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Juggling Paradoxes: Commentary on the Work of Jessica Benjamin

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Jessica Benjamin's contributions have exerted an enormous influence on contemporary psychoanalytic thought in general and on me in particular. I consider here some of the concepts basic to her approach that I find most helpful: recognition, identification and identificatory love, and gender overinclusiveness. I then point to the ways in which overinclusiveness in retaining certain lines of theorizing poses occasional problems for me.

I feel honored to have been invited to comment on Jessica Benjamin's work for this important and promising new journal. What I have always loved about the field of psychoanalysis, second only to the richly complex satisfactions of clinical work, is that a psychoanalyst gets to spend a great deal of time thinking about how mind works. Since the human brain, of which mind is an expression, is itself the most complex of all natural phenomena yet encountered, the human mind will, for a very long time, remain full of mysteries. Yet this complexity, filled with mysteries, is us. To the extent that we care about ourselves and each other, to the extent that we matter, we think about our minds: How do they work? How do they develop? How can they change? For the past decade, Jessica Benjamin has been one of the principal reasons the community of psychoanalysis has been a vibrant and exciting place.

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to think together about mind. Her writings have been unfailingly creative, challenging, carefully crafted, and provocative. She thinks and writes with an intellectual exhuberance; she seems to pursue her investigations of mind partly for the sheer fun of it, and that has made it more fun for the rest of us.

A signature feature of Benjamin's thought is that she conserves and layers old ideas alongside new ones and sets apparent alternatives into a dialectical tension with each other. Tracing the complex organization of her argumentation is a conceptual analogue to the visual delight of watching a master juggler who sets plates spinning, one after the other, and throws balls and indian clubs into the air, one after the other. All the parts are moving around, and each part relates to all the others. I have had many different reactions to Benjamin's conceptual pastiches over the years: sometimes they delight me with their artistry and inventiveness; sometimes they solve problems I have been struggling with myself; sometimes they open up new problems I never thought to address; and they always teach me about some area of human knowledge with which I have been unfamiliar. Occasionally, Benjamin throws in a conceptual indian club that, too abstract for me to grasp its experiential referent, disappears into thin air. What I would like to do here is to consider three of Benjamin's key concepts and what they have meant for me—recognition, identificatory love, and overinclusiveness—and also to try to track down one or two of Benjamin's errant indian clubs.

**Recognition**

To appreciate the importance of Benjamin's contributions involving the concept of “recognition,” we need to set them in their context within the history of psychoanalytic ideas.

It has become a commonplace to note that, until recently, theorizing about the analytic process within the Freudian mainstream either placed the analytic relationship in a minor, subsidiary role or left it out entirely. The analytic situation was understood not as an engagement of two persons but as a medium within which the mental content of one person unfolded and was interpreted by another person, who operated as a more or less generic, objective functionary. Anyone familiar at all with the world of psychoanalysis recognizes that there has been a broad sea change in how the analytic process is now understood and envisioned. A central feature of this new understanding is that the analytic relationship, the personal one between the two participants, is now granted a fundamental, transformative status. Several major theoretical traditions have played a role in this pervasive paradigm shift.
From (British Middle Group) object relations and self psychology has come a replacement of the classical psychoanalytic metaphors for the analyst's role as rational scientist and oedipal patriarchal symbol of the law by postclassical metaphors for the analyst's role as a (romanticized) maternal presence, holding, containing, empathizing. Nevertheless, the analyst still remains a generic functionary (albeit of a more appealing sort).

From interpersonal psychoanalysis has come an iconography of psychoanalysis as a highly personal, “authentic” encounter. Once one gets past the word interpersonal, however, there are problems with imagining quite how this encounter works. The two dominant influences on the development of interpersonal psychoanalysis as a clinical tradition were Harry Stack Sullivan and Erich Fromm, whose sensibilities were conveyed much more through an oral tradition and generations of supervisees than through their writings. And Sullivan and Fromm had very different clinical sensibilities.

Sullivan himself seems to have had two divergent styles, depending on whether he felt he was encountering a patient suffering from schizophrenic or neurotic difficulties in living. With schizophrenic patients, Sullivan was extremely careful, one might almost say delicate. He regarded them as poised always on the edge of utter humiliation and was deeply respectful of their brittle shreds of self-esteem. This current in Sullivan's work dovetailed with the remarkably empathic and patient approach Frieda Fromm-Reichmann developed in her work with schizophrenic patients at Chestnut Lodge. With neurotics (and supervisees), however, Sullivan was often extremely sarcastic, even brutal. He seems to have regarded neurotic “security operations” as a form of nonsense from which patients were usefully disabused.

