The Analyst as Muse: The Expansive Dimension of the Transference

Penelope S. Starr-Karlin, Psy.D., M.F.T.

A new “Muse transference,” which animates creativity and an “expansive” dimension, distinct from the developmental and repetitive dimensions of transference, is introduced. The expansive dimension is differentiated because it is influenced by the subjectivity of the analyst and is emergent from contemporary contextual possibilities. A theoretical discussion and case study using intersubjective-systems theory illuminates how intense passion vivifies sublimation leading to creativity when the Muse transference and expansive dimension are active, forming the foundation for new life directions. The role and solicitousness of the analyst being used as a Muse are addressed, and a clinical approach is suggested.

Keywords: analyst's subjectivity; creativity; expansive dimension; intersubjective-systems theory; muse; passions; sublimation and Eros; transference

Introduction

...Your therapy seems to depend not merely on the affects released by abreaction but also on certain personal rapports. ...—Jung, letter to Freud (1906, p. 4)

Transference provides the impulse necessary for understanding and translating the language of the ucs.; where it is lacking, the patient does not make the effort or does not listen when we submit our translation to him. Essentially, one might say, the cure is effected by love. —Freud, letter to Jung (1906, p. 10).
This is a story of love in the transference and how it contributed to an analytic couple becoming organized into a “Muse-analyst—Creative-analysand” dyad. “Thom,” 55 years old and divorced, organized my subjective traits into a Muse transference. Our subsequent experiences cast doubt on the conventional notion that a Muse is simply a passive source of inspiration, posing some important analytic questions when Thom’s level of creativity changed from beginner to emotionally expressive produced playwright. I was also inspired to write this article—a reflection on, and theorizing about, our generative analytic process.

Clinical events are explained through the perspective of intersubjective-systems theory (Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood, 1987), and I propose a new dimension of the transference, the “expansive” dimension, extending this theory. The expansive is context-emergent, exponentially building, and expressive of the characteristics of each unique analytic non-linear dynamic system. I demonstrate how the Muse-analyst’s subjectivity plays a co-constitutive part in the expansion of the analysand’s self-experience.

Use of this theory affords phenomenological and interpretive understandings (Coburn, 2009, p. 191) of Freud’s observation that “the cure is effected by love” (letter to Jung, December 6, 1906). I follow the golden thread of the emotional experiences of the analysand, analyst, and the dyad, by considering love, sublimation, and transformation in psychoanalysis as complex intersubjective-system processes. Furthermore, by conceptualizing the love transference using an affect theory in which a passion or mood is considered as a continuum of shades of similar affect (rather than segregated into discrete feelings), I can conclude that there are new prospects for analytic action: When the analyst is organized as a Muse, the expansive dimension joins the repetitive and developmental dimensions of the transference at the center of change in analysis.

**Self Psychology, Intersubjective-Systems Theory, and Change**

Kohut and Wolf (1978) used systems thinking to consider the caretaker’s influence on the early self which, they assert, begins in a “virtual” imaginal form as “specific hopes, dreams, and expectations . . . in the minds of the parents, especially the mother” (p. 416) They explain that once the infant is born the child’s actual traits then influence and modify the imaginal self-form in “the interplay between the new-born’s innate equipment and the selective responses of the selfobjects through which certain potentialities are encouraged in their development while others remain unencouraged or are even actively discouraged.” Furthermore it is the “responses of the parents . . . [not in the form of] what the parents do . . . [but] what the parents are” that influence the developing child (p. 416, emphasis added). These ideas presage the expansive dimension I discuss here.

Kohut and Wolf (1978) use a Cartesian understanding of the self, however, once it is formed describing it as “. . . an independent centre of initiative, an independent recipient of impressions” (p. 414, emphasis added). The self must withdraw from dependency

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1 A composite, details changed to protect confidentiality.
in order to become autonomous enough to carry out "... the specific intrinsic pattern of its constituent ambitions, goals, skills, and talents" (p. 414, emphasis added). Later, developmental strivings emerge as selfobject transferences when the well-trained analyst practices vicarious introspection and empathy (Kohut, 1971). In contradistinction, intersubjective-systems theory suggests that in healthy relationality, continued growth depends not on withdrawal but on movement toward the other for stimulating new experience and support. This phenomenological-contextualist perspective prioritizes the what and when, to discover the why of emotional experience, and positions affect at the center of human motivation. Priorities include the achievement of a full emotional life, and the ability to relate authentically.

Intersubjective-systems theory fundamentally assumes that the processes of selfhood (Stolorow and Atwood, 2012) are constitutively embedded in relatedness: "self-experience is shaped at every point in development by the intersubjective system in which it crystalizes" (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992a, pp. 17–18). Responsiveness to relational situations requires a flexible, permeable yet safe, set of stabilizing processes to maintain an accustomed sense-of-self and world. Meaning-making about continuously changing emotional experience—within a familiar range of affectivity—constitutes the foundational sense of selfhood (Stolorow, 2011a, p. 60), and this is understood to be the most analytically significant modifier at the center of the experience of being. Transference is conceptualized not as regression or displacement, but as experience shaped by ongoing pre-reflectively unconscious organizing (or meaning-making) activity in the present moment. Certain transference themes can be recognized in the analytic relationship and are used for the illumination of organizing principles. These processes shape distinctive affectivity and self-experience by making meaning of sense perceptions by fitting them into a unique set of familiar scenarios based on past experiences (that had high volume of specific affects, developmental or repetitive) and activate stabilizing and self-perpetuating defensive or desiring strategies (Stolorow et al., 1987, pp. 36–37). Intense affects (passions) drive the creation, modification, or break-down of organizing principles.²

