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Through the mothers eyes A crochet of thoughts on the maternal and paternal

Yvette Esprey

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Psychoanalytic Practice



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Editorial

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Welcome to the first issue of *Psychoanalytic Practice* for 2024. This editorial is the first that I write as editor of the journal, as I attempt to fill some impressive shoes. I am honoured to take over editorship of *Psychoanalytic Practice* from Katherine Bain and I hope to make both her and the rest of the editorial board proud. Getting this first edition to print has been a steep learning experience, and I hope to produce issues that continue the tradition of excellence within analytic publishing that my predecessors have established. In line with the editorial board's vision for *Psychoanalytic Practice*, we aim to publish work that speaks both from within the consulting room and beyond, challenging and reimagining what psychoanalytic thinking and theorising can offer.

With this in mind, this issue follows a recent South African Psychoanalytic Initiative (SAPI) conference held in Johannesburg, which was themed around paternal functioning. Two papers on the paternal function that were presented at the conference have been further defined and are included in this edition: the first by Portuguese psychoanalyst Rui Aragão Oliveira and the second from a South African psychotherapist, Thomas Burkhalter. Response papers follow each of these articles respectively, the first by Jennifer Allen responding to Aragão Oliveira and the second by Yvette Esprey responding to Burkhalter. The result of this configuration is an interesting psychoanalytic dance between the papers, that together cover an explication of the paternal function, and its relevance and importance in current analytic thinking. There is a wonderful playing with this towering

theoretical concept, as spoken by and heard through both masculine and feminine voices, pondered on by these mothers, fathers, analysts and teachers, and imbued with loss, confusion, erudition and power.

Whereas Katherine left off her final edition speaking to the lessons that can be learned when contemplating how our individual subjectivities infuse our intersubjective patterns, and questioning a need to learn from the past, the paternal function asks for something similar yet also quite different. The intersubjective and its created thirdness – an evolving analytic attitude linked to the creation of transitional space, as Benjamin (2004) so eloquently describes – links to the paternal function. It challenges us to not only learn from what has come before but as a balancing of or breaking away from enmeshments with traditional values that no longer serve us, thereby allowing us to safely individuate within the collective. The foregrounding of paternal function is about bringing in a new perspective that has dogged analytic thinking and also the way we operate in the world. This could not be more relevant in a world which appears to be returning to narrow, problematic ways of thinking. Paternal function, however, seeks to challenge binaries and limiting ways of thinking, it hopes to evoke and play, and the papers in this edition inhabit this space in sophisticated and eloquent ways. They not only define paternal function and its workings within the analytic setting but show, through writing and conference presenting, paternal function as active and alive, asking us to tolerate the unknown, challenging antiquated ways of thinking and showing the relevance of paternal functioning in modern psychoanalysis.

The first paper by Portuguese psychoanalyst Rui Aragão Oliveira is entitled *Paternal function, masculinity and the introduction of the third: The mind of the analyst in clinical practice*, which introduces the concept of paternal function and frames the theme of the issue. Aragão Oliveira carefully and skillfully describes the origins of the paternal function, how it develops, the functions that it fulfils and its role in the dynamics of

psychic life. The paper also discusses how the paternal function influences object relationships, symbolic elaboration, and learning experiences. It further touches on the interplay between fear of the castrating father and the development of the superego. Through clinical vignettes the author reflects on the challenges posed to clinical work and analysts themselves regarding the complexities of the paternal function. It's a complex, heady piece that is eloquently responded to by Jennifer Allen. Entitled *Response to Paternal function, masculinity and the introduction of the third*, Allen argues that paternal function is not a gendered concept but an internal psychic process which lies somewhere 'between limitless desire and a natural limit from which a third position can emerge' (p. 26). Allen, too, uses a clinical vignette to explore the workings of this concept and her understanding of paternal function.

The third paper in this issue by Thomas Burkhalter, *Playing with 'the father' in memory and desire: Exilic thirdness in transitional space*, is a thought-provoking and challenging piece which deepens the exploration of paternal function. Burkhalter's elegant article is both a response to Aragão Oliveira's paper and a powerful demonstration of how writing his paper served as a paternal function working-through process. This process allowed him not only to contemplate illness but also the passing of his son. It is a profoundly moving tribute and a courageous piece of work. As Burkhalter explores his own mourning process, he shows the link between paternal function and transitional space, and reiterates a space that is not only for mourning but for playing too and, of course, working through. Burkhalter notes that this 'playing with tension' is familiar territory for psychoanalysis, which 'is always struggling with these tensions, between the polymorphous and Oedipus, the ego and the id, conflicted and haunted' (T. Burkhalter, personal communication, June, 21, 2024). The final paper is Yvette Esprey's response to Burkhalter titled *Through the mother's eyes: A crochet of thoughts on the maternal and paternal*, and 'crochet' feels like the right word to use

for a piece that weaves complex psychoanalytic concepts into a digestible, personal and affecting piece of writing.

The edition closes with a thoughtful review by James van der Walt on Adrian Perkel's recently published book entitled *Unlocking the nature of human aggression: A psychoanalytic and neuroscientific approach*. Van der Walt elaborates on the central tenet in Perkel's work: the nature of aggression and how aggression is linked to our most instinctual drives. He shows how Perkel develops his thesis by using both psychoanalytic theory and neuroscientific evidence, and weaving complex theories into a readable and decidedly modern analytic text.

References

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Article

Paternal function, masculinity and the introduction of the third: The mind of the analyst in clinical practice

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Abstract

This article addresses essential aspects for defining the paternal function in metapsychological terms. The enormous sociocultural changes that took place in the 20th century, relating to the decline of patriarchal societies, and the emergence of a new and fascinating vision of the feminine in the 21st century, have allowed us to gain a new perspective on the psychoanalytic 'paternal function' and to take a different look at the complexity of the internalisations associated with it. This article discusses the paternal function as a singular object of representation in the organisation of the mental world, associated with power, protection and admiration, but also with castration anguish, authority, dread and obstruction. The main theoretical influences that have made it possible to relate the maternal body to the possibilities of new identification processes are discussed. More recently, the paternal function has been associated with the development of symbolic capacity. This has major implications for psychoanalytic identity and the connection to authority, masculinity and the notion of the third. In a final section, using clinical

vignettes, the author offers a brief reflection on the challenges posed to the specificities of clinical work, as well as to analysts themselves.

Introduction

Many concepts in psychoanalytic vocabulary use expressions derived either from everyday life or adapted from other areas of knowledge, especially the social sciences and humanities. The 'paternal function' is a good example of this. The implication is that the concept runs the risk of being confused with the meanings given to it by sociology, educational psychology or even by developmental psychology. Due to its proximity to these sciences, its designation in psychoanalysis allows for doubts or misunderstandings, including among analysts. I remember, for example, Leticia Fiorini (2014) – who has made significant contributions to this particular topic – suggested that this term should no longer be used in psychoanalysis to avoid many misunderstandings and confusion with parental functions or issues associated predominantly with external reality or role behaviours. In psychoanalysis, regardless of the form of paternal function present in reality, or even in its absence, the father interests us as an object of the internal world. The origins of the paternal function is the focus of interest in this article, which includes how this structure develops, the functions it fulfils, and its role in the dynamics of mental life. Exploring the paternal function and holding the 'third' in psychoanalytic practice is one of the main clinical topics that currently needs to be further developed.

The paternal function as intrapsychic construct

From an epistemological point of view the paternal function is perhaps the most structured and essential. It has been attributed to different elements and historical-evolutionary perspectives have been advanced

by various authors (Aragão Oliveira, 2020). The central claim is that it indeed fulfils a structuring role in the mental world, which deserves more attention.

The paternal function does not exist as something in and of itself, but rather is intertwined with, a probably unending, didactic process, associated with creativity, learning and alterity or 'Otherness'. It introduces a different view of both the external, and also our own internal world. It refers to a process that is problematic, but also dynamic, flexible, and variable. It exposes the individual to different qualities of anxiety and emotions, which influences their internal structure of object relationships, as well as the capacity for symbolic elaboration, creativity, and the possibility of learning from experience – as Bion purported. Mindful of the importance of the paternal function, our Italian psychoanalytic colleague Giovanni Foresti (2008) recommended that we should keep the paternal function clearly specified, because its meaning changes, disappears and/or reappears in various guises over time. Wise and sensible advice.

The evolution of this construct constitutes an object of singular representation in the organisation of the mental world comprising elements of power, protection and admiration on the one hand, and on the other equally associated with castration anxiety, authority, dread and obstruction. More recently, however, it has been associated with the development of symbolic capability, and so carries implications of utmost importance for the psychoanalytic identity (Aragão Oliveira, 2020).

From loss to creativity

In Freud's (1913) original work, the father is closely associated with the idea of loss (of the mother and/or of omnipotence), submission, and also,

gradually, representing the impossibility of access to the object – the experience of a disturbance in the realisation of a desire. This disturbance or castration then serves as a trigger for the subject to creatively do something with the feeling of 'facing impossibility' or limits. Something decisive which provokes structuring of an internal law, or the ego ideal and for the organisation of more advanced mental mechanisms, in particular the sublimation capacity.

In relation to the experience of fear of the castrating and possibly threatening father, Freud, at first, emphasised identifying with the phallic and idealised father as a possible way out of the intense Oedipal experience, organising the super ego structure and the ego ideal. I suggest, however, that Freud's papers that were written after 1923 seem to offer another interpretation. While he did not elaborate directly regarding the structural model of the mind, he came close to elaborating concerning roles of the paternal function that could have various outcomes for the mental world: constructive and progressive, or absolutely crushing and catastrophic. This article, which primarily has a clinical focus, seeks to demonstrate how the two roles associated with the paternal function, those of a regressive nature and those that favour growth, can be interrelated in a demanding and elaborate transformation. Leveraging this idea of two roles we can potentially come closer to a contemporary view of the paternal function which can also incorporate cultural constructions and the development of curiosity.

In *Civilisation and its discontents*, Freud (1930) pointed out that the formation and development of the superego mitigates the forces of our primitive instincts which manifest in sexuality and aggression. Since the subject cannot simply satisfy these primitive instincts freely, they learn to transform, or access other possibilities and pleasures at their disposal. In this way, one part of the self (the superego) comes to love and admire the other part (the ego) for being able to renounce drives or, at least, for being able to circumvent and/or modify them. However, this can be seen

as a partial artifice because the conflictual tension has only given way to a temporary compromise. The part that we identify as the id, considers itself a 'victim', and waits for an opportunity to act out and experience the pleasure drive.

So, the idea of how we can internally lead with our drives, what we should do or feel able to do with frustration are absolutely related to the ability to organise such an internal structure, resulting from the identification with the enigmatic figure – the father. The father facilitates the paternal function and what dynamics it is, or is not, able to mobilise in the internal psyche. In fact, we can think of it in terms of different modalities of facing impossibility, that actualise the outcome of the problem of what we can or cannot do with our drives and unsatisfaction.

The effort to 'get away from something' does not just concern an impulse but can be something more problematic due to its irreconcilability with other demands and intentions. The aim is then to banish from consciousness the impulse that seeks some kind of pleasure or desire, or to distance oneself from pain and displeasure. In other words, the impulse is subject to repression if it comes up against the opposition of another strong impulse, is ego-dystonic, is framed within the ego ideal, or is subject to superego demands. All these dynamics associated with repression *cause* anxiety. They are not the result of anxiety, as is sometimes mistaken.

In addition to repression, Freud also described one of the most elaborate forms of the psychic apparatus – which we have labelled the most mature – as sublimation. Sublimation implies an internal transformation caused by the pressure of the drive, in which the achievement of the experience of pleasure, in its most evolved forms, determines a change in the dynamic-economic balance of the psychic apparatus (Aragão Oliveira, 2023).

The repression associated with the third gaze, which assumes an apparently passive position, enables the reduction of libidinal intensity from the impulse. The portion of libido that escapes repression, through sublimation, becomes curiosity which is a powerful tool for investigating the world around, and also within us. In this way 'sexual' desire is transformed into a thirst for knowledge, which is nevertheless another way for the subject to sublimate and thus 'secretly' take possession of the object, in another form of pleasure. Consequently 'knowing' can be another way of 'having' the object with us.

In his well-known book *The work of the negative*, André Green (1999) paid particular attention to the vicissitudes of sublimation. He pointed out how Freud tended to oscillate between the progressive and the regressive aspects of sublimation. The progressive aspect was considered as a development that follows from the drive whereas the regressive was conceived as eventual deviations from the drive, and which therefore implies sacrifice and/or renunciation of the pleasure associated with the drive. It seems then, that sublimation is organised into multiple derivatives of the 'thirst for knowledge' that often triggers diverse pleasures in a private and complex relationship. Sometimes these pleasures may be ego-dystonic such as in the form of voyeuristic-exhibitionism or sadomasochism.

While Freud essentially postulated the divergence and renunciation of libidinal pleasure which led to progressive desexualisation, Melanie Klein focused on the child's developmental capacity to identify with objects and make new investments. In the latter case, a narcissistic libido is transformed into an object libido which lends itself to sublimation. As a new object, even if initially only in the mother's mind, the father emerges as the fundamental figure available for the child to identify with. The effect of sublimation is to extend the action to the thought process and its multiple forms of expression. If, at first, the subject seems to renounce the satisfaction of the libido, he has the expectation of

satisfying himself through knowledge and access to other pleasures of a subjective nature, with different characteristics. Therefore, beyond simple renunciation, we can frame sublimation as a capacity for development, with the aim of also fostering psychic growth.