Along somewhat similar lines, Fromm placed great importance on frankness and honesty. He felt that people in our culture systematically deceive themselves and each other about how they really feel. Fromm envisioned the patient as coming to analysis to hear the truth, and he regarded the analyst's role as, primarily, the deliverer of that truth.

As a candidate trained at an interpersonal institute, I was taught a mode of participation in the analytic relationship that, drawing on the priority Fromm placed on authenticity and Sullivan's no-nonsense approach to neurotic dissembling, put a considerable emphasis on the here-and-now, confrontation, and an open discussion of transference-countertransference. In counterpoint, on the basis of Fromm's humanism and Sullivan's and Fromm-Reichmann's work with schizophrenics, I was also taught to pay careful attention to the patient's self-esteem and potential humiliation. I was sometimes struck by what seemed to be an overemphasis in the interpersonal approach on a certain kind of toughness that had an almost macho quality. Fromm,
whose clinical influence on his contemporaries was vast, apparently had a way of being a curmudgeon with patients while at the same time conveying deep caring. I had the impression that his admirers often mimicked the bluntness as a virtue in itself, while leaving out the subtleties of deep caring that made it effective. And while I always found genuineness to be a fundamental ingredient in an analyst's work, I felt that there was a current of anti-intellectualism in the interpersonal tradition (“It is the Freudians who have ‘theory’; we just call it as it is”). These features combined to glorify what at times seemed to me to be a kind of nonreflective spontaneity or impulsivity marching under the banner of “authenticity.”

During my analytic training, as I struggled to find a clinical style that worked for me, I found myself bouncing back and forth between these different voices, which seemed important but skewed one way or the other. From the interpersonal tradition, there was a humanity and a precious emphasis on personal involvement and authenticity that remained undertheorized and lacked both a developmental rationale and a rigorous framework of considerations for its constructive application. From the object relations tradition, there was a textured developmental perspective and rationale for a constructive restraint that lacked a place for the more active forms of the analyst's personal engagement. The struggle with and exploration of these tensions and counterpoints has been a major feature of both my clinical work and my theoretical contributions over the past two decades. And it is here that Benjamin seems to me to be a much-appreciated fellow-traveler, whose contributions have advanced my own thinking and clinical sensibility.

Benjamin's (1988) concept of recognition is much too rich to be presented comprehensively here, but for me its most helpful feature is the way it bridges subjectivity and intersubjectivity, connection and difference, assertion and accommodation. In her blend of Winnicott and Hegel, Benjamin finds an important place for both the mother and the analyst as persons rather than simply as functions. What the child and the analytic patient both require is not generic holding, but personal holding; not mirroring, but personal recognition; not just sameness, but also enough differentness to highlight the presence of another mind who is struggling to find one.

The decisive problem remains recognizing the other. Establishing myself (Hegel's “being for itself”) means winning the recognition of the other, and this, in turn, means I must finally acknowledge the other as existing for himself and not just for me. The process we call differentiation proceeds through the movement of recognition, its flow from subject to subject, from self to other.
and back. The nature of this movement is necessarily contradictory, paradoxical. Only by deepening our understanding of this paradox can we broaden our picture of human development to include not only the separation but also the meeting of minds—a picture in which the bird's flight is always in two directions [p. 36].

Benjamin uses Hegel to toughen Winnicott, to introduce the tensions of intersubjectivity that are lost in Winnicott's romantic idealization of traditional mothering. And Benjamin uses Winnicott to soften Hegel, to fill out a mutually enriching (but never without tension) intersubjectivity beyond the power dynamics of the master—slave relationship. Benjamin greatly extends Winnicott's concept of “paradox” from the ontological ambiguities of “transitional” phenomena to the complex personal and interpersonal engagement of the analytic relationship: the patient can become a subject only through recognition, on a very personal level, by another subject. The fullest sense of self is discoverable only at its boundaries, accompanied, as Loewald (1973, p. 349) put it, by the “enriching aspects of limitations.” Benjamin (1988) stresses repeatedly that

the need for recognition entails this fundamental paradox: at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of “I, myself,” we are forced to see the limitations of that self. At the moment when we understand that separate minds can share the same state, we also realize that these minds can disagree [p. 33].

One of Benjamin's central projects has been to explore just what an authentic interpersonal encounter, true intersubjectivity, involves. For Fromm and other interpersonalists of previous generations, authentic relatedness seemed simple and apparent. But for us, still reeling from the impact of the Heideggerian and Foucaultian critique of humanism, subversion of agency, and decentering of the subject, it is difficult to know quite who or what would be involved in an interpersonal relationship. Because “recognition between persons,” as Benjamin (1995) puts it, “is essentially mutual” (p. 33), she considers in a richly textured way both poles of authentic relatedness.

