

Finding an Ear: Reflections on an Analytic Journey

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What is worth finding, to paraphrase D. W. Winnicott, is what we have had a hand in creating. A simple sentence to the eye, revelatory to the ear and enticing to the mind. Looking back on my years of teaching and practising psychoanalysis, I am convinced that only those experiences that have these qualities are worth knowing, remembering and making our own. In the thoughts that follow I hope to address how such an approach affects our understanding of psychoanalytic theory, practice and training. Since psychoanalysis is a profoundly human and personal endeavour, I will attempt to do this by recounting my own psychoanalytic pilgrimage over the past thirty years.

It was in my last years of training at the Training Institute of the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis that I was introduced to Winnicott, in a course on child analysis, taught by Dorothy Block. Dorothy was writing her book *So 'The Witch Won't Eat Me'* and recounted touching experiences of her therapy with children; she spoke of Winnicott with admiration and sensitivity. I had spent the last four years reading most of Freud and a number of Theodor Reik's² works - the latter since he had founded the Institute I was attending twenty years before. Reik was prodded to do so by a number of students he was privately training and by the myopic and 'anti-psychoanalytic' stance of the New York Psychoanalytic Society. They were willing to admit this creative colleague of Freud's on the condition that he not train anyone who did not possess a medical degree - Reik held a doctorate in psychology. That Freud himself wrote *The Question of Lay Analysis*³ to defend Reik against similar prejudices in Europe meant nothing to these committed Freudians. And so I began my study of psychoanalysis disaffected, and in the nineteen sixties, with some feeling of

¹ Block, Dorothy, (1978), *So 'The Witch Won't Eat Me'*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

² Reik, Theodor, (1956), *Listening With The Third Ear*, Grove Press, New York is one of his most insightful works

³ Freud, S, (1926) Standard Edition, Vol. 20:183-250.

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being disinherited from the official branch of psychoanalysis. Luckily I received at NPAP a solid and deep training in Freudian thought and I was spared the delusion that there was one priesthood to which I was supposed to belong. My own background included a master's degree in theology; I had been a lay professor of religious studies at a college in Riverdale, New York - I knew well, consequently, the seductions of dogma. What more I needed to learn about the danger of orthodoxy was taught to me by Winnicott. But I have gotten ahead of myself a bit.

There was a sympathy, I soon discovered, between Reik's candour as expressed in *Listening With The Third Ear* and the honest, forthright reflections I found in Winnicott.⁴ It would, however, take me many years before I would begin to grasp the significance of his insights about our human need of finding and creating, of teddy bears and things and of understanding culture more as a mirror of man's hopes than a jailer of his dreams and desires. In my reading, teaching, and reading again, it became clear to me that finding and creating, while descriptive of early developmental processes, were equally crucial for adult maturation and experience(s). Crucial, for example, for how we come to form and to understand the role of intellectual abstractions, i.e., theory. Psychoanalytic theories are personal myths of meaning helping to organize our lives and direct the products of our hands. Such an approach does not lessen their operational validity, it is merely meant to appreciate the place and limitations of organizing models.⁵

Prior to and concurrent with my psychoanalytic training I was, as I indicated, a college professor of philosophy and religious studies, both disciplines of internality and meaning. Psychoanalysis was, I soon came to appreciate, a fruition of these studies. What I had discovered about the teaching of religious studies I would likewise come to confirm in my teaching of psychoanalysis, namely, that in teaching theory we have the promise of keeping a cultural enterprise alive; we also have the possibility and the op-

⁴ see in particular: Winnicott, D. W. (1958), *Collected Papers*, London, Tavistock Publications. *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (1965) New York, International Universities Press. and most particularly: *Playing and Reality* (1971) London, Tavistock Publications.

⁵ for a further discussion of this theme see: Gargiulo, Gerald. J. (1989) 'Authority, The Self and Psychoanalytic Experience', *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 76 No 2.

