This constitutes a compressed summary of the book. I believe we may find the goal of this collection condensed in the two following sentences. The first one has been taken (not literally) by R. Moguillansky from Paz’s essay (p. 291): ‘The study in depth of the specific field is the best contribution psychoanalysis may offer, both in terms of knowledge production and of ethical modelization’ (p. 30). The second one can be found also in the Introduction:

> We hope that the honest exchange of clinical experiences will allow us to ease the way through the difficult path we take when analysing patients who suffer, and make others suffer, their perversions or their addictions, both pathologies in which making others suffer seems to acquire, in my view, a particularly dramatic dimension (p. 30)

References


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The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life

by Daniel N. Stern


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Poets and philosophers sometimes reflect on the vital yet fleeting experience of the present, but psychoanalysts typically do not. Yet this is a fascinating topic. How do we think about the present moment? Stern brings it to us as a unit of process that cuts across domains. With an average duration of 3–4 seconds, but ranging from 1 to 10 seconds, it corresponds to a phrase of words. But it also corresponds to a phrase unit in music. And it corresponds to a phrase unit in dance, poetry and gesture. Present moments have a strong physiological background as well. To recite a line of poetry out loud, such as in the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare, corresponds to what one can do in a breath cycle. It also takes 2–3 seconds on average for two speakers engaged in dialogue to take a speaking turn. It seems that the temporal units for speech production, parsing meanings and dialogue have all evolved together. Thinking about this, the reader may be reminded of current research on working memory. But Stern intends the idea of the present moment, while consistent with knowledge about working memory, to go beyond it. The present moment is thought of as a subjective unit while working memory is thought of in objective terms. More importantly, the present moment is considered the fundamental chunking unit for meaningful subjective experience. Typically, as the reader will come to appreciate, a present moment also involves experiences that occur between people.
The present moment, for Stern, is subjectively experienced in some ways as a lived story. It is a microcosm, or fractal, existing as part of the larger stream of one’s life. Stern argues that the story elements include aspects of incentive, with self and others having intentions that are networked in a plot. The elements include aspects of dramatic tension, with experienced directionality toward a goal. And the lived story of the moment is also characterized by contoured feelings or what he refers to as ‘vitality affects’.

A second main theme of the book extends the first theme of the present moment and has to do with what Stern refers to as the ‘intersubjective matrix’. This refers to the intimate context for lived experience that resides in the connectedness with others. Human existence is social existence and we are biologically prepared such that the private self is a social self that is involved in a continuous dialogue with other minds. Although there are individual differences among us with regards to our sensitivities and immersions, the intersubjective matrix is, for Stern, like oxygen: we breathe it continuously without being aware of its presence. Further, the desire for intersubjectivity is considered a primary motivational system, similar to sex or attachment. It is seen in early infancy and exists throughout life as a primary need to read the feelings and intentions of others and to maintain self-cohesion (‘we need the eyes of others to form and hold ourselves together’ (p. 107)). Most of what Stern refers to as an intersubjective orientation, with a fine-tuning and negotiation of shared states of mind, operates silently, or implicitly, and beyond conscious awareness. Moreover, individual consciousness is extended to include ‘intersubjective consciousness’. Much of what happens between two people who are closely connected is guided by ‘implicit knowing’ but there is also an ‘intersubjective consciousness’ in which the repeated intersubjective exchanges of two people give rise to an emergent experience. In this state, in addition to each person in the dyad having a similar experience, there is an awareness of the other’s experience as well as an awareness of the concordance of that experience with one’s own. Intersubjective consciousness is thought crucial for psychotherapy, a topic that becomes the third and final main theme of the book.