Who are the subjects that engage each other in intersubjectivity? Are they persons in our everyday, phenomenological sense? Are they the much-beleaguered, autonomous Cartesian fictions so central to our Enlightenment tradition? Are they Freudian egos, so mocked by Lacan as an illusion? For the psychoanalyst, one of the most appreciated of
Benjamin's skills is her incisive ability to parse these distinctions and rescue a sense of the person, a sense of self, that works for everyday clinical explorations.

Psychoanalysis has to retain some notion of the subject as a self, a historical being that preserves its history in the unconscious, whatever skepticism we allow about reaching the truth of that history. Even if the self is not unitary but has multiple positions and voices, psychoanalysis must be able to conceive of the person's singularity, his or her aesthetic or unique idiom (Bollas, 1992). Even if the subject's positions are “constructed,” psychoanalysis must imagine someone who does or does not own them (Rivera, 1989). And precisely because psychoanalysis claims that something else that is not-I (not ego but It) speaks, that self is split and the unconscious is unknown, It must also be considered to belong to the self. And this idea of an otherness within, an unconscious, unavoidably both transforms and preserves … the idea of a transhistorical, essential self: not a Cartesian ego, not even all ego, but still a being separately embodied, and in that sense an individual psyche [Benjamin, 1995, p. 13].

Despite Lacan's contempt both for American culture and for object relations theory, Benjamin has brought into dialogue Lacanian-based postmodern feminist theory with American relational psychoanalysis, and relational psychoanalysis has survived with a workable notion of self(selves) intact as a locus of experience and center of agency.

Now, who is the “other” from whom our newly rescued self would seek recognition? Here Benjamin has also done extremely important work in distinguishing between “other” and “object” and between the other as subject and the other as object. In Freud's drive-based object relations, the other serves as the object of the drives. In the intersubjective object relations of relational psychoanalysis, the other emerges, in varying degrees, as a subject in her own right; and, in the paradox of recognition, it is the very subjectivity of the other that is necessary for confirmation of one's own status as a subject. Thus, as Benjamin (1995) notes, the routine collapsing of “other subjects into the rubric objects … is a symptom of the very problems in psychoanalysis that a relational theory should aim to cure” (p. 28).

It is here, in the representation of the mother not simply as an object of the child's needs but as a subject in her own right, that feminist psychoanalytic authors in general and Benjamin in particular have contributed psychoanalytic ideas of extraordinary importance. In developing the concept of “recognition,” Benjamin has demonstrated the way in which the intersubjective dialogue between the baby and
his caregivers serves as the fundamental basis for the development of mind, the way in which the mother's "mental work," as Benjamin (1998, p. xv) puts it, is essential to the constitution of mind. And in her latest work Benjamin (1998) explores in vivid detail the ways in which this solution to the problem of the emergence of mind in the mother—infant dyad also resolves a fundamental contradiction at the center of traditional theorizing about the analytic process.

How can psychoanalysis help a fragmented patient who lacks a strong sense of his own voice if psychoanalysis is structured as a relationship within which only the analyst can speak with authority? Once again, Benjamin (1998) explores and fills out what a truly intersubjective or interpersonal view of the analytic relationship would have to entail:

[W]e can see the problem of constructing the encounter as one between the Analyst-Subject who already speaks and the Patient-Other who does not yet speak for herself. This suffering Other requires recognition by the subject who does speak. But this recognition will be effective only if it incorporates a moment of identification, and so disrupts the enclosed identity of the Subject. Likewise, the Other's attainment of speech may only proceed by her identification with the speaking subject, by which she is in danger of losing her own "identity" as Other. If the patient must 'become' the analyst, the analyst must also "become" the patient [p. 9].

Thus, recognition, through its mutual identifications, becomes, in Benjamin's evocative vision, the key ingredient in interpersonal intimacy, gender relations, early development, and the analytic process.

**Identification and Identificatory Love**

Benjamin's exploration of the nature of identification and its relationship to recognition is one of the richest areas of her theorizing, particularly in its implications for clinical psychoanalysis. At first glance, identification and recognition seem quite opposite. Recognition highlights and celebrates difference; identification is grounded in sameness. In fact, Freud introduced the concept of identification as a defense against loss, precisely as an escape from difference and differentiation (see Mitchell, 1988a, chapter 2). But, in Benjamin's hands, drawing on subtextual hints in Freud that were never integrated into his metapsychology, identification becomes much, much more. It is a rich form of relatedness and growth, a bridge to the other.

