

# Dancing with the Unconscious

*The Art of Psychoanalysis  
and the Psychoanalysis of Art*

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# Introduction

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Dance is the hidden language of the soul.

—Martha Graham

The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs.

—Sigmund Freud

I have lived and worked at the junction of psychoanalysis and art for many years. The origin of my interest in these two disciplines, and especially in their connection, is rooted in my early childhood. I was a child when my family emigrated from French Morocco to Pennsylvania Dutch country in the United States, two worlds farther apart in culture than in miles. Whisked away from the bright, fiery colors of Morocco, baked by the sun and caressed by the sea, I was deposited in Pennsylvania, a land of cold, empty streets and hills coated with endless snow. In the country of my birth, people with olive-colored skin sang Andalusian melodies in passionate voices, the marketplace boomed with the raucous pyrotechnics of gritty commerce, and ghosts walked among the night trees. In my new home, pale Amish women quietly sold their produce, their hair pulled back so tightly that their faces seemed stretched upward, while their stone-faced men stood, inscrutable, behind unruly beards. Having gone from couscous and b'stilla to funnel cakes and shoo-fly pie, I had no choice but to creatively bridge those two worlds.

Watching my parents reinvent themselves also taught me about trauma and creativity, resilience and sublimation. My father had been at the top of the class ladder in the small coastal town of Safi, where he was both a mathematics teacher and the owner of a local department store. In the United States, he was humbled in his new position as clerk in a supermarket, but he slowly managed to create a new and prosperous life for himself

and his family. My mother, a homemaker who learned English by watching *I Love Lucy* episodes on television, was more isolated. Having had a number of servants in Morocco, she now did everything herself. I learned from her how to use creativity and resourcefulness to survive in a strange land. She sewed haute couture clothing for me and my sister as well as our dolls. She cooked gourmet food and served up 10-course feasts on a daily basis. She helped us put on plays and created all the costumes for them. She was a gifted storyteller, a true Scheherazade who brought the dazzling tapestry of her Moroccan childhood to life in the stories she told us.

I learned from my parents' adaptation to trauma and my own bridging of worlds how creativity infuses everyday life. When I became a professional psychologist in Israel I learned how much creativity and resilience survivors of trauma must have in order to continue living a life that has betrayed them. Helping Holocaust survivors, combat veterans, and victims of terrorism create new lives after undergoing the worst human experiences reminded me of what Elie Wiesel once said: "When He created man, God gave him a secret and that secret was not how to begin but how to begin again" (1976, p. 32). No doubt beginning again is a creative act, and it is no coincidence that so many immigrants and exiles—persons who have suffered great loss and survived trauma—are often among the most creative. Art often becomes the new home for those displaced from the mainstream. Living outside the box becomes thinking outside the box. Theodor Adorno wrote that "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" (1974, p. 87), and Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott expressed the same notion in "The Schooner Fight," where he wrote, "I have no nation now but the imagination" (2007, p. 129).

Working with severely disturbed individuals, often diagnosed as psychotic, has taught me that there is no manual for entering the human mind and that one has to be creative to reach those deemed unreachable. While many of my colleagues found psychosis frightening or labeled it untreatable by psychoanalytic methods, I have always felt excited and privileged to encounter and treat a human being suffering extreme disturbance, because the psychosis itself is a creative response to some unbearable situation and holds the key to its own creative resolution. I additionally perceived similarities between psychotic experiences and the products of creative artists. Both involve fluid, even regressed, self states and access to unconscious processes; both create new worlds to deal with pain; both are attempts at healing what's broken; both offer alternative ways of viewing and experiencing reality.

The life of an immigrant, the work with trauma, and the treatment of psychosis all demanded of me a creative response. Just as I lived the double life so common to immigrants and traveled between cultures, I learned to move easily between the worlds of art and psychoanalysis. In addition, since my early childhood, I danced, played music, drew, and wrote. I have

always loved the arts and felt that both art and psychology deal with the human condition and require many of the same skills. As a result, bringing worlds together and having them dialogue with and learn from each other have characterized my life's work, and that work is reflected in this volume, which contains many examples of creative transcendence precipitated by various forms of exile and loss.

## Why the Dance?

Psychoanalysis has traditionally been thought to exist somewhere between the disciplines of science and art. John Bowlby (1979) distinguished the “art of psychoanalytic therapy” from the “science of psychoanalytic psychology.” He explained that while the clinician deals with complexity, the scientist seeks to simplify, and while the clinician employs theory as a guide, the scientist challenges theory. Loewald (1974) similarly divided psychoanalytic technique into the art of applying psychoanalytic knowledge and methods to particular cases and the science of psychoanalytic observations and theory.

More recently, articles in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* (Baker, McFall, & Shoham, 2008), *Newsweek* (Begley, 2009), and *Nature* (Abbott, 2009) harshly criticize psychotherapy—and especially psychoanalysis—for not being scientific enough. In contrast, Shedler (2010) has presented abundant empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy. The debate rages on, although categorizing psychoanalysis as a science remains an elusive goal. Irwin Hoffman (2009) argues against the current ascendance of empiricism, saying that questions addressed in psychoanalysis, such as “What is a good way to be in this moment?” “Which human motives are most important?” and “What constitutes the good life?” “cannot and should not be adjudicated by ... ‘science’”(p. 1049).

Although theorists of psychoanalysis are often influenced by empirical study, and many aspire to scientific validation, the practice of psychoanalysis possesses commonalities with many art forms. Analysis and dynamic therapy have been compared to the interpretation of literary texts, co-authorship, the construction of narratives (Lacan, 1959; Loewald, 1974; Schafer, 1992; Spence, 1982), and storytelling (Ferro, 1999/2006). Dreams, a frequent subject of analysis, are visual and depict scenes, like paintings or “moving pictures.” They speak in code and demand access to unconscious revelation. The analyst “sculpts” the patient’s material. The patient and analyst enact and reenact [psycho]dramas and, in many respects, they are both creative and performing artists, each fluidly (one hopes) moving from one role to the next (Loewald, 1974). Like artists, both therapist and patient enjoy sessions of white-hot creativity thrumming with possibility, as well as endure slow and seemingly unproductive fallow periods, where,

nonetheless, some important change may be taking place within the unconscious. Many decisions made during therapeutic engagement rest upon intuition, hints, clues, associations, pregnant silences, and missteps. How much like the artist is the therapist who often may be at nearly a complete loss about how to proceed when, in the gloomy darkness of uncertainty, a door suddenly opens and fills the room with dazzling light.

Wilfred Bion, in his 1978 Paris seminar, stated, “One cannot afford to cast aside imaginative conjectures on the ground that they are not scientific enough.” He compared the psychoanalyst to the artist and invited him to consider which type of atelier he works in: “What sort of artist are you? Are you a potter? A painter? A musician? A writer?” His interviewer opined that some analysts might not see themselves as artists, to which Bion replied, “Then they are in the wrong job” (1978). If Bion were to ask me that question, I would answer that my consulting room is a dance studio and my patients and I are partners in dance. The metaphor of dance appeals to me as a provocative representation of the dynamic aspect of the psychoanalytic process and relationship—the movement from past to present, the movement of defense and catharsis, the movement of containment and release, the movement between conscious and unconscious and, most of all, the movement created by analyst and analysand. Like the dance, psychoanalysis is an art in which we use ourselves as the medium; the dance and the dancer are one fabric. Steps are required, but they cannot be performed rigidly, without grace or fluidity; every passage must involve creativity. Theory guides me but cannot restrict my engagement with my partner; theory cannot be adhered to so closely that it binds the interaction, nor can it be loosened to the point that the embrace is broken. I must remain ever sensitive to the rhythms, alterations, and intensities of the dance in which I sometimes lead and sometimes am led. It is a dance of high purpose whose proper execution, though informed by theory, is nothing if not art.<sup>1</sup>

Dance was present at the beginning of psychoanalysis when Breuer and Freud filled *Studies on Hysteria* (1893–1895/1955) with stories of women’s bodies that were stuck. Some of them literally could not move. Freud danced with his patients as he addressed the performative elaboration of their symptoms. He passed from hypnosis to the pressure technique to free association to dream analysis, as he tried to move his patients out of emotional and “physical” paralyses. (See Plate 1.)

