

My Experience as Object

Patricia Welles

I write this to raise awareness on the part of therapists, and would welcome feedback, negative or constructive.

The first time I occupied the inner experience of an analyst was as a teenager. I was the teenager, age 19, not the analyst, although if his countertransference was in order he was experiencing my teenagerness as if it were his own. I shall call this analyst Dr C, for Confidentiality. He was an enthusiastic Freudian. At that time in the middle-class suburbs of a large metropolitan American city an analyst was like a fashion accessory — absolutely *de rigueur*, and no more expensive than an engagement ring. I had been urged into treatment because my ex-mother-in-law thought I was psychotic for divorcing her son. He went on to win a Pulitzer prize in poetry. I went on to another husband.

Dr C took me seriously, which was a new experience. I occupied Dr C's inner experience for the better part of two years until my husband whisked me away to the environs of Harvard University, thus severing my link with the doctor and the journey I might have taken with him, had I listened to his idea that making major decisions during analysis was unwise.

It was in Cambridge I met Dr K for Krankheit, my special name for him. He tried in his gentle way to get me to keep my appointments, but my rebellion was beyond him and me and I would ring him up from New York explaining that I just

felt like 'taking off'. He might have asked, 'taking off what?' but I did not let him get that far. I never did become part of his object world. No metamorphosis took place, only in my bank account, as I had to pay for the hour even if I did not show up for it.

I was too unassertive to leave Dr K and find someone I felt could 'handle me', nor could I truly tell him of my deepest feelings. He did not seem to notice this. I plodded away at this unsatisfying relationship for a couple of years. My second marriage seemed to mirror the lack of creative progress in the therapy and in due course I found the courage to divorce the analyst and my second husband.

For a decent interval of some eight years — while I remained single — I decided that my thrills at being an object would have to be obtained in other normal people's psyches, not in the psyche of a therapist, and therefore no therapist sat in front of me or behind me. It was a lonesome time.

Eventually, I went to two therapists, back to back, as it were. The first one, a psychologist, I shall call Mr B M (for Bad Manners). He had a shaggy beard, torn trousers and put his feet up on his desk at our very first encounter. I am not taking a swipe at therapists by describing him. This is, indeed, what he looked like. Therapists are not always groomed in Armani and that's okay with me. What was

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not okay was that the chap did not make eye contact. I don't know if he incorporated me into his inner world because I only saw him once. My cousin, a therapist, referred me to another psychologist.

I made an immediate hit, and object, with Mr U. I name him for the Unknown and perhaps even Unthought. Mr U's consulting room was dimly lit by several perfumed candles and I sat, or half lay, upon a seductively comfortable couch, engulfed in masses of cushions of sensuous and soft textures.

I was knee-deep in writing a novel whilst Mr U was busily transforming his traumatic inner constellations by attempting to hypnotise me as he stroked my stomach. I thought the touching was a little unusual for a Jungian, but I was again willing to let myself be part of his dream work, until the afternoon I arrived to find that he was covered in hideous bruises and black eyes, as if he had been in an extremely traumatic accident.

Indeed, he was a 'trauma-seeking' analyst who had allowed his wife to hit him over the head with a bottle of wine and push him down the stairs, whereupon he took 95 Valium tablets to commit suicide. He failed at suicide, but he was an obedient time-keeper and on time for our last 50-minute hour.

This experience confused and distressed me and I felt deeply guilty that I had abandoned him to his wife. I had no one to whom I could explain my disappointment. He was my cousin's friend and I did not want to debunk him to her. I had to grapple with my feelings alone.

I felt used by Mr U and it dredged up childhood memories in which my parents involved my sister and me in their numer-

ous quarrels and disagreements. This was a subtle kind of abuse, and a violation of trust, as I was then torn between the two of them, needing love and protection from them both, and being forced to lose one of them by choosing sides.

I was too scared to go to another therapist for years and years but eventually went to Dr G — for Gorgeous. Drop-dead good-looking and with a posh accent — an English psychiatrist in New York. He rendered me speechless, an extraordinary task, with his film-star dark eyes and his six feet of hunk. He could not help being handsome, but his looks triggered off my sexual desires, of which I could not speak except indirectly. I would have welcomed some interactive talking instead of the long silences from him where I was imagining his sexual fantasies about me. There was an opportunity to get to grips with *feelings*, but we both missed the opportunity.

From my vantage point now I would think the onus, the responsibility, would be a little bit more weighted on his side. After all, a client/patient goes to therapy because the client/patient is suffering in some sense. Is the client/patient supposed to know the therapeutic ropes as much as the therapist? Years later I heard from my then husband (we remain friendly) that the psychiatrist's wife had left him for a woman, which I still find incredible, which shows how little I know!

