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The Problem of the Private Self

Unformulated Experience, the Interpersonal Field, and Multiplicity

As Harry Stack Sullivan was the first to see, the smallest meaningful unit of human experience is not the individual human being, but the interpersonal field. In arguing to reject the traditional notion of a unitary, interior, unique self, Sullivan portrayed the psychic life of the individual as a collection of what today we might very well call multiple and discontinuous selves or states of self. A number of today's theorists of the multiple self (e.g., Mitchell, 1991, 1993; Bromberg, 1993, 1994, 1996a, b) acknowledge Sullivan's work as an important inspiration. Even among those multiple-self theorists who do not embed their ideas in the interpersonal tradition, ideas similar to Sullivan's are in common usage, most particularly the idea that a self or self-state can be understood as "the crystallization of different interactional schemes" (Slavin and Kriegman, 1992, p. 204).

In what is arguably his single most mature and seminal paper, "The Illusion of Personal Individuality" (published in 1950, but orally presented six years earlier), Sullivan made his position crystal clear: the feeling of being a unique individual, and of having a uniquely individual self, is nothing more than a narcissistically invested fiction—a useful fiction for most people to have, perhaps, but one that clinicians should be knowledgeable enough to see through. What he called the "self" (or self-system) was not connected with the sense of identity, as it was for Erikson, and had nothing to do with shaping life in the pursuit of ambitions or ideals, as in Kohut, but was instead that part of the personality central in the avoidance of anxiety—and

anxiety was everything to Sullivan. According to Sullivan (1950), people cannot exist outside the interpersonal field; hence, this psychic, adjustive mechanism, this "self-system," can never be understood in isolation from others. Therefore,

one of the greatest difficulties encountered in bringing about favorable change is this almost inescapable illusion that there is a perduring, unique, simple, existent self, called variously "me" or "I," and in some strange fashion, the patient's, or the subject person's, private property [p. 220].

And again:

You will find that it makes no sense to think of ourselves as "individual," "separate," capable of anything like definitive description in isolation, that the notion is just beside the point. No great progress in this field of study can be made until it is realized that the field of observation is what people do with each other, what they can communicate to each other about what they do with each other. When that is done, no such thing as the durable, unique, individual personality is ever clearly justified. For all I know every human being has as many personalities as he has interpersonal relations; and as a great many of our interpersonal relations are actual operations with imaginary people—that is, in-no-sense-materially-embodied people—and as they may have the same or greater validity and importance in life as have our operations with many materially-embodied people like the clerks in the corner store, you can see that even though "the illusion of personal individuality" sounds quite lunatic when first heard, there is at least food for thought in it [pp. 219–220].

These were not Sullivan's only descriptions of this view. Earlier, he had referred to "the overweening conviction of authentic individual selfhood" that "amounts to a delusion of unique individuality" (1936–1937, p. 16). Later (1938), again mentioning "delusions of unique individuality," he went so far as to label such beliefs as "the very mother of illusions, the ever pregnant source of preconceptions that invalidate almost all our efforts to understand other people" (p. 33). Sullivan recommended, in the strongest terms, that we give up the attempt to characterize unique, defining "selves" and instead try to

grasp what is going on at any particular time in the interpersonal field. In such an inquiry, the place of history remained secure, because the way the field operated was a combinatorial function of one's past and one's perception of the present.

Here we have Sullivan on one side and all of the psychoanalysts of his day on the other. No wonder classical analysts have sometimes misunderstood the work of interpersonal psychoanalysts as radically environmental (though there was an important political agenda in this rejection as well). And no wonder some of those very interpersonal psychoanalysts who were inspired by Sullivan's work have argued that he didn't *really* mean to exclude the uniquely individual self, that he was only following the dictates of his operationist principles, and that there actually is room in his theory for a self and an internal world.

But he *did* mean to exclude the unique, individual self. He meant just what he said. I cannot read the passages I have just quoted any other way than as a straightforward rejection of the traditional unitary, unique self and its contained inner world. Sullivan means to define the personality as the sum total of one's interpersonal relations, and the self-system as the anxiety-gating processes of the personality. We are nothing more, he says, than agglomerations of interpersonal relations, although many of those relations may go on privately (that is, with a symbolic or fantasized other) after an origin in the external world.

