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RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYSIS AS POLITICAL RESISTANCE

Abstract. The intellectual movement known as the interpretative turn is used to develop an understanding of relational psychoanalysis as a way of preparing patients and practitioners to resist the dominant way of being and political structures of the current era. This interpretation is explored by discussing a newly emerging configuration of the self—the flattened, multiple self—and its connections to 1) the growing influence of neoliberal proceduralism, and 2) an increase in both political indifference and political fundamentalism in the general population. By providing a brief history of relational psychoanalysis that highlights its moral vision and political implications, and by drawing on film, television commercials, online gaming, and psychotherapy practices, it is argued that relational practice can oppose and offer an alternative to a neoliberal way of being, the political arrangements it serves, and the psychological attitudes that enable it. By explicitly recognizing some of the political meanings of relational practice it is hoped that practitioners will be helped to develop political practices within the clinical hour more directly than in the past.

Keywords: relational, hermeneutics, neoliberal, dialogue, proceduralism, instrumentalism, technicism

Social theory, especially feminist, critical, postmodern, and hermeneutic theories, have had a noticeable influence on American psychotherapy. This is true especially in psychoanalysis, where some philosophical and sociological concepts have been integrated into what is now called relational psychoanalysis. Relational theory appeals to therapists of many stripes, not only because of its intellectual force but also because, like

any popular theory, it fits well with the overall spirit of the times. We live in a social world characterized by preoccupations with—and the valorization of—communication, social interaction, and interpersonal relationship: preoccupations linked ironically to their vicissitudes and absences. It is not a coincidence that these activities are at the center of contemporary relational psychoanalytic theory and practice.

In this article, I argue that relational psychoanalysis is not only a psychological healing practice; it is also a social phenomenon, a site in the social terrain in which—strange though it may seem—an implicit (and perhaps unintentional) political resistance shows up. I draw heavily on the intellectual movement called the interpretative turn (e.g., Hiley, Bohman, & Shusterman, 1991) to examine such an unusual idea. The interpretative turn is constituted by two traditions: postmodern theories and hermeneutics. Whereas various postmodernisms such as deconstructionism and poststructuralism are focused on identifying and exposing the covert exercise of power in texts, hermeneuticists are focused on the significance of historical traditions and the moral understandings that they believe frame all aspects of a culture, including the exercise of power (Orange, 2010; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). From an interpretive perspective (e.g., Derrida, 1974; Foucault, 1975/1977; Gadamer, 1989; Heidegger, 1927), healing practices such as psychotherapy inevitably have political effects, and these effects usually reinforce the political status quo (Cushman, 1995; Mednick, 1989; Portuges, 2009; Samuels, 2001). What is unusual about relational psychoanalysis is that some of its practices function not to support, but to resist, the moral and political structures of its time and place.

By referring to the shape of political resistance I mean two things: First, there is a subtle way in which relational psychoanalysis could be interpreted as preparation, or, in its better moments a school, for resistance. This is because its practices can enable a way of being that is honest, self-reflective, critical, humble, curious, compassionate, and respectful of and willing to learn from difference. It is true that these personal qualities can be produced by the practices of different therapeutic schools, but the commitments relationalists make to honest interpersonal engagement and the clinical practices that bring it about (see e.g., Aron, 1991; Ehrenberg, 1974; Levenson, 1991b; Maroda, 1999; Stern, 2010) seem intended specifically to develop these traits. Further, they are usually justified not because they are in line with an inflexible theory or have been putatively

“proven” to be the one effective practice for a specific therapeutic moment, but because they are thought by relationalists to be a good way to live. “Implicit theory,” Stern (2012) explained, “is the expression of value positions that we often have not reflected on. It is our positions about what is good in life . . . that underlie our theories of technique” (p. 33). The relationalists’ commitments to what philosophers call the good (even though often implicit) oppose the dominant way of being of our time and could lead to direct political activity. Whether or in what ways activism would result, however, is an open question.¹

But there is also a second meaning of resistance at play here. Hermeneuticists suggest that each social terrain is like a room that is lit only by indirect lighting. The shape of the room is determined by the particular language, customs, beliefs, moral understandings, means of production, institutions, science, art, and laws—the overall cultural effects of a society. Due to the particular contour of a terrain, various things, people, and activities are illuminated and will show up in certain ways. For instance, in every social terrain there will be sites in which politics of a certain type will be available, and within this space, various acts, allegiances, and commitments that fit with that culture will be able to be lived out. The presence of political alternatives, on the other hand, are often harder to detect, and their activities and influence more difficult to recognize. This is particularly true in the first decades of the 21st century, where the profusion of consumer items, such as smart phones and designer shoes, tend to obscure from view the moral confusion and economic suffering that are also significant features of the terrain. With such elusive and seemingly unconnected social effects, it is difficult to see the links between glitz and suffering, know what to fight against, and

¹ This is a continuing dilemma for political activism in psychology: How to shift from what Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974, p. 10) called first-order change (from psychological change located in the individual, the dyad, or the family) to second-order change (to larger systemic, foundational change located in the political arrangements of a society)? Over the last 100 years, several schools of psychology, such as Reichian body work, interactionism in social psychology, radical psychiatry, and humanistic psychology have all failed to articulate and live out real-life solutions to that enormous problem. And of course some forms of ego psychology, object relations theory, and cognitive psychology were from their beginnings uninterested or functioned to directly oppose the connection between therapy and political activism (see Buss, 1979; Sampson, 1981). Could relational psychoanalysis, by drawing on the interpretative turn’s emphasis on history, critique, and moral discourse, be able to find a way?

how to do so. Thus, political resistance sometimes appears in surprising shapes and locations.

The last 400 years of Western society have been marked by an undermining of the public commons (i.e., both the specific social sites in which meanings are debated and negotiated and a more general sense of the collective—the public realm). This has been accomplished by an ongoing weakening of the historical traditions and communal values that support the commons and keep it vital (see, e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, & Swidler, 1985; Habermas, 1991; Sennett, 1988; Taylor, 1989). In the last 35 years, conservative and neoliberal rule in the United States has imposed a regime of privatization and commercialization that has further shrunk the commons. As a result, in our current social world, opportunities for effective political activism from the Left have narrowed (e.g., Bauman, 1999; Gitlin, 1995). It is fortunate that progressive motivations and commitments have not been destroyed (e.g., Botticelli, 2004), although explicit opportunities to live them out are increasingly limited. Thus, the possibility of carrying out some sort of politically meaningful Left-oriented activity is often available through roles and identities that sometimes appear benign or apolitical, even to those who live them out. I mean to suggest that relational psychoanalysis is one of those spaces in which resistance can quietly, subtly, even unintentionally, show up.

