

# Hidden Boundaries/Hidden Spaces

(slightly modified version 2007)

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*As the fish does not live outside of the dark abyss,  
So man should never strive for knowledge regarding his own essence.  
Lao-Tzu (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)*

Psychoanalysis, as we know, has striven for knowledge of our human essence - Freud, employing archeological and literary metaphors, suggests that in understanding man's instinctual drives, his defenses and, most of all, the pervasive presence of what he calls the unconscious, psychoanalysis has plumbed the depths of man - well aware, in his better moments, that the depths are ultimately bottomless. So why would I, in a conference dedicated to psychoanalytic knowledge, begin with such a quote? Perhaps the American poet A. R. Ammons (2) can provide an answer. In a poem innocently entitled #43, Ammons makes the following observations on human awareness.

*sometimes I get the feeling I've never  
lived here at all, and 31 years seem*

*no more than nothing: I have to stop  
and think, oh, yeah, there was the*

*kid, so much anguish over his allergy,  
and there was the year we moved to*

*another house, and oh, yes, I remember  
the lilies we planted near that*

*siberian elm, and there was the year  
they made me a professor, and the*

*year, right in the middle of a long  
poem, when I got blood poisoning from*

*an in grown toenail not operated on  
right: but a wave slices through,*

*canceling everything, and the space  
with nothing to fill it shrinks and*

*time collapses, so that nothing happened,  
and I didn't exist, and existence*

*itself seems like a wayward temporizing,  
an illusion nonexistence sometimes*

*stumbles into...  
(p.121)*

What both these quotations imply is that what we humans, and perhaps we psychoanalysts in particular, with our putative understanding of the unconscious, have to be alert to is the narcissism of awareness, the narcissism, if you will, of knowledge. Psychoanalytic education, which follows from our understanding of psychoanalytic space, has always been multi-dimensional - on the one hand, we have followed the pursuit of understanding, codification, interpretations - all of which obviously serves therapeutic goals; and, on the other hand, we have explored a psychoanalytic space where the operational boundaries of our respective "I" s are relaxed; (3) where inner and outer are not cautiously monitored; a transitional space, which, Winnicott postulates, gives birth to music, to art, poetry and spirituality, to philosophy as well as to psychoanalysis - to those areas of human experience where we traditionally call upon the Muses for inspiration. But there is a deeper, more pervasive ground, as it were, to human experience, a ground that I have characterized as *an everyday transcendence*, to follow James

Grotstein's (4) thought. Such a ground is a dimension of human experience and of psychoanalytic space that Grotstein has brought to our attention, an area of experience we have been slow to recognize - at least within the more traditional Freudian modalities. I am well aware that in trying to delineate such a no-boundary-inner-space, which is, in some sense, no place at all - I may be indulging in what I have characterized as the narcissism of knowledge. Ammons, too, however, writes of non-existence, (5) well aware that in the deepest sense he has no idea of what he is talking about. I think, nevertheless, that his words touch something deep and necessary within us.

In an attempt to highlight that which Ammons is reaching for, what I would characterize as an enchantment with unknowingness, I will offer some personal thoughts and observations - convinced, as I am, that one individual's enchantment is not automatically solipsistic; but rather that our singularity, our individuality, can be a royal road to our commonality, to the universality of our humanness. Even what we identify as our personal interiority is, for many poets, mystics and philosophers, a mirror of what we identify as exterior to us. Interiority is exteriority (6) in the writings of the great medieval poet, philosopher and mystic, Meister Eckhart. This thought reflects his conviction, elaborated on in the twentieth century by Martin Heidegger, (7) that not only is the ground of being the same for all, but also that we live in a world of utter inter-dependence. Just as poets can be seers who can guide us into new spaces, in some way each analysis is a poem, created by both analyst and analysand. In this vein Andre Green (8) in a seminal article written in 1975 observed that: *In the end the real analytic object is neither on the patient's side nor on the analyst's but in the meeting of these two communications in the potential space which lies between them, limited by the setting which is broken at each separation and reconstituted at each new meeting...*(p.12a) Some of the questions we ask of a good poem are as applicable to a good analysis as well. Does it touch deeply the soul? Does it give the participants a new footing from which to know the world? Does it recast personal experience in a new language, a language that can

function as a lens for emotional as well as cognitive integration?

