Welcome to a course on Contemporary Psychoanalytic Theories. You have been introduced to some of these theories in prior courses (Models of the Mind, Attachment, among others). Yet, theory is a moving target, and there is always more to learn about it and from it. We will begin by thinking about what theory IS and why we teach so much of it in psychoanalytic programs. How do we USE it? What does it do for us?

In order to develop as much of a “think tank” as we can, as a group, it would be helpful if you could jot down two kinds of questions as you read this material: (1) what terms or statements leave you confused or completely in the dark? And, (2) what theoretical or clinical questions does the reading bring to mind? (Particularly: how does what you’re reading conflict with what you thought or believed previously?) We can help each other with the difficult terms. And we can all benefit from pondering the conceptual clashes or questions your reading brings up in your mind. Please bring both kinds of questions with you to class.

[Please note that Bohleber’s chapters, while clear and well-translated, demand thoughtful reading – and probably repeated readings. If you have an opportunity to “read ahead” in this book, it will be useful in the coming weeks. Also, in the syllabus below, I have put the quantity of pages of the readings in brackets, for a quick “alert” as to the size of the upcoming assignment for each week.]

Required Text (Please purchase this text – all other readings will be supplied by email):

Class One: 8/27/2019: What is “theory”? Why study it?

Our first readings approach the whole idea of “theory.” These brief excerpts will hopefully provide a kind of “road map” for our course. Where are our minds “going” when we study theory? What is the relation between theory and clinical practice?

Suzi Naiburg’s book is a blockbuster text for psychoanalytic writers. Naiburg, a former writing instructor at Harvard, a clinical social worker, psychoanalyst and writing consultant, helps us both read and think on what she calls the “Ladder of Abstraction.” Human minds are capable of moving all up and down this ladder, in the blink of an eye. As psychoanalytic therapists, we are privileged to spend our workdays exercising this ability. Let’s take time, at the outset of this course, to think about just where our minds ARE when we read theory and work with our patients.
Per Aage Brandt is a Sorbonne-educated philosopher of linguistics. (He is also a poet and jazz musician.) He works with graphic models to help us stay afloat in the “deep end” of abstract thinking. Notice the parallels between his Model of Mental Architecture, and Naiburg’s Levels of Abstraction. If you read the paragraphs of Brandt’s text on these two pages, you may possibly understand how Brandt shows markings on his chart to represent bits of information that are NOT contained in the scope of each attention unit. These are the bits of sense impressions that we ignore when pulling together an interpretation in analysis; they become the ‘excess’ left waiting there for possible use on another day, in another session.

Ricardo Lombardi, an Italian neo-Bionian psychoanalyst who writes about his work with very primitive patients, makes some comments about theory in the introduction to his book. Two questions to entertain as you read these few pages: (1) What theories would you include in your own concise list of necessary theories? -- see page 9 for Bion’s list. (2) How can we make sense of Lombardi’s sentence on page 10, “Mental models and abstraction are, for Bion, the mental tools that the analyst generally uses in his practice for organizing observed data. These are much more elementary and limited tools than psychoanalytic theories…”

Richard Almond’s article provides one take on how theory helps us in our clinical work. To what extent does the “holding function” of theory tell us what to SAY to a patient?

Reading:


Class Two: 9/3/2019: The Kleinian Oedipus Complex as a Model of the Mind

Ron Britton’s development of an understanding of the Oedipal transition (which parallels movement into the Depressive Position) leads us into a “geometric” view of mental space that foreshadows later ideas of Mentalization. Bohleber’s chapter introduces us to a chain of metaphors (think of them as verbal “graphics”) for various aspects of psychoanalytic work that may also help to orient us. What distinctly Kleinian metaphors do we encounter in Segal and Britton?

Reading:


Class Three: 9/10/2019: Further development of a Kleinian Model of Mind

Here, Ron Britton extends his understanding of “triangular space” further and shows how it helps us to work with “difficult” patients. Ogden’s chapter provides readable and useful descriptions of the Kleinian “positions” (which he calls “modes of meaning-making”) and adds a third one – the “autistic-contiguous” mode. The latter will show up again, under a different name, in Infant Research studies that alert us to the importance of the non-verbal, “implicit” dimension of human interaction and its role in structuring the mind.

