



Between the Analytic Third and the Family, Social, and Cultural Third - A Psychoanalytic Perspective

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Abstract: The analytic third is a concept imbued with significance and importance in psychoanalytic thought. It begins with Freud's Oedipal triangle, continues with Britton's perspective that offers an external view (Britton 1989; Aron 2006), and culminates in the third as a space created between the therapist and the patient, holding the tension between their separateness and unity (Benjamin 2005; Ogden 1994). Despite the profound differences among these forms, I have chosen to focus on the deep connection between the various types. I will address, with the help of these theoretical positions, the mutual dependence of the analytic third (specifically Ogden's version) and the social third, whose significant expression is the law. Finally, I will also propose a reflection on how the existence of the therapeutic dyad is derived from the public space, shaped by it, and how the latter either protects it or, alternatively, intrudes upon it, threatening to drain the therapeutic space of its content.

Key Words: *Analytic third, Social, Cultural, Psychoanalytic, Thought.*

1. Introduction

The Oedipal Third

Traditionally, in Freud's thought, the third is associated with the father, or the "Name of the Father," according to Lacan. Freud argued that the father effectively creates a threatening separation between the child and the object of his desire - the mother. The tumultuous ambivalence that develops towards the frightening, hated, yet also beloved father is resolved through the internalization of the superego. Thus, the moral mandate becomes part of the child. From this point onward, the child can observe himself in the way that the other - the father, or

the law - observes him. From this moment, there also arises an opportunity for social perspective. The child concludes this period of his life by succumbing to a painful sacrifice, but on the other hand, he gains acceptance in the society in which he lives as a functioning individual and a member of culture.

Since Freud's time, through Melanie Klein, and even among the relational writers, the exploration of this developmental achievement has evolved. The theoretical gaze has shifted beyond the drama of jealousy, love, or sexual hatred, toward the ancient challenge faced by every human being - the confrontation with the otherness, and with the principle of reality, and what is beyond the control of the ego. As a legacy from Freud's time, the father symbolizes the precursor of this otherness. The father's otherness, emerging from the dyad of mother-infant, brings with it the challenge of recognizing the existence of the other who is not part of the dyad. The father brings relationships that predate the infant and continue to exist without his participation and beyond his horizon of understanding. As such, he is perceived as severing the umbilical cord and exposing the infant to the law and the limits of his desire. This is a process that will restrict the child's needs but will also protect him and enable adaptive coping within the constraints and demands of reality.

The "other," whose entry is often accompanied by sadness and loss, serves a dual role of protection for the infant: on the one hand, from his own needs, which, if unrestrained, could destroy the benevolent other and even the family framework, and on the other hand, from the needs and greed of others, directed toward the infant himself. The mere appearance of the father, or of the otherness he symbolizes, ventilates the initial dyad and extricates the child from absolute dependence on primary relationships devoid of any separateness. Thanks to the father, the child transitions from a two-dimensional world to a symbolic reference where the self, the other, and the third exist. This triangular dynamic is essential for the emergence of an internal world, as well as for reality testing and healthy object relations.

In this context, Britton writes: "The child's recognition of the relationship between his parents unifies his mental world, sealing it into a world that he shares with both parents and within which various relationships with objects can exist. The closure of the Oedipal triangle, through the connection established between the two parents, provides a boundary line that delineates the internal world. It creates what I call a 'triadic space', meaning a space delineated by the three individuals comprising the Oedipal triangle and all potential relationships between them. Thus, this space includes the possibility of participating in relationships in which a third party observes, as well as the possibility of being an observer on the sidelines in relationships between two individuals" (Britton 1987, p. 84) (Free translation).

This ability to observe from the sidelines, and to contain the frustration that such observation evokes, is one of the early manifestations of all forms of observation - a kind of perception of an external perspective of the self, and the capacity to bear frustrations. When this developmental process is distorted, the consequences can be severe. The ability to hold another perspective besides my own is compromised, and in the absence of appropriate tension and separateness between inner and outer experiences, the "other" perspective may be perceived as one that threatens to dominate my own, thus necessitating its destruction! Otherness becomes a pursuing otherness that incites paranoia, as is often observed in psychotic and borderline conditions or generalized to the social level in fascist regimes.