The analyst, central to an analysand’s emotional world and co-constituent of the intersubjective field, brings matching or opposing affects, themes, and subjective features to the analytic moment. These are especially significant during heightened emotional interactions. As the analysand is liberated from the constraints of old organizing, the Muse-analyst’s responses can be unconsciously used to shape new organizing principles such as “My wonderful Muse values my ideas (my family was wrong)!" The new context also offers the influence of the Muse-analyst’s subjectivity, forming supports for the expansive dimension as needed by the analysand for art (or other new behavior). This article looks at the way the system composed of relational experience, passionate affectivity, sublimation, unvalidated potential creativity, and the analyst’s subjectivity all interweave to provide the conditions for an ongoing emerging future-oriented process as the analysand experiences a “modernization” of character and increased resilience.²

²The affective arousal of emotionally vivid REM dreaming enhances the plasticity of neural pathways (Cai et al., 2009), suggesting a correlation to the maintenance of organizing principles (often identifiable in dreams).
This systems perspective contrasts with Kohut’s self that fragments, coheres, and unfolds according to a linear pre-determined plan. I will show that any program may be revised or created by the contemporary dynamic relational system in which it is situated, given conditions involving strong affect. The case study demonstrates how a relationship with a Muse-analyst can bring out creativity irrespective of barriers formed by early neglect, malattunement, or trauma.

**Aspects of Subjectivity**

Stolorow and Atwood commenting on Kohut’s theoretical pre-suppositions of a self in deficit of structure comment that he “... establishes a clinical focus on what is missing rather than what is present in self-experience” (1997, p. 521, emphasis added). What is painfully present, such as themes formed during a history of abuse, result in repetitive organizing of current events of an ambiguous nature, while what has been missing shows up as developmental longings, appetites, and idiosyncratic proclivities. What is helpfully present in what the analyst brings is an additional and vital component of context that I explore as contributing to the “expansive” dimension of transference. By not assuming a fixed “blueprint” (Kohut, 1984, p. 42), it can be seen that the future direction of change is current-context dependent, being subject to and emergent from (1) impactful emotional interactions, past and present; (2) the many ongoing changes taking place in analysis (such as increasing self-reflective capacity and the easing of the control of organizing principles over meaning-making); (3) the intersubjective field of both worlds of experience interacting together, apart, and separately but in reference to one another; and (4) importantly, the subjectivity of the analyst along with his or her distinctive (or organized to be) traits are among the key factors in the unfolding self-experience and growth of the analysand and, therefore, of change in future possibilities.

A distinction is made here between a Muse and a mentoring transference just as Parker (1998) excellently delineated: “Muses inspire while mentors instruct. Muses are accomplices, mentors are models ...” (p. 767). Parker’s idea emphasizes the Muse’s ability to quicken and animate, a point I will elaborate later, the result of a complex form of love called Eros by the ancient Greeks (historically thinned out into lust). Eros-as-passion leads to mutual responsiveness, longing for generativity, sublimation, inspiration, and the urgency to create. The Muse-analyst’s personal qualities, talents, and concerns become, endure, or may be transcended by the analysand as the desired “something” valued as a prompt for the unthought known (Bollas, 1987), for Thom the emergence of his creativity.

There are two factors to be considered when there is an increase in creativity. Before analysis creation was prohibited either by the presence of something damaging, or the absence of something facilitative. The first occurred when early relationships undermined creativity due to malattunement (such as devaluing, disapproval, parental narcissism or pre-emption, conflicts about competing, perfectionism, and more). Hostility toward inventiveness caused inhibiting repetitive organizing principles to form and endure, resulting in repression by dynamic unconscious process whenever the

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3For a description of the dynamic, pre-reflective, and unvalidated unconscious processes see Stolorow and Atwood (1992a).
context has potential for creativity. Analytic work diminishes the grip of these organizing principles, what has been defensively sequestered is vivified, and the results seemingly fulfill Kohut’s “nuclear program.” Mentoring can then help with extant creativity, but a Muse transference can ignite the spark of inspiration and draw out the “never before.”

In the second case creativity was inconceivable due to childhood deprivations and deficits and it remained as potential—formless, indistinct, and unrealized. A depleting environment may have required pathological accommodation (Brandchaft, 1994) whereby creative self-experience remained undiscovered or deprivation involved passivity, ignorance, poverty, or lack of resources. Conceptually speaking, creativity had remained an ephemeral aspect of unvalidated unconsciousness which: “... could not be articulated because [it] never evoked the requisite validating responsiveness from the surround ...” (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992a, p. 33). Thom’s childhood had been devoted to serving others and his developmental needs had gone largely unmet. Now his context included my traits, ongoing solicitousness, and analytic work relieving harmful themes. Thom fell in love and longed for some form of communion with me. I became his Muse and felt moved by his way of being with me. The expansive dimension formed and self-expression flowed from possibilities imbued with meaning by their association to me, especially the creative aspects of my subjectivity. Thom’s experience of passion, and the need for a solution to its unbearable extremity, called his nebulous creativity into consciousness and then form. The patient’s “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” was being manifested (Stolorow, 2011b, p. 47).

