Double Catch: Writing Reverie in Motion

Adam was brought to me shortly after his ninth birthday in early January, 2011 due to behaviors which risked his safety, such as wandering from home at night and in the hallways at school. He also lied, stole, smeared and wet the bed nightly.

Adam hadn’t seen his mother since six months of age - her whereabouts are unknown. He returned in June, 2010 from living with his father for two years in a distant state, where he intimated foraging for food and being exposed to adult sexuality. His father’s calls are increasingly irregular and infrequent.

My work was cut out for me: “Make him behave.”

In the Work

I met with Adam twice weekly for seven months. He was physically active in the small office where we met, going from one activity to another. I set limits when concerned about safety; e.g., That looks like fun but the file cabinet isn’t for climbing, Adam. Initially, we reviewed self-calming techniques taught to him during his recent psychiatric hospitalization, where he had cut his clothing and was placed in the safe room several times. “This is boring. Can I go now?” he said.

Initially, Adam played aggressively with miniature animals, enacting biting and devouring as well as flinging these toys against the wall. By March, he was interacting with me rather than exclusively with inanimate objects albeit through the intermediary of a board game. There was no “as if” quality to his board game play; these were non-competitive games but played by Adam with a fervor as though “winning” meant everything. Not getting to the finish line first, determined solely by a roll of the dice, was expressed with a solemn affect.

We were playing catch one day in the late spring when Adam suddenly had an idea for a new game and following his directive, we each threw a ball simultaneously to one another. At once, he announced the name of the game, “Double Catch” and proclaimed that the goal is to see how many catches we could reach before a catch was missed. The throws had to be real throws and not simply designed so that there would be no chance of missing the catch. No. They had to be real; well, mostly and pretty much real. It was clear: We were playing for real though we sometimes had to pretend for it to be really real.
We often counted as we played, sometimes alternating and sometimes simultaneously. I found myself entering into a pleasing, motoric reverie with the rhythm of tossing and catching punctuated by our “eye smiles” when we reached ever higher records of catches while emitting sounds of glee or oops in tune with one another - sounds not unlike the cooing, oouus, aaahs, aaaws of a mother and infant. The tone of our voices would affectively rise to match our brightening affects as we passed previous records. Our gaze was held in the - what seemed to me - mediating reverie of rhythm, rupture, repair of the toss toss catch catch, toss toss catch catch aaahh, toss toss catch catch miss aaaw, toss toss catch catch oouu toss toss catch catch aaah.

The Developmental Impulse

How different is confident, unselfconscious awareness from impulsive lack of awareness! Adam functioned “like water in water” (Bataille, 1989) at home, school and the neighborhood. A lively boy with a proclivity for propelling himself into space resulted in frequent, mild injuries.

I imagined Adam enacting his developmental striving for a reverential (sic) experience with a caring, consistent, emotionally safe other, albeit a substitute in the form of a transferential figure in the midst of a therapeutic reverie (Ogden, 1994). His creation of this game was of course, multidetermined and included psychosomatic cohering as demonstrated by his thumb and fingers grasping the ball, which may have served to “lock in” internal structure through the body ego given the conditions provided by the good-enough environmental therapist. Just as his thumb and fingers grasped the ball in interactive play with the therapist, so too did his mind grasp the gaze and empathy of the reflecting other within the repartee in which we engaged, facilitating his intrapsychic development.

Countertransferential Reverie in the Service of Development

My ‘being with’ attunement was in paradoxic distinction to simultaneously being separate and in reverie - I was both with Adam in milky vicosity* and other from him as he from me. Time was suspended for me during this reverie-in-motion of catching and throwing as I engaged in reverie as such, a sense of permanence, or going-on-being pervaded the experience for me. I don’t know whether Adam was transported into reverie.; nevertheless, the transient sessions bounded by time and
space were paradoxic in that they hopefully contributed to intrapsychic structural and interpersonal development.