Reading:


Class Four: 9/17/2019: “Mrs. Klein” meets American Interpersonal Psychoanalysis: The Roots of “Relationalism”

Stephen Mitchell – in his typical clear and thoughtful style – lays out the distinctions and overlaps between these two roots of Relational Psychoanalysis. Bohleber’s Chapter One provides a comprehensive survey of the developments toward Intersubjectivity, of which Relational theory is an important step on the way. This chapter is an “umbrella” chapter for our entire course; returning to it often for re-reading will be useful. Note that Bohleber’s survey of contributions from Continental Philosophy (pages 9-15) will be our primary source on these concepts for this course; we will otherwise be reading primarily ‘mainstream’ psychoanalytic publications, rather than these important (particularly the phenomenological) philosophical sources.

Reading:


Class Five: 9/24/2019: Relational Psychoanalysis, cont’d.

Bohleber’s chapter on Identity is, again, a survey of important influences on psychoanalytic theory, this time particularly focused on societal changes. Identity is always a matter of “To whom do I belong?” – and this is no less true for psychoanalysts than it is for any adolescent. Stephen Mitchell explores the “identity crisis” for psychoanalysts who are shifting from the observational and authoritative stance of tradition to a more relational position. Although Peter Fonagy is an “Anna Freudian” rather than a “Melanie Kleinian,” I think you may find his process notes with “Miss A” sounding rather authoritative in a Kleinian style. Irwin Hoffman’s Commentary critiques Fonagy’s style from an
interpersonal/relational perspective. (You may not have time to read Paul Denis’ critique of the same case; he represents a “Continental” – esp. French – style of analysis.)

Reading:


Supplemental Reading:


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Class Six: 10/1/2019: Mind: Representation versus (or “and”?) Function

This early article by Fonagy shows him in transition between the Anna Freudian thinking he was trained in and the concept of “mentalization” that he and his colleagues developed over the subsequent years. Although in this article, Fonagy defines “representations” as “patterns of mental activation,” the term tends to make us think of an image, like a mental icon that represents some kind of “content” in the mind. And, indeed, this focus on “content” used to be the primary – even sometimes the only -- kind of “material” that was discussed in psychoanalytic articles. This tour-de-force by Fonagy stands, in my view, at the fulcrum of the shift from “content” to “process” in psychoanalysis. With his case illustrating difficulties with certain “mental processes,” Fonagy begins to build our understanding of the functioning of mind in health and in pathology. Busch’s article illustrates the difference between these two categories – representation and process – as it appears in analytic treatment. He suggests that it is important to help the patient learn to track his/her own mental process. Is what he suggests still rightfully thought of as “interpretation”?

Reading:


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(No Class Oct. 8)

Class Seven: 10/15/2019: Mentalization and Reflective Functioning: The Impact of Trauma

Although this article by Fonagy and Target introduces itself (horrifically!) as being primarily about trauma and its impact on the mind, we are going to be reading it primarily to understand the components of mentalization – just what ARE the mental functions or processes that constitute a capacity for mentalization? In this chapter, F and T also present what seems to be a paradoxical relationship between attachment and mentalization – one that is important to understand in the clinical setting. Meanwhile, Bohleber’s chapter surveys the interweaving of trauma theory with psychoanalytic
theory over the course of the past several decades. Before there was interweaving, there was a hesitant, stand-offish courtship, as it were. Bohleber provides a birds-eye view of this development, while Fonagy’s chapter takes us into the micro-level of mental processes. [Although this is a heavy reading assignment, I do recommend perhaps beginning with pages 1-5 of the optional Introduction to Mind to Mind, as it places Fonagy and Target’s chapter in context.]

Reading:


Optional Reading:


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Class Eight: 10/22/2019: Trauma and the Mind.

