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## Patterns: Basic Units of Emotional Memory

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In psychoanalysis, we attempt to engage with one another in ways that enhance understanding. We tend to valorize the verbal domains, yet much of the information we seek may be relatively inaccessible to conscious awareness, obscured by trauma or by the early age at which the information was encoded. These types of information are stored within the body as sensory memories, in which it is through the patterns of the communications that meanings are derived. Affect, most particularly, is known through its patterns of prosody and intensity. Greater appreciation of the patterned forms that underlie emotional memory can help us to better locate ourselves within this infinitely complex and fertile realm of nonverbal understandings, and to learn to communicate these understandings in constructive ways.

IN THE QUEST FOR EMOTIONAL MEMORY, THIS MOST ELUSIVE OF endeavors, we need a frame through which to find our way. Our theories mesh with our basic preconceptions of the “way things are,” moderated by the “facts” as we experience them. To the extent that we can be present in the lived moment, we are in a better position to navigate effectively through the dense and multilayered complexities of

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explicit and implicit meanings. As we “learn from experience” (Bion, 1962; Charles, 2004a), our learning bears the marks of self and world in ongoing iterations. I have referred to these marks as patterns: nonverbal units of meaning that are “read” intuitively without necessarily invoking conscious attention (Charles, 2002).

The nonverbal, implicit memory system functions most efficiently in moments of relative inattention, whereas in times of disequilibrium or startle, when our expectancies do not match our experience, we are drawn to more focused attention. Factors that inhibit active engagement with our experience, such as stress and trauma, disrupt the fluid interplay of explicit and implicit understandings, interfering with our ability to make sense of self and world. In this way, it is often exactly what we most need to encounter and negotiate that may be least accessible.

Psychoanalysis has provided a means for encountering intrapsychic limits and working them through toward greater understanding,

adaptiveness, and resiliency. Defining the territory of this complex terrain has proved difficult, however. Our personal histories guide our resonance and resistance to the various models put forward and to the idioms employed in articulating them. For me, the idioms of Klein and Bion have been particularly evocative, and most useful in helping to organize my conceptions of the analytic enterprise. Klein and Bion each left a rich legacy of metaphors in the wake of their efforts to define and delineate regions and processes that defy description, yet profoundly undergird our understandings and our theories. The insights to which these metaphors point, however, can be found across “party” lines (Charles, 2004a).

Bion (1977) spoke of theory in terms of models of reality that provide landmarks that help us find our way. His use of the term myth reminds us that the metaphors offered by these models are always imperfect conceptualizations that both anchor and obscure. Optimally, these metaphors (and the theories that prescribe them) evolve as our conceptualizations are refined by experience. There is always a tension, however, between the primary experience that forms and constrains our understandings, and the words that help us to organize and communicate those understandings. These tensions have been an essential part of the history of psychoanalysis, in which the dialectic between the rational and emotional worlds has provided an uneasy yet productive forum for growth.

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It is our willingness to confront disjunction and to consider differences that helps us to deconstruct extant realities so that we might come to see anew what had become invisible because of avoidance or habituation (Charles, 2002, 2004b). In these confrontations with “truth,” the analyst helps to safeguard the integrity of the analytic process through ongoing attempts to ensure that one foreclosed vision is not being exchanged for another. Rather, we hope to invite the person into an encounter with self such that a model for growth and understanding might emerge—a model that enables the person to continue to encounter self in world, mind in motion, so that they might better discern form rather than impose it arbitrarily.

The psychoanalytic process is not exempt from the ambivalence between knowing and not knowing that is captured so richly in the story of Oedipus. A fundamental aspect of the oedipal struggle relates to the willingness to encounter difficult truths without turning a “blind eye” (Steiner, 1985). At best, psychoanalysis facilitates our capacity for understanding, but it can also promote a hierarchical obeisance to “received knowledge,” leaving us caught once again between two extremes. We are cautioned, on the one hand, to heed the wisdom of

those who have come before and have marked the path in their own ways. However, if part of the journey into adulthood is to slay whatever “beast” stands in the path of self-knowledge (Campbell, 1949), we must also be wary of our willingness to yield to the arbitrary authority of the other (and the urge toward obeisance within the self), if we are to encounter ourselves in ways that invite enrichment rather than invoking fears of imminent annihilation.

