

Paradox and play

The uses of enactment

I originally intended to write one chapter on play and ended up with two, one emphasizing the shifts and overlaps between enactment and play, the other (Chapter 6) the role of negation. In this chapter I tried to play with and put into the pot ideas cultivated in quite different theoretical territories. It was mostly written from a place of uncertainty and questions and this makes for some unclarity that may be unavoidable. This chapter is divided into three sections. Part I introduces the idea of accepting paradox, and makes use of Bateson's idea of the double bind, as interpreted for analytic purposes by Ringstrom (1998) who has contributed greatly to thinking about play and improvisation. I discuss how recognition occurs in action through enactment and play, and how we might use the idea of paradox to reconsider the relation of the two. I am thinking here about the movement between enactment and play as parallel to the shifts between complementarity and thirdness. While enactment is known to present dissociated experience in unlinked form, play can allow opposing experience to be accepted in the paradoxical form of thirdness. I consider the developmental origins of the capacity for play and how clinical work addresses deficits in that development. Part II presents a lengthy clinical illustration of some of these ideas; Part III aims to differentiate relational clinical theory from those contemporary theories that emphasize either symbolic or procedural-implicit modes of interaction, by recoupling them. I outline how relational thinking pays attention to dissociation and the forms of intersubjective relating, which in turn informs how we put this recoupling into practice.

PART I. THE PARADOX IS THE THING

My contribution is to ask for a *paradox* to be accepted and tolerated and respected, and for it not to be resolved. By *flight* to split-off intellectual functioning it is possible to resolve the *paradox*, but the price of this is the loss of the value of the *paradox* itself.

(Winnicott, 1971b, xii)

[T]he paradoxes of play are characteristic of an evolutionary step . . . similar paradoxes are a necessary ingredient in that process of change which we call psychotherapy. The resemblance between the process of therapy and the phenomenon of play is in fact, profound. Both occur within a delimited psychological frame, a spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages. In both play and therapy, the messages have a special and peculiar relationship to a more concrete or basic reality. . . . the pseudocombat of play is not real combat.¹

(Bateson, 1972, p. 191)

I will begin these reflections on fostering the movement from enactment to play by turning to the meaning of play in psychoanalysis. Thinking about movement itself is important. Borrowing from Gadamer's (1989) reflections on play as any movement of To and Fro, we might view play as an action that creates a Third by containing the Either/Or poles within a larger movement: tacking Back and Forth to encompass both or multiple sides. The idea of play as "any movement" between opposites, by contrast with being stuck on one side, or locked into a repetitive back and forth between two sides, approaches the heart of the matter. Play is not necessarily jocular or humorous. In psychoanalysis, it above all implies dramatically acting or trying on a feeling or idea rather than being subjected, taken over, in the grip of it.

Ringstrom (2001; 2007), in his seminal work on improvisation and play, elaborated the essence of improvisation in terms of the key improvisational phrase "Yes, And!" which replaces the "No, But." The improvisational method of responding with "Yes, And" puts into practice the idea "Both, And," a version of the Third. The third position being the one that, again, allows movement—in this case, beyond the rigid opposition of "Either/Or" of "My Way or Your Way." The Third of Yes/And suggests a kind of movement that releases us from the impasse that is generated with the action of complementary twoness: the struggle for control of "My Way or the Highway," in which there can be only one reality, one right interpretation. Metaphorically, that phrase symbolizes the idea that there can only be one direction of movement, and by extension, there is only enough space for one mind to live. The Third refers to a movement in which both directions contribute, so that there must be, if not harmony, then at least a coordination of traffic. Play implies freedom of movement between the two.

Enactments in the dyad take on the complementary structure of doer and done to in which each motion is so tightly coordinated that each person's move is pre-determined and controlled by the other. There is no give or (yet another meaning) "play" in the system, no alternation, and no coordinated realignment to adjust to the other.

1 Bateson goes on to say that "pseudolove and pseudohate" in the transference are not real, a statement we might have to modify to make paradoxical: real and not real. Exactly this sense of play as involving the paradox that something is both real and not real was an important effort to formulate the resemblance between play and psychoanalysis.

Here we come to thinking about process, about how the dyadic shift from complementarity into thirdness is paralleled by the transition, gradual or sudden, from enactment into play, with its Both/And cooperative structure. In this transition, the acceptance of paradox plays a great role, for paradox is a form of relationship that does not resolve the opposition by denying one side, or by simply synthesizing. Paradox means entertaining incompatible versions of what is going on, the two directions on our mental highway, each of which seems "true" on its own (Pizer, 1998). As Winnicott (1971b) articulated, to resolve paradox through "split-off intellectual functioning" is to forfeit its value, which is maintaining both sides of what seeks expression.

From this vantage point, we recognize that enactments themselves are paradoxical. They both hinder and further our work, depending upon how we engage them. At the beginning of the relational turn some 25 years ago, an important development was the move into reconsideration of enactments—regarding them not as missteps but as both inevitable and opportune. In this move, as formulated by Ghent (1992) early on, enactments were a kind of live theatre, where the goal is to recognize the meaning of the scenario in order to "demystify some earlier traumatic set of experiences that could never be integrated" (Ghent, 1992, p. 151). It took some work to realize that enactments were hard to recognize precisely because these unintegrated experiences were obscured by the shadow of dissociation which, fell upon the analyst as well (Bromberg, 1998; 2006; 2011; Bass, 2003; Black, 2003). Enactments came to be seen as a dramatization of dissociated self-states, revealing unformulated experience that require us—in the midst of confusion, shame or guilt—to reflect on our own participation, often aloud with the patient (Maroda, 1999; Renik, 1998b).

And here we may accept the crucial paradox that by making dissociation *communicative*, the very enactment that conceals also serves to reveal. As Bromberg put it:

A dissociative mental structure is designed to prevent cognitive representation of what may be too much for the mind to bear, but it also has the effect of *enabling* dissociatively enacted *communication* of the unsymbolized affective experience. Through enactment, the *dissociated affective experience is communicated from within a shared "not-me" cocoon.*

(Bromberg, 2011, p. 21, my emphasis)

Or as Ghent (1992) put it, what is calling for recognition is masked by something that closely resembles itself. "Need masquerades as neediness," (p. 152). The need for a witness to one's pain may appear as the plaint that no one sees or understands what has been suffered. Or the need to assert a truth that was denied and mystified may appear as a conviction that it is being denied once again. In this way the analyst, too, would often be drawn into the dissociation of the "black-washed" need.

The paradox of enactment: concealing and revealing

Notice the dialectic here: even as it prevents symbolic play of the kind psychoanalysis historically privileged, enactment can enable communication by "playing something out." In this sense, enactment itself presents a paradox: it is only a misstep because (parallel to Winnicott's point about destruction) it is liable to be missed—if we fail to recognize it, to work within the drama, to eventually grasp its generative potential (Aron & Atlas, 2015). Despite Freud's early recognition of "acting" he opposed it to the use of language: the metaphor of textual interpretation rather than theatrical participation dominated psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 1998).

Essentially, through dramatization or performance of what cannot be spoken the concealing/revealing action of the shared not-me can be understood to work like dreams. But rather than looking at them from the outside in and decoding, as in original dream interpretation, enactment demands that the analyst work as a participant from the inside out. We must lend ourselves, let ourselves "play a part" as Freud (1905) notoriously refused to do with Dora. The "shared dissociative cocoon" (Bromberg, 2006) incubates the not-me experience—until it bursts its confines so that meanings can be negotiated and symbolized. Play, then, might be seen as a way of making a transition from dissociated to expressive awareness by lending ourselves—"playing along"—without yet knowing its meaning but aware that something more than meets the eye is unfolding.

The tension of paradox is essential to psychoanalysis, indeed a formal condition of its way of working between illusion and reality. Paradox is the invisible undergirding of our method, the condition for using transference. Indeed, it is far more essential to the idea of transference than has been recognized. To be able to play, or learn to play, as Winnicott famously declared what we analysts and patients must do, is to make use of the paradoxical space of analysis. The most obvious paradox we require is the one that permits play by simultaneously engaging in a way that feels real and not-real, though very consequential: emotionally what happens between us serious make-believe.

And yet such paradoxical positions are also inherently unstable: they tend to break down into one side or the other when the affective arousal becomes too painful or frightening. The contradiction between their realities can become too intense, no longer make-believe. We might say that this instability makes for the inevitability of enactments, in which the wish to escape the tension of opposing realities which has become too painful drives the effort to resolve paradox. For instance, "You are my mother; you are not really my mother," either of which could become too painful. Here is where we see the splitting to resolve the tension by restoring or perpetuating dissociation.

As Ringstrom (1998) has shown, the theory of the double bind can help us to better understand breakdowns of paradoxical tension. A key paradox is that while the patient is enacting past injuries she must also hold some sense of the analyst as the safe person who will help repair them. These two visions can easily become

incompatible realities. As long as the dyad can negotiate the tension between the pull to repeat and the push to repair—living within the paradox—things look “good.” But when the two sides split apart thirdness devolves into complimentary twoness. The analyst then finds herself unable to respond to both demands, to embody the role of both/and, healer and harmer. When the repetitive dimension takes the lead, it can be frightening to both participants and stymying for the analyst, especially when she is invested in being the healer, the “good one.”

While enactments bring dissociated self-states into play at the stress point where the repeating versus repairing sides of this paradox break into Either/Or, this breakdown can be vital to articulate the patient’s dissociated fear and mistrust: “if you are the one who hurt me as I was hurt in the past, how can I trust you and see you as the one to witness or understand me.” For instance, the dissociated unlovable state emerges that feels rejection is too real a possibility to engage in play with the feeling of being loved and accepted by the analyst. If both positions—trusting and not trusting—seem crazy or threatening to the attachment, then acknowledging or escaping the danger or disappointment may seem equally impossible moves. Here we may find ourselves in the double bind, the “crunch” (Russel in Pizer, 1998).

If the analyst tries to resolve paradox by moving to the side of realism, telling herself that this enactment of injury is “not real” and “just transference,” her denial of danger may intensify the patient’s anxiety and struggle. Here, acceptance of paradox may mean accepting the apparent failure. Because, to paraphrase Winnicott’s formulation about the usable object surviving destruction, *the person who fails is paradoxically the one whom you desperately need to witness how she failed, to receive the communication*. That is, when the analyst can bear her own realization that she has played the role of harming, she can step back into the role of the one who acknowledges and thus offer something new. This then restores a more complex version of the paradoxical relation between playing out the Both/And of repetition and repair. The paradoxical form of repairing by acknowledging the failure can be seen as a form of meta-communication, a term introduced by Bateson.

In whatever version we enact the repetition of an original failure our (however tenuously maintained) analytic vision of paradox tells us we are trying to facilitate the dramatic emergence of new experience. We allow ourselves to become part of a complementary opposition that serves to expose the “truth” of a hidden self—perhaps in us. We have found that the collaborative effort to unpack the dramatic meaning is part of the process of restoring the paradoxical space of thirdness that holds the old and the new. In the intense collaboration of unpacking enactments, a new space opens for self-states and their accompanying “truths” that have felt irreconcilable to share the stage.

