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Secret Passages

The Theory and Technique of Interpsychic Relations

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But I think that this was possible also because, a little at a time, through prolonged living together and the analytic cohabitation, Alba became accustomed to sharing – at least at times – a functional interpsychic dimension in which the perception of the meaning of things, of exchanges, of relational movements slightly precedes the conscious and logical registering of these same things on the part of the central ego.

This is nothing extraordinary, I would like to make clear; we are all familiar with this dimension, and we have all experimented with the possibility of implicitly retaining a working ‘cat-flap,’ provided we have acquired a certain familiarity with our house cat. But this relative familiarity is not an obvious fact, already given: one must profit from it, construct it together.

To gain access to secret passages, familiarity is necessary.

MY DOG DOESN'T KNOW DESCARTES

The disenchanting analysis of the
‘interpsychic’ man–dog

If one wants to know a man in depth, one must first read what he writes, then observe how he behaves when he eats and when he plays, and finally one must see his dog.

A man's dog speaks for him.

If a man tells you that he doesn't have dogs and perhaps even detests them, then you will have defined him.

Piero Scanziani, ‘The Mystery of Man and Dog,’ 1978¹

If dogs don't go to heaven, I want to go where they go.

Anonymous

The dog loves to live, play, and work with people.

To do so, he has been accustomed for thousands of years to co-constructing and sharing a basic interpsychic area with us, just as he has, since the dawn of his origins, cooperated syntonically in the pack with his fellow dogs.

Only some humans, however, know how to recognize and utilize this common area, responding ‘sensibly’ to the animal's explicit

¹ Translation by Gina Atkinson.

convocation and creating meaningful situations of understanding and rapport.

As in the much more dramatic cases related to child-rearing, between dogs and masters, too, a prevalence of the human 'intrapsychic' in relation to the shared 'interpsychic' opening interferes with the couple's creation of something enjoyable and profoundly sensible and produces unproductive and frustrating situations for at least one of the two. The projection of the foolish and incompetent 'master' (as we will call him) reveals his pathological tendency to take the place of the other's reality, and to suppress a possible shared intersubjective reality.

As is known, dogs lend themselves very well to representing projections of people's internal images, both positive and negative. In his text, Scanziani (1978) – who was not a 'psycho-something,' but a great expert on dogs – presents an interesting historical panorama of the propensities for dogs of famous figures from the past, with rather convincing reconstructions about the underlying motives of some chosen individuals. Recall, for example, Alexander the Great's preference for giant Molossus dogs, which obviously fulfilled in him a fantasy of prevailing power; and, by contrast, Frederick the Great's passion for little, slender greyhounds – at first inexplicable in a king who challenged his enemies in wars over seven years, and who made Prussia into a formidable war machine. This predilection on the part of Frederick the Great, however, is ascribable to his having been born to a coarse and oppressive father, while he himself was a delicate, frail youth, lonely and in need of warmth. Interestingly, the supreme narcissist Gabriele D'Annunzio displayed for this same breed, the greyhound, an affected desire that was more declared than felt, since he valorized these dogs as the contemporary equivalent of the strong and fast, tracking and hunting dogs of medieval times, while in reality making sure they were not underfoot. Scanziani (1978) writes:

He who loves himself too much cannot love dogs.

Napoleon and Mussolini did not have dogs.

Bonaparte always detested the infidel Josephine's little dogs, and they repaid him in kind, to the point of following him and biting the imperial heels. . . . Napoleon, indifferent to the deaths of men, did not even notice the dogs' exploits.

One evening, on the field of Bassano, which was covered with dead bodies, the tyrant heard the desperate cry of a dog next to the

body of his dead owner. Many years later, at St. Helena, the ghost of that dog still haunted the sick and imprisoned emperor, who confessed to the Count De Las Cases: 'I calmly ordered the initiation of 100 battles, and I looked on with an impassive eye as thousands of men died. But I still remember an evening in Bassano when I felt my soul pierced at the cry and the pain of a dog.'²

Today, after a century of psychoanalysis, we could say that a neglected and renounced part in the interior of the self of that cruel and megalomaniac leader had found a secret passage through the network of narcissistic and split defenses that so strongly characterized him, finding a way to represent itself in an unexpected creature, in an affectivity and expressiveness that had been torn by pain.