What Freud grasped early on is that dance is about the mind and body working together and that dance and health are about movement. Mitchell (1988), too, referred to a patient’s dance as either restrictive or expansive:

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<sup>1</sup> After I wrote this introduction, I came across a paper by Wilma Bucci (2011) comparing psychoanalysis to the choreography of Argentine tango.

I do not propose going to the dance and complaining about the music, but enjoying the dance as offered, together with questioning the singularity of style. How did it come about that the analysand learned no other steps? Why does the analysand believe that this is the only desirable dance there is? Most analysands need to feel that their own dance style is appreciated in order to be open to expanding their repertoire. (p. 212)

Movement contains a symbolic function; it gives evidence of the dissemination of unconscious processes and mental health. It has its own pulse, heartbeat, and breathing cycle—the enfolding of experience and the unfolding of knowledge and action that heals. Pathology is about being stuck, repeating the same patterns of behavior again and again, even when such repetition deepens restriction and despair. Any movement can be viewed as dance, and any dance—physical or emotional—has its own vocabulary. Think of the sexuality and aggression expressed in the tango, the relaxed, rhythmic movement of a waltz, or the lively, flowing feel of a samba. Psychologically speaking, we dance through life and change partners throughout. There are developmental dances, beginning with that of the mother and child, whose choreography is so beautifully demonstrated in the microanalysis of Beatrice Beebe’s films. There is the dance of children playing together. There is ebb and flow of friendships and the excitement in the dance that is part of courtship and lovemaking. Finally, there is the dance of old age, as one begins to dance with loss and death.

And then there is the dance of psychoanalysis, offering freedom for personal expression and intuitive, spontaneous invention. Of course the dance of psychoanalysis is more than a dance, certainly even more than an art. Hoffman (2009) writes that “the reality of the ambiguity of human experience requires a creative dimension in the process of ‘making something’ of that experience” (p. 1048). Bollas (2009) likens the analytic session to “an act of creation” (p. 12), and Ringstrom (2011) speaks of the “ensemble work” and “spontaneous gesture” involved in playful analytic improvisations, which he likens to jazz (p. 469). That one human being works with another for the purpose of personal transformation is both a therapeutic and artistic endeavor. But the artistic component of psychoanalytic treatment (that is, the creative engagement with the analysand) might be the most significant in effecting positive change. If this is so, why has so little been written about the artistic elements of the therapeutic process itself? Perhaps it is because creating art is messy, full of false starts, interruptions, repeat attempts, punctuations of despair, flashes of inspiration, and long-awaited breakthroughs. The artistic process does not lend itself to linear descriptions. The inspired artist relies on the covert and spontaneous activity of the unconscious, never quite sure of, exactly, what she is doing or what she will do next. This is no less true of analysis. Even if the whole process



were filmed, every word recorded, and every event analyzed from multiple perspectives, still something vital would remain hidden. The resonant, pregnant silences, the complex and subtle layers of cognitive, affective, and expressive patterns of embodiment, and the hidden radiances of the underground all remain elusively beyond capture through formula and theory.

To be sure, the deep work of psychoanalysis is not readily recognized in every session. This is because psychoanalysis is messy and because, like artistic production, it has periods of incubation. Just as an artist does not write or paint every day, so too, psychoanalytic work is not always visibly productive or creative. There are long days, weeks, months, and even years that prepare the way for breakthroughs, those dazzling moments when the rhythm of change beats the air. This period of incubation is a necessary prelude to the illumination that accompanies creative and emotional transformation and synthesis (Arieti, 1976). Stillness is also a part of the dance and beautiful in its own way.

### **Why the Unconscious?**

The unconscious stands as the central pillar in psychoanalytic thought. Although Freud did not discover the unconscious, as many believe, he did bring our attention to its primacy in human life. LaPlanche and Pontalis (1973) claim that “if Freud’s discovery had to be summed up in a single word, that word would without doubt have to be ‘unconscious’” (p. 474). Freud emphasized that unconscious processes played a much larger role in human experience than conscious processes, comparing them to the greater portion of an iceberg submerged and hidden from view.

Freud’s unconscious was influenced by his observations with hypnosis (Breuer & Freud, 1893–1895/1955). He theorized that a splitting of consciousness occurred when one is confronted with trauma, “incompatible ideas,” or unacceptable wishes. Undoing repression was for Freud a major therapeutic goal related to that of making the unconscious conscious (Knafo, 2009a).

Over 100 years later, there is widespread agreement that most mental processing is unconscious (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Velmanns, 1991; Wegner, 2002; Wilson, 2002). Nonetheless, theorists, researchers, and clinicians have different definitions of the unconscious mind. Pierre Janet (1919/1976) wrote of dissociation as a congenital weakness in synthesis that, when coupled with trauma, results in a separate state of consciousness. Interpersonal and relational schools of psychoanalysis have preferred to speak of dissociation rather than repression. Davies and Frawley (1992) and Bromberg (1998) have continued Janet’s emphasis on dissociation to address the discontinuity of self states that takes place in trauma. Stern’s “unformulated experience” is not restricted to trauma—“thoughts not yet thought, connections not yet made, memories one does not yet have the resources or willingness to construct” (1989, p. 12)—but can be correlated

with research on trauma that shows how such experiences are not symbolized (van der Kolk, 1997).

Current ideas about the unconscious mind among cognitive psychologists (Greenwald, 1992; Hassin, Uleman, & Bargh, 2005; Kihlstrom, 1987; Kihlstrom, Barnhardt, & Tatarzyn, 1992; Wilson, 2002) and neuroscientists share common ground. Neuroscientific research on implicit memory, vision without awareness, critically injured patients, subliminal perception and the “adaptive unconscious” (Pierce & Jastrow, 1884; Silverman, 1983; Weinberger & Hardaway, 1990; Wilson, 2002) all point to the consensus that the unconscious directs thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994; Bargh, 1994; Higgins, 1989), and that we can learn without consciousness (de Gelder, de Haan, & Heywood, 2002; Kandel, 1999; LeDoux, 1996). Kihlstrom (1987) claims that “the unconscious of contemporary psychology is kinder and gentler” (p. 789) than Freud’s (1933/1964) “cauldron full of seething excitations” (p. 73) in which sexual and aggressive drives needed to be banished from consciousness or socialized.

Eagle (2011) notes that within psychoanalysis there has been a shift from an unconscious of infantile wishes to an unconscious of learned cognitive structures and interactional representations. Regardless of the way in which the unconscious is viewed, it remains one of the primary constructs that distinguishes the interests of psychoanalysis from other therapeutic approaches. Both artists and psychoanalysts intentionally seek special access to the unconscious, a territory without full and accurate maps, a place where one thing may become another in the wink of an eye, where meaning itself originates not as a monolith, but as a deeply layered matrix of possibility, and where every action is multi-determined.

Indeed, what can we name that is more complex than the human mind? When Lacan (1953/2004) wrote that the unconscious must be structured like a language, surely he could not have been referring to language in any ordinary sense of the word. Language and conscious thought are essentially serial in nature; yet they spring from a subterranean world comprised of complex parallel processes that function simultaneously and result in a thinker, a thought, and a feeling about what is happening. If the unconscious is structured like a language, it must be a language that also keeps us alive—for instance, in the autonomic control of heartbeat, respiration, and fight-flight chemistry. It must be a language that creates a sense of time while remaining steeped in timelessness, a language that fashions limits through limitless vision, a language that denies nothing while embracing everything. It must be a multidimensional language capable of infinite representation and remarkable connectivity. It must be a language that dreams and from whose dreams emerge the forms of knowledge and expression that apprehend and expand the scope of human possibility. The unconscious makes possible the whole of the epistemological universe, encompassing the known and the as-yet undiscovered and unrevealed. Though all

human disciplines must rely upon it for their existence, both psychoanalysis and art talk to and about it most obviously, the former rather directly, the latter in nuanced code, each discipline enhancing and clarifying the other.