**AFFECT**

Thom’s passionate affects activated sublimation and resulted in creativity. To better understand the emotional phenomena I turned to affect theorists, Sylvan Tomkins and Philip Fisher. Both agree that affect delineates our world even if the feelings we have may not be those we prefer and shows whom we are to ourselves and others (Fisher, 2002, pp. 218–219). Meanings are revealed by comparative volume and type of affect, evaluated by use of unconscious analogues formed by previous experience, and used to activate conscious and unconscious processes (Tomkins, 2008, p. 325).

Following a tradition from ancient Greece to later European culture, a distinction can be drawn between “passions” and those emotions that can be reflected upon—“feelings,” “sentiments,” or “moods” (Fisher, 2002). This philosopher illuminates the significance of differences between, for example, the fear of imminent death on a battlefield, as compared to fear of missing the train (pp. 18–19). Importantly, nuances in the division and naming of affect states (and the exact usage of words) reflect political attitudes and prejudices and “... participate in the communal act of installing and defending one or another design within psychological life. They are, we might say, legislative vocabularies” (p. 41). Passions are described as too powerful to objectify, all consuming, unquenchable, persistent, and as often exerting extraordinary pressures. He explains that passions involve “undivided being” (p. 42), a state beyond self-reflective focus. Passions carry the opportunity to embrace the divergent and newly emergent due to the by-passing of normal limitations and rigid patterns.
The devaluing of everyday concerns along with the undisguised and unmistakable embodied expression, such as facial distortion, coloration, amplified gestures, and so on, reveal the unified mind–body state of passion. Once valorized as essential to early Greek warrior culture, passions were rejected by the Stoics who established a solid conceptual separation between thinking and emotion, effectively irrationalizing, and devaluing all strong affect (pp. 48–50). The Stoics prioritized reasonableness, separateness of self from emotional state, and insisted on a “radical privacy” (p. 49) that inhibits physical communication of affect. Furthermore, passionate affects (such as Love,⁴ a single word that still embraces a host of volumes, types, and expressions of love), were compartmentalized and de-complexified into a set of delimited feelings largely defined by situational descriptors (for example, friendship). Thinking was celebrated while emotions were relegated (through shame) to a private, domestic, realm. Stoics thus diminished our ability (as a culture) to experience our full capacity to emote, and its benefits to self-experience. Stoic influence remains through the works of such philosophers as Descartes, Hume, Kant, Darwin, and James, and the many psychoanalytic theories they have influenced.

Fisher (2002) describes three early literary proto-narratives concerning the working through of fully felt passion; dissipation, discharge, and displacement. Dissipation involves full immersion, followed by frantic activity leading to exhaustion, while discharge goes from fullness to an “explosion of the will” (p. 91) such as murder. Displacement describes Thom’s experience of one passion being abruptly replaced by another which conserves the volume of affect but changes its mood and intentionality. Limits, he explains, are found by the opposition of other passions. In the analytic setting, for example, the horizon lines acceptable for the expression of Love for the Muse-analyst will eventually be opposed by the analyst’s Anger. The context of other relationships could bring Guilt, Fear, or Shame, and the limits imposed by the facts of commerce lead to Grief. This, Fisher refers to as the “blocking” of one passion by another (2002, pp. 33–35).

The affectivity of Thom’s love transference is best described as a continuum of fluidly interconnected forms of love, from spiritual to earthy, not limited to the univalent and psychoanalytically familiar “erotic.” Given this complexity I sought further understanding by reviewing the mythology of the god, Eros (see Figure 1), for example Plato’s Symposium (385–380 BCE) an exploration of Greek thinking about Eros’ manifestations. There are four forms of love—biological, romantic, devotional, and philosophical (Jung, 1954, para. 361).

As biological process, Eros makes use of the other in an individualistic and emotionally unrelated way. He is world-creator (Hesiod, 700 BCE), and father of the human race (Aristophanes, 414 BCE). The Eros of romantic process is concerned with finding, learning to relate to, and losing, a specific beloved other (Plato, 385–380 BCE). Eros as a devotional form of love binds together through a glimpse of the “eternal forms” (potential) in the other, and bodily desire is sublimated for the perfection of the soul (Plato, 370 BCE, stephanus pag. 198–207). The Eros of philosophy is the passion for truth and

⁴Fisher (2002) uses capitalization to indicate passions, a notion I have used here. He includes Love and Lust as passions, but says little about them (2002, pp. 8–11).
knowledge. Messenger and mediator between humans and the gods, Eros intercedes so that “the universe is at one with itself” (Plato, 385–380 BCE, stephanus pag. 202e).

Eros, understood as a psychological metaphor for the continuum of unifying processes at work in the analytic couple during a love transference, offers a richer picture of the link between love and creativity: Biological Eros organizes the world of the psyche, and drives the desire for generativity (the dyad is energized and use is made of aspects of the analyst’s subjectivity). Romantic Eros activates the affinity that bonds and maintains the analytic couple (mutual engagement creates a special context conducive to fertile experimentation). Devotional Eros seizes on a glimpse of something surpassingly excellent in the other that stimulates the desire to transcend mortal weaknesses (idealization and motivation to become best self). Reflective philosophical Eros absorbs insights from the analyst (inspiration and integration occurs).