Enactments can be potentiating, in the sense that one agent in a chemical interaction helps potentiate another, by calling forth a part of self into collision with a corresponding part embodied in the other. The enactment may allow both partners to become more aware of what was dissociated, to recognize the affectively

charged experience of the patient—and at times that of the analyst as well—that had been incoherent, disorganized, and even disruptive to a person's sense of self. The effort to restore regulation and coherence by articulating this emotional content is one in which part of the incommunicable "not-me" becomes communicable. The not-me who is hurt, injured by non-recognition, is not identical to the not-me who holds unrecognized needs and desires, however. The reason for dramatizing both the failure *and* the needed recognition is to bring these two not-me experiences or associated states together—loss and desire, disappointment and relief, repetitive and generative dramatizations.

Meta-communication: the nip and the bite

Seeking more insight into how we release enactment binds, I turned back to Bateson's ideas about meta-communication and its connection to the development of the capacity for play. Both play and meta-communication involve the mental holding of more than one truth or view of reality. There is an aspect of differentiation involved in play in addition to the obvious rhythmic thirdness of joining and harmonizing, as seen in early face-to-face play or improvisation. The differentiating aspect has important consequences for the ability to use meta-communication—commenting upon or signalling the intention of the communication. Meta-communication also helps to create space for play: "Let's pretend that . . ."

Bateson's (1972) work made the link between meta-communication and play, showing how both rely on transmitting two different meanings in which one meaning modulates and inflects how the other should be received. He provided a new emphasis on the non-verbal, proto-symbolic communication that categorizes the message. Both animals and humans play by signalling that the thing normally denoted by this particular behavior is precisely now not being denoted: This nip is not a bite. That is, it is not an act of hostility but of affection or invitation to play. The idea of psychoanalysis, Bateson thought, is to set up a space for play in which a "pseudo-form" of the action is communicated, not merely symbolically represented. This allows us to nip or love to our heart's content, as it were.

However, Bateson (1972) added, in play combat when people get too aroused they might accidentally lunge at their partner or strike too hard. Bites happen. Excitement and aggression mix and so may get mixed up. Extrapolating, we could say that heightened affect arousal can destabilize the paradoxical holding of something as both in the past and not the past, as when the past is too frightening or painful, and so the play gets mixed up with the real. The nip no longer serves as a signal of not biting, but rather feels too much like the bite it is denoting. In fooling around, teasing hits a sore spot and someone's feelings get hurt. Sameness and difference collapse in certain states. The experience becomes not just "like" the past, it *is* the past. Paradox collapses when too much arousal breaks down the categorical difference between symbol and symbolized, nip and bite. We may think we are nipping and the other may feel bitten—or we may be so fearful of biting that we can't properly engage the other's nip.

Bateson, having moved from anthropology and animal studies into collaboration with family therapists and systems theorists, famously noticed how schizophrenic communication reflected the inability to frame any message or understand in what sense it should be received, to categorize the relationship between speakers and receivers (see Ringstrom, 1998). The ability to grasp, signal and denote in this way is part of applying necessary distinctions between the category of the frame and the category of what takes place inside the frame: the rules versus the content of the "game" (Bateson, 1972). Without such discrimination of categories, this ability to differentiate, for instance between play and reality, the transitional area within the frame is not protected and the content can become threatening. The ability to read categories may fail entirely. What if this were a clue about what causes breakdown in paradox and play?

We see this collapse in patients who, in certain self-states, assure us that we cannot care about them because we are merely professionals, not persons, but in other states behave as if they expect us to *really* care. This "categorical" collapse likewise means there is no *inside* separate from the outside, that is, no protected area for exploring the internal world so that everything can be played with as illusion or pretend (Milner, 1987).

Marking and meta-communication

How play is developed and relates to our capacity to understand our own minds and others'—mentalization—was the concern of Fonagy and Target (1996a; 1996b; 2000), coming from an entirely different background than Bateson, that of developmental and psychoanalytic child psychology. Fonagy and Target analyzed the development of the capacity for differentiating beliefs or thoughts from reality, which prevents thoughts and feelings from being frighteningly real. They (Fonagy & Target, 2000) associated this capacity for differentiation with the use of the procedural communication we have considered, called "*marking*" or markedness (Fonagy et al., 2002). Recall that in marking her responses to the baby, the mother simultaneously exaggerates and mirrors the baby's reaction to show she understands the fear or pain but does not think the situation is serious—as in, the falling down has not hurt you. As Fonagy and Target (2000) describe it, mother mirrors the baby's affect with a slight difference, so that it is apparent she understands the baby's distress but is not herself upset which conveys "that there is nothing 'truly' to worry about, but more importantly the parent's reaction, which is *the same yet not the same as the baby's experience*, creates the possibility of generating a second order (symbolic) representation of the anxiety. *This is the beginning of symbolization . . . [emphasis added]*" (p. 856). I would also see it as the beginning of meta-communication, as I will discuss in a moment.

This idea of the origins of symbolic capacities in a differentiating thirdness that distinguishes feeling from reality, relates to our understanding of reflexivity as well as the ability to hold two meanings at once: this *nip* stands for a bite, but means something less frightening. This relates to our use of metaphor, which was central to the classical definition of play, as *reverie* in psychoanalysis. However,

Fonagy and Target expand our grasp of the importance of relating two different meanings to different minds, or mind and reality. The symbolic function that later crystallizes in metaphor is broader and begins earlier in proto-symbolic, gestural marking of same but different. Importantly, that this differentiating function also underpins dramatic *action*, simulating affects or attitudes in exaggerated or ironic ways that provide a commentary on how a given communication is being received or communicated. That is, we meta-communicate through action. Meta-communication through play makes use of symbolization, but as we see is rooted in the implicit domain of pre-symbolic, procedural action.

The most important aspect of differentiation for both play and mentalization, in Fonagy and Target's (1996a; 1996b; 2000) theory, is the separation of thoughts/feelings from reality. Initially children hold a view of pretend as a separate domain in which things are not frightening but separated. However, they also operate mentally in the mode of "psychic equivalence," in which thoughts and reality are not separated but congruent. If I think it, it must be true and generated by the "outside." The child cannot safely play until he separates pretend from the mode of psychic equivalence. We can see how this separation is what underlies the ability to distinguish the nip from the bite.

To generalize, enactment occurs in the mode of psychic equivalence—"you are that thing I fear" and implies the use of dissociation to substitute for differentiation of real and not real. Play is a mode based in the ability to differentiate, where pretend can be retained as a domain of emotional expression because it does not seem equivalent to reality. It is not what it is. Sometimes the play is a very serious drama, not a comedy, but it is still held in mind as feels real but is not real. The movement from enactment to play roughly corresponds to the move from psychic equivalence into differentiation: differentiation of real and pretend, of my mind and the other's mind, of multiple meanings. Fantasy and pretend can now be used to process emotions, "rewrite" negative emotions, and so regulate one's own affect while communicating with the other (Fonagy et al., 2002).

Fonagy and Target's theory, like Bateson's thought, pays attention to the *form* of thinking, and therefore the development of capacities that are intersubjectively mediated. Rather than merely addressing frightening or painful psychic *content*, for example, oedipal rivalry, fear of dependency, we are theorizing the *form* that holds content. With this more elaborated sense of what functions contribute to play, we might better follow Winnicott's (1971a) famous directive that the therapeutic work is "directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play" (p. 44). An important effect of using an analytic version of meta-communication or markedness is to introduce the capacity to play with reality, to interact in a way that helps to develop the missing structures of differentiation and attunement.

The double bind

We might see Bateson's (Bateson, 1956; 1972) theory of the double bind as representing what happens when the difference between the procedural and the symbolic

levels is not marked but takes the form of an unremarked, mystifying contradiction. Originally, Bateson's theory of the double bind (Bateson, 1956) described a set up in which the person is subject to two mutually exclusive demands, so that to fulfil one would violate the other. Resolving the contradiction would require stepping outside the frame, but any outside perspective is prohibited or reabsorbed as part of the original demand inside the bind.

Ringstrom (1998) points out that "Historically, the resolution to the double bind has been in some form of meta-communication, that is, news of a difference . . . a spontaneous and unpredictable level of language about the confounding paradox" (p. 302). But how can this occur? Traditionally, analysts tried to interpret enactments by referring to the repetition of the patient's past, and the analyst's response would then procedurally be felt as "more of the same," a perpetuation of the power struggle or posing the threat of having one's own mind disrespected or negated (Mitchell, 1997). In other words, it did not serve as a viable form of thirdness but as the pseudo-Third of detached observation, the look-alike for meta-communication. Conversely, though, once the bind is in effect, empathic understanding can be felt as undifferentiated mirroring, a sign that the other is not able to think her own thoughts. Differentiating and joining are opposed and split into complementary roles, either one of which is threatening.

The contribution of Ringstrom's (1998) discussion of double bind theory was to show how enactments of this kind are organized around the mutually exclusive injunctions to repeat and to repair, the vectors of old and new experience (Stern, 1994). The bind leads the clinician especially to feel "damned if you do and damned if you don't" (Ringstrom, 1998, p. 299). Instead of paradox, the contradictory demands to be the repeating and the needed object—or the one defeated and the one who survives—are presented in such a way that they cannot both be fulfilled at once. The demands ought to be paradoxical insofar as we can only repair by repeating, as when the analyst can only survive if he is tested by being "destroyed." But in the impasse the analyst is experienced in the mode of psychic equivalence, where thoughts are too real, so the patient's belief is simply true, she *is* either the injurer or *is* destroyed. How do we release ourselves and our patients from such binds? This question vexes at least some clinicians some of the time.

When a person is able to at least partially be in touch with the space of paradox, they might be enacting in the spirit of "*This looks like the past, but this time it will turn out differently, I will get what I need.*" or even, "*This time I will 'win'*" (This is probably the spirit in which the analyst should take it). Because of dissociation, at least one self-state is in the psychic equivalence mode and experiences this staging as real—not "pretend," not a nip but a bite. Yet another self-state may be backstage, sometimes observing or even making sidebars in the wings, knowing it is meant as a nip. The dissociation is partial, perhaps in both partners, and the analyst, it is hoped, can see the leading edge possibility of a way to engage both states at once. Here is where play comes in—because it is a way to bring in the other less frightened self-state without negating what the injured one feels.

Meta-communication from within the drama can sometimes speak to both the injury of repetition and the hope of repair together. What I mean by meta-communication is this: a form of reflecting or creating difference without disrupting rhythmicity, staying inside the flow rather than stepping outside to comment, performing recognition in action.

Performing recognition, meta-communication in action

The question of how we meta-communicate without appearing to invalidate one side of the paradox is related to how we play by affirming with marking, by finding the Yes/And improvisational position. Play describes one method of keeping a foot in the Third space of paradox, acknowledging what feels real to the patient, while speaking from a place of difference. At times, of course, this occurs first by enacting the collision, putting the other foot in our mouth—but at least this gets the feared repetition out in the open. At other moments, through play we more gradually move the enactment into a space of collaboration without collision. We try to reshape the impasse by speaking from “inside” the play, as we lend ourselves and become the part we are asked to play. We *perform* recognition rather than merely verbalize it, using our rhythmic capacities, thereby marking it and creating a degree of difference. This is what it means to use our subjective expression to improvise, to introduce play within the enactment, to shift self-state so as to repair disruption or open up to emergent meanings of what is going on.