The title I chose for this chapter ('My Dog Doesn't Know Descartes') is actually a citation. There was a book of this title by Mario Girolami (1967) in which the author (a prestigious doctor and clinical chair in Rome, and at the time also president of the Italian Society of Gastroenterology), on the basis of his observations about the mental life of his dog, firmly rejected the Cartesian distinction between body and mind, between 'res extensa' and 'res cogitans,' and especially between the animal psyche and the human psyche (usually upheld by excessively emphasizing presumed qualitative differences rather than quantitative ones between them and us). Furthermore, and quite significantly, the counsel of the then-very-young Giulio Cesare Soavi was cited many times in that text; he was a Roman psychoanalyst who would later become well known at the national level for his studies on interpsychic 'fusionalità' (e.g., Soavi, 1989; see also Neri et al., 1990).

The book's thesis was not so innocent from a cultural-political point of view, when one recalls that Girolami was the personal doctor of the pope (Pius XII), and that the book thus brought some trouble to him in his Vatican visits. As a result, he assigned responsibility for it to the top management of the National Board for the Protection of Animals, of which he was president for a long time in subsequent years, having made a very definitive choice of field . . .

I cite this book and that person in order to describe a possible ideological conflict of principle that could have created then (and

² Translation by Gina Atkinson.

could even create today) some 'blind spots' in considering, with a sufficiently liberated spirit, the relationship of human beings with animals, and also something that interests us more as analysts: the relationship of the ego with the self, of which the animal can become the natural representative at an internal level.

Political-cultural problems of this type did not exist, on the other hand, in Freud's home. Those who have visited Berggasse 19 and lingered attentively in the room where a video runs continuously – showing images of the family that are commented upon by Anna Freud on the occasion of her historic return to Vienna for the International Psychoanalytical Congress of 1971 – will have noticed that Anna's voice, always deeply but composedly moved at the replaying of family scenes, breaks down into uncontrollable tears when, just at the end of the video, the household dogs appear. She calls them 'these marvelous creatures,' and she reacts, not more and not less, as though she has once again seen family members; and in effect it was so.

According to the testimony of his patient Smiley Blanton (*Diary of My Analysis with Sigmund Freud*, 1957), Freud, who took great account of his dogs, thought that: 'The feeling for dogs is the same that we harbor for children: it is of the same quality. But do you know how it differs? . . . One gives nothing ambivalent in it, one does not notice any resistance.'³ And further, in a famous letter to Marie Bonaparte, Freud makes reference to the fact – in addition to the absence of ambivalence – that the dog gives us a representation of the 'simplicity of a life free from the almost unbearable conflicts of civilization, the beauty of a perfect existence in itself' (in E. L. Freud, 1960, p. 434).

As Anna Maria Accerboni (1990) wrote, Jo-fi, the chow given to Freud by the Princess Bonaparte,

. . . was so dear to Freud that he separated himself from her only with difficulty, and he held her close to him even during sessions. The testimony of Freud's son Martin maintained that, with the little dog present, he never needed to consult his clock in order to know when the analytic hour was finished: 'When Jo-fi got up and yawned, this was the sign that the hour had concluded; she never surprised him in announcing the end of the session late, though my father maintained that she was capable of an error of perhaps a

minute, at the patient's expense.' Evidently [concluded Accerboni], Jo-fi, like any good dog, sided with her master!⁴

Cohabitation and *collaboration*, to my mind, are the two key words for understanding the interpsychic dimension that can unite man and dog in some situations.

