



An Axis of Reception Counseling and Reading Theory

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These pages are writings as signum: markers, signals, seals of another's life which is one's own.

As I write, I attend to the idea of reception. In Ingarden (1973), aesthetics is marked by the particular attention to detail in the response of the reader or viewer. To the moment of reception. The open schemata of the work invites completion through the process of the reader.

The open schemata = the becoming of the reader in the process of the text.

Reception theory discovers itself in a dialectic of full and empty perception.

Reception as immediate experience. A photograph of an 11-year-old girl from the Tibetan mountains hangs to the right of my desk where I am writing. She has entered a tent in the evening where preparations for a musical evening are taking place. In the photograph the girl looks without anticipation, anxiety, or desire. Virtually it is a look that receives (Silvers, 1988).

Reading/Reception

Reading as model, as paradigm in human science, in teaching, in counseling, in understanding.

Hermeneutic moments: projects of skepticism, of recovery. Witness of self/witness of other. In Gadamer (1975), understanding unfolds in the process of dialogue. Except, he notes, in those projects of dialogue where one party has a particular agenda, that is, the therapeutic conversation. This intentionality interferes with the play of dialogue. Solution? Inhabit space of interferences.

Public stories of language, of meaning. Vocabulary, grammar, acquisition. New pedagogy. Whole language learning. Language rooted in context, language in coalition with child, with student. Language seeking anchor in significant moment, in self's recognition of word. Weight/meaning. Language learned backwards—on field trip exploring high grasses, blood red rocks,

river, stream, sunlight on water. Crevice= word; also immediate signification—place to fall. From rock, grass, water to lines etched in book, consonants formed: from alphabet to symbol, sentence to meaning (Darroch-Lozowski, 1987).

Private accounts of reading. Deep structure. The problem of narrative, of words and language in counseling. I have learned language, this speech too much by rote. I connect dots, trace lines into words, reduce to meanings. I seek entirely private (barely communicative) language. In the therapeutic context I am again asked to link dots into meaning, to trace the shape of the line. How do I live in dialogue, in some connection with other?

As aesthetics of reception (Jauss, 1982). I listen to client speak. I experience in myself maternal/child pulsion—the move to heal quickly, to place Band-Aid, to kiss, to make better. Pause. Hermeneutics *and* Poetics. Clinical project of recovery, of recuperation of meanings set against metalinguistic project: technical place of desire's fusion to word.

Clinical Arc

There are notes but I do not own them. They are filed in a small town where I no longer live or work. The record is from my memory going back perhaps three years. I forget more than I remember.

I met with her as a therapist during a period covering six months. She comes to my office with a story of interior life. Dreams, images, and thoughts. She tries to keep away from the kitchen, especially from one particular knife in the drawer.

She sits in the client's chair. She leans into her story. There is much sexuality. She wears a very short jean skirt and a low V-necked sweater. Her story spills over with nightmare images of killing her husband—of sticking a knife into him. Describe the images. He is sleeping at home, peacefully. She cannot sleep, furious. Burning with anger. All of her energy committed to not killing him. How can he sleep while she burns inside?

Story in foreground—demand for acceptance in the background. Subtext. A body rhetoric—movement, gesture, expression—pulses within the story. Listen, this story is about me, it is sex.

The husband, the object of the story, is in the waiting room. He goes out to his truck. Doors open and close. Outside of the story, pacing. Physical movement, walking back-forth. Earthsounds of boots on pavement.

What is the thing that worries her the most? Besides killing her husband. Ending up in the hospital. That she could not handle. Confined to the room. Wearing ugly pajamas that open at the back. She wants to know if she is crazy. She wants to know if she will kill him.

Narrative Life

This specific time of the story dominates, the time of telling the story. Sitting in a room, speaking to someone who is supposed to listen, to assess. There is pain, anger, rejection in this story and a person's body inside it. A short time will go by, perhaps an hour or only slightly longer.

She has been told to come here. We face off. A brief, blank stare. Get on with the interview. She wonders (out loud) what kind of person she has been sent to see. Have I ever seen anyone like her before? Do I have experience with this kind of thing?

Resistance is the action of the therapy. It is the foundation of the therapeutic relation. To be in relation, to speak, to think in a particular way. I speak to you as other connections do not happen. I may think of resistance as a particular moment in the therapeutic relation.

I resist therefore I am.

