

Foreword

By James S. Grotstein

Marilyn Charles treats us once again to a highly readable, articulate, erudite, work in which she seamlessly glides between fascinating, poignant, and “alive” clinical material and current, broadly-based psychoanalytic theory. She has already introduced us to her unique way of working in her most recent work, *Patterns*, in which she explored and applied the technique of detecting patterns that analysands subtly reveal over time. Extending on Bion’s work in this area, she showed there how the revelation and detection of patterns of behavior belong to the intuitive as well as the observational mode and can be traced all the way back to early infancy where the infant relates to the object world by revealing its contours, shapes, and patterns – and likewise, the mother must be sensitive to this primitive form of communication from her infant.

In this present work Charles is concerned with the task of how to engage the difficult-to-engage analysand. The first step is “wondering,” the title of her first chapter; wondering how to create a “psychoanalytic space,” a joint therapeutic venture in which the analysand can be made to feel safe enough to participate and free enough to explore. She is concerned with how the analyst might create an effective and workable opening so that the unplayful analysand can feel free enough to play with his/her emotions, be able to have feelings about them, and be able to transcend the anxiety of being the plaything of persecutors in the internal *and* external worlds.

The psychoanalytic points on her compass are many, but she seems to veer closely to Bion and Winnicott in the main. One of the many high points in this book is her keen ability to juxtapose the works of these two giants and show how they are congruent, overlap, or are complementary with each other. An example of this integration is showing how Winnicott’s playing corresponds to Bion’s use of myths in the clinical situation. Myths are Bion’s way of playing - and encouraging the analysand to play - with his/her deeper anxieties. Playing with unknown anxieties, after the atmosphere has first been made safe to play in, offers the analysand the opportunity to down-regulate and to master anxieties that originate in infinity and chaos. Playing with them reduces them to “life-size.” Myths similarly are preformed patterns of interactions (of playing) that allow for a safe, well-known vehicle of containment to detoxify the brunt of terror. They are models of reality that help to organize our understanding.

John Dryden once wrote, “It is the cleverest achievement of art to keep itself undiscovered.” This is true of Charles’ work. She is very artistic and even poetic in her prose and freely borrows from many psychoanalytic sources beyond Winnicott and Bion but skillfully avoids becoming cast as belonging to any particular school. If anything, it would seem that her analysands are her muse and that she is the inspired scribe who jots down all that they inspire her to think when she is with

them.

Utmost, *Patterns and Constructing Realities* comprise a refreshing re-introduction to psychoanalytic technique in the new current age of intersubjectivity, complexity, and uncertainty. In the past, “left-brain” psychoanalysts psychoanalyzed “right-brain” emotions. Today, the psychoanalyst must abandon the comfort and sense of safety that that perspective insured and surrender instead to the not-knowingness, the uncertainty of the right-brain (emotions) and wait along with the analysand for the gradual emergence of a pattern that finally can shed light on the unknown. That is the consummate artistry of this work. It is a textbook on psychoanalytic technique without ever appearing to be.

There are many unique clinical nuances in this work. I shall cite but a few. Charles focuses on the development in the clinical situation of the experience of keeping oneself *present* and *alive* in the analytic moment, with the emphasis placed on *being* fully in the moment - all this so that the analysand may become a fully experienced self. Further, Charles believes that the analytic task is to enlist the “magical self” in bringing a “hidden self” to life. These have become ontological sine qua nons but had escaped our attention not too long ago.

Another theme is her focus on the many ways the analysand can demonstrate splitting of his/her personality, not only the magical versus the hidden self, but also the devalued or disavowed self versus the surface self or the constructed self versus the underlying self. One is reminded here of Winnicott’s theory of the true-self/false-self dichotomy, which he in turn borrowed from Fairbairn. Charles reworks the dichotomy in a number of rich harmonics.

What fundamentally informs Charles’ work can be summarized in her citations from Bion and Winnicott. Bion states that interventions of the psychoanalyst consist of the interplay of *intuition* and *reason*. Winnicott states, “Even the right explanation is ineffectual. The person we are trying to help *needs a new experience*.” This book helps the analyst to have a new experience in being an analyst.