The Bodymind Reality of ‘Internal Objects’ in the Transference

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How does a past scenario become manifest in the transference?

- parallels between transference and early developmental wounding

- but why is that not more obvious to everybody (apart from denial and unconsciousness)?
The mechanism that transfers past relationships into the present relationship are internal(ised) relationships, i.e.

**object relations**

- Greenberg/Mitchell: Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory
- Lavinia Gomez: Introduction to Object Relations
- Cashdan: Object Relations Therapy
- Klein, Winnicott, Fairbairn, …
What can we learn from the fact that ...

a) transference is disputed and not obvious to everybody?

b) internal objects are not obvious to everybody?

→ points to gaps and weaknesses in our theory, practice and meta-psychology
Why other approaches can remain unaware of transference:

- attend to the story, narrative; content rather than also to *here & now relational style*
- counteract transference (usually unconsciously)
  - e.g. ‘medical model’ thinking and interventions
  - emphasise reparative, ‘alongside’ relationship
  - deny transference for ‘ideological’ reasons (authenticity / equality)
But also: other approaches remain unaware of transference because …

- internal objects as ‘mental representations’ ??
- interpretation ??
- developmental internalisation process ??
- extent of transference and enactment on non-verbal & subliminal levels ??
Use the lack of support by other approaches to improve theoretical understanding of ... 

- relevance of internal objects for transformation (sense of self)
- internal objects (and their relationships with each other) as bodymind processes
- *simultaneously* constellated (dynamic intrapsychic and interpersonal system)
- internalisation, transference and countertransference as parallel processes
- enactment via bodymind (third relational revolution)
“Internal Objects – myth, construct, fact or useful clinical notion – discuss!”
The Presenting Past

- textbook: Michael Jacobs
- Malan: The Science of Psychodynamics
- triangles according to Jacobs
- triangles according to Malan
- principles of short-term psychodynamic work
Basic example:
the shamer and the shamed
(superficial example especially useful for illustration)
• presenting problem: procrastination at work
• coach’s problem: client’s high standards, lack of self-awareness, sense of entitlement and demands
• coach gets ‘foggy’, expects accusation
• roleplays client in supervision
• shamer ≠ procrastinator (blaming the victim – the client’s version of the problem is the problem)
Where ARE the internal objects?

• fantasies about past original scenario

• countertransference as information about present relational style

• but what evidence for presence of internal objects?
three parallel relationships:

• PAST: originally wounding relationships

• PAST & PRESENT: internal(ised) relationships

• PRESENT: (re-)externalised here & now relationships (transference)

✎ hand-out:
three parallel relationships – what do we use in practice?

• PAST: historical interpretation

• INTERNAL OBJECTS: ????

• PRESENT: mutative (here & now transference) interpretation
three parallel relationships

1) Primary Scenario (Jack Rosenberg)
   originally wounding relationship
   becomes internalised as ...

2) Character Structure (Wilhelm Reich)
   frozen life history = energetic bodymind matrix
   is manifested / externalised and enacted in ...

3) Therapeutic Relationship
   transference & countertransference
Character Formation: internalisation as a bodymind process

- Wilhelm Reich (1934): Character Analysis
- Stephen Johnson (1994): Character Styles

- turning against the self = internalisation
- internalisation on ALL bodymind levels (physiological, muscular, breathing, emotional, imaginal, mental)
- fixated development (Freud: “repressed does not change over time”)

