BOOK REVIEW

Gerald J Gargiulo: Quantum Psychoanalysis: Essays on Physics, Mind, and Analysis Today

Dr. Gargiulo makes the excellent point that psychoanalysis should be like physics. That is where you do not know the outcome and both analyst and patient are surprised by what they say.

But that’s not all. Dr. Gargiulo also deals with metaphor.

I was excited to review this book as I was not familiar with Dr. Gargiulo’s writing. However I do not have a physics background and was glad to note that I did not need to have a background in physics as Dr. Gargiulo’s explanations are clear and he refers you to the original works in case you wish to learn more.

Quantum Mechanics

In 1923 concurrent with Alfred North Whitehead’s integrating of some of his findings into his process philosophy, quantum physicists were publishing some of their bewildering findings. For psychoanalysis however, Newtonian physics, which was the accepted scientific model of the time, became normative. Its major tenet, a strict separation between the observer and the observed. Psychoanalysis used such models notwithstanding Freud’s revolutionary exploration of the unconscious – an area of psychic experience that shows remarkable parallels with some of the basic findings of quantum mechanics.

Gargiulo quotes Henri Ey (1978) “We must remind psychoanalysis of what the intoxication of discovery has caused it to forget of its first fundamental intuitions: there is no unconscious without the structure of consciousness” (p. 329).

Metaphor

Gargiulo’s reading of the generic/descriptive unconscious employs metaphors that come from quantum physics rather than the more mystical imagery some analytic writers employ when speaking about such an unconscious.
Psychoanalysis is about meaning; and about categorization. It is a science of metaphors grappling with human subjectivity.

Freud felt that he was able to read the unconscious, as it expressed itself in dreams and symptoms, because he had discovered its language – primary process.

In some profound way truth has to find each individual in order to be personally meaningful, rather than coercive, “Self-recognition,” as Ricoeur (1974, p. 185) reminds us, is such a truth.

Mind and meaning

Obsessive-compulsive mechanisms are a prime example of split off mind: mind that has lost any bearing to psyche/soma, mind that no longer feels alive through every pore of the body but is exclusively experienced through one’s head.

A quantum mechanics model.

We are, after all, measuring information. When, if ever, we have a theory of information that explains most of the phenomena of the micro world, the area studied by quantum physics, we will simultaneously understand much more of the macro world in which we pass our days.

Gargiulo states that the repressed unconscious, as interpreted in the clinical setting, does not exist either before or after its interpretation, in the same way as In quantum mechanics a particle does not exist before or after an observation, that is, a photon particle has no rest mass. It only exists when it is observed. Heisenberg said that atoms or elementary particles are not real; they form a world of potentialities or possibilities rather than one of things or facts. (p. 186). Henry Ey stated that there is no unconscious without the structure of consciousness (p. 329).

Winnicott states that there is no such thing as a baby without the mothering environment. To this Gargiulo adds that there is no such thing as a mind without a community in which it comes to be. There is no such thing as a dynamic unconscious without the community of patient and analyst and the presence of
interpretation, just as there is no such thing as a particle without observation. There is one closed system, and that is the cosmos itself: everything within that system is intimately and interchangeable related to everything else in that system: it is what quantum physicists refer to as nonlocal. Or what we call reality. Consequently no analyst is a separate, unaffected, noninterfering neutral observer. One thing that quantum mechanics has confirmed is that there are no neutral observers. We are all part of and interact with the reality in which we live.

Observation

Observation creates the reality that is being examined. This is not so different from what happens in psychoanalytic practice when either an analyst or a patient make an interpretation. Gargiulo believes that the modus operandi of the psyche is much closer to our experiences of the quantum world than to the macro world in which we seemingly operate.

Mind is best thought of as a bridge - not just a personal possession or an exclusive subjective experience. It locates us within a particular community at a particular historical moment. It has to do with the experience of meaning and the location of meaning which arises in and from the communities in which we live.

The way an observation is set up determines what will be observed. Rather than a correspondence between the neutral observer and the neutral observed we have a situation where the questions we ask determine the answers we get. Niels Bohr reminds us that we cannot know the quantum world; we can only know our description of it. We have to recognize an accepted quantum conclusion, articulated by Erwin Schrodinger, that our experienced world is a construct, operationally necessary, but a construct nevertheless. Rather than assuming that we can know reality in any definitive and unquestioning way, practical realism, as expressed through what Dr. Gargiulo calls operational models, pursues truth as an ongoing opportunity.

