

MEETING THE OTHER, BEING THE OTHER: PROPOSAL
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Lewis Aron (2018) speaks of the possibility of meeting and becoming the other, while Robert Grossmark (2018) states: “Both analyst and patient reside within an emergent and hallucinatory field ...”. Certainly, Donnell Stern (2019) has written of these ideas extensively and continues to in his latest book. This paper is my own understanding of these ideas.

For me, ‘relational’ work is an inward turn with outward consequences: to understand better our patients, with *the help of our own subjectivity*. This implies a field. Thus, we break with a dominant understanding of our recent past: that objective and repeatable data are the *sine qua non* of valid knowledge. The use of subjectivity is emerging from its Cartesian status as a poor relative of objectivity, to the position of a necessary partner. Scientific truth is found by a strict separation of subject and object: of experimenter and the experimenter’s data. Subjective truth has been misplaced.

First, I examine the process of murmuration of starlings, noting that this process is commonplace in nature. Murmuration refers to the phenomenon that results when thousands of starlings fly together in swooping, intricately coordinated patterns. The origin of this behavior is in the avoidance of predators: it can confuse predators by forming an infinitely changing whole. I describe the non-linear process of thousands of individual birds engaging with small sub-groups within the flock generating the behavior of an entire flock. Murmuration is spontaneous and inspires awe in human observers.

I briefly site Kurt Schneider’s (2019) description of awe, as well as Christopher Bollas’ (1978) analytic understanding of the “aesthetic moment”, both being important subjective human needs. I discuss Emanuel Coccia’s (2016) assertion that Rene Descartes’ paradigm separated humankind from their subjectivity by relegating sensation to a secondary status as compared with thought. And Jessica Benjamin’s, “... deconstructing ... objectively knowing ... in favor of a personal subjectivity ...” (Benjamin, 1998, p25) Is discussed. Subject and object have been separated, and it is into this dilemma that relational work has moved, honing its

own clinical methods fostering the re-attachment of cognition and sensation, body and mind, self and other.

I explore the clinical implications by analogy of therapists with farmers: farmers can only supply an environment in which plants may grow. The capacity to generate growth itself is beyond their ability. Similarly, a relational therapist can only supply the emotional environment in which our patient may grow, and that environment is primarily the relationship itself, in which subjectivities are the seeds for growth.

I present a case of a young man whose ability to think has been compromised by an incestuous environment, leaving him at times unable to separate his feelings and sensations from reality, resulting in lurid projections and the fear that his own psyche can be read by others. I describe our process wherein I can accept his projections onto me while comparing my own subjectivities to his, giving neither one more validity than the other, which is allowing him to slowly reorganize.

What I appreciate in relational work is moving into the field that connects me implicitly with my patients. I carefully step into the boundary between self and other; the boundary where some might focus on symbiosis or lurking personality disorder: however, also lurking is the innate ability of most to self-organize along more stable and productive lines. If we can hold our patients lightly, carefully, honestly, they may become able to recognize themselves.

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