

## Creativity and Psychotherapeutic Technique

### Reading the Language of the Right Brain

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Interactive, dyadic affect regulation and meaning-making moment-to-moment: the creative intersection of art and technique in psychotherapy

Philosophy in The Flesh, Lakoff and Johnson, (1999)

- Thought is mostly unconscious
- The mind is inherently embodied
- Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical - and metaphors originate from the human body as ways of understanding external reality through subjective experience in what is mostly a non-conscious process (p.3).

#### **Poincare's four stages of the creative process**

**Preparation** – work, discipline, practise, learning one's field and the specifics of a given problem.

**Incubation** – putting aside conscious "work" on a problem and doing something else – letting ideas "play" in the unconscious

**Illumination** – The "aha" discovery – the synthesis of disparate elements in a new way to solve a problem or create insight

**Verification** – testing the hypothesis or new idea and validating its accuracy.

(Add the foundation of R dominant affect regulation as crucial underpinning for stages one and two and then intersection of L and R in stage 3)

#### A synthesis of what is happening in the "incubation" stage:

- A mental space is allowed in which the mind can play with ideas – combining and recombining in the imagination. This space allows combinations that the conscious mind might not allow because they don't "make sense" – they are "absurd" or "impossible".
- The mental play involves making analogies and associations. Guilford calls this "divergent thinking", De Bono calls this "lateral thinking".
- In this stage, different matrices of thought with their own internal logic, which might appear to be incompatible, are bisociated and a new and novel idea occurs, according to Koestler.
- This stage demands a suspension of traditional modes of thought and reasoning, and a willingness to question ideas assumed to be "true" and the ability to withstand the upheaval and uncertainty caused by that questioning

#### Creativity, Intuition, Novel Stimuli and the Right Hemisphere

- "The right hemisphere is dominant for processing novel and emotional information at unconscious levels, for primary process cognition, and for curiosity and related processes of creativity, intuition, and insight" (Schore, 2007).

### Intuition

- “ This embodied cognition is nonverbal and expressed in images, feelings, physical sensations and metaphors – all right brain processes” (Schoore, 2007).

### Affect Regulation and Creativity

- Space for Play
- Foundation for the ability to withstand the upheavals of change that come with creative growth and learning
- The ability to tolerate unintegration in the service of integration without falling into disintegration

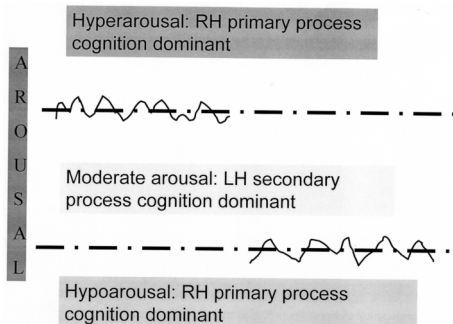
### Creative Space or Black Hole?

- Music – the space between the notes, not the notes themselves
- Transformational attuned psychotherapy focuses on the space between the words, thoughts and actions
- Question moment-to-moment:
- Fluidity, change, chaos, transformation, linking, unintegration in the service of integration
- Dread, annihilation, fragmentation, attacks on linking, disintegration, or fear of disintegration (breakdown)

### On Change

- "The strange resonant word "instar" describes the stage between molts.... As a caterpillar splits its skin, instar implies something both celestial and ingrown, heavenly and disastrous...and perhaps change is commonly like that."

Rebecca Solnit, *Getting Lost*.



### Intersubjective Co-created Matrix

- This matrix is comprised of and facilitates a complex and fluid series of interactions between the infant-caregiver pair, with each influencing and non-verbally "cueing" the other. The on-going interactive synchrony characterized by nonverbal emotional rapport and empathy, create patterns of experience which, when repeated and elaborated over time, become encoded with meaning.

### Sensory-Affective Clusters of Meaning Stored in the Unconscious

- These non-verbal, patterned, affective - sensory clusters of meaning provide the early pre-symbolic mental representations that form the foundation for the development of the cognitive and symbolic complexity of language and abstract thought.

## Brainshifting

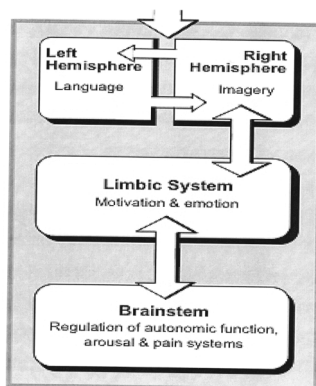
- Right hemisphere is dominant during the first two years where attachment communications and early ways of making meaning are encoded in facial expressions, tones of voice, gesture and the early sensory templates for metaphor.
- Also for essential survival functions such as reading nonverbal communications from others and from the self, empathy and affect regulation.
- At around one and a half to two years there is a shift from the right hemisphere to the left, but this transfer is not just limited to the acquisition of language.

