

# A Critique of Relational Psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT: Psychoanalysis today is largely a psychology of consciousness: post- and neo-Freudians form a marginalized community within North America in comparison to contemporary relational and intersubjective theorists who emphasize the phenomenology of lived conscious experience, dyadic attachments, affective attunement, social construction, and mutual recognition over the role of insight and interpretation. Despite the rich historical terrain of theoretical variation and advance, many contemporary approaches have displaced the primacy of the unconscious. Notwithstanding the theoretical hair-splitting that historically occurs across the psychoanalytic domain, we are beginning to see with increasing force and clarity what Mitchell and Aron (1999) refer to as the emergence of a new tradition, namely, relational psychoanalysis. Having its edifice in early object relations theory, the British middle school and American interpersonal traditions, and self psychology, relationality is billed as “a distinctly new tradition” (Mitchell & Aron, 1999, p. x). What is being labeled as the American middle group of psychoanalysis (Spezzano, 1997), relational and intersubjective theory have taken center-stage. It may be argued, however, that contemporary relational and intersubjective perspectives have failed to be properly critiqued from within their own school of discourse. The scope of this article is largely preoccupied with tracing the (a) philosophical underpinnings of contemporary relational theory, (b) its theoretical relation to traditional psychoanalytic thought, (c) clinical implications for therapeutic practice, and (d) its intersection with points of consilience that emerge from these traditions.

Relational psychoanalysis is an American phenomenon, with a politically powerful and advantageous group of

members advocating for conceptual and technical reform. Relational trends are not so prevalent in other parts of the world where one can readily observe the strong presence of Freud throughout Europe and abroad, Klein in England and South America, Lacan in France and Argentina, Jung in Switzerland, the Independents in Britain, Kohut in the Midwestern United States, and the Interpersonalists in the East, among others. Despite such secularity and pluralism, relational thinking is slowly gaining mainstream ascendancy. Perhaps this is due in part to the following factors: (a) In the States there is an increasing volume of psychoanalytically trained psychologists who graduate from and teach at many progressive contemporary training institutes and post-doctoral programs, thus exerting a powerful conceptual influence on the next generation of analysts who are psychologically rather than medically trained;<sup>1</sup> (b) There has been a magnitude of books that have embraced the relational turn and are financially supported by independent publishing houses that lie beyond the confines of academe, thus wielding strong political identifications; (c) There has been a proliferation of articles and periodicals that have emerged from the relational tradition and hence favor relational concepts in theory and practice; and (d) Several identified relational analysts or those friendly to relational concepts are on the editorial boards of practically every respectable peer refereed psychoanalytic journal in the world, thus insuring a presence and a voice. Politics aside, it becomes easy to appreciate the force, value, and loci of the relational turn:

- (1) Relational psychoanalysis has opened a permissible space for comparative psychoanalysis by challenging fortified traditions ossified in dogma, such as orthodox conceptions of the classical frame, neutrality, abstinence, resistance, transference, and the admonition against analyst self-disclosure.
- (2) Relational perspectives have had a profound impact on the way we have come to conceptualize the therapeutic encounter, and specifically the role of the analyst in technique and practice. The relational turn has forged a clearing for honest discourse on what we actually do, think, and feel in our analytic work, thus breaking the silence and secrecy of what actually transpires in the consulting room. Relational

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<sup>1</sup> Note that most identified relational analysts are psychologists, as are the founding professionals associated with initiating the relational movement including Mitchell, Greenberg, Stolorow, Aron, and Hoffman, just to name a few.

approaches advocate for a more natural, humane, and genuine manner of how the analyst engages the patient rather than cultivating a distant intellectual attitude or clinical methodology whereby the analyst is sometimes reputed to appear as a cold, staid, antiseptic or emotionless machine. Relational analysts are more revelatory, interactive, and inclined to disclose accounts of their own experience in professional space (e.g., in session, publications, and conference presentations), enlist and solicit perceptions from the patient about their own subjective comportment, and generally acknowledge how a patient's responsiveness and demeanor is triggered by the purported attitudes, sensibility, and behavior of the analyst. The direct and candid reflections on countertransference reactions, therapeutic impasse, the role of affect, intimacy, and the patient's experience of the analyst are revolutionary ideas that have redirected the compass of therapeutic progress away from the uniform goals of interpretation and insight to a proper holistic focus on psychoanalysis as process.

- (3) The relational turn has displaced traditional epistemological views of the analyst's authority and unadulterated access to knowledge, as well as the objectivist principles they rest upon. By closely examining the dialogic interactions and meaning constructions that emerge within the consulting room, relational psychoanalysis has largely embraced the hermeneutic postmodern tradition of questioning the validity of absolute truth claims to knowledge, objective certainty, and positivist science. Meaning, insight, and conventions of interpretation are largely seen as materializing from within the unique contexts and contingencies of interpersonal participation in social events, dialogical discourse, dialectical interaction, mutual negotiation, dyadic creativity, and reciprocally generated co-constructions anchored in an intersubjective process. This redirective shift from uncritically accepting metaphysical realism and independent, objective truth claims to reclaiming the centrality of subjectivity within the parameters of relational exchange has allowed for a reconceptualization of psychoanalytic doctrine and the therapeutic encounter.

No small feat indeed. But with so many relational publications that largely dominate the American psychoanalytic scene, we have yet to see relational psychoanalysis undergo a proper conceptual critique from within its own frame of reference. With the exception of Jay Greenberg (2001) who has recently turned a critical eye toward some of the technical practices conducted within the relational community today, most of the criticism comes from those outside the relational movement (Eagle, 2003; Eagle, Wolitzky, & Wakefield, 2001; Frank, 1998a, 1998b; Josephs, 2001; Lothane, 2003; Masling, 2003; Silverman, 2000). In order to prosper and advance, it becomes important for any discipline to evaluate its theoretical and methodological propositions from within its own evolving framework rather than insulate itself from criticism due to threat or cherished group loyalties. It is in the spirit of advance that I offer this critique as a psychoanalyst and academically trained philosopher who works clinically as a relational analyst. Because the relational movement has become such a progressive and indispensable presence within the history of the psychoanalytic terrain, it deserves our serious attention, along with a rigorous evaluation of the philosophical foundations on which it stands. I do not intend to polemically abrogate nor undermine the value of relationality in theory and practice, but only to draw increasing concern to specific theoretical conundrums that may be ameliorated without abandoning the spirit of critical, constructive dialogue necessary for psychoanalysis to continue to thrive and sophisticate its conceptual practices. Admittedly, I will ruffle some feathers of those overly-identified with the relational movement. But it is my hope that through such crucial dialogue psychoanalysis can avail itself to further understanding.

### **Key Tenets of the Relational Model**

I should warn the reader up front that I am not attempting to critique every theorist who is identified with the relational turn, which is neither desirable nor practical for our purposes, a subject matter that could easily fill entire volumes. Instead I hope to approximate many key tenets of relational thinking that could be reasonably said to represent many analysts' views on what relationality represents to the field. To prepare our discussion,

we need to form a working definition of precisely what constitutes the relational platform. This potentially becomes problematic given that each analyst identified with this movement privileges certain conceptual and technical assumptions over those of others, a phenomenon all analysts are not likely to dispute. However, despite specific contentions or divergences, relational analysts maintain a shared overarching emphasis on the centrality of relatedness. This shared emphasis on therapeutic relatedness has become the centerpiece of contemporary psychoanalysis to the point that some relationalists boast to have achieved a “paradigm shift” in the field.<sup>2</sup> On the face of things, this claim may sound palpably absurd to some analysts because the relational tradition hardly has a unified theory let alone a consensual body of knowledge properly attributed to a paradigm. Nevertheless, for our purposes, it becomes important to delineate and clarify what most relational analysts typically agree upon. Where points of difference, disagreement, and controversy exist, they tend not to cancel out certain fundamental theoretical assumptions governing relational discourse. Let us examine three main philosophical tenets of the relational school:

#### *The Primacy of Relatedness*

When Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) inaugurated the relational turn by privileging relatedness with other human beings as the central motive behind mental life, they displaced Freud’s drive model in one stroke of the pen. Although Greenberg (1991) later tried to fashion a theoretical bridge between drive theory and a relational model, he still remained largely critical. Mitchell (1988, 2000), however, had continued to steadfastly position relationality in antithetical juxtaposition to Freud’s metapsychology until his untimely death. From his early work, Mitchell (1988) states that the relational model is “an alternative perspective which considers

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, Mitchell (1988), in his Introduction to *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis*, coins his and Greenberg’s newly formed relational model as a “paradigmatic framework” by referring to Kuhn’s description of the nature of scientific revolutions, a point he emphatically reinstates in the Preface of *Relationality* (2000), p. xiii..

relations with others, *not drives*, as the basic stuff of mental life” (p. 2, italics added), thus declaring the cardinal premise of all relational theorists. Greenberg (1991) makes this point more forcefully: the relational model is “based on the *radical rejection of drive* in favor of a view that all motivation unfolds from our personal experience of exchanges with others” (p. vii, italics added). The centrality of interactions with others, forming relationships, interpersonally mediated experience, human attachment, the impact of others on psychic development, reciprocal dyadic communication, contextually based social influence, and the recognition of competing subjectivities seem to be universal theoretical postulates underscoring the relational perspective. These are very reasonable and sound assertions, and we would be hard pressed to find anyone prepared to discredit these elemental facts. The main issue here is that these propositions are nothing new: relational theory is merely stating the obvious. These are simple reflections on the inherent needs, strivings, developmental trajectories, and behavioral tendencies propelling human motivation, a point that Freud made explicit throughout his theoretical corpus, which became further emphasized more significantly by early object relations theorists through to contemporary self psychologists. Every aspect of conscious life is predicated on human relatedness by the simple fact that we are thrown into a social ontology as evinced by our participation in family interaction, communal living, social custom, ethnic affiliation, local and state politics, national governance, and common linguistic practices that by definition cannot be refuted nor annulled by virtue of our embodied and cultural facticity, a thesis thoroughly advanced by Heidegger (1927) originally dating back to antiquity. But what is unique to the relational turn is a philosophy based on antithesis and refutation: namely, the abnegation of the drives.

### *Intersubjective Ontology*

Relational psychoanalysis privileges intersubjectivity over subjectivity and objectivity, although most theorists would generally concede that their position does not refute the existence of individual subjects nor the external objective world. Yet this is still a topic of considerable debate among philosophy let alone the field of

psychoanalysis which remains relatively naive to formal metaphysics. It is unclear at best what ‘intersubjectivity’ may mean to general psychoanalytic audiences due to the broad usage of the term, and despite it having very specific and diversified meanings. Among many contemporaneous thinkers, intersubjectivity is used anywhere from denoting a specific interpersonal process of recognizing the individual needs and subjective experiences of others, to referring to a very generic condition of interpersonal interaction.

