The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked goodnatured, she thought: still it had very long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt it ought to be treated with respect (Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland).

I want very much to comment on Jay Greenberg's “The Analyst's Participation: A New Look.” The problem is, to my great dismay, hard as I try, I can't find my way into the logic of his thesis. I don't recognize the landmarks (odd mines?) of his argument; and, worse yet, I keep finding myself standing in the middle of his objections, which, it seems to me, he has himself created by virtue of promoting them. For example, his rendering of particular interactions in four well-known relational vignettes distorts them in such a way that it makes each author-analyst's behavior appear outrageous (Gerson lies, Davies lusts, Ghent covers up, and Frederickson screams). Although the distinct theoretical material that fuels each vignette is missing from Greenberg's portrayal of these works, he asks us to believe that they all sound the same. He needs us to accept this premise in order to argue that contemporary relational analysts throw standard technique out the window because they believe that each analytic dyad is unique, and yet their cases get written up in a form that comes out very much the same. Now, mind you, Greenberg asserts that he is a fellow contributor to this “trend.” Much in the spirit of Freud, who handled the Nazis with his written statement, “I can certainly recommend the Gestapo to everyone,” Greenberg allows that these vignettes are important contributions to the field. But then he likens them to prescriptive “morality plays” that pressure us all to go forth and respond likewise.

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat... “In that direction,” the Cat said, waving its right paw round, “lives a Hatter: and in that direction,” waving the other paw, “lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad.”

“But I don't want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can't help that,” said the Cat: “we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.”

Let me try and start again. Perhaps a step-by-step or plodding approach will serve to clarify my perhaps naïve take on a muddle wherein every now and then I catch a glimpse of Jay Greenberg before he disappears in a fog of rhetoric that leaves me reeling. And I know, having studied with and admired Greenberg in my student years, that I am missing his direct presence, that I feel disappointed and deprived of a more direct exchange with him over issues and ideas.

“And I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy.”

“All right,” said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.

“Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin,“ thought Alice; “but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!”
I think, although I can’t be sure, that Greenberg wants to warn us against the dangers of too much two-person in the two-person relationship, too much action in analytic interaction, too much “participant” and not enough “observer” on the part of the analyst. I think he worries that we have taken too much private space away from the patient and the unfolding transferences. And I, for one, would certainly welcome a straightforward exploration of these dangers. I would welcome an open debate in the full light of diverse points of view rather than a narrowing or diminishing or dichotomizing of ideas in order to build a case about the “excess” in our approach to the work we do.

Greenberg constructs his argument around four major premises that he says are largely accepted by all relational analysts. The first refers to the analyst’s personal influence on what the patient thinks and feels. There is no mention here of the patient’s influence on the analyst; no mention of a bipersonal field, of mutual and reciprocal influence. So when Greenberg writes that “suggestion and personal influence, once the base metal of the despised and disdained psychotherapies, have become coin of the realm and a prime area of psychoanalytic investigation,” the two-person relationship drops out in favor of a focus on the increased power of the analyst. Similarly, the second premise identified by Greenberg, which has to do with the ubiquity of enactments, implies that they are precipitated solely by the power of the analyst's unexamined behavior. And the impact of that behavior can be understood, if at all, only when the enactment is over. If at all! That is, some of us go along with the notion that enactments roll over into one another “in the absence of any privileged insight into what was intended or even into what happened.” Here we see a one-person turned to a no-person focus on a two-person field that leaves me with an eerie, out-of-control feeling. I really don't want to quarrel with Greenberg; I want to have the

conversation he says he hopes for, one in which new ideas can “be seen as supplementing, or productively competing with, but not rendering obsolete everything that had come before.” The third point of consensus, according to Greenberg, suggests, “contra Freud and his followers,” that relational analysts can rely on no technique or posture that will create a predictable atmosphere in analysis. The keystones of classical technique have become “empty concepts.” In the fourth and final premise, Greenberg reports that even as observers we believe in the notion of the analyst's subjectivity. We don't agree on the extent to which “the patient brings something—an unconscious—that can be discovered and known, or whether all meanings are constructed within the dyad.” Once again, there is no mention of the interplay of subjectivities—of intersubjectivity.

By way of developing his “new look,” Greenberg wants to address a tension “between the teachings of formal relational theory and those implied in many of its most widely accepted clinical narratives. It is in these narratives that the excess I want to address is expressed.” Is Greenberg saying that relational analysts do not practice what they preach? Now, indeed, I feel completely turned around and stymied: like Alice in Wonderland, eager to play a game of croquet, only to discover that the croquet ground is all ridges and furrows. I want to have a crack at the ball and it becomes a hedgehog. And never before have I been handed a mallet that becomes a live flamingo with a mind of its own. Given Greenberg’s groundwork (his “take” on four principles of formal relational theory), I have no basis for contextualizing Gerson’s “lie” to his patient (1996b) as an example of his wish to meet the “challenge of analyzing a mutually constituted intersubjective resistance with the aim of emerging into a new neutral zone” (p. 633). Ironically, in a response to Cooper, Gerson (1996a) writes, “As much as we may accept Greenberg’s useful idea that all issues of technique be considered within the ‘interactional matrix’ defined by the unique personalities of the analyst and patient, as much as we may agree with Hoffman’s (1994) hesitation to substitute a new ‘rule book’ for the old one, we should not allow cautionary tales to warn us off the quest for principles of technique that can be considered, however tenuously, as being applicable to more than one analytic dyad” (p. 905).