Stern states he is not proposing any radical revision of psychodynamic psychotherapy. Instead, he advocates for more attention to a broader view of consciousness, one that considers both the present moment and the intersubjective matrix. The therapeutic relationship is a two-person co-created journey that makes use of moments of intersubjective contact. It is the need for such moments of contact that moves psychotherapy along. Intersubjective motives for therapeutic change are apparent in the moment-to-moment orienting to the intersubjective matrix, in times when the patient experiences an enlarged new way of being with the therapist, and when the patient experiences a redefining of self by way of a reflection from the therapist. Regular present moments are interspersed with especially vivid ‘now moments’ and moments when patient and therapist are aware of what each other is experiencing; the latter are referred to as ‘moments of intersubjective meeting’. Missteps or mismatches along the way are expectable and important. These provide opportunities for negotiating repairs and correction that are a key way of being with another.

A related idea is that coherence in the therapeutic experience is co-created in the midst of ‘sloppiness’. Inexact communications and connections yield opportunities
for emergent experiences and new understandings. Examples are given. These are also intended to illustrate the points that intersubjective exchanges go on continuously in the psychotherapeutic relationship, that they are largely implicit and that they do not require verbalization in order to have their therapeutic effects. Verbal interpretations and implicit expansions of the intersubjective field are complementary acts.

How does the present moment connect with the subjective past? The experience of the present moment is to a considerable extent involved in selecting and rewriting past memories. An interpretation can in small steps change the past and there can be multiple parallel memories of the past. The past, for Stern, influences the present but typically in a silent way. Its influence operates from knowledge that is implicit and not only from repressed and conflicted memories. It tends to operate outside of awareness and analogically, similar to a metaphor.

In sum, psychotherapy consists of a series of present moments, driven forward by a desire for intersubjective contact and an enlargement of a shared intersubjective field. There are important ‘moments of meeting’ between patient and therapist. Change takes place through a rewriting of past experiences as lived and as the temporal dynamics of the past are activated with an influence on present behavior. In other words, what is experienced is a happening in real time, so that a lived story is rewritten. In this process the living of the implicit experience has as much importance as explicit verbal content. From the therapist’s standpoint, a lot of work goes into setting up an appropriate intersubjective field before interpretive work is meaningful. The immediate relationship is to be lived fully. Defense analysis comes second to the progress that occurs from implicit aspects of flow in the therapeutic relationship.

Stern concludes his book by acknowledging that in psychotherapy a goal is to come up with a meaningful life narrative, and that this is achieved with the aid of a psychodynamic understanding. But in addition the therapist should feel deeply with the patient and share experiences so as to apprehend ‘what [it] is like to be him, and what [it] is like to be with him’ (p. 226). Implicit ‘knowing frames’ and enlarged ways of being together are intended to supplement the flow of explicit understandings (i.e. reflective functioning) that psychoanalysts are more used to.

As I move to my critical perspectives, a personal disclosure is in order. I have known and valued Dan Stern as a friend and colleague for nearly 40 years. Over the years we have worked together on a number of joint academic ventures, and have shared many moments of discussion and being. And, throughout, he has treasured other views and questioning, so I feel free to offer what comes next.

This book is gracefully written, and in some ways the reader can experience being in an intellectual dance with the author. ( Appropriately, the book is dedicated ‘in memory of Jerry’; and the author was a close friend of Jerome Robbins.) But, more than being a pleasure to read, the book offers many stimulating questions; it provides insights from recent research and it gives fresh turns of thinking for a psychoanalytically interested reader. The book engages, and I predict it will be widely read. Below I provide critical reflections for each of its three themes.

The discussion of the present moment is powerful in its particulars. Indeed, I am hesitant to distract from it with commentary. The reader will enjoy many ‘moments
of meeting’ from engaging with phrases and ideas, and there will be evoked reveries about past moments as well as anticipatory thoughts about how to use insights gained from the text in future work. Stern is undoubtedly right that the present, both in its momentary and streaming aspects, deserves more attention in our therapeutic considerations that have heretofore been so preoccupied with the role of the past. But as my previous sentence about using insights indicates, so does the future deserve more attention. We are profoundly motivated by a ‘future orientation’, both in a short-term sense (with expectations, anticipatory signals and goals) as well as in a longer-term sense (with plans, practicing of new schemes of behavior and with attitudes containing varying degrees of hope and optimism). And individual differences in aspects of future orientation have obvious and large implications for work in psychotherapy. There is a rather full discussion of the present’s use of the past. More discussion of the present’s use of the future could have strengthened his exposition, especially since the topic of future orientation is now the subject of considerable theoretical and empirical attention (see Haith et al., 1994).

