The Evolution and Development of Psychoanalysis: **An Interview with Leo Rangell, M.D.**

Douglas Kirsner, PhD

Abstract

Psychoanalytic theories and practices grow and develop in their own particular ways in different times and places. They evolve in their own socio-historical and cultural contexts in a mix of people and ideas. This interview with Leo Rangell, M.D. explores the changes in psychoanalytic technique in the United States as he saw them develop from Freud era to the current era. The interview was conducted before his death in 2011 after 60 years of experience and productivity in the field both nationally and internationally. He was Honorary President of the IPA until his death, twice President of the IPA and twice President of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Rangell understood psychoanalysis as an evolving, composite discipline continuously building upon a range of approaches based upon Freud's immense footprint. In this interview Rangell describes the route psychoanalysis took in the interrelated aspects of theory and practice in the US, many far from beneficial. He discusses the distortion of Freud's concept of the analyst's neutrality whereby on the one hand there could be a very cold attitude in an attempt to be objective, and on the other hand, inadequate objectivity, inappropriate self-disclosure and acting out.

Key words: Leo Rangell; history and philosophy of psychoanalysis; American psychoanalysis; psychoanalytic technique; psychoanalytic neutrality.

Psychoanalysis is a developing, evolving and living field of inquiry powered by love and understanding of the human spirit. As a calling psychoanalysis does best when practitioners and theorists are passionate in exploring the evolving field of inquiry in an open-ended way, discovering both blind alleys and truths as they emerge over time. Part of this evolution is to trace how psychoanalytic ideas develop in different eras and contexts.

I was privileged to conduct with the Honorary President of the International Psycho-analytical Association, Leo Rangell, M.D., just six months before his death in 2011 at the age of 97. It is of both historical and intellectual significance given Rangell's seven decades of extensive experience and productivity in the field both nationally and internationally. Dr. Rangell understood psychoanalysis as an evolving, composite discipline continuously building upon a range of approaches. He was a key witness, contributor and participant in the evolution, character and development of the range of psychoanalysis in the US.

Dr. Rangell was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1913, studied pre-med at Columbia College (B.S., 1933), graduated in medicine at the University of Chicago (1937). He completed his training in psychiatry, neurology and psychoanalysis in New York before joining the US Air Force during

World War II, treating pilots with war neurosis who had been shot down or been prisoners of war. He moved to Los Angeles after the war, hoping to work with Otto Fenichel, who unfortunately died prematurely, just months before Rangell relocated. Rangell remained living and working in Los Angeles until his death in 2011. He was twice President of the IPA, twice President of the American Psychoanalytic Association and three times President of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society. He was the author of nine books and 450 scholarly articles covering a wide range of topics, from anxiety and unconscious choice to politics, clinical theory and practice.

According to Leo Rangell, Freud made a massive footprint: 'The trunk of the psychoanalytical tree is the Freudian theory of the mind' (Rangell, 2007, frontispiece) which Freud developed over some 40 years. This psychoanalytic tree has come to have many twigs and branches. In the interview we learn about Rangell's perspective of the route psychoanalysis took in the interrelated aspects of theory and practice in the U.S. He clearly contends that not all these developments are beneficial, warning: "We have to be scientific and curious and not idealize our pursuits". For example, the distortion of Freud's concept of the analyst's neutrality where on the one hand there could be a very cold attitude in an attempt to be objective, and on the other hand, inadequate objectivity, inappropriate self-disclosure and acting out.

Here is my edited transcript of the interview that I was very pleased to conduct at his Brentwood office \ about his experience and thoughts on the evolution of psychoanalytic theory and technique throughout his long and very productive life.

Interview with Leo Rangell, M.D.

By Douglas Kirsner, PhD

Brentwood, CA. November 19, 2010

DK: Psychoanalysis in different countries develops in its own particular way. I discussed with Elise Snyder the idea of a project, 'All psychoanalysis is local'. Part of the idea is to try and trace the changes in psychoanalysis in specific places and how they developed in their own idiosyncratic way, for example New York and in the US in terms of issues of technique. The accumulation of ideas as progress across the field is sometimes seen as inevitably positive, rather than as quite varied, with some advances, some setbacks, different responses in different places and times that do not necessarily amount to unalloyed advances. I think the particular combination of people, ideas, circumstances and culture make quite a difference.

