

WAINTRATER, RÉGINE. 'Intersubjectivity and french psychoanalysis: a misunderstanding?' *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*. 2012 13:4, 295-302.

Régine Waintrater Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy at the Department of Psychoanalysis Studies of the University of Paris 7-Diderot. She wrote the introduction to the recently published French edition of Jessica's Benjamin's *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995) and persuaded the French publisher of Freud (*Payot*) to publish Benjamin's book in France. *Bonds of Love* had already been translated in France without generating significant regard for Benjamin or for the Relational Psychoanalytic School. Indeed the very topic of this essay concerns what Waintrater refers to as misunderstandings and misconceptions about the relational movement in France amongst french psychoanalysts and its subsequent unpopularity there.

Relational psychoanalysis emerged as an American phenomenon and is not generally prominent in other parts of the world. There is no singular theory of relational psychoanalysis or its therapeutic action. Instead there are a number of schools of thought that are relational in nature going by various names such as 'intersubjectivity', 'postmodernism perspective', 'contemporary psychoanalysis', 'intersubjectivist-relational,' or 'constructivist'. In general, the relational movement is concerned with contextually based interactions with others and the impact of others on psychic development (Mills 2012). Additionally, experiential insight is preferred over its classical antecedents, which are seen as more cognitive. Relational perspectives have redefined or displaced many aspects of orthodox Freudian epistemology such as drive theory, the analyst's neutrality, authority and access to absolute truth claims and objective certainty, the patient's resistance, transference and admonitions against analyst self-disclosure (Mills 2012). The relational turn has opened up multi-disciplinary modes of discourse that address the plurality of human experience (and corresponding self states) and especially our views of otherness. These generative works have invigorated and reshaped the theoretical psychoanalytical landscape. Concern with power in the therapeutic context of otherness moved into queer theory, cultural studies, psycho-social studies, post colonial studies and genocide studies, radicalizing and extending our view of the proper 'site' of analysis.

The primacy of relatedness is asserted to be antithetical to Freud's metapsychology, which is generally portrayed as being derived from unconscious processes independent of one's relatedness to others. In contrast, the relationalists privilege intersubjectivity over the language of subject and object although most do not refute the existence of individual subjects or the external objective world (Mills. p. 7). Various and distinct theories of intersubjectivity have emerged from within the tradition of relational psychoanalysis that Mills has collated into two branches: a developmental orientation and a systems view. For example, Stern (1985), Benjamin (1988) and Mitchell (2000) view subject formation to occur developmentally in relationship to the m/other (maternal-infant dyad and therapeutic couple) while Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange (2002) view intersubjectivity as ontologically constituted in intersecting worlds or realms of experience.

Relational analysts have incorporated various types of psychoanalytic hermeneutics. For instance, Thompson identifies two philosophical traditions that inform intersubjectivity theory and its use of phenomenology: (1.) through the subject's conscious experience of others, and (2.) through the unconscious dimension of language, which serves as a vehicle for discourse. (Thompson 2005). The former was employed by Heidegger's modification of Husserl's phenomenology and appropriated by Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, R. D. Laing and recently by Stolorow and colleagues in their inter-subjective approach. The linguistic approach was utilized by Jacques Lacan, and later Jean Laplanche who acknowledged Jung and Silberer as bringing a hermeneutic method into psychoanalysis (Laplanche 1999 p. 138). Jessica Benjamin traces the philosophical underpinnings of her own use of inter-subjectivity to Hegel's dialectical theory which reinforces her intention to retain both object relations theory and childhood development in her view of subject formation.

With this overview in mind, I return to Waintrater's basic dilemma of attempting to re-introduce Benjamin's works to a culture of french psychoanalysis that is unsympathetic to the premises of the relational school. The author tells us that few English language psychoanalytic texts or publications are translated into French contributing to ill-informed stereotypes regarding contemporary American psychoanalysis. For instance, she says that one frequently finds statements such as 'Anglo-Saxon, psychoanalysis is limited to object relations or Ego psychology'. Indeed, I wondered what Anglo-Saxon psychoanalysis is, seen from their perspective? One recently published text characterized contemporary psychoanalysis in America to be limited to the relational school, the intersubjectivist school, the neuroscientific approach and cognitivism, all bundled up together. The french view such things as feminism, and queer theory etc. as trends that are really in the domain of other disciplines such as sociology and political philosophy, the author states.