The interpsychic (Bolognini, 2004a) is for me that dimension of cohabitation and cooperation in which the sense of the self is extended – naturally, and not in a pathologically shared way – to another contiguous being, with effects that at times are reciprocally propagated at the level of the central ego (Fairbairn, 1944, p. 71) as well, with an awareness of what is unfolding, but not always and not necessarily. As I have earlier specified, I find useful, by contrast, the term *transpsychic* to designate those pathological processes in which the extension goes beyond the borders of the other in a violent way, intrusive and subtle, passing through anomalous and nonconsensual channels, with distortion and dispossession of the other's subjectivity.

Let us refer to the interpsychic without any reference to, as I think of it, telepathy or various paranormal phenomena, but as the condition of the *benign and necessary, primary physiological fusional*ity that we all recognize as legitimate and even 'a duty' in the mother-baby couple, and thus one that is practical for growth and for the transmission of life and competence, until the maturity that leads to a progressive detachment has been set in motion. In it, too, in fortuitously natural situations, an attribute of cooperation can be recognized, from the first intake connected to mouth-nipple suction.

As everyone knows, the canine capacity/necessity to live together psychically as well was originally connected to the life of the pack, of the group, and to the natural propensity for 'common work' in hunting and in the defense of territory and the biological heritage of their community (the 'guard'). But it is also connected to the game, perfectly congruent with the natural system, of teaching and learning. Wolves, too – the ancestors of our dog – have their own formative 'training'!

Jo-fi and Freud, during their daily cohabitation in the microcosm of Berggasse 19, formed a proven 'operative unity' in which Jo-fi seemed to have modest duties, but well-defined ones: to be there, to

3 Translation by Gina Atkinson.

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be patient with the guests, and then to say 'enough,' not by chance but based on a fixed and controlled protocol, day after day. We do not know what idea Jo-fi formed of the contents of the sessions, but we can imagine that in the case of violently acted-out negative transference, she would not have remained indifferent, and that she would have arranged, perhaps in her own way, to reestablish the setting that she knew was correct.

As I am attempting to show in this book, the intra- and interpsychic dialectic is one of the recurrent themes of contemporary psychoanalysis. Unfortunately, starting with an observation of the human-animal relationship, one could furnish an infinite string of examples (mostly rather tragic ones) of the prevalence of the human intrapsychic with respect to the perception of others' psychic reality. By now I am trained to recognize the signs of disappointment and mortification in a dog that is not minimally understood by someone, either in his needs or in his offers to play, to exchange, to collaborate, or simply to cohabit.

But rather than citing one among an infinite number of piteous cases capable of tearing the hearts of dog lovers, I want to recall for you a happily ironic representation of this type of human-dog mismatch. In the famous film by Aki Kaurismäki, *The Man Without a Past*, the absent-minded protagonist finds himself facing an improbable Nazi-like character from whom he rents a cottage near the sea. The landlord, to give a firm idea of his own terribleness and to subjugate the interlocutor by terrorizing him, arrives dressed in paramilitary fashion and brings with him a dog harnessed like a ferocious attack animal (calling him 'Ursus' or 'Brutus' – I don't remember which). The landlord threatens that he will set the dog on the unfortunate and bewildered protagonist in the event of any default in rent payment, but the dog, affectionately wagging his tail, goes to lick the poor man's hand, curling up at his feet (later, in the film's credits, the viewer finds out that the dog belongs to the film's director and was engaged as part of the cast on this occasion).

One could comment on the *human intrapsychic* and *human-dog interpsychic* aspects of this interaction as follows: there was much of the human intrapsychic, and all of it deposited in the foolish aspirations of the landlord, and there was zero human-dog interpsychic interaction between the dog and the landlord's conscious aspects. There was considerable interpsychic exchange, however, between the dog and the undefended 'man without a past,' and, probably, with an

underlying split part of the Nazi-like landlord, evidently not as bad as he consciously desired to represent himself.

Several years ago, I observed a real clinical situation in which a patient's transference expectations did not correspond to canine reality, when I had a young man in treatment who at that time displayed markedly narcissistic and solipsistic traits. He strongly devalued his dog, an affectionate mongrel who was always ready to play and cuddle, precisely because of his dependence and friendliness. He considered the dog to be weak and, instead, dreamed of having a proud and distrustful dog of a type that he had vaguely heard talked about: the Mali greyhound. The patient explained to me that, in the desert areas of that African country, groups of semi-wild greyhounds followed the nomadic tribes, collaborating in the hunt, and receiving in exchange a part of the kill.