Benjamin's concept of "identificatory love" is a particularly significant contribution to psychoanalytic developmental and gender
theorizing. In brief, she elaborates the crucial developmental passage (described by Mahler and other ego psychologists) through which the preoedipal child identifies with the father as a symbol of the external world, “outer” space. Missing in prior accounts, Benjamin demonstrates, is the *intersubjective* dimension, the crucial significance of the father's identification with the child. Identification for Freud was always a one-way street (Benjamin, 1995, p. 153). What makes identification either self-enhancing or self-depleting, Benjamin suggests, is the father's ability or inability to identify with his child. This crucial feature has enormous implications for the ways in which identification operates, either for constructive growth or for enslaving submission.

Because a daughter often represents her father's own disclaimed feminine identifications, fathers routinely have more difficulty in an intersubjective exchange of identificatory love with their daughters than with their sons. And, because whatever the actual family dynamics, fathers carry such symbolic freight as representatives of power and the outside world in our culture, this disjuncture between paternal identifications with sons versus paternal identifications with daughters plays an important role in the perpetuation of gender-based conflicts in our culture.

Similarly, in the traditional assignment of roles in the analytic relationship, the objective, ultimate authority assigned to the analyst forecloses identification with the patient and his struggles. For Benjamin, a key feature of the postclassical investigation of the analyst's countertransference as a valuable site of analytic action is the permission, even the injunction, to the analyst to cultivate such identifications.

What is the relationship between identificatory love and recognition? This is one of the many points in Benjamin's work where seeming opposites operate in mutually enriching tensions with each other. In places, emphasizing the contrast between sameness (in identification) and otherness (in recognition), Benjamin presents identification as a counterpoint to recognition. In other places, Benjamin presents identification as operating as a kind of prestige to and vehicle for higher forms of recognition. Whereas identificatory love lacks the clash of wills inherent in recognition, identification provides a counterpoint to the sense of otherness in intersubjectivity that makes mutual recognition possible. Ultimately the concept of identification becomes a key feature of Benjamin's rescue of the psychoanalytic concept of self and selves from the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment ideal of the unified subject. In arguing against Butler, Benjamin (1998) asserts, “The critique of identity does not prevent us from postulating a psychic subjectivity that takes up various positions through identification, a kind of ‘identifier behind the identification’” (p. 87).
Gender Overinclusiveness

Many of Benjamin's contributions concern not just the intersection between psychoanalysis, critical theory, and feminism, but also various complex doctrinal disputes and positions within philosophy and feminism. Because I am not very familiar with the history of these traditions and controversies, I often feel like something of an eavesdropper on these conversations. But I would like to share some of my reactions, both as a psychoanalyst and as a man, to Benjamin's positions.

A central feature of Benjamin's (1995, 1998) approach to gender in her recent writings is the concept of “overinclusiveness.” As far as I can tell, this idea represents an adaptation of Irene Fast's (1984) notion of bisexuality as a universal preoedipal phase that must be renounced by girls and boys alike as the price of gender identity formation. Fast regards the renunciation of bisexuality as a narcissistic struggle with omnipotence. Benjamin keeps apace with Fast through the establishment of oedipal gender polarities but then introduces a postoedipal phase in which a kind of now differentiated bisexuality once again becomes possible because of multiple gender identifications. The goal, suggests Benjamin (1998) is “to recuperate the overinclusive without losing differentiation” (p. 74). Although Benjamin finds it helpful to retain the concept of developmental “phases,” in her account phases do not constitute an irreversible linear sequence, but rather a sequential layering of new organizations on earlier ones. Thus, Benjamin (1995) points to what she terms a “relatively benign form of omnipotence” (p. 69) as a component of what strikes me as a Loewaldian (see Mitchell, 1998), postoedipal dynamic fullness. “Development thus requires not a unilateral trajectory away from the overinclusive position but the ability to return without losing the knowledge of difference” (Benjamin, 1995, p. 75).

