

# Urgent Voluntary Errands

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When I was a student at The Anna Freud Centre I marveled at the way Anna Freud responded to a paper that a student or a member of the teaching faculty had taken months to write. In a ten minute discussion she would give a crisp account of the metapsychology behind the intrapsychic story of the case in a most engaging way. I wanted to learn how to do that. In her story making technique ***description invariably preceded interpretation***. It was an intuition then. Now, and for the first time, I know that one can train oneself to emulate that.

Another aspect of her functioning was her philosophical pragmatism. While others debated the merits of the topographical theory or the structural theory and/or their continuities and discontinuities, she would say the following:

Different from the people who found the structural theory in existence when they entered psychoanalysis and saw the topographical scheme as a thing of the past, I grew up with the topographical scheme, and had a gradual transition to the structural in my own psychoanalytic development. I must say that ... I never made the sharp distinction between the two that later writers made, but according to my own convenience I used the one or the other frame of reference.

Now, and for the first time, I have come to grasp the continuities between the two systems as indices of ***structural delay***. First, selections from the sedimentations of history get appropriated by the subject. Secondly, the appropriations come to create a representational world. Thirdly, out of this representational world, transference wishes, pleas and demands enter the public space of the analytic setting between the patient and the analyst. The intentionality behind the wishes, pleas or demands requires reciprocal connection and reciprocal correction to enable hitherto unresolved grievances, conflicts or deficits to be negotiated and renegotiated until a reconfiguration of the subject's world shall have taken place. The most representative account of my work using this frame of reference is in a special issue on intercultural analysis in the January 2006 issue of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*.

How does this structural delay between the topographical and the structural schema show itself? What is the nature of the relationship between internal fields of reference to the outside and, in reverse, external fields of reference to the inside? How is it that a parent has parents and yet we focus inordinately on the primary caregiver and the child? Where do generations fit into the work of psychoanalysis? These and other transformations into what we know as the psyche have preoccupied me for years?

Some of these questions have been answered. In Andre Green (2000), we learn that in a structural delay the "paradise" of the mother-infant relationship translates into the "id". The relationship of a mother to her mother translates into the "ego". The "superego" is the end product of the father's role that ends the two-in-one relationship between the mother and her baby to which she is bodily linked. In the translation of the father's role into the formation of the superego, Green indicated that time brings a sense of order and registers prohibition in order to declare that the child is in a different generation from the father. ***Two generations are therefore not sufficient to define a human subject and it takes at least three to do so because even in the mother-child relationship there is the potential idea of the father inside the mother and the father outside the mother.*** In other words, in Green's praxis, the timelessness of the unconscious brings up the imperative of the paternal function to provide order, generalization and continuity.

The idea of three generations in psychoanalysis is not new. Providing an adaptational view, Heinz Hartmann (1958, p.30) wrote that the human subject does not come to terms with its environment

anew in every generation. Rather, this relation to the environment is guaranteed by an evolution peculiar to us humans through the influence of tradition and the survival of our creations. Accordingly, we take over from others a great many of our methods for solving problems. We therefore live in past generations as well as in ours.