The maternal body and the opportunity for new identifications

Now, moving on to a second way of looking at and understanding the paternal function, where separation anxieties and individuation processes find another space. From this standpoint, if we consider the contributions of Klein (1945), we understand that these anxieties were always more centred on primary investment of the maternal body – which, indeed, Klein called the feminine stage of infantile development. It is essentially the frustration that the breast presents and the desire to notice it (associated with depressive anxieties) that would lead the child to return to the father's penis, conceived as belonging to the maternal body and thus invoking the Oedipal triangle. It therefore allowed the conception of 'another Oedipus', extraordinarily precocious and far from the experience of the triangulation of the external world, in something that we today understand as pre-Oedipal.

Kleinian theory constructed the complexity of the internal world in which representations of the self and of objects (the maternal body, the breast, the penis) appear from the very beginning. From this theoretical vantage point, we understand that, like these bodily experiences, the experiences of the internal world that determine the idea of masculinity and femininity also begin at birth. As Freud argued, these experiences occur long before the existence of the maturity with which the difference between the sexes can be observed and affirmed. Research in developmental psychology highlights the importance of parents' unconscious communication with the child. This includes the parents' unconscious processes, as well as the way they conceive and organise the

'masculine' and 'feminine' within themselves. The interrelationship between the masculine and feminine become important elements in the child's unconscious and phantasmatic creations which has consequences for their later physical, affective and cognitive development.

Paternal function, masculinity and the introduction of the third

This section highlights that the father is valued through his presence in the mother's mind, even if only an 'unconscious presence'. In this sense the paternal function is organised as a third element that creates the prohibition of incest and fusion in the relationship between the mother and baby. The mother does not need to think, to verbalise or to act differently: Her intentionality makes itself felt. It is enough to be emotionally connected with the father (or with a third figure) to transmit the unconscious presence. The baby can feel the difference in the relationship with a mother who has another person inside her mind or a mother who lives the fusional fantasy and excludes connection with any other figure. The baby does not understand it but can feel it.

It is therefore contact with the presence of the father in the internal world of the mother, which places him back into primal scene fantasies that introduce the child, almost brutally, to the psychic space between mother and child. The idea of the 'father in the mother's head' becomes an essential element, capable of facilitating contact with the 'yet-to-be-known' father (Ogden, 1989) and subsequently with external objects. This moment of internal transition, between the presence of pre-Oedipal mother and the 'mother the woman of the father', acts as a dynamic system, capable of first organising unconscious movements of identifications. We can therefore surmise that the fantasies associated with the primal scene are essentially a constellation of thoughts and feelings in permanent flux and evolution. These fantasies make themselves felt but are difficult to define and work with.

The formation of masculinity emerges from the introduction of the third party, a paternal function, on condition that it offers itself as an object of identification. The British psychoanalyst Fakhry Davids (2002), clearly influenced by Bion, argues that the roles performed by either the mother or the father in the human mind are different, and should not be reduced to the mere complementarity of being connected, such as when the Oedipean issue arises. In Davids' view, these roles exist potentially even before the full experience of the Oedipus complex. The experience of meeting the real father, or merely meeting with the internal representation of the father in the mind of the mother, produces the realisation of the father concept in the mental world of the child.

We therefore understand that the perception of the father is created from the first direct contacts, but equally through the 'eyes' of the mother. The mother's conscious and unconscious expectations and fantasies about the role of the father seem to play a decisive role in the child's psychic formation and in organising the structure of the internal object relationship. The role of the internal representation of the father has been understood as fundamental because it allows for the introduction of a different, external reality to the primitive, symbiotic relationship between the child and the mother. The real absence of the father is in no way equivalent to his absence of representation. For the same reason, we can understand that the introjected father is very different from the real father.

In 1968, Greenson pointed out the particularities of how the process of disidentification with the mother in the male child was complemented by counter-identification with the father. His theoretical hypotheses were widely accepted at the time, apparently proven by anthropological studies where the presence of ceremonies, sometimes violent, signalled the radical separation of the boy from maternal influence, with the justification of guaranteeing a future, manly man. This forced separation supposedly made it possible to achieve the desired autonomy, virility and

independence that were essential characteristics of good masculinity at the time. Following this line of argumentation, prolonged contact with the maternal figure was to be avoided because the ‘excess of mother’ would contaminate the boy, hindering the organisation of masculinity. Thus, in the words of Michael Diamond (2009), ‘the most significant thing about being a man is not being a woman’ (pp. 23-54). Cultural and artistic expressions of masculinity have portrayed the individualistic heroes of the 1940s to 1960s as the self-sufficient man who seduces and conquers but does not connect and consequently suffers loss in a love relationship. For example, in the famous performances of John Wayne, or the *James Bond* and, later in the 1980s, the *MacGyver* series.

Today we understand that when ‘mother excess’ occurs (that is when the child internally attributes such omnipotence to the bond with the mother, there seems to be no room for the presence of the father in its symbolic expression, and the father is eclipsed in the child's mental world) we are faced with a pathological, rigidifying dynamic, where the mother seems to oppose autonomy, disidentification occurs and this ‘cutting-off’ function serves as a narcissistic defense. These dynamics usually contribute strongly to the organisation of severe and rigid superego structures. Figlio (2024) believes that this creates the conditions for organising what he calls ‘toxic masculinity’, where phallic narcissism imposes itself through dominance and omnipotent intrusion. In reality, this contributes to a more rigid sense of masculinity without room for affective plasticity or ambivalent feelings, and it could even give rise to emotional dullness. Contact, when considered in these terms, would basically tend towards an intrusive and defensively penetrating experience in terms of the associated unconscious fantasy. The feeling of possession, although essentially subjective, would seem to govern in this economy of psychic dynamism.

However, research into attachment and early development has shown something different: it is the quality of the relationship with the mother,

and not the quality of the separation, that seems to facilitate or hinder the construction of masculine identity (Fonagy, 1996). In this sense, Diamond (2004, 2009, 2017) assumes that the child is capable of condensing both identificatory processes. And so, instead of just highlighting the cut of separation and emphasising the polarity of choices, we can conceive of the child as being able to take advantage of the shifting of identity transformation to mobilise a phallic function, knowing how to place it at the service of contact with a different reality. It is a connection and communication link, which demonstrates the ability to tolerate incompleteness and the restlessness of discovering the strange, respecting otherness, and an awareness of vulnerability. Figlio (2024) contends that it essentially stimulates a depressive position which is oriented towards reality and relationships, characterised by hopeful fertility and with a 'seminal' quality. In this way, the desire and pleasure of possessing the object can be transformed into an instrument or differentiated mental function, capable of promoting the opportunity for discovery, creating connections and intersubjective encounters with the potential to have an impact on one's own internal world. This means that from the same moment can emerge the cut, characterised by intrusiveness-penetration, or a caesura, which favours communication and creative construction.

I think that potentially both solutions co-exist, accessing different pleasures, albeit sometimes contradictory and/or conflicting. The pleasure of dominant possession and/or, the creative encounter of discovering the Other[1], while simultaneously discovering oneself through the relationship with otherness. It is from the internal organisation of this coexistence and the dynamic-economic balance of the psyche achieved that an ethical responsibility and the caring function,

[1] In psychoanalysis, the concept of the Other refers to the external world and other people as perceived by an individual. It encompasses the idea that individuals develop their sense of self and identity in relation to others.

of the reflexive nature inherent in the development of the analytic function of the mind, can be effectively organised.

The relationship with the father should be capable of allowing for the internalisation of the paternal imago – representing genital masculinity – in which adaptive and phallic aspirations are integrated with relational and bonding faculties. The phallic characteristics therefore become more pertinent, being organised into more integrated forms of the self that seek complete, flexible relationships and where recognition of incompleteness and the consequent need for the object is present. The paternal imago therefore mobilises the phallic function at the service of contact with reality, understanding of differences with the other, and to develop a true empathetic capacity.

It was in this sense that Dana Birksted-Breen (1996; 2016) proposed the concept of 'penis-as-link' as an instrument of *eros*, challenging the notion of it as an instrument of *thanatos*. It is the mental function of 'penis-as-link' that allows the linking of the parental figures inside the head of the child, signalling the emergence of the Oedipal structure: 'it has to do with the tripartite world of the self in relation to the parents as different yet linked to each other… It involves the knowledge of difference and by the same token the recognition of incompleteness and need for the object' (Birksted-Breen, 1996, p. 650). It allows for the recognition of the parental relationship and both generational and gender differences and their implications for mental functioning. This is in stark contrast to the phallus that does not recognise such differences.

It is the libidinal bond with the subject and its loss or renunciation together with the search for a substitute that promotes the internal movement towards symbolisation, as well as the internal organisation of a paternal function. This makes it possible to bear the separation and the new bonds, and to develop symbolic capacity and thought as a true instrument of internal change. Therefore, identification with the father's

penis is not only structured as having an intrusive and penetrating element but also a binding function between two parts/figures, conceptualising the combined figure.

Changing views of masculinity and authority

The enormous sociocultural changes that occurred in the 20th century relating to the decline of patriarchal societies, and a new and fascinating view of the feminine, allow us to acquire a new perspective on the psychoanalytic 'paternal function' and to look differently at the complexity of the internalisations associated with it. From a sociological viewpoint, the transformations have been immense and rapid. Fathers and mothers, family dynamics, the hierarchical system, professional activities, and social representations of the genders have mobilised ethical, moral and ideological debates from political forces all over the world. These issues were not properly considered at the birth of psychoanalysis. Also, the new advances in technology and, of course, changing world economies have exacerbated the situation. For example, in his book *Rethinking the psychoanalysis of masculinity*, Figlio (2024) seeks to make a significant contribution to a psychoanalytic understanding of the financial crisis and a world deeply marked by mental functioning associated with a toxic form of masculinity, in which reality is neither entirely accepted nor rejected. It evokes the phantastic object described by David Tuckett, which Figlio describes as phallic, grandiose, and capable of providing magical expansive power.

The social and human sciences have facilitated this debate, reporting on injustices and suffering, and promoting deeper reflection of the subject – sometimes driving home a point; sometimes bringing confusion and contradictions too. Changes have been felt in all walks of life including education policy, professional hierarchies, family life, and so on. Even in the analytic relationship, the listening position of the analyst or

supervisor role has undergone significant transformations and challenges.

Until a few decades ago, paternal authority was essentially associated with the power that was attributed to it, sometimes acted in a didactic way, and which could mark relationships in the family structure through repression, coercion, and violence. Within this paternal framework, relationships were organised through Others' responses of submission and/or withdrawal. The authority figure saw the Other as an extension of himself, not separate. Others were at the mercy of his manipulation, desire and even perversity. It meant obedience and loss of individuality, using fear and threats. Historically – not that long ago – the 'rule of kingdoms' mirrored this powerful figure, who was decisive in controlling and imposing limits. This represented the perfect scenario to elicit fear and experiences of castration anxiety, and revenge too. In this view, it is easy to recognise the castrating father, who keeps away any prevaricating incestuous desires, reducing the mother's influence and imposing space for the Other and the law. The castrating father thus makes loss, submission, and fear prevail, instilling a feeling in others of 'having to put up with it', of having to live with inevitable dissatisfaction.

We can also recognise authority over the Other but coloured with more positive associations, different meanings. Thus, we can also find an authoritarian father, capable of loving and caring for the mother, and who offers himself as affectionate and close to his children. He can open up to the world, exploring it, promoting multiple interests, compensating for the introduction of limits, self-control and tolerance of frustration. This type of authority can be trusting and appreciate their responsibility and the independence they have achieved. Understanding this form of authority can be essential for the construction of our own identity. The introjection of a sense of authority, self-confidence and respect for our freedom is used to construct a sense of self-determination and

transformation, as well as for needed self-control of impulsive and/or destructive aspects.

Paternal function in the psychoanalytic process

In this section I have introduced two clinical vignettes – Alberto and Anna – in the hope of demonstrating the complexity of the different roles of the paternal function as well as of the analyst's role as 'the third'. As elucidated in this article both phallus and penis-as-link can coexist in the unconscious world, serving different mental functions. It is in the coexistence of the complexity of roles that it seems possible to develop true mental flexibility, and a greater capacity to deal with external and internal reality in a more gratifying way. This internal position is inherent in the reflexive attitude needed for investigative exploration and access to a differentiating quality of intimacy. It functions as a separating element that creatively reinforces the capacity for intimacy with a different and autonomous Other. This alternative perspective is equally present in the reconstruction of the 'prehistoric' individual – the individual prior to having any experience of conflict or history within the environment. Although the mother-baby combination is certainly necessary to organise a stable and secure internal structure, an exclusive focus on it becomes frighteningly insufficient, as portrayed in Vignette 1.

Clinical vignette 1 - Alberto

> *Alberto is a young accountant, curious and attentive. Fatherless since childhood, an only child, he complained of professional insecurities and difficulties in deepening a love connection, despite easy contact and feeling that he has a good physical appearance. 'For some reason, my relationships don't develop', he initially confided.*

In the early days of analysis, it was very difficult for me to help him shift his concrete speech about himself. Any simple interpretation or comment of mine sounded to him like an inaccessible intellectualisation. He seemed to have the concrete thinking of a psychosomatic, but without any complaints or other characteristics. However, he gradually began to realise the mental barrier he was creating on topics directed at his internal world, which I was trying to propose, as opposed to his great sensitivity to others, to listening and understanding.