In this process, one beast to be considered is our tendency to valorize the verbal domain (Charles, 2001a). Albeit not easily articulated, the unconscious has its own logic that works in accord with the parameters described by Freud (1915) and then further elaborated by Matte-Bianco (1975). Although language helps us grapple with complexity, it can also obscure the essential understandings of self and world that are based, not on rational logic, but rather on our deepest sense of what it means to be human. These primary understandings are derived from regularities and disregularities of sensory experience that are integrated as patterns. The meanings of these patterns are diverse and multilayered. They evolve over time and inform all our thoughts and actions, whether or not we are conscious of them (Charles, 2002). It is often when we can still the voice of reason

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sufficiently that we encounter these basic truths. A major task in the analytic endeavor is to then bring to conscious awareness the forms and meanings of these patterns, so that we can more explicitly think about and come to understand them.

This encounter with truth is one of the challenges of which Friedman reminds us as he points toward the hazards of comfort and the benefits of tension and resistance in analytic work. This encounter can be both tantalizing and terrifying, inviting us to test the ostensible limits of what might be known without imminent annihilation. Psychoanalysis provides a forum within which we might know while not knowing, thereby revealing important truths while also obscuring them sufficiently to tolerate the exposure. This titration process is crucial. In Bion's (1977) terms, we are charged with easing the other's encounters with the infinite by transforming and translating the primary experience into tolerable and meaningful chunks that can then be further elaborated and integrated. Over time, what is internalized is a process whereby the individual can ease his own encounters with the infinite by transforming it in various ways through the use of symbols. Symbols help us to play with aspects of experience that are not accessible to conscious thought, including whatever might be too terrifying if it were to be perceived as too “real.”

The reversal of this integrative process is the unlinking of associations described by Bion (1967) in his depictions of factors that inhibit creative thinking. Denial of meaning can be an important safeguard against the traumatic onslaught of overwhelming affect that may occur when we are faced with things that cannot be thought about in spite of the need to understand them. Many primary experiences have never been encoded into verbal memory, but rather become part of the nonverbal, implicit system. Some of these experiences occurred before language was acquired; some were too traumatic to be integrated. These unmetabolized experiences are then held as sensory memories that cannot become conscious without being transformed in some fashion.

Memories of this sort tend to be experienced as “truth” without inviting reflection. In locating the essential task of analysis in the disruption of routine ways of thinking and being, Friedman is in accord with what I have described in terms of a foregrounding process that disturbs these ostensible realities and invites us to consider and reconsider the extant “truths” (Charles, 2002). Foregrounding enables

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us to change the frame sufficiently that we might catch a glimpse of whatever has become invisible (Symington, 1983; Parsons, 1986). Often, it is the pattern of an experience or interchange that draws us in. Rhythmicity and anomaly invite our attention and feelings of engagement, encouraging the types of affective, idiosyncratic responses that are needed for creative interchange (Miall, 1987; Miall and Kuiken, 1994).

Growth depends on our ability to fragment, recontextualize, and reconsider meanings. This is the essential dialectic between processes of fragmentation and integration that Winnicott (1971) points to in his conceptualization of the “use of an object.” According to this formulation, in order to be able to interact with another as a separate and sentient being, we must learn that the other can survive our attempts at destruction. From another perspective, it is our myths about the other that are being destroyed (Grotstein, 2000). In some sense, it is the ability of the other to destroy us (in the sense of knowing more or other than we can know) that highlights the limits of our apperceptions and enables us to push beyond our preconceptions into the reality of the other. This tension helps us to keep in mind the precariousness of “reality” itself, lest our understanding become so fixed that it precludes growth rather than facilitating it (Bion, 1977, 1997; Charles, 2002).

We are inevitably caught within the constraints of human consciousness that delimit our capacities for explicitly attending to and integrating our perceptions. Thus, we organize these perceptions in line with what Bion (1977) has called the “selected facts” we have learned to steer by. These selected facts guide our theories, so that our relationship to reality might be more accurately defined as apperception than perception (Grotstein, 2000). Our field of vision shifts along with our presumptions, requiring us to alter our focus periodically in order to see what we might be missing. This means, as Friedman notes, that in following the current trend to foreground the relational aspects of psychoanalysis, we may fail to pay sufficient attention to the experiential elements that define and delimit the parameters. In this way, we also fail to note assigned values that prescribe what may be acknowledged or ignored, and the various prices for these.