What greatly seduced my patient was the fact that these dogs were not really domesticated. They followed the tribe, it was true, but remained at a certain distance (literally, some ten yards from the caravan) and maintained a collaborative interdependence, but avoided direct contact. This seemed to me a 'talking metaphor' of his unconscious relational plan within our analytic cohabitation.

This idea worked extensively in the patient, such that, on his return from the summer break, he announced that he had succeeded in procuring a Mali greyhound puppy, who now trotted exuberantly around his house. In a certain sense, the patient expected from the puppy the personification of his longed-for, ideal style of relationship, arrogant and proudly reluctant to engage in affective contact.

But he had counted his chickens before they were hatched – that is, without taking into account the extremely warm-hearted mongrel he already had, who in the course of a few weeks had, without difficulty, turned upside down the patient's plan and in good measure the genetic mandate of his African cohort. Through play, the call for connection, and naps together, the Mali greyhound ended up firmly ensconced on my patient's bed, together with the other dog, in a climate of blessed fusionality.

My patient gave himself no peace, and was profoundly disappointed.

But when, some years later, he terminated his long and tormented therapy, with the modifications in object relations that analysis can permit, he surprised me: at his last session, he brought his dogs to my office. They entered, I have to say, in their own ways: the mongrel came directly up to me, wagging his tail cheerfully and sniffing my

hand (to 'register' me), showing no sign of distrust. The other dog did not do this; he traced the boundaries of the large room, exploring the perimeter, and only a little at a time did he approach me, cautiously, and then curled up a few yards from us. His face, his expression characterized by those horizontal and enigmatic eyes, was effectively very different from the mongrel's.

Still, the Mali greyhound cohabited with us for the entire hour, calm, in representation of that part of my patient that, though marked by a traumatic history that could not be denied, was at this point integrated into his conscious sense of self and rendered tolerably co-livable with me and with his internal objects. The patient was no longer the victim of the sabotaging demands of an ideal ego, one that was both hypernarcissistic and desperately defensive.

In contrast – and rightly so, in the spirit of equitable justice – here is a strange case of the clear prevalence of the canine intrapsychic with respect to the unfolding of an interpsychically consensual relationship. Professor Casolino, an expert at the ENCI⁵ and a judge of the international contest, is an elderly gentleman with a zest for narrative. (Incidentally, he was the official discoverer/savior of the 'Cane Corso,' the thirteenth Italian breed to be officially recognized, which was recovered *in extremis* at the border of extinction in the 1970s.⁶) During one of our long conversations in the public park in which our dogs were used to gathering, Professor Casolino recounted a curious episode to me of which he had been a direct witness.

Some years earlier, he had found himself accompanying a well-known breeder of St. Bernard dogs to a competition. During the trip, made by car, they stopped along the freeway at a coffee shop, and allowed the two imposing animals bound for the competition (a male and a female) to get out of the back of the station wagon, in order to water them and let them warm up a little in the flowerbed behind the coffee shop. The two big dogs had done their regular business, roamed about in the green area, and then had unexpectedly run off, in unison and at full speed, in the direction of a nearby machine shop. From there human screams of terror were heard a few seconds later, and the breeder and Professor Casolino ran inside to catch the animals.

5 *Translator's note:* The ENCI (*Ente Nazionale Cinofili Italiani*) is the National Society of Italian Dog Lovers.

6 *Translator's note:* The 'Cane Corso' is a medium-to-large-sized guard dog of the molosser or mastiff type.

The scene was this: the two dogs had seized by the overalls, at shoulder height, an unsuspecting mechanic who was busying himself with the oil pan of a car, lying on the floor under it, and they had extracted him by force from underneath it. The man, who appeared terrorized, had felt himself caught from behind and had then seen just a few inches from his face the two huge nonhuman heads, and he nearly had a heart attack.