My best, most creative and interactive experience as object was with Mrs Rosenfeld. This was her actual name and I name her because she was a real human being. A retired Freudian training analyst in London, she was the essence of eclectic: a free spirit, who used the techniques of

humanists, freethinkers, healers, witch doctors, spiritualists, artists and politicians. She lived the dream life at a high level, but was not afraid to make a descent into Hell if necessary.

I went to her shortly after my twin sister died suddenly and tragically. Overcome with grief, I was not able to function. Mrs Rosenfeld knew all about loss, having lost three of her four children, and having been forced to flee to England to escape the Nazis. When I encountered her she was already an old woman who had lived a rich, multi-layered life. She knew how to share her objects with me and her positive regard, interest, and associations to my experience, my dreams, enriched my experience as object. She was not afraid to take me with her on mental trips. We went to Berlin, where she had been a social worker and had had a school for children. This was before the second world war, when Fascism had entered the bloodstream of Europe and was spreading its poison. Mrs Rosenfeld took me to the Alps where her teenage daughter had died in a terrifying skiing accident. I accompanied her to the Freud family dinner table, and to tea at the Stracheys. She told me tales of Leonard Woolf and his 'poor' treatment by Virginia. All of this was related to what I brought to her, of course. It was not just out of the blue.

The point here is that she was *in* the therapeutic relationship and she was struggling with me to understand *me*. She got into the trenches with me and we dodged the bullets together. It was true 'tele', a two-way communication as Jacob Moreno calls it. Mrs Rosenfeld revealed something of herself and her own inner vision and at the same time she knew

about boundaries. She knew where not to go and she knew where I was not going, and so I knew because of her ability to share.

This was 25 years ago. Last year I decided I needed more talking cure and found Mrs Clue. I call her Mrs Clue because she did not have one.

She did a lot of staring into space and barely spoke and when she did this I felt anxious that she might not be understanding me at all. At the last agreed session she suddenly told me that she had been afraid of me and this was why she had been extremely cautious in what she said to me. I was an object of her fear. I was the fear. This made me part of her internal process, surely, an important object for her. This could have been rich material for us both, but as she chose to tell me at the last session it gave neither of us any opportunity to delve into it.

I have mentioned seven therapists and in my view only one of them was not resistant to countertransference. She had humility, as well, and could apologise for making a mistake, which she did from time to time. Mrs Rosenfeld encouraged the objects to flow out of the many rooms of my life as she invited me into her house to identify, use and play with her objects. Sometimes this was a painful, sorrowful experience — whoever said therapy was fun — but it was also a rewarding, enriching experience of *mutuality*.

Gestalt therapy says 'love aims at proximity, that is, the closest contact possible while the other persists undestroyed'. Unfortunately, there's just too much negative countertransference that goes unrecognised. Too many therapists don't understand how to get down into their

client's basement to examine and acknowledge the stored objects down there, and then help to transport them to the light of the penthouse. Hell, they don't know how to get into their own basements. The doors are locked.

As a client/patient I welcome appropriate interaction, though clearly not exploitative, as in the experience with Dr

U. A self-disclosing intervention can give the client a new, creative, transformational way to view the therapeutic relationship. The unhappy, angry person is nurtured in mutuality and it's in this exchange that learning begins. Therapy is after all a learning relationship and a relationship by definition means connecting — one to the other.

Quaesitor — How Humanistic Therapy Got Going in Britain

Tom Feldberg interviewed by David Jones

David: How did you get involved in Quaesitor?

Tom: I was dragged into one of the introductory workshops run by Paul Lowe, reluctantly curious because I wasn't into any of these things. I was a lecturer in mathematics and a Marxist at that time — 1970. Nothing could have been further from where I finished up. In the workshop we did exercises where you had to walk around and touch somebody. I found it absolutely terrifying, and revealing. It blew my mind and from then on I went to every group I could.

David: Who started it?

Tom: Alan Watts, Bill Schutz and others came over from the Esalen Institute in California. They held a weekend workshop at The Inn On The Park hotel in London in about 1970. Paul Lowe took over after that weekend and started a programme in his basement flat in Avenue Road, St John's Wood. After a year or two of this Paul set up a nine month intensive; three evenings a week, a weekend each month and three five-day groups. Many of the weekends were run by Americans who came over, people like Bill Schutz, Jay

Quaesitor was the first growth centre in Britain — part of the Encounter Movement that came from California in the late 1960s. The Encounter Movement faded away, giving rise to the Rajneesh 'cult'; the IDHP (Institute for the Development of Human Potential); the AHPP; and to many of the humanistic and integrative trainings now grouped in the HIPS section of the UKCP. Tom Feldberg, a UKCP psychotherapist, was an encounter group leader at Quaesitor and one of the people who started the IDHP diploma course. David Jones, commissioning editor for S&S and also a UKCP psychotherapist, took the IDHP diploma course at Guildford.