For instance: a patient expresses exasperation that the analyst is not advising her as to how to solve a predicament she can't solve. She begins in a state of concreteness, without reflection: “I know you aren't supposed to tell me what to do, but why can't you help me figure it out? Aren't you supposed to know?” she demands. The analyst replies with a Yes/And move that recognizes the patient's fear: “Uh Oh, You're right, I guess I should know what to do—but what if I don't?” The patient challenges: “Are you saying you are just like me, you know as little as I do? That's my point, how can *you* help *me*?” The analyst replies: “It really would be a disaster to be up shit creek without a paddle and have an analyst with no paddle. You're right, you need someone who has a paddle or knows how to get one” (Again Yes/And, adding to the improvisational tone, with a meaning to the meta-communication: your need for help, for a grown up to be in charge is not wrong). Patient, shifting state, speaking metaphorically and reflectively, somewhat rueful in tone: “Yeah, I guess that would be my luck, I get the analyst with no paddle. Like having a Mom who never tells you it's bedtime, so the kids are up until all hours eating cookies and watching TV.” Analyst: “Yes. You get the useless Mom instead of the one who tucks you in, reads you a story, and tells you there are no monsters behind the closet door. *And when you don't have that, it's hard to calm down enough to figure out what to do.*” The analyst is confirming that she is both the useless one (destroyed) and also the one who knows what it is to have a useless mother (surviving). Patient: “Yeah, I probably could figure

things out if I weren't so pissed off about having to do it all by myself. I just had to take charge of the kids when Mom was out of it. I didn't want to know I was scared. I don't want you to be scared either." Analyst: "It is frustrating and scary to have to be big when really you're just a little girl. You don't want to have to tell me what to do, but it's kind of irresistible unless I give you what you need: bath, bedtime, healthy snack, colored bins to sort all the toys." These previously shared metaphors of an intact mother are now used to recognize and differentiate the "blackwashed" need from the appearance of controlling behavior, the masking in which the wish to have a parent reverses into acting like the child's imitation, bossy and angry—a repetition of complementarity that has been enacted many times. While playing with the metaphors the analyst's tone, the procedural music, suggests not interpretation but affirmation of the patient's feeling, pointing towards the leading edge.

Communicating from *within* the action, playfully or ironically, can shift from blocking and defending into more marked forms of thrusting and parrying: sometimes a good catch and throwing back a "zinger" or curve ball can make movement possible (see Ringstrom, 2007). These procedurally recognizable actions communicate by using marking behavior. Such *commentary-in-action*, or meta-communication as performance, takes us back, so to speak, to the early developmental stage where marking creates safety, thus supplying the needed relationship, the building blocks of later symbolization and differentiation. The therapeutic effect is to sponsor intersubjective development, the missing capacities that make meta-communication, use of metaphor and dramatic play possible.

Acknowledgment, sometimes sober and serious, is of course a crucial form of meta-communicative action. Not only when there are collisions, but also in the course of dialogue. The sense in which acknowledgment remains an action inside the play is that we do it as actors rather than observers, perhaps because we have actually bitten and we don't deny it, even if we meant it as a nip. When the analyst finds herself playing two opposing parts at once—causing injury and recognizing the feelings of unsafety, confusion or hurt, acknowledges at the implicit meta-level, that we are open to the other's perspective and feeling. We might later play with what just happened, meaning will be created together. We reinstate the paradox that we are simultaneously vulnerable participants and responsible observers, both repeating and repairing as we rebuild the Third.

Acknowledgment in this way gives permission for the patient to likewise meta-communicate. In the patient's case, the freedom to comment on what the analyst is doing or saying is a way out of the bind, and restoring the paradox that the analyst is both the one who repeats the old and creates the new. In facilitating this shared thirdness we are trying to offer an experience, to repair a basic, original fault in which play—trying on feelings and beliefs in the mode of pretend, fantasy, or symbolization—did not develop in relation to emotional life. This experience of co-created thirdness is itself the repair. Such relational repair of disruption is qualitatively different from the simple satisfaction of sharing a "reparative" fantasy of goodness that seemingly restores the dyad's regulation. The patient is becoming

able to actively use the contrasting modes of joining and difference to express his own emotional experience. Repair by the analyst through acknowledgment is now distinguishable from complementary demands associated with one person “winning,” and the other “losing,” or submitting—it is not more of the same zero-sum game (Ringstrom, 2015; 2016). The forward motion of our back and forth, give and take, liberates the capacity to think because thinking something is not felt to be equivalent to making it so . . . or not forever.

PART II. ENACTMENT, PLAY AND THE WORK

I have been trying to make a framework for thinking about play and paradox as form, considering dramatic interaction, meta-communication and the performance of recognition. My clinical theory of the Third is an attempt to formulate a process that embraces and ultimately requires binocular vision of both the rhythmic and the differentiating or symbolic principles of interaction. The Third grows through actions that consist of fitting/accommodating/joining and differentiating/articulating.

Play relies on the same principles as the action of marking, in which the coordination of implicit and verbal meanings creates attunement with a difference.² The differentiating moment of marking should be embedded within the attunement to the other's inner experience—otherwise marking turns into dissociative distance. We grasp the other's anxiety but we are containing and relativizing it. In this way rhythmicity and differentiation in thirdness work together. Differentiation of meanings or the other's perspective is not dependent on symbolic function, rather it contributes to the emergence of the symbolic. Differentiation begins procedurally, with gestures that frame and inflect the meaning of communications, which in turn establishes the basis for meta-communication and the ability to use symbols and metaphors.

The use of symbolic capacities to represent affectively saturated rests on pre-symbolic experience with both differentiating and rhythmic thirdness. Otherwise, words will be divorced, split off from, and at odds with the procedural. This decoupling of the implicit and symbolic often evolves into a detached or dissociated form of observation, a simulacrum of the Third—the split off intellectual functioning that cannot hold paradox. Whereas play, with metaphor or dramatic interaction relies on integrating implicit, procedural with symbolic communication, inability to play is characterized by decoupling, characteristic of dissociation.

Clinically, we are tuned into this decoupling: to failures in integration, or moments when the clash or incongruence between these domains strikes us. As our process of coming to recognize the unformulated intentions of both partners

2 Consider the parallel with Stern's (1985) point that when the mother recognizes the baby's excitement she expresses it cross-modally, that is, in a different form: if the baby crawls the mother shimmies, thus mirroring with a difference.

necessitates using our own reactions, we are aware of disjunction between the two channels, of chafing or constriction of our movement (Stern, 2009; 2016), the signs of dissociation. This takes place not simply in the patient, but in ourselves and in relation to our shared rhythm. Dissociation presents frequently as failure to coordinate the implicit or affective with the symbolic. Relational analysis has a developed clinical lore of attention to dissociation based on our affective-somatic reception of both channels of intersubjective action. It seems to me that we often struggle with coordinating symbolic understanding with attention to the implicit movements in the couple. We are aware of when our attention is freer to notice disruptions, obstructions, the feeling of being able or unable to move and so hold both avenues of communication in mind. Play, after all, procedurally implies freedom of movement not just within the mind but between us. In the double bind, for instance, we can't move.

Increasingly, as such attention to movement and implicit sub-symbolic action has increased, we are better able to focus on the How and not merely the What of intersubjective relatedness: implicit relational knowing, the quality of "being with" the other (Stern et al., 1998; Stern, 2004), but also contradictions between procedural signals of the other's self-state and the words that metaphorically and symbolically create pictures and narratives concerned with those states. We are interested in whether images and words have resonance and impact or function in dissociation. We are aware that the use of reflexive function can become detached observation and so perpetuate dissociation.

The development of the capacity for play involves integrating procedural and symbolic channels and thus countering dissociation. The expanding ability to use different channels to modify and inflect meaning makes meta-communication possible. In working our way out of enactments we usually need to meta-communicate, and this helps to initiate or further expand the individual's capacity for play. The meta-communication from "inside" the interaction becomes part of a shared process with the patient, who is also struggling to say the "unthought known" (Bollas, 1987). The emergent shared affect, metaphor or meaning is then experienced as a shared Third; the intersubjective process of creating thirdness along with the recoupling of affect and symbol may then be more important than the content.

This process is so important because the decoupling of symbolic thinking and implicit action often accompanies or underlies the contradictory demands encountered in enactment, especially the double bind. Decoupling may occur only in some self-states or be pervasive, it may have accompanied the developmental trauma or damage patients come to heal. Recoupling is part of what is involved in creating or restoring the space of paradox, in which two different levels of meaning, procedural and symbolic, work in tandem. Thus I am proposing that we grasp meta-communication as more than a form of explicit commentary on what's going on, and view it as a form of recoupling thought and feeling dramatically or in fantasy. I would contend that even when meta-communication involves the analyst formulating what is happening in the relationship, this implies an intersubjective process with sub-symbolic procedural dimensions. Recoupling addresses not only

a specific moment of dissociation in enactment but a developmental need to experience the Third in action.

I will accordingly describe my work with a patient, Hannah, whose symbolic capacities were detached from affect, whose sense of the rhythmicity of attunement was so constricted that her mode of reflection was largely persecutory or negative of the Third. Such individuals can symbolize, be humorous and self-ironizing, yet their most painful experiences drop into the mode of psychic equivalence because they have known neither reliable attunement with states of distress nor marking of difference. The observing function and, indeed, analysis itself are consequently identified with a shaming scrutiny, split off from the emotional connection of compassion—have become a simulacrum of the Third.

In Hannah's case, this decoupling of the rhythmic and the symbolic appeared to be the effect of a failure of both attunement and differentiation. The lack of maternal marking of her anxieties led to a detachment of the heavily relied upon symbolic thinking from connection to affect, so that Hannah seldom experienced a defined emotion in a way that fostered coherence. Thinking was not genuinely containing and ineffectual against the shame of dysregulation. Thus despite her seeming capacity to produce reverie and make use of metaphor, something was missing that makes for the ability to play with reality. Any problem Hannah experienced appeared to be "Real."

I should note that I originally used this piece in a presentation in front of the British Psychoanalytic Society, where my assertions about enactment and acknowledgment were considered quite controversial—so much so that a brief version of my presentation (Benjamin, 2009) was published along with a reply by a member of their society (Sedlak, 2009) in the "Controversies" section of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*.³ Originally, however, the paper aimed to illustrate improvisation and show how the symbolic work of analysis depends upon the rhythmic Third as well as acknowledgment.

In this writing I will illustrate the bind between the repeated and needed relationship, the use of meta-communication and the recoupling of rhythmic and symbolic. In this instance, recoupling is part of creating a third position, moving into play with the paradoxical tension between the forward and trailing edge, the needed and repeated relationship. Together we succeed in creating a dramatization of past injury with a "new" reparative outcome that involves the recognition of past vulnerability and the need for a moral Third.

In a synthetic formulation, Aron and Atlas (2015) have suggested how we might view this reparative outcome as foreshadowed in the work. They adapted Jung's

3 Interested readers may note how thoroughly different and incompatible are the views of psychoanalysis taken by Sedlak and myself in this debate. In my reply to him (Benjamin, 2009b) I addressed the fundamental difference in assumptions: how from my perspective the analyst's subjectivity is not a lamentably necessary means of knowing the other but an offering of something needed, related to our developmental need for connection with the other, and thus intrinsically healing.

idea of the prospective function to theorize how enactments are generative, bringing the future into the present: with the prospective function, often operative in dreams, the mind looks forward; it “exercises or rehearses, it anticipates, prepares, shapes, and constructs” (p. 310). Aron and Atlas (2015) suggest that we think not merely in terms of what is reparative but what is generative—thinking not in terms of how collisions simply repeat the past but also create the new, bringing hidden potential to the fore. This transformative potential, the generative element, lies not only in working through the enactment but in emphasizing the tendrils of development it evinces, what Tolpin (2002) called the “forward edge.”⁴ This formulation has also been related to the “leading edge,” the reparative aspect of the analytic work (Kohut, 1977).