In order to examine relational psychoanalysis' political effects, I utilize the hermeneutic concept of the self (i.e., embodied cultural understandings about the correct ways to be human). I first identify the emergence of a recent and problematic way of being that has become increasingly prominent in the United States: a flattened, multiple self (Cushman & Gilford, 1999, 2000; Jacobson, 1997; Orange, 2009). This is a way of being that has diverged sharply from the emphasis on interiority and the valorization of "authenticity" of the modern era. Thus it emerges as a self that is thin or superficial and valorizes flexibility and shape shifting. This new self is preoccupied with consuming for the sake of creating and presenting identities in order to fend off danger or attract others. Although an interest in multiplicity is shared by both the flattened, multiple self and psychoanalytic theory about multiple self states (e.g., Bromberg, 1993, 1996, 1998; Davies, 1998; Davies & Frawley, 1994) they are two different phenomena (see footnote 2 and the "Is Multiplicity Reflection or Resistance?" section).

I especially want to examine the flattened, multiple self's connection to two of the more serious—and entangled—political problems of our

time. They are 1) the neoliberal proceduralization of American society (Binkley, 2011; Layton, 2010; Rose, 2007), leading especially to the overreliance of procedural concepts such as competencies in education and health care (Botticelli, 2006; Hoffman, 2009)—what is referred to as the industrialization of those fields; and 2) a significant increase in either a political indifference or a rigid political fundamentalism among the general population. Finally, I indicate how relational psychoanalysis is a site that sometimes opposes a neoliberal way of being, the political arrangements that it serves, and the psychological attitudes that enable it.

I do not mean to suggest that relationality, as a thing in and of itself, is an unproblematic natural force for good. A concept like relationality is a cultural artifact—as such, its moral and political meanings are contingent on how they function in a particular society. For that reason, relational theory and practice cannot be exempt from ideology and culture critique. Their worth can only be understood through interpretation that situates theory and practice within their sociohistorical context. A predominant way of being in any one historical era, and the social practices that fit with it, usually have both good and bad aspects. What matters is how successfully their good qualities can be used to attenuate their more destructive tendencies.

For instance, the concept of relationality—i.e., the attention to and valorization of the many forms, activities, and meanings of relational life—does not only show up in psychotherapy (see e.g., Gergen, 2009; Sampson, 1993). At the present time, a focus on relationship is pervasive in American popular culture; for instance, relationships are considered the bedrock of family life, and are used to sell consumer products, influence political opinion, and recruit for military organizations. A television commercial depicted computer competition as an ongoing conversation between two people, one named “Mac” and the other “PC”; commercials for medications almost always feature people interacting with friends or loved ones; politically oriented right-wing radio talk shows consciously create a personal connection with the host that includes nicknames, in-group jargon, and the cultivation of group identity; in recruitment commercials, the Army is often referred to as “a band of brothers.” Relationality, in other words, can be used for diverse, even incompatible, purposes.

Due to the conservative political traditions from which this flattened, multiple self and its political arrangements emerge, it stands to reason that

the forces that oppose them will come from the political Left. But let us remember that potential political resistance exists within a larger cultural terrain that includes both problems and their alternatives. If political resistance cannot speak the language of its time and place, it cannot be persuasive. So it should not be surprising that problematic aspects of the era (e.g., the flattened, multiple self) and social practices that sometimes oppose these aspects (e.g., relational psychoanalysis) also have things in common.²

A Brief Historical Overview

As many historians have noted (e.g., Lears, 1983; Susman, 1984), by the last decade of the 19th century American ideas about the essential qualities of the self began to focus on impressing and attracting others rather than on deeply felt Victorian commitments to living out a traditional moral code. Several aspects of Western, and especially American, history have reflected and contributed to that shift. Over the course of the 20th century, the economy moved from a focus on production to one of consumption and from an emphasis on physical labor to one of salesmanship; important personality characteristics shifted from Victorian “character” to Roaring Twenties “personality” and more recently to communicative (i.e., relational) expertise; psychopathology turned from hysteria and neurasthenia to what are sometimes called disorders of the self, that is, to psychological processes identified with narcissism and more recently dissociation (Guralnik & Simeon, 2010); and psychotherapy practices moved from an authoritarian style about intrapsychic events

² Relational analysts such as Bromberg (1993, 1996, 1998), Davies (1998), Davies and Frawley (1994), and Stern (2010) write about multiplicity and accord the concept of multiple self states an important place in their work. However, these writers are not valorizing the kind of flatness prevalent in contemporary pop culture. Psychoanalytic multiplicity reflects the hermeneutic belief that there is more than one truth in a text or an issue, and in that way it opposes fundamentalism and reinforces egalitarianism. Psychoanalytic multiplicity also supports the idea that individuals are constituted by various desires, values, ideals, commitments, cultural traditions, and emotional patterns. Thus, multiplicity opposes the belief that humans can and should be reduced to one unified unproblematic self. In this way, the concept opposes the unitary singular Victorian self; it valorizes conflict, variation, and difference. Of course, relational theories, like all theories, have their good and problematic aspects. Clinicians need to be mindful of the pitfalls as well as the advantages of multiplicity and be vigilant in historically situating therapeutic theory and guarding against uncritically accepting all aspects of any theory. See also “Is Multiplicity Reflection or Resistance?” in this article.

to a collaborative style about interpersonal or intersubjective events. All of these more recent phenomena are featured in current relational theory.

Above all, relational psychoanalysis is a combination of some of the most important intellectual movements of our time: it includes aspects of the interpretative turn, feminism, critical theory, and anti-racism in political theory, and interpersonal, object relations, and self psychology in psychoanalytic theory (Seligman, 2005). But relational psychoanalysis is not simply an isolated intellectual or scientific theory. It is also a cultural product, and as such, it inevitably and powerfully reflects and affects moral understandings and exerts subtle political influence.

Of course, it is not by chance that, even in psychoanalysis, some sort of left-oriented political potential would show up during the late 20th century. First, soon after mid-century, interpersonal analysts carried on the social vision of Sullivan, Horney, and Fromm, and then young analysts from the post-World War II Baby Boom cohort carried on the idealistic, rebellious, liberationist, socially oriented spirit of the 1960s in their work, even though in the form of a technical healing practice. Some of these early relationalists were left-leaning civil rights and peace activists in their younger days. They turned to psychotherapy for various personal, political, and financial reasons in the last quarter of the 20th century, when the war in Vietnam ended, the Left began to unravel, and intellectual jobs, especially with a social change component, became increasingly scarce.

As their psychoanalytic careers developed, the Baby Boom analysts quietly, but determinedly, questioned authority and lived out new and creative practices. With a style that fit with their times, they were optimistic, integrative, colorful, sometimes brilliant. They coined a new term—"relational"—for the embrace of the newer, nonorthodox, post-ego psychology theories that appealed to them, synthesized them under a new philosophical framework,³ and challenged the old guard. It is not surprising that their new practices featured a less formal, less depriving, more expressive, egalitarian, emotional, mutual, cooperative exchange between analyst and patient. These qualities—although obviously reflections of contemporary popular and intellectual culture—were contained

³ See Levenson (2006) for his concerns that this strategy obscures their meaningful differences.

in theoretical moves carefully buttressed by textual support from earlier psychoanalytic literature (Seligman, 2003). Thus, this young cohort fought for a place within the psychoanalytic establishment.