In Chapter 5, Bohleber surveys not only what happens to memory as a result of trauma but what is the shifting relationship between psychoanalysis and memory? This relationship has been the subject of much debate in the psychoanalytic literature over the past several decades. (The debate between Peter Fonagy and Harold Blum – which we are not reading in this course – is one of the arenas in which this topic has taken center stage.) Henry Krystal’s article – a relatively early one in the interweaving of psychoanalysis and trauma – describes the difficulties faced by Holocaust survivors as they approach the developmental tasks of aging. Notice that Krystal does not use the word “dissociation,” yet he describes sequelae of trauma (i.e., damaged mental processes) that later writers ascribe to the protective use of dissociative processes under the pressure of extreme trauma.

Reading:


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Class Nine: 10/29/2019: Trauma, Dissociation, and the Brain.

Bohleber deals in Chapter 6 with the increasing acceptance of dissociative states into the world of psychoanalysis. Patients who entered such states used to be considered “unanalyzable.” Now we consider that we must adjust our way of working in order to accommodate patients who are not typical on-the-couch analytic “cases,” but increasingly populate our practices. With the article by Ted Gaensbauer, we bring a bit of neuroscience into the picture we’re studying. The cases he describes are quite amazing and, unfortunately, apparently not rare or all that unusual, due to the function of mirror neurons, and they give us some inkling of how trauma affects the brains even of older patients who are perhaps better
equipped to buffer and heal themselves. The supplemental reading shows Bessel van der Kolk discussing the way that, in trauma, it is not so much that memory is “etched” in the brain but that part of the brain – the part that “narrates” experience and works on it to create meaning – shuts down.

Reading:


Supplemental Reading:


   *Note: I included it here because of the very readable way Van der Kolk and Caruth discuss some key elements of the neuroscience of brain functioning after traumatic experience. A quote from page 171: “Without language we are just a bunch of traumatized animals who act and react without any choice.” When you have time, you may enjoy many of the chapters of this book, each a truly rich conversation. The interviewees include: Robert Jay Lifton, Dori Laub, Jean Laplanche, Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudilliere, Judith Herman, and others.* [24]

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To protect the privacy of their research subjects, Beebe and Lachmann do not provide films to the public. However, there are other films on-line that are available and very helpful in understanding the descriptions and drawings provided in Beebe and Lachmann’s chapter. We will watch samples of the Strange Situation research protocol, and Ed Tronick’s “Still Face” protocol, both of which can be painful to watch because of the children’s distress. Seeing their reactions on film, however, is “worth a thousand words” in showing us the importance of the findings of this research! In Seligman’s article, we see how Klein’s originally “intrapsychic” theory evolves into an intersubjective one.

Reading:


Class Eleven: 11/12/2019: Attachment and the Mind, cont’d.

We are not reading, for this course, the earlier work in Attachment Research that presented the several categories of “secure attachment,” but rather are focusing on the later work that attempts to account for pathologies associated with “disorganized attachment.” Karlen Lyons-Ruth’s Tables 1, 2, and 3 present excellent distillations of prior research on disorganized attachment. I hope that images from Beebe and Lachmann’s research will come to mind as you read this article. The latter part of Lyons-Ruth’s article peer into the inner workings of the therapy process, both conceptually and experientially. Wilma Bucci’s work focuses on “dissociated schemas” that, during treatment – and in the therapeutic relationship – can become integrated. These are both dense and important articles: I encourage you not to try to read them too fast.

Reading:


Class Twelve: 11/19/2019: Verbal and Non-verbal Dimensions of Mind

From the Introduction to Change in Psychotherapy: A Unifying Paradigm (2010): “In 1994, the Boston Change Process Study Group (BCPSG) came into being. It began as a disparate group of eight, where five were analysts (Alexander Morgan, Jeremy Nahum, Louis Sander, Daniel Stern, and initially Alexandra Harrison). Two of the analysts (Sander and Stern) were also pioneers in the field of psychoanalytically oriented infant research and have continued to individually make major original contributions. Sander brought a deep knowledge of biological systems. Daniel Stern had pioneered microanalytic methods for describing mother-infant interactions. Two were developmental researchers (Karlen Lyons-Ruth and, initially, Edward Tronick) who were contributing major insights to the developmental literature on attachment and affective processes in infancy and who were interested in psychodynamically oriented clinical process. One (Nadia Bruschweiler-Stern) was a developmental pediatrician and a child psychiatrist involved with early processes of the infant-parent encounter and attachment. Although the analysts in the group in full-time practice (Morgan, Nahum, and, initially, Harrison) came later to the recognition of the potential value of studying recent infancy research (than the others) in the theory and practice of psychodynamically oriented therapeutics, one belief bound them all together: that the study of early development was a rich and unique source for contributions to psychoanalysis.”