It may be helpful to identify two forms of intersubjectivity in the analytic literature: a *developmental* view, and a *systems* view, each of which may be operative at different parallel process levels. Both Robert Stolorow and his colleagues, as well as Jessica Benjamin, are often identified as introducing intersubjective thinking to psychoanalysis, although this concept has a two-hundred year history dating back to German Idealism. Intersubjectivity was most prominently elaborated by Hegel (1807) as the laborious developmental attainment of ethical self-consciousness through the rational emergence of *Geist* in the history of the human race. This emergent process describes the unequal power distributions between servitude and lordship culminating in a developmental, historical, and ethical transformation of recognizing the subjectivity of the other, a complex concept Benjamin (1988) has re-appropriated within the context of the psychoanalytic situation as the ideal striving for mutual recognition.

Like Hegel, Stern (1985), Benjamin (1988), and Mitchell (2000) view intersubjectivity as a developmental achievement of coming to acknowledge the existence and value of the internalized other, a dynamic that readily applies to the maternal-infant dyad and the therapeutic encounter. Daniel Stern (1985) has focused repeatedly on the internal experience of the infant’s burgeoning sense of self as an agentic organization of somatic, perceptual, affective, and linguistic processes that unfold within the interpersonal presence of dyadic interactions with the mother. In his view, intersubjectivity is like Hegel’s: there is a gradual recognition of the subjectivity of the m/other as an independent entity with similar and competing needs of her own. In Fonagy’s (2000, 2001) and his colleagues (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002) more recent

contributions, he describes this process as the development of “mentalization,” or the capacity to form reflective judgments on recognizing and anticipating the mental states of self and others. Stern’s work dovetails nicely with the recent developments in attachment theory (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Hesse & Main, 2000; Main, 2000; Mills, 2004; Solomon & George, 1999) and reciprocal dyadic systems theories derived from infant observation research.

Following Stern’s developmental observation research, Beebe, Lachmann, and their colleagues (Beebe, Jaffe, & Lachmann, 1992; Beebe & Lachmann, 1998) have also focused on the primacy of maternal-infant interactions, and thus following the relational turn, have shifted away from the locus of inner processes to relational ones (Beebe & Lachmann, 2003). Beebe and Lachmann’s dyadic systems theory is predicated on intersubjectivity and the mutuality of dyadic interactions whereby each partner within the relational matrix affects each other, thus giving rise to a dynamic systems view of self-regulation based on bi-directional, coordinated interactional attunement and cybernetic interpersonal assimilations resulting in mutual modifications made from within the system.

Stolorow, Atwood, and their colleagues (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987; Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997) cast intersubjectivity as a more basic, ontological category of interdependent, intertwining subjectivities that give rise to a “field” or “world,” similar to general references to an intersubjective “system” or an “analytic third” (Ogden, 1994). Stolorow and his collaborators are often misunderstood as saying that intersubjective constellations annul intrapsychic life and a patient’s developmental history prior to therapeutic engagement (see Frank, 1998b), but Stolorow et al. specifically contextualize intrapsychic experience within the greater parameters of the intersubjective process (Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997, pp. 67-68). Yet it becomes easy to see why Stolorow invites misinterpretation. Intersubjectivity is ontologically constituted: “experience is *always* embedded in a constitutive intersubjective context” (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p. 24, italics added). Elsewhere he states that the intersubjective system is the “constitutive

role of relatedness in the making of *all* experience” (Stolorow, 2001, p. xiii, italics added). These absolutist overstatements lend themselves to decentering intrapsychic activity over relational interaction, draws into question the separateness of the self, the preexistent developmental history of the patient prior to treatment, the prehistory of unconscious processes independent of one’s relatedness to others, and *a priori* mental organization that precedes engagement with the social world.<sup>3</sup> These statements irrefutably replace psychoanalysis as a science of the unconscious with an intersubjective ontology that gives priority to conscious experience.<sup>4</sup> To privilege consciousness over unconsciousness to me appears to subordinate the value of psychoanalysis as an original contribution to understanding human experience. Even if we as analysts are divided by competing theoretical identifications, it seems difficult at best to relegate the primordial nature of unconscious dynamics to a trivialized backseat position that is implicit in much of the relational literature. For Freud (1900), the “unconscious is the true psychical reality” (p. 613), which by definition is the necessary condition for intersubjectivity to materialize and thrive.

Although there are many relational analysts who are still sensitive to unconscious processes in their

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<sup>3</sup> Although Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange have defended their positions quite well in response to their critics, often correcting disgruntled commentators on facets of their writings most readers—let alone sophisticated researchers—would not be reasonably aware of without going to the effort of reading their entire collected body of combined works, one lacunae they cannot defend in their intersubjectivity theory is accounting for *a priori* unconscious processes prior to the emergence of consciousness, a subject matter I thoroughly address elsewhere (see Mills, 2002a, 2002b). Although having attempted to address the role of organizing principles and the unconscious (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992), because they designate intersubjectivity to be the heart of *all* human experience, they commit themselves to a philosophy of consciousness that by definition fails to adequately account for an unconscious ontology, which I argue is the necessary precondition for consciousness and intersubjective life to emerge.

<sup>4</sup> Freud (1925) ultimately defined psychoanalysis as “the science of unconscious mental processes” (p. 70).

writings and clinical work, including Donnel Stern, Phillip Bromberg, Thomas Ogden, and Jody Messler Davies among others, hence making broad generalizations unwarranted, it nevertheless appears that on the surface, for many relational analysts, the unconscious has become an antiquated category. And Stolorow (2001) specifically tells us so: “In place of the Freudian unconscious . . . we envision a multiply contextualized experimental world, an organized totality of lived personal experience, *more or less conscious*. . . In this view, psychoanalytic therapy is no longer an archeological excavation of deeper layers of an isolated unconscious mind” (p. xii-xiii, italics added). For Stolorow and many other relational thinkers, psychoanalysis has tacitly become a theory of consciousness. But regardless of the multiple contradictions that pervade his early work, a ghost that continues to problematize his theoretical positions, in all fairness to Stolorow, he and his colleagues have cogently embraced the primacy of contextual complexity situated within intersubjective relations, an observation most would find difficult to refute.

What is clearly privileged in the relational platform over above the unique internal experiences and contingencies of the individual’s intrapsychic configurations is the intersubjective field or dyadic system that interlocks, emerges, and becomes contextually organized as a distinct entity of its own. The primary focus here is not on the object, as in relatedness to others (object relations) or the objective (natural) world, nor on the subject, as in the individual’s lived phenomenal experience, rather the emphasis is on the system itself. The intersubjective system, field, territory, domain, realm, world, network, matrix—or whatever words we wish to use to characterize the indissoluble intersection and interactional enactment between two or more human beings—these terms evoke a spatial metaphor, hence they imply presence or being, the traditional subject matter of metaphysical inquiry. Following key propositions from the relational literature, the intersubjective system must *exist* for it is predicated on being, hence on actuality; therefore we may assume it encompasses its own attributes, properties, and spatiotemporal dialectical processes. This can certainly be inferred from the way in which relational analysts use these terms even if they don’t intend to imply this as such, thus making the system

into an actively organized (not static or fixed) entity of its own. Ogden (1994) makes this point most explicitly: “The analytic process reflects the interplay of three subjectivities: that of the analyst, of the analysand, and of the analytic third” (p. 483). In fact, the intersubjective system is a process-oriented entity that derives from the interactional union of two concretely existing subjective entities, thus making it an *emergent property* of the multiple (often bi-directional) interactions that form the intersubjective field. This ontological commitment immediately introduces the problem of agency, a topic I will repeatedly address throughout this critique.

How can a system acquire an agency of its own? How can the interpersonal field become its own autonomous agent? What happens to the agency of the individual subjects that constitute the system? How can a “third” agency materialize and have determinate choice and action over the separately existing human beings that constitute the field to begin with? What becomes of individual freedom, independence, and personal identity with competing needs, intentions, wishes, and agendas that define individuality if the “system” regulates individual thought, affect, and behavior? What happens to the system if one participant decides to no longer participate? Does the system die, is it suspended, does it reconstitute later? What becomes of the system if one participant exerts more will or power over that of the other subject? Is not the system merely a temporal play of events rather than an entity? And if these experiences were possible, it would render the system impotent, acausal, and non-regulatory, which directly opposes the relational view that the intersubjective field, dyadic system, relational matrix, or analytic third has causal influence and supremacy over the individual autonomy of its constituents. The system would merely be an epiphenomenon,<sup>5</sup> thus completely lacking determinate freedom

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<sup>5</sup> In philosophy of mind, epiphenomenalism is associated with brain-mind dependence. Much of empirical science would contend that any brain state can be causally explained by appealing to other physical states or structural processes. Philosophers typically qualify this explanation by saying that physical states cause mental events but mental states do not have causal efficacy over anything, a point William James first made when he coined the term ‘epiphenomena’ to account for phenomena that lacked causal determinism.

or influence, hence merely relegated and deferred to the individual subjects that constitute the field. So how can the intersubjective system be granted such an exalted status by the relational movement? What becomes of the individually constituted and constitutive self? These questions are indeed difficult to sustain because they imply that the intersubjective system has no causal power, autonomy, nor deference to individually mediated events that comprise the system to begin with. These conundrums have led Peter Giovacchini (in press) to conclude that for the intersubjectivists the individual mind becomes this ephemeral ether that evaporates the moment one enters into dialogue or social relations with anyone. While intersubjectivists do not claim that the individual mind vanishes, they do unequivocally concede that it becomes subordinated to the intersubjective system or relational matrix that regulates it.

#### *Psychoanalytic Hermeneutics*

The relational turn has largely embraced a constructivist epistemology and method of interpretation, what Hoffman (1998) refers to as “critical” or “dialectical” constructivism based on “mutual influence and constructed meaning” (p. xii) in the analytic encounter. Many relational authors generically refer to “co-constructed” experience that is sensitive to the contextually derived elements of the interpersonal encounter subject to each person’s unique perspective and interpretation, but ultimately shaped by mutually negotiated meaning that is always susceptible to a fallibilistic epistemology (Orange, 1995). As Stolorow (1998) puts it, “the analyst has no privileged access” to the patient’s mind or what truly transpires between the analyst and analysand, for “objective reality is unknowable by the psychoanalytic method” (p. 425). Drawing on Kant’s Idealism, whereby claiming that we cannot have true knowledge of things in themselves, these epistemological positions are largely gathered from postmodern sensibilities that loosely fall under the umbrella of what may not be inappropriately called psychoanalytic hermeneutics: namely, methods of interpretation derived from subjective experience and participation in social relations that constitute meaning and knowledge.