The argument is brave, brilliant, and prescient; but it is too extreme. Sullivan sought a remedy for the exaggerated internality of the psychoanalysis of his day, and he found one. Like many who propose correctives, though, he rode the pendulum too far in the other direction. We do not have to do away with the inner world to preserve what is most important about his insight.

I should add, whereas Sullivan intended to explode the unitary self, he was certainly not arguing in favor of a theory of multiple, discontinuous selves. Multiple-self theory was, at the time, no more than a novelty, written to deal with certain rather bizarre cases (multiple personality), the reality of which was in question to most clinicians. It is also important that Sullivan understood dissociation as a defensive process, the one used in the most severe instances of anxiety. He did seem to imply the possibility of a multiple self, but he did not explicitly conceive the idea; he did not get to the point of thinking through the notion that various selves or self-states might interact, or that dissociation was a concept that described such a phenomenon. Those meanings, however, are among the most important meanings of dissociation in today's literature.

What, then, does Sullivan mean when he says that "every human being has as many personalities as he has interpersonal relations"? He means that each relationship creates a certain kind of interpersonal field, and that as long as we limit our frame of reference to the confines of that field, it is fair to say that a human being has a certain "personality" or "self." From a more contemporary perspective, we would add that the field is not an objectivistic concept; it is not construed on the basis of data or essences to which we somehow all have access in just the same way. (Sullivan's attitude toward this point would have been highly ambivalent, and perhaps more negative than positive.¹) It is constructed, rather, according to the interaction of the conscious and unconscious psychic realities of the participants.

How does an interpersonal field come into being in any particular instance? For instance, what happens when the telephone interrupts me while I am talking to my spouse? How do I suddenly become the person I am with the salesperson on the other end of the line, or with Aunt Bess, or with my best friend? How do we move from one "personality" to another? Part of the answer here depends on Sullivan's notion of what a "personality" is. Each person we know (or think we know, as when we make assumptions about a new acquaintance) calls out in us a set of operations that have been effective in the past with this person, or with a person we take to be similar, in managing the regulation of security and insecurity. Thus, for Sullivan, each "personality" is no more or less than a set of security operations; these, however, can be immensely complex. These various individual "personalities" we "have" can be linked in groups. Some people somehow remind us of our fathers, for instance, or make us feel like the son or daughter of our fathers, and therefore tend to call out the repertoire of security operations related to the expectations, perceptions, and so on, that we bring from that relationship.

What are security operations? Very simply, they are ways of constructing and constricting experience in order to avoid anxiety and encourage its opposite, security. To refer to security operations is to refer to the shapes and limits of the experience that we allow, prohibit, or encourage ourselves to formulate with particular individuals. This shaping and limiting is carried out by means of a process Sullivan describes, in self-explanatory fashion, as selective inattention. In Sullivan's frame of reference, then, it is the interpersonal field, by means of the security operations deployed by the self-system, that determines the moment-to-moment content of consciousness—for both participants. This is very important, crucial even, because it

means that the interpersonal field determines what unformulated experience is articulated, and how; similarly, it is the field that determines what unformulated experience remains unarticulated.

BEYOND ANXIETY

At this point in the argument, however, Sullivan and I part company, because he was really interested only in helping people to become functional members of their society. Although psychoanalytic ideas have been partially inspired by some of his ideas, Sullivan was not a psycho-analyst, and did not pretend to be. He did not even wish to be.²

Contrary to Sullivan, I (along with most contemporary analysts who have been influenced by Sullivan) hold that the configuration of anxiety and security operations are only part of what defines any particular interpersonal field (e.g., Lionells et al., 1995). The conception of the field I favor is something broader than that, something that better suits psychoanalytic purposes. The field should be defined in terms that include anxiety and its avoidance, but that also go beyond them, terms that refer to the other aims and purposes the field's participants try to fulfill with one another, and especially unconscious aims and purposes.

Each of us continuously and unconsciously casts about for other people to play roles reciprocal to our own in various fantasied interpersonal events that we actually want to create in the outside world. These key events have to do with intrapsychic dynamics and early history, which are represented in our minds by internal object relations. We are searching, therefore, for ways of actualizing our wishes by means of bringing certain internal object relations to life in the outside world. We "cast about" by means of unconscious behavioral invitations for partners in various interpersonal ventures (cf. Sandler, 1976). The field that is constituted depends on the other person's generally unconscious response to these invitations. That is, we continuously treat other people in ways unconsciously designed to have certain effects. Each of us, then, is not only ceaselessly issuing invitations, but just as ceaselessly and unwittingly responding to the invitations of others. This is interpersonal life.