“I do schtick”

Hannah began her treatment in a state of continual psychic pain, a kind of pervasive unhappiness that seemed without cause—it simply was what she had always felt. Her pain was most readily associated with feelings of immense shame, now lived daily but dating from childhood, when she had felt isolated, outcast, Other—unable to grasp and mesh with the implicit rules of relating to her peers. This state in turn seemed to represent something like the forced introjection of her mother’s despair and self-hatred linked to the absence of any consoling, containing maternal presence. Family life was overshadowed by the mother’s depression, anger and social alienation. Hannah in young adulthood had used her intelligence to learn how to function in the normal world, but she suffered continually from excruciating feelings of failure triggered by any moment of social anxiety, which brought on lamentations of ruin and disgrace.

Hannah strove for insight but could not believe in comfort or consolation. My appointed role in her drama seemed to be that of joining her attacks on herself, to be her critic or at best a stern mentor; her role was to struggle against failure to be a good enough patient or student of analysis. In this way we were meant to enact her existing “self-cure.” In the early days I often found the combination of self-beratement and assumption of my superiority quite painful to listen to. For Hannah initially psychoanalysis was idealized, associated with a persecutory ideal of knowing everything. It had little to do with empathy and much with judgment—while her feelings remained raw, uncontained.

Hannah described how her mother had always responded to accounts of being excluded and ridiculed in childhood with anxious despair, unable to comfort or encourage her. The experience was one of distorted mirroring by a parent who was entirely one with her anxiety and despair—reflecting back only the same,

4. Apparently there is a difference to be made between “leading v. trailing edge” interpretations, first suggested by Kohut and developed by Lachmann and Tolpin’s developmental “forward edge.” (Lachmann, commenting on Tolpin, IAPSS Keynote 2014)

"echoing the child's state without modulation, as in the mode of psychic equivalence, concretizing or panicking" as Fonagy and Target (1996a) put it.⁵ As we reflected together, Hannah could think about her mother's lack of attunement to emotional cues or a baby's need for regulation as well as her impaired ability to differentiate between herself and her children. It seemed that mother had never been able to soothe and match, to create a rhythmic Third with her as a small child. There truly *was* "something to worry about."

Thus Hannah's precocious intellectual and verbal development gave her an apparent access to mentalization and insight into others, but barely masked her profound aloneness, emptiness and fear of being poisoned by the other's toxic anxiety or deadness. Even while Hannah sought in me an antidote—a more powerful, more perfect and satisfying mother, attuned and empathic, an idealized object with whom she could aspire to identify—at any moment of vulnerability when she actually felt need she was liable to be overwhelmed by shame. She strove to protect herself by convincing me that all was lost, inviting me to join the self-beratement, obscuring her longing for consolation, so that I had to resist the contradictory injunction to repair by repeating. I often found myself in the position of a helpless bystander, as if she were forcing me to witness to her attacks on her shameful, "monstrous" self (see Benjamin, 2009). My empathic formulations at any rate failed to reach the shamed, urgent part of her that needed yet refused a witness and a consoler, one who could contain and respond to her pain while marking it as not her own.

The other side of the ongoing enactment expressed the danger that I as bystander might view her positively and so fail to witness her distress, to contain her anguish, hold the injured self-state. In taking up the leading edge, keeping in mind her functioning, presentable self, or allying my ideal self with her need to be connected and "good," I would be denying her pain, rejecting her suffering monstrous self. If I tried to mark the difference, rather than reflect exactly the same despair, it seemed I was shutting out the frightened part, which would find no home in my arms or mind. The affective experience of different with same had no inner template. My empathic reverie had to fail.

Reading Ringstrom's translation of the double bind retrospectively made clear the structure of this enactment: if I did not join Hanna's despair I would be denying and refusing to contain her pain; but if I did join it, I would be missing her need for both soothing and hope, a leading edge pointing the way out. Meta-communication in the form of commentary, while not forbidden, seemed unable to touch the part of her that was dwelling in psychic equivalence. There was as yet no space for it. I tended to think of her traumatized self-state as one in which her mother's anxiety had become her own, rather than her separate reality being

5 Alternatively, say Fonagy and Target (1996), the mother may avoid reflection on the child's affect through a process akin to dissociation, which effectively places the mother in a pretend mode, unrelated to the external reality of the infant—the child's genuine feelings or intentions.

confirmed by mother. We thought in intergenerational terms: this powerful sense of catastrophe might reflect her mother's immigrant trauma of being alien and endangered (Faimberg, 2005). Yet, even as we spoke of it, her wound was mixed with such deep shame that it had to remain hidden—and paradoxically it also had to be known and healed.

At the time I could not so precisely formulate this bind, and I often struggled to maintain contact with Hannah's need for a vital, soothing mother, to not drift off into dissociative space when she self-protectively shifted into "insight," her substitute for the missing rhythmic thirdness and soothing she had missed. In retrospect, it seemed that the more one part of Hannah craved soothing, the more her vigilant self felt with traumatic certainty that the mother figure would collapse, would fail to survive her bid for regulation and so would retaliate in some shaming way. This mother in turn would be crushed by Hannah's destructive disappointment, and must be protected by Hannah demonstrating her own unworthiness. The she who needed and she who repeated dimensions could not come together.

However, as many small disruptions were survived, Hannah and I attained some rhythmicity that allowed us to play with the negativity that shadowed her every move. Hannah could recognize her identification with the "one who was doing the beating," as Guntrip's (1961) patient famously put it and her expectation that I, as the powerful one, would join the beating. Hannah had a dream that her whole family was having a picnic and Adolph Hitler was joining them. In the dream, as she reported humorously, she told herself that Hitler really didn't seem like such a bad guy after all. I expressed my appreciation for her audacity in inviting "Hitler" in and she acknowledged her hatred of her family, giving playful expression to her identification with the evil-doer: at the end of that session she quipped, paraphrasing Flaubert on Madame Bovary, "Hitler c'est moi."

At about the same time Hannah began to express her intense wish for solace, her identification with the fearful and injured animals she rescued, and her wish to become the kind of mother she could be with her animals. In turn, her longing evoked anguish over the part of herself who hated her mother, even wished she were dead in order to escape the sense of being infected and poisoned by the dead food of her mother's body/spirit. These feelings were associated with the dream as she flipped into the horrible thought that she might wish to exterminate the animals, just as she wished she could expunge her shameful self or her reviled mother. A confusing fantasy of infanticide-matricide afflicted her, a sense of being the hated mother. The emergence of both the longings and terrors suggested an implicit belief that I could contain such dangerous emotions, that we, in our shared space of thirdness, could contain them.

With this greater safety, Hannah and I were finally able to revisit her interpersonal trauma and dramatize a different outcome, a release from her painful self-cure. Hannah returned from a weekend in the country with some other young people, relating a familiar tale of woe. Unable to engage in witty banter, she had become withdrawn and grew excruciatingly uncomfortable, as she felt observed scornfully by her friends. Hannah believed that as she had become progressively

anxious, they had made fun of her all the more. In this instance I did not question in my own mind her extravagant conviction of failure and shame. But even while I was empathic to her fear, I challenged her conviction of ruin and catastrophe. I let myself speak from "inside" the drama, but with my own subjective perception, which contained alongside empathy an element of difference: a kind of protective indignation. I had a barely formulated thought, as if she really were my own child: "There is nothing wrong with Hannah. She is at least a match for her friends in integrity, personal insight, and intelligence. Why should she be shamed?" I also spoke from my sense of the moral Third, which led me to formulate my indignant response as a question: why didn't she deserve the understanding and compassion from her friends, which she would surely have given had the situation been reversed? I warmed to my topic and continued asking: "Why were these feelings not a part of imperfect but acceptable humanness?"

To my great surprise, Hannah began the next session with an unusual response, saying how surprised and gratified she was by my "staunch defense." Hannah now went on to reflect that in her mind she had thought accepting her friends' making fun of her was the right thing to do, that she had been trying to take responsibility for her problems by identifying with her friends' judgment. I said rather with emphasis to mark it, "Indeed, you do identify with this kind of judgment! You might even have elicited their contempt because you actually feel it yourself." She readily agreed: "Yes, I do shtick, I make a shtick out of vulnerability when I'm anxious." I said, "Yes! It really is a *shtick*—you punish yourself with it and invite people to join you. What you have to be responsible for is not your vulnerability—that's just human—but for your punishing and beating yourself, for your lack of compassion towards *you*."

I waited while Hannah took this in, wanting her to take the lead as we were now improvising from the same script. She allowed as how her self-beratement proceeded from thinking this was a way of facing reality (a form of self-protection), but it suddenly occurred to her that there was a different way to listen and respond to the other. What she was able to hear from me this time was not a refusal to bear her despair or witness her demise, but rather my presence at her side defending her vulnerability as well as a way of connecting, my defense of a principle of empathy for vulnerability. This is an idea about behavior she herself believes in. Suddenly, this principle, embodied by me, became a felt conviction about herself—"I don't deserve to be treated badly when I am frightened and need soothing." This constituted a recasting of the original scene of distress, in which relief is provided rather than catastrophically absent, an absence that led her to self-regulate by telling herself what a bad girl she was.

Further work revealed the generative function of my willingness to enact the role of a protective mother who stands up for her child, rather than a collapsed and deflated mother, one who can mark the pain as real, but not her own and not catastrophic. I could recognize how much this was a reflection of my identification with Hannah, based on my own struggles with shame and social non-conformity, my own hard won solution of placing compassion and kindness over superiority

and invulnerability. I admit that this value system, highly reflected and intellectually worked out but still rooted in my own personal pain, is not neutral, it is deeply personal and specific. However, it also seemed to resonate specifically with Hannah. My indignant reaction to the pain visited upon Hannah by her protector self did accord with my ideas about compassion, my sense of the moral Third. My response came from a conviction that it was possible to accord dignity and respect to the fragile, frightened Hannah while simultaneously holding in mind her strength, not least as a person struggling to understand her own pain. She could shift from enacting a masochistic submission to a look-alike Third of punitive scrutiny into a shared thirdness, which combined the rhythmic oneness of empathy with a narrative of compassion and respect for human vulnerability. My ability to see a Hannah who is more than her "weakness" was like the position of the mother who sees beyond her baby's pain to a coherent self who will be free of it. In this way both soothing and differentiating were shaped via the maternal function of imagining the child's future function (Loewald, 1960). What Hannah was able to identify with in me was the strength that comes not from hating the shame-filled parts of self, but accepting psychic pain as a position of the moral Third: accepting What Is.

What fostered the movement towards accepting the reparative protection and soothing, which in turn allowed her to relinquish shame and have insight into her self-cure, her preference to hurt herself before the other could hurt her? A form of meta-communication from "inside" the drama in which I incarnated (Hoffman, 2010), a version of my protective self being called upon by her frightened self, lent myself to the enactment. I was not commenting from outside, rather I was responding personally to her pain. In this sense our "moment of meeting" was deeply personal, as my response deviated from the script, introducing an element of difference that came from my personal style of thinking and marking. I did this, spontaneously and implicitly, by playing the part inside her story of a witness who identifies with the suffering but also uses her indignation to be protective.

Hannah had idealized me and wished to identify with me; but now this ideal persona turned out to be radically different from her previous idea of strength—one that dissociated from pain and suffering. Instead she discovered a version of the moral Third that lifts dissociation by according safety and respect to the fragile, frightened self-state, affirming the dignity to be gained from struggling to understand one's own pain and that of others. No longer dissociated, both self-states, the weak and the strong, converged in a generative moment, a dramatic shifting from blame and shame to understanding and acceptance.