Constructivist positions, and there are many kinds—social, ethical, feminist, empirical, mathematical—hold a variety of views with points of similarity and divergence depending upon their agenda or mode of inquiry. Generally we may say that many relational analysts have adopted a variant of social constructivism by claiming that knowledge is the product of our linguistic practices and social institutions that are specifically instantiated in the interactions and negotiations between others. This readily applies to the consulting room where knowledge emerges from dialogic relational involvement wedded to context. This is why Hoffman and others rightfully state that meaning is not only discovered but also created, including the therapeutic encounter and the way we come to understand and view our lives. In fact, analysis is a creative self-discovery and process of becoming. Mild versions of constructivism hold that social participation and semantic factors lend interpretation to the world while extreme forms go so far to claim that the world, or some significant portion of it, is constituted via our linguistic, political, and institutional practices. Despite the generic use of the terms construction and co-construction, relational analysts have largely avoided specifically delineating their methodology. With the exception of Donnel Stern (1997) who largely aligns with Gadamer’s hermeneutic displacement of scientific conceptions of truth and method,<sup>6</sup> Donna Orange’s (1995) perspectival epistemology,

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Gadamer’s hermeneutics is an analysis of the text, not the human subject. Despite this qualification, he does, in my estimate, develop a dialogical model of interpretation as though the text were treated as a ‘thou,’ hence a human being we find ourselves in conversation with, and this no doubtedly had special significance for why Stern gravitated toward Gadamer’s hermeneutics. It may be argued, however, that Ricoeur has an equally appealing approach because he insisted that philosophical hermeneutics was more fundamentally reflective than the methods used in the behavioral sciences for the simple fact that it does not alienate itself from its subject matter unlike the human sciences that view people as objects rather than subjects of inquiry. Ricoeur further believed that hermeneutics must serve an epistemological function by incorporating its own critical practices within its mode of discourse, which is not unlike many relational theorists today who criticize how previously held theories and objectivist assumptions have the potential to distort

which is a version of James' and Peirce's pragmatic theories of truth, and Hoffman's brand of dialectical constructivism—the term 'dialectic' lacking any clear definition or methodological employment—relational psychoanalysis lacks a solid philosophical foundation, one it claims to use to justify its theories and practices. Perhaps with the exception of Stolorow and his collaborators' numerous attempts, none of the relational analysts I've mentioned provide their own detailed theoretical system that guides analytic method, hence falling short of offering a formal framework based on systematically elaborated, logical rigor we would properly expect from philosophical paradigms. Of course psychoanalysis can claim that it is not philosophy, so placing such demands on the field is illegitimate; but contemporary frameworks are basing their purported innovations on justifications that derive from established philosophical traditions. Therefore, it is incumbent upon these “new view” theorists (Eagle et al., 2001) to precisely define their positions. Without doing so, relational analysts will continue to invite misinterpretation. Moreover, the psychoanalytic community may continue to misinterpret their frequent use of employing arcane and abstruse philosophical language culled from a very specific body of demarcated vocabulary that is re-appropriated within the analytic context, to such a degree that the reader is either confused or sufficiently impressed because on the face of things it may seem profound. The obfuscating use of philosophical buzz-words may give the appearance of profundity, but they may be quite inaccurate when they are dislocated from the tradition in which they originally emerged.

Take for example Hoffman's use of the term 'dialectical.' This word imports a whole host of different meanings in the history of Western philosophy. Is he merely invoking the interplay of opposition? Does this imply difference only or also similarity? How about the role of symmetry, continuity, measure, force, unity, and/or synthesis? Is there a certain function to the dialectic, a movement, a process, or an emergence? If so, how does it transpire? Does it follow formal causal laws or logical operations, or is it merely acausal, amorphous,

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our methods of knowledge and interpretation, thus championing the role of the analyst's participation in analytic space.

accidental, invariant, undecidable, spontaneous? Is it universal or merely contingent? Is it a necessary and/or sufficient condition of interaction, or perhaps just superfluous? Is his approach Socratic? Does he engage the impact of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, or Marx on his view of the dialectic? He does not say. Hoffman (1998) emphasizes “ambiguity and construction of meaning.” While I do not dispute this aspect to the dialectic, I am left pining for more explanation. Is there a teleology to the dialectic, or is everything “unspecified and indeterminate” (p. xvii), what he tends to emphasize in a move from “symbolically” well-defined experience, to “underdeveloped, ambiguous” features of mental activity or the lived encounter, to “totally untapped potentials” (p. 22)? Here Hoffman seems to be equating dialectics with construction *qua* construction. We might ask: Constructed from what? Are we to assume the intersubjective system is the culprit? cursory definitions are given, such as the implication of “an interactive dynamic between opposites” (p. 200, fn2), but he ultimately defers to Odgen (1986): “A dialectic is a process in which each of two opposing concepts creates, informs, preserves, and negates the other, each standing in a dynamic (ever changing) relationship with the other” (p. 208). This definition emphasizes dichotomy, polarity, and change, but lacks articulation on how opposition brings about change, let alone what kind, e.g., progressive or regressive, (given that change annuls the concept of stasis); or whether this process is subject to any formal laws, pressures, trajectories, or developmental hierarchies; nor does he explain how opposition emerges to begin with. Is the dialectic presumed to be the force behind all construction? And if so why? In all fairness to Hoffman, he does concede to the “givens” of reality and appreciates the historicity, causal efficacy, and presence of the past on influencing the present, including all modes of relatedness, and in shaping future possibilities. While I am admittedly using Hoffman here in a somewhat caviling manner, my point is to show how omission and theoretical obscurity in progressive psychoanalytic writing leaves the attentive reader with unabated questions.

A coherent framework of psychoanalytic hermeneutics has not been attempted since Ricoeur’s (1970) critique of Freud’s metapsychology, and there has been nothing written to my knowledge that hermeneutically

critiques contemporary theory. What appears is a pluralistic mosaic—perhaps even a cacophony—of different amalgamated postmodern, hermeneutic traditions derived from constructivism, critical theory, post-structuralism, feminist philosophy, sociology, linguistics, narrative literary criticism, deconstructionism, and—believe it or not—analytic philosophy that have shared visions and collective identifications, but with misaligned projects and competing agendas. For these reasons alone, I doubt we will ever see one coherent comparative-integrative contemporary psychoanalytic paradigm. These disparate groups of theories exist because human knowledge and explanation radically resist being reduced to a common denominator, and here the relationalist position is well taken. There is too much diversity, complexity, difference, particularity, and plurality to warrant such an onerous undertaking. While I have emphasized the recent upsurge of attention on constructivist epistemology in relational circles, it may be said that a general consensus exists for most practicing analysts that absolute truth, knowledge, and certainty does not rest on the crown of the analyst’s epistemic authority, and that insight, meaning, and explanation are an ongoing, emerging developmental aspect of any analytic work subject to the unique intersubjective contingencies of the analytic dyad.

Having sufficiently prepared our discussion, I now wish to turn our attention to what may perhaps be the most controversial theoretical debate between the relational traditions and previous analytic schools: namely, the subject-object divide. Contemporary relational psychoanalysis claims to have transcended the theoretical ailments that plague classical analysis by emphasizing the irreducible subjectivity of the analyst (Renik, 1993) over objective certainty, the fallacy of the analyst’s epistemological authority, the primacy of context and perspective over universality and essentialism, and the adoption of a “two-person psychology” that is thoroughly intersubjective. But these premises are not without problems. Does the analyst’s subjectivity foreclose the question of objectivity? Does epistemically limited access to knowledge necessarily delimit our understanding of truth and reality? Does particularity and pluralism negate the notion of universals and collectivity? Does a

nominalist view of subjectivity necessarily annul the notion of essence?<sup>7</sup> And does a two-person model of intersubjectivity minimize or cancel the force and value of intrapsychic reality and lived individual experience? These are but some of the philosophical quandaries that arise from the relational literature. But with a few exceptions, it may be said that contemporary psychoanalytic theory is premised on re-appropriating old paradigms under the veil of popular garb. Here enters postmodernism.

### **The Lure and Ambiguity of Postmodernism**

What do we mean by the term postmodernism? And what is its burgeoning role in psychoanalytic discourse? Within the past two decades we have seen a resurgence of interest in philosophy among contemporary relational and intersubjective theorists whom have gravitated toward key postmodern tenets that draw into question the notion of universals, absolute standards of truth and objectivity, and the problem of essence within clinical theory and practice. The lure of postmodernism is widely attractive because it explains the hitherto unacknowledged importance of the analyst's interjected experience within the analytic encounter, displaces the notion of the analyst's epistemic authority as an objective certainty, highlights contextuality and perspective over universal proclamations that apply to all situations regardless of historical contingency, culture, gender, or time, and largely embraces the linguistic, narrative turn in philosophy. Although postmodern thought has propitiously criticized

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<sup>7</sup> It has become fashionable for contemporary analysts to abrogate the notion of "essence" within relational discourse (e.g., see Demin, 1991; Teicholz, 1999; Young-Bruehl, 1996). These views are largely in response to medieval interpretations of Aristotle's notion of substance as a fixed universal category. However, it is important to note that there are many divergent perspectives on essence that do not adhere to a substance ontology with fixed, immutable, or static properties that adhere in an object or thing. Hegel's (1807, 1812) dialectic, for example, is necessarily (hence universally) predicated on process, which constitutes its structural ontology. From this account, essence does not suggest a fixed or static immutable property belonging to a substance or a thing, rather it is dynamic, *relational*, and transformative. As a result, Hegel underscores the notion that *essence is process*, which is largely compatible with many relational viewpoints today.

the pervasive historical, gendered, and ethnocentric character of our understanding of the world, contemporary trends in psychoanalysis seem to be largely unaware of the *aporiai* postmodern propositions introduce into a coherent and justifiable theoretical system.

Although postmodernism has no unified body of theory, thus making it unsystematized, one unanimous implication is the demise of the individual subject. Postmodernism may be generally said to be a cross-disciplinary movement largely comprising linguistic, poststructural, constructivist, historical, narrative, deconstructivist, and feminist social critiques that oppose most Western philosophical traditions. As a result, postmodern doctrines are anti-metaphysical, anti-epistemological, and anti-colonial, thus opposing realism, foundationalism, essentialism, neutrality, and the ideal sovereignty of reason. In this respect, they may be most simply characterized by negation—No! Moreover, erasure—~~Know~~.

Although postmodern sensibility has rightfully challenged the omnipresence of historically biased androcentric and logocentric interpretations of human nature and culture, it has done so at the expense of dislocating several key modern philosophical tenets that celebrate the nature of subjectivity, consciousness, and the teleology of the will. Consequently, the transcendental notions of freedom, liberation, individuality, personal independence, authenticity, and reflective deliberate choice that comprise the essential activities of personal agency are altogether disassembled. What all this boils down to is the dissolution of the autonomous, rational subject. In other words, the self is anaesthetized.

Postmodernism has become very fashionable with some relationalists because it may be used selectively to advocate for certain contemporary positions, such as the co-construction of meaning and the disenfranchisement of epistemic analytic authority, but it does so at the expense of introducing anti-metaphysical propositions into psychoanalytic theory that are replete with massive contradictions and inconsistencies. For example, if meaning is merely a social construction, and all analytic discourse that transpires within the consulting room is dialogical, then meaning and interpretation are conditioned on linguistic social factors that

determine such meaning, hence we are the product of language instantiated within our cultural ontology. This means that language and culture are causally *determinative*. And since therapeutic action is necessarily conditioned by verbal exchange, language causally structures the analytic dyad; and even more to the extreme, as Mitchell (1998) proposes, “interpretively constructs” another’s mind (p. 16), to which Morris Eagle (2003) argues is absurd. The implications of these positions immediately annul metaphysical assertions to truth, objectivity, freewill, and agency, just to name a few. For instance, if everything boils down to language and culture, then by definition we cannot make legitimate assertions about truth claims or objective knowledge because these claims are merely constructions based upon our linguistic practices to begin with rather than universals that exist independent of language and socialization. So by definition, the whole concept of epistemology is merely determined by social discourse, so one cannot conclude that truth or objectivity exists. These become mythologies, fictions, narratives, and illusions regardless of whether we find social consensus or not. Therefore, natural science, mathematics, and formal logic are merely social inventions based on semantic construction that by definition annul any claims to objective observations or mind independent reality. In other words, metaphysics is dead and buried—nothing exists independent of language.