She talks about her history with men. She is restless, unsatisfied. There are too many boyfriends in her past. She feels she has stayed too long with this man. She blames men. There is, though, no woman friend. How is it possible to live with someone this long? Pause. She leans forward into her words. Communication. Raw, physical, insistent language of gesture and silence.

I don't know.

This relation is overloaded with gender-history. The intersubjective axis of language. I am male and this story is articulated in this particular way.

I seek analogues to this relation. The mother. Mother as metaphor, as model. Mother as relation of care to the body. Mother as spoken word. The esthetic images that recur most constantly to me—the Mary Cassatt images of mother and child. These images are present to me in dreams, emerge only as fragments. Pieces of image. Cassatt postcards mailed from distant places.

I am childless. She is childless. We.

There was a hysterectomy at 35. Since that time everything is different. She refuses to speak about what this might mean,

about any emotion tied to this particular event. This was an operation, not something with feeling in it. She talks about being operated on. Lying unconscious, being worked on by a doctor. Now (she feels) the husband treats her differently. They never intended to have children, but now she can't. His actions, his desire for her (may or may not) remain the same but she feels that something within him is changed. Desire is desire articulated through the other.

Hyster-ecto-(me).

Tell me about a different time of your life.

We spend long sequences on the absolutely ordinary. The minute details of everyday life. Tell me about the movie you watched last night. Who played the hero? Did you like him? I want to listen to the plot unfold. I attend to the structure of plot, I seek in this discourse beginning, middle, and end.

There are moments of repose we know only in looking at pictures. A moment of intimacy, of privacy. According to the French analyst Jacques Lacan (1978), the Gaze rests only in this moment of the visual representation. For a moment this woman/story is still and cool breath floats silent in the room.

Image as dream, as trance, as fantasy. In the image we rest and hear.

I live in an apartment that is the upper half of a duplex. The office is underneath. At the time of one of the appointments she goes upstairs to look for me. A woman answers the knock. There is tense reaction. Transference as this full response—a response of childhood, of regression, imagination.

The discourse itself is profane, earthy. Male dominated language. She watches me listen to her. Needing response. Something other than this calm, patient look. She swears harder and waits to see if I am interested in this version of the story. Do I mind her swearing? No answer.

Linguistic analysis. These words as short, vocal expressions of pent-up meaning. Street phonetics. Cruel irony. Childwords: I double dare you to be involved in this! Oneiric language as images of dark and heat, of looking and being afraid. Lover's discourse—rhetoric of seduction and misunderstanding. Graphology—I scrawl this story in huge child-letters from me to you.

On occasion, (the emergence of) a lyrical language of tangible physical hurt without mask or plaster.

Her purse falls open. Lipstick, keys, make-up, Kleenex, candy. Mirror. Pins, cards, notes. Matches, hairpins, mascara, scissors, comb. Wallet. Photographs.

At least therapy is this highly structured relation.

At least this highly structured relation is therapy.

The husband waits outside the door. How to interpret? He knows what she thinks, about her images of killing him, but does not understand. He spends most of his time in backbreaking labor, cutting trees in the sun, wind, cold. He is partner to his wife. He comes with her to the appointments. He talks to me. There are walls between his experience, the action within the marriage and her interior life.

Tell me about.

On the Borderline

=An agreement is acknowledged

She experiences herself as living in the 1960s. We talk about the music. I am startled that this music has returned. I want to listen to her talk about this music. We talk for a long time. I saw Jimi Hendrix play in Ottawa. I was 14. I do not remember anything else from this time with just this clarity, precision.

For her part, this woman breathes with the rhythm and pulse of the music inside her.

Tell me about your house, about where you live.

She lives in a house on the highway. In the bush. Much of the time she spends waiting for her husband to come home. He works as a cutter. Sometimes he will be away for a week. Sometimes she (I) feels time so slowly hairs prickle along her neck. He comes home and he wants to lie down with her. The relation of one person's body to another is lost. She is all sex and no sex. She tells stories of forced sex—stories that hurt now more in the retelling, the reliving in narrative of this history. She is on her back in a gravel pit. It did not hurt then. Now.

As I listen, I accept that my role is to interpret. There is a message here. It is waiting for me to understand. I listen to this woman and I feel the theoretical, psychological dialogue of analysts—of Kernberg (1975) and Kohut (1977). I wish I understood better. I wish I lived in New York instead of this frozen place in Northern Ontario. Then I would be able to help this woman.