This book focuses on the interrelatedness of psychoanalysis and art, and how the operations of both utilize the unconscious in the quest for creation, transformation, and healing. It has become important of late to position psychoanalysis as a science, but this view seems to minimize the creativity involved in both analytic and scientific endeavors. Similarly, artists obviously use unconscious processes in their creative work, yet many of them are unaware of the therapeutic aspects of art. This volume uncovers the creative structures common to both psychoanalysis and art and demonstrates how each can illuminate the processes of the other through a unique and valuable partnership.

The first section of this volume examines the artistic components in psychoanalytic theory and work. Case studies and commentary demonstrate how free association, transference, dreamwork, regression, altered states of consciousness, trauma, and solitude form a braid of creative elements in psychoanalysis. The first section also describes how the analytic couple functions as an artistic couple (dance partners) in the service of growth. Rather than tout the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis, this section emphasizes the artistry and profound creativity that exists at the heart of the psychoanalytic dance. I call this the *creative action of psychoanalysis*. In fact, the quest for transformation sought in psychoanalysis or psychodynamic psychotherapy is itself a creative endeavor, one best served by allowing the unconscious to speak to the analytic couple through the artistry of the analyst. Like the dedicated artist and his or her object of art, the analytic couple must be willing to endure the fallow times, where the unconscious slowly toils in the depths of the subterrain before a breakthrough occurs. For me this moment of breakthrough, creation, and discovery is the jewel in the crown of psychoanalysis.

The second section of this volume presents in-depth studies of a number of artists and their works. Just as Freud studied psychopathology in order to learn about the psyche, these chapters will look at creative artists and thinkers to understand psychological processes that exist in all of us. The artistic project can serve and illustrate many psychological needs: the creation of a self; the establishment of connections with the world; affect regulation; the working through of conflict and processing of trauma; myth and meaning making; and the symbolic search for immortality. For this reason, creativity is at the heart of self-transformation. The bridge between psychoanalysis and art does not need to be built; it has existed all along. Following is a synopsis of the individual chapters.

## **Part I: The Art of Psychoanalysis**

Chapter 1, “Dancing with the Unconscious: The Art of Psychoanalysis,” looks at psychoanalytic work as an art form and uses the metaphor of

dance to describe the rich creativity of mental life and analytic work. The creative dimensions of free association, transference–countertransference, and dreamwork are each discussed, along with their coupling in the service of a “cure.” A compelling session with a transsexual patient that used dream analysis is presented verbatim, supplemented by transient reflections and subsequent analysis. The case study illustrates the creative collaboration that occurs between analyst and analysand.

Chapter 2, “One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: Regression in the Service of Art and Psychoanalysis,” develops a critical reexamination of the usefulness of Ernst Kris’s concept of “regression in the service of the ego” and shows how regression is at the heart of creativity. It is argued that one must depathologize the concept of regression as well as expand its terminology to reflect advances in object relations theory. Creative regression is facilitated by the artistic setting and relationship to one’s craft, just as therapeutic regression is facilitated by the analytic frame and the transference relationship. Case material is presented.

Chapter 3, “The Senses Grow Skilled in Their Craving: Thoughts on Creativity and Substance Abuse,” explores the frequent connection between artistic creativity (and success) and the use of substances. Many artists use alcohol and drugs to aid in creative regression as well as ease personal sensitivity, deal with the pressures of fame and the fear of failure, and lessen the sense of isolation that accompanies the lone pursuit of art. The danger is of course addiction, degeneration, and destruction. A case is presented.

Chapter 4, “Creative Transformations of Trauma: Private Pain in the Public Domain and the Clinical Setting,” examines two artists’ lives and works. German born Charlotte Salomon, killed in Auschwitz at 26, engaged with personal and political turmoil and atrocity in her art, while Michal Heiman, a contemporary Israeli artist, deals with terrorism and its effects in her art. Additionally, a case of an artist who is the child of a Holocaust survivor is presented to demonstrate the creativity needed in the analytic relationship to deal with intensely destructive trauma. This chapter argues that no horror is off limits to the making of art, which can act on the destructive event to attenuate its impact, promote healing, and generate a meaning that better contains it.

Chapter 5, “Alone Together: Solitude and the Creative Encounter in Art and Psychoanalysis,” examines the central role of solitude in the creative process, particularly in relationship to the female artist. Artistic creation in essence is a solitary endeavor, and artists seek solitude to create and to work out their issues. Women, for the most part, are and have been expected to be more social, communicative, and nurturing; by retreating to create, they relinquish their leading roles in social engagement, a difficult and tricky affair. A clinical case is presented to describe the treatment of a woman who could not bear being alone until she began writing her memoir in solitude.

## Part II: The Psychoanalysis of Art

Chapter 6, “Dreams of Genius: Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung,” illustrates the manner in which two dreams—one of Freud’s and one of Jung’s—inform the minds of these two giants, as well as their respective constructions of psychoanalytic theory. From the viewpoint of the unconscious, each man dreamed his theory before he wrote it. Dream analysis allows us to glimpse the dazzling complexity of the human mind.

Chapter 7, “Egon Schiele: A Self in Creation,” describes the psychological processes underpinning the haunting work of Austrian *fin-de-siècle* Expressionist artist, Egon Schiele. Schiele’s countless anguished self-images represent attempts at mastery over traumatic childhood events: the death of his father and three siblings and the lack of mirroring from his mother. The spectators’ experiences in viewing the personal and emotional turmoil in Schiele’s art are also examined.

Chapter 8, “At the Limits of the Primal Scene: Revisiting *Blue Velvet*,” reveals the primal scene elements that infuse the cult classic film and help create its power. Director David Lynch plays with questions of looking and being looked at as well as revelation and concealment. His film incites and gratifies the viewer’s curiosity, while also invoking feelings of helpless inadequacy and anxious guilt—all part of the primal scene. The primal scene is shown to be a guiding fantasy of the unconscious as well as a primary human reality that deals with exclusion, uncertainty, mystery, and the search for truth and meaning.

Chapter 9, “Ana Mendieta: Goddess in Exile,” looks at Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta, known for her earth and body art. Mendieta was separated from her mother and her motherland at a young age and later created art from the earth to express the suffering of exile, the ephemeral quality of existence, and the need to merge with the mother archetype and grow beyond her personal loss. Mendieta’s art, born in the gap between loss and longing, conveys the fragility of human bonds as well as the process of reunion and recovery.

Chapter 10, “Bruno Schulz: Desire’s Impossible Object,” examines the sadomasochistic vision of Polish artist Bruno Schulz, shot by a Nazi at the age of 50. Schulz, one of the 20th century’s most enigmatic artists, mastered both the visual and textual medium. He wrote between the dream and the waking state, with an evocative language that uses mechanisms of fantasy, regression, condensation, and the spatiotemporal plasticity of the unconscious. Schulz positions nature and women as sadists and men as masochists. Though Schulz’s role is one of a castrated and powerless masochist, he stuns us with his mastery as an artist; though he found life very difficult, he was able to see into its depths and eloquently render its brutal and beautiful vision.

Creativity generally involves something new, something fresh, something with an original perspective. It can entail bringing things together or taking them apart, reformulating questions, sniffing out novel connections, or taking leaps of imagination that take the mind into a new territory. It involves bracketing what one feels sure of in order to welcome and see what may appear when we put certainty aside.

Creativity in the service of life, art, and psychoanalysis is an open-ended, ongoing process of discovery, revelation, and construction. It is one of our greatest and most elegant adaptations, seated in the very heart of human possibility. Everything made by human beings begins as an act of imagination, an adaptation not merely in the service of survival but also of growth. It is not enough for us to merely survive. We must also thrive, and our growth is assisted by our creativity. Psychoanalysis at its best is a life-serving enterprise that can unlock the creative potential in ourselves and in others.