Today, in response to increasingly powerful neoliberal corporate forces insisting on medicalizing therapeutic practices, quantifying outcomes, and controlling labor—what is referred to as the industrialization of health care—many schools of psychotherapy have capitulated by relying increasingly on a medical model of care. This model is highly technician and behavioral, using cognitivist language and a physical science methodology that ignores social context and interactive process; it privileges quantified outcomes research that produces what is called “evidence-based practices.” All of this has led to an authoritarian management of the labor force (i.e., therapists) by means of a hierarchical administrative structure featuring a rigid bureaucratic proceduralism. Unlike most schools of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis has been less willing to comply with those pressures. However, recently the neoliberal ethic has made inroads even there (Botticelli, 2006; Walls, 2007, 2012).

Pockets of resistance in psychoanalysis do remain, and in my opinion, the most explicit and philosophically sound is currently being produced by the relationalists. Some (e.g., Cushman, 2013; Hoffman, 2009; Stern, 2013; Tolleson, 2009; Walls, 2012; Warren, 2010) have publicly argued against the technicism and instrumentalism that frame the industrialization of psychotherapy. These writers have intentionally drawn from the interpretative turn, especially feminist postmodernism and philosophical hermeneutics, to make the case for valorizing a nonmanualized, nonscientistic, more interpretive, collaborative, emergent practice of psychotherapy.

This resistance opposes a way of being that is increasingly dominant in our time. It is sad that in the United States as a whole, opposition to the hegemony of neoliberalism, of which the industrialization of psychotherapy is but one manifestation, is difficult to locate today. This is partly true because any resistance against such a subtle nuanced political phenomenon must necessarily be equally subtle and nuanced. And U.S. society, currently, is not exactly known for those qualities.

By making the observation that relational psychoanalysis is a site of resistance, I am not claiming that it is the best, most effective, or strongest form of resistance the Left could develop—not at all. I am simply interpreting its ideas and practices as expressing and living out certain moral understandings about the potential limitations, worthy possibilities, and

proper comportment of humans that oppose the emerging technicist, instrumentalist tendencies of the flattened self and the political arrangements, procedures, and institutions it serves.

This political claim would undoubtedly make most analysts, even many relational analysts, extremely uncomfortable. I do not mean that relational psychoanalysis is a conscious, strategic, calculated effort to deceive or subvert. But I do think relational psychoanalysis functions in ways that have social effects, effects that reach into the realm of moral and political meaning, far beyond the limitations that U.S. society popularly ascribes to healing practices.

In fact, Botticelli (2004) argued that important characteristics of relational practices—such as egalitarianism, feminism, antiracism, and the questioning of authority—that might ordinarily lead to more explicit political expression are curiously limited to events and relationships within the analytic hour. He believed that they represent an attempt to live out a circumscribed political vision in a world closed off from other more explicit political activity, a “replacement” for a more direct and explicit politics.

The commitments that animate this article arise not from a disagreement with Botticelli but rather with a sharing of his concerns and an interpretation of the puzzle from a slightly different perspective. Perhaps we need not only a “rediscovery” of the political, but an understanding of the political as it does show up in our world. That could lead to a sense of what lasting political change requires: the capacity for recognition of and respect and care for the other, and the realization that psychological relatedness in that spirit must necessarily lead to concrete political action.

What Kinds of Resistance?

Resistance appears to be coming to light in relational psychoanalysis in three ways. First, relational theory and practice are founded on, and have been elaborating, a philosophical foundation that directly challenges a modern-era Cartesianism (e.g., Fairfield, Layton, & Stack, 2002; Frie, 1997, 2011; Levenson, 1972, 1983; Mitchell, 1988; Stern, 1991, 2012; Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002). This is an important development, because much of what is destructive about current political arrangements (e.g., Bauman, 1999, 2006; Sennett, 1988) initially rested on the Cartesian split between matter and spirit, mind and body, and the further political splits

that followed (see e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Bordo, 1987; Flax, 1992; Stolorow et al., 2002).

Second, the consequences of relational psychoanalysis' non-Cartesian foundation are beginning to bear more explicit forms of progressive political fruit in therapeutic theory (e.g., Layton, Hollander, & Gutwill, 2006). There are subtle signs that the connections among philosophical theory, clinical practice, and progressive political activity are becoming more visible. For instance, one can see the effects of postmodern thought and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in Irwin Hoffman's 2009 article "Doublethinking Our Way to Scientific Legitimacy," an article that forcefully opposes the industrialization of psychotherapy. One can also see the influence of the interpretative turn in the defense of Hoffman found in articles by Cushman (2013), Stern (2013), Walls (2012), and Warren (2010). The explicit use of Gadamer in contemporary relational theory was first initiated by Stern in his groundbreaking work in 1989, 1990, and 1991. In a recent article, Stern (2012) applied Gadamer's philosophy by discussing the implicit moral understandings that frame current psychotherapy theories. By doing so, he demonstrated his long-held awareness that therapy is a moral discourse—not a technical, procedural practice, but a moral practice with political consequences.

Also, a cultural history approach to psychoanalysis, used by Harry Stack Sullivan (e.g., 1964) and Erich Fromm (e.g., 1955), has been drawn upon by clinicians such as Neil Altman (2005), Rachel Peltz (2005), Susie Orbach (2008), Lynne Layton (e.g., 2009, 2010), Orna Guralnik and Daphne Simeon (2010), Steven Botticelli (2012), and Roger Frie (2014). It is just such a cultural history approach, I argued in 1994, that if properly developed can lead to a more explicit, philosophically sound, self-aware political consciousness (Cushman, 1994). In fact, the earlier philosophical foundation has made possible the relational leap from a one-person to a two-person psychology (Levenson, 1991a), and still more so from a two-person to a more explicit cultural and political (i.e., three-person) psychology (Altman, 1995; Benjamin, 2009; Cushman, 1995).

Third, the last two decades have witnessed relationalists engaged in more explicit ventures in political analysis and activity. For instance, feminists, multiculturalists, queer theorists, hermeneuticists, and postmodernists such as Altman (1995a, 2000, 2006), Aronson (2007), Botticelli (2004, 2006, 2012), Chevront (2010, 2013), Cushman (2000, 2002, 2014), Dimen (1991, 2011), Goldner (1991), Gump (2000, 2010), Guralnik (2011), Haaken (1998), Harris (1991, 2000), Harris and Botticelli (2010),

Hartman (2005), Hollander (1997), Layton (1998, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2014), Leary (1995, 2000, 2007, 2012), Orbach (2006, 2008), and Scholom (2013) are addressing issues related to gender, militarism, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation; Levenasian therapists such as Goodman (in press), Goodman and Freeman (2015), Huett and Goodman (2012), and Rozmarin (2007, 2011) have critiqued the consequences of war, scientism, and managed care in the treatment of the poor and dispossessed; Gerber (1990) has described attending to explicit political issues in clinical work; and Division 39 political activists (e.g., Altman, Hollander, Reisner, Soldz) continue to play a role in the fight to oppose the role of psychologists in the Bush—and now Obama—administrations' torture practices.⁴

I know it seems questionable to suggest that the practices of Western-style psychotherapy could be involved in political resistance, given that therapy is often criticized as the purveyor of a decontextualized individualism that encourages a noncommunal, if not narcissistic and certainly politically disengaged, way of being. In fact, viewed from the perspective of some forms of social theory (Foucault, 1975/1977; Kovel, 1980; Rose, 2007), psychotherapy has often been the instrument of a compliant, regressive, conservative politics.