From a phenomenological-contextualist systems hermeneutic the ever-changing relational context mediates between the tolerable and intolerable (due to organizing activity) and delineates the point at which a feeling becomes a passion (Stolorow, 2007). Neither univalent nor intrapsychic, Eros-passion is highly influenced by the other’s responsiveness which can quench or amplify affects. The analyst’s subjectivity contributes to the persistence of the Muse transference and the qualities of the expansive dimension. Eros, a force of attraction, draws the couple together and amplifies the observer-expectancy effect in needed ways to form strong multi-layered connections. The continuum of Eros affect, from biological to philosophical, acts individually and together simultaneously, pulling toward union. Creativity emerges as passion pulls a third (the
art) from the two by the bridging and fractifying process of sublimation which serves to transform destabilizing passions into a symbolic union. Thom’s Love transference in analysis was a signifier of generative potential, until then languishing unvalidated and interrupting the possibilities of the creation of a better future world for the analysand.

Freud (1920) struggled to understand Eros, sublimation, and his brilliant clinical observations, poignantly owning that: “... the libido of our sexual instincts would coincide with the Eros of the poets and philosophers which holds all living things together” (p. 50). Later he (1938) writes,

After long hesitancies and vacillations we have decided to assume the existence of only two basic instincts, Eros, and the destructive instinct. . . . The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus—in short, to bind together. (p. 148)

Freud (1933) suggested that sublimation involved two components—the ideational and the energetic—that is, the instinctual (seeking) drive content, and a “quota of affect” (passion), respectively (p. 83). He thought that in repression both components are out of awareness, whereas in sublimation only the instinctual. He divided artists from neurotics suggesting that only artists had the ability to flex repression into sublimation, and the ability to communicate concealed feelings (Wolman, 1967). I have come to think that sublimation may be more widely available. That Eros can be found in the consulting room and represents what Freud termed the life force of “uniting and binding,” (1923, p. 45) was a helpful discovery, and a systems reconsideration can provide further insight. For example, passion with its affective intensity could not ignite and endure without some sense of reciprocity within the depriving limitations of analysis. Faced with a context delimiting the usual relationship paths to deepening connection, each participant unconsciously uses situational possibilities to transcend constraints and “unite-and-bind” with the subjectively important traits of the other.

Thom sublimated aspects of my creativity as analyst and architect (my former career) to become a playwright. All three require a vision, a process full of diversions, a certain determination, and the negotiation of constraints. Our analytic process paralleled the symbolic union of loved and lover in his work of creating a theatrical play. See Figure 2.

**Being a Muse**

The analyst’s attitudes, values, and talents are a constituent of the intersubjective context available to be interpreted by the analysand. In the first session Thom and I established that we had a mutual interest in dreams, mythology, and the arts. Over the years he learned more about me from clues on the walls and bookshelves of my consulting room (in my house), absences, unavailability due to conferences and teaching, online information, and inevitable sidebars in our dialogue. He attended institute events and we accidentally met at community cultural occasions. My perceived creativity, affirmative
relationship to my inventiveness, and willingness to risk spontaneity, played a significant role in Thom’s imaginative projections of possible self-experiences.

The intersubjective field during a Muse transference has modified and distinctive qualities. Perhaps the first act of the creative analytic couple is to explore the possibilities of the analytic encounter, creatively experimenting in order to make it their own: “... in playing... the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 54). Winnicott (1953, p. 89) describes use of the analyst as a “transitional object” and analysis as “potential space” but underplays the important reciprocity of playfulness and its usefulness to the process of the analytic couple through increasing responsiveness, spontaneity, types of encounter available, and range of play.

As Muse I offered the following qualities: (1) I inspired exciting flights of imagination and vitality; (2) I was receptive and protective of Thom’s imaginative experience of who I was; (3) I had an ability to be organized as valuing of art forms relevant to Thom and associated with excellence in them; (4) I was responsive and solicitous toward his development and he felt my affection for his personhood; (5) I was able to motivate him to exceed self-held limitations through modeling and perhaps by accepting his longing to be the special recipient of my love and respect; (6) I had an ability to meet a need for mentoring with authentic interest; (7) I recognized the emergence of the expansive
dimension and allowed Muse-organizing without disturbance; (8) I was a “relational home” (Stolorow, 2006) when disaster struck—supporting Thom through the inevitable chaos of creative endeavors and helping him with anxiety-driven retreats in the form of dissociative process, states of panic, and other forms of defensive process.

Growthful change is usually followed by unbearable emotional reactions, and a retreat from the new behavior (to safe but limited actions). Developmental experiences are followed by what is termed backlash—a self-created defensive pre-emptive move to repetitive organizing in anticipation of re-traumatization—a bad but familiar emotional world. Retreat from the expansive dimension of experience is a harsher process called decay. Backlash activates a lightning-fast engagement of predetermined defensive processes, while decay is a collapse following the act of leaving the familiar, fundamentally challenging an old identity, and encountering difficulties without defensive strategies in place. The Muse-analyst must interpret backlash, and illuminate the retreats caused by decay, so that historical experience can be grieved, integrated, and left behind, allowing a new identity to solidify, and the “possibility of new possibilities” to exist.

Bearing the impact of the analysand’s passions and their frustration is another difficult challenge the Muse-analyst must bear. Recipient of Desires and Anger, witness to Grief, perceived as cruel rejecter, dissembler, abandoning, heartless Monster, begged and implored as Goddess, persuaded like a jury to protect from suicidality and eternal damnation, accused of complacency and indifference, and offered inappropriate favors, all took great skillfulness. The analyst needs fortitude, clarity of purpose, and faith in the process. He or she must be willing to struggle with related affects, themes, transference processes, and frequent crises.