The universality of our humanness encompasses more than can be captured by our understanding of desire or defense, and/or by our understanding of individuals as constituted through interpersonal relational experiences. Discursive understanding, or what we refer to as secondary process thinking, does not lead us to an encompassing picture of ourselves. Therefore, following Lao Tzu, never strive for knowledge of (your) own essence - need not be a useless mystical injunction. Rather what this quotation is suggesting, I submit, is our human unlimitedness - an unlimitedness that cannot be categorized, except in the most general of insights. Just as John Wheeler, (9) Princeton University's still reigning physicist, can look at the world and see an all-encompassing mist of possibilities - so likewise we can speak, analogously, of a mist of possibilities when we speak of humanity, both individually as well as collectively. Such endless possibilities are a dance, as it were, the movements of which depend on our ever-changing individual lenses - meaning, as Wheeler reminds us, that the act of observation is an elementary act of creation. (p.96) And he explicates his point when he asks...*May the universe, in some strange sense, be "brought into being" by the participation of those who participate?* (p.1273)(10) Another way of approaching such insights is to observe, as the physicist Bruce Gregory (11) does, that ...*When we create a new way of talking about the world, we virtually create a new world.* (p.198) In language which may be more familiar we could say, following Winnicott, (12) that our developmental task, individually and collectively, is to create the found world - quantum mechanics goes a step further with its understanding that as we are finding the world we are, in fact, creating it. Obviously, then, when we employ our psychoanalytic lens of conscious and unconscious, of need and desire, of defense and developmental experience, of dependency and interpersonal relations, we should never entertain the phantasy that we have taken the full measure of who we humans are.

If we, as well as those we treat, can experience or, perhaps, can momentarily sense that wave, which Ammons speak of, that slices through,

canceling everything, we may experience a transient overcoming of what Herbert Fingarette (13) in his text, *The Self In Transformation*, so aptly calls our narcissistic anxious ego. It is such an anxious ego which is the storehouse of our fear of death and which keeps us from experiencing that our individual lives are more than a dialogue between inner and outer, between past and present, between conscious awareness and unconscious conflicts. There is an everyday transcendence, as I alluded to above, which, although difficult to conceptualize, helps define our universal human dignity, a dignity which is both particular and universal and which justifies our healing efforts. With the postulate of an everyday transcendence we have a wider lens with which to experience the world; - such a concept, however, does not entail an otherworldly reality - over against us, so to speak. This everyday transcendence, which each person somehow reflects, is another way of speaking about the infinite possibilities for creating meaning, for creativity, in all its embodiments, that each individual, as well as each society, embodies.

Did Freud mean more than is captured by the term mental mechanisms when he wrote, as Bettelheim (14) translates him, the word soul? If mind is understood as not exclusively encapsulated within the individual - if mind is, as I have written of elsewhere, (15) more a phenomenon between people, a result of language and therefore of society, if meaning is inextricably communal, (16) then the concept of soul is a way of saying that we are not disconnected isolates floating down a river but rather, in some profound way, the river itself. Each society's poetry speaks to its members because of the commonality of language and commonality of meaning - issuing in its particular reading of the world. If none of us, for example, ever wondered what non-existence could possibly mean, Ammon's poem would sound like the ramblings of a madman - that is, one not speaking within the arena of a common consciousness. If such a common consciousness, particularly between analyst and patient, appreciates awe and mystery, as well as theory and technique, then the poetic dimension of psychoanalytic space can be present.