Since Hartmann we have gone much further in describing multi-generational transactions. Haydee Faimberg (2005), Vamik Volkan (2002), Apprey (1993) have described different ways in which the ego can be subject to tyrannical intrusions and it happens in ways that cause the subject to carry mandates of intrusive parental projects with which the ego may identify and appropriate as one's own. ***My theoretical interest in this unconscious transfer between subject and object dates back to age fifteen.*** It was a time when I had not as yet learned that a student must have empathy for teachers who were trying to do their best. In a literature class, my Latin teacher who also taught the poetry of W.H. Auden described the notion of "urgent voluntary errands" in the poem "On this island" as an *oxymoron*. I protested that his rather cavalier attempt at interpreting the phrase from Auden lost sight of a powerful *metaphor* that depicts human conflict. I intuited then that the urgent and the voluntary can coexist in one metaphor. Today, I see an ***urgently infused mandate*** being given; a mandate ***followed by a voluntary appropriation***. This appropriation gets mentalized and undergoes a structural delay. Subject and object shall have changed places so that the subject now has his or her own poison to deliver, as it were. Now, and for the first time, I realize how formative that argument with my Latin teacher who had doubled as a teacher of English literature was. Now I write about maternal *misconception*, *transgenerational haunting*, *dreams of urgent voluntary errands*, among other notions of psychical transfer and appropriations into the domain of the representational world. Two opportunities allowed me to advance my work on psychical transfer from here: one from psychoanalysis; the other from Continental philosophy. From psychoanalysis, I encountered Robert Stoller's work. From my study of French reception of Husserl's philosophy, I studied closely Descartes, Foucault, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, Politzer, and Romano, among others. From psychoanalysis, I was particularly intrigued by Stoller's account of a mother whose nine year old son wanted to become a girl. (Stoller, 1968). The mother spoke about her relationship with her mother before she bore a son. She felt like a cipher. She hoped to become a nun. Notice how the word "nun" sounds like. Her recurrent dream before she had a son was as follows: ***"I had died and was now dead. But my mother kept sending me to the store on errands because she had not even paid enough attention to know it."*** This case and Stoller's interpretation of a mother's emptiness and a grandmother's refusal to lend her femininity to her daughter resulting in massive object hunger in a mother along with a persisting bisexuality, did not constitute an epiphany for me. Rather, I felt I had confirmation for an idea that needed to be further developed. From Continental philosophy, I came to assemble the following ideas about the human subject as follows. From Descartes we could say, with some qualification, that the human subject is realized through its encounter with ***"truth"*** and with indubitable certainty. The human subject in Foucault is realized through its encounter with ***"errors"***; errors as *mistakes*, *wanderings*, preconscious or unconscious representations of *mandates*. In Husserl the researcher constitutes intersubjective phenomena *without presupposition* and in the service of *fidelity to the perceived object*. We travel then ***from the events of history to a sense of history*** as we create intersubjective constitution of perceived phenomena. In Claude Romano, the subject that constitutes phenomena in Husserl is now radicalized so that ***the subject is one who comes back to oneself; an "advenant"*** (Romano, 2009).

Various syntheses of ideas from both psychoanalysis and Continental philosophy enabled me to rethink Freud's account of the four properties of instincts. At one time, I thought of an instinct as having a biological *source*, as operating under *pressure*, as having an *aim* and as having an *object*. Now I think as follows: beyond biology, an ancestral mandate with a peremptory wish is formulated; the unconscious wishes behind that mandate undergo structural delay so that they lose their urgency

and are instead suspended; active injection and obedient reception change places; agency between subject and object alternate. Finally, the object through which the satisfaction is to be derived is but a figuration in the representational world; an introjected self, as it were.

The result of this reframing of Freud has made me so glaringly aware that we often think we are experientially going somewhere only to realize that we have *already* been there. Or, we think we have a project only to realize that we have already been *sent*.

Thus psychoanalytic time construed as timeless may no longer be demarcated as past, present and future; but rather as **pluperfect time**.

My synthesis of ideas that subserve psychical transfer, transgenerational transmission of destructive aggression follows that of Gaston Bachelard to this effect: synthesis is transformation. My synthesis of Auden, Freud, Husserl, Foucault and Romano, among others, has enabled me to coin the term “pluperfect” errand.

The idea of pluperfect errand here elaborates and brings fullness to Freud’s notion of “nachträglichkeit” that translates as “deferred action”. We now have a circular, ten-fold mnemonic taxonomy of the nachträglichkeit behind transgenerational transfer of destructive aggression. First, a destructive ancestral mandate is formulated when a traumatized family, community or group is attempting to change events of history into a sense of history. They must find a hospitable home for the psychological toxin. They must inject it into a suitable object. Secondly, and through structural delay, the injected poisonous project undergoes storage for an indeterminate period of time. Thirdly, the indeterminate time for the storage is numinously suspended. Fourthly, it is suspended until an errand can stealthily rob the carrier of one’s sense of agency. Fifth, a paradox occurs where we have an urgent voluntary errand. Sixth, the subject that carries her inheritance as though it were one’s own must find a new context to create a public space for reactivation, away, from the haunt, as it were. Seventh, any sense of having been sent is by now totally lost. Ninth, the categories of active and passive are now fixed in irreversible and *unrepresentable* presentations. Finally, precisely because the infusion is unrepresentable, active or passive voices are inaudible. A middle voice must now be nurtured and co-created through *reciprocal connection* and *reciprocal correction* through the therapeutic story.

When I have presided over an analysis in this way, the unconscious errand shows itself. Now, and for the first time, I can see that ordinary and extraordinary phenomena reveal themselves through a relatively simple word like “errand” even if it is subserved by metapsychological and philosophical assumptions that have to be bracketed and suspended so that I do not get ahead of the patient.

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