# Dancing with the Unconscious

## The Art of Psychoanalysis<sup>1</sup>

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Those who danced were thought to be quite insane by those who could not hear the music.

—Angela Monet

Begin with a room, its four walls displaying a few choice prints, evocative images that perhaps speak with artistic subtlety to the room's singular purpose. It is a room with a view, less to the outside than the inside, a room prepared for a human encounter like no other. Within this room two people will dance, not with hands and feet, but with voice and soul. Moving with faith through the ballroom of the unknown, they will make up the steps as they go along, guided by currents of unconscious thought that ebb and flow between them. As the dance unfolds in imagery and sound, in memory and meaning, in desire and suffering, their aim is to suspend disbelief, judgment, and censorship in order to invite life to speak from its deepest recesses. Ideally, this dance will not end in stillness but in self-awareness and transformation.

This dance will employ three forms of unconscious expression unique to analytic work: free association, transference–countertransference, and dreams. All bear an important relationship to art, and all require a creative response on the part of the analyst. In the course of our discussion we will see how all three function creatively and how the analyst employs them in the art of the psychoanalytic dance.

### **FREE ASSOCIATION**

When a patient speaks to the analyst in an atmosphere of safety and trust about “whatever comes to mind” in a stream of free associations, he or she is expressing thought and meaning that is largely woven together and determined unconsciously. Such content, against which the patient may be

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<sup>1</sup> A revised version of this chapter appeared in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 32(3), 2012.

defended, is the hidden narrative that nurtures the dialogue, keeping it alive and moving it forward. Bollas (2009) calls the “momentum” gained from free association’s serial logic, “an intrinsic connective reasoning” (p. 4). In turn, the analyst listens to the patient with an “evenly hovering attention” or, as Freud (1912/1958b) said, the analyst “should withhold all conscious influences from his capacity to attend, and give himself over completely to his ‘unconscious memory’ ... He should simply listen, and not bother about whether he is keeping anything in mind” (p. 112). The analyst’s rarified, nongrasping listening puts consciousness in brackets while heightening unconscious receptivity to the secluded, disguised, or inaccessible dimension of the patient’s communications. The analyst listens for what thus far has remained silent. It is listening for the voice of the other who is denied; who has been rendered silent; and who can speak only in the language of the body, affect, symbol, or action.

Theodor Reik (1948) called this receptivity “listening with the third ear,” or “perceiving what has not yet been said” (p. 17). Anton Ehrenzweig (1967) referred to a similar “apperception” when he spoke of being able to grasp “the hidden order” of things. Such listening establishes the basis for connectivity, not only among the disparate thoughts of the analysand, but also between the analytic couple. Ogden (1997) has written about the analyst’s states of reverie as corollaries to the patient’s free associations. In his reveries Ogden believes he taps into something crucial occurring between him and his patients as well as into his ability to use what emerges to guide him in the treatment. This bidirectional connectivity thus allows transmission and reception while encouraging continued and deepening exploration. The analyst is often *right there* with the patient in a state of openness and unknowing, and she allows links to form on their own without yet applying the shaping force of analysis. Both the analyst and the analysand are like the artist who, in the act of creation, *always stands on the threshold of the unknown*.

Partnered with the listening analyst, the patient speaks about whatever comes to mind. As the analyst suspends the urge to listen with the aim of immediate construction and analysis, the patient suspends the need to adhere to an agenda, or tell an interesting story, or make a point, or follow any specific logical form ordinarily found in ordinary speech. The patient *freely associates*; that is, he allows one thought to follow another in a stream of internal monologue, speaking unreservedly about the reflections and feelings that demand voice. This partnership ideally allows the unconscious to become known. What is hidden and yet driving what is apparent can now begin to permeate the dialogue. This movement is itself the transformation of understanding in both parties. At its best, it is the literal and gradual integration of disparate and cut off aspects of embodiment.

The sequential, yet nonlinear and sometimes seemingly contradictory thinking that characterizes free associations is a central component of



creative thought. Albert Rothenberg (1990) names this “Janusian thinking” and explains how it shapes the ability to perceive relations among things where such connections might not otherwise be perceived. The content of free association, like the content of creative thought, emerges from the multiple meanings and affective perspectives embodied as memory, trauma, and knowledge. Of course, theory guides the linear and logical interpretation and reconstruction of the deeper and continuous meanings that tie together seemingly discontinuous and disparate associations. Surrealist artists were quick to notice the creative potential of associative thinking, and they incorporated its methodology into specific artistic techniques, such as automatic writing. James Joyce is an early example of a writer who replaced linear storytelling with stream of consciousness as form and content of the novel. Today, it is well known that creative thinking entails at least partial withdrawal of judgment and censorship, as well as the ability to make links not immediately apparent to reason or logic (Arieti, 1976). In working associatively and teaching the patient to do so, the analyst invites creativity into the sessions, the kind that creates personal movement and “new being.”

## **TRANSFERENCE–COUNTERTRANSFERENCE**

If free association functions as a highly compact creative language that contains multiple perspectives and meanings within the patient’s unconscious, transference unconsciously expresses that embodiment in action and within the relationship. The patient will naturally enact and repeat (early) relational patterns within the therapeutic context, and the analyst will function as a living screen and a dynamic container for the issues or wrongs the patient needs to redress. At the same time the analyst will help the patient apply a therapeutic and transformative perspective to what occurs. In doing this, the analyst naturally comes into the relationship with her own transferences. Because the transference relationship is bidirectional and co-created, it functions as a malleable context within which layers of identifications, projections, enactments, and symbolizations can come to light and be explored and worked through. What this means is that the relationship itself becomes the means by which the patient and analyst grow and are transformed.

Transference–countertransference is the unknown, delimiting factor in the therapeutic relationship. As with any relationship, it is what ultimately determines the quality of the work. But here the analyst is very much in the dark. No one can know the extent of her own transference with regard to a specific individual. Because transference–countertransference involves the relationship between two unconscious minds, it is the most unknown and exciting aspect of the work. “It is a very remarkable thing,” wrote Freud

in 1915, “that the unconscious of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the conscious” (p. 194).

The transference is creatively handled by allowing the relationship to flow and change, by guiding, through free and spontaneous dialogue, the growing insight of the patient, and by becoming aware of the multiple transference dimensions arising in oneself. This process requires that the analyst engage multiple meanings while taking on multiple identities—a highly fluid process fraught with potential difficulty and requiring a loosening of boundaries between the self and the other, between what is inside and what is outside. Such boundary fluidity (though often not smooth) is a hallmark of creativity, where the artist extends his notion of self to take on other identities, and explore and step into alternate realities. Ogden (1994b) speaks of the third analytic space that is created between the analyst and analysand, a space that moves them both beyond the boundaries of their limited selves and experiences. Winnicott (1971a) introduced the concept of play in analytic encounters that takes place in this third, potential, space—the space of creativity.

### **DREAMS**

Dreams are perhaps the most direct communications of the unconscious mind. Freud (1900/1953b) used the dream as the model for all unconscious mental experience. Like graphic artworks, dreams employ an economy of visual expression to articulate our inner lives. Dreams occur prior to the intervention of conscious thought and frequently present themselves as riddles to consciousness. Often the more incoherent dreams appear, the greater their revelatory value, for the condensation of their symbolism contains a world of meaning. Clearly, creative processes underlie both dreams and art. The creative aspect of working with dreams involves the art of interpretation, which includes asking the questions that will lead the analytic couple deeper into the dream’s hidden meanings.