At the arrival of their owner, the two St. Bernards, in contrast, appeared happy and certain of praise; in fact, *they had rescued an unlucky man who had ended up there as though in the case of an avalanche*, and so the dogs would certainly have been rewarded for the excellent work they carried out, as in the age-old tradition of human-dog collaboration. Psychoanalytically speaking, the two 'rescuers' had thus proceeded according to a regime of clear predominance of the overdetermined intrapsychic, producing a *transference* (in this case, in playing with terms, we could even call it a 'rescue transference') in relation to that man. In perceiving the other's terror, the dogs would probably have ascribed the experience to the risk run by the human being under the oppressive mass of the car, but luckily they had arrived, and then the poor man – thanks to their well-timed intervention – would soon be calmed down.

Let us move now to the city center of Bologna, the European capital of 'Punkabbestia.' Hundreds of 'alternative'-type young people arrange to meet – and often end up firmly ensconced – under the porticoes of the historical center of the city, together with their dogs, with whom they form a structured psychic unity, rich in meaningful implications. The Punkabbestia are a phenomenon of youth that is widespread in Italy, and I don't think they exist elsewhere in the same characteristically militant way (in Brazil, for example, there are 'Pit boys,' who keep the regulation, *de rigueur* pit bull, but they are a completely different phenomenon in that they are at the extreme right and their dogs are openly considered weapons).

Those local figures are boys and girls who are adorned and dressed in a plain but bizarre way; they distance themselves from their homes and their own cities, each having a dog as his only regular companion (they are, therefore, 'punks' *con una bestia*,⁷ or 'Punkabbestia'). Usually, they are not delinquent, but they live in a sort of parallel world with

7 *Translator's note:* This translates as 'with a beast' or an animal.

respect to society, though they locate themselves for the most part in the historical center (they are the 'excluded,' 'eccentric' ones) of the city. They make the most of their assets, receiving money from their families; they usually do not steal. They refuse every type of commitment and dependence on others.

Through piercings and tattoos, these young people condense a complex representation of their unmentalized – indeed, narcissistically invested – internal wounds in the service of defense, which I will not describe at length. They form a group, and their dogs are together but do not form a pack, because each depends on his own master.

The Punkabestia actively and narcissistically try to sustain an idea of themselves as *intentionally 'eccentric,' to deny an originary experience of de-centralization and exclusion*: they avoid depression through narcissistic overinvestment in an idealized, self-sufficient self, and they may *project their needful and dependent self onto the dog*, who follows them like a shadow and who in effect depends on them. They seem to take reasonable care of the dogs, but overall the dog must fulfill two basic functions:

- 1 It must represent and confirm an 'ideal self' who is liberated and ostentatiously instinctual, who does not bend to society's conventions and does not suffer the disgrace of a leash.
- 2 It must, however, impersonate the dependent self as well, toward which – through the medium of the dog – the Punkabestia display a sort of affectionate condescension; the dog serves to reassure the boy, in fact, that *the one who is afraid of being alone and of feeling abandoned is not the boy himself*.

But let us return to the interpsychic.

With that concept, I intend something very modest: nothing to do with amazing intuitions or lectures on thought, and not even with who knows what moving instances of the dog's understanding of the master (which in some rare cases are in fact verified, in a totally natural and explicable way). I refer to the habitual cohabitation of being together, very often the result of a sort of reciprocal tuning, which is the product of one's reciprocal investment and progressive entry into the other's reasoning and feeling, which can be accomplished between a trainer and his dog-student just as between a retired person and his mongrel. I am thinking of the kind of cohabitation that permits them not only to know each other very well, but also to

feliculously take for granted a host of functions that have come to be carried out together, often without noticing this: perceptive functions, whether directed toward the external ('who is arriving?'), or reciprocal signaling ('we are calm,' or 'we are alarmed,' etc.).