It seems unlikely, though, that we simply issue the same invitations to everyone we meet. It makes more sense to imagine that we unconsciously test the waters first, so that we issue only those invita-

tions (that is, we "inhabit" only those self-states) that have some chance of being accepted and eventually fulfilled by the other person. We seek out safety and avoid putting ourselves in the position of being turned down flat and made to feel foolish, humiliated, or worse. Such an addition makes interaction more complicated, but by making it possible to understand how different selves or self-states come into play in different environments, this revised version is a better fit to the world we live in. All of us are continuously and unconsciously testing the water, issuing what seem like the appropriate invitations, responding to invitations, revising the invitations we send on the basis of the responses and invitations we have received, and so on.

Heinrich Racker's (1968) theory of transference and countertransference (see especially pp. 134–136 and 175–176) is a good way to conceptualize this testing of the waters, because Racker suggests that analyst and patient inevitably adopt crucial unconscious parts in one another's intrapsychic dramas, played out and possibly solved anew in the therapeutic relationship. When we approach another person with the intention to understand him—as we do in the analytic relationship, of course, but as we also do in "testing the waters" or in any part of life when a grasp of the other's experience has some personal import—we tend to identify with that person. We learn about people by experiencing ourselves as if we were them. Racker proposes two kinds of identifications. In *concordant* (or *homologous*) *identifications*, each "part of our personality" may identify with the corresponding "part" of the other person's personality. Ego identifies with ego, id with id, superego with superego. This kind of identification might feel like, "I can understand that kind of wish easily enough, because I would wish it myself," or, "I would criticize her husband just the way she does." On the other hand, in *complementary identifications* (a term Racker adopted from Helene Deutsch), the analyst's ego identifies with some internal object of the analysand's, such as the superego. In this kind of identification, the analyst actually feels like one of the other person's internal objects, or like one of the important people in the patient's life, something on the order of, "This guy is so provocative that he's really asking for it," or, "I am deeply moved by her generosity." Concordant identification is "feeling with"; complementary identification is "feeling toward."

Now widen the range of application of these two kinds of identifications from the analytic situation to the continual everyday activity of "testing the waters." For "parts of the personality" or psychic agencies, substitute aspects of the self, or multiple selves. And think of

identification as the conscious or unconscious attempt to *imagine* another person's state of mind, doing away with all traces of direct knowing. We then have a situation in which each of us continuously identifies with those around us, trying to develop concordant identifications in order to know who will respond favorably to the invitations we want to distribute (who will feel well disposed toward the kind of interaction we seek?), and who will not. We try to develop complementary identifications, on the other hand, so that we may know whose invitations we want to respond to favorably and whose we want to reject (how would we feel about responding to the kind of interaction offered by this one or that one?). Through our different self-states, or selves—each the sedimentation of a bit of history and a clutch of hopes and fears for the future, each called out by the invitations we receive and those we want to give—we imagine how other people will respond to us and how we will feel about them. The resulting sets of interactions between our various selves and everyone else's begin to seem quick, evanescent, and enormously complicated, a kind of crowd of selves whizzing hither and thither like fireflies on a summer night. This is the interpersonal field, and if it is not blooming and buzzing, it is close. To see human interaction this way is to gain a great deal of respect for the difficulty of formulating it, and an equal degree of certainty that what we do formulate is a tiny proportion of the events that make it up. Each of us seems to be so much more—and perhaps so *many* more—than we can ever know. Many different experiences, it seems, many selves, can be simultaneously represented in the codes of practice or action (see chapter 1). Interpersonal life, that is, can be processed in parallel. But verbal reflection is linear, and therefore clumsy by comparison. We can "act" many things at once, but we can "know" only one at a time.

