

The Shadow of the Object

*Psychoanalysis of the
Unthought Known*

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IT will be months after greeting a new patient before I have some 'sense' of the person's private and unconscious use of me as an object within the field of transference. During the early weeks of an analysis, both the analysand and I are usually taken up with the patient's narrative of his reasons for having sought help, and he 'presents' his life history. This presentation of one's life to the other is a quite special event for the analysand, and its character is as much marked by its eventual dissolution as it is by its early pertinence. For after a while the patient finds he has nothing more to say.

To some extent, this is when free association, or its negation – lack of association – begins. It is also during this period of transition from reporting one's life to discovering life within the analytic space and process that the analysand establishes the nature of transference object use. Each analysand uses me in a different way. Some patients may elicit my differentiated critical capacity since they seem transferenceally confused, while others may not use this capacity much at all. Some analysands create 'points' of empathic identification, enabling the analyst to settle into them for a period of time, while other patients sustain a rigorous affective distance that impoverishes the analyst's emotional life.

As I work to understand what I am in the transference, defined by the function elicited by the analysand, it may be possible in time to discover who I am, even if this 'who' is a composite of the patient's mother, father and former child self.

Our psychoanalytic understanding of the transference has always been that this psychological phenomenon is a re-living in the analytic process of earlier states of being and experiencing. But I wonder now if this is strictly true. Can we say that what is

occurring in the analysis has in its entirety ever been lived before? I think that in his discovery of psychoanalysis Freud created a situation, now with the person's adult mental faculties present and functioning, in which the individual could live through for the first time elements of psychic life that have not been previously thought.

Such a view of the transference holds that this is not merely a reliving of a relation to the mother or father, or a re-presentation of the child self, but a fundamentally new experience, in that 'something' is given a certain dosage of time, space and attentiveness in which to emerge.

I turn quite naturally to Winnicott's concept of the true self to indicate what I believe this previously unlived something is. However, I quarrel with him slightly, in that I do not think this true self should be identified as the id and differentiated from the ego. I think Winnicott was much closer to the truth when he stated that by true self he meant the inherited disposition, and as the id is the psychical presence of the bodily instincts, then all id representations involve ego organization.

Furthermore, if we place greater emphasis on the individual character of the infant, on that organization of the person that is genetically given, and if we understand this core of the person to be the essence of the true self, then it is possible to link up the idea of the ego with the true self and to see how the ego is in part the organizational manifestation of the true self.

We can now further link the concept of true self and the ego to the notion of primary repression. The primary repressed must be that inherited disposition that constitutes the core of personality, which has been genetically transmitted, and exists as a potential in psychic space. How this true self will be realized involves consideration of the mother's and father's facilitative logic in their function as the transformational object.

At the very core of the concept of the unthought known, therefore, is Winnicott's theory of the true self and Freud's idea of the primary repressed unconscious. Indeed, I think that Melanie Klein's assertion that infants vary in their fundamental representation of the life and death instincts is determined by the intrinsic

nature of this true self. Phantasy, however, does not constitute the true self: it represents it. In this respect, my view differs from the Kleinian position that early phantasy structures the ego. Phantasy is the first representative of the unthought known in mental life. It is a way of thinking that which is there. In other terms, it is an expression of the idiom of the infant's being and is the first mental act in the gradual and complex development of an 'internal' world.

That internal world will process other aspects of human life through phantasy. Along with the representation of the true self will be the mental representation of the mother's logic of intersubjectivity. As I have held in the previous chapters, in the early months and years of a person's life the mother 'instructs' the infant in the logic of being and relating. She does this through countless intersubjective exchanges in her function as the transformational object. And each exchange is a logical paradigm. It supports the mother's theory of being and relating, and will in varying degrees facilitate or forestall the infant's true self, the unfolding of the person's intrinsic character through object relations.

Alongside the true self as the core of the unthought known, one can add the countless rules for being and relating that have been operationally determined. The mother teaches the infant her logic, which is partly included in the infant's logic of being and relating. The infant will alter this logic, or form compromises between the logic of his being and object need which is fundamentally determined by his inherited disposition, and the logic of the mother's care. But this continually developed field of knowledge is not thought. Or to be precise, it is not mentally represented, even though of course phantasy continues to represent some aspects of the infant's mental experience of this complex negotiation with the mother. However rich a one-year-old's conscious or dynamically unconscious fantasy life may be, it is not the constituting factor in the development of the unthought known.

If we combine what we might think of as inherited or intrinsic logic with intersubjective logic, so that we link a logic that stems from the given – from the core of being itself – with the logic of the

other, both of which are revealed through operational processes and not via mental representations, then before the small child is capable of topographically significant mental representations (involving secondary repression and pre-conscious processes) the child already 'knows' the basic essentials of human life, in particular, of his human life. And what is known has not been established via discrete mental representations, in which the human subject forms mental objects in his mind, and abstracts from them theories about existence: that does occur, but much later. Indeed, the oedipus complex engages the subject in the formation of mental representations that do involve unconscious thought as the originating factor, and in this respect the psychic activity in the oedipal phase differs fundamentally from psychic life of the 'preoedipal' phase.