Paul Ricoeur (17) (1970) in *Freud and Philosophy* characterizes psychoanalysis as a therapy of suspicion - so perhaps some of you may be wondering whether my speaking of an everyday transcendence, an unknowingness, an experience of relaxed boundaries for what we call our "I," is indicative of a regression of ego functions reflecting a primal merger with mother/world in need of developmental differentiation. Such an observation can be both a serious question, as well as a useless one. It is a serious question if we are ascertaining the possibility of an individual suffering from serious pathology, as evidenced by his or her life situation and overall cognitive and emotional functioning. It is an unproductive question if it aims at a reductionistic reading of a level of discourse that a listener may not be familiar with; we sometimes experience alternate and unfamiliar metaphors and models as anxiety provoking. Just as Pinchus Noy,(18) in a seminal article, postulated that primary process thinking is not developmentally primitive but rather a creative alternate, developmentally equal to secondary process thinking, so, too, we can say, along with Ammons, that there is more to the term nonexistence, than meets the ear, so to speak. The sense of mystery, which the concept evokes, is more an invitation to explore a space that compliments rather than contradicts our more discursive psychoanalysis.

In our traditional psychoanalytic training have we, at least in North America, overemphasized discursive disciplines and undervalued courses that rely more on primary process thinking? We would do well, I believe, to introduce courses in art appreciation, in literature and poetry, which reveal as much as they hide, not unlike the unconscious, and even a rudimentary course or two in the history of Western music. Ear training can be as helpful for an analyst as it is for a musician. Such courses, given the cultural background of the early European analysts, would have been redundant for them but are, generally speaking, not redundant for us

The continuous creation of meanings, which we humans pursue with the same force as sexual desire, inevitably brings us to mystery - to a level of awareness where our human essence of necessity

eludes us. If we appreciate the function of metaphor in acquisition of knowledge, then the concept of an infinite mist of possibilities, which reflects our human essence, becomes clearer. Without teaching a deep appreciation of metaphor, as I have addressed in a previous IFPE presidential address, (19) we are in danger of concretizing knowledge, of missing the perennial forest for the trees. I noted in that talk that... *By intellectual discipline and/or life experiences one must be able to transcend the immediacy of the present, the immediacy of the concrete. To be able to appreciate the intrinsic arbitrary selectivity of awareness that any language or cultural modes provide is to experience our symbolizing capacity and to set ourselves loose from the illusion of certainty* (p.420.) Poets (20), among others, help us find the words to highlight our ignorance of the world we live in.

In Western Aristotelian thought to speak of nothing and to relate that to an everyday transcendence seems like a violation of the principle of contradiction - something cannot be, and not be, at the same time - similar to our Western understanding that out of nothing, nothing comes. In trying to understand how nonexistence could have any meaning, how nothingness could have any significance, we are attempting to understand, I believe, what a natural everyday transcendence could possibly mean. Trying to relate this concept to more familiar analytic concepts, we can say, following Eckhart's imagery, that there is a ground, so to speak, to what we identify as the unconscious - a ground that is dense with a mist of possibilities; a ground, however, which supports both what we call the dynamic as well as the phylogenetic unconscious; a ground that is pure possibility, imageless, a nothingness, in the language we have been using, and yet powerfully active. (21) In order to appreciate the possibility of such a ground we need to experience periods of quiet reflection. Such reflection can spring from an analytic space that is not cluttered with intellectual understanding and/or with interpretations. What I am speaking about is certainly not new to psychoanalytic thought. In our day-to-day clinical experiences we not infrequently find, when we hold ourselves back from the rush to understand, from the need to conceptualize, that we can be as

surprised as a patient may be, by what we ultimately say, or occasionally, do. (22) When, that is, we are guided more by an informed Muse than an informed memory. Certainly this must be the meaning of Bion's injunction to let go of both memory and desire.