THE FIELD AND PERSONAL AGENCY

The field that emerges from the invitations and responses thus unconsciously issued and unconsciously received should not be understood as one's simple choice, not at any level of awareness, but as unformulated experience or an ongoing "crowd" of (in Fingarette's terms) implicit engagements—that is, as activities we participate in, but that we do not "know" we participate in. (And as always, our not-knowing in this case may be either implicit to language or structured and nonlin-

guistic.) We do not have to take the action of “not-spelling-out” (chapter 6) for the field to be an implicit engagement. An engagement may remain implicit for reasons not connected to defense, but to other factors—narrative rigidity, for example, and the role of convention in supporting it (chapter 7). The implicitness of an engagement certainly *may* be unconsciously purposeful, of course; but it may also be that we simply have not had a sufficiently compelling reason to articulate it.

In either case (that is, whether our unawareness of the field is motivated or not), we do not and cannot “plan” or “intend” the eventual shape of the field, at least not in the strongest sense of those words. We cannot plan the field on any level, conscious or unconscious, because we do not control it. We can plan what we *desire* the field to be, of course, and routinely we do; and we act on the resulting wishes by exerting unconscious influence. But we have no way of ensuring that the field will *become* exactly what we desire it to be. Each person we are with, and sometimes even a particular kind of interaction with the same person, “calls out” a different interpersonal atmosphere, which makes possible and appropriate, in our own frame of reference, a certain set of invitations and responses. Each field, that is, calls out our capacity to formulate experience in a particular way. What we can imagine fully, and what remains dissociated, is a function of the field we are inhabiting at the moment; which is to say that even on an unconscious level, and even if we broaden the scope of our responsibility to enclose what we intend without knowing we intend, we cannot be held fully responsible for the limits of what we are capable of formulating in any particular interpersonal field.

In contemporary psychoanalytic thought, we are becoming used to the idea that we move in and out of self-states on the basis of our perceptions of the interpersonal world that faces us. But we are less used to the thought that we also *are moved* in and out of self-states. The degree of personal responsibility we have for the exact shape of the interpersonal field, I suggest, lies somewhere between these active and passive poles. We do not move or purposively “stride” in and out of self-states, nor are we simply transported. It is the interactive combination of we ourselves and the influence on us of each person we encounter that calls out a particular interpersonal field. The influence of another person on us, of course, can be shaped and dominated by our autistic perception of that person; but unless we are flagrantly psychotic (and probably even then), our perception of the other is always at least partially shaped by what the other actually brings to the situation, and this contribution is beyond our control.

The field, therefore, is neither simply the result of our own unconscious internal choices nor a force or filter imposed on us by others. It is both simultaneously. I am looking here for a degree of responsibility somewhere in the middle of the continuum, suspended between undiluted personal agency and absolute destiny. Somewhere between activity and passivity, the field continuously reconstitutes itself. Its shape changes; its atmosphere changes; the selves and motives it brings to relevance change. The limits it places on what can and cannot be imagined within it change.

We take advantage of whatever freedom we sense in the field at any particular moment (as we test the waters and note the invitations and responses we receive), but we neither observe nor go beyond the limits that determine that freedom. Unless we have some very special reason to do so, we do not spell out content outside the field’s boundaries, nor do we issue or respond to what we sense are dangerous invitations. In this way, the engagements that make up the field generally remain as implicit as they begin. A reason that is good enough to encourage us to take a risk (that is, to stretch the freedom offered by the field) does two things: it draws our attention to the relevant aspects of the field, making it possible for us to reflect on these heretofore implicit parts of our experience; and it makes us feel safe enough, or gives us a reason to be courageous enough, to formulate those aspects in language. Analytic curiosity is designed, among other things, to draw attention to just this kind of dangerous content, and the analytic situation itself is intended to create enough new safety, or courage, or both to increase the patient’s freedom to render it in creative language.

Under most of the rest of life’s circumstances, however, it is only when the field itself allows certain formulations that those formulations are articulated. If a particular formulation would violate the limits of the field, that content simply goes unarticulated. Prime examples of formulations that would violate the limits of the field are explicit descriptions of the field itself. Fields, then, are not only defined by the experience they make possible for their participants to formulate; they are also defined by the experience that may not, and sometimes must not, be formulated within them. Each interpersonal field is defined by both dissociation and imagination, by what it illuminates and what it keeps in the darkness.

I am proposing that the outer world plays an *independent* role in establishing which parts of the inner one—which selves—are relevant at any particular moment. The influence cuts both ways, in other words. The outer world, by setting the limits on what the field can be,

helps to determine what parts of the inner world are relevant. The inner world influences what parts of the outer world we select and try to encounter, and what parts of those selected aspects of the outer world we try to bring into active relatedness with us. The relationship of the inner and outer worlds is dialectical, with each the primary ingredient in the recipe for the other.