Then I would be able.

Opening up the relationship. The dialectic of the transference and the countertransference. I look at you and ... project.

Bleich (1983) writes on the topic of reading and on the function of the transference within reading. We begin with the expectations of the reader. We place writing within contexts. We listen to the particular place of the story, authorial place and purpose. We read (sometimes) within contexts—we trace the curve of the story. (Sometimes) we subvert. Reading is parallel to writing—the letters spill out over the lines. In one moment the pencil is traced light; the next, black line presses hard, tears page and needs to start all over again.

In this same moment, a moment of writing on gender and reading, Bleich (1983) speaks of the medical roots of psychoanalysis. Prior to the discourse on the specificity of defenses and the Unconscious, the roots of analysis are in the medical examination. Undressing. Asking, touching, inquiring. Feeling for temperature, listening to chest, heartbeat. The origins of this healing are rooted in physical rituals. Body, experience, touch. In the maternal. Sign, gesture, relation. The origins of the sexual hypothesis. This discourse (of interpretation, of learning) intends to replace this touch: Care.

What do you want?

What do you want from me?

Incantation of Self's desire for Word and Other.

As I listen, lines of assessment are drawn. Lines drawn between normal, neurotic, psychotic, painful, healing. Kernberg (1975). I have read these papers, listened to these arguments. What attributes of the self are missing? What elements to instill, to encourage. I forget. The Self is disintegrated. I wish that Kernberg was here with me to explain his book, to meet with this woman. But he is not. This is how far we get with theorists.

Borderline. Unique articulation of the empty. We sit, we talk together. She tells me about herself, her life. She asks questions about me. I look for the curve in the interpersonal relation, this relation between her and me that may lead toward something that is therapeutic. I stay away from the dramatic, attractive. I seek relation that is different for her than other relations. I wait for phrases, sentences about the totally mundane. When the ordinary emerges, I lean forward to listen.

(In Search of) An Axis of Response

She is telling me about the homicidal impulses. About her attraction to the kitchen, about her fear to open the drawer. What should she do about the knives? Will she kill him?

(I should go to her house, take away the knives and tape the drawer shut. I should establish a therapeutic imperative: *Do Not Cross This Line!*)

Instead, reading draws me to a place within description, within dialogue. Fabula: timeless element of story, weaves through plot, settles with ending.

On an esthetic of response: Kristeva (1978) writes

The Analyst who takes this into account probably will not assume the pleasurable role of comforting or persecuting mother; instead he will hold on to the thread guiding him through this game of hide-and-seek or chess, which is the narrow path of transference and countertransference, intermingled with sex and death. The analyst's attentiveness to language makes him open to works of art, since it is the so-called aesthetic production that knows how to deal with the (de)negation inherent in language without actually knowing it. (p. 39)

This particular de-negation that slips through the cracks of language and syntax. This person (You). I express to you but in a deep way this language, all language, refuses interpersonal connection.

I listen to a story of her relation to her mother. There is much similarity. The mother is both distracted and demanding. She dresses like a teenager, she refuses role of mother. Most of the time they live far apart. There are phone calls, short visits. There is no particular, identifiable emotion. This woman is her mother. Having lunch together. Bearing the weight of human relation. Later, after she leaves, there is a reverberation first quite subtle but cumulative. Anxiety followed by a lucid, articulated sense of the absolutely empty.

Rocking. Hunger.

Problem: to carve story out of the structure of relation.

Kernel and Shell

I listen to story, receive.

Ontic possibility. I read, listen, hear. Narrative story, interpretation. Between these lines, images of story that is hers/mine. Shared place.

The aesthetic image that recurs to me—a pointillism, dots mounted on canvas: blue water, lake, sail, meaning. Hot wind, spray. Perception hangs, glides, dips, rises. Listen/share.

This story pulls me inside. Images of depth: the unconscious, the silent, the dialogue. Image, archetype. There is archetype imprinted on the soul: mandala is story. I listen, assess, write down, analyze. Gift to me—story as pencil lines traced on paper, interior soul.

There is a torque within language that pulls back on itself. We speak, chase after meaning, duck and pull string together as tightly as possible. There is language that is entirely invented: anasemic language (Abraham, 1979). Language chasing meaning, forgetting. Lightness. Weight. Being.

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