I like this concept of overinclusiveness for several reasons. First, it fits nicely with the pervasive shift from Freudian ego psychology to relational psychoanalysis in terms of what we might understand as ideal mental health, or the richest organization of experience. The goal in ego psychology has always been synthesis. The healthy ego was the integrated ego, with splits and conflicts resolved as much as possible. Shades of grey replace black or white. In relational psychoanalysis, the goal of synthesis has been replaced by the goal of multiplicity (see Mitchell, 1991; Bromberg, 1993; Davies, 1996). The healthy self can contain different, discontinuous self-states and selforganizations. They are not synthesized; they coexist. In Benjamin's theory of gender development, oedipal and postoedipal positions and organizations are added to rather than replacing preoedipal experience. This makes possible a vision of healthy, multiplicitous

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gendered identifications rather than a fixed gender identity. And it is also consistent with other approaches to self-and affective states that emphasize dialectical tensions between discontinuous organizations rather than synthesis (Loewald, 1977; Mitchell, 1993, 1988b; Ogden, 1994). As Benjamin (1988) puts it:

Tolerating ambivalence, being able to feel both love and hate toward the same object, does not mean that love and hate are synthesized so that love triumphs over hate. Rather, it means that hate can be borne. Difference, hate, failure of love can be surmounted not because the self is unified, but because it can tolerate being divided. Inclusion of split off feelings or blocked aspirations is motivated not by a compulsion to restore unity but out of the wish to be less resentful and afraid of projected anger, less terrified of loss, less punitive toward what one desires [p. 105].

A second reason I like Benjamin's concept of overinclusiveness is that it helps make her brand of feminism more plausible for men than do many other approaches. Benjamin, in characteristic fashion, attempts to strike a balance between different positions that I have always found hard to take. She draws on but does not limit herself to feminist approaches that have reversed phallocentrism by establishing the preoedipal mother as the reference point for virtually everything or by glorifying traditional feminine sensibilities as a higher form of humanity. And she draws on the Lacanian-based feminists for their derivation of gender concepts within our culture from masculine oedipal positions, while rejecting their claims of the universality of patriarchy and the phallus.

Psychoanalytic developmental theorizing has always seemed to me to be largely prescription masquerading as description. We make claims about what babies are like and how they develop as a way of imagining how we would like ourselves, our children, and our patients to be.¹ I like the prescriptions inherent in Benjamin's approach to gender because she portrays men and women alike as struggling to elaborate and balance both agency and connectedness. (Lynne Layton, 1998, has creatively extended Benjamin's contributions.) This sort of approach makes it possible for men and women to explore masculinity

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¹ It may be that these issues concerning boundaries and agencies between babies and their caretakers have more immediate relevance to women who have given birth to children than they do to men. Women who have nurtured babies as protoagents within the boundaries of their own skins have experienced dramatic shifts in their own states of mind generated by the physiological surges of fetal development (Margaret Black, personal communication).
Reading Benjamin: An Intersubjective Account

In Benjamin's particular vision of intersubjectivity, minds tend toward an autonomous omnipotence in which other minds (and bodies) are treated as objects rather than as subjects in their own right. Our fullest humanity, our movement into subject status, comes with the recognition of ourselves as subjects by others whom we have come to acknowledge as subjects as well.

Reading is an intersubjective process. (See Ogden's, 1994, brilliant account of the intersubjectivity of reading in the opening paragraphs of Subjects of Analysis.) So, Benjamin's key concepts of recognition and identification pertain to the intersubjective dimensions of the experience of reading Benjamin's work. I thought it might be most appropriate in this essay for me to speak up as an “other” in the intersubjective matrix generated by Benjamin, the writer. As I suggested at the beginning, I have different experiences with different areas of Benjamin's contributions. But I want to note some of the places where I have some trouble; her tendency toward overinclusiveness in theory building (in contrast to gender development) is the source of some of that trouble.

One of my favorite of her essays, which I find equally intriguing and bedeviling, is “Sympathy for the Devil: Notes on Sexuality and Aggression, with Special Reference to Pornography” (Benjamin, 1995, chapter 6). This essay is so packed with so many different ideas that, to do it justice, simply in expository terms, would require an essay of equal length, and to really explore the many issues it opens up might take a book. Further, although I've read it several times, I don't feel I've fully grasped it all. I look forward to reading it some more. But, because I find myself struggling to understand it, I thought it might be useful to try to portray a bit of my own phenomenology in reading it. There is no way to do this without a reductive account of Benjamin's argument. This account, of course, cannot do it justice; it is a device to portray its impact on this reader.

The paper begins with the striking, politically incorrect observation (in feminist circles) that pornography, including sadomasochistic pornography, in addition to being distasteful is also often exciting.
Some antipornographers, who argue that sadomasochistic pornographic fantasy reveals the singular truth about what men really want, collapse the space between fantasy and reality, between intrapsychic symbolism and intersubjectivity. Leaving out women's participation, except as coerced, they suggest that women's nature is precisely as pornography portrays it, submissive and docile. With a similar concreteness, traditional psychoanalytic accounts have assumed that the excitement attached to rape fantasies for many women suggests that what is most deeply traumatic about experiences of actual rape is the stimulation of the wish to be raped. What is foreclosed in both these accounts (the antipornographer's and the traditional psychoanalyst's) that collapses the space between intrapsychic fantasy and intersubjective reality, Benjamin suggests, is the fascinating "mystery of what makes violation and powerlessness exciting" (p. 177). Thus, Benjamin begins to explore the workings of sexuality and violence in the two spheres, sometimes parallel, sometimes intermingling, of the intrapsychic and the intersubjective.