LR: In Chicago, the Kohut thing was at a local level.

A propos of what you said that every single view could be cumulatively positive, that was the idea they were promulgating. I completely deny that and am opposed to it.

I think that a huge basic footprint of psychoanalysis was laid down during the Freudian era. Not just by Freud but by the original Freud followers like Abraham, like Ernest Jones at his best, before he was Kleinian, and even Ferenczi and Glover. Those early books laid down a huge footprint in which there was a cumulative growth of a new basic science. For instance, Freud died in 1939. Let's say he started this in 1900. So that's 40 years. During that 40 years, you have first the dream with its instinctual emphasis, drives and instincts. Then you have *The Ego and the Id* (1923) with the ego and superego coming in, there is already laying down the tripartite model: id, ego, superego, which I think has withstood the ravages of time. I don't think that we stick to that triad because of loyalty to Freud, otherwise we're stuck admiring somebody, but because they continually apply to data that we accumulate, old and new data. I haven't found any data that requires the upset of the structural point of view, which is why I disagreed with Brenner, who at the end of his life desisted on that. That was an amazing thing. So now, in this little letter about China [to the IPA Beijing Conference), I point out that all the excitement that's really quite inspirational happens in a new country, a new locus. I agree with the thing about local. You know, you get Eastern Europe, they have caught up the way China did. They didn't have any big blockbuster of a meeting. By the way, there's something for the future for the IPA, of a big meeting there. And you'll see if that there is a meeting it will repeat what happened in China. There will be hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, and they will be talking about proof for the existence of the unconscious, repression of memories causing trauma, or being the nucleus of trauma.

And then *The Problem of Anxiety* (1926). I think that was the second most important book after *The Interpretation of Dreams*. So in 40 years, Freud and his followers built the footprint of a permanent science, as far as when it will be replaced by something better. Now all the avant-garde changes which happened after 40 years, after 1939, after World War II, where you started to get enactment as the method--instead of talking, you got acting-out, enactment. Instead of a neutral position, which allows the unfolding of the transference and its analysis, you get what Owen Renik calls self-disclosure. And then comes Gill, with this third or fourth change of a two-person psychology, not recognizing that the earliest analytic relationship was a two-person psychology, but with an asymmetrical two-person psychology. The subsequent intersubjective bi-personal analysis had two equal people in analysis, the patient and the analyst. Each one would tell about his own life, and people vied for it. I was carrying on supervision at that time and an analyst would be presenting a case and the patient would tell something about his dreams, what he thought, and what his fantasies were, and the analyst would come back with his fantasy say, 'I'll tell you what I think. That reminds me of my mother, you remind me of my mother'. Well, I think that was a farce. And, what I said in this letter about China is that at the beginning you spell it out with inspiration. After that, there is no doubt that time corrupts the inspirational quality and erodes it, and finally you get a peak and a decline and then you get a disillusionment and a tremendous demoralization, which affects the public as well as the analyst. It's contagious to the public and you get the doldrums of analysis, which is the last third of the 20th century. We sort of have to start all over again. But we don't have to start only by having new areas, like the rest of the world, Australia, China, Indonesia. You have to start by undoing the corruption that took place, and we need what we used to call the discriminating function of the ego. That was a hard-won term, which is in disrepute today. But we need a discriminating capacity to know which advances are positive and which are negative in its development. That's the future assignment and challenge.

We have to be scientific and curious and not idealize our pursuits. It isn't as if every day we get better. We'd like to think that we do, but that's a lot of self-deception. The real objective fact of history was that there was a huge improvement, footprint, for the first 40 years, and after that people got bored with it. Kurt Eissler (1965) said that analysis had ceased to collect data from the analytic situation. That everything had been already extracted from the couch and that from now on all research has to be by extra-psychoanalytic methods. I completely disagree with that because I think to this day, and I think in almost a hundred years…, I've been practicing for 70 years and I still feel that every single patient on my couch or in my seat next to me is a source of wonderful data. I tell you I see new case histories every day, they never cease to amaze me, but to consider them jaded and no good, that's not where the jading is, the jading is our conceptions.