These propositions problematize the whole contemporary psychoanalytic edifice. If nothing exists independent of language and the social matrix that sustains it (in essence, the relational platform), then not only is subjectivity causally determined by culture, subjectivity is dismantled altogether. When analysts use terms such as “construction,” hence invoking Foucault—whose entire philosophical project was to get rid of the subject and subjectivity, or even worse, “deconstruction,” thus exalting Derrida, the king of postmodernism, whose entire corpus is devoted to annihilating any metaphysical claims whatsoever, thus collapsing everything into undecidability, ambiguity, and chaos, analysts open themselves up to misunderstanding and controversy, subsequently inviting criticism.

What perhaps appears to be the most widely shared claim in the relational tradition is the assault on the

analyst's epistemological authority to objective knowledge. Stolorow (1998) tells us that "objective reality is unknowable by the psychoanalytic method, which investigates only subjective reality. . . there are no neutral or objective analysts, no immaculate perceptions, no God's-eye views of anything" (p. 425). What exactly does this mean? If my patient is suicidal and he communicates this to me, providing he is not malingering, lying, or manipulating me for some reason, does this not constitute some form of objective judgment independent of his subjective verbalizations? Do we not have some capacities to form objective appraisals, here the term 'objective' being used to denote making reasonably correct judgments about objects or events outside of our unique subjective experience? Is not Stolorow making an absolute claim despite arguing against absolutism when he says that "reality is unknowable?" Why not say that knowledge is proportional or incremental rather than totalistic, thus subject to modification, alteration, and interpretation rather than categorically negate the category of an objective epistemology?

Although Stolorow is not trying to deny the existence of the external world, he is privileging a subjective epistemology, and this is no different from Kant's (1781) view expounded in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Ironically, this was also Freud's (1900) position in the dream book: "The unconscious is the true psychological reality; *in its innermost nature, it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs*" (p. 613). Following Kant, both Stolorow and Freud are critical realists: they accept the existence of objective reality because there must be something beyond the veil of appearance, but they can never know it directly. There is always a limit to pure knowing, a noumena—the *Ding an sich*, or the Fichtean (1794) *Anstoss*—a firm boundary, obstacle, or check. This is the hallmark of early German Idealism, which seems plausible and is defensible. But Stolorow, in collaboration with his colleagues, makes other claims that implicitly overturn his previous philosophical commitments. He reifies intersubjectivity at the expense of subjective life, subordinates the role, scope, and influence of the unconscious, and favors a relational focus in treatment rather than on the intrapsychic dynamics

of the analysand. For example, take Donna Orange's extreme claim: "There is No Outside." For someone who rejects solipsism, this seems outlandish.

Because postmodern perspectives are firmly established in antithesis to the entire history of Greek and European ontology, perspectives widely adopted by many contemporary analysts today, relational psychoanalysis has no tenable metaphysics. This begs the question of an intelligible discourse on method for the simple fact that postmodern sensibilities ultimately collapse into relativism.<sup>8</sup> Since there are no independent standards, methods, or principles subject to uniform procedures for evaluating conceptual schemas, postmodern perspectives naturally lead to relativism. Categories of knowledge, truth, objectivity, and reality are merely based on *contingencies* fashioned by language, personal experience or opinion, preference and prejudice, parallel perspectives, social agreement, negotiated meaning, collective value practices that oppose other collective practices, and/or subjectively capricious conclusions. Contingency always changes and disrupts established order or causal laws, therefore there are no universals, only particulars. The relational focus on context, construction, and perspective is clearly a contingency claim. We can't know anything, but we can invent something to agree upon. This hardly should be toted under the banner of "truth," because for the postmoderns there is no truth, only truths—multiple, pluralistic, nominalistic, hence *relative* to person, place, and time. While we may all agree that subjectivity is infused in all human experience by virtue of the fact that we can never abrogate our facticity as embodied, sentient, desirous conscious beings—hence a universal proposition that transcends history, gender, cultural specificity, and time—this does not *ipso facto* rule out the notion of objectivity or realism.

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<sup>8</sup> While some relationalists refuse to be labeled as relativists, James Fosshage (2003) recently attributed relativism to the relational tradition by highlighting a "paradigmatic change from positivistic to relativistic science, or from objectivism to constructivism" (p. 412). I would like to use the term in reference to its original historical significance dating back to preSocratic ancient philosophy, most notably inspired by the Greek sophist Protagoras, that generally denies the existence of universal truths or intrinsic characteristics about the world in favor of relative means of interpretation.

For all practical purposes, the epistemic emphasis on subjectivity that opposes objectivity is a bankrupt claim because this devolves into untenability where everything potentially becomes relative. From the epistemic (perspectival) standpoint of a floridly psychotic schizophrenic, flying apparitions really *do* exist, but this does not make it so. Relativism is incoherent and is an internally inconsistent position at best, to simply being an unsophisticated form of sophistry based on crass opinion. I once had a student who was an ardent champion of relativism until I asked him to stand up and turn around. When he did I lifted his wallet from his back pocket and said: “If everything is relative, then I think I am entitled to your wallet because the university does not pay me enough.” Needless to say, he wanted it back. Relativism collapses into contradiction, inexactitude, nihilism, and ultimately absurdity because no one person’s opinion is anymore valid than another’s, especially including value judgments and ethical behavior, despite qualifications that some opinions are superior to others. A further danger of embracing a “relativistic science” is that psychoanalysis really has nothing to offer over other disciplines who may negate the value of psychoanalysis to begin with, e.g., empirical academic psychology, let alone patients themselves whose own opinions may or may not carry any more weight than the analysts with whom they seek out for expert professional help. When one takes relativism to the extreme, constructivism becomes creationism, which is simply a grandiose fantasy of omnipotence.

I suppose this debate ultimately hinges on how psychoanalysts come to define “objectivity,” once again, a semantic determination. Words clarify yet they obfuscate. So do their omissions. Is this merely paradox, perhaps overdetermination, or is this a Derridaian trope? One thing is for sure (in my humble opinion!), relational and intersubjective theorists seem to have a penchant for creating false dichotomies between inner/outer, self/other, universal/particular, absolute/relative, truth/fallacy, and subject/object. For those familiar with the late modern Kantian turn through to German Idealism, phenomenology, and early continental philosophy, contemporary psychoanalysis seems to be behind the times. The subject-object divide has already

been closed.<sup>9</sup>

Although postmodern psychoanalytic thought is attractive for its emphasis on contextuality, linguistic, gender, and cultural specificity, political reform, postcolonial anti-patriarchy, the displacement of pure reason and phallogentrism, and the epistemic refutation of positivistic science, it does so at the expense of eclipsing metaphysical inquiry, which was the basis of Freud's foray into understanding the ontology of the unconscious and establishing psychoanalysis as a science of subjectivity.

### **The Separateness of the Self?**

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<sup>9</sup> Schelling's (1800) *System of Transcendental Idealism* may be said to be the first systematic philosophy that dissolved the subject-object dichotomy by making pure subjectivity and absolute objectivity identical: mind and nature are one. It can be argued, however, that it was Hegel (1807, 1817) who was the first to succeed in unifying the dualism inherent in Kant's distinction between phenomenal experience and the noumenal realm of the natural world through a more rigorous form of systematic logic that meticulously shows how subjectivity and objectivity are dialectically related and mutually implicative. Relational psychoanalysis has left out one side of the equation, or at least has not adequately accounted for it. On the other hand, Hegel's process metaphysics cogently takes into account both subjective and objective life culminating in a holistic philosophy of mind (*Geist*) that both takes itself and the object world within its totality as pure self-consciousness, hence an absolute (logical) epistemological standpoint based on the dynamics of process and contingency within universality. When relational analysts return to the emphasis on subjectivity by negating the objective, they foreclose the dialectical positionality that is inherently juxtaposed and reciprocally intertwined in experience. For example, Hegel arduously shows how objectivity is the developmental, architectonic culmination of subjective life: regardless of our own unique personal preferences and qualities, developmental histories, or individual perspectives, we as the human race live in communal relation to one another constituted by language, social customs, ethical prescriptions and prohibitions, and civil laws we have come to call culture, hence an objective facticity of human invention. Despite Hegel's opacity, here the relationalists can not only find a philosophy embracing the fullest value of subjective and intersubjective life, but also one that describes the unconscious conditions that make objective judgments possible (Mills, 2002a).

One persistent criticism of relational theorizing is that it does not do justice to the notion of personal agency and the separateness of the self (Frie, 2003). Relationalists and intersubjectivists fail to adequately account for the problem of agency, freedom, contextualism, the notion of an enduring subject or self, and personal identity. It may be argued that relational thinking dissolves the centrality of the self, extracts and dislocates the subject from subjectivity, decomposes personal identity, and ignores the unique phenomenology and epistemological process of lived experience by collapsing every psychic event into a relational ontology, thus usurping the concretely existing human being while devolving the notion of contextualism into the abyss of abstraction.

Most relational analysts would not deny the existence of an independent, separate subject or self, and in fact have gone to great lengths to account for individuality and authenticity within intersubjective space. A problematic is introduced, however, when a relational or intersubjective ontology is defined in opposition to separateness, singularity, distinction, and individual identity. For example, Seligman (2003) represents the relational tradition when he specifically tells us that “the analyst and patient are co-constructing a relationship in which neither of them can be seen as *distinct* from the other” (pp. 484-485, italics added). At face value, this is an absurd ontological assertion. Following from these premises, there is no such thing as separate human beings, which is tantamount to the claim that we are all identical because we are ontologically indistinguishable. If there is no distinction between two subjects that form the relational encounter, then only the dyadic intersubjective system can claim to have any proper identity. Relational analysts are not fully considering the impact of statements such as these when they propound that “everything is intersubjective” because by doing so annuls individuality, distinctiveness, and otherness, which is what dialectically constitutes the intersubjective system to begin with. Clearly we are not the same when we engage in social discourse or form relationships with others, which simply defies reason and empirical observation: individuals always remain unique, even in social discourse. We retain a sense of self independent from the intersubjective system while participating in it. Of course, contemporary psychoanalysis uses the term ‘self’ as if it is an autonomous, separate entity while engaging

in social relations, but when it imports an undisciplined use of postmodern theory, it unwittingly nullifies its previous commitments. Jon Frederickson (in press) perspicaciously argues that despite the relational emphasis on subjectivity over objectivity, relational analysis inadvertently removes the subject from the subjective processes that constitute relational exchange to begin with, hence contradicting the very premise it seeks to uphold.