Is this ground, which we have spoken of, what Lao-Tzu means by our human essence, that which is deep and dark within us? And if it is, then a capacity for silent awe, for a quiet acceptance of mystery - which is not simply a cover term for our ignorance, - is an essential ingredient for any practicing psychoanalyst. I think that such an acceptance of mystery is crucial if we, and I mean both patient and analyst, are ever to experience an enchantment with the world, notwithstanding how profoundly troubled it constantly seems to be. Further, a good indication that an analysis is going well is the ability to feel, if I can put it that way, the world's enchantment with us - which we call life.

Can we, as analysts and therapists, experience such a sense of enchantment, of mystery, if it was lost along with the forgotten memories of our own childhoods? The answer, of course, is obvious. I have no trouble accepting what, in fact, many analytic authors have indicated, namely, that for many analysts their choice of profession has its roots in personal pain and developmental traumas. Lucky for any of us if that was the case; poetic sensitivity grows in such soil, although, obviously, not exclusively. Developmental traumas, singular and cumulative, can either be used as a bridge to others, just as poetry is a bridge or, sadly, they can be used to foster an experience of narcissistic isolation. What do I mean by a bridge? For one, it means that an analyst or therapist should be able to hold a patient's dreams before rushing to interpret them. It means that if a therapist cannot feel a patient's pain it will do little good to understand its causes. What I am also talking about is a capacity for cross-identification, what we usually speak of as empathy, as well as a capacity for personal civility. If a practitioner lacks such qualities, if intellectual formulas and sophisticated techniques are not informed by what we have spoken of as the hidden spaces of mystery and awe, not only will our therapeutic work be dead and repetitiously boring for ourselves but for our patients as well.

Such considerations bring us back to the issue of boundaries, to the space between therapist and patient. If ultimately the most productive reading of the issue of boundaries has to do with maintaining what we have come to call the frame, then it is particularly important to understand that such a frame refers primarily to the professional relationship between therapist and patient. All other conscious, or should I say objective factors, such as time and fee, possibility of personal contact outside of the sessions, etc. are important but subordinate to the therapeutic relationship. And that therapeutic relationship is one that has to be constantly re-invented - it is not a formula of rules and regulations that one simply applies under the guise of practicing psychoanalysis. In this vein it is Andre Green, in the article quoted above, who reminds us that *...an analyst cannot practice psychoanalysis and keep it alive by applying knowledge. He must attempt to be creative to the limits of his ability* (p.18a). Paraphrasing his thoughts we can say that if we are not constantly recreating psychoanalysis we are, in fact, killing it.

How to be creative in psychoanalysis without at times being crazy is both a humorous and important question. I do not believe that some state rules about dual-relationships, for example, guarantee professionalism or, obviously, creativity. I do not think that licensing guarantees anything, except income to the state. Nor is creativity guaranteed by an articulated concern as to whether it is permissible, for example, to walk a phobic patient to the elevator. (23) Such a decision either flows intrinsically from the professional clinical relationship, at its present development, or not; it can neither be condemned nor, for that matter, applauded, in terms of some set of external guidelines as to whether one is ever supposed to engage in such an action. What is important to remember is that language and personal integrity impose a discipline, just as a commitment to insight and civility imposes a standard of behavior. Such considerations as these are what we should highlight in our efforts to educate analysts and analytic therapists in negotiating psychoanalytic space. Such considerations are a necessary preparation for grappling with transference. Only when a therapist is not the all knowing or observing

other, but rather a respectful and active listener to the rhythm of the patient, as well as to his or her own words and actions, will any headway be made in recognizing and clarifying transference issues. Respectful listening entails good manners as well as professional competence, since it is only when patients know that their pain or confusion, despair or rage is heard will they be able to come to a deeper experience of themselves.

In listening to what is said, verbally and in action, we are, obviously, always listening to what is not, or cannot, be said. Such a psychoanalytic experience is possible when a therapist has a quiet place within him or herself out of which to react. It is this dimension of the psychoanalytic space that I have tried to speak about - a dimension best captured, as I have attempted to convey, through the humanistic discipline of poetry, a discipline that can help sensitize us to the space of mystery and awe in our lives. I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that with every patient we work with we are writing, in effect, and frequently with a sense of ongoing surprise, our own autobiography. We are not simply revealing a hidden or forgotten history but we are creating one anew - anew for both analyst and patient. This is what I mean by the frame ultimately reflecting the professional lived relationship between patient and analyst.