This was a fact that I was trying to point out, without any further understanding, by encouraging him to question himself. So, for some time, I had chosen to leave him with only a few of my own elaborations during the sessions, flagging the main emotions that showed up. My words were perceived by Alberto as incomprehensible, strange, and inappropriate. He listened to my words effortlessly, but they left him perplexed.

One day he received a phone call from the landlord of his house, whom he believed would force him to move house. This left him in a strange and disproportionate state of unease and wanting to switch off, even if he had not found it to be such a big problem nor unexpected.

Then, he admitted to me that at home, after the phone call, he quickly associated with the chaotic feeling when, as a child, someone went to his home to report the death of his father in an accident – in reality, he did not retain any other conscious memory of his father's presence. Quickly, in an unusual insight, he realised how the omnipresence of the maternal figure imposed itself on him in his life. This included the pathological mourning of his mother which created an overwhelming feeling of insecurity. This was a feeling with which he fought in the

> *construction of his autonomy, his masculinity and in contact with other women.*
>
> *Although Alberto had previously been prevented from hearing and understanding my words and comments, the accidental contact with the painful consciousness of loss allowed him to suddenly begin to listen to me – an enigmatic other – in another way and to perceive a little of my own language.*

Vignette 1 demonstrates how the practice of the analytic function has implications for different levels of emotional involvement – including intimacy, closeness, spontaneity, emotional intensity and authenticity – for both participants in the analytic dialogue, patient and analyst. A mature intimacy corresponds to triadic functioning, in contrast to a proto-intimacy associated with the experience of imperious contact with the mother's body. As analyst, I sought to use the analytic setting to achieve an optimal relationship between immersion and interactivity. This included listening to and observing: the dynamics of the paternal function of the patient; how I perceived Alberto's understanding of the interpretation; and how he experienced the relational moment. These essential elements regulated the degree of interactivity and immersion of the interventions. It resembled a continual manoeuvring between being immersed in fluctuating attention and the surfacing regression of other levels of internal reality.

As analysts, we must tolerate 'losing' the 'internal setting' (Diamond, 2013, 2017), but create conditions to bring the patient back to presence; this arises from the unconscious collision of the analyst's ambivalence with the patient's own world of unconscious anxieties. The analyst must be able to withstand the narcissistic blows and demands that the patient uses for their own balance. In the case of Alberto, I had to tolerate the inability to be heard immediately by the patient. At the same time, I had to offer myself as an element of connection and creativity with whom

Alberto could identify. In so doing I aimed to organise a third in his own mind, being able to listen to himself and work out his content internally. The pace of this type of transformative work is crucial. The demands on the analyst are perhaps greater as they are required to: remain alert and flexible; understand the multiple languages of the unconscious; withstand not knowing or erring; tolerate narcissistic pains; and maintain their investigational attitude and curiosity to learn.

Clinical vignette 2 – Anna

> *Anna is a young woman who came to me in desperation. She cried compulsively as she felt that she was destroying a love relationship – one that had spanned many years – and she appeared to be destroying this relationship involuntarily, however with great aggression. This aggression was also directed at herself, putting herself in risky situations and sometimes mistreating her body with severe cuts and deep pains.*
>
> *Through the evolution of analytic work Anna associated the violence that had lived in her family of origin with her present love relationship. Her father subjected her mother to domestic violence, instilling a climate of terror in the family, and that led her to cut off relations with her father. Noticing the uncontrollable similarities with dad left her in a tremendous amount of pain and deep depression.*
>
> *During the analysis, she recounted a dream: she was in a factory with her partner, and they realised that in a large room there was a man being tortured by workers. It was an environment of enormous tension. The man revealed nothing, and remained well-disposed and smiling, despite being tortured. Anna was seized by the workers and was forced to also torture the man*

> *with syringes. He continued to resist and laugh. In the next moment she was outside the room, in a car with the man who was tortured. Anna's boyfriend was outside, shouting for her to leave, but also trying to calm her down. She took off in the car at great speed with this man who meanwhile becomes a woman inhabiting a mixed position, half man, half woman. They then proceed to a boat. All the while her boyfriend continues to shout at her, while trying to encourage her to remain calm.*
>
> *She associated the man being tortured with the analyst, but was impressed by the torture/resistance, even though she found in him a guarantee of persistence and a sense of humour in the face of the despair that she often brought to the sessions, expressed through uncontrollable crying. I pointed out the details of this man that she felt firm, as if to direct her to the waters of the feminine. She laughed and commented: 'You won't believe this! For the first time this weekend, I was able to talk to my mother at length. And I experienced a different woman who seemed to have never realised I exist, yet she was capable of listening to me! We felt so close for the first time'.*

It is perhaps in the analysis of cases, as portrayed in Vignette 2, that distortions – sometimes subtle but fundamental – of the paternal functions are particularly well demonstrated, because the place that the subject occupies in the particularities of the phantasmal game of parental relations is revealed to be perverted. In Anna's case, the father does not position himself in the mind of the child as an absent object, nor an object to be hated, nor of being a lost object. The paternal function therefore needed to be reconstructed in the analytic setting through the remaining fragmented debris, or as Green (2009) states: 'the lost father needs to be somehow found within the transference' (p. 45).

The internalisation of the father figure thus arises early with an important function of mediation capable of structuring itself and promoting mental development. In Anna's case, the analytic context aimed to promote mediating the relationship with the reality of the external world, and also mediating the relationship with the unknown found within Anna, herself. Anna then needed new resources that allowed her to deal with the non-thinkable reality, to develop mental contact with the 'different' and to support the narcissistic wound of the discoveries being made.

In Anna's vignette we realise a painful but necessary process of disidentification from a phallic-narcissistic representation of the father figure. The analysis revealed a difficult process that involved the internal separation of identifications that constituted a narcissistic, overbearing, arrogant and violent ideal ego, which did not seem to recognise or value otherness in a couple relationship. Risking change in these cases can result in disillusionment about oneself, exposing oneself to a lack of identity. In doing this, the patient feels that parts of her with which she had identified and valued immensely, which were necessary to her in some aspects of her psychic survival, had been mutilated.

The analyst needs to exist in the patient's mind, in a seemingly passive and intuited way, but not available to be reflected upon. The analyst must wait for the right time to assert themself. Vignette 2 demonstrates that it was necessary for the analyst to allow some kind of fusion with parts of the patient, yet in such a way so that she did not get confused. This dynamic facilitated the emergence of a different object which offered other qualities (does not retaliate, does not seek to dominate, but also does not withdraw). Moreover, it afforded Anna the opportunity to establish identifications with this object; she could get to know the Other, get to know herself and understand that the human dwells in the Other and, potentially, also in herself.

Thus, as analyst I sought to promote in the patient the feeling of being observed, allowing her later on to develop the capacity to understand herself in interactions by identifying with a third position – in an internal identificatory triangulation – essential for the capacity to be observed and to reflect on oneself. The organisation of this third, which we attribute to the organisation of a paternal function that is more capable of discovering otherness and finally perceiving the Other (and the parents as separate entities too), is perhaps what facilitated Anna's discovery of living affective relationships beyond the dominant/dominated binomial. Because Anna acquired the possibility of being a participant in a relationship – of being observed by a third person and being an observer of her different relationship – thereafter she was able to imagine and create different stories around her parental relationship, to discover herself as 'thoughts in the mind of others'.

Final notes

It is my hope that this article has shown that the analyst can give life to the paternal dynamics arising from the patient's unique configurations by tolerating ambivalence and ambiguity. Only with careful consideration can the analyst tolerate being placed transferentially in both places and make use of interpretation with the ultimate objective to *not* produce a direct insight, but to facilitate the psychic functioning of the patient that assists them in reaching the insight. The associations created by the patient make it possible for them to overcome resistance and gain the flexibility that stimulates contact with the 'different'.

In the complex work of analytic intimacy, where the internalisation of the paternal function can be revived and recreated through the figure of the analyst, the subject seems to renounce primordial parental images. However, this is done while still using them as identity origins, enabling the development of a sense of temporality and history of their own,

thereby constructing their 'own project' and the objectives of the therapeutic process. In performing this paternal function, the analyst needs to renounce the temptation of 'possessing' the infantile sexuality of the patient. In a similar vein to how their own internal parents renounce the process of infantile sexuality (Perelberg, 2009). The analyst must be neither too fragile nor too narcissistic in order to withstand the patient's criticisms and able to organise themself as an attentive observer, even when they do not understand or understand very little. By holding 'the third', the analytic setting evolves from a transitional state of symbiosis to potential union, capable of reflecting the original location and the differentiating identity of the subject.

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Response paper

Response to Rui Aragão Oliveira's 'Paternal function, masculinity and the introduction of the third: The mind of the analyst in clinical practice'

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In his paper Aragão Oliveira describes the paternal function as an intrapsychic construct; a psychic development which has a structuring role in the mental world of each individual.

The installation of this function is part of a psychic journey from loss to the potential for psychic creativity and whilst it is called the paternal function, it concerns the mental life of both boys and girls – as a 'structure' it is not gendered.

The internal representation of the paternal function sets in motion the germination of a different, separate reality in the primal fusion between the child and the mother in the child's mind. It has an inner psychic quality that has less to do with the real father and his concrete absence or presence. A lovely example of this function is cited by Aisenstein (2015), which shows how a single mother can induce the third element to which we are all subjected. This example comes from a reading of Barack Obama's memoir *Dreams of my father.* After his father had returned to Kenya, Obama was brought up by his mother who had to get up at 4 a.m.

to make him do his homework before she went to work. He probably resisted this. His mother asked him whether he thought she enjoyed waking him so early, then pointed out that she had no choice.

Reading this paper reminded me of Freud's (1913) earliest ideas about the psychic significance of the father in the inner world. In *Totem and Taboo* he posited in our ancient prehistory a story of the murder of an all-powerful narcissistic father by an original horde of brothers because he had ruled through terror and possessed all the women. The murder was followed by guilt and remorse as the brothers both loved and hated their father. Now that he was out of the way they found a new problem to contend with – they all wanted the women to themselves. To prevent their own destruction through violence they instituted a law against incest, forbidding sex with their mothers and sisters (Perelberg, 2013). This prohibition represents the beginnings of the foundation of society. The killing of the father represents the renunciation of violence and the installation of the law against incest.

In contemporary psychoanalytic theory, as Aragão Oliveira describes in his paper, the paternal function is not the representation of an actual foundational murder but rather as a primal potential in the psyche of the conflict between limitless desire and a natural limit from which a third position can emerge (Aisenstein, 2015). As Green (1995) describes, on a primal level, the father represents a third term: a separator of the mother and the child before he is an Oedipal father, an object of desire or a figure arousing destructive rivalry. Inhibition – of the limitless power of the drives – is at the heart of the primal identification with the father.

I thought that Aragão Oliveira's heading, *From loss to creativity*, was beautifully put and thought about, what is felt on a primal level so profoundly, as loss. The child meets the third – the father in the mother's mind – and with it comes the experience that there is a limit to the satisfactions he can have with the mother. If you remain in the 'bliss' of

the fusion with the primal mother, or in thrall to the seductive or overstimulating violent mother, you will not thrive – it will become a terrifying psychic catastrophe. This pertinent idea will be illustrated in my case description which follows shortly. This limit is a psychic boundary of safety out of the fusion with the mother and allows for something essential to develop – the link with the two parents and a relationship of tenderness. This loss of fusion is felt as an absence, is painful and has to be mourned over and over in many iterations. The psychic reality of separateness, the limiting acknowledgement of the difference between the sexes and the generations are all experienced as painful narcissistic loss which, through the work of mourning, can be transformed into a renunciation of the demand for limitless desire.

These tropes of parricide, remorse, guilt and renunciation – sacrifice – underlie many stories from religious narratives to works of literature. And, in the internal world of individuals is a source of suffering brought into the consulting room by our patients. This leads me to my associations with the section of Aragão Oliveira's paper concerning the clinical setting. I share a few thoughts and end with a short clinical vignette of my own.

Our psychoanalytic technique flows directly out of our theory. The frame and the setting serve as a holding structure, a boundary of safety and a limit. A safeguard against incest and violence. This structure is the paternal function. It is a limit for both the analyst and the patient: the limit of set session times in the week, the rule/law of abstinence and the asymmetry in the relationship between the patient and analyst. The analyst is the guardian of the treatment where intimacy can be safe and all wishes and desires of the patient can be expressed both sexual, sensual, aggressive, and hostile, with love and hatred. No other relationship offers this.

The third term is also represented within the internal setting of the analyst holding in mind their internalised theory and technique. Termination is the final expression of the paternal function in the clinical setting. Both therapist and patient must renounce their desire for their relationship so the symbolic chain of the generations can be perpetuated (Delourmel, 2012).

Clinical vignette

N is a man in his late 40s who had contacted me in a terrified, shattered state and profound despair. He was only able to leave his home to see me after receiving intensive anti-depressant medication. N had some terrifying realisations set in motion by the exposure of his and his partner's lifestyle. This included the exposure of sexual practices, contact with the underworld of prostitution and limitless parties with drinking and drugs. He had been abandoned. N said that on the surface of all of this he would have described himself and his life as golden and in control of it all but for there being in him always a sense of anxiety.