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portunity of killing it. It was Origen, I believe, an early father of the Church, who spoke of knowledge as going from the known to the unknown - a building process. How easy, however, to project the known into the unknown, proclaim our discovery as truth and thereby calm anxiety. Dogma. No need to do battle with the muses of creation.

Winnicott, and what little I could find of Sandor Ferenczi, spoke to the issues of knowing and unknowing. Over my years of study, teaching and writing I would, of course, read many others, most recently the works of François Roustang⁶. And while I could admire Reik's candour, Eric Erikson's insights and Roustang's formulations, it was Winnicott, in his unassuming brilliance and poetic imagery, that conveyed the psychoanalytic task. Without poetic imagery can we hear the psyche or understand the words before our eyes? Theory, as I now conceive it, is to be played with and mused about, otherwise we lose a broad range of our analytic hearing and foreclose any consolation as we repeatedly encounter love and hate, pain and confusion.

How rare to read an analytic author building his thought(s) not with the clarity of a blueprint but with the evocativeness of a Cézanne. 'On the seashores of endless worlds.' Winnicott would quote the Indian poet Tagore and then go on to speak of man, woman and child; go on to write of that fertile space between the 'me' and the 'not me' - that bridge which we all walk upon, a bridge which both analyst and patient traverse as well. Long before North American psychoanalysis would accept the import of counter-transference in the therapeutic encounter, Winnicott had written of how he had to allow a moment of personal insanity in order to understand that the male patient before him was, to his eyes, female. Projective identification? Maybe. Built, however, upon a willingness to be had, so to speak, by a patient, not to be always in the know, being lost with a patient so that, together, they could find a way out - a passageway to what is real and alive. For an analyst, like myself, trained in the sixties in American ego psychology's notions of psychoanalysis, Winnicott's thoughts promised a way of doing analysis which respected our common human need to be with another in dialogue; not locked away in discreet obser-

⁶ see: Roustang, François, (1982) *Disc Mastery*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press; and *Psychoanalysis Never Lets Go*, (1983). Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press.

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vation, caring, but basically untouched, by the human drama unfolding before us. Freud's most obvious, and yet all too easily forgotten contribution, was that we can not hear ourselves unless another hears us and tells us of that hearing. How easy to substitute mechanisms of the mind and transference enactment's for the profoundly ethical and existential task of working out personal meaning through human discourse and relationship.

Along with my reading, it was my patients who forced me to understand and put into practice the observations Winnicott was so gently writing about. Forced me to acknowledge openly what I had felt quite personally, namely, that there was something dead in just observing and clarifying; in fostering a regression, and presuming that gratification was what a patient was surreptitiously seeking, eclipsing thereby a patient's development lacunae - a developmental absence needing both to be named and responded to. Thirty years ago these were new thoughts, at least to my North American ears; today we act as if we always knew them. And in the glimpses of case histories which Winnicott, in particular, gave us a new paradigm emerged for working with patients and talking about our work. When I came to teaching technique and theory I found, likewise, that I was using one case study, in particular, to convey new entries to the soul. Although I have spoken and written of this case elsewhere, I would like to summarize it again since I have found, like Reik and Winnicott, that it is in self-revelation as well as self-reflection that psychoanalysis is best conveyed.⁷ Such an approach also helps lessen the perpetuation of what Reik referred to as psychoanalytose; an arcane, special language - more attuned to academic self-awareness than interpersonal reality.

Gary was a quiet man who seemed particularly out of place in the busyness of mid-Manhattan. He was, as I remember him, both innocent and bewildered; he was hardly able to articulate why he was in my office at all. As for myself I felt not only some concern, but protective of this unknown stranger. (I was puzzled by my feeling responses.) He was a carpenter, he said, as well as a political-Marxist activist. He spoke of his father who had left the family many years ago and of his mother in such distant terms that I was barely able to sense their presence. He grew up in a country farm

⁷ Gargiulo, Gerald J. 'The Autobiography of Humpty Dumpty', read June 1995 London: Psychotherapy Consortium Lecture.