The price of never making serious errors in such a relationship is, I am convinced, the possibility of not creating anything new - I see no way around this. The only safeguard, I can think of, for avoiding serious errors is a constant commitment to personal honesty - an honesty that says that every action or word can be understood and reflected upon, can be recognized as coming from the many tributaries that feed our thoughts and actions. Morality, all too frequently, puts labels on those tributaries; psychoanalysis, which is a more serious endeavor, sets itself the task of mapping them as well as their effects. A lot of contemporary psychoanalysis, from my reading, has fallen into a morality of correct technique, of correct thought - an over development, if you will, of our professional superego. The goal of psychoanalytic education is not to teach correct technique, or a set of correct thoughts, but to aid the persons involved, analyst and patient, so that they begin to see what is

hidden just beneath the surface, what is taunting them, just around the corner, so to speak, and in the doing of such to experience, ideally, a new level of personal integration. When we have more internal bridges we have more external bridges to others and the world. Technique fits each patient, not the other way around; Francois Roustang, (24) in his text *Dire Mastery*, reminds us that ultimately each therapist/analyst, in their clinical practice, relies solely on him or herself - education should help us do that with some sense of ongoing creativity.

What many mystics, throughout the ages, have tried to inculcate, namely, an encounter with what is transcendent in human experience, has been demythologized by psychoanalysis. The mystery, we have learned, is within us, not outside us. Psychoanalysis has provided a new space in which to live life, and paradoxically, in doing so, it has re-found old truths. The only transcendence we can know, now, is an everyday transcendence. Standing in Winnicott's shadow we can say that this is good enough. The mist of possibilities that grounds our lives is the seedbed of awe and creativity. The poetry of each person's life is what we aim for in therapy, the poetry that can sensitize each of us to the possibility of an everyday transcendence, which we have tried to elaborate. Without such a sensitivity to what I have spoken of as an everyday transcendence, we are in danger of an analysis going on for years, to use another one of Winnicott's metaphors, under the false assumption that the patient is alive - we are speaking of the possibility of the analyst being alive as well. Winnicott clarified his meaning, I believe, when he wrote that we are poor indeed if we are only sane (p.150). (25) We are no more than merely sane if the psychoanalytic space we inhabit has lost a capacity for metaphor, has lost a sense of mystery and awe.

As therapists we are not only midwives of memory and meaning, but we are - despite the darkness of the forest we occasionally walk in - midwives of hope and possibility. That is what it means, I believe, to be alive. That is the space we seek.