In the most obvious sense, pornography seems purely intrapsychic, arousing excitement "inside the enclosure of one's own fantasy" (p. 180). Yet pornography is a social institution that generates objects and therefore also points beyond the individual to the culture. But sexuality in general, Benjamin suggests, drawing on Bataille, always plays on the tension between the individual and otherness, beyond the individual. Sexuality entails a loss of differentiation between self and other; loss of a differentiated self is a kind of death; therefore death is deeply implicated in the tensions and excitements of sexuality.

Benjamin then provides us with an intriguing definition of erotic union as the most intense version of the desire for recognition. When both individuals experience themselves as being transformed by the other, or by what they create in conjunction with the other, a choreography emerges that is not reducible to the idea of reacting to the outside. The experience is not one only of sensual pleasure, which can be felt in a state of aloneness or indifference to the other's existence, but of co-creation and mutual recognition. In erotic union the point is to contact and be contacted by the otherapprehended as such [p. 184].

In this ideal state, intrapsychic fantasy in each partner becomes an intersubjective event, as long as it remains fluid, continually, reciprocally generated and transformed. As Benjamin puts it, "The presence or absence of power fantasies is not the issue; it is their intersubjective context that is decisive" (p. 184). In sadomasochism,
this complementarity is split and rigidified: “one self asserts power, the other recognizes that power through submission” (p. 185). The possibility for transcendence is foreclosed, and “vertigo is replaced by control” (p. 186).

So far, very good. But at this point Benjamin draws instinct theory into the picture. She introduces the terms of Freud's final instinct theory (Eros and Thanatos), not as Freud himself meant them, as causal, energic, motivational pressures, but as metaphors that have counterparts in intersubjective theory. The conflict between Eros and Thanatos is thus translated into the terms of the fundamental conflict of intersubjectivity between recognition and destruction of the other. Why introduce these terms but with changed meanings? Benjamin explains:

The metaphor of the death instinct, recast in light of self-other differentiation, helps to link the idea of loss of tension to the trajectories of sexuality and aggression. The advantage of Freud's theory of the death instinct is that these links are clearly established, even though in the final analysis “instinct” may best be understood not literally, biologically, but rather as a metaphor for somatic and affective states [p. 189].

I am not sure what this means. If Benjamin wants to link the idea of loss of tension to sexuality and aggression, why does she need Freud's instinct theory, in which these links are “clearly established,” to do so? Why can't she link them herself, in her own way, particularly since Freud's links are between terms that she is explicitly redefining? As the reader, I am now feeling the strain of holding on to the new meanings of the old terms, which are being brought into juxtaposition with the new terms of intersubjectivity theory. And over the course of the next several pages, it gets even more daunting, as Freud's “death drive” is linked with many different key phenomena, including narcissism, dominance, trauma, absence, and omnipotence.

What seems most interesting to me about Benjamin's account is the way she traces the interpenetrability of the intrapsychic and the intersubjective, particularly around the management of tension. She draws on the new infancy research to show how tensions are managed in the intersubjective field between mother and infant. She suggests that it is precisely tensions that cannot be sustained intersubjectively that become intrapsychic, experienced as “other” within the self, and pervaded by aggression. And she suggests that it is this aggressivized tension that becomes mixed up with the part of sexuality that emerges in sadomasochistic fantasy. This intrapsychically grounded, fantastic, aggressive sexuality needs to be distinguished from another root of the erotic, in the simple corporeal sensuality and attunement central to the presymbolic world of the infant” (p. 206). In healthy sexuality,
these become comingled in intersubjective mutuality; in pathology, they remain split off from each other.