His traumatic realisation was, in his words, 'the ugliness of it all' – the contempt, blame and hatred emerging from himself and his partner and the shame and the depth of the despair he felt. The pain of being alone was crushing and unbearable and he felt totally abandoned and in terror of losing everything. Now that he was also a father, he could not bear repeating the contempt and hatred so thinly disguised between his parents during his childhood. He had avoided thinking about it but, now, clearly saw was being repeated between his partner and himself.

I thought of N as a clinical example in response to Aragão Oliveira's comment on limit cases, that is, where there is a tragic failure in the development of the paternal function and a perverse solution is instated in the inner world of the subject. For N his golden, perverse solution was

his reckless rejection of any boundary of psychic or bodily safety and the refusal of any limit. Rather, taking a position of invulnerability and omnipotence, was a desperate attempt to ensure his psychic survival in the face of danger of his own pain, hatred and terror, and in the face of the danger of the other from whom he was not psychically separate. But this solution inevitably will not hold and when it shattered it threw him into an experience of painful psychic catastrophe.

N has struggled violently with the drug-like allure of his physically beautiful but cold mother/lover/partner, where it feels to me that when he is in this state there are no internal qualities to her, but a desire for the possession of her body and fusion with her. This is the shadow in his inner world of the painful failure to separate psychically from the over-arousal of his violent and seductive mother in persistent hostility with a distant authoritarian father.

In his third return to treatment with me: it had been a long and hard road and a six-year interval between his last treatment. It is very difficult for patients such as N to enter into a therapeutic relationship and receive help because the other, the analyst, is a dangerous other and in the patient's experience the connection between the self and the other is the 'glue' of hostility and unbearable anxiety. This is a precarious psychic situation in which it is difficult for the patient to use the analyst, in Winnicott's terms, for holding and containing. This also means that intervals between sessions, weekend breaks, or any form of waiting are difficult to bear and are responded to with panic, rage and despair. There is no internal sense of safety, security, care and continuity.

I will describe below how this internal psychic state of affairs came alive in the room between N and me. On his return in crisis, he had difficulty with the frame – the holding structure and boundary of safety of the paternal function. He sent me desperate texts between sessions and on weekend breaks. I saw him four times a week face to face. He would

arrive early for his sessions, ringing the bell eight minutes before, then five minutes, and then three minutes, violently banging the doors on his entrance and exit. Over time and many repetitions, he found a sense of safety and reliability in my analytic stance of absorbing and acknowledging his rage, frustration and panic while at the same time holding the boundary of the frame with regard to the limit of time.

As our work together progressed and the storms of the very early days of the therapy were weathered, N discovered, new to him, a few experiences with me of real warmth and comfort. In relation to this I'd like to echo Aragão Oliveira regarding his comment of the psychic risk of change in these cases.

I have hope for this patient – on this very long road we will have to see how long he stays the course. With this in mind and to conclude I'd like to quote from Eizirik (2015):

> *We must maintain the hope for change and transmit this hope even in cases of multiple trauma where the real father has failed while continuing to believe in the patient's primary psychic potential whose role of induction can be activated/reactivated through the analytic relationship* (p. 344).

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Article

Playing with 'the father' in memory and desire: Exilic thirdness in transitional space

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Abstract

This paper is located as a transitional object in transitional space, that while exploring the play of paternal function, itself serves to provide paternal function in a process of becoming. It is an account concerned with intersectionality, a situated subjectivity, and the psychosocial in a South African context. It employs theoretical plurality to speak to how we construct meaning, position authority, and navigate otherness with thirdness, and to explore how a broader situated experience might be an influence on how we approach the therapeutic endeavour. Maternal and paternal orders are conceived relationally, to present thirdness as the interplay of primary and secondary process. As such, it offers a perspective on paternal function that is not only the bearer of paternal law and separating third, but also a facilitator of space and play that operates in the spaces between. To do so, the narrative traverses the author's experience of disability and trauma. The paper proceeds to focus on the father as a specific paternal functionary, and given his precarious grounding in masculinity and the patriarchy, posits an exilic

consciousness as an orienting perspective to navigate states of marginalisation, dislocation, incompleteness and precarity.

Introduction

Thirdness, or paternal function, is an integral part of psychoanalytic practice, and a critical developmental achievement. Being neither fixed nor static, where we place thirdness shifts within session, along the length of a treatment and with experience across a lifespan. It is uniquely positioned according to therapist and patient and in relation to the nuances of a particular therapeutic relationship, and is employed differently within and across various psychoanalytic schools. Developmentally, while paternal function (thirdness) comes into play for the child at the dawning of the capacity for representation, it has been present and active long prior to that, in the minds of their caregivers and in the social and physical structures into which the child is born. As such, paternal function can be said to always reflect what has been, and as pointing towards what is to come. Because we ask something with it, and it asks something of us, we need to ascertain how we are positioned within it.

Paternal function implies a particular vantage, a point of view. As representation, it ushers in a distancing (separation) to allow a way of looking in on something, in order to reflect on and give meaning. And yet, we do this in a time historically located that not only allows us to deconstruct authority, but has made us aware that all knowledge construction must be considered to be provisional, contingent and strategic (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). Our world increasingly asks that we hear the voices on the periphery. This requires, when translated as depressive position functioning, the capacity to hold the tensions between the centre and the margins, between enlightenment notions of a stable, unified identity, and ‘post’ conceptions that ‘deconstruct

naturalism, disarticulate identification, and relativise normativity' (Corbett, 2001, p. 319). Further, as psychoanalytic practitioners we understand that the psyche is not stable, linear or clearly and consistently articulated. Rather, we hold to being driven by unconscious wish and desire, to experience being haunted, and to the unreliability of memory. In what ways does this inform the construction of thirdness? More specifically, what do I want with thirdness and what does it want of me given my lived experience? I engage these questions with memory, desire and some things I found and picked up along the way on a journey, to illuminate something of the play of paternal function, in order to make sense, and as it turns out, to engage with and to find, a father.

Thirdness is crucially implicated in separation, and can thus be seen as having a transitional function. In line with Green's (2005, 2009) use of Winnicott (1971), I situate 'the father' in potential space, in the arena of play – language being 'the heir to the first transitional objects' (Green, 2005, p. 47). As this writing too is a transitional phenomenon, it must similarly be understood as being replete with contradictions, paradox, and irony. The paper therefore asks, contrary to the traditional 'paternal' symbolic, that you tolerate the slipperiness of its signifiers, its fluidity, and its irresolution. How this informs technique is related to psychoanalytic ethics asking us to wrestle with abstinence and the suspension of pre-judgement (Thompson, 2004), and is tied to the notion of psychoanalytic space being an openness to absence, to the 'potential area of play and field of illusion' (Green, 2005, p. 57). And because we practice (and write) in a context where we are continually rubbing up against otherness, the challenge then is to resist the 'will to power', the tendency towards knowing, when confronted by the anxieties that otherness induces. In order to negotiate what that throws up, we may feel drawn to constructing reflective positions with exclusive binaries, or otherwise, by collapsing the notion of difference and in so doing erecting authoritative platforms that restrict flow and subjectify. In counterpoint, holding transitional space allows for the use of illusion, the possibility of

movement and for attuning to and bearing our doubling; to forever becoming and being undone in the process.

In line with earlier efforts (Burkhalter, 2015, 2021) and with thirdness thus positioned, my aim is further to extend the notion of (counter)transference beyond what we might traditionally or exclusively recognise as a regression – transference as the evocation and repetition of the archaic unconscious and of formative relations. Given that the therapeutic relationship resides in social context, transference also carries the history of place and the reverberations of the physical spaces and community in which it plays. In a sense, I am advocating for a psychosocial thirdness, not intended to undermine or reprioritise tradition but rather to add to. Because 'therapy' and 'analysis' play in the interchange of beings in space and time, it impels us to think about how our particular lived context weighs and impinges, often unconsciously, on how we think and practice. Clearly, how I have constructed my thoughts here has everything to do with how my internal objects are arranged along with unconscious desire, and in relation to the desire of the intimate socius of my formative beginnings (Laplanche, 1997). But I take this aspect to be commonplace and well considered within psychoanalytic theory and praxis, and I ask that it be sufficient to be assumed here.

Situating paternal function

I will be drawing considerably from outside of psychoanalytic theorising. These thirds in my relationship to psychoanalysis are offered to triangulate my 'primary' relationship, and to show how such ideas might resonate with psychoanalytic thinking. They serve to emphasise thirdness not only as difference, but as other – given that I assume their being unfamiliar. I do so to give form to the idea that however demanding, disruptive and unsettling moments of bumping into

otherness may be, they can, with curiosity and engagement – to which the therapeutic relationship attests – yield creative growth encounters. And yet, when confronted with the unfamiliar, we often stop listening. Otherwise we subtly retranslate otherness into a language, a theory for example, that brings it inline and renders it familiar. At best we remain inquisitive and through close listening, allow for the expression of this otherness to reveal possible points of recognition and convergence. Consequently, the more I look at it the more I see paternal function as an elaboration of maternal holding, and maternal function as mediated by the 'father in the mind of the mother', with their differences having a lot to do with how we arrange them relationally within theory. Psychoanalytic practice requires that the dream, representing the order of the child, the free associative reverie of the maternal order, and the interpretative function of the paternal order, must learn to play together (Bollas, 1999).

Following on the notion that pre-oedipal and oedipal dynamics are continuous and interrelated (Green, 2005; Ogden, 1989), we may read the distinctions in positioning between them to set up a false dichotomy. We are born to and nurtured by bodies that we experience through the senses, and we are also born into a symbolically constituted social world that predates us. This arrangement, constructed across the human lineage, shapes the boundaries of what we can be. If we think of this through the language of desire, we may say that we come into being through how our wanting unfolds in relation to what is wanted of us. Thirdness, through signifying our subjectivity, might then be understood as being constituted through both the sensorial and the symbolic orders, as employing the acquired capacity for representation to navigate the dialectics of these orders. We assign thirdness the 'paternal function', because the 'father' is the necessary third in relation to the 'mother'/infant dyad, and as such, 'he' has an observing function, present or imagined, that stands outside looking in (Green, 2009). Paternal function looks on the space between the indeterminate, the indefinite

being-in-oneness on one side, and the finite limit and difference of the symbolic[2] on the other. We might call these poles, those of maternal and paternal law respectively.

I will, later in the paper, situate paternal functioning in a particular father and specifically, with one who identifies as a man. Being a cisgender, heteronormative story, it is not intended to essentialise, but is offered rather with the hope that the reader finds enough room in it and in response to it, for the play of their own positioning and desire, allowing space to drift with it, to transpose, transfer, translate, transition or transgress. Being of transitional space, its paradoxes need to be respected. To that end, I make my way with the idea of language as a signifying practice, where the meaning of 'practice' involves 'the acceptance of a symbolic law together with the transgression of that law for the purpose of renovating it' (Kristeva, 1986a, p. 29). I insist on this because the path we set out on, what we intend, expect and assume, can never be read as given, and so I require paternal function that can hold its own doubling, and that can go off-road.

The writing here carries the additional dimension of not only playing with the notion of paternal function, but also of having served as paternal function in a particular way: It has worked to traverse trauma. The original paper was largely written over three months, during which time I had intensive chemoradiation therapy for a head and neck cancer. The paper was to be presented at a conference a month after the end of treatment. I disclose this because having been constituted in the performance of specific work, the paper must inevitably carry in its bones something of that experience and what it asked – albeit too close for me to reflect on at this juncture, other than to contain the fear of losing the

[2] According to Lacan (1977), the symbolic order is the ultimate guarantor of meaning, while also, the order of symbolic fiction, and is related to notions of paternal law, the phallus and castratedness – all touched on or alluded to here but not developed further.

capacity for representation. In so doing, while the ideas presented here predate the paper, they coalesced with the treatment in a way that made how they worked for me very evident. As such, the writing served as a transitional object, both found and created, inherited and conjured, in order to among other things, help carry me from somewhere towards someplace else. They are ideas fashioned under pressure and animated by a deeper sediment disturbed, in order to illuminate the play of thirdness as I needed it. Namely, a thinking function that augments and stretches maternal holding and containment, to make sense of and to orientate within self-experience, in close proximity of the real. As Czeslaw Milosz's (2006) poem portrays:

> *To find my home in one sentence, concise, as if hammered in metal. Not to enchant anybody. Not to earn a lasting name in posterity. An unnamed need for order, for rhythm, for form, which three words are opposed to chaos and nothingness.*
> (p. 197)

The constructs gathered here shelter and give form to a habitus. They play in the interchange of past, present and future, through fantasy and materiality, and through the work of filling absence with objects that have accompanied and grown with me along the way. I re-emphasise, that I do so by following a path that holds to representation and symbolisation having embodied origins, where drive and the symbolic, and affect and idea, are intimately arranged as different, but not distinct (Kristeva, 1986b).

Representing the senses

To follow up an earlier statement, our (post) Enlightenment time lacks the founding of universalised, totalising theories, and this leaves us having to find grounding without foundation. In a context where our

reference points are provisional, and where we need to account for the substantiation and goal of every step we make, it is arguably aesthetics that become paradigmatic (de Solà-Morales, 1997). 'In contemporary experience, the aesthetic has, above all, the value of a paradigm. It is precisely through the aesthetic that we recognize the model of our richest, most vivid, most 'authentic' experience in relation to a reality whose outlines are vague and blurred' (p. 59). Our aesthetics speak from the periphery. They are seductive, implying rather than constituting how we apprehend reality, which makes it all the more important that we recognise them in order to render them thinkable[3]. This way of acknowledging our subjectivity and how we construct meaning is important because much of what we translate in the room is shaped by the currents of how we are affected, how we feel – on the effect that the patient's communication has on us, rather than exclusively on an analysis of the content of what they say (Green, 2005).