The work of Ferenczi and others, as well as relational psychoanalysis has highlighted the intrinsic and essential interface of analyst and analysand – the
observer and the observed. Theodor Reik said that an analyst should be equally surprised by what he says as by what a patient says.

Many quantum physicists maintain that consciousness, in the sense of observation, is a prerequisite for anything to exist at all.

Gargiulo presents the conclusions of some noted quantum physicists supporting such a conclusion.

The received view that states of consciousness are generated by neurons is misleading, neurons being elements of just empirical reality. Those neuro-scientists who espouse such a materialistic psychology are conceptualizing exclusively within a Newtonian physics context. The experience of self-observation – which is a form of measurement - creates consciousness, just as the act of observing an electron, for example, locates/concretizes an electron. Consciousness is not a thing – it is a dynamic experience. Pathology may be characterized as a freezing up of such a dynamic process, i.e. rigidity in the capacity to experience information /energy. If a patient cannot tolerate the intensity of their energy/information, we know that an analyst has to contain it for them; that is, from the perspective offered here, to enable what we refer to as everyday consciousness to progressively integrate more energy/information. Consciousness is a capacity to observe and therefore measure.

What constitutes observation? Does that necessarily entail human conscious observation? Or might the universal interaction of everything with everything constitute observation/measurement? Such a way of understanding an all-encompassing interaction is referred to as decoherence. When Reik speaks to the capacity of one’s unconscious knowing another person’s unconscious he was not advocating some mystical or special psychic power. He was trying to put into words, something close to what we are describing here that is one of the consequences of both the micro and macro worlds being entangled. Micro world is atoms. Macro world is our reality. There is an abyss of potentiality that awaits our observation. If we know the location of a proton we cannot know its momentum – observation is not able to capture both properties simultaneously. In the same way an analyst cannot know/him/her self at the same time that they
know the patient. The more an analyst focuses on one dimension, the more he or she loses precision with regard to the other dimension. Only by knowing our transitoriness can we truly experience each moment.

Technique

Ultimately technique, as practiced by any analyst, is a response based on a personal philosophical belief of what life is all about. If the goal of life is to experience one’s self as real, as effective, as creative and consequently as competent, then such convictions will form the basis of any therapeutic interventions. The starting point for any therapeutic experience is the need for both participants to be emotionally alive. Alive means an affective appreciation of connection and interdependence of everything with everything. Technique follows from this awareness. Allowing a patient to experience the therapist’s personal reactions – not just interpretations—makes the experience real for both participants. Such an approach doesn’t limit itself to observing a patient, within a diagnostic framework, it focuses on how to structure a patient’s coming to know him or herself by knowing the analyst as well.

Individual qualities needed for an analyst: a capacity for personal honesty; a desire for cross-identification issuing in compassion and civility, and the possession of a playful intelligence. Psychoanalysis is primarily a metaphor perhaps a key metaphor for understanding many of the other metaphors that comprise our intellectual, cultural and personal lives. Artists and poets create the unconscious more effectively than we analysts, particularly to the extent that psychoanalytic education does not encourage playfulness with language and theory. Freud said that Dostoyevsky was a better psychologist than he. Winnicott said that our first task as analysts is fostering a patient’s capacity for play. If we do so, if we encourage the play of metaphor, in all its ramifications with the self, the other, and the world, we will have done more than we can possibly know. We will have freed the soul from the body, we will have made life possible, free from living in a world of the concrete, the concreteness of things, the concreteness of thought.
Our meddling intellect/misshapes the beautiful form of things; we murder to dissect said Wordsworth. The great spiritual traditions, both east and west have been in search of a deeper experience of life, of a vital sense of interconnectedness. Psychoanalysis has similar goals. As we are listened to, we know that we have a voice, as we are cared for; we know that we can love the world. Winnicotts’ simple prayer is: that he be alive when he dies. If a man gains the whole world sand loses his soul he has nothing is a thought with which most psychoanalysts could agree.