However, by suggesting other possibilities, I do not mean to imply that relational psychoanalysis is the only current site of political resistance. In fact, I believe that political criticisms of relational practice—for instance, that it does not adequately attend to the world outside the consulting room, treat an economically diverse population, and make the leap from the interpersonal to the explicitly political—are, generally speaking, well-founded. But I have come to believe that it is indeed functioning as a quiet, somewhat unintended site of Left-oriented resistance and, in fact, potentially an important site, if therapists could better understand their place in the history of Western society as it relates to this particular political moment. It would take unusually perceptive and skilled therapists to

⁴ I do not mean to suggest that relational theory either naturally leads to a left-oriented politics, or that a left-oriented politics inevitably leads to a relational orientation. Certainly there are relational psychoanalysts whose politics are not oriented to the left. Likewise, there have been writers who have attempted an integration of psychoanalysis and Marxism but would not be considered relationalists (e.g., Erich Fromm, Norman O. Brown, Russell Jacoby, Joel Kovel, Herbert Marcuse). These writers have generated a number of ideas such as the importance of psychological freedom; a rejection of normalizing therapies through a privileging of the id; and the description of and opposition to consumer capitalism's creation of a "repressive desublimation," but none of these concepts were understood as being expressed through relational practices.

understand and live out the kind of relational practice in the detailed political terms that embrace and extend generalized political resistance into a more overt activism without violating their therapeutic commitments. But I believe that extension is possible, in fact plausible, if therapists could draw more robustly and intentionally from the interpretative turn.

Our Historical Moment: Consumerism, Electronics, and Technicism

There are many disturbing events and institutions in our current social world that warrant immediate attention; they call out to us as citizens to oppose certain policies, redesign specific political structures, institute new processes and do away with others. In this article I only discuss one, which is intimately related to issues that touch on psychoanalysis in the United States.

Consumerism continues unabated and in fact has deepened in the last 30 years due in part to the now overwhelming presence of computers, electronic gadgets, communications systems, social media, and the software that controls them. This has had a negative effect on the political awareness and activism of the population as a whole and the youth in particular (e.g., Carr, 2010; Lanier, 2010). These devices and platforms have brought about important transformations in everyday life through their computational speed, research capacity, and communicative possibilities, but they have multiplied the burdens of middle-class employment by providing recent reductions of the workforce and worker benefits with a putatively rational justification. This technological explosion has also caused a kind of social isolation among the young by retarding social-skill development, delegitimizing the humanities in the schools, and negatively affecting brain development (Carr, 2010).

This electronic revolution, in concert with the powerful entertainment and sports industries, has produced and reflected the growing technicism and instrumentalism⁵ of American society. When combined with an omnipresent American racism, homophobia, and misogyny, and an increasing neoliberal competitiveness that is the product of the economic and emotional insecurity characteristic of late capitalist societies, instrumentalism has exacerbated American militarism to a frightening degree.

⁵ That is, the belief that others exist to be used in order to achieve one's personal ends and that technical advancements are the best means to that end.

And the continuing wounds to a putatively American exceptionalism produced by the war in Vietnam, the attacks of 9/11, and ongoing failures of colonial adventures in the Middle East serve only to escalate these proto-fascist tendencies. The immense popularity of U.S.-style football and electronic war games reflect this worrisome dynamic.

Escape from the real world of face-to-face relationships has become ever more possible and seductive with each passing year. The purchase and consumption of goods and the search for evermore stimulating, outrageous, and crass entertainment has overtaken much of American life and especially much of how Americans think of and understand themselves. Bill Moyers and Michael Winship (2013) have written that self-deceit and intellectual laziness are destroying the ability to participate meaningfully in a democratic society. "Ideology and self-interest trump the facts or even caring about the facts. . . . The ground is all too fertile for those who will only believe whatever best fits their resentment or particular brand of paranoia. . . . [The greatest danger] is. . . 'the self-deception that believes the lie.'"

Along with the increasing violence, anti-intellectualism, and militarism in popular culture, and the continuing erosion of historical traditions and community involvement, has come an increased suspicion and fear of others. Judging from the introduction of various rigid and self-righteous ethical codes in business and education, it appears that there is a growing consensus that the only protection against the aggression, greed, and violence of others is the installation of detailed, step-wise procedural practices such as the installation of an overwhelming number of HIPAA regulations in health-care settings. Procedures are commonly thought of as the only means of controlling the otherwise unpredictable and dangerous other.

Above all, there is little organized disagreement with, let alone rebellion against, this state of affairs. The vast majority of citizens go about their lives either struggling to survive and gain a small amount of security for themselves and their families, or so immersed in the electronic consumer and entertainment culture that they do not seem to care about much beyond their next purchase, incoming tweet, or participation in a multiple online role-playing game such as *Second Life*, *Farmville*, *Siege Online*, *Stormfall: Age of War*, or *Criminal Syndicate*. In these games, participants electronically join a team of other users and invent, design, name, and direct an avatar. Games continue on indefinitely even though individual participants sign off. Virtual money is earned and spent, virtual

crops are grown, sold, and consumed, and battles are waged. In the process, avatars can even contract PTSD and attend virtual trauma therapy sessions, which must be completed before returning to battle.

Until we can intelligently and self-reflectively think, study, and cooperate with others in order to organize against the forces that have created our current political arrangements, it is difficult to imagine how any effective resistance will be able to succeed. The absence of the ability to effectively engage in those activities, alongside the great political necessity of doing so, is of course not a random coincidence. Research such as that conducted by Carr (2010), Turkle (2011), and Watkins (2009) indicates that the effectiveness of the strategy that the Roman poet Juvenal (1918) long ago (late first century, C.E.) called "bread and circuses" is today exacerbated many fold by advances in electronic computational and communications technology. All eyes are on the screen. The intellectual, political, and interpersonal characteristics of the flattened, multiple self will need to be shifted if we as a people can become capable of making the important changes that are needed. The current practices of relational psychoanalysis seem to be one of the practices that could be well suited to shifting the limitations of that self.

From Emptiness to Multiplicity

It seems imperative that we explore the puzzling way Americans are manifesting the kind of political paralysis, disinterest, and self-deceit described above. But instead of interpreting it through the Marxist concept of false consciousness, let us learn about it hermeneutically by studying the way of being that brings it about in order to interpret the social context that brings it to light. In 1999 and 2000, Peter Gilford and I suggested that the United States is witnessing a shift in the early 21st-century way of being, from the last 100 years of an increasingly empty self (see e.g., Cushman, 1990, 1995) to a newly emerging multiple self.