I later understood that my being in reverie qua the therapeutic process with Adam was in service of developmental progression (Sugarman, 2008) rather than if I had offered specific content interpretations. The-You-Through-Me-Returned-To-You of our Double Catch repartee affirmed our separate autonomies as well as the shared effusions of our psyches. Serving, Receiving and Returning were therapeutically embedded in the game created by Adam in his developmental striving, analogous to the Rhythms, Ruptures and Repairs of the actual play. My reverie was syntax to Adam's psychological development. And metaphors. Always metaphors - mother, midwife, repair shop and later, oriental carpet were present in my reflection.

As a child, I would sit on our large living carpet and become pleasantly lost in its design. Especially intriguing was where the interior design met the borders. What happened to it? Years later I read about field patterns of infinity which, as it were, flow eternally under bold patterned borders on Islamic Rugs, which serve to bound endless permanence in transient time and space. (Schuyler V.R. Cammann, p 14)

I propose that the field patterns of such carpets are graphic representations of the unconscious, which expressed itself in Adam’s Double Catch. And like the Ushak weavers, it didn’t matter to us where we stopped - the game - this playing for real, this essence of our work together - would continue on its own as the work of the unconscious is timeless and ongoing.

A permanent, intrapsychic and interpersonal terra firma of calm, endless, going-on-being was being neuroaffectively (re) woven in our play. We were “in the zone” of at-one-ness as our ostensible goal-oriented play reached ever ever higher records.

What was going here vis a vis affective neuroscience? Allan Schore has expanded the primacy of affect into regulation theory and a pragmatic model for the psychotherapeutic change process. Interactive affective communication effects psychic development in its structure and function. Our barely verbal though dialogic process mediated an attuned, patterned interpersonal resonance, promoting attachment and its beneficial derivative, self-regulation. (Schore, 2008) Though Adam’s maladaptive behaviors continued, they became less frequent and less intense. The preverbal matrix was strengthened resulting in improved intra- and interpersonal regulation. “The fundamental role of nonconscious attachment dynamics is therefore interactive psychobiological regulation . . . and generates
brain development.” I felt myself the affective gaze of the mother’s eye in mutual recognition with the budding infant’s mind as the relational unconscious was being mediated by essential implicit communications aided by the vehicles of the toss toss catch catch (Schore, p. 12 - 15) of two right brains communing. Whether there is a two-person relational reverie created in the transitional space of the work, with one person, the therapist engaged in a silent verbal reverie while the other, a child entered a reverie which remained somatic and pre-symbolic remains a question; however, as Shore states, psychotherapy is the communicating and not necessarily the talking cure.

Deceit was also operative in that Adam consciously thought that our play was really about seeing how many catches we could reach though little did I know when we began the game, that Double Catch would transform my experience of what we were doing. Since unconscious motivation is a sine qua non of my approach to practice, it’s axiomatic for me to assume that Adam was motivated by an unconscious unmet need to strengthen and consolidate intrapsychic structure and function, which paradoxically can only be consolidated through reverent, interpersonal action and which remained an unthought known throughout his experience.

Stone (2012) elaborates different forms of the mother/infant differentiation in the pre-Oedipal stage, which subsequently is expanded into (rather than interrupted by) language. Re-interpreted as a space of libidinal connection and differentiation, regulated through maternal bodily care, gestures, sounds, and movements, Kristeva’s chora is for Stone a . . . pre-linguistic “third” term mediating mother/infant relations . . . produc(ing) the beginnings of a firmer differentiation between infant and mother. Regular rhythms of coming and going, weaning, feeding, toilet-training and so on pattern the infant’s biological affects and impulses in determinate ways . . . ” and were indicated by Adam’s apparent need for a simulacra of the early mother-infant relationship and I would no more verbally address this with him than would a mother take her maternal preoccupation as an object to discuss with her infant. I purposefully stayed in the displacement. (Neubauer, P. (1994) Indeed, we were back in the language of movement. Stern (1985) concludes, “the experience of the present moment…aims for life verisimilitude, not meaning.” (p. 141) The child therapist’s task is to avail herself of whatever observing ego can be called up even as our body is in motion, as our experiencing egos are engaged. (Szajnberg, ipnet, Jan 16, 2012) I was chewing Adam’s cud for him, so to speak and returning pre-masticated bits in the intermediate space of our repartee in “a place to live” – an area between privacy
and relatedness (Winnicott, 1971b) My responses while playing Double Catch felt almost psycho-somatic as though those of a mother ministering to her infant.