Psychoanalysis and Spirituality

A spiritual journey entails a sober recognition of our place in the cosmos, our interdependence with all that is, while simultaneously addressing the potential self-reference and self-delusion that hinders such awareness. The commitment to be honest, to practice civility and compassion, along with a self-transcending desire for justice, are operative goals for any spiritual journey as well as for a personal psychoanalysis.

Any talk about God is ultimately talk about, and to ourselves. Silence is a better venue. The greatest honor the soul can pay to God is to leave God to himself and to be free of him says Meister Eckhart.

All too frequently the attempt is to resolve the unknowingness and anxiety of death by promising resolution rather than invitation. Any spiritual practice that hinders the experience of the present by interpreting it either in terms of a supernatural future, or by obsessively categorizing the present, is in danger of missing the experience of being alive.

In psychoanalysis, when the process goes well, good self, bad self, are ultimately replaced by just real self; good and bad are experienced as adjectives not nouns.

Psychoanalysis Today

Home offices – this essay is a response to articles by Karen Maroda and Robert Langs concluding that home offices are an example of a self-serving and possibly unethical frame violation on the part of the therapist.
Under most conditions, certain operative boundaries between analyst and patient do obtain. The analyst usually has a set fee, a specific time, a private setting in which to conduct therapy. An analyst should provide a quiet, safe and, when possible, consistent setting for the analytic experience.

Ethics

Astronomy locates our fleeting place in this stunningly complex and unimaginably expansive cosmos. While astronomy presents us with one hundred million galaxies, quantum physics presents us with a world of infinite possibilities – from the macro to the micro, we are exposed to a level of complexity that transcends human understanding. The concept of reality is as indispensable in science as it is in everyday life. If we construct our reality, we likewise construct any code of ethics. If human beings do not possess free will, in any complete sense, they can with honesty and self-understanding, experience freed will – to borrow Edward Glover’s evocative phrase (Glover, 1963, p. 193).

Ethics, I suspect, begins with a capacity to love the world, a capacity, as we know, which entails good-enough developmental experiences. The result of psychoanalysis should be the capacity to sustain a willingness “to know and engage one’s repressed and disclaimed motives.” Davis argues that such a commitment is essential if an individual is to live ethically, by experiencing the freedom that awareness of the human situation brings.

The Disappearing Profession.

Have you noticed, for some time now, that few people speak about what’s going on in their analysis? Except for the analysis of Woody Allen which is ongoing. Psychoanalysis reached a high point in the nineteen fifties and sixties. By the nineteen nineties people spoke of seeing their therapist or analyst only once or twice a week. Individuals no longer had the time or the inclination for an unhurried three or four times a week treatment. Psychoanalysis came to be seen as quaint, a treatment that did not fit into the busy, high tech, exercise-conscious world in which we now live. Sensitivity to one’s personal insides is the starting place for any resolution of conflict and the easing of psychological pain. It is the
soil where our sense of dignity grows. Sensitivity to interiority is an experience not of our specialness but of our uniqueness, a uniqueness that reflects a quiet internal place where we come to terms with our personal history and try to resolve the leftover pain it may entail; a quiet place where we can look at ourselves, unhurriedly, in order to find what is real, and what we want to be real in our lives. No one knows if psychoanalysis has just momentarily gone from our cultural awareness or not. If we abandon the search within we will be left in a world of things and facts where we would be sane but nevertheless poor. The great literary masters of the West remind us that we are made of our dreams. Psychoanalysis is one discipline, one profession, which understands that it takes time to know our dreams, and more time to hold them as one’s own.

What’s in a Name

Doesn’t a psychoanalyst analyze the unconscious? Isn’t that an adequate job description? Not really. No one analyzes what is unconscious – least of all an analyst. All that can be known about the unconscious is what interpretation creates. What we know is the interpretation.

The Long History of Story Telling

We humans love to tell stories. An encounter with one’s history, one’s feelings and one’s hopes is not limited to the proverbial troubled patient. We all come injured into adulthood, in one way or another; that is simply the human condition. Life can be lived more deeply with the kind of self-exploration that psychoanalysis can offer. As an analyst listens to a patient, he or she is writing his or her own autobiography as well. What clinical experience has confirmed is that in a productive therapy there is a deep resonance between both participants – a necessary resonance if any healing is to occur.