The concept of primary repression does not address early intersubjective contributions to the infant's knowledge of being and relating. It is because we must give room to the infant's internalization of the parent's paradigmatic operational logic that I think a new term, such as the unthought known, is called for. We need a term to stand for that which is known but has not yet been thought, if by thought it is understood that we mean that which has been mentally processed accurately. Phantasy does give some mental representation to the unthought known, but it is insufficient to process the unthought known, and its liability at times expresses its limitation.

In what ordinary way, then, does the unthought known become thought? In some respects in the same manner that it partly developed: establishment through object relations. It is only through the subject's use and experience of the other that mental representations of that experience can carry and therefore represent the idiom of a person's unthought known: which, of course, brings us to the transference and the countertransference. I know something about the analysand before I have thought what I know. Through the patient's idiomatic uses of me (both as his internal object and as the other to whom he speaks and from whom he expects), I am instructed in the logic of his intersubjectivity, and gradually I have a sense of the nature of

this person's being. Becoming the cumulative recipient, for example, of the analysand's varied projective identifications means that I know something 'about' the patient without it having yet been sufficiently mentally processed through my own internal cognitions, reflections and eventual interpretations. Thus a psychoanalysis constitutes a time-consuming effort, as both the analyst and analysand need to begin to think the unthought known. Much of my work in the countertransference will be a struggle to put into imagery and language the experience of being the analysand's object.

So an analysis partly recapitulates ontogenesis. In the beginning there may be the word, but there is also the wordless. The infant-mother dialogue is more an operational and less a representational form of knowledge. And the analyst, like the infant becoming a child, will struggle to move the unthought known into the thought known.

The role of projective identification in this procedure cannot be underestimated, particularly if we bear in mind that infants and children contain unwanted or treasured parts of the parents. How does an infant or a child think about this? If the mother or father projectively identifies the element of grief into the child by isolating any sign of sadness as a major psychic occasion, biasing the child to be the family bearer of loss, how will the child know this? Will he know it analytically? Of course not. Will he know it through the mediative and fecund potential of fantasy? Try as he might this will not process the content of the known. Then how will he know what he knows? He knows because he bears a projective identification that will seem to him to be part of the nature of his being or of life itself. Containing the other's projective identification seems life defining; grief, in this last example, feels like the essence of his person; it is not to be thought - it cannot be: it is lived.

Alongside that which is known via the recipient's containment of projective identification, we must add the child's knowledge of extractive introjection. The nature of this knowing will not be identical in both situations: the child who contains split-off fragments of the mother's or father's personality will be under some

kind of pressure to sustain some element of personality in the theatre of family relations, while the child whose psyche has been denuded by a parent's theft of parts of his mind will know this only through a mood based on a primal loss and a sense of a prevailing harm having been committed. Precisely because the nature of extractive introjection occurs in a wordlessly violent manner – so that even adult victims can have a very difficult time identifying the cause of their distress – a small child will be unable to bring this psychic act into thought and speech.

Another element in the unthought known is somatic knowledge. In our work with analysands we experience the patient in our soma. In the most obvious sense, some analysands enable us to feel somatically rested and receptive, while others precipitate complex body tensions within us which we endure but to which we may give very little attention. This is not a peculiarity of psychoanalysis, as in all of our relations with people, we somatically register our sense of a person; we 'carry' their effect on our psyche-soma, and this constitutes a form of somatic knowledge, which again is not thought. I am sure that psychoanalysts could learn a great deal about this form of knowing from modern dance where the dancer expresses the unthought known through body knowledge. And it may well be that musical representation is somewhere between the unthought known and thought proper.

There is in each of us a fundamental split between what we think we know and what we know but may never be able to think. In the course of the transference and countertransference the psychoanalyst may be able to facilitate the transfer of the unthought known into thought, and the patient will come to put into thought something about his being which he has not been able to think up until then. But all analysts will at times fail to transfer the unthought known into thought, and it is important to form a relation to the rather mysterious unavailability of much of our knowledge.

A generative respect towards every representation in thought of the origins of the true self, and of the countless speeches mother and infant make through their curious dialect, enables us to face that knowledge we possess but cannot think. Is it not possible that

by eventually developing a limited relation to the unthought known in ourselves, we can then address the mysteries of our existence, such as the curious fact of existence itself, particularly the legacy of our ancestors carried as it is through the generations via the idiom of the inherited disposition? In thinking the unthought known we ponder not simply the kernel of our true self, but elements of our forebears.