Instead of this rosy picture that we get better and better and that we are so wonderful, I think that we got great till roughly 1940. When Freud died and the War started it was still good. I was in the army. Psychodynamic psychiatry, which came from psychoanalysis, thrived during the four or five years of the War. I only went forward as an Army psychiatrist - as a dynamic Army psychiatrist. I never regretted loss of any kind of professional advance. I grew forward, and forward, and forward. My early days as an analyst continued for a number of years, and then the decline started in the mid 60s. In the mid 60s, we reached the peak and started downhill in my opinion. All these changes that you are interested in, which you are concentrating on, the emigres, on the people who came, they came in the late 30s, and then they had their influence till the 60s and 70s, and then they disappeared or they were kicked out. Martin Bergmann always says that the Hartmann era is over. He didn't necessarily agree with it, but said that it was over. And I don't think he was right in saying it was over because, believe me, I'm a Hartmanian through and through until this day. I regret and rue the day that Rappaport and Hartman have been relegated to ashes. Shevrin is the one person who stayed loyal to Rappaport (see Shevrin, 1984) after Gill and Schafer and a whole lot left him in a revolution, and then started the NYU Post-Doctoral Program.

In the mid-60s was when the decline took place. And what took place there was a great challenge and change in the strength of the ego psychology school of America. In my view, America was not promulgating ego-psychology. It was promulgating the structural theory: the ego, id, super-ego, internal/external world psychology. The whole gamut. It was that version historically of what I came to call 'total composite psychoanalytic theory', which I then developed later up to today's date, including all the dissident ideas and whatever had value in them, like relaxation of the objective view so that there's a good deal of subjectivity in it; not self-revelation in the service of the analyst, but revelation only in the service of the patient, maintaining the asymmetrical duality of the dyad instead of making them a two-person psychology of equal, unconscious value. I don't think that every analyst has analyzed every day of his life differently by every patient and that he has a cumulative psychoanalysis going on. I think he remains the analyst and his life goes on just the way the analysand's life goes on with certain changes.

DK: Can you say something about your own experience and your thoughts about the development in the very early stage? About how it moved from the idea of it being about neutrality, which could be warm and not withdrawn, not related to this abstemious, cold, forbidding approach.

LR: I think that you, and whoever you talked to in New York and myself, made a very important observation that there was a pre-transference history in psychoanalysis. Before Freud knew about the transference, no one knew about the transference. I don't think it came with Strachey, who did that big emphasis. I think there was a period when there was a bona fide duality with the therapeutic intention of the analyst in charge, and he was acting in a way that was optimum for the evolution of the therapy as it was being practiced then. That was to make the unconscious conscious and that did not deserve a cold blade of steel to what people characterized Charles Brenner for instance later on. One person had said, it was Leon Altman actually, said to me, as Brenner was coming across the stage, 'There comes the cold blade of reason.' And I thought, that's too bad, I mean, that's not very therapeutic to have a cold blade treating you. That was the theory of the time, but what you say, and I agree with, and Lipton brought out, and many people like that, Freud was a human being and he applied a new method; the human being never disappeared however. It was the new method plus the human being. I think that later the younger analysts like myself, 40 years later, way later, we also maintained the human attitude. I used to talk about this with Victor Calef in San Francisco. He used to say to me, you know Leo, you and I are not like these old, cold…, –he used very unflattering words, meaning cold potatoes, you know, these Europeans.

Not all Europeans were that way, believe me. Some of them were so exuberant that they couldn't even maintain an objectivity. I don't think Fenichel was objective. Fenichel was a great joke teller. I'm afraid I know some of his analysands. From the way they talked about their analysis it was not very inspiring of how Fenichel acted to them in an over relaxed sort of a way. Well, anyway, paring the evidence down to the bone, I feel that there was a period at the beginning, before the emigres came to this country perhaps, when the original Freudian attitude of objectivity, with the retention of the human attitude prevailed. That then came a period of the discovery, and it became a hyper-discovery, of transference, at which time the analyst assumed that the attitude which went with the necessity to develop the transference because of the idealization of the transference, he then acted like, when the patient said, 'How are you today?' he would say, 'I wonder what he means by that?' Or 'Good Morning' or 'Good Afternoon', Gregory Zilbourg always used to say this: 'I wonder what he meant by that?' It became a caricature that was not helpful but was detrimental to the image of psychoanalysis to the average human being. You see that today in the program *In Treatment.*