Further statements such as this: “There is *no* experience that is not interpersonally mediated” (Mitchell, 1992, p. 2, italics added), lend themselves to the social-linguistic platform and thereby deplete the notion of individuation, autonomy, choice, freedom, and teleological (purposeful) action because we are constituted, hence caused, by extrinsic forces that determine who we are. Not only does this displace the centrality of subjectivity—the very thing relationality wants to account for, it does not take into account other non-linguistic or extralinguistic factors that transpire within personal lived experience such as the phenomenology of embodiment, somatic resonance states, non-conceptual, perceptive consciousness, affective life, aesthetic experience, *a priori* mental processes organized prior to the formal acquisition of language, and most importantly, the unconscious. The confusional aspects to relational thinking are only magnified when theorists use terminology that align them with postmodernism on the one hand, thus eclipsing the self and extracting the subject from subjectivity, yet they then want to affirm the existence of the self as an independent agent (Hoffman, 1998). While some relational analysts advocate for a singular, cohesive self that is subject to change yet endures over time (Fosshage, 2003; Lichenberg, Lachmann, & Fosshage, 2002), others prefer to characterize selfhood as existing in multiplicity: rather than one self there are “multiple selves” (Bromberg, 1994; Mitchell, 1993). But how is that possible? To envision multiple “selves” is philosophically problematic on ontological grounds, introduces a plurality of contradictory essences, obfuscates the nature of agency, and undermines the notion of freedom. Here we have the exact opposite position of indistinguishability: multiple selves are posited to exist as separate, distinct entities that presumably have the capacity to interact and communicate with one another and the analyst. But committing to a self-multiplicity thesis rather than a psychic monism that allows

for differentiated and modified self-states introduces the enigma of how competing existent entities would be able to interact given that they would have distinct essences, which would prevent them from being able to intermingle to begin with.

This brings us back to question the separateness of the self if the self is envisioned to belong to a supraordinate emergent agency that subordinates the primacy of individuality and difference. For relationalists who uphold the centrality of an intersubjective ontology, the self by definition becomes amalgamated within a relational matrix or intersubjective system. Beebe, Lachmann, and Jaffe's (Beebe, Jaffe, Lachmann, 1992; Beebe & Lachmann, 2003) relational systems or dyadic systems approach specifies that each partner's self-regulation is mutually regulated by the other and the interactions themselves that govern the system, therefore locating the source of agency within the system itself. But this is problematic. What becomes of the self in the system? Is it free from the causal efficacy of the relational encounter or is it determined by the encounter? Does the self evaporate, or is it merely dislocated, hence demoted in ontological importance? And what about the locus of agency? How can an interactional process acquire any agency at all? Of course Beebe and her colleagues would say that the self does not vanish, but by attributing agency to a bi-directional, coordinated "system" rather than the intersection, negotiation, and competing autonomous assertions of two individuated "agencies," they open themselves up to charges that they reify the system by turning it into an agentic entity that has the power to execute competing (reciprocal) modes of determination.

We see the same problem in Ogden: "The intersubjective third is understood as a *third subject* created by the unconscious interplay of analyst and analysand; at the same time, the analyst and analysand qua analyst and analysand *are generated* in the act of creating the analytic third. (*There is no analyst, no analysand, no analysis, aside from the process* through which the analytic third is generated)" (Ogden, 1995, p. 697, italics added). Not only does Ogden specifically hypostatize the intersubjective system by making it an existent "subjective" entity, he also asserts that each subject in the dyad is "generated," presumably as a co-construction, yet this is left

unexplained. But he also nebulously introduces the notion that the analytic dyad is “generated” through the process of “creating” the analytic third, hence overshadowing his previous claim that the “third” is “created” by the intersubjective dyad, a convoluted thesis that begs for misinterpretation. What I believe Ogden wants to convey is that the analytic dyad is *transformed* in the act of intersubjective engagement, but this assumption is rapidly overturned when he implies that the duality creates the third yet is generated by the third, hence begging the question of what exactly constitutes agency, causal efficacy, and the analytic third. This is evinced by his irrefutable erasure of personal identity all together by claiming that there is “no” analyst or analysand—hence a negation—-independent of the “process” that brought the third subject into being to begin with, thereby collapsing his argument into a tautology or self-contradiction.

I believe the relational turn would be better served to indubitably acknowledge that the intersubjective system, field, or matrix is not an agentic subject, being (*Sein*), or entity (*ens*), but rather a “space” forged through transactional psychic temporal processes. By conceiving the relational matrix as intersubjective space instantiated through temporal dynamic mediacy generated by separate subjective agencies in dialogue, the ontological problematic of an emergent, systemically constituted (hence created) entity or analytic third is ameliorated. From my account, there is no third subjectivity or agency, only experiential space punctuated by embodied, transactional temporal processes that belong to the unique contingencies of the human beings participating in such interaction, whether this be from the developmental perspective of the mother-infant dyad to the therapeutic encounter. To speak of a third subject or subjectivity that materializes out of the vapor of dialogical exchange is to introduce an almost impossible problematic of explaining how a non-corporeal entity could attain the status of being *qua* being ( $\text{E}\kappa$ ), let alone how such entity could claim to have agentic determination over the dyad. But this is not to say that the intersubjective dyad does not introduce a new movement or generative element within the analytic milieu, what we may refer to as a “new presence,” the presence of affective and semiotic resonance echoed within an unconscious aftermath born from the spontaneity of the lived phenomenal

encounter. This is what I believe the best intentioned writers are thinking of when they speak of a relational field theory, not as an entity, but as a complex succession of temporal processes that mutually transpire yet are asymmetrically (not equally) generated from within the intrapsychic configurations of each person's psyche interjected and instantiated within interpersonal transactions—both transitive and mimetic yet under degrees of freedom—that are mutually projected, filtered, incorporated, assimilated, transfigured, and reorganized within each participant's internality, hence temporal psychic processes that dialectically unfold and are realized through actively constituted intersubjective space. This is not a third subject or agency, only the product of enriched, complex interactional transmutations, partially co-constructed, but ultimately conditioned on the unique contingencies (unconscious, historical, developmental, etc.) and teleological (purposeful) trajectories that inform each participant's inner experience, choice, and actions within any interpersonal encounter.<sup>10</sup>

### **Illegitimate Attacks on Classical Psychoanalysis**

What is perhaps the most salient transgression repeatedly made by relational psychoanalysis is its unrelenting misinterpretation of Freudian theory. What is so vexing to many analysts is the polemical denunciation of classical thought, which is used by many relational analysts to advocate for their position, arguably a politically driven ideology, at the expense of providing accurate scholarship. Masling (2003) has recently criticized Mitchell for setting this trend among the relational tradition thereby leading to continued unsubstantiated claims that are overstated, provocative, confrontational, brazen, and taken out of context. Richards (1999) argues that the relational school has constructed a false dichotomy between drive theory and relational theory, when in fact Freud's mature theoretical system clearly accounts for relational concepts (Reisner, 1992), a position Frank

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<sup>10</sup> Here it is important to reiterate the distinction between a climate, ambiance, or emergent process we may generally refer to as a third movement within relational exchange that may include both conscious and unconscious reverberations within each person's subjective interiority within the patient-analyst dyad, thus always in dynamic flux and subject to re-transformation, as opposed to a third subject, entity, or agency that materializes out of the analytic encounter.

(1998a) cogently reveals began in Freud's early career. Furthermore, Lothane (2003) recently and persuasively argued that Freud was an interpersonalist, while Roazen (1995) and Lohser and Newton (1996) show that Freud was at times quite relational in his therapeutic actions as evinced by testimonials acquired from the first hand accounts of his patients.

Let us first examine the exaggerated polarization the relational turn has created between the concepts of relation and drive, an antithesis it has capitalized on to serve as a launching-pad for its "new" theory. Mitchell (1988) specifically tells us that his approach is "a purely *relational* mode perspective, unmixed with drive-model premises"(p. 54). Here Mitchell clearly wants to create a fissure between his relational matrix theory and drive theory in order to advocate for why his framework is superior to Freud's, a position he reinforced throughout his entire body of works to the point that it has become an entrenched trademark of relational lore. Unlike Greenberg (1991) who was concerned with reconciling classical drive theory with contemporary relational perspectives, Mitchell was not only not interested in attempting to account for drive theory, let alone re-appropriate it within his alleged "paradigm," rather he wanted to debunk it entirely. Here he introduces a major flaw to his theory, for he jettisons the primacy of embodiment. What becomes of our corporeality in a relational field theory if drives are no longer acknowledged as basic constituents of psychic activity? Mitchell's intent is to overturn their importance within psychic life, but he does so through an extreme position of negation—not merely displacement. Mitchell's denunciation of the drives is tantamount to a fundamental denial of our embodied facticity.<sup>11</sup>

Freudian drive theory is an ontological treatise on unconscious organization, human motivation, and

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<sup>11</sup> Mitchell was so unfavorably disposed to the notion of embodiment that it led him to make extreme indefensible assertions such as this: "*Desire is experienced always in the context of relatedness*" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 3), thus leading Masling (2003) to charge that he was willing to ignore empirically verifiable facts, such as biologically based desires for thirst, hunger, sleep, and sex, in order to magnify the differences between his viewpoint and classical thought.

psychic development. Unlike Mitchell, Freud was deeply engaged in the problem of nature, hence the empirical *and* speculative investigation of our embodiment. Freud had to account for our embodied, sentient life within human motivation and behavior in order for psychoanalysis to be legitimately viewed as a human science, so his solution was to develop a philosophy of organic process that could potentially account for all forms of psychic and cultural phenomena: namely, the doctrine of drives. What sets Freud's drive theory apart from any other theory in the history of psychoanalysis is that he systematically attempts to philosophically address the ontological foundation or *a priori* ground of all psychic activity anchored in unconscious process. It is not enough (let alone sufficient) to claim that everything is relational or intersubjective without attempting to explain how relationality is constituted to begin with, that is, how it comes into being; and for this reason alone the relational school can hardly claim to have a sophisticated metaphysical position on the matter. In fact, it was Freud who first explained how relationality was made possible through the transmutation of the drives (Mills, 2002b).

It is beyond the scope of this critique to offer a justification for Freud's theory of mind, a topic I have addressed elsewhere in considerable length (see Mills, 2002a, 2004); however, a few points of clarification are in order. Freud (1915) used the term *Trieb*—not *Instinkt*—to characterize the ontological basis of inner experience, not as a fixed, static, immutable tropism belonging to animal instinct, but rather as a malleable, purposeful, transforming and transformative telic process of directed mental impetus, impulse, or endogenous urge.<sup>12</sup> For Freud (1915), *Trieb* was pure psychic *activity*: while drives have their source (*Quelle*), hence not simply

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<sup>12</sup> All references to Freud's texts refer to the original German monographs compiled in his *Gesammelte Werke, Chronologisch Geordnet*, 18 Vols., Anna Freud, Edward Bibring, Willi Hoffer, Ernst Kris, and Otto Isakower, in collaboration with Marie Bonaparte (Eds.) (London: Imago Publishing Co., Ltd.). *Triebe und Triebchicksale* appears in Book X., *Werke aus den Jahren, 1913-1917*, pp. 210-232. All translations are mine. Because many English speaking analytic audiences may not have access to such texts, I have cited the page numbers to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 Vols. (1886-1940), James Strachey (Trans. & Gen. Ed.) in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by

their motivation,<sup>13</sup> rooted in biologically based somatic processes, the “essence” (*Wesen*) of a drive is its pressure or force (*Drang*), namely its press, demand, or motion toward action (p. 122). Freud has to account for the question of origin, what I refer to as the “genesis problem” (Mills, 2002b), and this is why he could not omit the importance of our organic (hence constitutional) nature when describing the organization of mental life, what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the question of flesh. The mistake many relational theorists make is to equate drive with material reduction, a position Freud abandoned after he could not adequately reconcile his psychophysical mind . . . body thesis envisioned in the *Project*.<sup>14</sup>

Because *Trieb* becomes an expansive bedrock of psychic activity, Freud (1926) stipulated that the dual instantiation of drives properly introduced in 1923 are derived from a developmental monistic ontology (see p. 97; also see Freud, 1933, pp. 76-77): that is, drives are the initial impetus underlying the evolution and sublimation of the human soul (*Seele*) and civilization (*Kultur*). What is most interesting about Freud’s notion

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Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press).