Although we long for answers and ultimate meanings, growth and understanding are inherently recursive and never final. The tension

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between the known and the unknown—the visible and the invisible—has given rise to many psychoanalytic metaphors that mark quite vividly the recursive nature of growth. These include Bion's (1977) “container and contained” and Klein's (1946, 1952) “paranoid-schizoid” and “depressive” positions, in which ostensible realities prescribe truth and then become fragmented and assimilated, leading to increasingly more complex integrations of experience. This essential dialectic, within which the self is formed and elucidated, is constrained by our inevitable ambivalence between the desire and the fear of knowing self.

Our relational metaphors have evolved along with an emergent sense of parallels between the roles of analyst and parent. The “holding” metaphor is most often conceptualized in symbiotic terms, which neglects the importance of the encounter with otherness that further delineates the self (Slochower, 1996; Ryavec, 1998). There is an essential tension between pulls toward attunement/containment or separateness/survival. If we conceptualize parental roles along the dichotomous lines traditionally drawn, we can see a dialectic between attunement and misattunement, synchrony and asynchrony. This tension would seem to be an important condition for growth, in which the containment provides sufficient capacity for affect regulation to enable us to tolerate the excitement of moving out into the unknown. It is in this latter realm of more autonomous action that we encounter most pointedly our own sense of agency and efficacy.

The developmental literature illustrates how the interplay between attunement and autonomy in dyadic relationships provides anchors through which novelty can be assimilated, thereby enabling the infant to learn to tolerate the disorganization that accompanies growth. Included in this developmental challenge is tolerance of the loss entailed in experiencing an evolving relational matrix in which one must stand increasingly alone. Relational models that point to the essential and evolving interplay between self and other in intimate relationships have profound relevance to our tasks as analysts. They invite us to consider more deeply some of the subtleties involved in the fundamental analytic task of entering into the world of the other sufficiently to be able to “read” idiosyncratic meanings and nuance, while also standing as other in counterpoint to self. In the continuing encounters with the other, we build a world based on shared meanings. These meanings are anchored more firmly because of the very

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disjunctions that disturb whatever presumptions have obscured alternative views of self and other.

As we emphasize disruption as a mutative factor, we highlight the importance of contextualizing relational elements with regard to the needs of the individual. The literature detailing nonverbal communications between individuals helps us to make sense of the inevitable tensions between processes of fragmentation, assimilation, and integration. Attention to these elements helps us track the extent to which learning might occur. Sensitivity to levels of tension is particularly important with severely traumatized individuals and others who experience difficulties in affective self-regulation, who often need us to titrate affect sufficiently that they can begin to develop this function within themselves. Our attunement to nonverbal elements helps us to attend more pointedly to information regarding the affective field, which in turn helps us to track the relative absence and presence of the other in the lived moment.

Our attunement to nonverbal elements helps us to make sense of the verbal elements, as well. We are reminded that the words used in the analytic setting are not merely objective entities but rather, because they are formed in the context of the treatment, they take on added depth and dimension via the shared experiences through which they occur. An appreciation of the richness of communication processes helps us to reach into the deeper layers of primary experience and to develop metaphors through which to communicate with greater complexity and integrity within the dyad. The greater our appreciation for the subtleties and nuance of nonverbal interchanges, the more we

can fine-tune our understandings of what is being taken in by self and other, and consider how these interpretations may interact in the moment.

Friedman reminds us to pull back from the moment sufficiently to be able to recognize the inevitable subjectivity that is being communicated within the analytic dyad from one party to the other. He brings us into the fascinating territory of layered, patterned meanings when he asserts that in “dealing with emotional memory ... you are not just dealing with the pattern of the patient's behavior, or even the form of his wishes; you are dealing with the form of you.” Here, Friedman confronts us with an essential dilemma for us as analysts: We are always working at the edge of the intersections of diverse and

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often elusive meanings being communicated through formal properties that may evoke intense resonance without necessarily providing sufficient anchors by which to name the experience.

An important aid in this endeavor is our ability to resonate to and explicitly attend to patterns. Patterned form is a primary unit of meaning that we recognize at a fundamental level. This “language of the body” has its beginnings in our earliest moments of being, before verbal language is acquired (Charles, 2002). The interactive rhythmicity of sensation provides the context in which basic antitheses, such as light and dark, comfort and discomfort, come to order the universe. This dialectic provides the building blocks of experience through which the world is ultimately “decoded” (Mancia, 1981). Ultimately, our sensations become organized into complex narratives of self, other, and world, mediated by the rules of language (Solms, 1996). Words provide a means for organizing these experiences, but also distance us from them. We then need ways of reattuning to our more primary understandings of self and world.