Hannah explicitly articulated this meaning in her own language sometime later when she said that what I had given her was a moral universe. She reflected on the impact of experiencing me as a protective mother who stands up for her child but also believes in her child's resilience. This offered a version of anger that came neither from the place of helpless victimization nor from a simulacrum of insight that was conflated with a fantasy of acting like a normal person, who has no shameful fears, who needs no recognition of distress. In accepting my

marked recognition of how painful that was, she was able to give up her dissociative aspiration to a fantasized normality in favor of a different experience of being with the other. The implicit experience was that she could be lovable as a vulnerable being, one whose anxiety is visible but can be borne by the intact other.

With the establishment of this greater sense of safety, Hannah spontaneously brought up her "secret life," the hiding place of her real anger, her worst feelings of rage and loneliness associated with adolescence, when she was desperate and promiscuous, and ran away from home. All her rageful self-affliction was really aimed at her mother, whom she hated beyond reason, not least because she still needed her to provide the missing experience of home. As she contemplated my leaving for the summer, Hannah was able to speak for the first time of the feared, shameful, hated image of her own need: a stalker. A vision of the girl who had killed her college roommate because at first they had been close, but then she suffered a stinging rejection when the roommate felt suffocated. The appearance of the stalker girl deepened our sense of the fear and destruction that had haunted her during our first summer separation. This time she was able to imagine my accepting and embracing the girl, her abandoned self. A nascent version of sustaining the paradox of repetition and repair was being constructed: the girl would be too much for me—and, the girl was just a needy child and I could hold her. We then were able to take in and give a name to this "not me" figure of shameful rejection, which she had tried to ward off and had enacted with her friends; it became a more metaphorical character with which Hannah could play.

Finding a dance partner, the rhythmic Third

As I have said, my sense of what Winnicott meant by playing was the use of fantasy and metaphor—alone or with the other—that is now usually referred to as reverie and associated with transformations into articulated emotions. Theorizing of reverie has become a defined perspective, influenced by Bion's idea of thinking and alpha function. Ferro (2009), one of the main proponents of working with reverie, has suggested we think of the metaphorical figures that appear in the field as "characters." We can let these characters (like the stalker girl, but also objects representing an emotion or impulse, like a bomb, a plant, a wall) play in the room, without always specifying which real person they are currently attached to or their transference meaning. In translation to relational analysis, we might think these characters represent aspects of previously dissociated self-states or feelings. However, I believe that play with the other also involves the real relationship, it creates a real shift in the relations between self-states and self and other (Peltz & Goldberg, 2013).

My thesis is that in analysis learning to play is a process that includes not only use of metaphors but also incremental moments of marking and meta-communication in action informed by the rhythmicity and differentiation originally lacking. This involves dialogic play with the other on the stage of enactment where

dissociated characters first appear. Gradually, these characters can be owned and become more obviously parts of self rather than not-me, and so attached to the other in less restricted ways. Thus Hannah's repudiated needy self that originally came into the relationship through enactment gradually evolved into a character in our emergent play with the same material.

Here I will illustrate with a moment of spontaneous shared reverie, the kind in which unconscious communication creates a synchrony of rhythmic and symbolic, form and content. Play occurs as a back and forth movement. Hannah began a session speaking about a man she had begun dating, somewhat older, very admired and liked, whom she found to be amazingly solid, compassionate and understanding. She said he was able to call up the best in people, in her. Perhaps, because Jane Austen was an author we had often referred to, my reverie turned to the character of Knightly in the film *Emma*, which I had recently viewed. Knightly, though obviously in love with Emma, is older and wiser. Emma has taken in an orphaned young woman, Harriet, a farm girl, whom she now tries, against Knightly's advice, to pair with a higher born man who considers himself too good for Harriet. In the scene at the ball, this man publicly spurns Harriet, leaving her to stand embarrassed, without a partner, as everyone looks on. Knightly, who of course is going to marry Emma, comes to Harriet's rescue, dancing with her and saving her from humiliation. It is after Knightly has thus restored Harriet's dignity that he and Emma finally dance together, achieving a compelling erotic synchrony of gaze and movement. I recalled now their dance, a beautiful representation of the rhythmic Third.

I decided to share the story and the dual image of Emma/Harriet with Hannah, formulating how touching it was that Knightly first accepted the more ashamed and socially awkward "part" of the character. From there we entered into a surprising moment of meeting. Recalling the film, Hannah burst out: "I love you, I really love you!" She paused, then explained: "I can't believe you would compare me to Emma or someone I fall in love with to characters in a Jane Austen novel. I have always wished I could aspire to the dignity and self-knowledge of Austen's characters." It was as if in this moment I had rescued Hannah's Harriet self, and she felt it.

Now we see one of those coincidences born of unconscious mental sharing that sometimes occur as minds meet. Hannah added: "The odd thing is, this morning, as I was taking the train in from the Island, I saw these fat suburban matrons, and I was feeling a kind of scorn for them, but then I caught myself, and I said to myself, *What would Jane Austen say about that attitude?* And then as I continued listening to them, I heard that they had lovely voices. And I thought, *they really are lovely women*". Hannah here has her chance to play the daughter who repairs the worthiness of the maternal other even as she directly recognized her loving feelings with me Knightly. She also partners with me in a shared reverie that transforms her default rejection of the mother/fat women into a fantasy of creating the good: it is her prospective vision of being a loving woman, as well as her own embodiment of a moral Third.

Austen's voice, like the voices of the matron-mothers, represents a maternal Third with which it is possible for her to identify, and it is notably parallel to the one I associated with Knightly. The voice of the moral mother and the music of the rhythmic Third create a space in which it is possible to contain multiples voices: at the same time, it is the maternal version of lawfulness, a symbolic Third, which says: "All my children are worthy of love"—Harriet and Emma, the fragile and the strong. As we went on to explore in subsequent sessions, there is the Emma in the Harriet, whose beauty can be recognized, and the Harriet in the Emma, whose pain can be accepted. In this and subsequent sessions, Hannah and I continued to play with the metaphors of Emma and Harriet, as we moved through the feelings of what it means to accept Harriet while finding new potential in the role of Emma, a rehearsal for a relationship (Aron & Atlas, 2015) in which desire and safety both feel possible. The story became a representation of the moral Third, allowing us to understand more of Hannah's struggle to embrace the Harriet in herself while finding new possibilities as Emma. There is room for both selves to live.

Knightly, Austen, the man Hannah was dating (whom she in reality would later go on to marry), and I all became characters on the stage (Ferro, 2009) and took turns in the dance of thirdness. The part of Hannah that once appeared as the stalker became a more lovable character, Harriet, who could be integrated into herself, whom I could accept and dance with, not leave alone to become destructive. This particular movement had many emergent facets, procedural and symbolic, implicit and explicit: our exchange itself became a rhythmic experience of fittedness and harmonizing of different voices, infusing the symbolic elements of the shared reverie with vitality. Form and content synchronized, as Hannah and I created a new metaphor in action, describing a dance and doing a dance. This coordinated movement suggested a harmony consonant with the content of our play, deepening the issue of—Hannah as Emma needing the lawful world of the moral Third in which vulnerable, potentially shamed characters like Harriet would be safe.

My play with Hannah around *Emma* might be seen as an example of the rehearsal and preparation described by Aron and Atlas (2015): a generative shared reverie, with the prospective function of anticipating her life-changing bond with this man. And the leading edge was in this case expressed through the character of the man who can "call out the best," who represented one part of the analyst as well. The aim in working with the enactment, then, becomes not only to identify the pathogenic past (Aron & Atlas, 2015, p. 312) and bring out dissociated self-states linked with trauma, injury, loss, pain and shame—the trailing edge—but also to recognize the hidden hopeful, the desires. Not only the not-me of loss or pain but also the not-me of desire and expansion.

However, the integration of the not-me part of Hannah that still felt connected to her damaged and damaging relationship to mother not through shameful vulnerability but defiant, rageful adolescent rebellion remained in the wings. She was not going to stay off-stage forever. As we shall see, her appearance in a collision became part of a generative enactment of a very different kind.

Vicissitudes of stage combat, or, a slip and a nip

As Bateson (1979) said, playful rituals can sometimes get out of hand, participants in the game can get too excited or reactive and forget they were supposed to be "only playing." What was supposed to be only a representative nip becomes a bite. In stage combat, actors often slip and jab too hard; there may be bruises by curtain time. Slips, Freudian and otherwise, are meant to give us pause. So the power of unprocessed emotions in the analytic dyad—in the field of interaction—may lead to the analyst's reactivity, exceeding what she can contain. But such loss of containing in analysis can indeed be thought of as part of the field, "an accident, sustained en route which will therefore, within limits, be thought of as *inevitable and indeed necessary*," as Ferro and Civitarese (2013) assert, but a process that can be reflected and ultimately used to enlarge and potentiate the interaction. In English, the word "accident" is an especially good metaphor for failure to contain, since it is what we call a child's inability to hold it in until he reaches the bathroom. And, insofar as we think in terms of unconscious communication or joint dissociation of that which slips past the analyst's initial awareness, they are part of the "royal road." Do we differ about the degree to which we can fathom the mystery through our own reverie, and how much it is the patient's work in the enactment, which we (sometimes unwillingly) co-sponsor, that moves us both forward? I suspect this might be where the ideas of play in the mode of reverie versus play with interaction may lead to different outcomes (see Stern, 2013; 2015).

I will, in the interest of describing working with enactment, relate a moment where the ongoing movement between enactment and play shifts into an out-right collision. This can certainly be described as an "accident" on my part; my dissociated wish for a certain kind of analytic goodness helped drive the interaction, thereby becoming dramatized and eventually understood. This moment illustrates how the not-me as painful repetition that needs to be dramatically portrayed shows up together with the unrecognized not-me that needs to find authentic expression in an intersubjective context: they meet first in a confusing mix, then become more clearly distinguishable as we unpack. Initially, it may be the analyst's outburst, the effort to escape from a bind (see Mitchell, 1993), that creates the accident. In this case the reaction that broke up our joint dissociation was triggered wholly outside my awareness of the repetition of an old pattern.

Originally (Benjamin, 2009), I discussed this collision in terms of how the interaction of different selves and their dissociation often require an acknowledgment of our part. Here, I am emphasizing as well the potentiating, generative side of enactment: the revelation of new feelings and the expression of the patient's agency, the leading edge of analyzing collision (see Slochower, 2006; Bromberg, 2011), with its production of emergent meaning (Stern, 2015). This collision brought forth a part of self, the defiant adolescent, crucial to Hannah's sense of agency. That agency first took the form of Hannah protesting my reactivity, then collaborating in the process of thinking, unpacking and creating meaning out

of disruption. This sharing and collaboration is part of what is potentiating in enactments, making them generative, giving us the sense that, as Atlas put it, the patient comes in to the “kitchen” and we “are cooking together” rather than merely having the analyst adjust their cooking to the patient’s reception (Aron & Atlas, 2015).