The empty self experienced a deep interior emptiness that needed to be filled up through the taking in of consumer items, charismatic leaders, or therapists. But recently there has been a shift, graphically reflected in popular culture, from an empty self to a shallower, flatter self, suffering less from being empty of meaning and initiative than anxious about the dangers of social interaction and searching, always, for opportunities to be entertained. It is a self populated with a multitude of identities developed over time by avoiding and controlling aversive social interactions

and purchasing various consumer products that contribute to that avoidance. These multiple identities cluster around the outside of the person, waiting to be called to center stage, depending on the social needs of the moment.

A 1998 television commercial opened with a young man racing an expensive sports car through the deep curves of a rural coastal road. He was dressed in an unkempt, grungy manner, played hard rock music on the radio, and wore an insolent, somewhat arrogant look on his face. A sour-faced, middle-aged motorcycle cop was hiding behind a billboard. He became instantly furious at the young man, turned on his siren, and took out after him.

The driver spied the cop in his rear view mirror and smiled knowingly. Before the cop could catch up and pull him over, the kid quickly pulled on a tweedy conservative sport coat, scholarly glasses, switched to a classical music station, and took out a portable electric razor and shaved. By the time the cop appeared at the driver's side window, the young man's appearance had radically changed. The cop looked astonished, completely taken by surprise, confused and disoriented. He stumbled away, muttering to himself, unable to follow through with an arrest or any kind of punishment.

The young guy watched in the rear-view mirror as the cop weaved back to his motorcycle. A small, quiet, self-satisfied smile played on his lips. He had used various consumer products to change his appearance, and by doing so he presented to the world a different identity. This new identity allowed him to escape a dangerous unreasoning authority—something he could not have accomplished otherwise. It was a shift in his outward appearance that saved him, a new identity, not an inward transformation of his private true self.

I believe this shift from an empty to a flattened multiple self has become more entrenched in the last 15 years. I discussed the relationship between electronic living such as online computer use and participation in multiple online role-playing games, on the one hand, and the ongoing undermining of historical traditions, communal experiences, and the public commons on the other (Cushman, 2011). The flattened, multiple self is also reflected in the fascination with psychological theory that describes human thinking as the product of information processing equipment (not thoughtful self-reflection), pop culture that depicts superheroes as cyborgs, and television commercials that portray humans

as poorly functioning computers that need an infusion of electronic or metal components in order to succeed.

Noticing these changes in cultural images that prescribe ways of being human can help us understand why there is little resistance against the beliefs that brains are organic computers; that sociobiology and neuroscience hold the keys to understanding (and by extension normalizing) human behavior; and that the secret to creating a safe, law-abiding society is to develop and enforce the correct set of procedural rules. Computers do not possess deep interiors with the capacity for thoughtfulness and creativity. They work because they follow simple orders, encoded in their software—they are procedural all the way down. Our social world is increasingly characterizing humans in the same way.

Think about all the digitized procedural forms one must fill out or procedural rules with which one must comply during an average day. From medical forms to insurance forms to tax forms to the procedural menu provided by an outgoing recorded phone message, an increasing amount of our daily lives is given over to the restricted choices of procedural living. In higher education, the concept of academic competencies (defined by hyperconcrete behavioral results) determines what teachers teach and students learn. In psychotherapy, therapists are being pressured to follow manualized treatments and encouraged to administer postsession consumer satisfaction surveys to patients in order to ascertain how well the therapist is complying with what quantitative research has determined to be proper therapeutic procedures. It seems humans are becoming thought of as poorly functioning electronic machines that simply need to become more robot-like, i.e., better at following the orders of manuals, procedures, and decision trees.

A young man is in a business meeting, populated by several well-dressed people, all sitting around a large conference table. He takes out his new smart phone called, it is important to note, a “Droid,” which technically is a human-like mechanical robot (e.g., R2D2 from the *Star Wars* movies). He begins to search for information or calculate some problem or key-in some data. The calculation gets increasingly detailed, and his fingers move at an ever-faster rate, almost as if the phone itself has taken over his actions. And then, as his fingers work faster still, they begin turning into a robot’s fingers, and his hands and then his wrists and arms all turn into metal parts of a machine. The voice-over states that the Droid, in order to hook “you up to everything you need to do,” will turn “you into an instrument of efficiency.” The man’s fingers are now almost

a blur, racing at superhuman speed. His Droid has turned him into an android.

This commercial illustrates a self that is machine-like and controlled through obedience to various official behavioral procedures that demand strict compliance. But of course Americans, who pride themselves on being highly individualistic and autonomous, would never tolerate being described as robots. So the description is disguised with pseudo-scientific technical terms and the inflated claims of a physical-science method applied to human problems (i.e., scientism). This disguise is made especially effective by the ethic of consumerism, enacted today through a multitude of social practices that help us live out the embodied understanding that persons are consumers. Consumers live in a social terrain that resembles a giant supermarket: everything is available to them as long as they have the money (or the credit). Autonomy and intelligence are important to consumers primarily because they need to make micro-decisions about what to buy, supposedly unencumbered by moral or political constraints and the opinions of others. Autonomy is valuable primarily because it allows for unencumbered purchasing, intelligence because it enables the correct choice of competing consumer items. When efficiency becomes the most prominent element of success, and success the most prominent producer of purchasing power, we don't notice that humans are thought of as robotic, because efficient performance facilitates consumption.

In the world of the supermarket, consumer items are thought to be important to the degree that they match the momentary wishes of the consumer. Items such as clothing, breakfast cereals, computer accessories, home furnishings, and automotive accessories are available in any number of combinations—what matters is that they are sufficiently compatible so that they can be mixed and matched at the consumer's whim. Things increasingly come to light in this world as discrete, simple, individual components readily available to be combined and used.

In the realm of psychotherapy, this way of being comes to light in the more recent *DSMs* through Axis I diagnostic categories, in which persons are thought to be composed of simple hyperconcrete behaviors that can be mixed and matched according to specific symptom descriptions—a kind of Lego-like picture of human being. This view is reflected in various advertising and marketing practices, such as the recent television commercial for a computer notepad called *The Surface*. It is a sunny day, and there are many good-looking young people of many shapes,

genders, and colors in the picture, but they do not seem to be interacting. One young man takes out his notepad, turns it around, and attaches a flat keypad to it with a loud, satisfying “click.” Others immediately notice, and one by one they begin clicking their notepads in unison, and then in time to a rhythm, then in time to a loud upbeat song. They sing and dance, handing off their notepads, exchanging keypads and screens of different colors, and the clicking is intoxicating. The notepads and keypads fly from one person to another, exciting, engaging, uniting everyone in a joyous dance. The equipment seems to have a life of its own, flying and spinning through the air in time to the music, unifying and inspiring everyone.