And Meryl Streep in *It's Complicated* says to her analyst, 'I know you are not supposed to answer this, and you're not supposed to tell me, but I want you to tell me, was it okay for to me have this affair with my ex-husband?' The analyst, who seemed like a decent human guy, says something like, 'It must have been very exciting' or 'You must have had a lot of doubt about it.' And, she says, 'That's not what I want you to say to me.' That kind of caricature overtook psychoanalysis. Joseph Schachter, whom I don't write things with very often, and I'm not much in touch with him, I nevertheless was a member of his panel years ago, in which he questioned the overuse of transference and his biggest supporter on that panel was me. I supported him when everyone else was denouncing him because that was the era in which Gill had established, after Strachey, the dominance of the neutral attitude in order that the transference should take place. And that made coldness. I don't think it fit many of these European people and I think I saw hypocrisy among some of them in trying to establish that, when they were actually quite human to their credit.

Nevertheless, I think this has something to do with your basic question as to what changed over the culture. There was a pre-transference period, then a normal transference period, and a hyper transference period, which had to be overthrown. Today, with enactment, that self-divulgence, that self-revelation, you get already the opposite; of the action of too much involvement of the analyst, where he should remain objective, and he acts out with the patient as well as encouraging the patient to act out with him. It's a big shock therapy, the history of analysis in that sequence.

DK: What do you think of psychoanalysis in 1930s New York?

LR: I was in New York listening to many neurologists who were analytic candidates talking to us about it, who worked at the New York institute. I do not have a big hatred and suspicion of the role of the New York institute. I think they were a very scholarly group, a very well-meaning group, and that they represented the dominance of each era. In 1940, it was that era of coldness. I remember my first analysis; I'd never spoken to anyone like that. I mean, it was the first time, it was inhuman. It didn't seem to fit her. She was just sitting there, she wasn't quite knitting. Later, I saw women analysts knit silently behind the patient. But it was like I had to get used to a new culture and a new relationship. I got used to it quickly because I realized that she was trying to be an observing instrument. You can't be an observing instrument, at least at the beginning, in a familiar way, unless you give up some of your old schmeering ways – when you schmeer each other when you talk. Every conversation is a mutual schmeering. I discovered that over the years. And I sort of admired it. I emulated it later on way too much. When I was a beginning analyst, I was probably a hyper objective analyst. I'd watch my pdqs but I would never stoop to the absurd, like, 'Oh, so there…' In later years, there was a big fire in Los Angeles. Four hundred homes were burning around all our offices in West Los Angeles. Stories used to come out as to what happened. One analyst's patient would say that she smelled smoke, and he'd say, 'Oh, what does that remind you of?' Instead of, 'Where the hell is it coming from? Let's get out of here!' I was always realistic enough never to abandon reality. I used to hear that the Kleinians abandoned reality in London. Rightly or wrongly that's what I used to hear. I heard of a case presentation once where someone opened a door and found a newborn baby at the doorstep - some nut had left the baby there. The analyst was more interested in: 'What comes to your mind?' rather than 'What did you do with it in that terrible emergency situation?' I never lost sight of that.

DK: There were the Controversial Discussions between Kleinians and Anna Freudians during World War II when there was bombing in London, and they were behaving that way.

LR: Exactly. Yes, excessive. I think there were phases in the attitude just as there were phases in the theory. I think they were parallel probably.

DK: In terms of that cold idea, that wasn't how Freud acted nor was that what Freud generally recommended. Freud didn't behave like a Freudian 'should have' in some people's eyes even though his recommendations never involved such coldness. Why did people misunderstand Freud in that way?

LR: Because that misunderstanding took place during the phase of hyper coldness and objectivity.

DK: But that was anathema.

LR: They thought that it was an improvement.

DK: But why did they think that was better?

LR: Because the currency at that time was the observing instrument. You can't have a telescope and have it be emotional. So if you were trying to become a microscope or a telescope you have to be made of metal, not of flesh.

DK: Not only that, if you had a camera in those days you had to be still.

LR: Exactly, and now you can move around, take a video.

DK: But you had to keep it still for a period.

LR: Motionless. Instead you get blurring. No human being is capable of doing what an instrument can do if you put up a tripod and leave it alone. I think all those factors when applied to the human relationship, the dyadic relationship, shows the goal, and that it was a high goal, and that the bar could not be maintained that high, they did as best they could and went through various phases toward achieving it, even thinking that it was good - the right thing to do.

