

Script Analysts are Better Freudians!

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Introduction

This brief paper is based upon a presentation I gave at the London Conference of the International Association for Relational Transactional Analysis on October 12, 2013, as part of a panel discussion on a chapter in Aron and Starr's contemporaneously-released sixth book in the relational psychotherapy series, *A Psychotherapy for the People: Toward a Progressive Psychoanalysis*.

There wasn't much discussion, actually – actually, there wasn't any discussion – since while the panellists offered some thoughtful and provocative accounts of their reading of the chapter, *Psychoanalysis as Holocaust Survivor* – it having been preceded by a reading by Lewis Aron himself – these accounts generated little engagement with conference, who seemed more concerned with what Maslow would no doubt have categorised as more basic needs (what Lacan would no doubt have characterised as a demand for love, and what Berne would have diagnosed somewhat less-charitably as the complaint of the Rebellious Child). Such is often the fate of those conferences whose anxious organisers have stuffed in too much, creating an indigestible if not acidic reflux, especially after lunch.

It wasn't immediately clear to me why this chapter had been chosen for such a privileged focus amongst others in the book; in my mind, later chapters were of greater theoretical and technical interest, not least for the direction in which they further developed the zeitgeist of the relational in analysis (oh, how Berne would have hated the title, with its 'towards' and 'progressive', the foil of the measurable/achievable contract!) However, after reading the chapter a couple of times it dawned on me that a situated socio-historical genealogy of the American trajectory of psychoanalysis has much to say about two aspects of analysis which are of interest to myself; the postmodern psychoanalytic tradition as it has been developed primarily in the French-speaking world (most notably, by Lacan and Laplanche) as well as transactional analysis, or rather the long-delayed postmodernising project of the latter.

This dawning inspired me to offer a few thoughts that progressed my own towards of TA, projecting my words far from the chapter at hand – perhaps one aspect of my contribution to the torpor of conference's response to the panellists' presentations – and, these four years later, to develop this brief address and add it to the overture with which I am currently playing; the muted fanfare of a postmodern transactional analysis.

This development, to be honest, was not foreseen. I'd quite forgotten about this conference – not least, no doubt, since I wanted to forget the general malaise in the TA world that the conference typified – and thus forgotten about my contribution to it. Upon reading my presentation again by chance one arduous afternoon during which I was compelled to spend time backing up files onto a new external drive – a

misnomer if we think about the analytic notion of the drive, as we shall see – I realised that I had also forgotten that I opened my few moments of glory with a particularly valedictory declaration by our own revered founder:

“Script analysts believe in the unconscious ... [they] subscribe to the doctrines of Freud in their entirety ... Actually, script analysts are “better Freudians” than orthodox analysts.”¹

What an impassioned compliant Child vow of faithful devotion to the one true father ... shot through with the revengeful bitter-sweet kick of the rebellious Child! This battle cry at once echoes the rueful howl of the neurotic who has reluctantly given up his jouissance in order to gain exclusive membership of the club of the civilised, while at the same time belying the (re)wounding that Berne suffered at the hands of his analytic colleague’s rejection of his haunted desire for recognition and acceptance.

Yet this should not surprise us. Eric Berne is, after all, both co-author and product of the history that Aron and Starr narrate in their chapter *Psychoanalysis as Holocaust Survivor*². Born in Canada in 1910 as Eric Bernstein, pressed under the blows of bullying, and pulled by his yearning to fit in, he split up and split off his surname to hide his Jewish ancestry; a profoundly primitive defensive manoeuvre that lies at the heart of the manic manoeuvre Aron and Starr consider. In 1941 he emigrated to the US and began training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute under Paul Federn, a Jewish Viennese émigré; he served in the war effort as a psychiatrist in the US army; and in 1947 he continued his training at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute, only to be denied membership in 1956 under the guise of that most anti-psychoanalytic of rationales; that he had not ‘completed’ his analysis (a rationale that, itself, props up the fantasy that an analysis is completable, that the unconscious is knowable, that the symptom is curable, that the real can be entirely symbolised, etc. ...)

The genealogy outlined by Aron and Starr, then, is also the woeful (hi)story of transactional analysis, and so, in my presentation, I took the opportunity to offer a brief TA riff inspired by my reading of this chapter, a riff in three variations: the Quest for Purity, Trauma, and the Marriage of Mortido and Libido.

The Quest for Purity

There are a number of such quests described in this chapter. The Third Reich’s final solution represents a third-degree script, and among second-degree scripts we find the immigration policies of America, amongst other nations, the power plays between various factions of American and émigré analysts, and the fetishistic trope of the one true Freudian orthodoxy, as echoed above by Berne.

Aron and Starr see such quests in terms of the manic defence. **Now, the *raison d’être* of the manic defence rests upon the primitive fantasy that something nominated as the *cause* of anxiety - something seen as existing in reality, outside, not-us and alien - that this something can be *annihilated*, and that such annihilation will restore the contaminated body to a state of purity.**

¹ Berne (1972: 399-400)

² Aron, L. and Starr, K. (2012). *A Psychotherapy for the People: Toward a Progressive Psychoanalysis*. London, Routledge

Here we find, in other words, the Eden Myth, echoes of which we can hear resonating in ego psychology's project of the triumph of Ego over Id, the rational over the sexual (and in particular, as the authors note, the *homosexual*).