“Play with a child psychoanalyst (sic) can have a developmental promoting impact with a minimum of verbalization and interpretation.” (Cohen and Solnit, 1993, p. 50) Nevertheless, both Bion’s understanding of reverie as receptivity to the patient and Ogden’s, “Reverie is a process in which metaphors are created that give shape to the analyst’s experience of the unconscious dimensions of the analytic relationship. Unconscious experience can only be ‘seen’ (reflected upon) when represented to oneself metaphorically” lends support for my experience of reverie in the sessions. (Ogden, 1997, p. 726)

What was accomplished in this two-way catch that couldn’t have been psychically accomplished for Adam playing catch with a single ball? Adam delighted in his two-way invention. Certainly, it required more dexterity and challenge than regular catch. More importantly, two balls lent a dialectic flavor and tension to our interaction and hence, my reverie; I could now reflect on our interaction as contextualized within a host of dialectics; such as, shared and separate selves, permeability and solitude, sound and movement, receptivity and expressivity and of course, the mother-infant dyad, the ur-dyad of psychological life. My reverie then became a fractal blending of mother-infant interaction in which his neurobiology apparently longed to find resonance, which wouldn’t have been well answered by playing catch with a single ball. Adam led to where he needed to be.

I’d like to note how the missed catches, the “oops” of Double Catch were “played with.” The affective exclamation was met, validated and followed by my picking up the ball and a resumption of going-on-being by tossing it back to Adam as I modeled and he playfully practiced the essential life skill of picking oneself up and going-on-being after disappointment and loss. In this way, I was able to enact Stuff Happens over and over and to affectively express the miss/loss and only then, resume going-on-being. Adam witnessed and experienced my surviving his aggressive impulses when I survived his fast balls with a shriek, a pick up and resumption of our game.

Therapeutic Action and Opening Indeterminate Space

What ensued during Double Catch can be likened to squiggle play - an enlivened going-on-being in the intermediate, shared space that was safe and affirming for Adam. The therapy occurred in the ‘in betweenness’ of our separateness, a “difference with” rather than a “difference from.” (Baraitser/Ettinger 2012) This
phenomena has been written about by literary philosophers such as Bachelard and Kristeva in writing about felicitous space and chora (Buren, 1993), respectively, and of course, the poet John Keats in his well-known quote, “Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (Keats, 1817).

The conditions for creating a Winnicottian transitional space in itself and as a vehicle for adaptive, developmental possibility were in play (sic) during Double Catch which allowed transitional phenomena, such as my reverie to develop and unfold experientially as well as secondary process contemplation in the service of Adam’s adaptive development.

Conclusion

Writing from rather than about reverie was attempted in the very brief clinical to communicate being in the therapeutic endeavor. The author was committed to staying stupid for trusting adaptive developmental strivings to unfold. Thomas Ogden’s and Allen Schore’s work anchor the experience of reverie in the transitional space of the therapeutic alliance in right brain to right brain affective therapeutic action.

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*http://www.princeton.edu/~gasdyn/Research/T-C_Research_Folder/Viscosity_def.html

What is viscosity?
This question is often best answered by example. Imagine a styrofoam cup with a hole in the bottom. If I then pour honey into the cup I will find that the cup drains very slowly. That is because honey's viscosity is large compared to other liquids' viscosities. If I fill the same cup with water, for example, the cup will drain much more quickly.

Viscosity is a measure of a fluid's resistance to flow. It describes the internal friction of a moving fluid. A fluid with large viscosity resists motion because its molecular makeup gives it a lot of internal friction. A fluid with low viscosity flows easily because its molecular makeup results in very little friction when it is in motion.
Gases also have viscosity, although it is a little harder to notice it in ordinary circumstances.

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