

Seattle Psychoanalytic Society and Institute Newsletter

April 2009

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Dear SPSI,

This is the third edition of the online SPSI "Newsletter". Our initial idea was to begin small and expand the publication according to the needs and interests of our community in an organic fashion. We are thrilled that the feedback to the "Newsletter" has been uniformly positive and it appears to read by a large number of you.

The "Newsletter" is largely a labor of our newest board member Aric Mayer. Aric is an artist, photographer and professional in the print and on-line publishing industry. Aric's expertise opens up incredible creative possibilities.

Starting in May, the "Newsletter" will exist in two formats. The first format includes content specific to the SPSI community, information from committees, letters from the director etc., and will arrive by email in the same way as it does now. The second format, as this is the digital age, is a blog version that will be searchable on the Internet. The purpose of this format is to bring our ideas and productions into conversation with the wider world.

The "Newsletter" will continue to bring information about people and events in our community, while expanding its compass to include ideas and productions from the consulting room and the arts and sciences. Regarding content, we see psychoanalysis as both a procedure in an office, and the name of a way of apprehending. We welcome submissions in any digital media relating to psychoanalysis. This can include photography or music. It could be writing pieces from poetry, to original research, to a psychoanalytically informed review of a gustatory experience in a restaurant. Or a response to a film, a review of a lecture or talk or performance, we hope you get the picture.

Finally, the name. I believe this publication began as the "Bulletin", became "Developments" and most recently the "Newsletter". Somehow these names do not do

justice to the vitality of our beloved subject. Freud called the ego a "Frontier Creature" in "The Ego and the Id". This creature lives at the creative edge of conscious and unconscious. We feel that the name provides a great platform from which to launch a dynamic, searchable, multimedia, 21st century publication dedicated to psychoanalysis in every day life.

Please look in your email boxes next month for the inaugural issue of "The Frontier Creature".

Best regards,

Martin Bullard, MSW

Letter from the Director

April 2009

Psychoanalytic colleagues:

The very essence of what our institute is all about occurred to me as I reflected on my recent experience as co-instructor of an 11-week continuous case conference during which the ongoing psychoanalytic treatment of an anonymous individual was presented and discussed. I continue to be impacted by the experience.

Even though various seminar participants were attached to different psychoanalytic theories, we could surprisingly easily agree on a number of basic psychoanalytic principles.

We all agreed that there is a formidable dynamic unconscious that influences us in ways in which we are not aware. We agreed that the spontaneous and reasonably free associational stream of thought of the patient conveyed the patient's experience of the evolving relationship with the person of the psychoanalyst. We agreed that symptoms that brought the patient to the analysis began to involve the person of the analyst. We observed the psychoanalyst respond not only cognitively, but also emotionally, i.e. countertransferentially to the patient by unconsciously and transiently assuming the role of some important past figure of the patient or else by transiently erecting a defense against assuming such a role. We could also agree on what defenses against what painful affects were used by the patient, and, at times, temporarily shared by the psychoanalyst. Finally, we could agree that interpretation of transferences at the moment that these were activated during the analytic treatment hour would be helpful to the patient who could then pair the experience of reliving of a memory of a trauma with the experience of a safe enough, attuned, and tracking relationship with the analyst.

We could *not* agree on when and how to carry out such an interpretation. It became gradually clear that those who were opposed to interpretations had good cause to oppose them. They were rightfully concerned that certain interpretive

maneuvers could be hurtful if poorly timed or worded unempathically. We all clarified how each of us would proceed somewhat differently clinically.

What was exciting was our ability to gradually agree on an interpretive approach that was empathic, tactful, and therefore would lead to an emotional learning experience on the part of the patient. What was even more exciting was that analytic progress could be demonstrated by the psychoanalyst in the subsequent seminar after the interpretation had been conveyed to the patient.

All of us had, for that moment, put aside our most favorite analytic theoretical orientations. It was a moment of enjoyable and shared professional work.

It is the essence of our institute to make many such moments possible, as we help each other become better psychoanalysts who heal emotional wounds that are so invisible to the naked eye.

Best Regards,

Werner Schimmelbusch, Director
Seattle Psychoanalytic Society and Institute

Just an Idea: A Small Series Questioning Theory

by Donald Ross, M.D.

I wanted to wonder with you about what is the mind that originates our most basic background of safety. While doing our work, there must certainly be a background environment that is involved in the constant activity of gathering information, collating and discriminating data, accessing data for decision making, and ultimately driving our behavior. Perhaps this is one aspect of the mental activity that J. Sandler refers to as "maintaining a minimum level of safety-feeling".

But, safety is defined by discriminating (or isolating) from that which it isn't. Where we know what constitutes the properties of safety, we know the constituents of danger. As long as there is this activity of discrimination, there will be more or less vigilance directed toward eliminating danger- events and maintaining safety-events. The safety of the subject and its object and how this safety-feeling is distributed between the two poles of subject and object, and all the necessary definitions of the subject in contrast to the object are at the base of Freudian theory of mind and its component conflict theories.