I am not sure I have this exactly right, because this account is presented partly in the newly transformed Freudian terms. But where the going got really rough for me was in Benjamin's use of Laplanche's concept of “fantasmatization”; “turning around occurs through the transmutation of aggression into ‘the sexual’” (p. 198). Perhaps it is just an atavistic colonial (through identification, not ancestry) response in me to French abstractions, but I find my reader's mind turning from attuned subject to numb object when I get to sentences like the following:

The distinction between fantasmic sexuality and symbolic play of eros is only a conceptual one. For in “real” sexual life, the distinction between the sexual and the erotic is not so easily upheld. In the abstract, we can agree with Freud that Eros is directed outward, toward the other; this places Eros in opposition to the turning inward of the sexual. For the sexual is the turning away from the world and even from one's own body sensuality, both of which become absorbed in the process of fantasmatization. Ever ambiguous, sexuality at once expresses this process and forms the most powerful conduit of erotic desire, desire for the other [p. 208].

HELP! Too many abstractions! Too many Indian clubs! Too many plates spinning! I think I will probably figure out what all this means, but it seems that it shouldn't have to be this hard, this much of a strain. And the strain generated by “overinclusiveness” in theory feels as though it sometimes undercuts and makes more difficult the kind of recognition Benjamin is seeking from her readers.

Although Benjamin the author is always a demanding intersubjective presence, most of the time her readers do not have to work quite so hard. And, even when they do, somehow the effort expended always seems worthwhile.

Hybrids and Paradoxes

Dialectical thinking of one sort or another has been a fundamental, signature feature of Benjamin's conceptual methodology, as it has for many other contemporary analytic writers (also see, e.g., Mitchell, 1986; Ogden, 1994; Hoffman, 1998). But each writer applies dialectics in his or her own particular fashion. Benjamin's approach entails the identification of complementaries between what appear to be disparate, often opposite tendencies and the cultivation of an enriching tension.
between polar opposites. And Benjamin has usefully applied this methodology to major areas of analytic concern. In developmental theorizing she has explored the complementary pairs composed of otherness-togetherness, assertion-recognition, resonance-difference, distinctiveness-union, connection-separation, dependence-independence, complementarity-mutuality, using-relating, recognition-negation, and identificatory love-object love. In gender theorizing she has explored the complementary pairs composed of male-female, preoedipal bisexuality-oedipal dichotomies, subject-object, activeness-passivity and knower-known. And, in terms, of psychoanalytic metapsychology, she has explored the complementary pairs of intrapsychic-intersubjective, and drive-relational.

On the whole, I find this conceptual methodology very productive and helpful. As I suggested earlier in connection with the concepts of recognition and overinclusiveness, it has greatly enriched our understandings of development, the analytic process, and gender formation. But when it comes to psychoanalytic theories in broader terms, I am not so sure. Sustaining tensions between some opposites may be enriching. Preserving other pairs of opposites may be more obfuscating than enriching. I believe that some forms of psychoanalytic eclecticism suffer from this problem.

In 1995 Benjamin distinguished her approach to these issues from my arguments against eclecticism as follows:

In contrast to seeing a sharp opposition between the drive model and the relational model, which rejects “model-mixing” (cf. S. Mitchell 1988; Greenberg and Mitchell 1983), I take eclecticism rather further than some explicit advocates of the relational perspective might (but not all: see Aron 1995). I do not see Freud's theory as something to be adopted or cast off [p. 4].

She then goes on to argue compellingly, in Hegelian fashion, that new ideas tend to emerge in dialectical relation to old ideas. To simply discard the old ideas without appreciating that heritage and the dialectical overswing that tends to characterize new ideas is to suffer from a sort of omnipotent denial. “The act of rejection shapes one's starting point” (p. 4). Only returning to the original texts and placing new ideas in complementary tensions vis-à-vis their predecessors makes it possible to avoid having one's own thinking wholly determined by those original ideas.

For me, this formula is just too broad and abstract to be always useful. I think some old ideas are usefully preserved and set in dialectical tension with new ideas, while other ideas are usefully jettisoned. To abandon them is not to deny their historical position as
predecessor, but rather to make a choice about their current lack of utility. Important psychoanalytic concepts generally become fashionable, which rapidly thins out their meaning. (This has certainly happened in recent years with the term relational.) The concept of paradox has been extremely fruitful in opening up new conceptual possibilities. It has been particularly helpful in exploring the relationships between self and other (Benjamin's concept of recognition) and between individuality and multiplicity (Benjamin's concept of overinclusivity). But I am a bit wary of paradox being elevated to a sure-fire method for dealing with contradictions. Sometimes contradictions are not worth sustaining but are better off resolved. Sometimes choices are usefully made.

Thus, I become a little worried when Benjamin (1995) says, “To accept paradox is to contain rather than resolve contradictions, to sustain tension between elements heretofore defined as antithetical” (p. 10). This starts to sound too formulistic to me, more like an abstract article of faith we are being called on to “accept” than a conceptual strategy that is useful in some cases but not in others.