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environment, of Swedish ancestry, and had, just a year or so ago, moved to New York City. After work, except when he attended his political discussion groups, he would go to his apartment and either read or play the piano.

Gary was a likeable young man who had little, if any social life. After speaking of his personal history, Gary was quite content to sit opposite me, on a twice-a-week basis, and say nothing to my attentive ears. He would, occasionally, give brief answers to my generic inquiries. To my gentle reminders that he try to say whatever might occur to him, with as little self-judgement as possible, Gary would smile uncomfortably while conveying bewilderment as to how he was supposed to speak of his insides. After a few months of our concerned stand-off, it became clear that I was not handling the case well and Gary wondered if therapy was for him.

I do not remember when it occurred to me to ask the most obvious of questions; in retrospect I am embarrassed by its simplicity. I asked Gary, one session, what it was like when there was so much silence between us. And in a quiet, calm voice he said that he was used to it. There was, he continued, hardly any speaking in his household when he was growing up. No talk at dinner time and after dinner he would go to his room, play piano or read. Occasionally he would hear his parents fighting. When he said this it became clear to me that our work together was not making headway since it was repeating and replicating Gary's childhood experiences. That was why my relatively silent presence was not experienced by him as a possibility for self-discovery. Gary did not know, in practice, anything about personal communicating. The space between us was cluttered with a dead silence.

If Gary had no bridge to reach me, then I would give him words, as building blocks; I decided, therefore, to speak and no longer to quietly wait for his associations. I spoke of carpentry, politics, piano playing or whatever he might mention. Gary listened and ever so slowly he began to answer, not with the dead language he had used till then but, almost imperceptibly, with a growing presence of tone and colour in his voice and a desire to connect in his intentions. The therapy continued for a number of years after this turning point and ever so slowly I was able to lessen my obvious presence as he was able to present his own. This occurred, I now understand, because we had found a therapy-playground where we were both on equal ground and having found that place, both of us

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having a hand in its creation, Gary was able, notwithstanding some developmental turbulence, to grow.

Psychoanalysis is about a mutual commitment to honesty, about equality, about one human being hearing the presences and the absences of an other; it re-awakens both love and hate and re-finds memory. When Freud spoke of freely hovering attention he was not fostering an observational technique but advocating an openness, on the analyst's part, so that a patient could make use of him/her - picture, if you will, different persons playing the same piano. I had, consequently, to remember my own silences before I could hear what Gary was saying to me.

How does one teach such a technique? Can we? In defending Reik in *The Question of Lay Analysis* Freud spoke of the necessity not only of avoiding psychoanalysis becoming a chapter in a psychiatric text, but of the need to attract individuals who were familiar with literature and poetry, history and theology, with all the gifts of a humanistic education and culture. How else could one listen with one's insides - such studies are ear training for the analyst. How different is this preparation from that of having as one's first therapeutic encounter, a cadaver. It was evident to me that Winnicott's commitment to children was in sharp contrast to the medical model of therapy, so prevalent when I did my studies and for many years thereafter. In my own teaching, while never explicitly teaching child therapy, I would bring in many texts such as *The Velveteen Rabbit*⁸ or works of poets, (I particularly like *The Four Quartets*,⁹) in an attempt to help the student analysts feel comfortable and competent in their own hearing, a prerequisite for their evenly suspended listening to patients. When this is not done, what I frequently encounter are students who have mastered the words only to miss the meaning.

What my experiences with Gary also taught was that one cannot subsume everything which occurred in sessions under the rubric of transference. Transference, we know, is a model to organize psychological material, perceptive and useful within a therapeutic context. But as a 'catch all' for everything it becomes both obvious and useless. Obvious because the shadow of the past is always with us and any act, thought or phantasy can be understood in terms of

⁸ Williams, Margery. (196?) *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Garden City, New York

⁹ Eliot, T S (1943) *Four Quartets*, Harcourt Brace & Co. New York.