The psychoanalytic relationship generally accepts that we engage each other as bodies with sensorial minds as well as embodied intellect. And so the paternal functionary must be sensitive to pre-symbolic communications, to the effect of the semiotic, that archaic layer of drives and their articulations that survive the work of repression by the symbolic (Kristeva, 1986b). Affect and how we sense things is often subsumed by the language of rationality. Self and other, parts of self, and body/mind, are difficult to disentangle. We know from therapeutic experience that we are, as Brennan (2004) asserts, porous and permeable, and that affect circulates to speak energetically between bodies in space. The things we feel in the room we do with a totality of bodily sense, and this is crucial to how we bring thirdness to mind and into play. The perceptual world, not unlike that of language and symbolisation, comes to us linked,

[3] I am drawing an association here to semiotics and to the poetics of representation (Kristeva, 1986a; 1986b), to the evocations of the maternal order, and to how these dimensions speak to both memory and desire.

connected and ordered, and as 'givens of sense' these associated perceptions 'give sense', namely 'orientation and meaning' (Lingis, 1996, p. ix). And so language, the body and affect, are not distinct entities, but rather related in a circularity that is mutually co-constituted (Ayouch, 2017). I am positioning maternal and paternal function in that reflexive dance.

This reading of the perceptual world alerts us to how affect, emotions, and their movement between bodies are situated, and further, that they often have a pre-existing place within the social imaginary (Ahmed, 2004/2014). In other words, we read bodies in context. We are informed and shaped by stepping into and performing the social repertoire of a perceptual matrix, by what we recognise or associate with, via the senses. As such, when we 'feel the room', we are also reading the perceptual matrix which conveys, among other things, the racialised, gendered, sexual and class givens of a particular context. This being a personal story, its writing must be understood to be shaped by these 'givens', 'my' gender, sexuality, education, class, age, culture, whiteness, and so on – and more recently, the poke of mortality. Such situated perspectivism is increasingly being theorised within psychosocial orientations to psychoanalysis, and consequently, generating extended notions of (counter)transference (Flax, 1990; Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Layton, 2008). And further, because this composition emerges in contemporary South Africa, it must be understood as of the postcolonial, within post conditions that are forever becoming and yet inevitably of what has been (Hook, 2014). It is bound to a history of cohabitation and contestation along disputed frontiers, among their shifting contours and with the inescapable, ongoing, rubbing up of otherness, wherein we try to find ourselves and each other [4] (Burkhalter, 2021). This is my home (habitus),

[4] We might draw an analogy here to the human psyche, antagonistic unto itself and bound to the dynamics of 'afterwardsness' or 'nachträglichkeit' (House & Slotnick, 2015).

and as such, must be considered to be sown into the text. Nuttall (2009) tells us that to inhabit such spaces of perpetual transition, leans on the improvisational, and requires 'conceptual categories which embrace social velocity, the power of the unforeseen and unfolding, and a concept of the social as experiment and artifice versus order and contract' (p. 156). It asks paternal functioning to navigate performances that are, if we add the postcolonial context, 'fundamentally ambiguous, fluid, and modifiable even when there are clear, written, and precise rules' (Mbembe, 2001, p. 129). There is here the evocation of the transitional, and of play.

And closer still, this is a Jozi story. It comes into being from within a sprawling metropolis of migrants who, as diverse, restless, resilient and creative, easily lawless and opportunistic, navigate the collisions and contestations that mark the being of this place. And as with all other modern South African cities, Joburg was designed to be divided against itself (Bremner, 2010). To live in such space is to breathe an atmosphere of vibrant uncertainty, need, greed, nervous tension and unstable meaning. I highlight this because '[c]ities as works of imagination… [as] structures of affect and producers of atmosphere' (Nuttall, 2020, p. 267), become 'constellations of enduring affect' (Brennan, 2004). Place reveals the world through moods that weigh upon us in ways that are noumenal and often resistant to thought (Lingis, 1996). They are not thirds as we might normally attribute, and yet they press on us, they present and represent, shaping how experience is translated and brought into light in any given situation. I am aware that the city is alive on these pages, woven into the fabric of what it asks and what it lays down as its maternal and paternal functions[5].

[5] Similar to what is inferred in the notion of the 'brick mother' (Trotter et al., 2023), and more broadly, inspired by Mbembe (2001).

What is it that you want with this?

Returning to more conventional thirdness, our first caregivers come to us bearing the mark of Oedipus. They are laced into the social order of the symbolic and the demand of paternal law. Parental functions (including those of the therapist), come with a teleology in mind, which is often subliminal (Laplanche, 1992). By that I mean that the functions come not only with an ask, but with a destination in mind, something seeking resolution, and that is always in the service of an aim – the aesthetics of what we think is a good life, the idea of what is a useful intervention, or the right way of being. You have an intention when you say something to your patient. And yet, across psychoanalytic theory, what paternal function looks like in theory and practice is different whether one is aligned to the maternal turn theories of Klein, object relations or attachment theory for example, or the more paternal theories of say Freud and Lacan. They all emphasise thirdness and the paternal differently, which is reflective of how theory is constructed around what is considered important developmentally, and what is considered therapeutic; albeit often paradoxically and ironically.

To use Bollas' (1999) example, where Kleinian theory is primarily focussed on development in the maternal order, in practice, Kleinians tend to be penetratingly interpretative. On the other hand, Lacanians, who privilege language in theory, might go an entire session in suspended reverie and not say a word[6]. And if you read paternal function as being the work of an actual father – 'of whatever gender' – a review of the psychoanalytic literature adds to a separating third and to thirdness as representation, the notion of paternal function as the facilitator of affect management and a place of psychic safety, thereby emphasising

[6] Understanding that the relationship is more complex than is stated here, including that Kleinians also value the structuring function of language, and that Lacanians are wary of the indoctrination and suggestibility of the analyst's desire (Birksted-Breen & Flanders, 2010).

thirdness as something that regulates, contains and secures (Davies & Eagle, 2013).

Understanding that our relationship to theory is transferential, we might well ask why we privilege one way of aligning these parental functions over another. In *Figures and their Functions,* Bollas (1999) makes the case that our allegiance to theory is an oedipal story. How we affiliate speaks to something about the anxieties we carry around belonging, difference, exclusion and rivalry. This lends itself to a tendency to want to align with one side or the other, even to the point of wishing to be rid of our rivals. So what we want with paternal function points to how we desire and how we identify. Even when we speak it as thirdness, what we have actively done is neutered something about the position of father as third; which is not arbitrary.

Lucas

I came to fatherhood with the birth of our first child, Lucas. Lucas was born in trauma, which left him with severe cognitive and physical disability – namely cerebral palsy, and for a long time, intractable seizures. Disability is a broad and heterogenous category, but in Lucas' version it meant that he was among other things, unable to walk, talk, see, or take care of himself. He had no 'language', and was in many ways always infantile. Our care of him remained largely in what we would understand as the realm of the maternal. While he felt difference and he felt pleasure, unpleasure and pain, we never knew what he thought, as he only had rudimentary capacity to represent it. He lacked the capacity to symbolise his experience and was as such, outside the realm of the paternal.

Lucas was many things to us, and while I do not want to reduce his being to disability, I focus in on this aspect to serve the purpose of the paper

and to illustrate how for his mother and I, his disability brought loss. It introduced difference and absence in a jarring and traumatic way, leaving us with a distinct sense of otherness in the world (Harvey, 2020). Among the things that Lucas brought us was the paternal law of Lacan's Freud, in both the 'name' and the 'no' of the father (Lacan, 2013). With disability you are located in society as other to the order of things – the 'name of the father' placing you in a generational lineage within language, culture and society**.** Within this and under the sign of disability, you become the carrier of dread and pity, you disturb and unsettle, and your path is misaligned. Secondly, the imposition of the 'no of the father', a castration that sets an immutable limit, is something which you are powerless to change. You wrestle with its insistence because you are in a period of magical thinking, of negotiating and investing in yearned for possibilities. You do so in the context of being trapped in mourning something that has not died, which, moreover, it still asks and provokes hope. The danger is that this orientation becomes hardened and fixed, exposed to the abyss and to falling into that which evokes the abject (Harvey, 2020) – a misery, bound but unattached, free but ungrounded, where melancholia stands as a substitute for the object in an enactment of despair, rather than its representation (Kristeva, 1982).

But limit, if navigated, can begin to surface a functional boundary, and I think that the acceptance of that boundary eventually freed something generative, opening space to play more freely. We understand that it is only safe to play if you have boundaries – the frame, the rules, the fence – otherwise the boundaries themselves become the zone of play, and which is an anxious space on the borderlines, lending itself to the perverse. The acquiescence to that boundary – ideally a mourning that is symbolised – instituted a degree of separation that allowed me to rework my position in relation to Lucas. I needed to (re)find myself as a man in the world, with adult want and desire outside of unending, recurrent care, as mothers do when they wean, when their child can no longer satisfy their desire. And so I began to write, trying to write myself out of

disability, to be able-minded and to speak to a life beyond. The work of writing, the emergence of intellect from the senses and the gathering of scattered thought, suggests that paternal function in this sense was about finding and writing myself into being with more mobile subjectivity.

During this period, when Lucas was five, our second child, another boy, was born. What then slowly began dawning on me was the question of what it meant to be father to a boy. I didn't feel I had much to go on. The patriarchy, masculinity and men in society – in which I am implicated – didn't leave much to trust in, other than as a point of reference to oppose. I grew up within Apartheid, where the privileges of positioning it afforded me were complicated, questionable and disturbing, but in my spaces not clearly framed. What was asked by the social order felt confusing and illegitimate at the very least. Growing up within the authoritarianism of Christian National Education (CNE) left me with a strongly ingrained aversion to rules, to law and to authority. I could not trust what I had inherited and, I must add, that I was born to parents who were recent immigrants and not acculturated, and who reared me with a lot of room to work things out for myself. Later, my professional training found me being cultivated within the maternal turn and object relations, by women, to find myself looking for a 'father' in Winnicott.

More especially, I felt I had no experience of being a father. Parenting Lucas for five years revealed not much difference in the functions provided by his mother, myself or his caregiver. We parented relationally with our bodies, through the senses. And being perpetually pre-oedipal, Lucas never read me through gender, nor differentiated me under the sign of the father. If, as Freud (1939) put it, the father is dependent on a narrative for his being, he never came to find or identify me as such, and I was unsure of locating that narrative in myself. Later, reading contemporary gender theory left me feeling that, in important ways, Lucas was not even gendered. To the extent to which gender is constructed, independent of sex, he could not self-identify, nor could he

represent or relate to the world in gendered ways, which then meant that in a certain sense I did not have a son, I had a child. This was convenient and necessarily functional, involving an elaborately theorised defensive position that threw up a screen in the face of pain, loss, and lack. If we extend this idea further, it is a reminder that 'trans' theorising resists, and perhaps re-envisions, 'Oedipus' as it is traditionally framed.

Writing led me to another paternal sign, a PhD, in order to explore fatherhood. Given that I imagined the distinction between father and motherhood to lean on gender, I focussed on the interface of masculinity and the experience of fatherhood; but not paternal function. In retrospect, this project too became a transitional object, a deeply personal 'found-created' object, guided by flow over structure, and in which I was never sure if I was finding theory to speak to experience or whether theory was guiding and generating that experience. Given that it leant on the autoethnographic, it is interesting to reflect that the entire project has no overt reference to disability at all. And yet, looking back, it is interspersed with a haunting – the problematisation of all positioning, the elusiveness of transcendence, the ever present spectre of abjection – that weaves through it. It pointed to an unfinished mourning and to a realisation that I was not going to be able to get away from that. Only later did I recognise that despite having written about what it was I wanted years prior to starting the PhD – in *Writing for special needs: The importance of the real relationship (*Burkhalter, 2010) – what this project was asking for was a way of navigating disability and incompleteness, within myself and the world. I was looking for a way of thinking and being that might make me fitter and more agile within those givens.

Channelling Winnicott, Eigen (1985) states that in order to make something generative out of the catastrophic, out of the experience of uncertainty and the discontinuity of being, one needs faith in the intuitive belief in something built on the continued renewal of good in the face of bad – namely, hope. This maternal residue, one's orienting idiom

(Jemstedt, 2002), is the ground on which paternal function must play. It is in the coupling, in the interplay of affect and idea that we are afforded the possibility of finding better ways to bear our anxieties and insufficiencies and through which to articulate our desires. This coupling is evident and resonant in a comment I came upon attributed to Vaclav Havel, that hope is a 'state of mind... an orientation of spirit… not the conviction that something will turn out well, but [rather], the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out' (Havel, as cited in Heaney, 1995, pp. 4-5). The orientation of hope to spirit is something we might assume to be of the maternal order, while the addition of something making sense speaks of the paternal – the co-conceived intersubjectivity of making sense of the senses and the sensual, and to how the semiotic is assembled to shape symbolic form.