<sup>13</sup> An endemic misinterpretation to many relational critiques on Freudian drive theory is that they often equate the somatic source of a drive with its motivation, the former being biologically conditioned, the later being pluralistically overdetermined in Freud’s system. Cf. Frank (2003).

<sup>14</sup> It is important to realize that Freud never intended to publish the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, written in 1895 and posthumously published, a manuscript he almost burned if it was not for the intervention of his daughter Anna who wanted to preserve it for his biographers. Freud’s early psychophysical project of mental life, a manuscript written before he established psychoanalysis as a behavioral science, was abandoned because he could not reduce the complexifications of mental phenomena, what in the philosophy of mind is referred to as *qualia*, to “quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles” (p. 295). By the time Freud (1900) published the dream book, he “carefully avoid[ed] the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion” (p. 536), a sentiment he reinforced in his public lectures of 1916-1917 and in 1932-1933.

of drive is that he ostensibly introduces the presence of otherness within the very fabric of libidinal and aggressive motivation. A drive has a *telos*, hence an aim (*Zeit*)—It (*Es*) seeks, yearns, pines for satisfaction, for fulfillment—which may only be sated through an object (*Objekt*), what Freud mainly considered to be other people, but it could be any object or part-object coveted for satisfaction. In fact, Freud says that an object is the “most variable” aspect to drive activity, but he ultimately privileges human connection. In other words, the force or impetus of a drive is to seek human contact and relatedness in order to fulfill its aims. To speak of the destiny of a drive without other people becoming the object of its aims is a vacuous and ludicrous proposition, for a drive without an object is blind and empty. And of course what Freud meant by a human object was in fact a subject, namely, another individual who was separate from the self. Yet Mitchell (1988) avers that “Freud . . . eschew[ed] any role for primary relatedness in his theory and reli[ed] instead solely on drive economies” (p. 54). This tenet is naively fallacious: let us examine why.

Not only is Freud’s object relations theory predicated on his seminal 1915 paper, “Drives and their Fate” (*Triebe und Triebchicksale*), thus making a conceptual clearing for “primary relatedness,” he specifically elevates the process of identification, hence an interpersonal dynamic, to the status of a relational phenomenon. Freud (1921) specifically tells us that identification is “the earliest expression of an emotional tie with *another person*” (p. 105, italics added). Later he reiterates this point more clearly: “Identification (*Identifizierung*) . . . [is] the assimilation of one ego [*Ich*] to another one, as a result of which the first ego behaves like the second in certain respects, imitates it and in a sense takes it up into itself” (Freud, 1933, p. 63). Freud goes on to say that it is “a very important form of *attachment* to someone else, probably the very first, and not the same thing as the choice of an object” (p. 63, italics added). Here he is deliberately wanting to differentiate the psychic importance and affective value of internalizing a parent or dependency figure rather than merely coveting any arbitrary object for libidinal gratification. And Freud (1931) specifically concedes that for each gender the mother becomes the original and most important object of identification (see p. 225) “established unalterably

for a whole lifetime as the first and strongest love-object and as the prototype of all later love-relations—for both sexes” (Freud, 1940, p. 188). Here Freud ostensibly says that “love has its origin in attachment” beginning with the appropriation of the mother’s body (p. 188). If the emotional processes of identification, attachment, and love are not forms of “primary relatedness,” then I don’t know what would be. From these passages, Freud is clearly describing an intrapsychic process of incorporating the attributes and qualities of another subject (in German, *Person*) encountered through ongoing intersubjective, relational exchange.

It is understandable why Freud would invite misinterpretation and controversy. He transcended his early neurophysiological footholds yet retained his commitment to natural science, wrote in ambiguous fashions augmented by metaphoric prose, and often changed his views over the course of his burgeoning discoveries. Feminists generally abhor Freud for his biologization of gender, and humanist reactionaries are sensitive to any form of material explanation. I can see why relational theorists would become confused when reading his early work on drives amongst the backdrop of his evolving theoretical variances. Yet by the time Freud introduced the notion of identification and attachment, such ambiguities are sufficiently remedied. This only points toward a lack of familiarity with Freud’s mature texts.

Freud (1921) fully appreciated the social phenomenon involved in psychic development and he clearly tells us so: “rarely and under certain exceptional conditions is individual psychology in a position to disregard *relations* of this individual to others. In the individual’s mental life someone else is invariably involved . . . so from the very first individual psychology . . . is at the same time social psychology (p. 69, italics added). Freud was not particularly impressed with having to think the same thing all the time: his ideas went through massive evolutionary changes with regard to both theory and technique, and by the time Eros was elevated to a supraordinate drive to account for narcissism, libidinal object love, self-preservation, and that of the species (1940, p. 148), the role of relationality was an indissoluble aspect of his mature theory of human nature. But it may be argued that relational concepts were implicit in Freud’s early work all along: Oedipalization is based

on coveting one's parents, to possess him or her, to extract their desired attributes, to *be* them. Despite the fact that Freud did not use terms such as 'interpersonal' or 'intersubjective,' Lothane (2003) rightfully points out that therapy was always characterized in terms of dyadic, interpersonal terms manifesting in all aspects of the treatment including resistance, transference, working-through, and the free associative method. Freud (1912) defines one facet of technique as the analyst's ability to "turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient (p. 115), hence arguably a dynamic that is accomplished by the analyst's attunement of his own subjectivity to the subjectivity of the patient. Yet Mitchell (1988, p. 297) and others (Hoffman, 1998, pp. 97-102) still misrepresent Freud's depiction of the analytic encounter by referring to the analyst as a "blank screen," when Freud (1912) actually said that the analyst should be "opaque" (*undurchsichtig*) to his patients, hence invoking the metaphor of a "mirror" (*Spiegelplatte*) (p. 118). There is nothing blank about opacity, and a reflective surface is hardly a screen. Take another example: Transference is the reiteration of the internalized presence of another person, hence a relational enterprise, which Freud (1916-1917) flatly tells us depends upon "the personal relation between the two people involved" (p. 441), namely, the analyst and analysand. We *relate* to our internal objects, that is, the internalized subjectivity of another. It should be irrefutably clear that from Freud's own writings he establishes relatedness as a primary role in personality development and the clinical encounter.<sup>15</sup>

When Freud's theoretical corpus is taken as a whole, the relational tradition's criticism that Freud's theory and method was a "one person" rather than a "two-person psychology" (see Aron, 1996; Mitchell & Aron, 1999; Mitchell & Greenberg, 1983) becomes an insipid, vacuous claim. Furthermore, accusations that Freud's view of the mind is "monadic" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 3) and "isolated" (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p. 12), thereby collapsing into "solipsism" (Mitchell, 2000, p. xii), is simply shabby sophistry. What is absolutely

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<sup>15</sup> George Frank (1998a) nicely enumerates many of Freud's technical papers where Freud invokes the "personal" dimension to treatment. For sake of brevity, I have only listed a few examples here.

inconceivable is that by Freud's own words, which I just presented, he cannot possibly be a solipsist who favors a view of the psyche as existing in isolation from other people. Yet this is the relational propaganda that has been uncritically circulating in psychoanalytic publications for more than two decades. When one closely examines even the secularity of the relational platform, many take a nihilistic critique of classical psychoanalysis based on misinterpretations (and sometimes blatant distortions) of Freud, omitting what he actually said in his mature texts—let alone reading them in German, and thus erecting a foundation of theoretical novelty based on straw man arguments. Not only is this not accurate scholarship, but it conditions the next generation of students, mental health professionals, and analysts to erroneously conclude that Freud's views were fundamentally flawed, antiquated, and reductionistic, without having to bother to read Freud's texts directly to decide for themselves, simply because credible authorities dissuade them from doing so. I believe this also sends the wrong information to the public who is generally naive about the historical terrain defining theory and practice, let alone psychoanalytic politics. What is unnecessarily unfortunate is that these invented schisms between classical and relational viewpoints, which only serve to differentiate contemporary approaches from previous schools under the guise of betterment and novelty, create more polarization and tension rather than unity and collective identification despite having many shared affinities based upon a common calling. What is of further irony, perhaps in part unconsciously informed, is that although relational analysts advocate the value of relatedness—not opposition or difference—many relational writers use the language of objection and difference to advance their cause.

In addition to these adumbrated criticisms, I have often speculated that the current preoccupation with Freud bashing among mainstream American psychoanalytic psychologists is due in part to an unconscious renunciation and dis-identification with what classical theory represents to a collective group narcissism identified with particular ideals within contemporary sensibility. What I particularly have in mind is the virulent need to reject Freud who is seen as a cold, depriving, critical father figure for the fantasy of the unconditional

acceptance, warmth, nurturance, empathy, and reciprocal recognition from an idealized loving mother whom forms the role model for a way of being in the consulting room, which from my perspective personifies the relational turn. In some ways we may not inappropriately wonder if this is due to an unresolved Oedipus complex from within this collective group informed by preoedipal dissatisfactions that continually strive to recover the lost presence of an idealized, albeit fallible, mother, what Ferenczi intimates in his correspondence to Groddeck as possessing “too little love and too much severity” (Ferenczi & Groddeck, 1982, p. 36). While there are many historically documented reasons to conclude that Freud had at times an intractable personality, this is not good enough nor a sufficient reason to discredit let alone jettison his ideas without giving them their proper due. It is with equal understanding and personal longing why the maternal function is such a prized commodity within ideological preferences informing our unconscious identifications with particular revisionist theoretical and technical priorities. And if attachment theory is correct, we may appreciate even more deeply why we are compelled to do so.