In the longest section of her essay entitled 'The Defense of Metapsychology', Waintrater attempts to contextualize these resistances to American psychoanalysis in general and to the relational school in particular. To that end, she attributes the criticisms of the french analysts to a misunderstanding of the ontological differences inherent in the foundational tenets that divide the schools more than to misinformation. This section also serves as a critique of the inter-relational schools, and is one of the most penetrating discussions in her short essay. She succinctly summarizes the ontological divide between the theoretical positions: 'One [is] based on the drives [french] and the other [relational] on notions of meaning and goal' (p. 296). In her view, relativizing interpretation and transference, the reduction of unconscious processes to brain states (including attachment theory), the primacy of the here now (as can be practiced in the hermeneutic method), and the deconstruction of analytical authority would transform the edifice of French/Freudian psychoanalysis into a kind of relativistic psychology based upon an 'ideology of adaption and motivation that gives precedence to external reality and actual relationships' (p. 297).

Ironically, instead of opening up dimensions of otherness, relational psychoanalysis fails to understand that an excess of desire, drive (*trieb*), intrapsychic conflict, Levinas's

'*il y a*', and the Lacanian 'Real' is what lies at the enigmatic core of the human condition. Many relational writers seem to ignore the profound otherness at the core of existence: the tragic, the non-rational, non-linear hallucinatory aspects of experience, fantasy, notions of *nachträglichkeit* or *après-coup*, and the death drive (viewed by the French as a corner-stone of human conflict).

In one short but pithy paragraph titled 'The Liquidation of the Drives and the End of Freudian Sexuality', Waintrater discusses the concepts of Jean Laplanche who to his death passionately opposed the discarding of metapsychology 'like an old shoe' (Laplanche 2001, Waintrater p. 299)! Laplanche extended Lacan's position of the traumatic 'real' more clearly into the intersubjective realm by emphasizing the enigmatic messages that partly originate beyond language and are passed from mother to infant before he/she has the capacity to comprehend them. One consequence of these unmetabolized messages is an asymmetry in the therapeutic relationship (an echo of Levinas). The enigmatic core that defies final explanation and can only be endlessly translated and retranslated throughout life. Therefore, in the Laplanchean view, the idea of finally resolving conflict and anxiety through a mutually shared elucidation and understanding is untenable. The analyst-patient relationship is fundamentally asymmetrical and analogous to the primary dissymmetry the patient experienced in infancy.

In the final, short section, Waintrater returns to the commemorative function of this essay – that of honoring Jessica Benjamin. Her hope is that 'unprejudiced' french analysts can receive the recent translation of *Like Subjects, Love Objects* with curiosity and interest. Benjamin's refusal to choose between drive theory and relational theory and her scholarly knowledge of Hegel, Lacan and general french psychoanalytical theory might make her work appealing to a french audience that is not so rigidly attached to maintaining a 'pure' Freudian edifice. Benjamin's criticisms of the binary logic of the domination between of the sexes, the harmonious maternal ideal, and including the father in the pre-oedipal period may have an appeal to those who are attracted to new perspectives. On the other hand, she notes that notions of intersubjectivity, mutual recognition, and negotiation are still generally met with distrust.

One cannot help but note the ambivalence regarding the relational analytic stance in Waintrater's remarks, reflected in one final comment. 'Of course, America's extreme eclecticism has given rise to rather esoteric movements that are psychoanalytic only in name (p. 301)'. The author's perspectives reflect the richness of her philosophical heritage and the orthodoxies of the culture whose voice she is representing as well as the heterodoxy that attracts her to Benjamin's corpus. I recommend this paper to the reader, most particularly for Waintrater's compelling defense (on behalf of french psychoanalysts) of metapsychology.

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