The language of the body is built on the patternings of elements that undergird what Bollas (1987) terms the unthought known: aspects of awareness that are so integral to our sense of self and world that they remain unnoticed. Primary experiences become integrated as models that guide and constrain all later understandings. The observational literature offers useful metaphors through which to understand how these experiences are taken in and communicated at primary levels without the use of verbal language. For example, Stern (1985) and Beebe and Lachmann (1988, 1994, 1998) have described what seems to be an innate facility for intramodal processing. This capacity enables us to take in information through one sensory modality, digest

it and then recommunicate it through another modality, retaining the primary pattern of the information.

These types of implicit intercommunications become the ground underlying our verbal interactions, which are slower and more highly constrained. Implicit communications form the basis for patterned understandings that have been termed procedural knowledge (Clyman, 1991; Fonagy, 1998) and implicit relational knowing (Stern et al., 1998). Over time, the patterns themselves evoke responsiveness and also provide criteria regarding what is to be perceived as useful information and what is to be warded off as “noise” or “threat.” This type of

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knowledge has been conceptualized in terms of a field theory, in which events are essentially and inherently interconnected across multiple dimensions (Kulka, 1997).

Intramodal processing may perhaps be illustrated most usefully by looking at affect. The affective system is fundamental and primary. It functions at a presymbolic or subsymbolic level and appears to be linked across multiple facets of experience (Bucci, 1997, 2001). Affect is to some extent separate from and prior to cognitive memory, exerting an influence on secondary processes whether or not the affect becomes conscious (Krystal, 1988). It is inherently a patterned phenomenon in terms of both our internal experience and our ability to perceive its traces on the visage of the other (Ekman, 1982), or in body position or gesture. Affect can be discriminated across cultures by reference to its prosody (hedonic tone) and intensity (Tomkins, 1982). These two vertices together provide the structure through which the affective field becomes known. At a primary level, we recognize and “read” both prosody and intensity as means for locating ourselves within socioemotional space.

Optimally, we learn to read affect like a signal, giving us ongoing feedback as to our status at any given moment. If we are able to notice our affect at relatively low levels, we can act accordingly and can generally keep our affect within tolerable limits. From this state of relative equilibrium, we are also better able to register and use spikes of affect as signals telling us that something is wrong that needs our attention. This signaling system is extremely valuable when it is functioning properly. It helps us to mark pleasurable and unpleasurable experiences, and to organize an understanding of where and how these experiences are encountered and known.



Deficits in the capacity for affect regulation put the individual at risk. Survival has depended on our ability to respond quickly and efficiently to the signal qualities of affect, which are integrated far more rapidly than conscious, verbal awareness. In the moment, the prosody of affective patterns provides important cues as to one's relative safety and the likely trajectory of a given interaction. Overstimulation disrupts this feedback system, encouraging a shutting down of the system when disregulation occurs rather than the fine-tuning of emotion that might take place with sufficient resilience.

Experiences of overwhelming affect, unmoderated, interfere with self-regulatory functions. Overwhelming affect can be experienced

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as traumatic, impeding the cognitive processes required in order to make sense of and organize our experience (Krystal, 1988; Schore, 1994; LeDoux, 1999). Trauma interferes with the signal functions of affect, blurring the features by which the signal might have been recognized. In the extreme case, affect itself can become a signal for avoidance, further impeding the individual's ability to encounter and use affective signals. This dilemma is amplified in fear reactions, which tend to be extremely entrenched and are particularly difficult to overcome because of their inherent survival functions (LeDoux, 2002).

Experiences stored within the body provide a complex coding system, enabling us to respond affectively to meanings the conscious mind may not comprehend. Our capacity for affective resonance provides a means for communicating without the necessity of conscious awareness or verbal language. This makes it a fundamental tool for both analyst and patient, who build a shared system of meanings through these exchanges. The analyst's model of reality is built on the sensations experienced in interactions with patients. These models are continually adjusted as we come to better understand how the individual experiences self and other; how they hold us in mind. Experiences of attunement and misattunement provide us with important opportunities to better understand the person's previous experiences, particularly those not encoded into verbal memory.