When working with dreams the analytic couple interprets an intimate and mysterious language, because buried in the dream may be the repressed memory, the hidden fear, the gnawing anxiety, the destructive assumption, or the quivering hope, the silent courage, the astonishing insight, the unseen solution. The dream is less governed by theory, censorship, or convention than by conscious thought. But more than a site of repressed content, the dream unites layers of memory, imagination, and desire, and crucial elements of our psychic life are encrypted in its architecture. Freud (1900/1953b) famously stated that “the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind” (p. 608).

Dreams, like free associations and transference, are bidirectional in nature. They express unconscious thoughts as well as our attempts to

modify and understand them. When dreams engage the analysis—and, among other things, dreams reported while in analysis are doing just that—analytic work gains the power to counteract or undo repression, to expand the limitations of our conscious minds, and to unite with the other in a profound and multidimensional encounter.

Following is a session that illustrates the raw, creative power of the dream as well as the creativity needed to mine some of its meanings. Additionally, the session incorporates free association and transference. In this case, we bear witness to the dance between two (conscious and unconscious) minds. Although many (e.g., Fenichel, 1939; Loewald, 1960/1980) have written about the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis, it is also important to attend to the *creative action* that takes place in analytic work. As demonstrated here, *creative action is therapeutic action*. Part of the artistry involves the ways in which the dream's meaning and context are brought into being. It may look simple, but it is often a subtle, quiet aspect of technique.

By including minimal information about the patient I aim to focus on the session itself. (For more on this case, see Knafo, 2006.)

## DANCING WITH DEATH

Ana was a 29-year-old male-to-female transsexual when she sought help for the first time. Significantly, Ana's birth was the result of a rape. At the beginning of treatment Ana physically appeared as a man and was married to a woman. She claimed to utterly hate her maleness and felt that she was a lesbian trapped in the body of a man. By the end of her 4-year treatment, Ana was a woman living with a man, referring to herself as an "omnisexual." The following session was the third in Anna's treatment and the first dream she shared with me. Consciously Ana was wholly resolved about going through the transition from male to female and claimed to have no conflict about her decision, as she simply wished to rid herself of everything male. The dream work that took place in the session reveals the many layers of unconscious meaning regarding this life-altering decision. The session is interspersed with an amalgam of my initial reactions and later analysis, in italics.

ANA: [*Enters and approaches my office window*] So you do have a view! It is difficult coming here with the gym across the street. My body will never be as pretty as a woman's ... I had a dream fragment. It came at the end of a series of dreams.

*I already sense this session will be profound. What tells me this? She begins with her hope for a view as well as her despair. I have a view. She believes I have a view. Perhaps in this room she, too, will have a view.*

*The opening lines of a session are like the opening theme in a concert; they will be repeated with variation throughout this session and those that follow it. I have a perspective that she lacks. Like the women in the gym, I also have the woman's body that she lacks. I feel the gentle urge to move with her, to let her lead me inwardly as I lead her outwardly. The dream yet unspoken electrifies the air between us.*

DK: Tell me what you remember.

ANA: There was a group of people. I was with a school group. We went to see ... It wasn't clear where we were going. We went to one place where they were going to have a public execution. I've never seen one.

*I listen to her and allow my associations to flow with her narrative. She has come to see something she has never seen before. Again she uses the language of vision. She dreams to see. She has brought me a dream to see, and she has perhaps brought me a dream that sees. Someone will be executed. We will see who and how and perhaps even why.*

ANA: It's strange, but it's as though I thought, society does this, takes kids to see a public execution. There was a woman there, sitting in a chair. You could see her face. She is as far as you are from me. She is thin, with thin features, forlorn, long, dishwater grayish-brunette hair, and very sad eyes.

*Ah, we dance now in the embrace of the transference. She is saying something about us, about the distance between us, the distance we are closing: "as far as you are from me." The dream incorporates the analysis. It refers to the analysis. It is meant at least partly as a communication to the analyst.*

ANA: And she sat there and the group came around. And the executioner people were fitting her, taking a noose and adjusting it. I couldn't figure out how this process would work, taking vital signs.

*How does this process of treatment work? What is its execution? What is happening here, and how does it correspond to what is happening within her? I let go and trust the movement.*

ANA: No one was talking to this woman. She was there all alone with no one to comfort her, only to watch her die. It became clear that she wasn't going to get executed at that spot. They were going to move her, and the group wouldn't see it. So, the group that came with me moved, went for coffee. But I felt that wasn't appropriate to just let a person die

and no one make contact with her. I felt empathy for that person. So, I went up to her, looked at her. She was troubled.

*As she speaks I begin to see and feel her loneliness. The woman is being moved from "that spot" and will be executed elsewhere. A position must be relinquished in order for the execution to occur. This may refer to the future surgery and the therapy as well. Ana is with the group and yet is uncomfortable with it. Ana is separating from the group, feeling empathy for the woman, moving closer to what is so hard to face. As she does so I am called to enter her dream more deeply, to dream with her.*

ANA: I asked, "How are you?" She didn't say a lot. She was depressed.

*Ana does not yet know that it is perhaps she who is depressed. She believes she is just fine with her decision.*

ANA: She knew she was going to be killed and wasn't going to say anything. But she looked at me and felt comforted and cared for. Someone from this world condemning her cared enough to talk to her, knowing this person was condemned.

*I savor that image of comfort and care, feeling she is talking about the therapy. We are joined to witness an execution. We are joined in being executed ourselves. Together we are executing a process of revelation.*

ANA: She looked at me knowingly. She knew I knew she'd be killed. [*Ana looks at me knowingly.*]

*Sometimes the dance moves so beautifully the two become as one. Where does the dream end and where do we begin? I deeply sense but do not yet fully know what is here to see. As I dance with Ana she dances with that figure who seems not to dance at all but sits trapped in a chair awaiting execution.*

ANA: This is what a person feels at the end of their life. There's nothing more that they can do. There's a recognition they have, and they can look at your life and think: you're so young and won't be anymore. She looked at me and said something like, "I feel cold."

*I quiver at this insight. She is leading me into my own fear, the fear of annihilation, the radical solitude which results from the awareness "I will die," an awareness that leaves us with nothing except the feeling of cold.*

ANA: Nothing more expressive. I noticed she was holding something in her hand. She looked at me and handed it to me. It was an empty cassette,

a tape box. There was a liner on it, but no tape. It was as though they grabbed her and this was the last thing she could hold onto. So this was it. And she realized what she held was nothing. But she handed it to me and I said, thank you.

*How the dream speaks of Ana's dilemma. The dream figure hands her an empty tape cassette. She will change her body into that of a woman. But will she be a woman inside or just an empty container, a box without content, a form without substance? Will she become nothing by doing this? Will nothing change? Is her sex change an empty gesture after all? How profound is the image of the empty tape box! Connections buzz through my mind too rapidly to analyze. My ears drink her words, and I am touched by the beauty and complexity of her dream.*

ANA: She asked, "Why do you have such long hair?" I answered, "Well, I am a transsexual." She looked at me very disappointed, as if to say, "Another crazy ... it figures." The only person who would care for her is an outcast. She may have glanced at me one more time but that was it. Then they came—one person in a white coat—took both her arms, took her to a room, and closed the door. I knew that was the execution chamber. I knew that I was the last person she had seen and that she was going to be killed. That was the end of her life and the end of the dream.

*Again I am struck with the depth of Ana's conflict over her decision, though she consciously felt little if any conflict. Part of her feels that she is "crazy" for making this choice. I know that the dream she has brought me is profound. I encouraged Ana to free associate to the various elements of the dream, and the dance continued to unfold.*

DK: Can you tell me about the group?

*Why this question? It feels right, but why? Because she begins here, being part of a group, then breaks away to encounter the condemned woman, and, of course, this encounter is with herself, with her choices, with her analysis, and with me. She is an outcast, and so the group holds clues to her identifications.*

ANA: I am not sure. I see myself as I am, but they were sixth graders. But I am among them. It's a cross between a sixth-grade population of boys and girls and a postgraduate population of men and women. The whole thing was a field trip—amusement.