Paternal law disrupts the primary attachment and then offers a compensatory belonging, and because it both dislodges and secures, its functionary needs to account for loss. Paternal function should ideally facilitate transition and through that, the elaboration on an emerging subjectivity or new configurations of self-experience. Locating paternal function within transitional space and play, speaks to how we elaborate on absence in order to navigate the liminality of loss and becoming, in the movement away from and towards, along uncertain outcomes. 'Absence', writes Green (2005), 'is potential presence, a condition for the possibility not only of transitional objects but also of potential objects which are necessary to the formation of thought' (p. 57). It speaks then to how we come to gather and hold, in the play of thinking, the tensions between points of tightness and looseness, closeness and distance, self and other, tradition and innovation, and so on.

Winnicott (1971) tells us that the antithesis of play is coercion. Given the traditional positioning of the 'paternal' in the social imaginary, the father as paternal functionary is well placed to assume that he mandates the law – 'he' being 'our first negotiation with authority' (Eddé, 2019). We all

want to know, and are drawn as such to the seduction of authority. Uncertainty and sitting in spaces between, while surprising and exhilarating, will also bring anxiety. And for this dilemma we have paternal law to root us. However, if not alive to counterpoint, the notion of the law can become fetishised as dogma, a fixation that carries with it the insistence to repeat, with the leverage of coercion. We tilt towards this when, regardless of how it lands, we insist on a particular therapeutic interpretation, or more broadly, when we get caught up in trying to (re)solve the problem of living, in order to avoid living the mystery of life, in its pluralities, its otherness, and its attendant anxieties**.** Living with disability will amplify this struggle with lack and uncertainty. Consequently, the experience of disability is prone to being plagued by the uncanny – 'unheimlich' (Freud, 1919) – the visitation of dread and horror that makes what is otherwise experienced as familiar and even welcome, unsettling and frightening (Harvey, 2020). Paternal function must under these, and in other less dramatic, provocative or perhaps common circumstances, sit within its tensions, and hold them, without seeking resolution.

Imagining the exilic father

I have been dancing between paternal law, paternal function and the paternal functionary, which are different but related things, and turn now to put these steps to a father. Within psychoanalytic theorising, the father has tended to be paradoxically positioned as an 'absent authority' (Freeman, 2008). He is either commonly excluded, as in object relations theorising, or otherwise assumed, based on patriarchal underpinnings, as the bearer of the symbolic; 'He' who brings paternal law (Nobus, 2002). Both perspectives are at odds with the father's contemporary role as a parent. To speak to this, I situate the father as paternal functionary in a particular way, by using the notion of the 'exilic', to lay out a thirdness sensitised to loss, dislocation, uncertainty and 'post' possibilities. I offer

an extract from an earlier paper (Burkhalter, 2015, p. 290) to introduce how I position this father developmentally:

> *... the experience of watching my three-year-old son blissfully lying with his mother on a bed, the two of them entwined, in semi-undress, still and peaceful. They folded into each other's bodies, seamlessly and with familiar ease, as if one. I looked on at some remove with pride, joy, and awe but also in longing, and soon found myself tearful. I did not want to disturb or jeopardize their being, nor did I at that point consciously feel rivalrous. I was taken instead by how sublime and immaculate an image this was and of how protective I felt in witnessing them. As I watched, unnoticed, I slowly began to feel deeply, and lovingly melancholic. I wanted to preserve this vision, in part for my son, for whom I felt an impending loss in knowing that his pleasure could not be sustained and that his time there was already long on the wane. But I also wanted to preserve an image that allowed me the poignancy of knowing that I had also once been there, while recognizing that I would never get to be there or to have that experience again. I became aware that where I had experienced the feeling of something similar subsequently, it had only been a fleeting and mediated approximation. After some time I found this image difficult to bear and I left the room. As the morning progressed I caught myself slipping between the grief of what felt to be a lost familiarity and doubtful wonder as to whether I had ever had much of that experience myself to begin with.*

This experience echoes Green (2009), who writes that the father is an observer on the scene of mother and child who, on 'witnessing the scene, experiences a nostalgia for something forever lost to him that the child and the mother have the privilege of enjoying' (p. 28). We might recognise a range of possible responses to this situation, for example,

disconnect or rivalry, abandonment or the need to assert authority. Preferably, the father's paternal functioning is best served if he accounts for this loss and does something constructive with it. He must crucially do this both for himself and the triangulated others in the mix. And yet, the father is dependent on and facilitated by how he, as a being, is positioned in the mind of the mother, and further, by how he is located within her own oedipal backstory (Green, 2009). And for the child, he 'stands', as Green (2009) puts it, 'as an enigmatic third whose function is not evident… whose love can always be questioned, answered only by still another question, unarticulated, about the relationship between the parents, [about what it is] that is going on between them' (p. 44). We find in this the experience of dislocation that ultimately initiates the child into a more separate subjectivity. And so paternal function introduces us not only to being curious about the other, but to what it is to be decentred, displaced, and impinged on by an otherness that pre-exists us.

What we inherit is among other things, paternal law, which is employed within the patriarchy to 'legitimise' the father's claim. The law he brings, by way of 'Oedipus', is considered to be a necessary injunction to limit both desire and the idea that we can have it all and have it on our terms. And yet equally, we must acknowledge that any movement that aims to liberate, to find ways of being ourselves, must also challenge the normative order of things. In holding these tensions, paternal function must then be both something that asks and limits, as well as something that enables by way of bumping up against otherness. Containment in this way, gives form and viability to our desire, to what we want. It must hold space safe for both the free play and the regulation of affect. The paternal function, as Green (2009) locates it, is that which looks on in order to hold 'the space between a listener and a reflector capable of resisting destruction' (p. 32).

But the father, both as a man and in his role, is 'inherently' vulnerable to feeling ungrounded. Part of this is tied to the fact that he too was born to

(m)other, and that he now returns to renegotiate his past through facilitating this for others – 'the child the father of the man' (McCarthy, 1990, p. 3). Hence, this vulnerability is often buttressed by a fetishisation of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. To clarify, most of us will get to feel the power of the mother, which is ideally, the securing bedrock that possesses the capacity to 'move and [to] stall a life' (Rose, 2003, p. 152). We are made of her body, and then given our prolonged immaturity, are sustained by it through a time of absolute dependency and helplessness. And while these origins are common to all genders, only one kind of us will ever have the possibility of having that power in turn (Phillips, 2011) – womb envy being a somewhat faded footnote in psychoanalytic theory. For boys, growing up and leaving the realm of the maternal, means normatively that they give up on both having their mothers and of being them. These are losses considered to be among the fundamental underpinnings of 'masculinity' (Diamond, 2015).

And while the mother is proved by the senses, the father is dependent on a hypothesis (Freud, 1939), further suggesting that his position is inherently questionable. This prompts Scruton (1992), ironically reflecting Freeman's (2008) critique referenced earlier, to posit the father as found asking whether the 'only ground of [his] command is that [he] commands it' (p. 88). And if we add masculinity to the picture of fatherhood, we find some consensus in the field of anthropology that identifies masculinity as being performative, something to be acquired, achieved and initiated into, and moreover, that has historically always been in a state of crisis (Solomon-Godeau, 1997). 'Masculinity' must therefore be considered to be an anxious condition, initially displaced and then grounded in an identification with the father who is always questionable, who is a rival and open to challenge. The boy, on leaving his mother, does not easily root a new sense of belonging.

In his introduction to Edward Said's (2003) *Freud and the NonEuropean*, Bollas, referencing Said's exilic consciousness, wonders whether our

movement from the maternal to the paternal order isn't usefully thought of as exilic. For Bollas, the exilic is a notion that speaks to the transience of time and representation. To be exilic carries a contrapuntal perspective, it is to have a simultaneous awareness of multiple and often divergent vantage points of home and belonging (Said, 2000)[7]. Developmentally, we never replace or reclaim our primal home, and at best, carry it with us in modified form on the move towards forever becoming. Given the vulnerabilities of the father just mentioned and Green's positioning of him as nostalgic, the father lends himself to being read as exilic, and as such, is arguably well served by an exilic consciousness (Burkhalter, 2015). Said's (1993, 1994, 2000) exilic consciousness is an intellectual stance that is not to be equated with the heartache and dispossession of actual material exile. It stands rather as metaphor to capture and give form to an epistemology of displacement, and to locate an unhoused, nomadic and migrant intellectual space. It emerges as a postcolonial construct, positioned to dislodge and critique the imposition of dominant, familiar and normative assumptions that reside in power, while simultaneously understanding that one will always inevitably be of what and where one is from. It may be evident to the reader, if you recall my earlier points and how they were positioned, that finding Said at this juncture was no accident.

One's habitus, that comforting assurance located in the notion of familiarity – the inhabiting of a home, including theoretical affiliation – is both a locus of belonging and that of othering (Hook, 2014). Phenomenologically speaking, we might say that we cohere to the forms we commonly feel and find around us, in order to domesticate and consolidate that which we otherwise experience as unsettling and disturbing (Lingis, 1996). As a construct, 'habitus' creates a notion of

[7] Said is primarily concerned with ways of knowing, by what we identify with and belong to, and to how what we include and exclude on that basis is dependent on perspective.

origins and thus shapes what gets read as recognisable and generalisable, defining and habitually locating what is held to be inside and what is out. In counterpoint, Said's 'travelling' exilic consciousness is more fluid, and speaks only to specific beginnings rather than essential ontology. It is paradoxically about being both located and displaced, familiar and estranged, apart from and part of at the same time. The exilic sits, in other words, within the dialectical tensions of belonging and estrangement. In so doing, it is a consciousness well placed to engage in the struggle to work through loss and change, and to the crosscurrents that the doubling of our inherent otherness brings. This sense of the uncanny, carrying here a resonance with the earlier gaze on disability, might also be read into the contemporary unsettling of normativity more generally. More specifically, to this writer as father, it then further applies to the dislocation of whiteness (post)apartheid, and to the 'troubling' particular to life on 'the Seam' in South Africa (Burkhalter, 2021).

The exilic position remains open to both the journey and a reflection on that journey (its construction and deconstruction), and to the evocations of the past, and in that, to insisting on not reverting to the consolations of a new belonging. It plays, to quote Eddé (2019), in the 'back and forth of a future assembled under the gaze of a past that is also in motion' (p. 15). It offers a critical vantage from which to engage and critique (Burkhalter, 2015, 2021; Stevens, 2018), mindful of (counter)transference, resonant with deferred action and retroactive modification, and alive to what it means to inhabit troubled states of uncertainty and precarity. In other words, it is a psychosocially situated analytic third, replete with the problem and possibility of memory and desire.

Looping back, Said's construct also resonates with the possibilities carried in the play of Winnicott's (1971) potential space. If thirdness, in Green's terms, is the 'representation that binds and symbolises relations within and between the intra-psychic (centred on the drive) and the

intersubjective (centred on the object)' (Green, as cited in Urribarri, 2009, p. 57), then, Green argues, 'the boundaries between the internal world and the external worlds are flexible if, and only if, an activity of play is at work' (p. 31). Transitional space being an intermediary area of experiencing, both inner and outer, collapses when one part of that duality becomes dominant for too long (Winnicott, 1971). Might there then be use for a paternal function that, positioned as exilic, serves as a facilitator of play in transitional space to mediate the 'ask' of maternal and paternal law – and, which sometimes as a transitional object, would need to be made available to be used as such (Green, 2005)?

Conclusion

I have offered my experience of paternal function, composed here in the contrapuntal, by laying out some of the thinking that has served me in trauma and in the touch of otherness in context. I have done so while also reflecting on the process of finding this function. Along this path I have considered it interesting to think of theory, of representation and articles of meaning, as transitional objects, as things both found and created. I have positioned this sense of self to be constituted in the tensions between what we bring and what is put onto us, between the subjectivity of authorship and the subjectification of authority. It follows to suggest that an aliveness to our 'coming into being' would include remaining open to transitional process and the dialectic between the sensory and representation. So when I speak and write, I am both following a path that was laid out for me, and following the trace and scent of my own desire – understanding that my desire is never simply my own (Laplanche, 1997). With this I hope to have illustrated that one's objects of signification are both found and (re)constructed, inherited and (re)discovered, in a dance that is 'mutually implicative and reciprocally determinative' (Mills, 2018, p. 4). I turn to Seamus Heaney (1998) and a stanza from his *Glanmore Sonnets*, for what speaks to the relational

reflexivity I am trying to convey. It is about the finding of words. For context, note that his reference to Oisin Kelly is to the stone sculptor:

> *Sensings, mountings from the hiding places,*
> *Words entering almost the sense of touch,*
> *Ferreting themselves out of their dark hutch –*
> '*These things are not secrets but mysteries,'*
> *Oisin Kelly told me years ago*
> *In Belfast, hankering after stone*
> *That connived with the chisel, as if the grain*
> *Remembered what the mallet tapped to know* (p. 164).

In closing, I return to my late son Lucas, and to an experience of fathering that I interestingly only remembered on his passing. It reminds me now, and with some sadness, how easily he could be reduced by assumptions. We always had to carry him, and one did so in a way where his head rested on our shoulder. Carrying him was not only to transport him, but was the way we would hang with him while going about doing the things we needed to. At some point he started to bite, very painfully, the shoulder of his mother and caregiver. It became a problem. One day, as he and I were going about in this way, he bit me. So I bit him back. He stiffened in response, startled. I then relaxed him and we continued on our way. I assume he must have registered and remembered my bite in response, and perhaps heard something in the tone of how I talked him down ('you see, some things bite back'), because as I was carrying him around the next day, or perhaps some days thereafter, I began to feel his teeth baring on my shoulder. He was applying pressure, but not biting. He then suddenly released the pressure and burst out laughing. We repeated this sequence of tension, release and shared laughter, until we exhausted the game. Thereafter, his biting stopped.

