patient identification and undoing of those facets of our implicit understanding that distort the reality of the other” (p. 132).

What is more, our situated understanding is never fixed or complete but always in the process of becoming revised in light of something new. Gadamer (1975) notes that it is an “error in thinking to claim that the horizon of the present consists of a fixed set of opinions and valuations” (p. 306), but we should notice that “the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices” (p. 306). This ongoing reworking of our own meanings in light of the truth of the matter under discussion is not a prescription, but rather a common feature of human existence. Even in the most desperate of situations, Gadamer tells us, people often strive to reach a common understanding that is based on shared discussion about a common matter. Although Gadamer has been taken to task by Derrida (1989) for what he considered to be an overly optimistic view of humanity’s good will to engage in dialogue, Gadamer has a strong argument in his observation that any communicative act presupposes the desire to be recognized and the belief that it is possible. Surely there are better and worse versions of this, but the act of trying to reach an understanding on a common matter is a universal feature of human existence, according to Gadamer.

There are always risks and limitations when we try to understand. But Gadamer utilizes the concept of a horizon to emphasize that in understanding “one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but in order to see it

better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (p. 305). Simply stated, in maintaining awareness of our finite take on things, we are able to transcend it by appealing to a broader context and enriched horizon. This does not mean that we somehow reach a point where we can understand free of prejudice, instead, our prejudices become transformed by richer and wider horizons. The goal is not to transcend prejudice because, as a positive phenomenon, prejudice always makes understanding possible in the first place by providing a ground from which to make sense of a situation.

According to Gadamer (1975), hermeneutic dialogue of this kind involves two constitutive movements: the anticipation of completeness and application. The first movement involves granting provisional authority to the claims of the person, text, or experience that we encounter and engage in dialogue. This is a difficult task, because it requires a person to take what Gadamer (1975) calls an attitude of “being negative towards itself” (p. 461), in order to let the meaning of what is confronted truly assert itself. This demands a special kind of rigor in listening that requires the granting of at least temporary authority to the claim of the other. But it does not mean that we have to surrender our views to passively accept what is presented to us. That would not be understanding but indoctrination, and the corrective to this possibility is what Gadamer calls application, which entails considering the other’s claim in light of our own situated horizon. Scharff (1997) effectively illustrates how application and the anticipation of completeness functions in open dialogue:

When I am disposed to listen, I no longer state, or speak out of, "my position."

Nor do I try to keep myself out of the affair and merely paraphrase or say back the other's words. Rather, I draw upon my own determinate materials--my own, current, yet always only partially explicit understanding--to form a listening statement. And I let the other correct it. (p. 1)

Scharff's comment draws attention to several features of hermeneutic dialogue.

First, he notes that it requires a disposition to listen, a type of openness to the claim of the other that compels us to curtail our tendency to speak from a set of already formed ideas about what should be said, what he calls a position. Nevertheless, he points out that listening always occurs from a particular vantage point, albeit not a fully determinate one, from which to respond to what is said. Lastly, this act requires an involvement in the situation, and thus responding by merely paraphrasing what was said illustrates a detachment and lack of understanding. This kind of involved openness from one's incomplete perspective also reveals that anticipation of completeness and application are not sequential steps in a method, but rather a concrete disposition in dialogue with others. These movements occur simultaneously, meaning that I can only listen if I can both grant some authority to the other's claim, however minimal, while making sense of it from the concrete realities of my situation. What is more, personal prejudices are not arbitrarily created; they are embedded in shared traditions handed down through history, such that understanding becomes "situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down" (p. 309). In other words, Gadamer does not think

that dialogue occurs between two separate subjectivities, it is a shared unfolding event that is historically situated in the larger conversation of the tradition. This is why Gadamer (1975, p. 278) claims that we belong to history before it belongs to us.

Gadamer's notion of authentic dialogue can inform treatment while explaining how this process shapes the self. As previously noted, Gadamer contextualizes Heidegger's critique of a substantive view of the self by bringing to light how we define our identity by means of an ongoing conversation with culture and others. To the extent that this conversation is authentic, it allows a person to confront their limits and gain a renewed sense of identity and purpose. Under the model of selfhood as an ongoing authentic dialogue, the self is a conversation stretched from birth to death, and therapy is an opportunity to reexamine our unfolding history, to rework our history in light of present concerns as it is oriented towards a future. Rather than focusing on the self in isolation from context, therapeutic dialogue is a working through of our being-in-the-world as it opens up in one's history and future possibilities. In the end, the insights of a hermeneutic approach, of authentic dialogue with one another, are not terribly new. When therapy is done well, it already incorporates many of its features. In essence, it points to the importance of the telling of stories that help make sense of our identity and our life.