We can use this point to broaden Fingarette's (1969) perspective. We do not simply decide, all by ourselves (as Fingarette seems to imply), which experience to formulate and which to perpetuate in its unformulated state. It is the field that sets these parameters; it is the field that determines what will be worthy of our actualization, what is relevant, safe, and so on. And the field is only partially our own creation. It is, to an important degree, imposed on us.

MULTIPLICITY AND EMBEDDEDNESS

I want to return now to the general orientation of postmodernism, that set of ideas that asserts that ~~not only~~ our knowledge of our experience, but our experience itself is continuously and necessarily shaped by our embeddedness in various social and cultural phenomena. One of the things most of these theories have in common is their rejection of the private, unique, interior, unitary, and masterful (that is, self-directing) self, in favor of a recognition of ourselves as socially constituted, as the products of cultures. We are not only the result of our own decisions, inner workings, and individual histories, but are the creatures of our time and place; our picture of the self is not the "natural" or necessary phenomenon we take it to be on an everyday basis, but a construction—and a construction of the West, at that. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1974) says it this way.

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures [p. 59].

In our notion, the self is the captain of its own ship, the undisputed master of its own destiny; it has control over everything about its own experience—even if that control is unconscious. It is *I*, and *only I*, who decides what experience I will be aware of; and it is *only I* who decides what experience I will not acknowledge.

This set of assumptions is under increasing scrutiny, and sometimes downright attack,³ though the ramifications are just beginning to be felt in American psychoanalysis (Europeans have been dealing with them for years). Although psychoanalysis, because it is an individual psychology, will never be social constructionism, and should not be, psychoanalysis does need to take account of the social-constructionist critique if it is to continue the creative reinvention of itself that has been reinvigorating it since the first dissident analysts broke with Freud. Psychoanalysts must begin to imagine the ramifications of the fact that consciousness is a much more social phenomenon than we have characterized it to be. We need to think through what it means for theory and clinical work that we are so much more thoroughly embedded in the world around us than we experience ourselves to be. Our theories must come to grips with the reality that cultures set the ground rules according to which experience can mean anything at all, and that psychoanalysis is therefore a cultural product, not the description of eternal essence. With the rest of the contemporary intellectual world, psychoanalysis must turn back on itself and find a way of bringing into explicit reflection the tools we use automatically and unthinkingly to grasp our experience in the first place.

If we take seriously the embeddedness of our experience in cultures, as claimed by the postmodern critique, we must also accept our embeddedness in relationships, because it is only by means of relationships that the broader discourses of the cultures we live in have their effects on individual human beings.⁴ And if we take this smaller-scale, personal embeddedness seriously, we must question the dictum that people originate, by means of potentially identifiable unconscious intentions, all the engagements in which they are involved. It is not just other people's participation we do not control or intend; it is the very field itself. Our participation may be motivated, but its result is only partially so.

The fields we attempt to construct, in the same way over and over again throughout our lives, are the ground of our being, the warp and weft upon which we weave the patterns of our experience. It is as true to say that the interpersonal field structures us as it is to say that we structure it. The horizons that define the shape and lim-

its of that which can have meaning for us are inevitably social constructions, whether those horizons are the massive and (relatively) static experiential clearings that define what it is to participate in a culture, or the tiny, quicksilver clearings that two people create between them to define what is relevant to one another about each other's inner worlds and outer behavior. I mean to describe the interpersonal field, as a matter of fact, as a small-scale analogue of the horizon or the clearing discussed by hermeneuticist Hans-Georg Gadamer (who, in turn, took the idea from his mentor, Heidegger; see chapter 11).

The field is the very epitome of what Fingarette (1969) means by an implicit engagement. It is, in the metaphor I used in introducing Fingarette's views in chapter 5, one of those "rocks" we do not "lift from the bottom" unless we have a special reason to do so. As long as we do not formulate it, the field exists in dissociation. It is a consolidation of experience in the mode of action. And until we do formulate the field, we blindly follow its dictates; that is what a field is; that is what "field" means.