Affective resonance goes beyond distinct categorical states to include all aspects of experience associated with those states. Stern (1985) describes the prosodies of affect as “contours,” in which the form and pattern come to have both evocative and symbolic functions. We can watch the transfer of these contours in the interactions over time between parent and caregiver and also between analyst and analysand. For example, we can notice how a child comes to internalize the mother's soothing tone, so that the tone comes to hold the child,

providing a regulatory function. Over time, this regulatory function becomes integrated into aspects of self-soothing, as when the child is observed to comfort herself via her doll, using the mother's soothing tone, "It's all right. Mama will be right back." Tone comes to carry meaning beyond—and often in disjunction to—the words expressed. There are many times when patients do not hear our words at all, but only the tone, which conveys important elements of meaning, rather like the child who complains about being

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"yelled at" when there has been no increase in volume, but rather some note of disapproval in the tone.

These resonances also play out in the consulting room. I have noted previously how patterned movements can be exchanged between analyst and analysand (Charles, 2002). At times, these take the form of autosensuous shapes that provide self-soothing and also carry meanings through their forms. Traumatic experiences can result in unmetabolized bits of experience that could neither be known nor integrated because of the intensity of the affective charge (Bion, 1977). We might then conceptualize these emergent shapes as pre-symbolic movements that can become symbolized through the processes of metabolization that occur in the therapeutic encounter (Charles, 2002). In this process, they move from what Klein (1930) and Segal (1957) have termed symbolic equations, in which no distinction is made between the symbol and its referent, to the symbol proper, in which the symbol is clearly distinguished from its referent and may thereby be used in conscious thought and communication. These presymbolic bits are often pieces of experience that could not be assimilated. Through our willingness to experience these bits and to turn our attention to them, we begin to metabolize the bits. In this process we also provide the analysand with important information regarding our faith that one might come to know impossible things and survive the encounter (Charles, 2003).

At times, reciprocal patternings of body and gesture become a means for aligning with the other and forming identifications with aspects of the other. This type of enactment can provide useful information regarding what it means to be with self and with other. For individuals who have been disrupted in the internalization of self-regulatory functions, the ability to moderate affect through identifications with the analyst's tone and body language can aid in the transition toward greater self-regulation.

"I noticed I was holding my body in line with yours," said one man, as he was struggling with his ambivalence over feeling anything at all.

This awareness of his resonance to my being was a tremendous breakthrough for someone who had denied affectivity as a component of his own being for over 40 years (Charles, 1999a, 2001b). Feeling entailed the risk that he might encounter the morass of his intense repressed yearnings for closeness, which made any emotional contact extremely precarious. And yet, it was through his

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identifications with me that “Michael” began to be more present in his own body and began to attend to some of the signals he had fought valiantly to override for so long. He can now come up against the precipice of emotional and interpersonal engagement with a sense of terror sufficiently titrated by hope to enable him to imagine surviving the encounter.

“I’m not going to bolt this time,” he tells me, with determination. “Don’t let me,” he adds, poignantly, acknowledging his fear of his own ambivalence as he searches my face for signs of approval or disapproval.

I interpret this scanning to him in terms of “seeking acknowledgment.” The word acknowledgment captures Michael’s attention and begins to pepper his thoughts and speech. He hangs onto it like a transitional object. It becomes pivotal to our work, seeming to signal something vital but elusive. Although he cannot quite recognize it himself, he instinctively intuits its value.

Michael’s urgent scanning of my face highlights another way in which visual cues may come to carry important meanings. For example, Stern (1985) notes the propensity of humans to attend to stimuli arrayed in the general configuration of the human face and form. Optimally, this configuration becomes associated with the onset of soothing regulatory functions. The gaze becomes a signal of presence, of soothing, of feeling “held.” It can also represent an invitation to be known or, alternatively, a prohibition against even being present as a separate subject. The ability to find one’s self within the gaze of the other is an important facet of development (Winnicott, 1971), complemented by the parent’s ability to see the child as a separate agent (Fairbairn, 1952; Fonagy and Target, 1997). For Michael, the mother’s face had become closed and unyielding. The very sight of it had become so traumatic that he had built his own wall as a way of not seeing hers.