In a session shortly after Hannah had become a mother and confirmed her capacity to soothe, comfort and love her baby, she began to revisit an old scene of self-criticism. Or so I thought. I heard her berating herself for being too unread in the classics (a patently false representation of herself) to answer her teenage stepdaughter’s homework questions the night before. Perhaps I was frustrated by this lapse, but I found myself unusually permeable to the anger in Hannah’s reproaches. I wondered aloud if Hannah was going to carry this propensity to denigrate herself into the relationship with her own children. Immediately, giving the lie to her own self-portrait, Hannah, in quite a different tone, exclaimed, “*That was draconian!*” She then tried to backpedal, to spare me being put in the wrong, as she herself had always been, explaining in an especially insightful tone that I *must* have intended something with this remark since I am a relational analyst. I was upset with myself, but not so dysregulated that I could not immediately acknowledge having said something hurtful. Stating clearly that it was not a strategy but an emotional reaction, I apologized for the harsh remark, and suggested she ought to not let me off the hook so readily.

As we reflected together in the next session, Hannah was now confidently able to express in a more forceful way her sense of being unfairly scolded by me, demonstrating her capacity for self-protection and tolerating what she knew about me without denial. But she then began to reflect on her own action and what was being dramatized in this scene: “Maybe you were reacting to something,” she said, “Because actually I wasn’t feeling like the mother right then, I felt like I was identified with Lucy, I was the teenager looking down on my stupid mother!” Well, I reflected aloud, if she was actually identifying with the teenage daughter, the one who despises the mother and sees her as pathetically inadequate, then maybe *I* was identifying with the mother. In the moment where Hannah identified her part, I was able to recognize and admit my unformulated counter-identification with the mother who was being despised and discarded. This was a dyad I remembered all too well from my own adolescence.

When I acknowledged how I assumed the counterpart role in the complementary relation, that of the attacked and retaliating mother, a different meaning emerged. Ironically—as is common in enactment, the hidden symmetry of dissociated identifications generates the reverse of what one intends. Wishing to rid myself of my assigned role in the drama, I stepped right into it. I became the mother I was trying to protect, because I was also dissociatively resisting being her (albeit in the form of a helpless analyst). In retrospect, I could see the way in which I felt my own need for affirmation of maternal goodness was frustrated by Hannah’s story of the attacking daughter and the failed mother. I was not reflecting on my need to see Hannah be healed by absorbing my goodness, and so my

conscious disappointment that Hannah was shaming herself masked my own feeling of failure.⁶ However, our role-switching revealed that the distinction between attacking herself and attacking me was, in a sense, fictitious. Our isomorphic identifications with the need not to be put in the wrong, and not to put the other in the wrong, were too symmetrical. Her move actually did express a dissociative attack on the mother's supposed goodness: my retaliation a dissociative defense of goodness. Being forever put in the wrong by a mother who was herself far from "good" reenacted the core of Hannah's disastrous fight to the death with her mother in adolescence—one which had condemned her to be the one who is crazy.

Our longstanding work and our experience recognizing the feelings of shame and disappointment allowed us to move easily into the activity of unpacking. I acknowledged to Hannah the way I had inadvertently become the very thing I was trying not to be. Once I acknowledged the part I played, the rejected mother to her defiant contemptuous daughter, Hannah could speak more of her anger at her mother's weakness. To both our surprise, then, she shifted self-states dramatically. A new unexpected character came leaping onto the stage, as she spoke in the voice of the protective daughter who identifies with mother, exclaiming how sorry she was for this poor mother who couldn't soothe anyone: "You don't love her, no one could love her, *she is so unlovable!*"

We paused to absorb this surprise, the forcible impact of Hannah's pity for this shameful person she nonetheless loved and identified with—the one I had for a moment become. I could now acknowledge my shame at my outburst and formulate Hannah's need to protect *me*, as the unlovable mother in the moment I had shown myself to be uncontained and critical. This mother, the one she found it so painful to identify with, was the last piece to emerge in analyzing the enactment. As our unpacking proceeded to this point, we slowed down, allowing us to stay together in feeling sorrow for the poor mother. As this feeling emerged, it seemed that we could listen together to the presence of opposing voices and reversible positions, containing and surviving their conflict with one another in that scene. The space of thirdness, thinking and feeling together, was palpable, open and mutual.

What emerged, "unbidden" as Stern (2009) calls it, Hannah's surprising turn after my acknowledgment of reactivity, seemed to be a revelation of the self-states involved in the earlier phase of her confusion over who was the one doing the beating: identifying as her mother's killer or the unlovable victim; either way, she had been put in the wrong. In our interaction, my recognition of the injury interrupted the switching off between doer and done to and opened up an avenue for agency as well as expression of the self-protective anger that had been missing in our earlier enactment where I was the one expressing indignation on her behalf. This time she was defending herself from my criticism even as she was

6 Rachel McKay, in discussion, clarified this idea of the enactment being driven in part by the analyst's dissociated need for affirmation of goodness by the patient's healing (see Mark, 2015).

unconsciously attacking her own mother. Recognition of the leading edge of protest transformed it into an active assertion, revealed its underbelly of anger, liberated the ability to think and engage in meta-commentary, and to contact the mourning about a connection never made and fulfilled. Thus moving from repetition to something new, our dialogue enable the space of paradox, the relation of real and not real, to be restored.

The collaborative unpacking, creating a mutual container, combines new and old in the process of moving out of enactment. We begin a dialogue of meta-communication that differentiates between old and new, no longer mutually exclusive pulls but part of the thirdness opened up by acknowledgment. This helped to restore the paradox of my playing the part of the rejected, critical mother and the analyst who was present to analyze and hear how she felt about it, differentiating my contradictory roles.

As the meta-communication differentiates between the need to be right and the need to put things right, feelings move from the place of psychic equivalence. The analyst no longer *is* the destroyed, retaliatory mother for the patient, and the patient no longer *is* the destroyed object for the analyst. The meta-communication about the process takes the form of play in which Hannah, as an assertive actor, could react to a bite with a nip: "That was draconian!" The nip, commenting on my bite, reflected the fact that commenting on my behavior was not destructive, and indeed paved the way for a symbolic explication of our roles. The analyst is there to receive the communication, and the patient is permitted to communicate. In this sense both partners survive destruction, that is to say, putting or being put in the wrong. Survival reinstates the paradoxical reality of analysis. What felt forbidden, inaccessible, not possible to speak becomes speakable now in the thirdness of play, made safer by acknowledgment of the violation.

As many relational thinkers have shown, collision may not only be unavoidable but potentiating (Davies, 2004; Bromberg, 2006; 2011; Slochower, 2006; Stern, 2009). Paradoxically, the concealing-revealing function of dissociated action made it possible to "play out" the meaning of the story more fully than my offering a containing formulation would have done: moving from failure to contain, repetition, acknowledgment, repair, new exploration and connection. Hannah's first anxious reaction, aiming to repair my ideal image, might be seen as reflecting a fear that through her anger all goodness would be destroyed and she would be to blame. However, with my acknowledgment we were able together to hold and survive the moment of fearing destruction, and so restore the tension of Is and Ought in the moral Third. We took another step towards replacing her old ideal of invulnerability, the longing for which had protected her against shameful need and fear of the unpredictable, damaging responses such needs might elicit while protecting her object from being "reduced to bits" as Klein (1952) put it.

We are able to move beyond this fear of damage when we create the moral Third, in this case through taking responsibility for hurt feelings. Hannah and I were able to move into a space in which both of us could feel the pain of this mother-daughter story: Mother's sense of being unlovable, unable to be soothed,

her daughter's identification with her, but also her deeper pain that mother had never been able to soothe her. Then, with me, the wish to transform that pain into a form that can be recognized and soothed by me in the part of mother, no longer reduced to bits but her surviving witness.

Dramatic enactment of jointly dissociated, powerful feelings can open the way for previously unrecognized self-states to step into the lights. But this use of the collision requires the analyst's acknowledgment and demystification, an invitation to the patient to join in sharing perception, formulating and analyzing, creating metaphors—ways of acting as a co-creator of the analytic process who can share the Third, rhythmic and differentiating. What appears in the guise of analyzing "what happened" might well be seen as constructing a narrative that can sustain the ambiguous relationship between Now and Then. We do not begin by knowing, nor even end by knowing, rather we lend ourselves to a movement from unformulated action to performance that creates meaning. Procedure matches content, as the movement of shared reflection and feeling elicits other self-states who enter the play. In this way a form of mutual recognition evolves with appreciation of one another's experience, separate and together (McKay, 2015).

PART III. PUTTING MUSIC AND LYRICS TOGETHER

I have tried to formulate an idea of meta-communication as part of what we do when there has been a rupture, by making use of enactments, that expose the complementary relationship or the uncoupling of feeling and thought or the shared dissociation. The effort to find our way into a felt connection then arises from within the action, and usually perforce embodies and encourages this recoupling of rhythmic and symbolic. Meta-communication that begins implicitly as performance during enactment can unfold in surprising ways, as if the script were writing itself (Ringstrom, 2007). Once we have performed the content and now the script contains a shared narrative action of the play, we may feel as if we, as partners, have become recoupled. The intersubjective process and psychic content work together.

My clinical illustration aimed to show the process of recoupling, between words and feelings, implicit and symbolic. With Hannah we saw how in the beginning, when symbolic representation is not anchored in the experience of attunement, it is not connected with knowing and being known by an other mind. Emotions first enter the field in dissociated actions that conceal and reveal. Performance of recognition within the dramatic action effects a transition to emotional expression, which then opens the experience to sharing of affect attunement, and thus to play with usable metaphors or characters. This process moves from Hannah enacting her outcast self to using the metaphor of the stalker to our enlivened exchange around Austen's Harriet. In this way we begin to generate symbolic thirdness in areas that were initially too shameful and anxiety-ridden to access. The dramatic interaction of repairing rupture moves from adversarial to collaborative and inquiring, with surprising guest appearances.

My contention has been that without having developed out of attunement and differentiation, a simulacrum of the symbolic Third arises that mimics reflection but is detached. As we work through enactments, moments of recognizing action can occur that link words and thoughts with feelings: implicit action and symbolic expression begin to match up.

I have highlighted how developmentally the same marking process that creates coupling of symbol with feeling gives rise to differentiating thoughts from reality, thus modifying psychic equivalence, making play with reality possible, as Fonagy and Target (1996a) theorized. Playing with the other, recognition, thus involves not only connecting through the rhythmic Third, but also differentiating feeling/belief from reality. This differentiation in turn results in ability to hold the paradox of analysis, the opposing needs for repetition and repair.

In analysis, recoupling the procedural action and the symbolic is what makes performed recognition distinct; it enacts or dramatizes rather than merely states or formulates. Of course much of what we do involves understanding, formulating, empathizing, reflecting. But the meta-communicating we aim for when we are stuck in enactment binds, or that comes more naturally when we are playing, can—like song or improvisational drama—help to form missing links between implicit and symbolic, words and music. In fact, what characterizes play is the congruence between action and words, or placing them in opposition so as to deliberately produce incongruence. Play requires the ability to use congruence and incongruence to shape new meanings and connection, often surprising and uncalculated.

Conversely, unintended incongruence and decoupling of these channels points us towards dissociation. I would contend that despite our greater attention to interaction and affect regulation, implicit sub-symbolic communication, the rhythm rather than words (Bucci, 2008; Knoblauch, 2000; 2005), the common pull to dissociation tends to uncouple the symbolic and rhythmic, that is, cause us to focus more upon the words or on the music alone, sometimes in alternation. Clinically, we may notice how this decoupling signals dissociation, especially the analyst's.

Decoupling, dissociation and play

It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose, but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself. The ease of play . . . is experienced subjectively as relaxation. The structure of play absorbs the player into itself and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constituted the actual strain of existence. The actual subject of the play is obviously not the subjectivity of the individual . . . but is instead the play itself.