### **Therapeutic Excess**

Frank (1998a) argues that the relational tradition has overstated its claim to providing an original contribution to the field, instead giving the “appearance” of a unique position when it is merely the re-appropriation of old paradigms with a make-over, what Giovacchini (1999) calls “old wine in murky bottles.” I would say that this is not entirely the case. From the standpoint of redefining therapeutic intervention, analytic posturing, and technical priority, relational analysis is a breath of fresh air. Having questioned, disassembled, and revamped the classical take on neutrality, anonymity, and abstinence, analysts now behave in ways that are more personable, authentic, humane, and reciprocal rather than reserved, clinically detached, and withholding. While it is indeed difficult to make generalizations about all relational clinicians, which is neither desirable nor possible, one gets the impression that within the consulting room there is generally more dialogue rather than monologue, less interpretation and more active attunement to the process within the dyad, more emphasis on affective experience

over conceptual insight, and more interpersonal warmth conveyed by the analyst, thus creating a more emotionally satisfying climate for both involved. No longer do we get an image of the sober, cerebral, emotionally sealed-off analyst who greets the analysand with a curt social acknowledgment, then walks back to his chair saying nothing, standing in thick uncomfortable silence with an expressionless face waiting for the patient to lie on the couch or sit down. Rather we imagine the analytic encounter aspiring toward an interpersonal ideal of relational fulfillment and mutual recognition that serves a nurturing and validating function for both the patient and therapist alike, similar to the consummate holding environment envisioned by Winnicott or a milieu of optimal empathic attunement identified by Kohut, with the supplementary exception that the analyst is also recognized.

Relational and intersubjective viewpoints have convincingly overturned the dogmatic inculcation of Americanized classical training and encourage free thinking, experimentation, novelty, spontaneity, creativity, authentic self-expression, humor, and play. And here is what I believe is the relational position's greatest contribution—the way they practice. There is malleability in the treatment frame, selectivity in interventions that are tailored to the unique needs and qualities of each patient, and a proper burial of the prototypic solemn analyst who is fundamentally removed from relating as one human being to another in the service of a withholding, frustrating, and ungratified methodology designed to provoke transference enactments, deprivation, and unnecessary feelings of rejection, shame, guilt, and rage. Today's relational analyst is more adept at customizing technique to fit each unique dyad (Beebe & Lachmann, 2003; Greenberg, 2001), what Bacal (1998) refers to as a specificity of intervention choice, and rallies against a blanket standardization or manualization of practice. Because of these important modifications to methodology, one may not inappropriately say that a relational approach can be a superior form of treatment for many patients because it enriches the scope of human experience in relation to another's and validates their wish for understanding, meaning, recognition, and love, what may very well be the most coveted and exalted ideals that make psychoanalysis effectively

transformative and healing.

Despite these noted strengths, relational analysis has generated a great deal of controversy with regard to the question and procedural role of analyst self-disclosure. On one hand, relational approaches break down barriers of difference by emphasizing dyadic reciprocal involvement, which naturally includes the analyst having more liberty to talk about his or her own internal experiences within the session. However, the question arises: Where do we draw the line? Of course this is a question that may only be answered from within a defined frame of analytic sensibility, is contextually determined, and open to clinical judgment. But this question has led many critics of the relational turn to wonder about the level of what Jay Greenberg (2001) refers to as “psychoanalytic excess,” or what Freud (1912) called “therapeutic ambition.” Equally, we may be legitimately concerned about the undisciplined use of self-disclosure, countertransference enactments, uninhibited risk taking, and flagrant boundary violations that have the potential to materialize within this evolving framework of analytic practice. While I believe that most relational analysts are very sound clinicians, it is incumbent upon us to flag potentially questionable or experimental practices in order to bring them into a frank and open discussion on exactly what constitutes a legitimate execution of analytic method. Recall that the earliest relational analysts within Freud’s inner circle were borne out of extreme and excessive forms of experimentation: Jung, Rank, Ferenczi, and Groddeck displayed palpable sexual transgressions under the illusion of analytic treatment, and they were also advocates of mutual analysis (Rudnytsky, 2002), which is not unlike the current trend to return to an emphasis on mutuality, reciprocity, and equality.

On the one hand, relational analysts are commendably brave to report case studies where their own internal processes and intimate experiences are discussed openly in professional space, which I find of great service to the community because it breaks down oppressive taboos surrounding restrictive attitudes on analytic disclosure, self-censorship, dishonesty among colleagues, and creates a clearing for acknowledging the value of the analyst’s phenomenology in analytic work. On the other hand, we are introduced to material that evokes

questions of potential misuse. There is always a danger with the over-expression of personal communications, countertransference disclosures, and the insistence on providing reciprocal revelations that may reveal more about the needs of the analyst rather than the patient's. While relational analysts operate with degrees of variance and specificity with regard to the employment of disclosure, this description from Lewis Aron (1991) may serve as an example: "I encourage patients to tell me anything that they have observed and insist that there must have been some basis in my behavior for their conclusions. I often ask patients to speculate or fantasize about what is going on inside of me, and *in particular I focus on what patients have noticed about my internal conflicts.* . . . I assume that the patient may very well have noticed my anger, jealousy, excitement, or whatever before I recognize it in myself (pp. 252-253, italics added). This statement leaves the reader wondering whom is the one being analyzed, thus raising the question of whether a relational approach is more in the service of the analyst's narcissism.

Presumably Aron is conducting his practice under the guidance of mutuality, what he specifically says is "asymmetrical" (Aron, 1996), or what I prefer to call proportional. The acceptance of mutuality within relational discourse is often unquestioned due to the systemic emphasis on dyadic reciprocal relations, dialogic exchange, and the value of the analyst's presence and participation in the therapeutic process. But we may ask: What do we mean by mutual? Is everything mutual or are there independent forces, pressures, and operations at play that are defined in opposition to difference? When relational analysts employ the notion of mutuality, do they really mean equality, such as having the *same* relationship, or are they merely inferring that something is shared between them? Modell (1991) refers to mutuality as a form of "egalitarianism," specifically canceling the notion of difference in favor of equality. In fact relational analysts often equate mutuality with equality, when I believe this is misguided.

Equality implies that there is no difference between each subject in the dyad, that they are identical, and that they have the same value. This position seems to ignore the substantial individual differences that exist

between the analyst and the analysand, not to mention the power differentials, role asymmetry, and purported purpose of forming a working relationship to begin with. Here mutuality merely means existing in relation to another subject who despite harboring individual differences still share collective values that define us all as human beings, but they are far from being equal (*aequalis*). We all have competing needs, agendas, defenses, caprices, ideals, and wishes, and these clash with others. So mutuality is merely a formal category of co-existence, not the qualitative implications it signifies. This is why I prefer to refer to analytic mutuality as defined through proportional exchange, whereby a patient, namely, one who suffers (*patiens*), seeks out my professional assistance as an identified authority and pays me a large fee to help. There is nothing equal about it: I'm not the one being analyzed. One cannot help but wonder how the overtly self-disclosing analyst reconciles the tensions that inevitably occur when the patient's personality or therapeutic process radically resists wanting to know anything personal about the analyst at all, let alone the analyst's "internal conflicts." Here I have in mind patients with histories of developmental trauma, attachment disruptions, abuse, and/or personality disorders whom are generally mistrustful of any kind of relationship. And narcissistic analysands will be the first to let you know that they are not paying you to talk about yourself, let alone demand mutual recognition. Of course we as analysts want to be recognized and appreciated by our patients, not only because the desire for recognition is a basic human need, but because our work is laborious and we wish some gratitude. Despite how intrinsically rewarding our work can be, we often serve as a filter and container for a plethora of pain, hate, and rage with some emotional cost to ourselves, therefore external validation is affirmative and rewarding. But we must be mindful that we need to be sensitive to the patient's unique needs and not foist or superimpose our own for the sake of our desires for gratification despite identifying with a certain therapeutic ideal. When this happens naturally and unfolds organically from within the intimate parameters of the treatment process, it becomes an aesthetic supplement to our work, and moreover, to our way of being, which speaks of the depth of attachment therapeutic relatedness affords.

Abend (2003) has recently questioned the purported advantages of analyst self-disclosure, particularly alerting us to concerns over radical self-revelation. Ehrenberg (1993), for example, radicalizes the emphasis on countertransference disclosures and argues that direct articulation of the analyst's own experience is the fulcrum for analytic work. We do not require much effort to imagine how this dictum could potentially lead to disastrous consequences, including unethical behavior and gross boundary violations. At a recent conference, Barbara Pizer (2002) delivered a shocking confession to a bewildered audience that she had broken the confidentiality of a former analysand to her current patient (who was in previous treatment with Pizer's analysand) by revealing that her former analysand was sexually abused. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the intervention, it becomes too easy to see how therapeutic excess can have possible detrimental effects. Other relationalists have forayed into what certainly looks like excess, at least out of context, including the disclosure of erotic feelings (Davis, 1994), lying to patients (Gerson, 1996), and even screaming while invading personal body space (Frederickson, 1990). Wilber (2002) confessed to a patient that he had had a sexual dream about her, and she reportedly became furious. If we were only to focus on the content of these interventions without taking into account the context and the overall process of treatment, then these enactments could be simply deemed as unethical, if not outrageous. My main point here is to draw increasing attention to how relational analysts are bringing their own personalities into the consulting room, presumably under appropriate discretion guided by clinical intuition and experienced judgment, as well as having the courage to discuss their countertransference enactments in professional space.

It has been argued time and again that it is far too easy for someone outside the lived analytic encounter to become an armchair quarterback and call all the plays after the game. While certainly no intervention is beyond scrutiny nor reproach, what strikes me about some of these therapeutic transactions is their humanness and authentic spontaneity despite seeming excessive. The hallmark of a relational approach to treatment is that it approximates the way real relationships are naturally formed in patients' external lives including the rawness,

tension, and negotiability of the lived encounter, with the exception that the process falls under analytic sensibility. This is why the relationalists demand malleability in the treatment frame rather than applying a rigid, orthodox, or authoritarian procedure because malleability is necessary in order to cater to the unique contingencies of each dyad; and this necessitates abolishing any illusory fixed notions of practice that can be formulaically applied to all situations. I believe most analysts can buy into this premise, but regardless of its pragmatic value, it still begs the question of method. If every intervention is contextually based, then it is relative and subjectively determined, hence not open to universal applications. The question of uniform technique becomes an illegitimate question because context determines everything. The best we can aim for is to have an eclectic skill set (under the direction of clinical judgment, experience, self-reflectivity, and wisdom) to apply to whatever possible clinical realities we may encounter. But perhaps I am being too naive or idealistic in assuming that every analyst is capable of achieving this level of professional comportment. Here I am wondering how this revisionist relational methodology affects training, supervision, pedagogy, and practice. Hoffman (1994) tells us to “throw away the book” once we have mastered it. Fair enough. But what if a neophyte were reading the relational literature and took such statement literally? What about reliability and treatment efficacy if there is no proper method to which we can claim allegiance? Could this not lead to an ‘anything goes’ approach conducted by a bunch of loose-cannons justifying interventions under the rubric of relationality? Yet the same potential for abuse exists when applying any approach rigidly, whether it is a formal procedure, orienting principle, or general technical considerations; thus the question of method will always remain an indeterminate question with some approaches being more justifiable than others.

In contrast to the relational analyst, let us examine an intervention from Bion. Bion (cited in Klein, M., Heimann, P., & Money-Kyrle, R.E. [Eds], 1957) offers an example of his work with a schizophrenic whom he had been seeing for five years in a five-day-a-week analysis:

Patient: I picked a tiny piece of my skin from my face and feel quite empty.

Bion: The tiny piece of skin is your penis, which you have torn out, and all your insides have come with it.

Patient: I do not understand . . . penis . . . only syllables and now it has no meaning.