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Article

Through the mother's eyes: A crochet of thoughts on the maternal and paternal

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Abstract

In this paper I engage with some of the ideas presented by Burkhalter in his article – *Playing with the father in memory and desire: Exilic thirdness in transitional space* – in which he journeys with the reader into the intricacies of his particular relational response to, and understanding of, the concept of paternal function. Responding to his invitation to readers to adopt a subjective stance in relation to his writing, I have gathered a mix of associations and thoughts as they emerged in my reading of this highly complex and layered offering, focussing on three themes which are especially salient for me. I engage initially with the meaning of paternal function from my perspective, both as a mother and clinician. Through this enquiry I contemplate the relative absence of the mother's subjectivity in the historical mainstream psychoanalytic canon, and I consider the increasing visibility afforded maternal subjectivity when mothering is regarded through the lens of recognition theory, as posited by contemporary relational theorists. In particular I focus on the experience of loss which I suggest is intrinsic to the experience of mothering. My paper then shifts from the maternal and

paternal within the familial enclave, to the global stage where I contemplate the idea of authority as seductive, considering the notion of a perverted paternal container, activated in service of authoritarian and malignant leadership. This discussion offers a springboard from which to engage the paper's third and concluding point of focus, that of 'hope', which Burkhalter describes hope as 'maternal residue', differentiating between the wish-fulfilling optimism which is accessible through the denial of reality and the idea of radical hope, grounded in depressive functioning.

Introduction and orientation

This paper was initially constructed as a response to Thomas Burkhalter's paper, *Playing with 'the father' in memory and desire*, delivered at the 2024 South African Psychoanalytic Initiative (SAPI) conference, held in-person, in Johannesburg. It is an expansion on my musings which coalesced through the reading and discussion of various iterations of the paper, as we prepared in tandem, through both writing and conversation, for the conference. As respondent, I endeavoured to narrate some of the associations and thoughts that I had in the reading of the paper, in which Burkhalter engages both playfully and skilfully with his relational response to the notion of paternal function. Whilst the essence of my response is preserved – remaining true to the relational exchange between presenter and discussant as it unfolded at the conference – in this expanded paper I engage further with some of the themes which were particularly provocative for me. The task of responding meaningfully to a deeply complex, layered and evocative offering has been challenging. There is much in Burkhalter's paper that I have not responded to, and yet which remains lodged in my mind, perturbing and evoking. To my mind, Burkhalter's paper has made an over-arching contribution that it engages the reader and listener in intellectual, academic and clinical ways, whilst also provoking a

subjective response that then invites a conversation between writer and reader, speaker and listener that extends beyond the moment of reading or listening. Whilst my paper is written in this subjectively engaged tone, I have also sought to scaffold it theoretically through both historical and current writing. It is very much a response which is inflected with my own bias and subjectivity, as clinician-who-is-also-mother. The paper begins in the style in which it was originally written, as a conversation with Burkhalter, following his delivery of his paper, as a way of conveying the dialogic tone of the engagement at the conference. Thereafter the paper shifts to a more formal style of writing.

In conversation with the author

'Having the opportunity to read and re-read your paper in preparation for the conference has been a privilege for me. Your writing is evocative and inviting, it is also provocative – as is your way – and I could hear your voice as I read it; hearing it spoken, too, is powerful. So many nuances have been covered in this paper; you are playing with the father, and also with the fluidity of the maternal and paternal, and in so doing you are giving both a tutorial on some core psychoanalytic thinking from a relational perspective, as well as critiquing the mainstream, particularly in our local context, which you do gently but emphatically. Boundaries and space are both evident, and throughout you are seeking to contain – but also open up – thinking and musing. Throughout, I am drawn to the theme of the transitional space, of playfulness, and in the reading of it, I thought that the prefix 'trans' felt so relevant, in all of its myriad meanings, both in analytic work and also in contemporary discourse, in how it implies movement and fluidity in both sense and meaning of words, concepts, theory, and identity. This is a multi-layered offering, which, I am quite sure, has provoked and evoked thoughts and feelings in both your listening and reading audiences. You have also emphasised the relational in the way in which you engage theory and make it your

own, and in letting us know that the writing of this paper has served, for you, a paternal function in what it offered you in the writing of it, as you have navigated and managed your cancer treatment. In your paper, you ask the question, 'What is it that you want with this function?', and you suggest that your reader's response to, and use of the paternal function speaks to how we desire and identify, and you ask us to be playful with our responses, as you have been.

In framing my response, I refer to your referencing of Bollas' (1999) description of the psychoanalytic endeavour as being an interplay between the 'dreaming' of the child, the 'associative reverie' of the mother/maternal, and the 'interpretation/penetration' of the father/paternal. When considering how I read your paper, and in noticing the thoughts and affect it sparked, I found that I was drawn not into the paternal, nor the interpretive, nor the active nor critical stance, but rather I was compelled into the associative reverie of the maternal. It was not unlike the state of mind I might at times fall into when listening to a patient in a session when, in response to the particular relational mix between us – or as Ogden (1994) describes it, because of our co-created intersubjective analytic third – I settle in to a 'listening to' and feeling of my own stream of consciousness as it tracks and reacts to the dance between us. This state of reverie, as Ogden (1997) reminds us, is a term which resists the hard edges of definition and is defined more by what it describes than by what it means. It refers to "the ruminations, daydreams, fantasies, bodily sensations, fleeting perceptions, images emerging from states of half-sleep, tunes, and phrases that run through our minds, and so on" (Ogden, 1997, p. 568). I found in the reading of, and listening to your paper, that I was compelled into a weave of associated thoughts, feelings, and self-insights, all of which cannot possibly be separated from conversations you and I have had in the past, nor from our particular relational web. Ogden (1997), again, tells us that the content of reverie is always both a personal and private experience, as well as a jointly created

one. My articulations to follow are therefore both deeply subjective, as well as inter-subjective'.

Through this mother's eyes

The idea of maternal or paternal functionary as being ungendered, is increasingly common in contemporary discussions of maternal and paternal function (Davies & Eagle, 2013). In other words, maternal function is not considered exclusively as being the purview of a (female) mother, nor is paternal function by necessity relegated to the (male) father. Rather, the function of the maternal and paternal can be fulfilled by a parent-of-whatever-gender. McWilliams (1991) refers to the necessity in psychoanalytic technique for what she calls 'mothering and fathering processes' (p. 527), which sit alongside one another and do not correlate with the analyst's gender. She uses the terms maternal and paternal 'in an archetypal way, as in the images of Mother Earth and Father Time. The former with its implications of closeness, nourishment, infinitude, and eternality, and the latter with its overtones of separateness, responsibility, mortality, and the limitedness of existence' (McWilliams, 1991, p. 527). And yet, in spite of this proposed theoretical fluidity of identity, this invitation to engage with mothering and fathering as unfettered by the constraints of a gender binary, I felt myself to be unequivocally gendered in relation to Burkhalter's paper. From the outset, I felt positioned in counterpoint to him. Whilst he advocates for fluidity and playfulness – the dance – between the maternal and the paternal, Burkhalter closes his paper by positioning himself firmly as paternal functionary, as a father, as a man. Similarly, as much as I am persuaded by the promise and possibility of potential and transitional spaces – particularly when it comes to aspects of identity – I found throughout the paper that I was rooted in my own positioning as a (female) mother, as a woman, standing opposite or maybe alongside, Burkhalter's own self-identification.

The idea of paternal functioning is a deeply challenging one for me. If I consider it from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, or if I look at it through the lens of a therapist, I can make use of it. Diamond (2017), amongst others (McWilliams, 1991; Davies & Eagle, 2013) emphasises the crucial role of the paternal in the development of mature object relations, asserting that healthy triadic functioning – infant-with-mother-and-father – is the indispensable foundation for mature intimacy. This makes sense to me; I recognise the imperative of the paternal function in the development of the child in relation to its mother functionary, and I acknowledge the essential role of thirdness in development, in the acquisition of symbolic functioning, and in the launching of separateness. My therapist identity facilitates a vantage point which is intrinsic to thirdness, it offers me a safe harbour – I can, more or less, keep my *self* out of it.

But, throughout Burkhalter's paper he reminds us of the relationality of theory, of the (counter)transference we inevitably have in response to it, and as such, rather than reading his paper as a therapist, I found myself engaging primarily as a mother, and I am also responding, in this paper, as a mother. And it is as a mother that I cannot help but experience a subjective and muddled entanglement with the idea of paternal function. This entanglement evolves from my own experience and positioning as the 'white, single mother' of a 'black, adopted child'. In the writing of it, I am aware that each adjective used, in its function as descriptor, carries with it a penetrative thirdness, puncturing with separateness, the mother-child dyad. Diamond (2017) notes that even in the absence of an actual father/paternal figure, thirdness is ever-present, existing psychically within the mother's mind. What this means for me, but also for my child, is that there has always been in mind the real, but absent and unknown father, sitting alongside, in parental dyad, the real, but absent natal mother, as well as the non-existent fantasy father – the one my child imagines and embellishes, in the absence of any circumscribing information. In other words, there has never been an illusion of just the

two of us, and neither has there been the internal experience, for either of us in relation to the other, of Mahler's (1974) notion of symbiotic merger.

Pine (2004), in elaborating on Mahler's (1974) conceptualisation of what she termed the normal symbiotic phase, reaffirms the centrality of ideas of boundarylessness and undifferentiated 'ness' which sit as central to the (illusory) experience of oneness which epitomises Mahler's mother-infant psychic merger. Slade (Pine, 2004) in personal communication with Pine, emphasises the developmental necessity of this stage: 'The deep human connections that originate here, unlike any later connections fettered by reason and objectivity, may well be central to the deepest love, intimacy, and connection in ways that are unbounded and inarticulable' (p. 515). It is this phase which sets the stage for successful and healthy negotiation of separation-individuation, the point at which paternal function, or thirdness, enters the narrative in order to launch separateness, and to facilitate the negotiation of the triadic functioning which is central to healthy psychic development. In the history of my relationship with my child, this phase of symbiosis is painfully complicated, as has been the experience of paternal function, of thirdness. In some ways, in my child's story, I am the penetrating third. From the start, too, there has been an experience of the presence of thirdness and of its insertion between myself, a white woman, and my black child, in multiple guises – political and social – penetrating in multiple ways. It is this subjectivity, fringed by a profound sense of loss, which has nuanced and muddled my reading of and listening to this paper on paternal function, and it is this subjectivity which textures the three themes which I wish to speak to.

The invisible woman

The first theme refers to the vignette in which Burkhalter movingly describes the scene between his son and the mother, intertwined on the bed. A scene from which Burkhalter feels excluded and yet one of which he has intimate knowledge because he, too, has been there and, as a son himself, he too has lost, as his son will lose. Burkhalter describes this very beautifully and allows us access to his deepest subjectivity. What is not, and perhaps cannot be, part of his commentary is the subjective experience of his son's mother in this scene. He does not comment on the impending, and in fact, ongoing loss for her, of the inevitability of penetration of the union by the father-of-whatever-gender, by the thirdness which facilitates development. And of the experience of transience and concomitant loss which is both an essential and an inescapable part of the experience of mothering. From the first moment of 'being', loss begins, and shadows the mother's experience throughout. The entrance of the paternal – of the third – ensures this. Such is the process of the development of selfhood, which brings with it separateness and difference. It brings the thirdness which threatens the symbiotic sanctuary of mother-child. I am reminded of a patient with whom I worked through the birth and early years of her son's life. As she became aware of the increasing development of his self 'ness' and therefore separateness, she began to mourn the pending loss this meant for her. In one session she said to me, 'What happens when he is six, and starts to be his own person, what happens if I don't even like him?' It reminds me too of Gibran's (1984) prophecy, which speaks to this inevitability of separation, and to the loss of the mother-child dyad:

> *Your children are not your children.*
> *They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*
> *They come through you but not from you,*
> *And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

Gibran's astute recognition of a mother's pre-ordained experience of loss is poignant, and more so when considering the scarcity of attention which is given to the subjectivity of the mother historically in psychoanalytic writing. My thoughts in response to the mother-child vignette in Burkhalter's paper prompted me to search for analytic writing which might speak to a mother's experience as she lives through and witnesses her child's increasing individuation and separateness. I was not able to find any. This apparent scotoma mirrors a broader trend in the historical psychoanalytic library, described by McKay (2019) in a paper in which she reimagines maternal subjectivity. It is a cultural trend which is also noted by Demetrakopoulos (1992), in her commentary on Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, where she speaks to the ways in which a woman's individuality is inevitably surrendered in the service of mothering, where she becomes defined (by the demands of the task, and also by the world) only in relation to the child she is nursing, not in relation to herself. Demetrakopolous' (1992) observation speaks to how the social expectations of motherhood render invisible the subjectivity of the woman who resides within. McKay (2019) describes the widely assumed cultural construct of a mother who not only surrenders and sacrifices, when necessary, but for whom self-sacrifice constitutes the quintessential, and much lauded expression of maternal love. McKay refers to Winnicott's vision of the non-impinging, good-enough mother, the mother who takes care not to allow too much of her own 'idiom' to intrude on the infant (Bollas, as cited in McKay, 2019, p. 166). She further notes that psychoanalysis has contributed significantly to the societal expectation placed on mothers, whose worth is measured by the degree to which they are able to forego their own needs, 'carefully

avoiding intruding into the private space of her child's imagination, and dutifully letting go to allow her child to move away' (p. 163). McKay (2019) suggests that Benjamin's (2018) theory of mutual recognition, grounded in relational psychoanalytic theory, offers an alternative view of the mother, moving beyond the infant's 'use of the object' (Winnicott, 1971) to a re-positioning of the mother as subject, alongside the infant as subject. In this conceptualisation of the mother-infant dyad, there is a more inclusive recognition of the subjectivity of the (m)other. In considering my response to the mother-child vignette described by Burkhalter, I would suggest that the lens of recognition theory (Benjamin, 2018) allows for a more complete representation of the lived experience of the mother – including the experience of loss – rendering it more visible, and allowing it to sit alongside the experience of the father's loss, as he acknowledges his exclusion from the intimacy of the symbiotic dyad.