*So it was a good question. She condenses two time periods. I recall that Ana was 11 when she dressed in her mother's clothing for the first time.*

*Gazing defiantly in the mirror, the little boy told himself that once he wore a woman's clothes—mother's clothes—there would be no turning back. Mixed with this is the postgraduate population, an age where one completes the launch into adulthood, having made most of the decisions that will shape the rest of one's life. I note her use of both genders—"boys and girls," "men and women"—since she herself is still very much of both genders. I feel the two of us are really beginning to move, to dance.*

DK: Was anyone in the group recognizable to you?

*I want Ana to show me who she carries within herself, the characters of her embodiment. I want her to focus here and connect us to her reality.*

ANA: No. We just met. It makes me think of the group TA [Transgendered Anonymous]. You walk in and they already have relationships with one another, not to you. I knew of them but had no close association with them.

*Like her dream, she speaks of her isolation. Excluded from the group from the first time she donned her mother's clothing; now, ironically, she has attained the ultimate exclusion—from a group that is itself extremely marginalized: Transgendered Anonymous.*

DK: And the execution?

*Her body shifts back in her chair, away from this question. I've made my first leading move, avoiding it until now, by choosing to step around the periphery of the dream's roiling center, its compression of conflict, terror, and hope. Will she pull away or step deeper into her own unknown territory? How to describe this dance? When do I stay back, attend to the edges, listen for the echoes of hidden meaning? When do I advance? How do I follow Ana as she leaves a thin trail of intent through the tangled brush of dialogue? When and how do I open a new path, engage a new question, move to a stronger and more insistent rhythm? Her body shift warns me not to advance too quickly. How we wish to know and not know the truth at the same time! How each of us plays the blind king or queen in our own drama!*

ANA: I would be curious.

*Strange wording indeed. Not "I am" or "I was" curious about the execution. But "I would be" curious, the conditional "would" indicating a defense against knowing and especially against feeling.*

ANA: It was a medieval image, a Civil War image, and a 1930s image. Someone is sitting in—taken from a black-and-white B movie made in the '50s—a chamber, an electric chair, someone taped and tied to the chair. There are windows and around are reporters. And the person is all alone, in the room of course. They pull the big switch and, of course, the person jolts and jumps. The silver of the metal has a glistening aura of cold. I can't relate to that person. It's probably some ugly criminal, but it is the spectacle of death. And there are Crimean War images with people on the gallows—dangling, with hoods over their heads. It is ghastly. The crowds. It is as though people don't exist and life wasn't worth a lot then. And a medieval image. There is a fair around an execution and everyone brings their kids. It's a cross between public humiliation and public entertainment. Ultimately, it's a combination. It's why people come to a public execution—the festival, celebrity, morality. But I don't relate to any of the people getting executed.

*Ana's narration is flowing easily now, in a quickened, excited voice. Her eyes are closed and her head is tilted back. As she speaks to me, past me, through me, meanings and connections arise in my mind without the need for reflection: war, circus, the pulling of the big switch, the black-and-white scenes. These images whirl through my mind, and I know she is telling me about her fear and terror, and its connection to what she is and what she may become. The multiple images of war and death and the public circus that surrounds them condense the horror of the spectacle she herself is enacting. One image by itself will not suffice, though the horror is implied in the odd phrase of "pulling the big switch"—pulling it off, switching genders—the literal castration that must occur, the execution of the man and the execution of the woman. The graphic quality of castration demands the harshness of black and white. The scene is too extreme for color, even if the one to be executed is little more than an "ugly criminal." The dream suggests that, at least for a part of her, the act of self-castration mocks the self built from biology's foundations. She is terrified and guilty. But she must negate the connection to the "ghastly," overwhelming terror she faces and so, even in her dream, she cannot relate to anyone being executed. She denies connection twice within a single paragraph. She must keep dreaming, and so must distance herself from the condemned; otherwise her dream will become a nightmare and she will awaken. Even in the depths of sleep the unconscious defends us from what we cannot yet handle. What a marvelous movement of revelation, what an uncanny masquerade.*

ANA: To me, the issue of execution is peculiar. I don't think the state is wrong in dealing with execution. So, I don't feel execution is so awful.



This happens. You're more likely to get killed by an accidental shooting. So I was curious.

*Her strange construction is haunting: The state is not wrong in dealing with execution. This avoidant, awkward construction suggests she may be speaking not only of the state at large but also of her state of mind. Her state of mind is not in error in wanting to change genders—in executing the surgery. If only her need were fully acceptable—to others and to herself. But Freud's concept of negation (1925/1961c) instructs us to remove negatives from dream reports. Thus, the state is also wrong for allowing executions. Still execution is less likely to occur than an "accidental shooting." Note that the "state" chooses the "execution" while death by "shooting" is "accidental." She chooses to execute the procedure; her biological gender, however, is arbitrary, an accident. What rage she must feel at being born wrong by accident (an accident of gender and an accident of rape), an accident that may not even be properly corrected by a proper "execution." But now she has moved from the conditional "I would be curious," to the admission that she "was curious."*

DK: Tell me about the woman.

*The flow of the dance is now carrying us along. I move back to the dream. I step lightly from the group/context to the action/execution to the woman/person being executed.*

ANA: Yes. She was sitting in a chair, probably like this, a chair not uncomfortable. She was in the position to contemplate, but without anyone paying attention to her—except her neck size, weight—the best way to dispose of her body. It was impersonal.

*The chair holding the one to be executed is like the chair in therapy. The negation of discomfort suggests that, at least to some extent, she experiences therapy as uncomfortable. Concern for the one to be executed only involves impersonal physical aspects.*

DK: What did she look like?

*Why do I ask this question? Is this a misstep? I seem to be colluding with the others in her dream who concern themselves solely with the physical. Am I proving her right? Is this what people are primarily interested in?*

ANA: She looked like a woman I know from church. We go to a church in Harlem, mostly Black and Hispanic. This woman—she's White—has

a Black husband or boyfriend. She always seems sad. She has more streaky gray hair than the woman in the dream. I don't expect a cheery outlook from the woman I know in church. In the dream too, I don't expect it. Also, the body type doesn't apply to me—5'2" and 100 pounds. I don't feel it's me or someone I know.

*The woman to be executed resembles a White woman in a Black church, a "sad" outsider. Her hair is "streaky gray" or in between black and white as Ana is in between male and female. The woman in the church and the woman in the dream bring no cheer. But again this is not Ana, she makes sure to tell me twice. "Dance with me Doctor, but let us not yet stare too directly in the magic mirror as we pass it." She cannot yet admit the questions her dream is asking: Why does my decision to change my sex fill me with sadness and pain? She is asking, too, for me to lead her lightly on. I must connect her with this figure at the heart of her dream, this phantasm composed of her terror and doubt that interrogates both the meaning of her act and the meaning of her life. Perhaps I stepped on her toes, but now I will take her whirling into the next series of movements. I am excited because I sense the dance beginning to quicken, bearing us both toward that inner flight that makes this thing we do so special. My next question seems simple, but it is meant to deepen our knowledge of the meaning the dream woman has to her.*

DK: Can you tell me about this woman?

ANA: I talk to her once in a while. Some people have the appearance that indicates there's something more to them—mysterious—you can tell this woman in church has been through a lot and you don't know what it is. It's the same thing in the dream.

*She is asking, "What is it about myself that I do not understand? What is the nature of my mystery—the mystery of who I am and where I fit in?" Naturally, she is also wondering about me, this woman who sits opposite her, reflecting her to herself—who am I, and what role will I play in her life?*

DK: And you're curious and approach her.

*Together we are cautiously approaching the woman to be executed, the forbidden signifier that both conceals and reveals. I am leading her closer to the truth she circles but does not directly encounter. The woman in the church—a sacred figure—has brought us nearer.*

ANA: Right. I was there to hear what she has to say—not to express something myself—but I had a sense she might've had last words, some sense of what life is about, even her sadness or anger or hopes, heaven forbid!