I have often been struck by the facial expressions of dog and master while they are going about their daily tasks. A classic example occurs when they ride together in a car, truck, or cart. I lived in the country for many years, for entire summers, and I was always surprised by the fact that, between the master who was driving and the dog seated by his side, there was always a model identity of expressions and intentions. In short, I marveled that the master left no doubt about the fact that, in spite of the rules of the road, the obvious place for his cohort was there, on the passenger seat (after all, the dog wasn't riding in a taxi!), not in the trunk that is used by – significantly – hunters, many of whom seem to see their dog as a biological device that is more or less efficiently directed toward the goal of catching game.

Furthermore, I was equally struck by observing in the dog/cohort/passenger an analogous certainty of his own role, and an obvious way of sharing the meaning of the mission that was being undertaken. This often seemed to be the case on trips to pick up or deliver fruit or vegetables, or construction materials or other goods, presumably from suppliers or warehouses already known to both dog and master. There was a firm certainty of the necessity for both to be present in order to achieve a good result of the entire operative maneuver.

It was not completely clear to me how far the detailed mentalization of all these processes reached (with regard either to the dog or to the master, who seemed equally mentally organized along the implicit procedural register). I noted, however – and, I must admit, greatly admired – a dimension of healthy self-evidence and of *mental energy conservation* due precisely to the fact that man and dog proceeded in evident accord, assuming a shared directionality and, all in all, assuming very similar expressions.

At this point, a long series of coincidences is clear enough, coincidences with a fusional dimension that we psychoanalysts hold to be (especially from the time of Mahler on; see Mahler, 1968) one of the necessary stages of the formative coexistence between mother and child in the development of the human being. And we well know the ruinous consequences that the lack of this physiological phase of upbringing can involve, with the desperate search in subsequent phases for equivalents to what was missing, and with others'

consequent incomprehension of the meaning of this search, which seems pathological and incongruous if one does not know how to understand it correctly.

What psychoanalysis has not been very interested in, by contrast, is precisely this *widespread dimension of the basic, necessary interpsychic*, which in fact the majority freely provide for themselves through family and work, in social gatherings or in other daily situations. In this way, people 'function in attunement' with others, without knowing it, satisfying a *basic quantum of microfusionalilty in cohabitation* that is beneficial to the self – stabilizing it, confirming it, and often conserving energy for the perception of a sense of existence, unity, and cooperative contact in being there with others.

The dog shares with us in these needs, and he is overjoyed to coparticipate in our existence.

Descartes and many others like him who 'know' – people who may be categorized according to various beliefs and narcissistic presumptions about the ennobling existence of a 'beautiful soul' of elevated spirituality – do not consider the dog our relative. But those among us who have really tested themselves in a dimension of cohabiting and reciprocally searching for understanding cannot usually support a conviction of radical, substantive difference for long.

One can agree, paradoxically, on only one point: we cannot realistically define dogs as 'our relatives.' In fact, if we live together and truly observe their profound way of being with us, the definition of dogs that we will find more correct and true will be different: it will be 'our family members.'

THE PSYCHOSEXUALITY OF MUCOUS MEMBRANES Inter-body and interpsychic

Among the many possible areas of reading through which the history of psychoanalysis can be considered, one of the most fascinating and at the same time most specific is that relative to psychosexuality.

Especially in 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905 [1901]) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud described the gathering and fixation of the libido, with major and minor erotization and with more or less pathological defenses, around the zones progressively experienced and invested by the subject in the course of his development. The oral, anal, urethral, phallic, and genital zones have been studied in relation to drives, sensoriality, unconscious fantasies, and modalities of object relations that characterize the various moments and levels of self-organization.

Of particular interest to us analysts are all the psychic and relational derivatives that are the result or the equivalent of the experience and sexual organization of the subject in his own self, and then in the relationship with the object. Psychosexuality has thus come to be considered, researched, and interpreted in a complex way – ever since Freud's time – in close continuity with the bodily.

Interesting, in this sense, are the notes of Ernest Jones (1961) on the fact that, in this sphere, he maintained two unfaltering points for his entire life: one was that no psychic process unfolds apart from physical ones; the other was that the physical process must precede the psychic one. 'Both opinions would argue a certain priority for physiological processes' (p. 368).