In this sense, a relational approach is a concrete theoretical advancement that captures the best insights that motivated Freud himself. Spezzano (1995) reminds us that: "Ironically, toward the end of her life, Anna Freud told the American

psychoanalyst Robert Coles that...she lamented that Freud the confessional storyteller had been replaced in the minds of analysts by Freud the theorist” (p. 21). As Mitchell (2000) states, Freud was always concerned with making sense of human relationships (p. ix). Retrieving this hermeneutic dimension in Freud, who at one point recognized that establishing a theoretical psychology based on a natural science model is perhaps unachievable (Flyvbjerg, 2001), is necessary in light of our need to enter in authentic dialogue with the tradition of psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy at large. Gadamer’s notion of authentic dialogue provides the opportunity to retrieve relational and classical insights while providing a corrective to their partial allegiance to modern ideals of context free individuality.

Hermeneutics and treatment

It is difficult to concretely spell out how a case, the analysis of Mr. Z for example, would exactly play out from this hermeneutic perspective. Certainly, appeals to internal and determining psychic structures would draw attention away from an engagement in history and crafting future possibilities. Instead, there is a real need to help the patient articulate the nature of their dissatisfaction in light of their best understanding of their situation and how they project themselves in the future. Mr. Z is isolated, anxious, and arrested in history, still dominated by an experience that he seems

to be repeating, stuck in an eternally recurring present. This repetitive attunement to his history is not something to overcome through rational insight, as an objectively detached observer. Neither can it be just catharted out, like a purely emotive experience also detached from the binding meanings of the past. Mr. Z is forced to truly face himself and confront the experience that continues to be repeated in an ongoing event of interpretation. This involves a carefully monitoring of his actions, thoughts, and feelings in light of his history and how he already knows it falls short of where he would like to be. To be sure, this occurs in the context of partnering dialogue, where Mr. Z can be given the opportunity to thematically rework the meaning of that experience as a matter of shared concern. Mr. Z needs to articulate with earnestness, what is it like to continue to be that injured child in light of his need to be an adult in the world. Not because he needs to be cradled or because he needs the compassion to heal a narcissistic injury. Certainly compassion is an integral part of this confrontation and rewriting of one's history and thus self-understanding. But the direction of that questioning is provided by what Mr. Z already knows: he is not living well, and there is more to life than what he is experiencing. Of course, the classic alternative of helping Mr. Z renounce childish wishes for wholeness is also inappropriate here. Mitchell and Aron (1999) are right in pointing out that there is value in opening an alternative between merely validating the patient's feelings and asking them to achieve a stoic rational insight into their situation. The careful process of helping patients see their relationship to others, so that modifying it is an option, is neither colluding nor criticizing the client. It involves engaging in

dialogue to help them confront the ongoing event that they are, in light of their present dissatisfaction with how their life is unfolding. Clients are aware, however remotely, that they fall short of who they need to be. Articulating that pre-reflective understanding in open dialogue with another brings it into the open so it can be thematically reworked. For the client, engaging in this process requires both trusting the claims of the therapist who helps understand their limits, but also applying the therapists voice in light of their experience. What emerges in that process, when it is conducted authentically, is perspicuously described by Guignon (2004) in the following manner:

the locus of this activity as we experience it is not my mind and yours, but rather the “between” made concrete in the issue of the truth of the matter we are discussing. In vital, intense discussion, egos fall away and are replaced by something much more important: the matter that matters. (p. 165).

From a hermeneutic perspective, what matters in the unfolding of people’s life is always shaped by shared cultural values and meanings. Taylor (1985) notes that these constitute “inescapable frameworks” (p. 1) that provide the basis for meaningful action and identity. In this sense, the therapeutic endeavor involves examining and reworking the values and commitment that already shape our identity. But because dialogue is always done through a partnering effort, it follows that the therapist cannot meaningfully partake of that conversation unless they also engage and comment on the meanings and values that are shaping the client’s life. Certainly relational approaches are quick to acknowledge the role of the analyst in shaping the direction of the therapy

(Mitchell & Aron, 1999; Fairfield, Layton, & Stack, 2002), but it is not clear that they let the implications of this observation sink deeply enough. Zeddies and Richardson (1999) note that after criticizing traditional notions of the therapist as wise expert, Mitchell (1998):

suggests that ‘the analyst's expertise lies, most fundamentally, in his or her understanding of a process — what happens when one person begins to express and reflect on his or her experience in the presence of a trained listener, in the highly structured context provided by the analytic situation’ (p. 21). In this sense, Mitchell's approach offers “a view of the analyst's knowledge and authority that portrays the analyst as an expert in collaborative, self-authorizing self-reflection” (p. 26).

However well intentioned, and likely based on a deep respect for the autonomy of the other, Mitchell's observations miss that it would be impossible to truly listen without already participating in some shared meanings. What is more important, if listening is not to become a mere parroting but a way to help the patient reframe their experience in richer and more constructive ways, Mitchell must rely on frameworks of meaning that will inevitably transform the personal search for meaning of the client. In other words, therapy cannot exercise what Mitchell (1992) calls the facilitation of “personal meaning” (p. 285) without somehow bringing to the table a viewpoint that informs what enriches meaning in everyday life.