Reading:


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Stephen Seligman’s review of Stern’s most recent book (his last book, since he recently died) provides an impressive description of Stern’s importance in the evolution of psychoanalytic theory. Because of the way Seligman describes Stern’s place – and our debt to him – I have placed his article at the top of this reading assignment, even tho’ that meant relegating one of Stern’s own chapters to the “optional reading.” Yet, I am hoping you will be able to make time for Stern’s Chapter Eight, since – esp. on pages 130-132 – he places his understanding of intersubjective consciousness in relation to the two other types of consciousness with which we are most familiar. Note that psychoanalytic has spent most of its years of theorizing being preoccupied with what Stern calls “introspective consciousness.” In addition, I believe that this breakdown of “consciousnesses” helps to clarify our previous readings by the Boston Change Process Study Group, particularly as regards the distinction between “implicit” and “explicit” knowing.

Reading:


Optional Reading:


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Class Fourteen: 12/3/2019: How Metaphor Organizes Mind

The idea that “metaphor” is more than a figure of speech – that it is, in fact, a fundamental element of mental functioning – has taken hold among some theorists as holding promise for increased dialogue among different disciplines – psychoanalysis, neuroscience, cognitive science, linguistics, art and literature, etc. Arnold Modell writes about metaphor as “the currency of mind” (a metaphor in its own right!): metaphor is as important to the workings of the mind as money is to the workings of commerce! Antal Borbely, a NY psychoanalyst with a background in linguistics, looks in close detail at the key role of metaphor-making in psychoanalysis – in sickness and in health.
Reading:


Supplemental reading:


Class Fifteen: 12/10/2019: Metaphor and Field

The logical extension of the understanding of metaphor as ‘the currency of the mind’ is the development of “Field Theory.” As we see how the combination of two ideas from different domains (i.e., a metaphor) gives rise to emergent meaning, our attention is drawn to this area from which emergent meaning springs. As countertransference has gained equality with transference as the source of interpretation of unconscious communication, the ‘space’ between and around the “analytic couple” is studied as the area of the “unthought known.” With roots in the Gestalt Psychology of the 1950’s, which sees the individual in “context,” (against a background) this theory has been taken up recently by “post-Bionian” psychoanalysts who use it to study how a psychoanalyst’s interpretations arise out of a bi-personal (intersubjective) field. A key article presenting Field Theory, written in the 1960’s by two Argentinian analysts, has recently been translated into English and published in the IJP because of its importance in this development. We will read only the introductory part of this article by Willy and Madelaine Baranger, before reading a more “conversation” treatment of its main ideas.

Reading:

1. Baranger, M., and Baranger, W. (2008). The analytic situation as a dynamic field. IJP, 89, 795-826. Please read pages 795-799 of this article – and, of course, as much of the rest of it as you have time for. [4]

2. Rizzuto, Ana-Maria. (2013). Field theory, the “talking cure,” and metaphoric processes. Psychoanalytic Inquiry 3, 210-228. [18] [T = 22]

Class Sixteen: 12/17/2019: Metaphor and Field: Conclusion of Course.

We wrap up with an article by Thomas Ogden in which he sensitively examines, in two extended clinical vignettes, the interplay between the analyst’s subjective experience and the intersubjectively-generated experience of the analytic pair, which he calls the “analytic third.” We will discuss in what ways Ogden’s concept of “analytic third” is similar to and different from the third point of the “triangular space” that we encountered in our first readings from Ron Britton.

Reading:

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