(Gadamer, 1989, p. 109)

Gadamer's insightful description of play might be seen as one version of surrender to the Third—giving over to a co-created structure that transcends and absorbs the individuals so that they attain a freedom from self-consciousness, effort, or strain. Such release into play implies feeling at ease in the paradoxical space of analysis

as real/not real, because the boundary is clear and secures the space. But for many individuals, this space of immersion can only be sustained in certain states while in other states the tension of opposites breaks apart. Because play is self-state dependent, we can notice the appearance of strain, which signals that paradox is becoming untenable as dissociated areas are uncovered. Here, as we conclude our discussion of paradox and play, I reiterate that even fruitful clinical work involves dyadic alternations between genuine play and strain, like that between thirdness and complementarity or breakdown. Thus the clinical question becomes how we identify disruptions, how we theorize breakdown, how we envision restoring thirdness and reopening the potential space of surrender to paradox and play.

Civitarese (2008) has proposed thinking about play in the space of thirdness as immersion in flow. He conceives of an oscillation in psychoanalytic process between immersion in the flow and interruption that take us outside the flow: in his terms, interaction or interpretation cause such breaks. He appears to me to be describing symbolic interaction that is decoupled from the rhythmic, which occurs because of some dysregulation in analyst or patient. In other words, play with metaphor and imagery can be interrupted by a kind of thinking "about" rather than with the flow (Winnicott's split off intellectual functioning). Interestingly, psychoanalysts who have emphasized "being with," and the importance of implicit relational knowing have also been concerned that formulating or reflecting on the process would interrupt the rhythmic flow of empathic immersion. It might seem as if the question of how we can avoid disrupting immersion or the rhythmic Third of accommodation and attunement, though differently articulated, is nonetheless common to the clinical theories of empathic knowing and containment through reverie. The sticking point, which has moved relational analysis to focus on enactment, is that repeatedly we find that the analyst becomes increasingly unable to maintain the empathic or containing stance under the pressure of dissociated states or dysregulation. The affect expressed in the mode of psychic equivalence, which cannot be put into play, often pushes towards complementary twoness, rupture or stalemate. This cannot occur without the analyst's identifications with the patient and her objects, but these identifications are usually at least partly dissociated. The aim of my discussion of meta-communication is to suggest that there is a way to move through these obstructions in the flow that plays with and acknowledges them, at times explicitly, when they take the form of enactment or collision. At the same time, the analyst may try to maintain a vision of the Third: meaning, that we are paddling down the stream together and so—regardless of which kind of stream we choose—when we must sometimes get out and lift the canoe over a rock we view lifting together as part of creating a shared Third.

Thus even when the interruptions or collisions generated by the concealing/revealing dissociated action become our focus, the question of how we procedurally use the experience of repair to acknowledge and witness is crucial. We are, after all, often playing with very dangerous and painful elements, such that the word play may give us pause. On the one hand, in working with patients with developmental trauma there is a need to stay empathically attuned to affect

regulation, aim for “concor-dance” and a sense of interpersonal safety. But since witnessing and empathy are challenged by the (variously understood) powerful projections or dissociated threats and self-states, this rhythmicity is often disrupted and the analyst’s acknowledgment becomes necessary. Even in the best of conditions, the “core consciousness,” the state that occurs when we are immersed in reverie or in interactive improvisation can never be wholly sustained (Ringstrom, 2016).

Despite doubts about when and whether I have only myself to blame for disruptions, I conclude that I must see to it that this crisis becomes opportunity. If others succeed at avoiding such crises, I will happily learn from them. If, however, as it seems to me and I shall now contend, in many cases useful opportunities for acknowledgment are being smoothed over—an action I am all too familiar with myself—then I believe that I and most of my colleagues will do better as Ferenczi advised to humbly analyze our own vulnerabilities and support each other in doing so.

For my part, I am interested in what causes these interruptions in play or immersion—assuming we have even gotten it going. I suspect that one-sided focus on either symbolic narrative or intersubjective process may be more likely to cause us to ignore the pressure put on us by contradictory injunctions on different channels. We may be reactive, dissociatively, to the fragmentation of experience this produces. This can cause us to smooth over breakdowns in the tension of paradox, muddle through the complementarity of less visible enactments by returning to what we analysts are comfortable with, our default metaphors, formulations or empathic stance. It is when we are at home with our own comfortable flow that we are apt to be surprised by the unexpected enactment. Especially if up to this point both partners have seemingly adjusted to familiar patterns of reactivity, our reciprocal expectations and reactions are by now on quite cozy and intimate terms, even if sometimes abrasive, like an old married couple. Our dissociative cocoon, with its familiar complementary structure, must now be unwrapped, exposed to the cold air to be seen: jostled and destabilized in order to create movement (the baby parts of us are not happy with this and need some marked reassurance!). For all these reasons enactment and subsequent destabilization may necessarily take the form of interrupting our immersion, perhaps a collision.

An unfortunate illustration of the problems attendant on rejecting the function of enactment may be found in Boston Change Process Study Group, despite their recognition of the generativity of “sloppiness” (Nahum, 2002) that might have seemed to gesture in the direction of exploring our missteps. Instead, a one-sided advocacy for implicit relational knowing and “being with,” a hugely useful contribution on their part (Stern et al., 1998; Lyons-Ruth, 1999; Stern, 2004; BCPSG, 2005), has been set up in opposition to examining the dynamic origins of sloppy moments and hence the symbolic side of our work. Despite noting the disjunction between implicit and reflective-verbal domains (Nahum, 2008), they have explicitly rejected examining the dynamic motivation for this decoupling, specifically dissociation (Knoblauch, 2008). Recently, BCPSG (2013) has directly argued

against the relational theorizing of enactment and dissociation (especially the analyst's) in favor of repairing disruptions implicitly through "realigning with intention"—without talking about it. So here arises the problem of interrupting the flow. I question this assertion that we must choose between symbolically reflecting on repetition and generating new experiences of "being with" (implicit knowing) rather than being able to recouple them through play. I am not convinced by the categorical assertion that only change at the level of implicit relational knowing is mutative (BCPSG, 2013); exploring the uncoupling of that domain from reflexive-verbal knowing would than appear to be unnecessary.⁷

In countering the idea of dissociation, BCPSG define enactments—without regard to narrative content—as interruptions, mismatches or ruptures in the flow of fitting and joining which ought to be smoothed, not highlighted. These ruptures would then need only be repaired via affect regulation and restoring fittedness at the procedural level rather than unpacking the meaning of the action or self-states involved. BCPSG dispute the necessary emergence of dissociated parts or self-states that need to be addressed, that is, the symbolic meaning of the interruption is irrelevant. The erasure of the category of symbolic repetition flattens out the paradox of repairing by repeating, real but not real, that is essential to the psycho-analytic method.

One might think that maintaining the rhythm of mutual regulation by smoothing disruptions at the level of the implicit would actually serve to further dissociation and obscure the narrative content of dramatic ruptures. It would seem that the patient might be mystified and encouraged to accommodate rather than protest against injury or articulate what feels like repetition of injury. How is this problem addressed? By defining disruptive emotional events as "local" to the dyadic system, BCPSG's proposal decouples the perturbing or painful event from narrative historical meaning. It is hard to imagine that the emergence of historical traumata and emotions related to it would not be blocked by this stance (see Bohleber, 2010); that concentrating solely on restoring harmony via attunement and fittedness would adequately constitute recognition of complex injuries and failures of witnessing.

The problem of dissociation underlies both the erasure of repetition and the patient's historical trauma as well as the unwillingness to analyze the meaning of the analyst's reactivity and participation in enactment. BCPSG explicitly advocate for restoring mutual regulation and moving back into alignment with the patient and counsel against analyzing our own reactions. Since joint rhythmicity

7 Ellman and Moskowitz (2008) make the point that once having left the sensory-motor world for the symbolic realm the dyadic experiences of recognition and regulation are symbolically mediated, the implicit experiences are recursively ("nachträglich") reformulated and occur at a higher level of differentiation and representation; these are shaped by and contribute to multi-level, and sometimes multi-self narrative dramas. Thus reducing the experience to the implicit and bypasses all subsequent symbolic reworkings.

is considered paramount, the symbolic meaning of our "slippage" becomes unimportant. This position is the more striking because the case vignettes they used to demonstrate their argument entailed complex enactments involving dissociation of different self-states in both analyst and patient. In both cases discussed (Black, 2003; Stern, 2009) the analysts analyzed their own contribution and dissociative moments extensively, with reference to the patients' traumas. Yet their self-reflective analysis is explicitly rejected by BCPSG who reduce it to the implicit domain of failing to fit in or align with the patient's affect.

For instance, BCPSG defend their point with a case presented by Black (2003) in which the enactment involves a moment of laughter by the analyst that seems to evoke repetition of historical injuries, both participants' experiences with humiliation in relation to their fathers. Black shows how the collision encouraged the patient's expression of anger that was new for her. BCPSG focus solely on the transformational potential of the emergent anger and the "vitality" of the exchange as a property of the dyad, while reducing the complex narrative to a moment in which an analyst takes time out from her depressed patient "to enjoy a moment of laughter" (2013, p. 231). It is unnecessary and "shame-inducing" for analysts to consider their own dissociation, they declare. Analysts would do better to simply "regard their behavior as filling important needs of their own, needs that exist side by side with those of the patient . . ." (p. 231). As the analyst's dissociation, reactivity and vulnerability are off limits, Black's laughter is reduced to a "slippage" that can be adjusted (a non-Freudian slip?). Since it is a mistake, not a repetition of our histories nor expression of the not-me experience, there is no need to repair through acknowledgment or unpack the enactment.

The logic behind this clinical perspective is that only the new experience of "being with" is healing. The differentiation between the really real and the not real is denied, and so the mentalizing activity, based on sameness and difference between our experiences is also disregarded. The implicit experience trumps the symbolic. In effect, the analytic relation exists only in its rhythmic dimension, becoming then a real relationship between persons, one of whom (like Mom) sometimes needs a break. The paradoxical tension of the analyst as the one who repeats and the one who receives the communication is lost.

As McKay (2016) has pointed out, the clinical ideal of BCPSG contrasts sharply with the relational one, in which otherness is seen as vitalizing and verbal negotiation of the enactment can lead to a new quality of intimate relatedness. We partake in a moment of recognition by the sharing of inner states that have been exposed. The intimacy of such potential recognition is discarded along with the unmanageable, shameful dissociation. By contrast, the relational perspective holds that such recognition might actually heal shame and lead to greater tolerance of vulnerability; the aim of learning something new about ourselves and our patients functions as part of our collective Third. In this sense, permitting the ongoing enactment to evolve into disruption or collision, or even recognizing our own dissociation, can be liberating and generative, as both partners create symbolic as well as implicit knowing.

In recognizing the value of dramatic enactments in analysis, however, we do not therefore reject the effort to realign with the patient's intentions, to create affect regulation. We attend to containing the enactment, hoping it will be safe-enough. But we accept the dialectical movement of exposing the concealing/revealing action of dissociation to create the new, so that enactment morphs into play and we restore the paradox of repetition and repair. Black (2003) argues, and relational analysts concur, that enactments disrupt the rigid dissociative structure of the patient and not merely the dyadic regulation; they grow within but then break open the dissociative cocoon. From this point of view, disruption can be vital in loosening the grip of dissociative order, to perturb the system (Bromberg cited in Greif & Livingstone, 2013). And part of this tightly controlled order consists in the decoupling of affect from thought, procedural from symbolic.

