Creativity is linked to a relaxation of controls, such as occurs spontaneously in manic-depressive states and in what Kris called regression in the service of the ego. All human societies have some form of art; in primitive societies, this was a communal affair and had survival value. Neanderthals had no art and became extinct. We are descended from Cro-Magnons, who did have art.

A union of humanities and science is in the far-distant future. Even in the field of physics, quantum theory and the theory of relativity cannot both be right, so that no grand synthesis, such as envisioned in E. O. Wilson’s *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* is possible. However, there can be more interaction across disciplines.

As we know, many analysts have argued for an end to our not-so splendid isolation. This is a superb book.

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**Mind Works: Technique and Creativity in Psychoanalysis**

*by Antonino Ferro*


Wilfred Bion gave birth to a number of offspring. Though loosely bound by the family name of “Intersubjective,” these progeny have very distinctive, creative voices and reflect both the individual psychoanalytic personalities and the cultures in which they developed (Bohleber, 2013). Lawrence Brown, James Grotstein, and Thomas Ogden, for example, are distinctly American in tone, whereas Antonino Ferro is quintessentially Italian. Madeleine and Willy Baranger, reflecting South American field theory, are close “cousins” of this Intersubjective family.

Why did this book initially seem frustrating and confusing and require rereadings to make a coherent impression on this reviewer? It is partly an element of Ferro’s style: he displays his own reverie as he writes about theory and analytic work, with inferential
leaps and sometimes tiresome repetition of his single-minded formulation: that virtually all of the analysand’s associations are metaphorical communications about the intersubjective field. His clinical vignettes, with a couple of important exceptions as noted below, are brief and painted quickly in broad strokes that occasionally veer into caricature. His confidence can be grating; e.g., “what is immediately evident . . .”; “it seems obvious to me . . .”; “it is hardly necessary to say . . .” This is ironic, given his own criticism of closed-minded, “epistemic arrogance” (p. 49). Ferro confuses rather than clarifies with many of his odd diagrams and pictures. He occasionally inserts abbreviations that are not defined. Finally, he is so focused on the metaphor of food, cooking, and digesting to describe the process of thinking thoughts and “dreaming” that the reader wonders what has become of sex and aggression, the intrapsychic world of impulses, defences, and object relations. At the same time, other portions of the book are so intellectually stimulating and impressively creative that his approach must be considered closely.

Ferro neglects to emphasize two important requirements in order to appreciate this book. First, the reader needs prior familiarity with, and receptivity to, Bion’s basic concepts, which in turn derive from unique modifications of Freud’s and Klein’s ideas. For example, whereas Freud traced a topographical movement from Ucs. to Pcs. to Cs., Bion was concerned with the development of thought through an unconscious α-function that transforms raw emotional/sensory experience into mental contents that can be represented/symbolized and thus made available for psychological work. Unlike Klein, Bion stressed the intersubjective dimension to projective identification that permits emotional communication in part through a capacity to tolerate oscillations between relatively disintegrated (paranoid-schizoid) states and integrated (depressive) states of mind symbolized as PS ↔ D. This is originally a maternal function provided to the infant, related to what Bion called “container-contained” as well as to “reverie.”

Ferro takes all this for granted from the opening paragraphs of the book. His fundamental premise is that the analyst “engages in an ongoing baseline activity of reverie, which is the way his mind constantly receives, metabolizes and transforms everything that reaches it from the patient . . . The purpose of analysis is first and foremost to develop this capacity to

1. For example, to prove his critique of a colleague’s “failure to listen,” he presents session material in a simplistic way (pp. 6–7).
2. On pp. 84–85, for example, he refers to “NC ↔ SF,” which is not explained until p. 135 as “Negative Capability ↔ Selected Fact,” a phrase that itself needs elaboration.
3. See his idiosyncratic ideas about homosexuality on p. 118.
weave a fabric of images . . . through the ‘narrative derivatives’ of waking dream thought” (p. 1; Ferro’s italics). We are clearly in the world of Bion as uniquely imagined and practised by Ferro. The book’s title could perhaps renamed “How My Mind Works.”

Ferro’s second understated assumption is that his technical approach is of value primarily in working with individuals whose psychic dysfunction lies outside the boundaries of structural (neurotic) conflict, what Bion called the “psychotic” part of the personality (1957). Unless this is borne in mind, the reader will question Ferro’s focus, and this complex book will seem too narrow.

The book is divided into nine chapters that have a loose correspondence with his central premise. Ferro loves metaphors, similes, and double entendres, which are often humorous: chapter titles include “Instructions for Seafarers and the Shipwrecked” and “Homosexuality: A Field Ripe for Ploughing.” He also favours the frequent use of highly condensed clinical excerpts to demonstrate how he achieves the “necessary oscillation between creativity and technique” (p. 5), a task that is specific to each analytic dyad.