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its genetic determinants. Obvious because we are historical by force of the consciousness we have evolved, and to be historical is to be had by all the personal, intellectual, emotional and cultural lineages that shadow us. Useless, because to interpret everything in the light of transference is to miss conveying to the patient the contrast between personal responsibility, present relationship and past experience(s). Only in a patient's experiencing an analyst for who he/she actually is can one distinguish idealizing positive transference or its negative.

In this vein it was not only Winnicott's unobtrusive yet personal presence, i.e., the squiggle games, that helped me but similarly the writings of Michael Balint.¹⁰ Balint was able to put into words what I repeatedly thought: that neutrality was not an analyst playing schizoid, so to speak, but rather knowing him/herself soberly and realistically and responding to a patient in light of that knowledge. How else is an analyst able to balance transference and present reality. When Freud asked for a commitment from his patients for personal honesty - the fundamental rule - he was interacting with a living person before him, not talking to an imago through a darkened mirror. He presumed free will, although he had particular difficulty with that formulation; he presumed free will in order to work toward what Edward Glover would so aptly call freed will.¹¹ That Gary struggled with interpersonal relationships and personal meaning is clear: that his pathology had its roots, its fertilization in his past and his reaction(s) to that past, is obvious. What is also true is that interpretation alone, without the unpredictable squiggle game of words between us, without the experience of my interest and concern, would have accomplished little or nothing. He had to find and make me alive in order to use me. He had to experience that he could be alive in the presence of another alive person. Creating and finding - simple to the eye - profound in its implications.

Finding and creating, obviously, affects how we teach, particularly when communicating psychoanalytic concepts. When I teach I ask the students to remember that their primary task is to read everything, to reflect, as much as they are able to and then to forget everything. Paradoxically, only in knowing are we free to forget. If we do not learn we are substituting personal narcissism for

¹⁰ Balint, Michael (1968) *The Basic Fault*, Brunner/Mazel Publishers, New York.

¹¹ Glover, Edward (1956) *Freud or Jung?*, Meridian Books, New York.

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intellectual training; if we do not forget we are substituting personal awareness for self-forgetfulness - for freely hovering attention. Having established these ground rules, I find it helpful to read a few lines or a paragraph of primary sources and to give a personal exegesis, as it were. I then ask the students to do the same. I am not concerned with how much reading gets done in a course as long as the students know where to find what they might have interest in. Without the students wanting to make a text their own, an author their own, without a student experiencing a necessary delusion that what they are reading is just what they themselves were about to formulate, without such a delusion any knowledge will be relegated to the category of facts, not living theory.

There is no such a thing as a baby, without a mother, Winnicott wrote. Likewise, no analyst without a patient. Similarly no objective psychoanalytic theory without the personal fantasy, the necessary illusion, that it works. Just as words have no meaning outside of context and usage, just so is theory dependent on personal conviction in order to be used, found and created.

We can ask, consequently, is it possible to teach one to be a psychoanalyst? Or, are psychoanalysts born, to quote Reik? Are they individuals who have, in particular, an unfinished dialogue with their mothers, to echo Harold Searles?¹² We know that an essential ingredient of training is a personal analysis and it is here, perhaps most of all, that the personal illusion of effectiveness takes hold; here, that the reality of the persons involved is most fully felt. If my own analyst, back in the nineteen sixties, had not been a man fiercely dedicated to social justice and acutely aware of social psychology, would I have been responded to in a way that made me pre-disposed to hear the psyche within a wider orchestration than individual defences and conflicts? Without such an analytic experience it would have taken me longer to find Erik Erikson, before Winnicott, and see in him a direct route back to Freud; although clearly with new societal vistas? More importantly, would I have had the experience that my thoughts were of value to him, that they were not going to be repetitively pathologised, were he not the person he was? At the end of my five times a week, four year journey, we stood on equal ground. After thirty years we still do; rec-

¹² Searles, Harold, (1965) *Collected Papers on Schizophrenia and Related Subjects*, International Universities Press. New York.