Given Greenberg’s premises regarding enactments, how can we consider Davies's alleged “confession” of erotic fantasies in the full light of her conviction that “part of the analyst's essential function is to recognize and maintain such disavowed experiences until such time as the patient can know them and integrate them…. Within such a scenario, the analyst oftentimes must speak the dangerously charged words for the first time” (p. 168). Clearly, Davies is painfully aware of the unconscious that her patient brings into their co-constructed dyad. Interesting to note, very much in the spirit of Freud, her paper focuses on the unfolding oedipal situation between parent and child, patient and analyst.
There seems to be no inroad, given that Greenberg's relational precepts ignore the bipersonal field, into talking about the work of Ghent and Frederickson. (Although it would be unfair not to mention, to anyone unfamiliar with the Frederickson case, that it is in fact his volatile patient, towering over him, who is doing the screaming, and that Frederickson, in an act of defense and containment, must meet him head-on.) Ghent's incredible attunement with patients illustrates the possibility of movement from entrenched repetition compulsions to the experiencing of a developmental need for recognition, and his vignette demonstrates the theoretical notion that interpersonal and intrapsychic responses can alter perception. But now I am really on dangerous ground, because Greenberg wants to tell us that responsiveness to patients’ needs opposes or defuses the analytic endeavor, and that such “excessive” clinical examples serve to “inflame” the analyst’s desire.

“In the new model,” according to Greenberg, “the analyst's ability to find and to satisfy crucial needs at crucial times makes analysis possible.” At best, such a one-person model constitutes a recipe for feeding the analyst's narcissism, and at worst, a sure-fire formula for abusive exploitation of a patient.

That is exactly how he makes it sound to readers when he begins to describe the Hoffman vignette as “a dramatic moment in which the analyst drew his patient back into analysis … by acting in a way that he calculated would meet a specific relational need” (emphasis added). In keeping with his second precept, in which he emphasizes the ubiquity of enactment, Greenberg asserts that relational clinical vignettes seem to him notably similar in the way that “in a moment of crisis the analyst creates a transaction that is new and surprising to the patient” (emphasis added). In my view, it is only from this perspective of invariably analyst-initiated transactions that the Hoffman vignette and Greenberg's supervision vignette are similar. However, whereas

Hoffman is responding to enactments originated by his patient, Greenberg's supervisee initiates an enactment, interrupting his patient's ongoing process and derailing it. It seems to me that Greenberg misses the relational point of ubiquitous enactment in the analytic process. But let us not, as relational theorists, declare a monopoly on the bipersonal view. In the interest of not continuing to promote historical schisms, let us acknowledge the contributions of contemporary Freudians like McLaughlin (1991) and Bach (1994). Referring to such moments of crisis as those experienced by Hoffman and his patient, Bach describes for us how “an act on the part of some patients, whether it be an enactment, a transference acting-out, or a reaction against the analytic framework, always carries the potential for being a creative act if it is met by a creative analytic response” (p. 65; emphasis added).

“One-sidedness of insight” (or light versus darkness) is indeed an antirelational idea! It is time to introduce, or reintroduce, Greenberg to a fifth premise, which his dichotomous arguments ignore, a precept that constitutes the very basis of what Hoffman means to illustrate through his clinical vignette. Oddly, Hoffman (1994) might even approve, although on different grounds, of Greenberg's attempt to compare the two vignettes. “It is important,” he writes, “to emphasize that my interest in this paper is in the dialectic between the analyst's personal emotional presence and the analyst's role-determined behavior, whatever their respective contents” (p. 197; emphasis added). In a manner that strikes me as more Talmudic than “casual,” Hoffman elaborates that “the point of appreciating the dialectic between personal responsibility and analytic discipline is to recognize that, despite the tension between them, each tendency is also reflected in a substantial way in the other” (p. 198). He asserts further that “the magical aspect of the analyst's authority is enhanced by his or her relative inaccessibility and anonymity” and that “we do not generally dismantle the analytic frame during the analysis or even after it” (pp. 198-199).

When Greenberg describes the interaction between Hoffman and his patient as a demonstration “that he could forsake his allegiances to analytic orthodoxy, and perhaps even to analytic propriety,” it is Greenberg who demonstrates dichotomous thinking. We can differ with Hoffman if we want to, argue with him, agree or disagree with him, but it strikes me as indeed a breach of propriety to misrepresent him.

I wish that, as psychoanalysts, we could accomplish what Greenberg recommends—that is, to communicate with one another.

rather than quarrel. As Greenberg writes, “the schisms feel painful to those committed to making psychoanalysis work as a discipline, and they are laughable to those who observe our battles from without.”

Desperately, Alice wants to appeal to the Cat, to tell him that this croquet game is not fair. But, when the Cat
reappears, all she can find of his image is from the neck up.

“Who are you talking to?” said the King, coming up to Alice, and looking at the Cat's head with curiosity.

“It's a friend of mine—a Cheshire Cat,” said Alice: “allow me to introduce it.”

“I don't like the look of it at all,” said the King….

Ultimately, the King of Hearts insists that the Cat be “removed,” and he calls to the Queen of Hearts, who has only one way of settling all difficulties.

“Off with his head!” she said without even looking round.
A great crowd gathers around the Cat and a terrible argument ensues.

The executioner's argument was, that you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it off from….

The King's argument was, that anything that had a head could be beheaded….

The Queen's argument was, that if something wasn't done about it in less than no time, she'd have everybody executed, all round. (It was this last remark that had made the whole party look so grave and anxious.)

What a terrible waste, this house of cards. By the time they got reorganized, the Cheshire Cat, of course, had disappeared entirely.

References


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