The modern fear of indoctrinating the client clearly presents itself here (Guignon, 2004, p. 232), and it is not without reason given the degree of trust the client places in the therapy and the potential for abuse. But it becomes essential to see that this respect for the autonomy of the other, perhaps reminiscent of the Hippocratic dictum to “first do no harm”, is itself a meaningful framework that shapes the direction of treatment. As part of a larger modern project of promoting personal emancipation from oppressive structures, explicitly embodied in the feminist approach of Fairfield, Layton, and Stack (2002), we respect the client’s individuality and tentatively offer our theory. But this underlying respect for autonomy tends to obscure other values that make a treatment outcome successful. Buechler (2004), in her recent book *Clinical Values: Emotions that Guide Psychoanalytic Treatment* poignantly articulates some of the resources upon which treatment draws to achieve its aims:

Treatment is, I believe, inherently a life-and-death struggle. It takes enormous energy and commitment from both participants. I don’t think we can muster, sustain, and inspire this over a career if all we believe we have to offer is one among many possible perspectives. Theories making such modest claims appeal to the mind more than the heart or soul. They don’t engender enough hope, or joy, too sustain a real fight for life. (p. 2)

Mitchell (1993) views hope as an essential aspect of successful treatment, and his description of this phenomenon in clinical practice is rich and nuanced. Yet, as Buechler accuses, relationality as a theory of self can be found thin and wanting in light

of the wealth of meanings Mitchell describes in his therapeutic vignettes. Relational psychoanalysis clearly attempts to thicken psychoanalytic descriptions of selfhood with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of human experience, which echoes Aristotelian values of politically embedded personhood. Yet Hillman (1994), in an article exploring psychology's view of the patient in light of Aristotelian notions of selfhood, explains that:

the patient cannot, definitely not, by definition, become a citizen, so long as the model of the psyche which therapeutic analysis serves remains fixed where it is. this model locates psyche either as intrapersonal (within human subjects) or interpersonal (between subjects in relationships, transference, group dynamics, and family systems). Soul is not in the world of systems like trees, rocks, cars and ashtrays, nor is it in the world of systems like education, finance, party politics, language and technology (p. 30).

Mitchell's (1993) rich description of hope and dread in the psychoanalytic situation evidences a masterful grasp of the subtle dynamics of human interrelatedness that have binding and healing force. To the extent that this phenomena is subsumed under the facilitation of personal fulfillment, it misses its structuring power and reduces it to an instrumental means to an end. In the case of Mr. Z, it is likely that his feelings of isolation and anxiety would become reinforced if the treatment is modeled on the ideals of individuality and self-determination rather than engagement, commitment, and openness to others. Hirsch (2003) describes the analytic situation in relational

approaches as working under “ the assumption of a universal conflict revolving around the wish to remain enmeshed within internalized familial configurations, on one hand, and the striving for the freedom and the loneliness of separation and individuation on the other” (p. 217). It is clear to see how the alternatives repeat the seemingly inescapable dilemma of the self either collapsing into a determining history, or stoically detaching from it to face a lonely fate. Mr. Z cannot bear either alternative, he cannot continue being who he is, and he would not do well in becoming more individuated.

We can find an alternative in authentic dialogue, one that rests on carefully interpreted cultural meanings, as a helpful possibility for Mr. Z. Treatment in this sense cannot use the cultivation of “a capacity for a certain responsiveness to oneself”(p. 184), as Mitchell (2001) suggests, as a yardstick for its success. In authentic dialogue there is a cultivation of a responsiveness to the ongoing conversation, always reliant on the participation of its members but also transcending their individual outlooks and carrying them forward. The mark of success in treatment, from a Gadamerian perspective, is suggested by the development of *phronimos* (Vessey, 2002), a lived practical wisdom, which allows patients to respond appropriately to situations. In other words, the patient is able to masterfully respond to the challenges presented by life. Zeddies (2001), and Flyvbjerg (2001) identify *phronesis* as the sine qua non for successful psychoanalysis and social science respectively. They explain, however, that it is different from a technical orientation to life, wherein our behavior is seen as means to obtaining some end rather than being intrinsic to the end itself. In this sense,

phronetic dialogue involves careful deliberation about one's ends in life, in light of one's best understanding of our values and commitments. Of course, as Zeddies (2001) remarks: "Thinking about analytic work as a moral enterprise stands in sharp contrast to what has heretofore been the conventional "wisdom" within analytic circles of what psychoanalytic therapy is and how it should work" (p. 228). Yet psychoanalysis, and psychology at large, is already involved in this process whether or not it becomes explicitly aware of it. Ultimately, heeding Heidegger and Gadamer's thought requires contextualizing relational and classical approaches in a wider philosophical horizon that allows us to retain the best of their insights, while suggesting directions for improvement. As such, the effort of this work constitutes merely a point of departure, and requires further deliberation about how an authentic dialogical effort could be practiced in treatment. However, if we take Heidegger and Gadamer's thought to heart, we can never reach any final take in matters of self-understanding.

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