Much as a child becomes distressed in the face of the unresponsive mother (Tronick, 1989), it is important for the analyst to be aware of the implications of her own apparent nonresponsiveness. For

individuals who have little expectation of engagement with another, the visual affirmation of one's value as a unique and separate self may be an important part of the analytic interchange, becoming the bedrock on which all later work can be built. Hymer (1986) suggests that "patients often require the affective engagement stimulated by eye contact

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with the analyst who is able to provide the gleam in the eye necessary for the development of trust and self-affirmation" (p. 156). With patients who have experienced the parent as hostile or disengaged, it may be particularly important to be able to see the analyst's face in order to assure one's self that one is in the presence of a benign or benevolent object (Hymer, 1986; Charles, 1999b).

In contrast to Michael, many individuals who experience insufficient parental attunement as children learn to attend to parental affect as a way of making safe their own surrounds. The resulting hyper-vigilance and hypersensitivity tend to exhaust the person's resources without inviting renewal through the interpersonal world. This was the case with "Nina," with whom my emotional resonance was a crucial factor in the treatment. Our relationship was always tentative, at best, with Nina standing vigilant like a startled doe, ready to run.

Nina described her mother as extremely narcissistic, intrusive, and overbearing, needing always to be the center of attention. The mother's needs were paramount in the family and the unwritten rule was that she must be accommodated to, first and foremost. This reversed the traditional parent-child roles, so that Nina became responsible for her mother's emotional well-being. Tracking her mother's affect thus became an essential part of Nina's own well-being. She learned to keep an external appearance of calm and contentment in place to hide whatever turbulence lay beneath. Being with others had always felt as though it must come at the price of being herself.

This emphasis on external image over internal experience created particular dilemmas in our work. Nina was very good at pretending that everything was fine and often would only let me know of her distress after a session had ended. At times, she would leave a message on my machine saying that she had decided to discontinue the treatment altogether. Then I would know that I had failed her in some essential way and that her affective intensity was such that we had become lost to one another. Responding to these calls with interest and concern helped Nina to rediscover in me the person who did, indeed, take her feelings and well-being seriously. This

acknowledgment helped Nina to imagine that she might be able to face me once again without being annihilated.

My preliminary sense in working with Nina was that I would need to be acutely attuned to her affect in the moment in order to avoid these types of disruption and repair sequences (Lachmann and Beebe, 1996).

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However, it was our very ability to play out this pattern of disruption and repair that provided Nina with reassurance that repair could be possible. Over time, as I became more attuned to the subtleties and nuances of form and prosody in our work together, I learned to speak to these as a way of naming and reclaiming territory that had seemed unknowable (Charles, 2002). Giving words to the dark recesses of Nina's fears helped us to reconstruct the disowned fragments, thereby affording her greater ease in her being and in her relationships, which also gave her greater access to her considerable creative resources.

In my work with Nina, attunement was an essential prerequisite. Because models of relationship are idiosyncratic, it is important to be able to move beyond our generic ideas as to how things should feel and focus instead on actual responses. For many of our patients, our ostensible “supportiveness” or care can feel intrusive, frightening, or seductive. For example, for Michael, who had felt abandoned by his mother at the age of five when his sister was born, his longings for closeness made the intimacy of the analytic environment both tantalizing and terrifying. Although we can obtain preliminary information from an individual's history that alerts us as to how their interpersonal world has been configured, it is really only in our moment-by-moment interactions that we obtain a more palpable sense of the emotional realities of that world. Our attunement to the affective field provides us with crucial information as to the feelings experienced and meanings construed by the other in a given interaction.

Our ability to attend to the disparate realities of self and other also helps provide some perspective from which to make decisions as to what might be too much or not enough, and to thereby titrate affect in line with the patient's needs and limits. Much as the parent registers the child's communication, takes it in, and then optimally feeds back to the child a metabolized version of the communication, so, too, the analyst can play an important role in the internalization of self-regulatory processes. This metabolization process serves many functions. At one level, it is a direct interchange regarding the lived experience of the moment, so that what is taken in through these exchanges is a process by which meanings can be exchanged and

refined. At another level, this interchange serves as a metacommunication regarding the nature of the world. The analyst's ability to tolerate the analysand's distress communicates that distress can be tolerated and meaning can

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be made. This is a very different universe being described than one in which the analysand's distress becomes the analyst's as well, thereby amplifying the distress rather than attenuating it. In this new universe, shared experiences provide consensual metaphors. These shared symbols become points of reference to which we might refer back and build on. In this way, rather than merely recapitulating traumatic experiences, we build both resilience and understanding.