The perversion of the paternal

A second theme on which I would like to elaborate is the notion of paternal function when it becomes corrupted in the service of malignant narcissism. This enquiry emerged for me from Burkhalter's comments on the seductive nature of authority, of paternal law which offers absolute certainty, a yardstick, and safety in knowing. He notes that when the word of the father is absolute and all-knowing, anxiety is eased, but what is traded is the curiosity and exhilaration which comes with not knowing, as well as the potential for creativity, replaced by dogma. Burkhalter reminds us of Winnicott's (1971) assertion that the antithesis of play is coercion, of omnipotent control. These words prompted me to think of the disturbing number of examples we have, both locally and globally, of the rise of authoritarian leaders who inspire significant numbers of idealising disciples. They are leaders who position themselves as omniscient, claiming expansive knowledge, and proffering promises

which scavenge off fear and uncertainty. These leaders wield paternal law in destructive and annihilating ways, and yet they draw a following because they offer phallus-like certainty and dominance in the face of anxiety and insecurity. In making sense of the cult-like rise of such authoritarianism, Zienert-Ellis (2020, as cited in Diamond 2023 introduced the concept of 'perverted containing' to describe the populist social movement known as 'Trumpism', named after the most current and florid personification of protofascist leadership. Diamond (2023) explores this concept by considering that the root of perversion lies in the wishful use of defences which allow for the repudiation of reality in the service of alleviating primitive anxieties. He suggests that authoritarian leaders, such as Trump, fashion themselves as father figures safeguarding a family of followers, 'while offering seductive solutions to primitive longings and accompanying anxieties' (Diamond, 2024, p. 99). In so doing they offer a dizzyingly compelling refuge from a complicated and threatening external reality. Loewenstein (2018, as cited in Diamond, 2024) asserts that Trump seeks to 'debase the very idea of the president as ... [the nation's] symbolic father. ... who abides by the Law' (p. 102). In so doing he (and other leaders like him) corrupts the paternal function, creating for his followers an idealised, split-off universe in which obstacles are eradicated, and good objects are attacked. In this perverse world, there is an absence of an alpha functioning, symbolising paternal third (Diamond, 2024). The container is perverted, and what is created is a reciprocally beneficial, closed system, preserved through attacks on thinking, in which the paternal object offers to his acolytes the fantasy of an omnipotently controlled illusion of reality, in exchange for the fuelling of a voraciously ravenous narcissistic grandiosity.

Hope springs eternal

While writing, I am aware that this depiction of the state of global leadership is sufficient to sink us into despair, and yet Burkhalter compels us to believe that even in the face of catastrophe there is always the possibility for creativity and hope. In concluding this paper, I wish to pick up on and explore this theme of hope – described by Burkhalter as maternal residue – which feels particularly resonant for me.

Burkhalter references Eigen (1985) who suggests that the transformation of the catastrophic is made possible through an intuitive belief, a hope, in the potential for renewal in the face of destruction. What comes to mind is Freud's (1957) short essay, *On Transience*, in which he describes his conversation with a young poet friend who, whilst on a walk together on a glorious summer's day is unable to enjoy the beauty of their surroundings because he is already anticipating its demise in the winter months. Whilst Freud notes that it is the nature of transience itself which deepens enjoyment of the moment which is sure to pass, he also mirrors Eigen's (1985) belief in the possibility of transformation following destruction: 'as for the beauty of nature, it will come back after every winter's destruction in the next year, and this return may be called eternal in proportion to our lifespan' (p. 305). Freud, curious about his friend's inability to savour beauty in the moment, for fear of loss, concludes that this must be an 'emotional rebellion against grief' (p. 306). He goes on to write that the conversation with his friend took place in the summer before war broke out 'rob(bing) the world of its beauties' (p. 307). He describes the war's destruction of the beauty of the landscape in particular, as well as of the works of art it destroyed as it ravaged Europe. But Freud (1957) ends his piece on a note of hope, suggesting that a completed process of mourning creates the possibility for the restoration of objects, both internal and external:

> *We know that sadness, as painful as it may be, ends spontaneously. When it has renounced all that has been lost, then it has consumed herself, and then our libido is freed again, insofar as we are still young and vital, to replace the lost objects with new ones as precious or even more precious. It is to be hoped that the same will be true for the losses of this war. Once grief is overcome, it will be seen that our high esteem for cultural riches has not suffered under the experience of their frailty. We will rebuild everything that the war has destroyed, perhaps on more solid ground and more enduringly than before* (p. 307).

Here Freud is referring to the capacity for hope in spite of devastation. As Burkhalter contends, not the hope which is tied to a particular outcome but rather 'the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out' (Havel, as cited in Heaney, 1995, pp. 4-5). Nelson (2006) deepens the enquiry into the nature of hope, suggesting that hope is relevant only when there is uncertainty of outcome. She draws on Klein in distinguishing between the hope of the paranoid-schizoid position, which is a longing for 'a magical, omnipotently controlled object', in contrast to the hope grounded in depressive functioning which 'requires great courage, a longing for an all too-human, irreplaceable object, outside of one's control' (p. 5). Lear (2006) differentiates too between wish-fulfilling optimism, which is wedded to outcome, and what he terms *radical hope* which 'anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it' (p. 103). He sees such an example of hope in the infant who reaches out for nourishment from a source of goodness, without possessing the concepts to understand what they are reaching for. Similar to Klein's definition of depressive functioning hope as portrayed in Nelson (2006), Lear (2006) identifies courage as central to radical hope; courage allows for a moving forward into a future which is undefined, the pathway towards which can be grasped only retrospectively. In many ways, radical hope, a manifestation of courage, is akin to faith. It is this

manifestation of hope, and its concomitant courage, which Nelson (2006) suggests is intrinsic to the process of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, a process which, at the outset, has no known or knowable destination, and yet it is one which we embark on, nonetheless.

In conclusion

It is this concept – hope – which links the various themes in my paper – hope that in the face of personal, social, environmental or political ruptures or catastrophes, a process of reparation and transformation is possible, even in the absence of knowing how or in what form that transformation may unfold. I suggest too, that it is this manifestation of hope, an ingredient of courage, which Burkhalter has modelled so skilfully for us. In the crafting of a paper in which he shares with his reader some of his own life's narrative – with its vicissitudes, its share of pain, loss and uncertainty, and also of triumph, and in the development of his thinking, in his playfulness with the topic – he affords us an experience of creativity in the face of catastrophe and uncertainty. And he invites us to believe that even in the darkest of times, hope springs eternal, and there exists the potential for regeneration, for repair.

In her poem, *'Hope' is the thing with feathers*, Emily Dickinson captures in simple phrasing, the profound essence of hope, indomitable and unceasing in its constancy in the face of any storm:

> *'Hope' is the thing with feathers*
> *That perches in the soul,*
> *And sings the tune without the words,*
> *And never stops at all.*

This depiction reminds me of one of the first patients with whom I worked as a newly qualified therapist. Chantelle's existence was one of

impenetrable darkness. She was deeply and profoundly depressed, an internal state of being which she embodied in each session in her stature, her impoverished speech, her appearance – her clothing, her hair, her make-up, always black. One day she arrived for her session, characteristically dressed in a long flowing black dress which completely covered her, yet I saw that she had, for the first time, painted her nails, a luminous yellow.

'I notice that you have painted your nails today, a striking yellow'. Chantelle looked for a while at her hands before lifting her eyes to briefly hold mine, 'That', she said, 'is the hope'.

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Book review

Unlocking the nature of human aggression: A psychoanalytic and neuroscientific approach by Adrian Perkel

Routledge, 2024. ISBN 9781032590059

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> *And man, whose heav'n-erected face*
> *The smiles of love adorn, –*
> *Man's inhumanity to man*
> *Makes countless thousands mourn!*
> (Burns, 1786)

Using the extract of a poem by Robert Burns, the author of the book *Unlocking the nature of human aggression: A psychoanalytic and neuroscientific approach*, Adrian Perkel – a senior psychoanalytic psychotherapist practicing in Cape Town – highlights the central and complicated tenet of aggression that he unpacks in the book. He addresses the perplexing and seemingly contradictory position on human violence, namely that aggression as a drive not only seeks to serve humans' needs but also has the potential to create the risk of immense danger to humankind. Throughout the book, the author engages with human aggression using a variety of lenses, including psychoanalytic and neuroscientific. He seeks clarity about the aim of aggression in a clear

and essential manner. He also shows how the drive to aggression may be perverted and how this can play out not only in individuals and groups but also geopolitically.

Perkel develops his hypothesis by mapping and integrating theories from various disciplines. In Chapter 7, towards the end of the book, Perkel conveys his hope that in reading the book there has been a fair share of 'theoretical heavy lifting' done. This is no understatement as the book weaves together multiple theoretical vantage points to consider aggression as well as to bolster the position he eventually proposes. Perkel uses elements of Freud's work as the psychoanalytic base for the development of his thinking. From the outset of the book the author refers to Freud's theory of aggression as incomplete and based on theoretical observations. He quotes Freud (1920) who had asked that we 'be patient and await fresh methods and occasions of research' (p. 338). This is what the book seeks to build on – and does so successfully. Perkel also incorporates other seminal psychoanalytic thinkers such as Donald Winnicott and Alfred Bion as well as contemporary psychoanalytic and neuropsychological researchers such as Mark Solms. In addition to the inclusion of psychoanalytic and neuropsychological theory, Perkel employs research from other disciplines to flesh out his central development. Perkel utilises methods and theoretical research not yet available at the time when Freud was considering his theory of aggression. In this sense Perkel adds further and important content thus giving substance to Freud's notion that his theory of aggression was incomplete.

As previously mentioned, the text draws on research from different disciplines for various purposes. An example of such research is that of Eric Kandel, a neurobiologist and psychiatrist, who studied the Aplysia, the sea slug, and discovered the vital role of synapses in memory and learning. Perkel explores this research and links the significance of these findings to the development of human aggression. The role of exposure

to stimuli and its impact on memory is fleshed out and linked to the development of a human's subjective response to perceived threat. Herein lies an important component that the book emphasises: individual subjectivity and the role of perception in human aggression.

Chapter 6 provides another example of unique research drawn on by Perkel to 'weave a tapestry of theory and science'. He includes work done by Thomas Boyce, a developmental pediatrician, who comes to the interesting and whimsical conclusion that children fall into one of two different categories: the 'dandelion' or 'orchid' child. Boyce uses these categories to emphasise the conclusions of his research which revealed that some infants are primed to be more sensitive than others. These infants he named 'orchids'. Perkel uses this research, which is beyond the strictly psychoanalytic field, to highlight the importance of subjectivity and how it is central to the interpretation of adversity and the development of the aggressive drive of individuals.

Perkel's lived experience is also considered in the book when he reflects on the apartheid era in South Africa. In a critical way he reflects on victim/perpetrator dynamics in the country at the time and how these dynamics affected his own life history. This personal approach brought to life the theoretical concepts considered in the text and is both evocative and useful in inviting deeper understanding.

While I was reading the book I found myself considering the various layers that the reader is invited to reflect on. The reader can find themselves drawn to reading as a clinician, reflecting from a personal position as well as being drawn to read with the geopolitical in mind.

The clinician who reads the text is invited to consider the patients' internal experience of aggression in a multi-dimensional way: its neuropsychological origins and make-up, the psychoanalytic drives and principles that colour the patient's aggression, the original aim of

aggression, and the perversion of this aim. At times I wondered if it may have been helpful to illuminate, through clinical applications and case illustrations, the ways in which the theory is apparent in therapeutic settings. Toward the end of the book Perkel does, however, overtly reflect on clinical practice and suggests that there is space for clinical application of the theory and further writing in this regard.

Reading the book will, in my view, also lead to self-reflection since there is a strong emphasis on the subjective 'I' in relation to human aggression. Moreover, there is a tacit invitation to reflect on one's own experience of aggression and, I suppose, at best consider ways in which an individual grapples with aggression in their own life.

Lastly, and importantly, the reader is drawn into the geopolitical arena to reflect on historical, and indeed, current geopolitical concerns around war and genocide. The book invites the reader to consider, through the lens it provides, the ways in which the devasting geopolitical aggression is a result of psychological roots. We live in a world where news bulletins and social media inundate us daily with the realities of war and genocide. Given this reality, the book offers a pertinent lens to aid in understanding the development and role of aggression as well as the potential perversion of the aim of aggression. The publication of this book is timeous, and it is an important contribution in the 'present' where aggression appears to be engulfing the world.

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