It seems to me that we need to ask ourselves in what ways TA continues to pursue such a quest, how it reverberates in our normative developmental theories, our thinking about Contracting, Contamination and Deconfusion, Integration and Script Cure. This are some of the questions upon which a postmodern TA reflects.

Trauma

It seems easy for us to be seduced by the commonly held myth that trauma is caused by the intervention of a certain 'reality'; that something from without wounds that within, a schema that itself clearly recapitulates the manic defence. This misrecognition eclipses the existential reality that we encounter external events *already* constituted as *subjects of trauma*; that we are *already* wounded. In other words, humanity is situated within a chain of trauma that extends back into antiquity.

Aron and Starr illustrate this chain at the level of the group. Germany and America were already traumatised before the Second World War. Germany had suffered the horror of the First World War, compounded by the crucifixion of war reparations, while America was suffering the decimation of the Great Depression following a harrowing fight for independence and divisive civil war to which all Americans remain enslaved. Both countries, then, were *already* unconsciously defending against the *return* of the anxiety and aggression, the loss and despair that these traumas had *branded*³ into their respective cultural psyches. Both had regressed to a primitive splitting by which groups already nominated as threateningly Other became *englobulated*⁴ with persecutory fantasies, resulting in a fear and loathing that formed the drive of the third Reich's perverse final solution, and America's neurotic immigration phobia, both fanatical dreams of a fundamentalist right wing.

How does the chain of trauma operate at the level of the individual? Well, Klein's theory of our *constitutionally* aggressive nature elaborates how the infant becomes terrified at the possibility that the mother will not survive its hate-filled attacks, or – if she does – that she will retaliate. In other words, annihilation anxiety refers us to the destructive power of our *own* aggression – and the fantasy that hate will destroy love – and only once this is projected outwards does the fear and loathing of the nominated Other come into play.

How does the infant inherit such a constitution? Well, Laplanche's rehabilitation of Freud's Theory of Seduction offers us a compelling account, in which the infant's intromission of the bewildering effect of the adult's repressed sexual desire, and the consequent inevitable failure of translation – or integration – play a structural role in the formation of the unconscious. Of course, in this primal moment the infant intromits not only repressed *sexual* desire, but *all* aspects of the repressed; that is, **every repressed dimension of the drive**. Put schematically, the encounter with the enigmatic signifier traumatises the

³ Laplanche says 'embossed', but that sounds too non-traumatising in this context

⁴ Bion's term, on the other hand, is suitably traumatising

infant, who feels invaded by an Other who is radically alterior; the infant feels as if there is “an alien inside ... put inside me by an alien.”⁵

So, the infant’s premature encounter with the repressed is traumatising in that it comprises an alieness both outside *and* inside; an alieness that represents a disturbing third. **It is to protect from *this* disturbance that the defences are constructed, and from *this* disturbance that the defences draw their raw material.**

The Marriage of Libido & Mortido

Well, they’re not actually married, but they have tied the knot; that is to say, **the drives are knotted.**

Freud was preoccupied in his later writings with the problem of repetition; specifically, that libido - the life drive - *cannot account* for our going beyond the pleasure principle (the avoidance of unpleasure) even when we acknowledge, as Freud did right from the start, that libido itself comprises a knotting of love and hate. Consequently, he postulated the notion of mortido - the death drive – as a “fundamental aspect of instinctual life: the return to an earlier state and, in the last reckoning, the return to the *absolute repose* of the inorganic.”⁶ Now the life drive, which TA fancifully translates into Physis, appears to strive in a quite different direction, and so, “has the task of making the destroying instinct⁷ innocuous, and it fulfils the task by diverting that instinct outwards ... The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the will for mastery, or the will to power.”⁸

Such a description of the death drive is very close to the definitions of the manic defence quoted by Aron and Starr.

It’s also important to remember that a “portion of the ... [death drive] ... is placed directly in the service of the sexual function.”⁹ In fact, it seems to me that, given Freud’s account of the morphing of the drives¹⁰ we may simply speak of *the* drive, one which is profoundly divided, knotted, malleable and dynamic.

I think this notion of the drive is disturbing not least because it **gives the lie to the possibility of purity.** If there’s no untangling of the drive – there’s certainly no possibility of annihilating it – then there’s no Hartmannesque taming of human destructiveness, no triumph of libido over mortido, of Ego over Id, reason over sexuality, life over death, only the vicissitudes of an ongoing struggle that is existentially our lot, like the inherent ambivalence of a good-enough marriage.

This understanding of the drive doesn’t bode well for TA’s grandiose fantasy of autonomy, and has significant consequences regarding our notion of the dynamics of analytic relating. After all, it

⁵ Laplanche, 1999:65

⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis, 1972: 98

⁷ I have not altered this quotation, but agree with the common convention of translating Treib as ‘drive’, rather than ‘instinct’. That is, in this quote, ‘instinct’ equates with ‘drive’.

⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, 1972: 98

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Instincts and their Vicissitudes, Freud (1914)

acknowledges the *fundamental conflict* that lies at the heart of human nature; the conflict within ourselves and the conflicts we play out with each other.

As such, **we must return to and develop the notion of the drive if we are to rally to Aron and Starr's call to think closely about the kind of dynamics they outline in the conclusion of their chapter.** This rallying cry is just as relevant to TA as it is to psychoanalysis. After all, if we are to take Berne at his word:

*"[I have] repeated and confirmed the conventional observations of Freud, [and agree] right down the line with him concerning the death instinct ..."*¹¹

¹¹ Berne (1972:400)