The first chapter, “Screenplays and Film Sets,” does indeed set the stage for what follows. In fact, reading this section closely provides an important grounding for Ferro’s restless shifts of topics and shorthand ways of presenting theoretical ideas and clinical excerpts in the subsequent chapters. He contends that the nature of the clinical encounter creates an intersubjective field of communication between analyst and analysand that “catches” the illness that needs treatment. Focusing on this here-and-now dynamic, Ferro shows how the first order of business is to determine whether the analysand has the necessary psychic structure/apparatus to think thoughts, experience disturbing affects, and make use of the analyst’s interpretative links. If the analysand lacks this internalized α-function, dealing with the content of his or her verbalizations to uncover repressed material and reconstructing childhood history will fail.

Ferro illustrates this idea with an unusually lengthy, engaging summary of his analysis of a young woman, Marcella. A primary feature of this case is that he struggles with profound counter-transference boredom for long periods of time. Then one day, listening to Marcella’s uncharacteristic report of a dream, he suddenly has a “playful reverie”: one of her Italian words, *spoletta*, has a double meaning, both “spool of thread” (her use); and “a fuse to detonate explosives” (Ferro’s association). This helps him to understand the dream as signalling their defensive *shared* boredom up
to that point in the analysis, and to find new, rich metaphorical meanings to her subsequent “manifest stories” in each session. Ferro recovers his capacity to think imaginatively and then, with great effort, to patiently contain the storm of emotions that both of them are experiencing, without prematurely making verbal interpretations, which would feel persecutory to his patient. Only after Ferro’s long, painstaking work with the manifest content of Marcella’s stories using unsaturated (Bion’s term, meaning “tentative or open-ended”) interpretations, does his patient begin to make her own associative links. This clinical sequence demonstrates the intersubjective analytic encounter in which “different interpretative modalities [are] matched to [Marcella’s] capacities for metabolization and digestion, as constantly signaled . . . by [her] responses” (p. 56).

Ferro then goes on to describe a lengthy relapse into counter-transference boredom that ends suddenly with Marcella’s anxious revelation that she has a cancerous lump in her thyroid gland requiring biopsy. While explicitly acknowledging the worrisome external reality, Ferro tentatively interprets her metaphoric blockage in speaking of something that she fears would be “highly malignant” to the analysis. Remarkably, Marcella anxiously reveals for the first time her “real” reason for beginning analysis years ago: her conviction that her house was haunted with several ghosts that played tricks. Ferro details the next series of sessions in which (with admitted trepidation) he explores this world of ghosts. The periods of drowsiness and boredom have now been replaced by lively emotions and back-and-forth analyst reveries and an upsurge of Marcella’s reported dreams that can be interpreted together.

It is fitting that a book on technique begins with detailed clinical material. Near the end (chapter 7, “The Patient’s Response to Interpretations and Events in the Field”), Ferro expands on the theoretical premises that inform his way of working analytically. First and foremost, he clarifies Bion’s caution about levels of interpretation. With some patients we can work immediately on interpreting content, but many others do not yet have the capacity to tolerate strong affective experiences and to think symbolically about them (an inadequate container or $\Theta$), requiring the analyst’s repeated experiences of “being in unison” with them. A third group has very little capacity to think symbolically at all (i.e., they lack $\alpha$-function), and the anxiety and psychic disorganization that resulted from “the projective identifications and reveries that miscarried during

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4. Ferro devotes the whole of chapter 3 to considering the complexities of this kind of psychic/somatic linkage.
the patient’s early life” (p. 169) must first be contained, transformed, and then articulated by the analyst before further work is possible.

Embedded in the historical information, childhood memories, sexuality, or current life events in the patient’s associations are metaphoric communications about the analytic couple, i.e., how the patient is experiencing the analyst’s interventions. This is the waking dream of the analytic sessions, and it is an intersubjective event, that is, “there is nothing the analyst does or does not do that is not a co-determinant of the session” (p. 168).

Finally, reworking Bion’s premises on transformation, Ferro outlines the stepwise analytic approach needed to gradually foster intrapsychic changes:

1. listening to and sharing the manifest meaning of what the patient tells us, keeping in mind the metaphorical communication that also exists;
2. abstraction and description of the prevailing emotions by linking painful there-and-then experiences to the here-and-now turmoil in the analyst session; and
3. possible contextualization in the transference, “possible” indicating the critical importance of the first two preliminary steps.

Ferro admits his disinclination to give direct, decoding-type interpretations of unconscious meaning. He goes further than this: “I now believe that only marginal importance attaches to removing the veil of repression, achieving insight and making unconscious or primal fantasies conscious. The ultimate goal of analysis is to enrich—or in some cases to supply for the first time—the equipment for metabolizing formerly unthinkable emotions and affective states” (p. 178). Much food for thought from a fertile mind.

REFERENCES

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