The discussion of the intersubjective matrix is likely to evoke controversy among psychoanalytic practitioners, as Stern proposes that not only does intersubjectivity provide a fundamental supportive environment for orienting an individual’s lived experience, but also the desire for intersubjectivity exists as a primary motivational system—and one as important as the traditional drives of psychoanalysis. On first reading, this proposal seems dramatic and bold. The presentation of it, however, would have been helped by more history of the idea and connections to previous work of others. There is a strong background of theory about the social self going back to the early 20th century with the writings of John Dewey, Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead. Indeed, some of Stern’s text reminded me repeatedly of Mead’s thinking (1934). Similarly, more of the background for this idea from research in developmental psychology, including studies of Stern’s own work, would also have been helpful. Additionally, links could have been made to interpersonal theories of psychoanalysis (see review of Stern, 1996) as well as to core conflictual relationship themes and related empirical work on psychoanalytic process (see review of Luborsky and Luborsky, 1993). Although intersubjectivity is not emphasized per se in this literature, linking to it could have made the exposition of points seem less radical. Moreover, motivational features that are inherent in development itself, that involve movement toward increasing organization and complexity and that include basic motives for social connectedness and reciprocity, could also have been reviewed as background (Emde, 1990).

The discussion of psychotherapy will undoubtedly provide the most fuel for additional thought and questions. If intersubjective sharing and moments of meeting are vital for therapeutic work and if, beyond this, emergent intersubjective experiences and co-creativity and co-constructing are central, and if, further, these involve major implicit as well as explicit contributions, what does this say about training? Would not psychotherapy trainees need more training in empathy and intersubjective work? Intersubjective skills are distributed among us with considerable individual differences. To what extent can intersubjective work be selected for or trained up to a standard of competence? And what would training consists of? Would there be
training in intersubjective goal setting and in sharing adaptive modes as contrasted with maladaptive ones? And significant moral questions follow. To the extent that therapeutic experiences and goals are co-created and are emergent, will not values of the therapist be influential? Although many of these values may be implicit, would there not be an ethical obligation to make them explicit, both in training and in practice? These are just some of the emerging questions. More will be stimulated in our dialogues to come.

References


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Sándor Ferenczi: El mejor discípulo de Freud

[Sándor Ferenczi: Freud’s best disciple]

by Antoni Talarn


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It is only in the last few years that a notable phenomenon has occurred in our profession: the rediscovery of an author as fundamental to the development of psychoanalysis as Sándor Ferenczi, after more than 50 years of going almost unnoticed. Among other developments, Ferenczi appeared at the origins of object-relations theory, of the re-evaluation of traumatic factors in the understanding of psychopathology, of the elasticity of contemporary psychoanalytic technique, of the assessment of the analyst’s person as one of the determining factors in what goes on in the relational field constituted by analyst and analysand, and of North American intersubjectivity. But, until the publication of his Clinical diary (Dupont, 1988), Ferenczi was an author who had disappeared from psychoanalytic training institutes. He was so little cited in bibliographies that, of Melanie Klein’s two analysts, Ferenczi and Abraham, only the latter deserved an entry in Hinshelwood (1989). In contrast, since the publication of Dupont (1988) and of the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence (Brabant et al., 1994; Falzeder et al., 1996, 2000), a true rediscovery has taken place, reflected in congresses, publications and many references to his influence on contemporary psychoanalysis.

This book by Antoni Talarn, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist at the University of Barcelona, is the Spanish expression of this phenomenon. Interest was already

1Translated by Kathleen A. Ross.