As we focus on the nonverbal aspects of our interchanges, we encounter quite vividly ways in which the individual's experience has patterned their relational world. These patterns lend not only coloration and tone, but also include judgments as to what may or may not be located within the bounds of self. Devalued aspects of self may be profoundly unknown, encountered only through their impact on the relational field. The analyst's willingness to recognize and accept all aspects of self provides an opportunity to integrate the rejected fragments. In this endeavor, our reading of nonverbal elements can provide important cues as to how the interpersonal world of the other is configured. Along with the verbal narrative and the affective prosody, there is a narrative of the body being played out through gesture and facial expression.

For an individual whose interpersonal experience has largely been one of misrecognition, disappointment, and despair, the encounter with the other is fraught with peril. At these times, our ability to be actively engaged in the emotional "truth" of a moment may be our only marker as to the extent to which we are moving in the direction of greater understanding or evasion (Bion, 1977), whether we are perpetrating further traumatization or facilitating constructive working through. With "Ruth," for example, it was my affective experience in conjunction with the emotion that was conveyed on her face as she talked about herself that provided the most important inroads toward breaking the impasses she had encountered in previous relationships and was reenacting in her relationship with me as well. Fundamental in this regard was my ability to speak to my readings of her affect, as well as my own, in ways that helped to illuminate the previous failures rather than merely reenact them.

The first major impasse in our work together had to do with the almost unbearable intensity of Ruth's presentation. As she told her

story, I could only conjecture that the empathic failures she described had resulted from previous therapists' desperate attempts to titrate

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this intensity as a way of trying to relieve Ruth's distress and to also safeguard their own well-being. The fact that these attempts had misfired, however, merely reaffirmed for Ruth her utter isolation in a universe in which she could never find a place. A complicating factor was Ruth's difficulty in convincing others that “happiness” or greater equilibrium was not her goal, but rather it was her desire to once again access her creative potential that was driving her with such urgency.

Ruth had always experienced the interpersonal world as remote and unyielding. She stood perennially outside the inner circle, longing to be allowed inside and yet certain that she contained within some fundamental flaw that would leave her forever cast out. When Ruth encountered a lack of understanding in another person, she would feel compelled to push for clarification. However, she was not good at understanding where the other person had become stuck. She lived in a world in which all others seemed to have the answers: she alone had not been given the key.

Ruth's compulsion for acknowledgment had an intensity that could be unnerving and distancing. From my own feelings in being with her, I conjectured that many of the reactions she had received from previous therapists resulted from their inability to tolerate the magnitude of the onslaught. What she had tended to encounter was outright rejection, compassionate condescension, or real compassion that she had not been able in any beneficial way to take in. The compassion was often accompanied by misguided attempts to calm Ruth down that minimized the very distress that she was attempting to have validated. This fundamental lack of understanding or connection seemed to underlie the impasses in which she had found herself in her previous therapies.

Ruth's narrative of self and other was vivid and expressive, providing important information as to how her interpersonal world was configured. Her facial expressions were such that she clearly viewed herself as repugnant and despicable. In this view, she seemed to be identifying with familial projections regarding her place in the family and relational world. These identifications were so strong that they colored all her interactions. Previous attempts at therapy seemed to be configured along the lines of failed encounters with a withholding, disidentifying maternal object who would always hold the needed resources just out of reach.

Her presumptions were such that Ruth tended to encounter exactly what she expected. She then seemed to be inevitably branded by the distress she evoked from others in reaction to her own. In our work together, her urgent entreaties to take her seriously took the form of attacks on my understanding. Whatever my own internal experience might be, Ruth seemed unable to encounter empathy or understanding in my face. As I began to speak to Ruth of my sense of the pattern being enacted between us, my attempt to understand her predicament caught her attention. Although she still experienced me as unempathic ("Your eyes aren't exactly these warm pools I fall into, but you do seem to understand what I am saying"), Ruth began to suspect that I might actually be taking her seriously.

Impasses of this sort are often worked through by way of reenactments. These enactments provide an opportunity to experience elements of the other person's world at a very primary level. As we register these experiences, we note patterns and generate ideas as to what they might mean. In verbalizing these meanings, we invite the other person to consider our interpretations and to provide their own perspective. In this way, meanings are constructed, shared, and elaborated within the dyad.