### Continued

- According to Goldberg (2001), this transfer continues throughout life with all new learning and revolves around the difference between novelty and routine or routine. This implies that there are two separate but interconnected systems – the right for processing novelty and the left for routine, stored information and skills that have become part of implicit knowing and memory.
- For example – musically naïve people will process music mostly with the right hemisphere, but trained musicians will show high left brain dominance .

### The reader's brain

- In *Proust and the Squid* ( 2007), Wolf states that as children become more fluent, their brain replaces bi-hemispheric activation with the more efficient system in the left hemisphere.
- However, the important finding here is that the specialized left hemispheric activation necessary for decoding allows more movement back to the right and creates more bilateral activation for meaning-making and comprehension processes.
- Staying in the left – we remain decoders of information
- Moving BACK to the right as begin to think metaphorically, inferentially, analogically and creatively.



## Creative Thinking for Therapists

- Attunement, multi-valent attentional stance
- Resonance
- Synchrony
- Empathy
- Scanning
- Tracking shifts in body, affect, prosody
- Imagination, flexibility
- Translation, Interpretation, Narrative
- Bottom-up ←---→ Top – down - circularity

### Goals and Outcomes

- Moments of intersection
- The creation of a space and states of mind where together the therapist and patient can safely play with a multiplicity of meanings.
- Deepening of affective states
- Freeing and mobilizing of body states
- Insight
- Transformative experiences
- Mutative and healing experiences through the new caregiving relationship

### Conscious “Forgetting”

- Because the information is stored and learned, the therapist can deliberately “forget” it in order to be able to be fully present to the patient’s communications at all levels.
- This allows the therapist to “tune in” to the patient and creates the space for the therapist to imaginatively understand the particular language and experiences of the patient.
- This state is similar to Winnicott’s primary maternal preoccupation, Freud’s “free-floating attention, and Bion’s “reverie”.

Examples of sensory-motor-emotional categories by which we make meaning out of experience, learn from experience and which form the basis for symbolic abstraction and metaphor. (Stevens, 2002):

Patterns of sound and silence.....	rhythm/presence/absence/space (regular/irregular)
Fast/slow.....	tempo (time)/movement (escalating/deescalating)
Warm/cool//light/dark//soft/rough.....	color/timbre/texture
Near/far.....	space/distance/perspective
High/low.....	pitch
Soft/loud.....	volume (crescendo/decescendo)
Part(s)/whole.....	melody/harmony/perspective/theme and variations/ narrative/form
Soothing/jarring.....	consonance/dissonance

Examples of what the therapist reads from somatic and non-verbal signals in the patient:

- Patterns and rates of breathing
- Facial expressions, facial color and tone
- Direction of gaze – eye contact, averted gaze, focus, lack of focus
- Gestures and subtle body movements (loose, tense, repetitive movements)
- Posture, gait and physical behaviors
- Prosody (tone, melody, pitch, rhythm, timbre, volume, silences, cadence of speech and sounds)
- Emphasis on particular words or repetition
- Space and distance

### Prosody

- Prosody includes vocal rhythm, pitch, melody, tempo and volume as part of the communication of linguistic and paralinguistic (emotional and attitudinal) information. This prosodic “speech” is characterized by elevated pitch, simplified pitch contours, expanded pitch range, decreased tempo and repetitiveness that convey meaning by varying stress and pitch irrespective of the words and grammatical construction (Mitchell, 2003).

### Therapist as External Interactive Psychobiological Regulator of Affective and Body States

- In each session, “the sensitive clinician’s oscillating attentiveness is focused on *barely perceptible cues* that signal a change in state and nonverbal behaviors and shifts in affect (Schore, 2003).
- “...when two right brain systems are mutually entrained in affective synchrony they create a context of resonance which is now thought to play a fundamental role in brain organization” (Schore, 2001).
- The therapist resonates with the patient’s internal state of arousal, modulates it, communicates it back prosodically in a more regulated form, and then (with rhythmically sensitive timing), verbally labels her states of mind/body/affect (Schore, 2003).

#### Examples of somatic signals the therapist reads in the therapist while in the session with the patient:

- Feeling tired, sleepy, distracted, lack of concentration, daydreaming, can't put thoughts together
- Feeling anxious, talking a lot, lecturing or teaching, using "pat" or theoretical phrases
- Body temperature
- Posture and body sensations
- Eye contact
- Rate of breathing, holding one's breath
- Deep emotional feelings that overwhelm thought or accompany empathic attunement at a somatic level
- Energy level in self and in the room
- Sense of time going slowly or not noticing

#### Logic of the Unconscious

- Timeless
- Absence of Contradiction
- Symmetrizing
- Concrete Symbolic Equations
- Question – what is the communication? – must be decoded like a dream:
- All non-verbal communication, behaviors, psychosomatic symptoms, substance use, etc. AND
- Hearing verbal communication in terms of both the prosodic elements and the poetic elements, as well as semantic meaning.