👉 hand-out:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>5 Steps of Character Formation</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>self-affirmation</strong></td>
<td><strong>CORE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rooted in instinctual / ‘object-seeking’ need</td>
<td>(Reich’s PRIMARIY)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>negative environmental response</strong></td>
<td><strong>SECONDARY</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>= the wounding, ‘not good-enough’ response (abandonment, invasion, rejection, etc, etc)</td>
<td>(Reich’s term)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><strong>organismic reaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>= protest against (2) = functional response to / against frustration</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>self-negation = turning against self</strong></td>
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<td>= i.e. turning against against both (1) and (3)</td>
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<td>- involves internalisation of the ‘wounding object’ on all levels across body / mind spectrum</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(through imitation, introjection and identification with the object)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>= unconscious attachment to internalised frustrating / suppressing ‘bad’ object</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- defined by what is denying and / or suppressing (‘anti-libidinal’)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td><strong>adjustment process (compromise)</strong></td>
<td><strong>FAÇADE</strong></td>
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<td>= habitual ‘unnatural’ accommodation to avoid pain whilst maintaining contact</td>
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<td>- defined by compensation mechanisms (what is exaggerated)</td>
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Internal Objects as bodymind processes

• are whole flesh-and-blood figures – working with ‘felt sense’ across whole bodymind spectrum
• *one* bodymind fragment contains the whole story /dynamic
• conflict between spontaneous experience and reflective map
• client’s ego has fragmented awareness of fragmented bodymind experience
A full spectrum of bodymind processes

- body
- emotion
- image
- mind
- intuition
A full spectrum of bodymind processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Mind</th>
<th>Intuition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>physiological and biochemical processes (the interlinked hormonal, neurological, endocrinial and immune systems, also vegetative &amp; metabolic systems)</td>
<td>autonomous nervous system (sympathetic &amp; parasympathetic) regulated processes</td>
<td>vitality affect / “felt sense”</td>
<td>raw emotion</td>
<td>self-reflexive thought / meta-level thinking</td>
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<td>energetic perception</td>
<td>inner movements, excitation, trembling etc.</td>
<td>impulses (manifesting instincts/drives or object-seeking needs)</td>
<td>breath</td>
<td>left- and right-brain synergistic thinking – complex intuition</td>
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<td>sensations, proprioceptions</td>
<td>spontaneous gestures / outer movements</td>
<td>complex feelings</td>
<td>mental: concrete-operational thoughts (language)</td>
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<td>vitality affect / “felt sense”</td>
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<td>right-brain hunches and perceptions – simple intuition</td>
<td>images, fantasies, dreams</td>
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<td>mental: formal-operational thoughts (including voices, internal dialogue)</td>
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hand-out:
Therapist’s internal process:

- oscillations in working alliance (rupture – repair)
- scan for when the ‘wound enters’
- enactment of the wounding relationship
- scan for relational positions involved
- images of figures in character formation
- energetic perception of body–mind conflict
five parallel relationships

• PAST: original, past relationship

• internal(ised)

• conflicted ego

• in conflict with

• spontaneous conflict

• PRESENT: (re-)externalised in here & now (transference)
five parallel relationships

- **PAST**
  - relationship(s)
  - 1) Primary Scenario

- **INTERNAL**
  - & internalised relationship(s)
  - 2) Character Structure
  - 3) Body-Mind Conflict
  - 4) Conflicted Ego

- **PRESENT**
  - here & now relationship(s)
  - 5) Therapeutic Relationship
Summary 1: internal objects ...

- are bodymind processes, not only representation in the unconscious mind
- can be perceived and worked with as spontaneous out-of-awareness experience
- are whole flesh-and-blood figures – working with ‘felt sense’ across whole bodymind spectrum
- constitute sense of self: transformation of bodymind relationships between internal objects
- = BODYMIND INTEGRATION (Dan Siegel)
Summary 2: enactment

- transference and countertransference as parallel processes
- parallel relationships constitute dynamic bodymind system (past – internal – present)
- it is ALL here & now, being enacted subliminally
- which internal object receives our therapeutic response? which internal object processes and responds in turn?
Further Learning & Practice:

• maximise your chances of turning therapeutic impasses and stuckness into productive engagement
• survive challenges to your therapeutic position non-defensively and creatively
• confront the client’s resistances, avoidances and manipulations effectively
• challenge ‘acting out’ and other attempts to undermine the therapeutic frame
• access the unconscious and pre-reflexive roots of your clients’ relational style as well as other patterns, schemas and scripts