## Notes & References

- Copyright 2002, by Gerald J. Gargiulo. Presidential Address for the International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education Conference on *Psychoanalytic Space*, October 2002 – Fort Lauderdale, Florida.
2. Ammons, A. R. 1997. *Glare*. New York. W.W. Norton & Co.
  3. In this regard we can note another famous poet's reflection when Borges writes: *If, in fact, I am a self*-p.93. (Borges, J. L. (1999) Selected poems. New York; Penguin Books.
  4. Grotstein James. S. (2000) *Who Is the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream?* Hillsdale, N.J. The Analytic Press. (See also, Gargiulo, G.J. (2004) *Psyche, Self and Soul*. London. Whurr/Wiley & Sons.)
  5. Complementary dualities in conceptual and metaphorical vocabulary goes back to Egyptian cosmology, see for example *The Egyptian Book of The Dead*. James Wasserman (1998). Raymond Faulkner (translator) pg 156. San Francisco, Chronicle Books LLC
  6. Eckhart, Meister. (1980) *Breakthrough*. (Matthew Fox – edition) Garden City. Image Books. (p.446-447)
  7. See: Kovacs, George. (1990). *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*. Evanston, Illinois. Northwestern University Press. (p.185 & 211).
  8. Green, Andre. (1975) The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting. *Int. J. Psychoanalysis.*, 56
  9. Gliedman, J. (1984-Oct). Turning Einstein Upside Down. *Science Digest* p.34.
  10. Wheeler, John, et al. (1973) *Gravitation*, San Francisco, Freeman. As quoted in: *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* by Gary Zukav. (1979) William Morrow and Co. New York. P.54. Wheeler goes on to say that: *the vital act is the act of participation. "Participator" is the incontrovertible new concept given by quantum mechanics. It strikes down the term "observer" of classical theory, the man who stands safely behind the thick glass wall and watches what goes on without taking part. It cannot be done, quantum mechanics says.*
  11. Gregory, Bruce. (1988). *Inventing Reality: Physics As Language*. New York. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
  12. Winnicott, D. W. (1965). *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. New York. International Universities Press Inc. p. 91.
  13. Fingarette, H. (1963). *The Self in Transformation*. New York: Basic Books.
  14. Bettelheim, B. (1983) *Freud and Man's Soul*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. For a critique of some of Bettelheim's sweeping judgments see: Ilse Grubrich-Simitis: *Back to Freud's Texts*. (Philip Slotkin, translator). New Haven. Yale University Press.
  15. Spezzano, C. & Gargiulo, G. (1997) *Inner Mind/Outer Mind and the Quest for the "I," Soul On The Couch*. Hillsdale. The Analytic Press.
  16. Cavell, M. (1988) Solipsism and Community. *Psychoanalysis & Contemporary Thought*, 11:587-613. See also Jacques, Francis. (1991) (Andrew Rothwell, Translator) *Difference and Subjectivity: Dialogue and Personal Identity*. New Haven. Yale University Press.
  17. Ricoeur, Paul. (1970). *Freud And Philosophy*. New Haven. Yale University Press.
  18. Noy, Pinchus. "A Revision of The Psychoanalytic Theory of the Primary Process," *International Journal of*

*Psychoanalysis* (1969) vol. 50 Part 2. pp. 155-177....*as the secondary process has to detach itself in the course of development from personal meanings and become more and more objective, the primary process has to improve its ability to deal with these personal meanings, i.e. become more and more subjective. So, each one has to develop in a different direction – but of course to the same degree.*

19. Gargiulo, Gerald. J. *Meaning and Metaphor in Psychoanalytic Education*. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 85(3) June 1998 (IFPE Presidential Address. Ann Arbor, Michigan. October 1997)

20. A literary description of the elusiveness of any objective reality vis-à-vis our desires is beautifully summarized in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1974) where he states: *At this point Kublai Khan expects Marco so speak of Irene as it is seen from within. But Marco cannot do this: he has not succeeded in discovering which is the city that those of the plateau call Irene. For that matter, it is of slight importance: if you saw it, standing in its midst, it would be a different city; Irene is a name for a city in the distance, and if you approach, it changes.* (P.99) New York . HBJ

21. Grotstein (2002), in the text cited above, employing Kleinian metaphors, writes about *preternatural psychic presences* (p.xxiv). In this essay I am not addressing the usefulness or not of such usage.

22. Reik, T. (1948). *Listening With the Third Ear*. New York. Grove Press. (see pp.258 ff)

23. It is surprising in a text that advocates, “throwing away the book” that Irwin Hoffman. 1988. in *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process*. (Hillsdale. The Analytic Press.) takes such pains to explain his action vis-à-vis a certain patient. Contrast this with Winnicott's simply stating that with certain patients he provides milk and cookies!

24. *If the analyst relies entirely on himself in practice, he cannot rely on someone else in theory. To dissociate the two makes no sense, because theorization can take place only during practice; otherwise, one will fall back either into ineffable non-communication or into a game of love and hate, which is bound to become vicious...p72.*  
Roustang, F. (1982) *Dire Mastery*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

25. Winnicott. D.W. (1958). *Collected Papers*. London. Tavistock Publications