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ognizing, however, my clay feet, as well as his. I had built a bridge back to my past which I could walk upon, sometimes run upon, and so I was more able to help others build theirs.

The making of a psychoanalyst is a complicated task. The teaching of transference, for example, outside of the experience of personal therapy is, I believe, most difficult. Made more difficult, I believe, by the fact that many psychoanalytic training institutes are modelled on an oedipal triangle - there are the powerful older fathers requiring submission to particular theory and technique in order for the student analyst to be admitted into the prized inner circle of training analyst or teacher. Of late, in my own readings, it has been François Rousting who has highlighted the dangers of masters and disciples; who has helped me think about the contradiction(s) of teaching transference in institutes which, in fact, unknowingly (?) exploit it. Whenever dogma is imposed, transference is exploited.

After twenty-five years of teaching, I have grown concerned about private psychoanalytic institutes conferring the titled mantle. An answer, if one can speak in such terms, might be take the majority of training and teaching analysts out of the protected confines of private institutes, teaching as they do for love of subject matter and for need of patients, and to bring this liberating liberal psychoanalytic tradition into the open market place of academia. Even at the institute where I was trained, where there is an exceptional effort made not to exploit transference by creating a special priesthood in terms of approved training analysts and control analysts, the spectre of the select still casts some shadows. All graduates, some taking many years to complete their training, are approved to function as analysts, teachers and supervisors. But all too frequently student candidates yearn for the powerful father - for the one who knows - for the analyst who has no clay feet. Consequently, they seek to know, all too often, who their analyst's analyst might have been; what ethnic and/or religious background they come from and where they stand in the hierarchy of the institute. Would it not be better simply to know if an analyst possess good character and a clear mind? These seem to me to be the only pertinent concerns; concerns which, I believe, because of the hierarchical power structure and financial factors, many private training institutes have not kept jealous watch over.

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I have encountered a few training centres in the United States which are institutes without walls, so to speak. Centres where an individual has a personal analysis, takes a number of seminars, studies intensively with his/her supervisors and somewhere along the process becomes self-reflectively and, within the context of their teachers and supervisors, aware that they are, in fact, functioning as a psychoanalyst. Close to Lacan's idea, as best I understand him, of the self-authentication involved in becoming an analyst. Just as one's personal analysis must be the work of one's hands, just so is the understanding and use of theory, an odyssey of knowledge. There are no knowing others; we are all alone but together, intermingled as air is to lungs in that aloneness.

What we are about, then, we who stand one hundred years upon Freud's shoulders, is the finding of mind and the construction of meaning - perennially tasks for humans. The location of mind, as I have written about elsewhere, has more to do with Winnicott's transitional space than has been appreciated.¹³ Mind is not some solipsistic entity to be jealously guarded by each individual. It is, rather, the playground of human culture and of our common human yearnings, needs and phantasies; it is, in fact, what allows psychoanalysis to be a therapeutic. The finding of psyche, when it is lost, is the psychoanalyst's archaeology. Only when we find ourselves do we understand our commonality, so that we can use language as a bridge rather than a self-soothing panacea. The experience of meaning, in all its shades from conscious to unconscious, in all its manifestations from dogma to personal myths, is the task at hand. Since it is only in the self ownership, which the struggle for meaning entails, that an individual can experience freed will.

Notwithstanding my concerns about private training institutes, when we celebrate psychoanalysis and its teaching centres, when we struggle to find ways to bring psychoanalysis to the worlds we inhabit in our efforts to mend the wounds of life, we are, in fact,

¹³ Gargiulo, Gerald J. (1996) (in press) 'Winnicott's Psychoanalytic Playground' in *Psychoanalytic Versions Of The Human Condition and Clinical Practice*, New York, New York University Press.

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doing the work of culture. Sacred in its human import. We are, of course, also finding and creating ourselves.