DK: But this developed particularly in the United States.

LR: I think the States took over the leadership of it during WWII, and kept it forever after. It always became something to deal with. That's why they have their own regional status in the IPA, which is so much contested. But it may not have been such a bad thing because they were upholding not ego psychology-- there comes the big fallacy—but the tripartite division of the mental apparatus into the structural theory. That's what was being maintained by the American Psychoanalytic Association, and by the New York Society. And therefore, I don't think the New York Society made any big blunder.

DK: Do you think the fact that psychoanalysis in the American Psychoanalytic Association was a medical specialty?

LR: Another whole subject! I think that it didn't hold up in future history, but I don't think it was evil. I don't think it was reprehensible. I think it had a logical base for it, namely; that the original discovery of psychoanalysis was to make it a therapeutic instrument. At the time, with the Flexner Report and medicine just getting off the ground, therapy covered all kinds of therapy: drug therapy, suggestive therapy. They were going to add suggestive therapy or mental therapy. And by adding, and being insistent that psychotherapy be a part of medicine—which, by the way it should be, but it shouldn't exclusively be-- there was room for a huge cultural influence that we were losing by limiting it to the medical, making it exclusive and blocking its development into the intellectual public, which gave it a huge boost later on.

DK: But when the Europeans moved to the US, they then superimposed themselves on a particular situation where there were people before, where there was a different culture. For example, there was certainly a successful struggle to campaign as well, as Wallerstein said, to make psychoanalysis part of psychiatry in which occurred in 1933. Perhaps some felt that if their ideal was going to be more like the cold eye of a surgeon, then it would be good to have psychoanalysis as an instrument of mechanistic objectivity?

LR: Definitely, yes, it was affected by that decision. That decision then led to a certain of period of history, which was defended against, probably too much and lasted too long. But it had reason, it had a logical reason. And that is, that even today, I think psychotherapy should be part of every MD's armamentarium. It's too bad that it's not, because a lot of the results he gets are by suggestion. It was a huge contribution when suggestion was brought into the realm of science, instead of left to Voodoos i.e., the magnetism. Gregory Zilboorg was the great historian of that period.

DK: There's no contradiction between being a good analyst and being warm and at the same time *neutral*. That word was used as though it was an abstention,

LR Inhuman.

DK: Yes, inhuman. Psychoanalysis moved away from the direct influence of hypnosis. The analyst was neutral or indifferent in trying to not allow the interference of counter-transference issues. This doesn't mean not caring, but it can mean either disinterested or impartial. If you mean the analyst is indifferent to the words of the patient, that the analyst is impartial about it – trying to assess it objectively – that's one thing. But then to say that the analyst doesn't care about it, that's completely different. But if the surgeon, who is carving you up, says, 'I am indifferent to how the patient feels, I don't care about whether there's pain or blood', of course that would be no good. The surgeon in an operation is going to cause some pain, but it doesn't mean that he or she doesn't care about the patient. In fact, the surgeon is doing it for the patient's good, because otherwise he or she would do no harm.

LR: Right, well that's why psychoanalysis was absorbed into medicine for the very reason to make the 'surgeon' more human and caring instead of being indifferent; interested in the patient's psyche instead of considering it outside his realm.

DK: You can have an attitude of a professional distance without it being a human distance.

LR: Without abandoning your humanity.

DK: You were talking about this issue of whether the analyst should be putting forward their view, their fantasies at the same time. An asymmetrical relationship doesn't mean the power relationship is power for the sake of power. Parents have an asymmetrical relationship. You'd have, then, the parent who would had no power.

LR: It reminds me of the permissiveness in the nursery school, where the child says to the teacher, 'Teacher, must I do everything I want today?' He wants some power observance. You

and I both covered a huge common ground and a new idea for a paper about the analytic attitude following on Schafer's work. Also, I notice in the American Psychoanalytic Association Open Line that Jonathan Lear is making a study of good and bad. What's good and what's bad? That's what we've been covering. That objectivity, power, is not bad. Permissiveness is not necessarily good—it sometimes is carelessness. There are so many fine lines. And I discovered all these differences when I started in with the Nixon book (Rangell, 1980). That so much was shady grey, shades of grey. That is what we have done here too.

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