

A tribute to Daniel Stern

By **Felicity de Zulueta**

I feel very honoured but also sad to be invited to write about Daniel Stern following his recent death on the 12th November 2012. It gives me a chance to both remember my few hours with him, and to reflect on the influence that his work had on me, and on so many professionals, parents and others interested in understanding the interpersonal world of the infant in the context of new developments in the field of attachment and neuroscience.

My few encounters with Professor Daniel Stern were as a young psychiatrist when I attended his lectures: what I recall most vividly is the impact he had on me when he presented, in his videos, the second-by-second series of interactions between mothers and their infants. It is from these countless moments of observation that he developed his understanding of human development, and of the sense of Self which is beautifully outlined in his book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. Though published as long ago as 1985, it was and still is, to my mind, one of the best books in the field of early human development, not only because of what it teaches us but also because of how he was able to bridge the conceptual gap that existed between the psychoanalytic view of infant development outlined by Margaret Mahler and others, and the new evidence emerging from the field of neuroscience.

In this work, Daniel Stern brought to the fore developmental concepts that were to be of increasing

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importance in the years to come. One of these, for instance, was the development of attunement, beginning with ‘affect attunement’. I cannot forget his video of a mother responding to her child’s jiggling movement with excited jiggling sounds which matched the child’s movement in shape, intensity and timing. It provided us all with such a vivid example of how a mother can match the inner affective state of her child, that the experience still resonates within me, 20 years later: Daniel was a wonderful teacher!

In his book, he took us through the experience of attunement, to the development of empathy and the sense of a subjective self and of ‘intersubjectivity’; he thereby opened up new ways of understanding these experiences which are now fundamental to the development of so many different therapeutic modalities.

He even managed to address a very important subject for me and other multilinguals, that of languages and the sense of self, outlining how language can be a ‘double-edged sword’, not only reinforcing splits that already exist in the developing self, but also by being a source of splitting in its own right, as I was to discover when presented with a patient who was mad in one language and sane in another.

Daniel was not only a charming and delightful person and speaker, but he was also a profound thinker whose capacity to take up new developments and integrate them within the psychoanalytic body of knowledge has done us all a huge service. He will be sorely missed, and I am sure that many of us will be re-reading his work in the weeks to come, just to remind ourselves of how well he wrote and understood the inner world of the child we all struggle to make sense of. **S**

Dr Felicity de Zulueta is Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist in Psychotherapy at the SLaM NHS Foundation Trust, and Hon. Senior Lecturer in Traumatic Studies at Kings College, University of London. Felicity is the author of the classic text *From Pain to Violence: The Roots of Human Destructiveness*, 2nd edn, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2006 (which we intend to review in our ‘Retro Classics’ section in a future issue – eds).