#### Language of the Unconscious

- Simile
- Analogy
- Metaphor
- Metonymy
- Synecdoche
- Condensation
- Displacement
- Symbolism

#### "In One's Bones"

- Knowledge of aspects of development, theoretical models and differential diagnoses
- History of the patient, history of therapeutic sessions and therapist's own history
- Knowledge of and familiarity with therapist's own transference and countertransference vulnerabilities and defensive default modes.

#### The body as the therapeutic instrument

- The attuned open therapeutic stance allows the therapist's body, affective and predominantly right-brain states to:
- Constantly adjust itself as it receives and resonates with the communications from the patient at all levels;
- Allow itself to be "play upon" by the patient (being present and able to be used by the patient in multiple ways (transference, a holding function or container, mirroring, a background object, etc.)

#### Breaking Up – Breaking Down

- Slowing down thinking, opening up the space and connections → feeling of having "no skin" and being vulnerable and "wide open" to being "pinged" constantly by anything and anyone
- Observing thinking and projections leads to insight and relief, but immediately brings up overwhelming dread, wanting to hide and panic – constant state of fear. Especially after meditating or after a session.
- Experiencing life as a "war zone" and I am helping her to lose her "armor" → fear of going crazy

### The War and The Park

- Hypervigilance re: war zone – “siege mentality”
- Internal world projected constantly onto external
- Note re: delicacy and tenderness of opening up the space for awareness and integration – very slow and awkward – developing the ability to read her own body, emotions, thoughts – right hemisphere foundation and space for creative thought.
- Winnicott: Fear of breakdown – as re: a breakdown that already occurred but we were not able to process it
- Very small movements of unintegration and integration with meaning and gradual development of tolerance for more and more space for connections between body, emotions and thoughts

### Interpretation: bi-lateral interplay, metaphor

- The non-verbal and verbal communications provide layers of subtext that inform the “story” that the patient’s unconscious is telling and affect how the therapist understands the particular words, sequence, silences, tonality, rhythms, gestures and movements of the patient.
- It is an essentially right brain cognitive function that is needed to take in the communications and then translate the emotional language into symbolic representations by linking to the linguistic and categorical representations of the left hemisphere.

### Insight and Interpretation

- Epiphany
- The Decisive Moment – “kairos”
- Illumination – “Aha”
- The “selected fact” (Poincare, Bion)
- Allowing for “not yet speech-ripe” communications to find a form
- The “unthought known” (Bollas)

### Integration – Intersubjective matrix

- A “co-creative process [where] both partners bring the meanings from their own states of consciousness into an interaction that opens up old meanings and transforms them into new ones....The new states of consciousness are not planned, nor predictable. Instead they emerge from a repetitive exchange of meanings that has the immediate goal of creating and maintaining a connection through making meaning (Bruner, 1990)”...The co-creating of meaning is inherently messy, but the messiness is not error; rather, it is the well-spring of new meanings” (Harrison, Tronick, 2005).

- The bilateral, bisociative, bi-logical interplay between the hemispheres, facilitated by experiences of attunement with and by others, creates a “space” for imaginative and creative interconnections between emotional and sensory states and symbolic representations, and between unconscious processing and conscious awareness.

### Horizontal Axis (in therapist’s mind regarding both patient and therapist)

- Developmental – Attachment History-----→
- Therapeutic relationship-----→
- Moment-to-moment shifts in a session-----→

Vertical Axis (for both therapist and patient, moment-to-moment)

- Specific events in the patient's life now – narrative – Autobiographical self – Orbitofrontal Cortex
  - Resonance with earlier events, transference - Core self - Cingulate
  - Body-brain-affective reactions – shifts in posture, breathing, prosody – Proto-self – Amygdala, Hypothalamus and Reticular Formation
- |   ^   |   ^   |   ^  
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Circular Looping:  
bottom-up / right ↔ left /  
top-down and moments of intersection

- The process of tracking the subtle shifts on all levels in the moment-to-moment encounter with the patient which evoke sensations, ideas, fantasies, memories, desires, impulses, daydreams and associations that, if allowed to be stimulated and present, act as important signals that play in the therapist's preconscious, therefore leading to a sense of the content and timing of interpretations.

The result of right-brain dominant reverie and empathically attuned meaning-making and play

- "This interanimation of subjects and consciousness through moment-to-moment attunement opens up dimensions of a lived experience where two separate beings are united in synthetic moments of imaginatively engendered unity..."
- Self-regulation, self-containment, self-awareness and imagination become vehicles for the empathic opening of the therapist to the experience of the patient and their interpretations of the world.

continued

- We cannot underestimate the importance of repeated experiences of being seen and heard by another in terms of the effect these experiences have on the development of a sense of being-in-the-world.
- The transformations that occur within the dynamically changing interplay in the intersubjective space between human beings, facilitated by creatively attuned empathic resonance occur then at all levels: physiologically, emotionally, psychically and perhaps most importantly, ontologically" (Stevens, 2003).

- "How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us" (Rilke, 1915).