The commercial is like a dance celebrating interchangeability, compatibility, and plasticity—all different colors and shapes and functions cooperating and enjoying one another’s easily accessible (i.e., “surface”) parts. Consumer items—and by implication, humans—are therefore thought to be composed of simple components that can be cobbled together in various shapes and designs, limited only by the desires of the individual consumer, the effectiveness of the latest technology, or in psychology the putative accuracy of the most recent assessment tool. The revolutionary change that *DSM-III* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) introduced was the shift from large complex configurations of personality to the conceptual simples of the behavioristic Axis I. Gone is the concept of the *DSM-II* (American Psychiatric Association, 1968) neurosis, for instance, and in its place are various combinations of behavioral signs of anxiety and depression.

If consumer desire is too extreme or unrealistic for everyday fantasies, which more and more appears to be the case, there is a consumer solution for that as well. Electronic games can transport us to a world in which one’s avatars are famous, possess superhuman qualities, or live a life free from the restrictions of ordinary laws or rules. This relation with alternative selves is graphically portrayed in the film *Avatar*. Jake Sully’s life as a career soldier at the beginning of the movie was crass, superficial, cruel. He had been marked, in fact disabled, by it: he could no longer walk. But then, through futuristic science, his avatar was transported to a radically different physical and social world, one that was beautiful, spiritual, proud, authentic. He comes to be influenced by these new values and tries to convince those in control of his old world that the destructive and cruel path they were on was wrong, but to no avail. By the end of the film (no surprise here), he chooses to remain permanently

in his avatar and live forever after in this new world. It is a kind of sci-fi version of the previously described television commercial about the young man, the sports car, and the old, sour-faced motorcycle cop. Escape, by shifting into a new identity, was the only option.⁶

We might say that this film portrays a new kind of a healing technology: a virtual, behavioral therapeutic for a flattened, multiple, self. Purchase the proper product, such as an expensive pair of basketball shoes, an ultra-stylish purse, a luxury car, an exciting video game or DVD, and you will be delivered into a new world—and a reconfigured self—that previously you could only imagine. Multiplicity, and the morphing it enables, saves the day.

A Relational Alternative

Many political observers have commented on the increase in working- and middle-class Americans who oscillate between political disinterest or right-wing fundamentalist politics. This is a trend developed successfully in Richard Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, his so-called "Southern Strategy" that attracted Southern Democrats to the Republican Party. It was carried further by Ronald Reagan's highly successful pursuit of blue-collar Democratic voters, dubbed "Reagan Democrats," in the presidential campaign of 1980 (see, e.g., Berman, 2012). This trend is currently reflected in the political climate's discernible shift to the right.

Rather than interpreting this phenomenon by using the idea that the working- and middle-classes are victims of a false consciousness, I prefer a hermeneutic approach. This perspective suggests that, in fact, their consciousness is true to the way of being of their time and place. We live out a flattened multiple self. We are constituted as consumers, and in fact, a particular kind of consumer—one who focuses on purchasing and consuming items or experiences in order to 1) avoid or escape potentially dangerous interpersonal situations through shape-shifting; 2) impress others and become a minor celebrity on social media; and 3)

⁶ The story line is reminiscent of the 1990 film *Dances With Wolves* (Costner, 1990), also drawn from the genre of the American frontier and the European encounter with the Plains Indian tribes. But in that encounter, we see a transformation in the deep self of a Victorian man. In *Avatar*, the hero's deep self does not seem to exist and therefore cannot be transformed. Instead, the change is accomplished primarily by transporting him into another identity: an avatar.

be entertained. Americans are isolated individualists who usually don't organize against bad communal or national policies because they don't really see them or consider them important. All too often, those who do organize do so on behalf of anti-intellectual hate-mongering leaders who offer one-dimensional solutions to complex moral and political dilemmas. The need and motivation for political resistance rarely or episodically come to light or sometimes come to light in racist and misogynist shapes because of the way the self is currently configured. By living out a flattened, multiple self, Americans are busily preoccupied with visions of the good, different from those valued by postmodern or Left-leaning academics—visions best thought of as different, perhaps wrong, but not false.

Thus, from a hermeneutic perspective, any political resistance movement from the Left would have to develop ideas about how to help shift that configuration of the self and the understandings of the good that it serves. Viewed from this perspective, relational psychoanalysis seems to be engaged in just such a process, although implicitly, not exactly consciously, and for the most part through individual, not societal, change. This is a tall order indeed, and one limited by an important flaw: At some point, psychological change must lead to political activity if it is to effect political change (see e.g., Botticelli, 2004; Tolleson, 2009).

Still, relational efforts inspire hope and do imply, as Botticelli (2004) suggested, expanded political meanings. Relational theory began emerging explicitly in the early 1980s. In 1983, Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell (see also Mitchell, 1988) began a remarkable synthesis of interpersonal, object relations, self psychology, and attachment theory, drawing heavily on the interpersonal tradition of Sullivan, Fromm, Levenson, Ghent, Racker, and Ehrenberg, among others, and called it "relational psychoanalysis." Mitchell argued that a new therapeutic paradigm was emerging, one that was exquisitely attuned to the powerful omnipresent reality and meaningfulness of relationship. Infants grew, friendships arose, psychopathology developed, lovers loved, therapists treated, all in the context of relationship. By riding the cultural trends of the day, Mitchell called classical and ego psychoanalysis into question because of their reliance on a Cartesian framework, a one-person psychology, and scientific tendencies. He challenged analytic concepts, such as the analyst as blank screen, as the only "healthy" member of the dyad, and as the unquestioned arbiter of reality.

Susie Orbach (2008) recently suggested that usually when relational writers offer brief historical sketches of the relational movement in psychoanalysis, they do not properly recognize the influence of social movements such as the New Left, radical therapy and radical psychiatry, and especially feminism. However, in 1982 Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum, aware of the political perspectives that these movements brought to psychotherapy, consciously applied such perspectives to their work at The Women's Therapy Centre of that era (e.g., Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982). Orbach mentioned that an emphasis on "the actual" affected most psychoanalytic schools in the 1970s and 1980s, including the attachment literature and the infant research conducted by Beatrice Beebe and colleagues. Of course, humanistic psychology (e.g., Grogan, 2013) was also influenced by this orientation. It is not difficult to see how an emphasis on the political arrangements of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation led to a more focused clinical awareness of lived experience and its effect on psychological patterning. Practices such as women's consciousness raising groups and self-help groups for mental patients and Vietnam veterans were at that time thought to reflect what Eichenbaum and Orbach referred to as "social object relations theory" or "feminist object relations." Orbach (2008) eventually accepted Mitchell's term, "relational," and added to it an emphasis on the democratic nature of the movement's practices.