Only infrequently immersed in passion, I primarily experienced milder forms of mentoring loving feelings and solicitude (Heidegger, 1962), care, or confirming (Buber, 1999). I was especially engaged as Muse, when Thom, in Buber’s (1965) words:

... secretly and bashfully watched[d] for a Yes which allow[ed] him to be and which [could] come to him only from one human person to another. It is from one [human] to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed. (p. 71)

As the work progressed, we were not only a Muse-seeker dyad, but we also became mentor–mentee as affect, context, and receptivity to creative expression ebbed and flowed without definitive or constant roles. In a non-linear process I was Muse or mentor, able to be an inspiring and containing other who discerned and reflected the goodness of Thom’s emerging creativity, or was there to facilitate his process. I was with him through the fear and chaos, and I fiercely protected his vulnerability as he birthed a new identity as a playwright. I was careful not to intrude, invade, pre-empt, or overwhelm Thom, yet help to bring out the essential “new concept” (Person, 1999). Solicitousness kindled his gratitude which in turn evoked more responsiveness from me, creating a process of

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5 Robert D. Stolorow, personal communication January 6, 2012.
6 For Buber (1999), “confirming” means recognizing and nurturing the other’s full potential (p. 266).
mutual inspiration. Kept safe by boundaries, our dyad found a way to tolerate mutual passion, tension from disparity in level of affect, and the impact of chaos and doubt, while staying close and connected.

**Clinical Details: Inner Experience—The Expansive Dimension**

The expansive dimension of the transference is a combination of intense affect and use of contextual possibilities. For Thom the frustration of his love and restricted access to me, his beloved Muse, led him to experience two passions, Love and Grief, the latter due to the limits of the analytic situation, his existential situation, and my non-accommodation of his desire that I be an antidote for the legacies of his history by boundary-crossing enactment. As an analytic couple we began to experience an unusually broad spectrum of affects made possible by the simultaneously frustrating and protective context.

The expansive dimension may have begun in early sessions as special moments of shared interest in the creativity of Thom’s dreams the only evidence of what was later revealed as a fine imagination. His eyes had flashed exuberantly and I had noticed myself leaning in, delighted by his curiosity, since his presentation had otherwise been remarkably concrete and emotionally flat. Now, three years later, Thom had become preoccupied with me, all I did, and his analysis. When his love blossomed into a full passion, his normal emotional experiencing changed. Thom’s organizing principles (affected by the emotional intensity) aligned to this passion by shaping perceptual information to confirm the theme of my “perfection.” Both developmental and repetitive dimensions were heightened (although the latter was almost entirely obscured). Longing became so strong that Thom demanded a softening of analytic boundaries.

Overcome by Eros (including its transcendent and wisdom potentials), he experienced his beloved analyst as beatific, flawless, and potent, a “divine Muse.” Thom’s affect over-rode the subjective and contextual contingencies and limitations of normal love, and like a benign illusion it extended horizons of “the conceivable” into an imaginative new world of possibilities (irrespective of our context). Powerful Eros also fell upon me and I was entranced as I “dwelled with” him (Stolorow, 2014, pp. 80–83), momentarily falling in and out of love too. We were co-creators of the expansive dimension.

As a system, attunement became extraordinary. The previous patient-doctor hierarchy could be organized as egalitarian, facilitating a sense of generativity that “quickened” creativity. For the analysand, every manifestation of being-in-love and of relating to me were imaginally organizable: from self as child relating to analyst as wise sage, to “soul mate” to “soul mate,” or as Thom found, playwright to Muse, or any of many types of relationship dyads, allowed the analysand’s imagination to play and “try out” scenarios in light of the receptivity of the analyst.

Meanwhile, Thom’s overwhelming multi-leveled longing escalated despite his attempts to tolerate or control it, and it became destabilizing and intolerable. Under

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7The recognition and use by the analysand of the analyst’s unconscious processes is described in Starr-Karlin (in press). See this reference for a case study on the use of transference dreams.
the conditions of analysis his passion could neither dissipate nor be discharged without risk of termination, so displacement by blocking came on-line. Grief at the impossibility of fulfillment of that Longing switched-in at the almost intolerable apex of its growing intensity. His Grief then also gradually escalated to a point of unbearable agony, had to be blocked, and Longing returned. Grief required an acceptance of separateness, but his Love prohibited it. Thom’s uncompromising passions fluctuated at varying intensities and intervals, producing uncontrollable affective-cognitive-somatic turmoil. Despite mutual caring, the unrelenting presence of inhibited and intense affective processes eventually de-stabilized our dyad. In the wake of volatility, exhaustion from tolerating and regulating interactions, appropriately fielding wishes for boundary violations, and other challenges, various forms of destructiveness began to loom. Lovingness was trumped by affects such as frustration, defensiveness, bitterness, demands, processes of dissociation, and increased symptomatology as passion met blocking. Thus consumed, Thom desperately sought relief. He considered termination and abandonment of treatment but that was too terrible with its promise of another agonizing loss. Irreconcilable urgencies plagued Thom and the processes of sublimation came on-line.

Past and present moments of emotional aliveness between us contributed to Thom’s identification of a unique activity wherein the constraints of the analytic situation were honored yet transcended. The pathway to contextually emergent creativity was found within an emotional reality suffused with Love and composed of my subjectivity, which included experience in art history and the design of environments, and the analysand’s history and his experience with school plays. I believe that it is likely that we both intuitively made unconscious note of the most delightful moments of connection, as ideas and ways of being with each other were tried. High points of mutuality characterized by peaking vitality, emotional connection, and an experience of communion, inspired the analysand to identify, re-experience, and memorialize these moments of emotional and creative union.