Bion: You have split my word ‘penis’ into syllables and now it has no meaning.

Patient: I don’t know what it means, but I want to say, ‘if I can’t spell I can’t think.’

Bion: The syllables have been split into letters; you cannot spell—that is to say you cannot put the letters together again to make words, so now you cannot think. (p. 229)

It goes without saying that, like the examples listed from the relational literature, we don’t know the nature or quality of Bion’s relationship with his patient, nor the historical or developmental contingencies, what the past content of sessions revealed, nor even the affective, unspoken, or behavioral cues of the current context that may be influencing Bion’s choice of intervention. We may even concede that in principle we have no way of knowing what is beneficial or detrimental in this therapeutic exchange, nor would the patient necessarily be in a position to know himself. But what is clear is the authoritative tone, hubris, and brazen certainty in which Bion delivers his interpretations, what Thompson (2004) calls “messages from the gods” (p. 118). Perhaps this is merely an artifact of his classical training, his personality, or both. After all, he was a tank commander in World War I. But he was also analyzed by Melanie Klein, herself analyzed by Ferenczi and Abraham, thus modeling the way analysis ‘should’ be done. Let us examine a vignette from her work.

In Klein’s (1961) *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, she analyzes a 10 year old boy named Richard whose treatment took place during the second World War. This is what transpired during the *very beginning* of the fifth session:

Richard began by saying that he felt very happy. The sun was shining. He had made friends with a little boy about seven years old and they played in the sand together, building canals. He said how much he liked the playroom and how nice it was. There were so many

pictures of dogs on the walls. He was looking forward to going home for the weekend. The garden there was very nice but, when they first moved in, 'one could have died' when one saw the weeds. He commented on Lord Beaverbrook's change of job and wondered if his successor would be as good.

*Mrs. K.* interpreted that the playroom was 'nice' because of his feelings about her, the room also standing for her. The new friend represented a younger brother. This was bound up with his wish for a strong father who would give Mummy many babies (the many dogs). She also interpreted his concern that, if he pushed Daddy out . . . he would take Daddy's place but would be unable to make babies and hold the family together. He was also happy because he was going home and, in order to keep the family life friendly, he wished to inhibit his desire to take Daddy's place. The weeds stood for himself when he upset the family peace by his jealousy and competition with his father. He has used the expression 'one could have died' when referring to the weeds, because they represented something dangerous.

Richard sneezed and became very worried. . . (p. 34)

Klein goes onto interpret Richard's purported fantasies of primal scenes, penises, dangerous internal objects, and *his wish to have intercourse* with her and his mother. It comes as no surprise that the boy became horrified and immediately wanted to flee from the anxiety she engendered with her interpretations. If the relational camp is to be overly criticized for therapeutic excess, then what should we make of this intervention—therapeutic ambition, over zealousness, excess, or wild analysis? Whether Klein was correct, semi-correct, or incorrect in her interpretations is not the point; we must seriously question whether deep interpretations *in this context* are the most effective form of treatment, especially with a child. Most relational analysts who place currency on the forms of relatedness that are cultivated in sessions would surely conclude that this analytic method is abusive and potentially traumatizing to patients.

Since its inception, psychoanalysis has always received criticism for not measuring up to the propounded status of a legitimate ‘science.’ But clinical case material is what we mainly rely on as legitimate sources of qualitative, empirical data.<sup>16</sup> As Safran (2003) points out in his survey of psychotherapy research, there are many empirically derived conclusions that address the question of treatment efficacy. Once taking into account the patient’s developmental and life history, we may be alerted to the following conditions that remain the major criteria in which to evaluate the merit and/or limitations of a treatment and the specific interventions employed: the (a) qualitative degree of the working alliance, including (but not limited to) the level of trust and capacity to form an attachment with the analyst; (b) mutual agreement with regard to the process and goals of treatment; and (c) the patient’s assent to professional authority as indicative of his or her level of satisfaction (with or without symptom improvement).

As I have stated elsewhere (Mills, 2004), in my opinion psychoanalysis is ultimately about process over anything else—perhaps even above technical principles, theory, and interventions—for it relies on the indeterminate unfolding of inner experience within intersubjective space. In our training we learn to cultivate an analytic attitude of clinical composure, optimal listening, data-gathering, hypothesis testing, critical reflection, clarification and reevaluation—all of which conceptually and behaviorally guide the analytic process. Process is everything, and attunement to process will determine if you can take the patient where he or she needs to go. The analyst has the challenging task of attending to the patient’s associations within particular contexts of content and form, perpetuity versus discontinuity, sequence and coherence, thus noting repetitions of themes and patterns, and the convergence of such themes within a teleological dynamic trajectory of conceptual meaning.

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<sup>16</sup> I am not in agreement with Masling’s (2003) claim that clinical data is “not empirical” (p. 597) since it relies on the qualitative enactments and analysis of experience, not merely culled from the analyst’s clinical phenomenology, but also empirically investigated by psychoanalytic psychotherapy researchers including Gill, Hoffman, Luborsky, Strupp, and Safran, just to name a few.

The clinician has to be vigilant for competing, overlapping, and/or parallel processes that are potentially operative at once, thus requiring shifts in focal attention and process. There are always realities encroaching on other realities, and affect plays a crucial part. Observation becomes a way of being that requires listening on multiple levels of experiential complexity—from manifest to latent content, detecting unconscious communications, recognizing resistance, defense, drive derivatives, transference manifestations, and differential elements of each compromise, tracking the dialectical tensions between competing wishes, fantasies, and conflicts with close attention to their affective reverberations, listening at different levels of abstraction, ferreting out one's countertransference from ordinary subjective peculiarities—to tracing the multifarious interpersonal components of therapeutic exchange. Given such complexity and the overdetermination of multiple competing processes, I hardly think psychoanalytic technique is capable of being manulized by following a step-by-step method.

### **Consilience**

I imagine some of my relational colleagues will view me negatively for offering this critique. I must reiterate my purpose for doing so is under the intention of advance. Because there is so much that is of importance and value in the relational school, a proper philosophical grounding becomes a necessary requisite in order to lend credibility and validity to its diverse theoretical positions. Ideas without critique are as blind as perceptions without thought; and just as linguistic mediation is a necessary condition for conceptuality, so is self-criticism a necessary dimension for growth and the actualization of further potential. The politics of psychoanalytic infighting is not a new topic. But it seems to me that the relational school has introduced a new tension within the establishment: with the hermeneutic turn, psychoanalysis is drifting away from its scientific foundations to philosophy. Bornstein (2001), Masling (2003), Silverman (2000), and Josephs (2001) reproach contemporary psychoanalysis for the abnegation of a scientific framework based on empirically derived research methodology under the seduction of postmodern hyperbole. While this criticism is not entirely without merit, it also presupposes that psychoanalysis must continue to view itself solely as a scientific discipline modeled after natural

science, a presupposition relational analysts have repeatedly drawn into question.

The conception of psychoanalysis as a science was as much a criticism of Freud's time as it is today;<sup>17</sup> and we can see why the empirical proponents of psychoanalysis—mainly academics—have an invested interest in salvaging psychoanalysis from the bog of illegitimacy. Popper (1972) and Grünbaum (1984) argue that psychoanalysis simply fails as a natural science because it is too private, not open to clinical testing or falsification, and not modeled after physics, while Sulloway (1979) and Webster (1995) decry that it must forgo the status of a serious science because it does not conform to Darwinian biology. In a recent defense of psychoanalysis, Marcus Bowman (2002) argues that outdated and misapplied notions of science and positivism erroneously serve as the main resistance against accepting the value of psychoanalysis as a rational inquiry into the essential conditions of internal human conflict. He claims that critics of psychoanalysis hold onto the illusory hope that human science should be modeled on physical science and/or evolutionary biology when these propositions themselves may be interpreted as category mistakes, distort the real practice of scientific observation which is based on consensus and agreement, and generally reflect an exaggeration of the authority of science as a touchstone to truth. Even Freud (1915) himself recognized the limits to the so-called 'scientific method': "We have often heard it maintained that sciences should be built up on clear and sharply defined basic concepts. In actual fact no science, not even the most exact, begins with such definitions" (p. 117). For anyone actually working in empirical research, we all know how easy it is to statistically manipulate data: 'scientific' reports are primarily based on the theoretical beliefs of the researcher who is attempting to advocate a specific line of argument under the guise of 'objectivity.' Freud (1912) saw through this game: "Cases which are devoted from the first to scientific purposes and treated accordingly suffer in their outcome; while the most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise

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<sup>17</sup> Freud states: "I have always felt it a gross injustice that people have refused to treat psycho-analysis like any other science" *Standard Edition*, Vol. 20, 1925, p. 58.

by any new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from any presuppositions” (p. 114), hence alerting us to the potential interference of the analyst’s subjectivity.

I am afraid that the polarity between psychoanalysis as science versus psychoanalysis as hermeneutics will always be a felt tension. On the one hand, disciplines that largely identify with being scientifically (hence empirically) grounded will need to justify their theories through collaborative identification with methodologies that claim to be epistemologically objective, while the hermeneutic tradition is invested in their renunciation because they simply can’t buy the premise of an objective epistemology. As a result, a stalemate is unavoidable: each side wishes to annul the validity and justifications of the other rather than seeking a complementary union or consilience.<sup>18</sup> Because psychoanalysis has historically always fought prejudice against its scientific achievements, a phenomenon that dominates mainstream academic psychology and psychiatry, perhaps the relational tradition is finding new momentum in the field because of the felt dissatisfactions inherent in an epistemological scientific framework. And with so many generations of analysts having to labor continually to justify their trade to an increasingly cynical public that wants only quick symptom relief rather than insight, it comes as no surprise that the rejuvenation of subjectivity needs to vanquish objective science by making it the contemporary whipping boy. The problem comes when radical adherents for each side attempt to ground their positions through the negation of the other rather than through seeking the fruitful unification that science and hermeneutics have to offer one another as a complex holism. Can the two identificatory bodies of knowledge co-exist in some type of comparative-integrative harmony or dialectical order? This I cannot answer. Yet I believe it remains an important task to pursue this possibility in order for psychoanalysis to prosper and reclaim its cultural value.

Following Bowman’s work, I believe it is important to reiterate the point that psychoanalysis is a

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<sup>18</sup> This word is adapted from Edward O. Wilson’s (1998) book, *Consilience*, where he attempts to unify the hybrid nature of scientific and hermeneutic knowledge.

behavioral science and not a natural (hard) science, which consequently elevates the role of subjectivity, negotiation, consensus, and relational exchange when making any observation, interpretation, or epistemological assertion. The implication of this thesis is that any form of science by definition simultaneously becomes intimately conjoined with the humanities. Yet at the same time, any true scientist would not make dogmatic metaphysical statements of irrefutable objective certainty because science (in theory) is always open to the possibility that any theoretical system or methodological framework is an evolving avenue or medium for procuring knowledge, not as fixed, irrefutable determined fact, but as a process of becoming. Given that relational psychoanalysis is enjoying adventures of change by re-appropriating philosophy and incorporating the empirical findings of infant observation research, cognitive neuroscience, and attachment theory, this seems to me to be an auspicious sign for our profession.

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