Meanwhile, in 1983, Donnel Stern published a treatment of the unconscious from a non-Cartesian perspective. Stern reenvisioned the unconscious as dissociative experiences that remain "unformulated," not repressed and fully formed artifacts buried in a Freudian-style Cartesian archeological warehouse. This opened up a new approach to memory, awareness, and psychological change. Change, therefore, is built first of all on experiencing that which has been unformulated. This requires a different kind of therapeutic process that looks for gaps, absences, and puzzles; it calls forth interpretations that rely not simply on the past but also on present experiences, not on the unquestioned authority of the therapist who discovers an already existing singular truth and delivers it unilaterally, but on the collaborative interpretive relationship between therapist and patient. Mutual interpretative processes, Stern wrote, develop emergent and contingent truths.

Also in 1983, Irwin Hoffman, drawing on his research with collaborator Merton Gill, made an important addition to early theory with the article, "The Patient as the Interpreter of the Analyst's Experience."

This was a radical attack on the blank-screen concept and those writers who claimed to agree with the attack but still held to the Cartesian frame—what Hoffman called the conservative critic. Hoffman showed how this was a major philosophical contradiction and encouraged the more robust radical critic who could reconceptualize (and thereby depathologize) transference–countertransference dynamics and directly challenge the Cartesianism of the one-person approach.

Jessica Benjamin published *The Bonds of Love* in 1988. This was a complex feminist study of human development, attachment, and Western arrangements of gender. Her work and the work of other feminists such as Muriel Dimen, Virginia Goldner, and Adrienne Harris have added a great deal to the meanings of gender and oppression. Over the years, Benjamin elaborated on her initial research, developing it into a sophisticated and nuanced (and implicit) project of moral development. Her discussion of the instrumentalism present in everyday forms of sadomasochism—what she refers to as the “doer–done to” relation—and her subsequent application of that concept from interpersonal to political venues (Benjamin, 2004), has been an important contribution to relational theory and practice. Recently her concept of “mutual recognition”—the opposite of “doer–done to” dynamics—has contributed to relational psychoanalysis’s (partially disguised) vision of the good, and has been applied to both interpersonal and international politics. Drawing on that concept, Judith Butler (2009, p. 20) wrote that “loss makes a tenuous ‘we’ of us all,” to explain the ongoing global difficulty with living through collaborative, respectful, peace-loving ways of being.

Stern’s work—and by extension relational psychoanalytic theory—were greatly enhanced when he found Gadamer’s philosophical work in the late 1980s. With Gadamer’s help, Stern came to describe psychoanalysis as an emergent process. Its material is the moral understandings and cultural meanings that have been embodied by the patient and cannot be forced by some sort of scientific proceduralism or simplistic manualized script into a previously designed mold. “Courting Surprise,” published in 1990, is a poetic clinical application of Gadamer’s insights into the mysteries of the creative unbidden, processes at the heart of art, literature, and psychotherapy. In 1991, Stern wrote the more theoretical “A Philosophy for the Embedded Analyst,” a description of how hermeneutics could be applied to therapy. Stern drew on Gadamer in order to broaden psychotherapy by extending theory into a fuller appreciation of the mysteries of a non-Cartesian world, one in which a human

being is both constituted and yet not fully determined by the historical era. Relationship is the water humans swim in and self-contained individualism is a wrong-headed ideology. Interpretation is not something specific, universal, and certain that the therapist has privileged access to, but rather something contingent, local, and questionable. The therapist, as well as the patient, brings his or her own limitations, foibles, and struggles to the therapy hour, and both are affected by the mutual influence of the dyad. In Stern's hands, Gadamer's concept of dialogue therefore becomes a way of describing the moments in which, through respectful listening and care, the therapeutic partners come to understand, educate, and influence one another and in the process experience meaningful therapeutic change.

In 1991, Lew Aron published "The Patient's Experience of the Analyst's Subjectivity." In this article, he expanded on and supplemented Hoffman's work with insights especially from Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity. He emphasized the mutual but asymmetrical nature of analysis, the importance of the analyst's emotional and psychological life becoming known to the patient, and the crucial need of the analyst to be able to tolerate being seen by and vulnerable to the patient. These efforts, taken together, developed a nonauthoritarian, anti-fundamentalist practice that stressed respect for the other.

RoseMarie Perez Foster's (1992) examination of bilingualism from a relational perspective explicitly brought race and ethnicity into the relational literature. This was soon followed by Altman's groundbreaking book *The Analyst in the Inner City* (1995a) and several articles on race (e.g., 2000, 2004, 2006), and Leary's (1995, 2000, 2007, 2012), Gump's (2000, 2010), Suchet's (2004, 2007, 2010), Guralnik's (2011), and Lobban's (2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012) important work on racial issues and enactments in the clinical setting. These authors focus on the damaging effects of racism on all races and ethnicities in the United States, and especially the ways that shame is embodied in both the privileged and the oppressed. Altman (2006), in fact, noted that psychoanalysis, in order to appear more acceptable to American society, often distanced itself from people of color in various unconscious but subtle ways. The effects of economic class and sexual orientation (e.g., Botticelli, 2004; Chevront, 2013, 2014; Hartman, 2005; Layton, 2004) have also been acknowledged, but much work remains to be done.

In 2010, Stern, demonstrating his indebtedness to Philip Bromberg's influential contributions to trauma theory and the postmodern concept of

multiplicity in psychoanalysis (e.g., Bromberg, 1998), published *Partners in Thought*. This book was dedicated to a description of how dissociative processes, both everyday selective inattention and extreme dissociation caused by trauma, force certain feelings, ideas, and events to remain unformulated. These form into multiple self states that are usually out of awareness and unknown to one another. They remain so, Stern wrote, until revealed by unintentional enactments during intense interactions with others. In this view, the analyst—sometimes the recipient of the process, sometimes the unintentional initiator—is caught up in the mutual misery of an enactment by virtue of his or her own vulnerabilities, limitations, and problems. Somehow, sometimes, through care and some combination of skillful noticing, wisdom, and luck, the therapeutic dyad pulls out of the enactment, is able to come to interpret the enacted drama, and ultimately the therapy is enriched. More of the patient's history is experienced, more self states are identified and therefore brought into conflict with one another and, as a result, more comes to light, and more becomes formulated, but it is mostly an unbidden process. It cannot be forced (although wisdom and a commitment to the other can help prepare for it): it just happens, and then the two can meet the moment and struggle through it.

Is Multiplicity Reflection or Resistance?

A confusing aspect of the current social terrain is that at the same time relational psychoanalysis can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the flattened, multiple self, an important theme in current relational theory is the concept of multiplicity and especially multiple self states. Is this a contradiction, and if not, how can we understand the similarity between terms? First, there are important differences between the two concepts, as discussed briefly in footnote 2. Second, it seems obvious that a preoccupation with change—especially psychological change—is in the air. Do persons in therapy change because of electrical events in the brain, or insight and the resolution of conflict, or empathic resonance and the internalization of a good object, or a shift in perspective? Or, is it the very nature of the self that it is composed of multiple self states that alternate in prominence, thereby giving the appearance of change? And what does all this have to do with one's identity or identities? Throughout the history of psychoanalysis, and certainly today, how psychological change is theorized is the subject of intense interest.