Among the actions the field leads us to take are episodes of spelling-out and not-spelling-out; and to say that is also to say that the field shapes and contains our motives, which therefore always exist relative to the interpersonal surround and never in some kind of intrapsychically pure state.⁵ And that idea, in turn, is tantamount to saying that the field is the greatest influence on the selection of the self-state(s) in which we experience at any given moment. The concept of the field, then, when married to the idea of unformulated experience, leads virtually inexorably to both dissociation and the multiple self. Because we are always caught in the grip of the field, the upshot for clinical purposes is that we face the endless task of trying to see the field and climb out of it—and into another one, for there is nowhere else to go.

DISSOCIATION AND SELF-DECEPTION

The problem of self-deception disappears, just as Fingarette claimed, when we reconceptualize the entire question; but Fingarette did not sufficiently justify his rejection of self-deception, because he did not go far enough in his reconceptualization. We need to realize that the humanism of Sartre, with its transparent consciousness and valorization of absolute personal agency, is no longer viable.⁶ Our experience

is partitioned, selected, made relevant, and banished by a process of social construction in which we participate—in which we are, of course, the most important participants—but which is by no means wholly our own. In that sense, we are always at least partially strangers to ourselves, inhabited and influenced by others, and by interactions with others. Our embeddedness in the people and influences of our histories is a socially constructed "other" in our psychic lives, potential experience that exists "within" us, in the sense that it is unconscious meaning, part of our unrealized verbal and nonverbal subjectivity. But while this potentially explicable experience is unquestionably our own, it may not exist within the horizons of a self-state that the interpersonal field ever manages to make safe enough for self-reflection—though, with analysis, we may accomplish such reflection.

And so we are not masters of our own destinies in any simple way. We are not even masters of that part of our destinies unaffected by accidents, natural disasters, wars, and so on. Sartre's objection to self-deception as bad faith therefore can be answered.

On the other hand, we can also say, on the basis of this conception of the field, that the inner world is not the unique creation of an isolated consciousness deploying individually determined motives, as Freud's model of self-deception would have it. Self-deception, that is, is not a matter of a house mechanistically divided against itself, at least not in the way Freud proposed.

We are neither in bad faith nor operating like machines. We are, instead, participants in interpersonal relations that structure our experience in the same way that the larger social configurations of cultures and subcultures do, and according to the same discursive formations. Simultaneously, we are agents pursuing our own courses, influencing the interpersonal relations in which we are involved in ways we fully intend and for which we are responsible. Self-deception, because it assumes absolute personal agency, is an incomplete description of the processes involved. It seems that the problem of what to do with self-deception, in the end, is really the problem of what to do about the private, self-contained, uncompromisingly agentic Western self. Self-deception disappears right along with that vision of what we are. We do not have to deceive ourselves; we do not have to refuse to know what we know. To dissociate, we have only to accept the limitations of the field in which, with the other, we are mutually embedded. We have only to take the path of least resistance and leave the rock on the bottom. We have only to be less than fully imaginative and curious. Paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty (see chapter 5), we have only to refuse to lend ourselves to the life of language.

COURAGE AND CURIOSITY

Since we coestablish the field, we are only partially responsible for the shape it takes. But in psychoanalytic terms, we *are* responsible for being curious about it. Both analyst and analysand are responsible in this way; this is psychoanalytic morality. We are responsible for turning back on our own experience and reflecting on the fields we have cocreated and in which we live.

It is true that there are some parts of experience we could not avoid formulating if we wanted to (how could one not be explicitly aware of going grocery shopping?). It is equally true that we need someone else's help to formulate other aspects, in which we are so thoroughly buried that our capacity for self-reflection is hopelessly occluded. But there is a range of experience in between, and in this range, it is possible to be effectively curious about ourselves, though it may be difficult. We may not characteristically deploy curiosity about these things; we may even prefer not to know them; we may not understand *why* we prefer not to know them. But it is *possible* to know them, or at least we are capable of knowing that there is *something* "there" to know, if we are but willing to transgress our own most natural inclinations to leave the experience unformulated. We have this choice. We have choice, too, about how openly or defensively we respond to another person's attempt to draw our attention to something we would rather not see. The choice of what to do about the other's call to curiosity is seldom made simply on the basis of the presence or absence of automatically deployed defense mechanisms.