Thom’s preoccupation ensured that my interpreted traits, interests, attributes, comments, and other forms of self-expression were always in mind and his pathway to relief involved imagistic and poetic-linguistic symbolization, a process paralleling REM dreaming which also entails two contrasting affects. Dreams, fantasy, reverie, projection into movies and myths, and the integration of my responses were all utilized as Thom’s imagination produced dream-like scenarios and, through them, he began to transcend the destabilizing experience. Symbolic ideas replaced his preoccupation and he felt relief as hopefulness and a sense of agency over chaos calmed his turmoil. Gradually, he became fascinated with a specific idea sprung from a field of ideas and the disturbing preoccupation lessened. The project brought a return to his own experience as the center of his reverie as the Muse transference formed a protective, inspiring, and reassuring context for the emergence of the play. With sublimation, affective opposites were transcended.

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8Symbolization takes place during REM dreaming. In a Harvard study by Fosse, Stickgold, and Hobson (2001), 86% of REM dreams were found to contain two or more discrete emotion types.

9For an extensive account of the relationship between dreams, organizing principles, and change in psychoanalysis see Stolorow and Atwood (1992b).
and passions diminished into lower intensity feelings accessible for self-reflection and analytic work.\(^{10}\)

Creation was a *commemoration* of a unique subjectivity-relationship-time-space unity. Rather than hurtful defensive strategies, Thom recognized that there may be productive and transformative value in our separateness (being the ground of expansiveness) despite the passions, only endurable while he was creative. Imagination gave Thom relief from suffering by finding and negotiating the pregnant space between us. Thom celebrated his new capacity to feel passions, express creativity, and become a playwright, and I conceived this article. Our projects had encoded within them much of him, something of me, and an expression of us. Discovering a unique and productive way to transcend painful deprivations pleased us both. Imagination profitably harnessed our situation, our differences, and our similarities. Thom’s self-image, self-compassion, and confidence increased, expanded by the knowing that he was capable of transforming limits and sorrow into creativity. This solidified the entire analytic work and a sense of resolve emerged, from which he reached for what was possible—a more authentic and creative life. Thom’s sense of identity changed from “non-starter” into someone who can survive and transcend self-diminishing loss and successfully create. In turn this initiated a new career trajectory with hope for exciting future possibilities.

**Clinical Details: Outer Situation**

Thom and I had established a mutual affectionate bond. His role, from his earliest years, had been to take care of his depressed mother and his half-siblings. Now deceased, she had been a popular university professor, unavailable to her child due to academic preoccupations and severe bouts of depression. His father abandoned the family soon after his birth, and a misanthropic step-father had preferred to spend his time alone working on their family farm, deepening Thom’s sense of rejection and the legacies of loss. The continuity of the analytic work and a long series of disjunctions and reparative understandings over the years led to a level of intimacy that was a first in Thom’s life. There was a period of developmental transference, in which he took great pleasure in his close association to me.

Thom’s affection gradually changed into erotic desire, then romantic love. One day he shared his desperation to have a life together. I was, of course, bound by professional ethics, happily married, and unavailable for a tryst or romantic relationship. Thom’s intense infatuation led him to treat me as if I were a Goddess, and I internally dismissed his words and affect as “idealizing,” missing the deep, tender, and true romance hidden below the effusive words with which he covered over his ongoing longings for me to be in-love equally. Poetic, passionate language (especially in e-mails) helped him deal with an impossible situation by converting it into the mytho-poetic in which the gradient between his and my perceived relative worth re-created the gradient between child and mother. He was untouched by the subtle warmth and affection I could genuinely offer him, defensively pushing it away to avoid the pain of disappointment. There

\(^{10}\)Passion returned when there was a new stimulus in the field.
were disjunctions when I inadvertently annihilated the illusion by becoming overly concrete, and conjunctions of mutual senses-of-unworthiness and unconscious defensive dismissal caused narcissistic injury and intensified our cycling between developmental and repetitive organizing, and heightening the affect.

My own organizing principles, developed in the context of a mother who only responded to my excellence in fulfilling her needs, caused Thom's bids for special attention to trigger me into repetitive dimension self-experience. I resisted moving toward him, and he would react by saying this “proved” he was unloveable, confirmed his fears, and set back progress to his sense of self-esteem. He was deeply hurt by my impenetrability, experiencing me as tantalizing and withholding. The genuine “true love” aspect of his passion was starved, constrained, and distorted by the analytic context.

Thom’s experience of me, the consequence of my analytic role and our context, was frequently organized as a rejecting choice. This took him to the edge of his ability to tolerate pain, for he accurately intuited my hidden ability to be passionate. Access to me was limited to three sessions a week by his modest resources, but there was an ocean of need and he was plagued with loneliness between sessions. These affects, while difficult, invigorated the analytic process and it was immensely absorbing. Thom was dedicated, intuitive, and emotionally lively. I was touched by his plight and I identified with his experience of only being valued as an object for someone else's use.

After a career as an elementary school teacher, Thom was laid off due to district cutbacks. Despite fewer sessions our work kept him out of a black depression and his grief occupied us for some time. He especially mourned the lost joy of being around children and directing the annual holiday play (the extent of his previous creativeness). When there was an opening I drew out hope through possibilities of new career directions, highlighting his preferences. Our common ground of interest in design and the performing arts vitalized him, although it was financially impractical. Our relationship was never more central to him and he dipped into savings to resume his regular frequency. Gratitude for my support fanned the flames of his Longings, even as his self-esteem plummeted.