*Note the condensation of the church woman with the dream woman. This moment is a beautiful example of unconscious connection. We wonder together: Are there any “last words,” any final “view” that will save her situation? Can she dare (heaven forbid!) to hope? And if so, what might she hope for?*

DK: And you get from her an empty tape cassette?

ANA: Well, there’s something precious about it ... and something unprecious. The precious is that she felt some grasp on life. It’s the last thing she could grab, a security blanket. Seeing the empty tape box, maybe you could read the title, what’s important. But I had a sense that it was on the table and she grabbed it, so there was no significance except that she held it. It’s the last thing she expressed caring for. It is precious and, therefore, she clings to it. It is unprecious because there is no meaning to this life.

*I’m struck by the poignancy of the contradiction of the precious and the unprecious. I want to obtain a pure association, thus my next question.*

DK: Can you associate to the empty tape cassette outside of the dream?

ANA: It’s a simple metaphor. It’s obvious; a tape unfolds. You only listen to one moment at a time. You look at it, or you could take it out and spread it. It’s tangled stuff, but when you play it, it makes sense. Even if it’s not quality, it records human life over time. I was a recording engineer and a musician. There are all sorts of things you have on tape. You can’t make it perfect. And people I like to listen to the most are people who leave space for mistakes in humanity—Brian Eno—where imagination is allowed to be there in the mistakes. But this tape box has no tape in it. It was discarded or left out. So I could never listen to or hear those glitches. I could only have the empty shell and not come close to hearing it. In the end, she was executed and I still have the tape box, the vague idea of who she is.

*I am so moved by what she has said that I am close to tears. This is the moment of flight when our feet leave the floor and we sail through the air, assured of a precious instant of truth, a beautiful revelation. A simple metaphor indeed! Yes, the tape is a metaphor for her life, a moment-by-moment record, and once exposed a tangled mass of moments to be understood and analyzed. This is why she is here. Over time memory revisits its tangled events and makes meaning, orders them into a story of some kind, a song, a dance—a unique creation. It may be more fiction than fact and more music than text, but still it is a life—both precious and unprecious. I did not know she was a recording engineer until just now. The cassette has a real historical significance. It is the dream’s central issue. The tape can’t be*

*perfect of course; there must be space for “mistakes in humanity.” There must be room for the mistake she feels herself to be. There must be space for the creative possibilities of imagination. There must be a space for healing. I am reminded of Leonard Cohen’s lyrics in his song “Anthem”: “There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” Realizing all this as I recount and analyze the session, I am in awe of the profundity and aching beauty of Ana’s thoughts. This dance with her feels visionary. In it she envisions despair and hope. But the box is empty, its tape, its (and her) meaning and substance “discarded and left out.” She holds in her hand the blank tape, “the empty shell”—the shell of the man who will be eliminated, the shell of the woman who will live out the rest of this life. We have come full circle, back to the session’s beginning. She will never be a real woman, she fears, not in body and not in mind. How much different does she feel than the figure of execution, the ghost destined for extinction in her dream? Not very much at all. Finally I manage to speak, moving her back to the dream.*

DK: But before that, she asks about your hair.

*Why this question? I’m not sure. I wanted to move from the existential to the concrete and try to balance the two extremes. I felt the hair was significant but didn’t know why.*

ANA: She says, “Why is your hair so long?” I was touched she’d ask. She’s being killed and she’s making pleasantries. It was touching she’d ask someone who was to live a question about their life minutes before she’d be killed.

*Again she refers to the therapy, to hope. There is always hope in life that one can gain insight and understanding by asking questions.*

ANA: When I had a beard, I wondered about myself. I grew up Christian. It struck me funny that Christ was around 30 years old and didn’t do anything. He was a carpenter; he hung around with rabbis. When God—excuse me, Jesus—was 30—my age practically—he suddenly was called by God to be this different thing. You had a sense that Jesus didn’t know about it until then. Even historically, Jesus was a person, a character until 30. And then he changed and became a messianic figure. It’s as though he had been called to something he didn’t realize. And before Jesus was crucified, he asked God, “Take this cup if it is your will because I don’t want to taste this poison.” Life is sweet, and you don’t have to feel pain. Funny, I’d grown a beard so I wouldn’t look to myself like a woman. At the same time, with the beard, people saw Jesus’s face from postcards and velvet paintings.

*This next movement is almost predictable. Opposed to the possibility that (her) life is without meaning is that it means everything. Her identification with Christ transforms the execution into a crucifixion, the castration into a sacrifice. Executions are performed on those who sin; the crucifixion is the sacrifice that God makes for humanity to expiate sin. God's sacrifice bears the burden of human existence. This sacrifice of Ana's will crucify the man and resurrect the woman. And here is Ana, now, standing at the threshold of her execution, which might also be a crucifixion, both a sinner and a saint, a figure of infinite emptiness and infinite fullness, asking me, asking God, "Take this cup from me." If only life were "sweet and you don't have to feel pain." If only she knew what she was—a phony Jesus, pious-faced on a postcard or a velvet painting, or something else altogether, something with sufficient meaning to live on with hope—someone precious enough to merit life, recognition, and most of all love.*

DK: People said that to you?

ANA: Sometimes. God forbid, the first time I put on a wig and I looked like Jesus. I looked ridiculous. I did look weird. In a roundabout way, I had a sense that this woman was asking: "Who are you?" Like Jesus, I was in a group of spiritualists who had their hair long and didn't shave their beards. It was the only way we know what Jesus looked like. So, this person was asking about my hair, as though it's a messianic thing, or I came to save her. So, there was some hope in her. But when I told her I'm a transsexual, there goes that hope. I wrote a poem, "Jesus Had a Sex Change," three months ago. It made fun of my peculiarities and I wondered, what is spirituality? Who is Jesus? What does it mean to me to have this feeling in me? Is it like a calling people feel? Does it have a purpose?

*"Who are you?" is the central question her dream is asking her and me, and it is the nexus of all of her other questions, equally important. The woman to be executed is asking to be saved. Can she be saved by the one she inhabits, Ana? And she is also Ana asking to be saved by me. Can her life mean something? Is she good or bad? Is she worthy? Can she again belong to some group? Will she love and be loved? Is she like Jesus, or is she ridiculous? Hope and hopelessness exist simultaneously in the unconscious. The hopelessness is symbolized by the empty tape cassette. The hope is symbolized by the quest to understand what she is doing, her needs and her longings. Her hope is symbolized by the dance we two are engaged in, for what we represent as we move together is the possibility of a creation that reconciles hopelessness and hope. What we strive for in the dance between two minds is the protection and nurturing of her life.*

DK: Or does it just lead to death?

*I was bringing back the execution, the duality and ambivalence, but I went too far. I stepped on her toes, as her reaction demonstrates.*

ANA: [*She flushes*] I didn't think—or it's just an inconvenience to make my life difficult.

*Ana becomes flustered and reduces the entire affair to an inconvenience. I know our time is ending. It is my move. Especially because of my misstep, I try to wrap up in a way that embraces the dualities and layers explored in the dreamwork. I especially want to say something about the transference level.*

DK: Perhaps the dream is telling us about the crossroad at which you find yourself in coming here—between male and female, life and death, your hopes about what you might get from me, as your therapist and as a woman—the “tape of life” that reveals the mystery of what it means to be a woman or the empty shell, like the women's bodies you saw at the gym on your way here today.

*I try to develop and bring to the surface the latent meanings in all of Ana's verbal and nonverbal productions, from opening commentary about the women, the view (perspective) and body that I have as a woman, and the dream itself. The interpretation is a creative synthesis that I hope will resonate with her experience.*

ANA: [*She begins to cry*] I only feel positive when I feel pain. I like coming here. And, yes, I know it isn't all pleasure; that there's pain.