The specifically psychoanalytic kind of courage is the willingness to be curious about oneself, even at those times when one knows, or has a sense, that the outcome may be distressing. Here I return to Sartre's *mauvaise foi*. Because of our embeddedness in cultures and in personal relations, I cannot accept the transparency of the self Sartre believed in; but I nevertheless believe that the courage to bear curiosity about what is not immediately knowable has the same moral authority as Sartre's ideal of the person who refuses to look away from what is plain to see.

PART III

Unformulated Experience in the Work of the Analyst

as human practice, which makes it hard to know when one is talking about culture and when about an individual—and that is as it should be. In that case, though, one has to decide what to do about the idea of self, to which I am also committed. This problem of self and agency in a postmodern world is key for all the intellectual disciplines, but for none more than psychoanalysis, which can only survive if it negotiates postmodernism while preserving some notion of what is personal and authentic. Throughout this book, I have tried to use the plural when discussing culture, since we never exist in “a” cultural context, but at the intersection of many.

2. Bartlett got the same kind of results I am about to describe when he substituted visual material for verbal material.

3. Important exponents of this view include Racker (1968), Levenson (1972, 1983, 1991), Hoffman (1983, 1991, 1992a, b, 1994, 1996), Mitchell (1988, 1993), Ehrenberg (1992), Hirsch (1993, 1996), Renik (1993), Greenberg (1995), Aron (1996).

4. For the purposes I address here, I could cite Berger and Luckmann's (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality* with nearly the same effect as citing Foucault. Berger and Luckmann take the position that everyday reality, which we take for granted and treat as objective, is actually a social construction. Processes that began as subjective (think of any discredited idea that once was taken for granted) come to be thought of as part of the natural world. These pieces of reality are described as “objectivations,” a term that bears a close relation to Bartlett's “conventionalisation” and to Foucault's “normalization.” I prefer Foucault's account, though. Whereas Berger and Luckmann preserve the removed and “objective” stance of the traditional social scientist, someone who is simply describing the way things are, political and moral questions are the driving force of Foucault's thought.

5. Schachtel, in fact, in his magnum opus, *Metamorphosis* (1959), presages much of this discussion of convention. The general tone of his work is similar to what I present here, and it is probably fair to say that a long and respectful acquaintance with Schachtel's work inspired this part of the chapter.

6. The dream also had to do with the transference, but that part of the session is not immediately relevant to the illustration.

CHAPTER 8

1. Despite his field theory, Sullivan took for granted the existence of an objective reality separate from the observer. Interaction in the interpersonal field, therefore, results in a version of reality that is either accurate or distorted. Sullivan, then, was no constructivist. On the other

hand, he was committed to the idea that one's vision of reality is determined by the field in which one observes it, and he argued that our perceptions are more often personal and autistic (i.e., parataxic) than objective and consensually validated (syntactic). See chapter 3.

2. Sullivan's thought, while it is not itself psychoanalysis, is nevertheless at the heart of the thinking of many of the psychoanalysts who have developed the interpersonal perspective (e.g., Lionells et al., 1995). Levenson (1992) has recently laid out this sequence of events in instructive fashion, showing the very particular ways in which Sullivan's thought is not psychoanalytic, and then detailing the developments, beginning in countertransference theory, that acknowledged the full import of Sullivan's conception of the interpersonal field (a task he himself never undertook) and built a psychoanalysis around that conception.

3. The references to this point would fill a substantial syllabus. In addition to Geertz, for accessible introductions to the most interesting of this psychological literature, see Harré (1984), Gergen (1985, 1991, 1992), Sampson (1989), Flax (1990), Cushman (1991, 1994, 1995), Kitzinger (1992), Kvale (1992), Shotter (1993), and Shotter and Gergen (1989). For those who wish to pursue them, these sources list the relevant philosophical references.

4. Philip Cushman (1994, 1995) argues that psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are inevitably political and moral activities, with their own embeddedness in various cultural surrounds. Cushman sees Sullivan's thought as an alternative to Winnicott's and Kohut's, in both of whose writings Cushman believes the self appears as a real entity, a “thing.” Such ahistorical and nonpolitical two-person psychologies, says Cushman (1991) although they add to our understanding of interaction, raise the dangers of “reifying, interiorizing, and historically decontextualizing the self, locating the self's origins in the ‘natural’ development of infancy, depoliticizing the self's illnesses, and commodifying its cures” (p. 838). In Sullivan's work, on the other hand, with its recognition of the interpersonal field and its dereification of the self, Cushman sees the opportunity to create a three-person psychology in which the third participant in the interpersonal field is the recognition that each person is an “intersection” of traditions. The third participant, that is, is culture. Such a conception is consistent with what I am trying to say, with the proviso that the effect of cultures is, of course, never separate from that of the two people involved. As Cushman says, it is not as if each of us is a self *influenced* by culture, as if culture were something that came along after the self already existed. Rather, each of us *is* an intersection of traditions.