When it comes to “Freud's theory,” as Benjamin (1995, p. 4) puts it, I believe some of his ideas (like the unconscious) will be with us forever; some of his ideas are usefully set in dialectical relation to new ideas (like oedipal vis-à-vis preoedipal, or the inner, intrapsychic world vis-à-vis the interpersonal or intersubjective world); and some of his ideas are anachronistic and need to be discarded (like Freud's, in contrast to other possible concepts, of instinctual “drive”). Benjamin likes to stress preservation, and I sometimes have found it important to stress choice. But when it comes down to actual cases, I am not sure whether there are real differences between our positions.

The dimension of Freud that Benjamin struggles to preserve is his intrapsychic perspective, which she so richly interpolates with intersubjectivity. I have no problems with this. The very term relational, as Greenberg and I defined it in 1983, was introduced to bridge interpersonal relations with the intrapsychic domain of internal object relations. But, then again, the interpersonal and the intrapsychic, as such, never seemed to me to stand in any sort of contradictory or paradoxical relationship to each other. It seems to me straightforward.

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2 Ghent (1992) has demonstrated that sometimes paradoxes are only apparent contradictions. A closer exploration may reveal an underlying process.

3 This difference between us may in itself reflect gender differences. Benjamin (1995) notes that Ghodorow has pointed out that men tend to “overvalue difference and depreciate commonality” (p. 50). But, of course, judgments about just how to determine valuation, overvaluation, appreciation, and depreciation are all, at least to some extent, subjective judgments.
to regard the inner world as an internalization of interactions that have taken
place in the interpersonal domain and to regard the interpersonal world as
continually and necessarily shaped by internal object relations. I cannot see
any tension or paradox here.

On the other hand, the dimension of Freud that seems important to me to
reject is his drive theory: I reject it because it is anachronistic in its claim that
experience is shaped by a priori primal fantasies and prewired impulses that
have a direct impact on mind, unmediated by interpersonal or social
interactions. This is certainly not to minimize the significance of the body,
biology, impulses, sexuality, psychic energy, or aggression. These are all of
central importance to any psychoanalytic theory. But all these concepts need
to be reconceptualized and recontextualized within a field or systems
approach to intersubjectivity or, as Adrienne Harris (in press) has put it, a
“twoperson biology.” I think we are better off preserving Freud's discovery
of the intrapsychic but rejecting his particular drive model rather than
preserving it in paradoxical tension with a relational perspective. Preserving
Freudian drive theory and its associated concepts leads to a kind of
overinclusiveness, as I suggested in my account of my experience as a reader
in the previous section, that seems conceptually cluttered and obfuscating.

Am I overvaluing differences? Wasteful of perfectly good theory that ought
to be usefully preserved? I don't think so. Consider the relationship between
Copernicus's sun-centered model of the heavens and Ptolemy's earth-centered
model, which preceded it. I cannot recall anyone ever arguing that something
would be gained by preserving both in the tensions of paradox, despite their
obvious mutual exclusivity. Such discarding does not imply any disrespect for
preCopernican astronomical observation or entail illusions of truth arising out
of nowhere. In fact, it was the observation and data generated by pre-
Copernican astronomers that led to the paradigm shift to a solarcentered
model.

Consider another analogy, this time drawn from physics. What is the
relationship between contemporary physics based on relativity theory and
quantum mechanics, generally called “the new physics,” and its predecessor,
“classical physics”? The principles of classical physics were not so wrong—
they worked within the context in which they were developed. But as
physicists began exploring (mostly in theory but to some extent in
experimentation as well) events taking place at velocities approaching the
speed of light and at temperatures approaching the levels of the big bang,
classical principles did not work. The processes involved needed to be
reconceptualized and recontextualized. Although there are plenty of mysteries
and paradoxes within quantum mechanics, physicists do not, as far as I can
tell, regard
the relationship between classical physics and the new physics as a paradoxical one. The latter has subsumed the former and forced a reconceptualization of basic principles. There is no waste or disrespect, nor are there delusions of self-generated birth. I think the same is true of the relationship between classical psychoanalysis and the new or relational psychoanalysis.

As I noted earlier, however, despite her having more preservative tendencies than I do, when it comes down to specific concepts and their fates, I am not sure if there are basic differences between Benjamin and me. I do not know whether she would agree or disagree with the argument I have just made regarding Freud's drive theory. And, on the whole, I have found my own thinking, and the field of psychoanalysis in general, greatly enriched by what Benjamin (1988) has recently described as her own inclination “toward incorporation, synthesis of opposing ideas” (p. xix).

References