*I led, she followed; she led, I followed. The dance can be graceful or clumsy. Ana embraces both pleasure and pain. It doesn't have to be black or white, life or death. There is a pleasure in looking, even if what she sees is painful.*

*On her way out of my office, Ana walks over to me, takes my hand, and holds it warmly for a long moment. I experience this as a repetition of what had transpired in the dream, the gift handed to Ana by the woman to be executed. Here Ana needs to show me concretely that I have given her something, she needs to get that something through touch, not only through mind-to-mind communication. It is an enactment that was never repeated in the remainder of the treatment. In this ending, Ana's dream literally dances with reality.*

## DANCING WITH LIFE

Freud (1915/1957d) believed that the unconscious was capable of development. Thanks to the associations, transference expressions, enactments, and dreamwork that took place in this session and the sessions that followed, Ana was positioned in a new relationship not only with me, but with her unconscious life. In the beginning she was aware only of being resolved about her upcoming sexual reassignment surgery, but that position was limited and reflected only a small part of her story. In fact, the possibility of not having “a view” that would save her situation and allow her to face the hard work of recreating herself as a woman, not merely from the outside but from the inside as well, made it impossible for her to realize her conflicts and fears. And that was where she was stuck. Thus, her dream brought to life her dilemma and a path to resolution.

Ana began the session telling me I had “a view.” She could not yet know what it would mean to be a woman. But by the end of the session, despair is paired with hope, death with the prospect of a new life, and, most important, meaninglessness with the possibility of meaning. Through the dreamwork, Ana opened the possibility of “seeing” the complexity of her decision and the feelings she had about it. She began to develop a view of her own. Although this required more work to sort matters out, it also meant that she could become engaged with various parts of herself and open her world to new possibilities.

The nature of psychoanalytic interpretation is that it is riddled with subjectivity, highly malleable, readily supplemented by additional interpretation, incomplete, and even undecidable in many cases. No absolute answer exists for such questions as: “How shall one live?” or “How shall I save my situation?” or “What does my dream really mean?” But the very limitations of psychoanalysis also encompass its beauty, for we must remember that its purpose is not to nail down reality, but to open a new path on which reality can travel. However grounded in empirical knowledge are its theories, the practice of psychoanalysis is an art whose goal is to lessen human suffering and create personal options. This art takes the form of an intimate and rarified dialogue and enactment. This art is a dance toward and for freedom.

The image of the dream woman is actually quite brilliant, a creative contrivance of Ana’s unconscious. Until the time they “pull the big switch,” Ana as a woman had been merely potential; the woman is within her as a possibility, an aspiration, an object of desire, and an act of imagination. Part of Ana feels she is a mistake—the product of a rape and the wrong gender. Yet, she can imagine, and correct through imagination, the mistakes in the “tape,” the mistakes in her life, and the mistake of her gender. She can bring forth the woman hidden within her. But in doing that she

will lose the *causa sui* that has driven her life for nearly 20 years. She will no longer be the man who wants to be a woman; she will be a woman who must then perform as a woman. She fears she will be a woman who will be born empty, without true content. The woman within will be sacrificed, executed, and destroyed so the woman outside can be born. And she, the woman within, is represented by the dream figure. No wonder Ana aches for a “view.”

The dream figure also represents me, and the ambivalence Ana feels about attaining a “view.” She has come to me to help her make the transition from male to female, to surface the conflict she feels about her decision, and to realize a vision that will save her situation by giving her hope for meaning and love. Yet she is terrified of what she might find: that not ever being a real man, she will also never be a real woman; that the sacrifice she is making has as much sanctity and meaning as a velvet Christ; that her act of imagination will result in spiritual and emotional bankruptcy; that she will never fit in with any group or family; that she will never be worthy of love; that she will float for the rest of her life in a twilight zone of non-identity.

She has good reason to be frightened: her entire life is at stake, and her decision is momentous. Sexual reassignment could make everything worse than it already is. At best she may never look like the women in the gym, but she may learn how to live as a woman and align her life more fully with her hopes and aspirations. At worst she will have left her manhood behind forever to inhabit a female simulacrum, transmogrified into a spectral figure stranded in a dream of death. I stand with her on the threshold of both possibilities, one hopeful and the other utterly terrifying and hopeless. Small wonder that I too must be executed, for I am the executioner, the one bringing Ana to a truth that might save her or slay her.

Highly illustrative of the immense creativity of unconscious communication is the nested structure of Ana’s dream. The richest and most poignant symbol at the dream’s core is, of course, the cassette that represents Ana’s decision in the mode of resulting in the worst possible outcome for her. Encompassing this cassette is the dream figure to be executed, a representation of Ana facing the surgery. Encompassing the figure to be executed is the dark and ominous atmosphere of carnival conveyed by the war and execution scenes; the voyeuristic engagement of the onlookers who pass the time by entertaining themselves with Ana’s spectacle; and the indifferent attitude of the team handling the physical aspects of the execution. Finally, the entire dream is encompassed by the therapy, because Ana’s unconscious prepared this dream specifically for her therapy. That such a complex set of relations can be depicted with such economy is indicative of the power of creation and the depth of art and neatly illustrates why free association, transference, and dreamwork are such potent analytic tools.



And yet the walls of the therapy room are not the last horizon of the dream. The nest of meaning transcends Ana's personal situation, just as a work of art transcends the personal issues of its creator. Ana's personal situation is rather unique and seems to have little to do with the problems most people face. She is a man who is utterly miserable being a man and wants to be a woman. Not many find themselves in this situation; surely, her case appears to fall outside the margins of ordinary concerns. However, her dream tells a different story. She is wrestling with issues common to all human beings—issues of identity, place, meaning, limitation, and mortality. Who among us has truly secured an identity? And what a fragile and temporary fabrication is identity, how easily damaged and vulnerable to assault by betrayal, loss, illness, and trauma. Who would not want to read or hear some last words of truth that would definitively convey life's meaning, for meaning is even more fragile than identity. Who does not long to belong? Who does not fear exclusion? Who does not repress the terror of death in order to live, and who does not wish to love and be loved? How poignant is Ana's plight, especially poignant because her situation places her farther outside the circle of life than most. Indeed, her pain is existential, and it is the problem of human existence itself that forms the ultimate boundary of her dream's concentric circles of significance.

Ana did go through with sexual reassignment surgery 4 years after she reported this dream. She claimed that, after the surgery, she was able to observe her body with relief for the first time. Although she had originally regarded the surgery as a terminal juncture in her life, an execution for an unspoken crime, she was surprised to find that from the "other side" there existed a continuity that had not been broken. She and I both knew that the work we had done in her analysis—the dance we had danced—helped to prepare her for the change. She had obtained a view—deep insight into the complexity of who she was and who she could be—so that by the time she faced the challenge, the cassette had been filled with a tape made by her creative mind and profound emotions. She had internalized me as a woman and as her partner in this most singular dance of life.

I also learned much from my work with Ana. I learned to question my female identity, something I had never done before. I learned to broaden my view of what comprises gender. I learned that gender is neither purely biological nor purely socially conditioned, but something that exists between reality and imagination. Most important, I learned about the resourcefulness and inventiveness of unconscious life and about the ultimate creativity that can take place in analysis: the creation of a self.

I've presented a narrative and a dream that highlight the rich possibilities open to the analytic dyad. The techniques of free association and dream analysis offer creative ways for the analytic couple to understand what is

happening and how to further incorporate it into the work. The transference and countertransference represent the living context in which meaning is formed. Like the creativity of the artist, the creativity of the analytic pair translates unconscious possibilities into visible or lived actualities. As with art making, the art of psychoanalysis both reveals what exists and makes something new. But psychoanalysis does more; it functions in the service of personal repair and human freedom.

Working with a patient is a highly creative process. There is no formula, no algorithm that calculates an answer. Though science will guide us and provide evidence for the efficacy of what we do, it is the art of what we do that addresses the age-old questions of who we are and how we shall save our circumstance.

The human heart houses many dancers and dances. After all these years, I still love to dance that dance we do, the one that always must end in continued dancing.