5. See Greenberg (1991) for a carefully worked out theoretical description of exactly how the interaction of the interpersonal and the intrapsychic might occur.

6. See Sass (1988) for a convincing description of the humanism that lingers in psychoanalysis. Sass also shows why the best remedy for humanism is hermeneutics.

CHAPTER 9

1. I have discussed this issue elsewhere (Stern, 1985).

2. See also the responses to Spence (1993) by Bruner (1993) and Rorty (1993), and the analysis of Spence's (1982) first book by Sass and Woolfolk (1988), who point out the contradiction between Spence's objectivism and his stated purpose of introducing hermeneutics into clinical psychoanalysis.

3. On the other hand, if one counts the contributions of object-relations theory and self psychology as elaborations of the observation, one would have to say that the literature on the problem is vast. Object-relations theory and self psychology have alerted us that what we have called resistance can be an expression by the patient of a certain kind of therapeutic need, and have suggested that under some circumstances the analyst should respond to this need in the here and now. For instance, the analyst may "contain" the patient's projected internal objects; or, upon understanding what it is to be the patient's selfobject, the analyst may accept the patient's use of him in this way; and so on. But these conceptions, however clinically vital they may have become, are not really ways of dealing with resistance as much as they are redefinitions of some instances of resistance. And we are therefore back at square one when it comes to the interpretation of the unconscious.

4. This point and the evidence to support it is in the tradition of James Strachey's (1934) theory of therapeutic action. In his classic contribution, Strachey suggested that the patient changed by installing the analyst as "auxiliary super-ego," which then allowed the patient to experience more than he would have been capable of without the treatment. I am also in debt to Strachey's contemporary, Richard Sterba (1934), the author of the other significant theory of therapeutic action of the day. For him, the therapeutic collaboration was not merely an aspect of the therapeutic process, as it tended to become in the work of later writers who emphasized it (e.g., Greenson, 1965, and Zetzel, 1956), but was a goal in its own right, and the key to therapeutic change.

The problem with Strachey's perspective is that he believed the analyst, in order to serve as the best stand-in for the patient's superego, should be neither a good object nor a bad one. I do not believe that the patient's feeling of safety can be adequately supported by a neutral

object relation with the analyst, even if such a thing were possible. What I am advocating in what follows is, in this respect, closer to the developmentally oriented analysts of the Edinburgh Congress (Gitelson, 1962; Nacht, 1962) and various early writers of the object-relations school (e.g., Winnicott, 1958, 1965; Guntrip, 1969), who are unabashed in their advocacy of the analyst's attempt to be a good object. These writers, however, do not necessarily take the perspective, as I do here, that that attempt is best served by the analyst's consistent and compassionate curiosity.

5. Hoffman (1983) is responsible for the compelling argument about the place of transference interpretation in the patient's feeling of safety. Hoffman also makes the companion argument about the place of countertransference interpretation in the making of transference interpretations, which he derived from Racker (1968).

6. Conversation does not necessarily require two human beings. It can occur between a reader and a text, a listener and a piece of music, a viewer and a work of art. See chapter 11.

CHAPTER 10

1. I emphasize the analyst's use of her experience for diagnostic purposes in this example, but it is equally important that the analyst see that the patient, by not saying anything directly, yet influencing the analyst to worry, is trying to create some specific kind of relatedness. The analyst needs to learn the specific way she was influenced, and she needs to consider how she might actually have discouraged the patient from being more direct. If such aspects of the interaction were discovered, then one might also want to question whether there were ways in which the patient had influenced the analyst to be less available than she might otherwise have been, thus making the patient feel less safe in being direct. And so on.

CHAPTER 11

1. Cushman (1995) makes Gadamer a mainstay of his examination of the self and psychotherapy in social context, and Sass (1988) discusses the relation of certain aspects of Heidegger and Gadamer to psychoanalysis. Orange (1995) gives Gadamer's thought an important role in

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