However, a crucial hermeneutic insight about theory is that, whether we draw from Freud's tripartite model of conflict, unconscious object relations, or dissociation, enactment, and multiple self states in order to explain change, we will always do so by drawing from the era's cultural-historical traditions. From a political perspective, this is just fine, as long as we don't take the theory so seriously that we come to believe it transcends our time and place. If we do make that mistake, then the particular cultural frame of our era will be all we can see, and we will drown in it. We will think the moral understandings and political arrangements of our time—and the psychological ills they produce—are the only ones possible. In doing so, we will become blind to the political causes of our suffering, or we will explain them away by proclaiming them to be universal unchanging elements of human culture—permanent aspects of all human societies we can do nothing to prevent. We will simply be reproducing the status quo without realizing it. We will think we are being revolutionary, but we will be wrong. This is a mistake psychotherapy theorists have made repeatedly in psychology's relatively short history.

As long as relational theories of dissociation and multiple self states are held lightly, not treated as objective, universal, singular truths but recognized as historically situated, sometimes useful ways of organizing our current world, then those theories will be differentiated from the historical interpretation of the flattened, multiple self. Relational theories and the current self both draw on the concept of multiplicity, but they use it differently.

However, there is a problem if relational theories are thought to be the latest version of the one truth—if, to borrow the critique that Layton (1990) applied to Kohut, they see appearance and call it essence. Then the same problem arises for relational thinking that I (Cushman, 1995) have suggested arises for so many other theories of process and change in psychotherapy: The theories, originally devised to be avenues of liberation, instead become part of the enforcement of the political and moral status quo. Commitment to a point of view—in this case relational psychoanalysis—is perfectly consistent with hermeneutic inquiry. Commitment is not the problem, because commitment can and must be questioned. From a hermeneutic perspective, our job is to respect and learn well the traditions we were thrown into at birth and have constituted us, and then continuously and conscientiously critique them. "The problem arises," Stern recently observed,

when commitment becomes unthinking belief. When this happens, ideas that were originally closely tailored to their contexts start to be treated as timeless truths. To whatever extent the mainstream psychoanalysis of decades ago continues to be defended by its adherents, it is being treated as just that kind of timeless truth. Relational psychoanalysis was devised, in part, as a corrective to that objectivism. Now the trick will be for the new ideas to avoid the same fate. (D. B. Stern, personal communication, February 25, 2014)

Conclusion

There is much more to relational psychoanalysis than the few contributions discussed above, but space does not allow for further elaboration. Even so, I hope the political ramifications of these relational concepts are by now obvious. We live in a Cartesian world that splits mind and body, rationality and emotion, male and female, individual and community, physical science and philosophy, objectivity and subjectivity, doctor and patient, heterosexuality and homosexuality and—most important—imputes to the first position in the split a privileged unquestioned right to dominate over the second. Many other relationalists, such as Hirsch (1997), Ghent (1989), Ogden (1990, 1997), Orange (2009, 2010), and Racker (1988), also contributed to articulating a philosophical foundation for the new theory that attacked Cartesianism and thereby critiqued the therapeutic practices predicated on it. By doing so, they

1. began describing a therapeutic process much less rigid, more egalitarian, more personal, and one far more fitting for the last third of the 20th century, when young Baby Boomer therapists were coming of age professionally;
2. initiated a tradition that over time has moved some analysts into explicit opposition to the scientism and technicism that is approaching hegemonic proportions in the profession of psychotherapy (for instance, Stern's 2012 effort that identified psychotherapy theories with implicit moral values directly challenged the objectivist scientific claims of mainstream theory);
3. explored and extended the ramifications of relational theory into explicit practices that have important political uses. Stern's (1991) application of Gadamer's concept of dialogue, in combination with multiculturalism's concept of an encounter with difference (e.g.,

Cushman, 2005a, 2005b, 2009), can be thought of as a description of how one can come to listen to foreign experiences and opposing points of view, be open and nondefensive enough to learn from them, and have the flexibility and integrity to shift one's allegiances accordingly. This is in line with the therapeutic stance Orange (2009) called "concrete fallibilism," Cheuvront's (2013) description of diaspora experiences, and Frie's (2011) and Guignon's (2004) descriptions of Heidegger's concept of authenticity. In a similar vein, Benjamin's condemnation of "doer–done to" relations and her subsequent valorization of "mutual recognition," and Hoffman's (2009) jeremiad against "the desiccation of human experience" provide us with glimpses into an interpersonal and international morality of care, respect, and cooperation;

4. built a philosophical foundation from which other relationalists could catapult relational practice into a far more explicit political discourse, such as fighting racism, voter suppression, misogyny, compulsory heterosexuality, war, torture, colonial occupations, and economic stratification.

What can be seen in all this work is a consistent interpretation, a particular moral vision, of relationality. It is a vision that focuses on the care of and engagement with the other, a recognition of the inevitable hurts and mistakes that happen with interpersonal involvement, the honest recognition of one's culpability, the awareness of one's imperfections and limitations, and the importance of attempting reparation. It is an attempt to resist the temptation to collude with an American status quo that demands that therapists comply with the predominant ideology of the moment by normalizing instead of encountering the other and pathologizing instead of contextualizing difference. There is an attempt to resist the status quo that privileges quantification, manualization, and physical science method over hermeneutic interpretation, emergent meaning, and the realization that transference–countertransference dynamics are common and nonpathological clinical experiences.

My aim in this article has not been to evangelize for relational psychoanalysis, but to notice a historical event: What is showing up in the site we call relational psychoanalysis is a description of processes that bring about change, change that can be applied to political as well as psychological life. In fact, I suppose we could say that getting better

at what Stern (1990) called “courting surprise” (i.e., developing the facility for experiencing *psychological* change), which could well lead to getting better at courting *political* surprise (i.e., developing the facility for creating political change, finding political allies, and entering into collaborative political ventures with them; see, e.g., Layton, 2005).

Participating in relational psychoanalysis either as a therapist or a patient might mean that one has begun preparing oneself for, or has enrolled in, a subtle school for political resistance. If, how, or to what degree all this gets extended by relational psychoanalysis into explicit political activity remains an open question. But perhaps, in some small way, through its activities, the bedrock of democratic citizenship in the 21st century might be strengthened. Because democracy in the United States is now seriously in doubt, various attempts to develop an engaged, knowledgeable, self-reflective, respectful, humble, and yes, relational citizenry—like the practices of relational psychoanalysis are essential elements in the reclaiming and rebuilding of democracy. The viability, the very survival, of a democratic peace-seeking Western society might well depend on the success or failure of those types of brave but uncertain ventures.

As mentioned earlier, Butler noted that “[l]oss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all” (Butler, 2009, p. 20). But realize that Butler’s statement highlights both the heartbreaking limits and exquisite possibilities of human life: a tenuous “we” is far preferable to no “we”—and perhaps it is the most we can hope for or aspire to in our current historical moment, as we hurtle through the enormity of space on our little blue planet, trapped and liberated as we are—tragically, beautifully, always and forever east of Eden.

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