I believe that a fundamental aspect of Freud's definition of a mind is that which contains these activities of a variety of species of subject and object, the mental conflicts engendered by these, how these are engaged in the opposing activities of pleasure, pain and reality or thanatos and eros or id and super-ego. This fundamental idea of conflict leads to the conclusion in one of his last works, *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, that formal psychoanalyses will need to be repeated at regular intervals if psychological safety is to be maintained. The reader is also left with pessimistic outlook about what can be achieved through formal psychoanalysis.

But, perhaps these conclusions are based upon just one theory of mind (though a theory that has become reified) that minds oriented toward safety, are fundamentally activities of conflict management. In a review of Brenner's book, *The Mind in Conflict*, Phyllis Meadow points out how, "conflict underlies all psychic life". Brenner himself points out his "proposition that a dynamic interaction among the components of psychic conflict underlie much or all of the subjectively conscious and objectively observable phenomenon of adult psychic life."

What if this appears to be the case because of unchallenged theoretic spin and lack of theoretical flexibility that creates a fit between itself and the ever increasing possible permutations on the theme of conflict and the symptoms arising from conflict and attempts at achieving safety? Contrarily, what if our theory is a mind that is essentially conflict free (i.e. not merely a Hartmannian conflict-free zone of the ego), and conflicts are manufactured through mistaken understanding of fundamental reality (not merely the child's mistaken understanding of the Oedipal situation)? Then a successful analysis will afford the analysis and the potential realization of the mind that's conflict free. These may be moments of realization or extended periods of time. In the Freudian and Brennerian sense, this would be conceptually impossible.

Of course, this requires an analysis of a different sort; what is the fundamental reality of that which carries on mental activity and what constitutes the apparent conflicts that obscure its reality. The nature of these conflicts would be considerably more abstract and less saturated (i.e. less singular regarding meaning) than the classic Freudian conflicts that exist within his structural model. The Freudian conflicts would be subsumed within the more fundamental conflicts alluded to here. They would be a subset, but nonetheless, a clinically salient instantiation.

I hope that this brief foray (and others to come) into challenges of our theoretical assumptions insert curiosity into theories which I believe tend toward concretization. It's easy to forget that theory began as a finger pointing toward the moon, but can end up as an investigation of theoretical fingers. Even more basically, let's not eat the menu instead of the meal.

Psychoanalysis and Visual Art

by Susan Radant, Ph.D.

Although you may be aware of the opera and psychoanalysis program which is directed by Lynn Buell, you may not be familiar with another Continuing Education Committee program, "Psychoanalysis and Visual Art." Since this program began in 2007, we have produced five programs and have two planned programs in the Fall, which examine the interface between the visual arts and psychoanalysis.

Almost from its origins, psychoanalytic theory has been applied outside the clinical sphere, especially to works of art. There are at least three ways in which psychoanalysis can be connected with art. One is with the nature of the creative process and the experience of the artist. The second way is through the interpretation of works of art. In other words, what can we infer about the artist, or

her state of mind from the art piece itself. Lastly, is the aesthetic encounter of the observer with the work of art, which like the individual, can be understood from multiple theoretical angles. For example, Winnicott saw the work of art as representing an "intermediate area of experience, between the self and the outside world."

In Kohutian terms, the artistic creation can exemplify the subjective experience of the artist's relationship to his selfobjects, and his internal fluctuations in sense of self. An evocative piece of art creates an intermediate zone (a transitional space) between the artist and audience, by which the inner, emotional experiences of the artist resonates with those of the audience. This is the area that we attempt to explore in these art events by creating an open and social atmosphere.

Typically we focus on a particular artist or series of works, with a presentation by the artist and a psychoanalytic practitioner. The audience is purposely kept to less than 40 people so that there can be a lively discussion between the participants and the artist. We maintain a casual atmosphere by serving wine and appetizers during these programs, which are generally held on Friday evenings. These programs are free of charge (a donation for refreshments is welcome however), so we do not offer continuing education credits. Feedback has been extremely positive and we seem to be developing a core cadre of participants who usually attend these events, as well as relationships with local museums such as the Frye and Seattle Art Museum. In past programs we have featured the following artists: Akio Takamori, Barbara Fugate, Dario Robleto at the Frye Museum, and Maxine Nelson speaking at the Seattle Art Museum about Anselm Kiefer, Josef Beuys and Do-Ho Suh.

Our last program was held on March 6 and featured Mark Takamichi Miller, a nationally known figurative painter whose large-scale works have been described as "alive in the chaos of their time and place." His work has been reviewed and featured around the region for many years, and he is sought after as an instructor. Taking their departure point from found photographs at Costco, his recent paintings are created with careful attention to materials and process, as well as conceptual restraints. Mr. Miller described his unfolding relationships with his anonymous subjects and their imagined stories as central to his finished work. His paintings are immediate, deeply human and powerfully evocative. We were privileged to have the chance to meet Mr. Miller in his gallery and to experience first-hand his paintings and creative process.

Of our two upcoming scheduled programs, one will feature our own Aric Mayer, a photographer and member of the SPSI Board. The second will feature Gary Curtis at the Davidson Gallery. Gary Curtis is a sculptor who makes heads that are illustrative of his emotional state.

If you are interested in learning more about our programs or attending our forthcoming presentations, please contact Susan Radant, Ph.D. or any of the other members of our art and psychoanalysis subcommittee (Cecile Bassen, John Cardinali, Matt Brooks or Joanna Goodman).