Then, I had a crisis. My mother became ill and later died. I had to abruptly cancel appointments and visit England twice. Thom was deeply affected by my sudden unplanned absences, unavailability, fragility, and privacy. He had to contend with his separateness from events that rocked my world. He knew of my bereavement and perceived my grieving, responding with the wish to comfort me. I was appreciative but sad and he organized me as deliberately aloof. Upon my return his symptomatology had increased.

Following a typical crisis over my “distancing,” he interviewed another analyst due to escalating feelings of panic, despair, and suicidality. He decided to come in for a final session and angrily reported that he could not go on with me since his passions were intolerable and I was as stubborn and uncompromising (he said) as his Love. He had a terrible choice to make for I could only offer my authentic self. Candidly facing the prospect of termination, Thom abruptly realized all that he would lose.

In many extraordinary sessions we investigated all that had happened and all the ways in which these were repetitive dimension experiences. I explored his fantasies of life
The Analyst as Muse

with me, the man he longed to be, and the meanings to him if Love was reciprocated. I empathically investigated but he suffered elevating Longing, deepening disappointment and Grief. Then suddenly change happened. Oscillating affects gave way to sublimation.

Thom came in very excited. As he began to write dialogue he discovered that he could become engaged and peaceful, optimistic, even happy. He had found a book that seemed to portray his childhood experience of being appropriated by a mother rising to professional stardom and gaining a cult-like following. He was excited by a plan to turn the book into an autobiographical Broadway play while he worked freelance. I responded enthusiastically and from this point on the mood of the analysis changed. The expansive dimension had begun to enrich the work. Months later he proudly handed me a script. His organization of me changed from Goddess to Muse (and sometimes back again) and the pressure to Love him eased. Wary of increasing his Longings I avoided true collaboration, seeking rather to draw out his budding ideas and help him refine them. My responsiveness (or lack thereof) could greatly affect him. Thom's depression and anxiety were largely replaced by excitement and optimism, with relapses into backlash and decay.

The script with its characters and scenes became like a waking dream. Unrequited love was a theme and we explored his passion by reference to literature, plays, and movies. He found use for Greek myths and even borrowed my books on architecture for use in his stage set designs. The intersubjective field was animated, as the focus moved from passionate affect to symbolic object. I welcomed and nurtured his curiosities, investigating his reflections and reactions, mirroring, providing enthusiasm, and checking for the impact of any suggestions. Sessions had a distinctive quality during this period, a different kind of collaboration—wider horizons, more spontaneous play, and occasionally giddy affect. Thom studied the art of theatre and opened his imagination, relying on our connection to move him into the expansive dimension as he enjoyed his Muse. I wished to support his expansive explorations appropriately, which led to these reflections. Sessions moved fluidly between creative content, themes, different dimensions of the transference, and defensive retreats triggered by his expansive risk-taking as he “reached for the stars.”

Once this imaginative phase was complete Thom’s work on the play became pragmatic. Issues related to its development now became central for some years. He was beset by disappointments and difficulties, real, and repetitively organized. I was there at the first and last rehearsals, shared in the anxiety of previews, and the excitement of opening night at a well-respected venue (I as his Muse/mentor, and he living the new world of experience made possible by his expansive dimension). He acknowledged me as his Muse in the Playbill. After the critics’ brutal reviews, I comforted him as he fell from grace and swore “never again!” As Muse/mentor I encouraged and held hope for a continued commitment to his art when he wanted to resign.

The play was sensitively and artistically made but, like most, it was not a commercial success. Still, it stands as an amazing accomplishment for a first time playwright, and

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11 It is important to maintain an awareness of the dangers of compliance.
we continue to work on Thom’s devastating organizing in the aftermath of this courageous leap into the unknown. He is now working on several new projects, and the Muse transference and expansive dimension ebbs and flows.

**Summary**

In contrast to Kohut’s ideas of a somewhat hermetic self that grows and changes in conformity with the blueprint of a program solidified early in life, I have demonstrated how previously unknown and unmanifested creativity can emerge from contemporary emotional experiencing in which connection is key. Such creativity emerges through two channels: (1) by exploring new freedoms released by the lessening of the grip of archaic organizing in analysis and (2) the influence of a Muse-analyst and the opening of imaginative, creative aspects previously left incoherent as part of the analysand’s unvalidated unconscious.

Thom’s expansiveness began with an Eros-love transference describable as a passion due to its intensity, encompassing range of volume, type, and form of affection, and the fluidity of movement between these configurations. Soon a Muse transference was experienced as the analysand yearned to earn the analyst’s special approval through channels unconsciously meaningful to both subjectivities, in this case, creativity. The analytic context of the Love, with its limits, gave rise to equally passionate and desperate Grief. Thom’s Love and Grief blocked each other and a state of chaos ensued due to oscillating passions. Sublimation came on-line, uniting-and-binding aspects of the subjectivity of the Muse-analyst which became reflected in Thom’s previously unvalidated formless creativity, crystalizing new self-experience. Thom’s passion was sublimated into substance and permanence in the writing and production of the theatrical play, an homage to the powerful Muse transference experience. This plumbing of new avenues of experience—the distinctive trait of the expansive dimension—can be seen as substitute union with the Muse-analyst.

The experience of a successful innovation leads to an improved and expanded sense of selfhood through improved self-esteem, sense-of-identity, by increasing optimism, and widening the horizons of a subjective emotional world. This brings gusto, the result of increased agency, and a sense of expanded future possibilities.