Moments of rupture can create movement in static, stuck complementary relations, and through this motion expose in action the paradoxical pulls of fear and desire that need to be explored. Indeed, the movement between intersubjective positions—between complementarity and thirdness, stasis and disruption, enactment and play—is often foregrounded content rather than background in the analyst's awareness of whether there is space for thinking, freedom to move and be, for both participants.

The process of using enactment and joint dissociation as opportune moments for differentiation and recognition, highlighting disruption and repair, likewise punctuates the relation of immersion and interruption differently than Bionian Field Theory (BFT) (Ferro & Civitarese, 2013), which nonetheless has much in common with relational thought (Stern, 2013; 2015). Turning to that perspective—in effect the opposite of implicit relational knowing—we find a clinical theory that emphasizes the development of imagery in “pictographing” activity, expanding the capacity for thinking feelings, thus a version of recoupling. Influenced by Bion's emphasis on enabling the patient to develop his own capacity to contain and metabolize emotions (Ogden, 1997; Ferro, 2009; 2011; Brown, 2011), the dialogic reverie is infused with new life.

We might say this is a version of what Winnicott saw as the analyst “bringing the patient into the state of being able to play” (p. 44). In fostering the creativity of what Ferro (2009) calls “wakeful dreaming,” imagining the sessions as a dream, the analyst facilitates the use of shared metaphors, and thus enables the metabolizing of raw affect (Bion's beta elements) into more articulated emotions (alpha elements), “alphabetization,” and “pictographs” (Ferro, 2009; see also Brown, 2011).

As described compellingly by Ferro (2005; 2009; 2011; Ferro & Civitarese, 2013) the process of containing projective identifications and transforming proto-emotions that originate in the mode of psychic equivalence contributes to the growth of the part of the personality that is “constantly working to find, or rediscover, a basic psycho-somatic integration” (2009, p. 219). Despite his emphatic concentration on the field within the session, interpreting all outside material as characters and metaphors meeting inside, Ferro (2005) respects and identifies the repetition of

micro-traumas of the patient's history "in the presence of someone who can 'see' and 'repair' the primal damage . . . which has affected the apparatus of thinking"; (p. 6) there is recognition then that patients use enactment to repeat and heal such trauma, by ignoring the real intersubjective process, there is a likelihood of ignoring the way trauma is repeated relationally, procedurally, and not just through symbolic content.

The movement I have described from enactment to play, creating metaphors and bringing new characters on the stage, can be usefully brought together with BFT's method of playing, as Stern (2013; 2015) has shown.⁸ Like Ghent, Ferro emphasizes that the pressure of uncontained emotions and needs can be black-washed as aggression. Wary of split off intellectual formulations of paradox or use of interpretation to decode rather than expand the dreaming, the aim is to foster the patient's own development of thinking, and the analyst learning from what the patient says.

I am most appreciative of the way that symbolic thinking is broadened in this method to embrace the use of image-making and narrative to metabolize affect, a medium for recoupling the words and the music. But, despite the opening that allows for movement between enactment and play, there are some important differences worth highlighting in our respective views of analytic methods and goals, as noted by Stern (2013; 2015; also Peltz & Goldberg, 2013) especially in terms of how we view disruptions in the field. Ferro (2007) gives welcome attention to failures of containment and has stated that "microfractures in communication" give rise to cracks through which "undigested facts can burst in," becoming the "engine of analysis," (p. 34) a position indeed closely akin to relational theory of dissociation and enactment.

However a crucial point of contention between relational theory and BFT emerges regarding what is happening to us when we fail to contain, and what to do about it (Ferro & Civitarese, 2013). What clinical response is called for when, to use Ferro and Civitarese's (2013) terms, the field, as it must, "also contract[s] the analyst's illness," and the inevitable "accidents" occur (p. 647)? Ferro (2005) has already argued that the analyst should monitor the patient's narrative responses to his interpretations, modify them accordingly, but only seldom interpret them; rather the "person at the helm" uses them as "guidelines . . . to stay on course."

8 Stern's discussion of this issue resonates with me in many respects but I have a problem with his nomenclature: because he refers to the Bionian field theorists, BFT, he gives relational analysis the name IRP, Interpersonal Relational Psychoanalysis. In my view relational analysis has been eclectically and significantly influenced by Object Relations Theory and Self Psychology, at least as much as by the Interpersonal School. So I stick with "relational theory." Stern raised the interesting question as to how and if my idea of the Third can be assimilated to the Bionian idea of the field. The Third in Ogden's theory is closer to the field, the relational matrix that we create and exist in together. For me, as I said in the introduction, the position of the Third is one crucial movement or position within the field.

Ferro and Civitarese (2013) assume that when the inevitable "accident" occurs, the analyst "given appropriate functioning" in the setting should simply "regain an ideal position for containing the patient's anxieties." Even if the analyst does acknowledge the lapse in containment, for example, let the patient know he is aware of his somewhat critical interpretation (Ferro, 2009) in the previous session, and modifies his "cooking" accordingly, he tells the patient that the dish was too spicy and he hopes the cook will be more careful in the future (Ferro, 2009). We note that in giving examples of acknowledgment, Ferro, who identifies as film director, does not call "Cut!" and review the scene with the actor. The break in our rhythmic Third is repaired implicitly, the immersive flow is not really interrupted, as the director continues to roll the camera. But the patient's confusion or anxiety is not directly addressed, his observations of his analyst not elicited.

If relational analysis has focused on revealing some of our process along with the source of our dissociation, as well as how we made use of this reaction to unpack the enactment, it may be because we are not so sure that, especially in painful accidents, we will regain an "ideal position" without talking through what caused the disruption. Inviting the patient to cook in the kitchen together so that she has a say in spicing the dish (Aron & Atlas, 2015) might appeal to us because, as Stern (2013; 2015) explains, we don't trust the analyst to reflect alone on where the ship went wrong or why he put too much pepper in yesterday's stew. We may be surprised. Failures are used to enlarge the patient's participation.

The exchange of the unspeakable known has implications for how minds meet, how truth can be spoken, and how the container becomes more mutual (Cooper, 2000). But of equal importance is the fact that in the face of injury or rupture, the analyst's acknowledgment becomes an opportunity for repair of the Third, for a new quality of relatedness that emerges as we shift self-states from complementarity to mutual knowing. The transition from complementarity to thirdness, from enactment to acknowledgment reinstates paradox, making play possible. This process of shifting is part of what is mutative in analysis, what intersubjectively anchors the new ability to integrate thought and emotion.

Of course, most analysts agree that if we can maintain the rhythm, recover an empathic stance and contain the "micro-fracture" through understanding, we may still find out something about our own reactivity. But some fractures are larger, more painful, originate in real trauma for which the patient seeks, yearns, for witnessing and acknowledgment as such. Some not-me states are calling to us through the pressure of such reality, unmetabolized and intensified by the fearful equation of inner and outer, then and now. Insofar as this pressure may activate the analyst, we will learn from reconstructing the analyst's part in the enactment. We will think in terms of the uncontained projections or dissociated self-state expressed in the complementary oppositions that tend to either freeze the action or lead to rupture. From the standpoint of intersubjective recognition, the characters of self-states that emerge in enactment are viewed as parts "belonging" not only to the field but to the analyst and patient as respective individuals. (Bernstein, in conversation), all the more stuck to us when we do not own and

take responsibility for them. In this sense, the analyst and patient remain separate subjects, who are aware of the painful or positive impact of their actions upon each other—blaming, criticizing, rejecting, joining or withdrawing from shared affect—which is part of what feels “real” in analysis as does the repair through shared knowing of one another. Such reality of feeling can co-exist with reverie and metaphor that contribute to the make-believe of affecting each other in quite “unreal” ways. Working through enactment ideally involves some version of reinstating or accepting the paradox that the relationship is both real and unreal, but only if the reality of what happened between us is not mystified. Then the analyst can be the one who both nips you and aids you in healing from the bites you have suffered.

This form of repair engenders as well a powerful experience of the moral Third, of lawful responsiveness: the patient has the experience that the analyst is aware that she will feel put in the wrong, and that the analyst puts her sanity and safety above his need to be right. The analyst is resisting the pull to be “good” at all costs which might extrude the badness into the patient (Davies, 2004) while making it into a disowned, not-me state for himself (Mark, 2015). The procedural action of co-creating the understanding as a form of thirdness figures in our theory of intersubjectivity as an added dimension; the analyst is able to reflect on one’s own accidents—those that trigger shame or self-reproach especially.

The procedural meaning of reconstructing our action together or co-creating a metaphor to express our understanding is that we create a container together, a form of thirdness. This idea of a third space that holds both partners emotions suggests that dialogic engagement fosters a form of mutual containing in which emotions become communication that moves the other. In this movement, epitomized by interactive play, symbolization manifests as an intersubjective process, a form of recognition between self and other. Procedure matches content. The movement of shared reflection and feeling elicits other self-states who enter the play.

The shared activity of reflection is a process in its own right, a form of knowing each other that is transformative: mutual recognition. As Bromberg (2011) put it “mutual knowing or ‘state sharing’ that not only is therapeutic in its own right but deepens and enriches the opportunity for symbolic processing . . . of each partner’s not me experience . . .” (p. 13). Note that Bromberg’s description of intersubjective recognition attends to both sharing of states and symbolic processing of the separate experience of each partner. Where the sense of recognizing one another’s experience may be “too real” for field theory, it seems that different self-states and meanings interfere with the unison of “being with” in the BCPSG version of implicit knowing. On the one side, the symbolic and symbolizing action seems to outweigh the implicit meaning of how it feels to be knowing each other’s minds, on the other side implicit knowing sidelines the symbolic. Intersubjective recognition theory envisions the recoupling, however loose, between interactional and symbolic knowing. The transformations in intersubjective relatedness provide early developmental experiences that have been missed, even as they create the

conditions for analytic play, interactive and symbolic. The intersubjective recoupling that I am proposing is thus about regenerating the rhythmic thirdness of mutual knowing that underlies all trustworthy connection, but this depends upon a vital form of differentiation. It is about restoring the paradoxical relationship to reality and pretend in psychoanalysis, repetition in repair of the really real from the pretend real—the ability to play in the paradoxical space of the analytic field.

From an intersubjective perspective, analysts can accept the ways we do not always know ourselves or the other, but rather surrender to the process of discovery by accepting the limits of our abilities to know ahead of the process itself (McKay, 2015). In this way we open ourselves to emergent meaning (Stern, 2015). We may, of course, become more familiar with the vicissitudes of dissociation and enactment, the nip and the bite; with the paradoxical dynamics of rupture and repair, repetition and reparation; the paradox of expressing pain, disappointment, betrayal even while being heard and received. We accept paradox in order to lend ourselves, including our most vulnerable states and feelings, to a movement toward the improvisational play where shared meaning emerges through our recognition of the other. The analyst's invitation to surrender to this open-ended process is intended to facilitate the restoration of thirdness as play—the state of absorption and participation in something larger. This something comes from the place of the Third, which beckons us from beyond our clinging to the familiar Me. This place, in which the news of difference is enlivening and "safe enough" we find some freedom from the ordinary strain of recognizing otherness. In shared surrender to this Third, we are able to appreciate yet again the rhythmic flow of recognition, as if the improvisation of Yes/And were effortless, as if feelings and symbols were part of our playthings. This is the "real" relationality of the analysis, in which we play with reality and the other, learning how to do it together.