Ruth, for example, had invited me into a reenactment of the impasse she had experienced with previous caregivers. I conjectured that the previous communication failures had resulted, not from Ruth's inability to communicate, but rather from her previous therapists' frustration at their inability to soothe her and to thereby stop the assaults on themselves. Ruth, in turn, had been caught by the similarity between the therapists' inaccessibility and her experience of her mother, which affirmed her sense of her own insufficiency and increased her urgency to forge a connection. The therapists' inability to tolerate her distress or their own had resulted in frustrating and disconfirming attempts to stop Ruth from "feeling bad." In contrast, my ability to tolerate my own distress in the presence of Ruth's negative affect enabled us to attenuate the intensity sufficiently to be able to attend more explicitly and speak to our experiences of interacting with one another.

"Feeling bad" was not the problem, but rather was Ruth's major marker for the dilemma she was trying to resolve. My acknowledgment and affirmation of her reality as she experienced it provided the initial containment Ruth required in order to begin to tolerate her



distress rather than relieving mine at her own expense. In this way, as she reassured herself that I understood what was at stake and could keep it in mind, she could allow her distress to relieve sufficiently that we could move toward the enhanced ability to be present in the moment that is so crucial to any creative endeavor.

One of the major hazards in that regard was the overwhelming intensity of Ruth's affect. Matte-Bianco (1975) has noted that as affective intensity increases, it becomes more difficult to distinguish differences between similar objects or events. In my work with Ruth, noting relational patterns helped to break them, thereby relieving the affective intensity sufficiently that we could consider alternative meanings. The reduced intensity also helped provide sufficient grounding that we could begin to distinguish her fears from the thoughts to which they had become linked.

One aspect of Ruth's incredible interpersonal assaultiveness was her relative inability to read interpersonal cues or to take the perspective of the other. Over time, I began to understand that Ruth's vehemence in countering my views did not reflect her unwillingness to see things from my perspective, but rather her inability to do so. This awareness helped me to persist in putting forward my beliefs such that Ruth was eventually able to consider them. We began to see that my way of looking at things was so different from hers that it inspired acute anxiety in her, which manifested as attacks on my thoughts. Ruth needed me to be able to survive these attacks (in Winnicott's, 1971, terms, she needed to be able to destroy the object and have it survive) in order to begin to be able to "play" with these new ideas I was putting forth.

In this interchange, we began to build a universe in which two realities could meet and be considered without either needing to annihilate the other. My ability to withstand her assaults without retaliating helped me to understand how her interpersonal world was configured. In turn, my willingness to consider her frame of reference helped Ruth to encounter my perspective and try it on for size. Highlighting perspective as a contextual factor introduced to Ruth the idea that she would need to take into account the other person's relative capacities in interaction rather than assuming that any deficit was inevitably her own. This notion provided her with a way of containing her own distress in moments of impasse with others. Her ability to titrate her own discomfort helped to relieve the escalating cycle and to

thereby reduce the other's distress in turn. As the interpersonal field began to be conceptualized as one in which she might carry equal weight and value, Ruth began to be able to make profound inroads in her relationships, deriving increased enjoyment from some and learning to accept the limitations of others.

Through our work together, Ruth, Michael, and Nina were each able to learn to attend to subtleties and nuances of experience that had previously eluded or overwhelmed them. This increased awareness helped to highlight patterns that had become so integral to their ways of being that they had trouble catching sight of them. Our willingness to take seriously the nonverbal elements of our interactions invites us to become more fully present in the lived moment. This heightened engagement brings us into the realm of myth (Eliade, 1960), from which point change feels more possible.

Myth helps us to encounter truth in a way that is not annihilating, so that one can move toward greater clarity rather than capitulating to an enforced blindness. It helps us to mark essential patterns and to order primary experience in ways that illuminate meanings, in the sense of “knowing” rather than “knowing about” (Charles, 2004b). One of the contributions that psychoanalysis offers is the type of mythic, heightened space in which one can learn to be with the self and thereby also come to more fully be one's self. For each of the individuals described in this paper, my ability to encounter unknown aspects of self through my own sensoria helped me to note patterns of being and of interaction. Through identifications with my affect, my body language, and my words, each individual was able to encounter aspects of self and to reconsider them in ways that facilitated acknowledgment and integration. In this way, psychoanalysis offered them an enhanced opportunity to know self and to thereby encounter the lived moment more fully, more freely, and with greater resilience.

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