A Muse transference requires that analysts allow themselves to be organized in the idiosyncratic ways the analysand needs a Muse to be. Analysts may be called upon to allow themselves to be in the spotlight, to be prudently self-disclosing of talents or interests, to be spontaneously inventive, resourceful, flexible, emotionally expressive, and open to new interventions. The two most important aspects of the Muse role are attitudinal—recognizing and welcoming creative capacity and imagination, and equally, welcoming, addressing, and dwelling with vehement, passionate, affectivity.\footnote{Krystal (1981) links use of imagination to the ability to tolerate affect.} Not only a source of inspiration, the role of the Muse-analyst is just as importantly one of emotional safety and support during inevitable retreats which are part of the process of change and helpful indicators of areas needing work.
I have discussed an affect theory that distinguishes passions from feelings. I have remembered passions as continuums of different volumes of affect in the same mood, and as having the potential for generativity. Eros understood as a continuum, explains the range of possibilities of expansive new self-experience and the enhancement of the sense of bettered future possibilities. The passion Grief has a continuum too, from profound anguish to sadness, for which potential for generativity lies in the realm of existential realizations, a topic beyond the scope of this article. I have offered a systems interpretation of sublimation, a process that bridges separateness and incommensurate passions by calling forth creativity and the making of artifacts to commemorate dyadic experience. I have described the co-authorship of new creativity, the metaphorical “child” of the intersubjective field.

Can the analyst enhance the possibility of being organized as a Muse? The Muse-analyst’s attitude supports the creative vision, recognizes the seeker’s particular gifts and graces, is dedicated to the relationship as a sacred place of growth, is carefully emotionally intimate, and is willing for his or her creativity to be part of the analytic narrative. Since affect is centrally important, the analyst must avoid censoring and receive all aspects of love by the analysand and, likewise, allow the analyst’s own Love for the analysand, honoring it as a precursor to creativity and expanded self-experience, not to be concretized into contextually inappropriate physicality, but instead, treated as a generative force to be sublimated. Any guardedness is felt in the emotional mutuality of the intersubjective field, obstructing the possibility of the Muse transference/expansive dimension. Repression impacts the transferences, and reduces Muse into mentor, causing sparks of inspiration to dissipate. This process parallels the impact of Stoic philosophy which tamed passions into feelings (Fisher, 2002).

It may be that the Muse transference—expansive dimension has not been recognized for its analytic usefulness due to historical prejudices about the role of the analyst, the nature of creativity, who can make use of sublimation, or the unfamiliarity of thinking in contextual, process, and systems perspectives about emotional phenomenology. Left undifferentiated from the developmental dimension, due perhaps to theoretical tendencies that prioritize history rather than exponentially building emergent possibilities significant for the future, the expansive dimension needs continued consideration. In light of the ideas presented here I propose that when an analysand becomes creative, he or she has either had the grip of inhibiting organizing principles lifted in analysis, or has successfully claimed contextually earned expansive dimension self-experiences, using the Eros transference and sublimation to integrate traits of a beloved Muse-analyst. The analyst becomes the transferential holder of the past, relational home in the present, and Muse for an enhanced future.

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Penelope S. Starr-Karlin, Psy.D., M.F.T.
3301 Colby Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90066-1325
310-391-8718
TruthAndImagination@verizon.net

Translations of Abstract

Se presenta una nueva “transferencia-musa” que anima la creatividad y la dimensión “expansiva,” distinta de las dimensiones repetitivas o de desarrollo de la transferencia. La dimensión expansiva se diferencia porque está bajo la influencia de la subjetividad del analista y es un emergente de las posibilidades contextuales contemporáneas. La discusión teórica y el estudio de un caso utilizando la teoría de los sistemas intersubjetivos iluminará como la pasión intensa vitaliza la sublimación que conduce a la creatividad cuando la transferencia-musa y la dimensión expansiva están activas, formando el fundamento para nuevas direcciones en la vida. Se aborda el papel y el grado de implicación del analista que es usado como musa, y se sugiere un abordaje clínico.

Cet article expose un nouveau «transfert de la Muse», cette dimension expansive du transfert qui, distincte des dimensions développementale et répétitive, se présente comme un vecteur de créativité. Sa caractéristique est de s’ancre dans la subjectivité de l’analyste et d’émerger du potentiel contextuel contemporain. Dans le cadre conceptuel des systèmes intersubjectifs, une discussion théorique et une étude de cas montrent comment une passion intense induit une sublimation menant à la créativité, dès lors que la dimension
expansive du transfert de la Muse est activée, donnant ainsi assise à de nouvelles directions de vie. La participation de l’analyste et sa sollicitude sont explorées dans leur fonction de « Muse » et une approche clinique est proposée.

Viene introdotta una nuova “traslazione alla Musa” che anima la creatività e una dimensione “espansiva”, distinta dalle dimensioni evolutive e ripetitive del transfert. La dimensione espansiva è differenziata perché è influenzata dalla soggettività dell’analista ed emerge dalle possibilità contestuali del momento. Una discussione teorica e uno studio clinico basati sulla teoria dei sistemi intersoggettivi, mette in luce come un’intensa passione vivifica la sublimazione e porta alla creatività quando la traslazione alla Musa e la dimensione espansiva sono attive, e contribuiscono a formare la base per nuove direzioni di vita. Vengono considerati il ruolo e la sollecitudine dell’analista utilizzato come fosse una Musa e viene suggerito un approccio clinico.