In such regimes, the other is perceived as an object to be hunted and destroyed, as it poses a threat to the sacred bond between the people and their land, their ideology, their "race," or their religion - a singular symbiotic connection. The ability to contain the tension in which the individual (and the people) are required to bear both the connection to their people, their religion, their leader, their homeland, and also a universal perspective that allows for holding alongside the rights of the other, is undermined within the psyche that cannot sustain a triadic space. A painful sense emerges that one must choose between the two. Thus, in the absence of a triadic space, splitting arises. Israel is no longer Jewish and democratic, with all the complexities and conflicts such a combination generates but experiences a collapse from the depressive position to a constricted and paranoid stance, where one must choose a pole and declare the other pole an enemy camp.

From the Oedipal Third to the Social-Cultural Third: The Law as a Shell

If we return from the discourse on the divided national psyche to the individual level, we understand that the father, as the severer of the umbilical cord (I clarify that I refer here to the father as a symbol and a function that exists, of course, in both the actual father and mother) is also a connecting function. A function that allows the child entrance into life in the symbolic world. This world requires communicating one's needs, listening to those of others, and negotiating about them under the auspices of law and cultural norms. These now constitute the third side that serves as the quiet, observing, and defining backdrop of all interactions between individuals, between families, and also between nations. Entering the realm of the third means that there is always another, and it must be taken into account! The other may restrict me, harm me, destroy me, or even respond to my desires. He may also be the other of the Winnicottian phase of "object use." He may be the other of mutual recognition in the sense of Benjamin, that is, one who enriches me and establishes a dialogue with me. Perhaps an "other" to be considered, due to being a subject in his own right. In any case, the other is always present:

limiting, standing in opposition, challenging, but also reflecting, nurturing, and growing myself, precisely because he delineates the horizon of his omnipotence.

Paradoxically, the existence of this otherness allows one to safely dive into moments of unity. In other words, the later use of the concept of 'the third' in psychoanalysis (Ogden 1994 & Benjamin 2005) posits the interplay between separateness and unity; the moments of unity that can dwell safely, because this unity will not turn engulfing. There is also separateness; there is law. In a healthy parent, separateness does not necessitate the presence of a concrete other. The intervention of the second parent is not required for the caring parent (traditionally the mother) to bear the law within herself and to be able to temporarily hold it in the role within the parent-infant dyad. With multiple external perspectives on this dyad: his relationships with other people, bearing the otherness within him and maintaining a profound, multi-layered connection with it, which, if it is beneficial, does not require an external object to serve as a barrier between the mother and her infant. The perspective, the ability to hold a triadic space, is part of the personality structure of the parent. The father, in Ogden's words, is actually found within the psyche of the mother (Ogden 2001). In a healthy state, therefore, an individual is always in motion between two poles, one of separateness and the other of unity with his objects, all under the auspices of the law. This 'third' I propose to understand as an invisible 'fatherly' shell, knowledge and internalization of unwritten laws that delineate the conditions of possibility for a primary relational fabric, between the infant and his primary caregiver. To better understand this, it helps to think about the concept of "the known that is not considered" (Bollas 1987). Bollas refers to "the known that is not considered" as the product of the unspoken rules of the game between the child and the mother, which over the course of life become the fabric of the child's existence. What was a dyadic dynamic with its own "grammar rules" has become an elusive quality that defines the child's being, which has grown out of it, and it is this that generates his personality. I would add and argue that similarly, the law, as part of the father's function, also creates (and thanks to) the conscious prohibitions - his own "known that is not considered," which exists alongside the dyadic game rules, interwoven with them and sometimes against them. Thanks to the law's boundaries, which protect and restrict the dyadic space, a shared maternal-paternal matrix is created, defining the possibility of existence and movement within the dyad.

The third of the law derives its importance from being external to the dyad and to the broader dynamics of the family. Therefore, it serves as a point to which all lines converge (in a drawing), allowing for perspective among the various objects representing absolute values outside of the familial culture. Alongside this, this third is also manifest within the family at

the most intimate levels, both overt and covert. It is only seemingly external, as in fact it structures it. Just as every family is part of the fabric that structures it. Thus, the maternal and paternal spaces exist within the triangle: individual-family-culture, intersecting with each other and defining and creating each other, similar to the definition of Ogden's analytic third.

The language, customs, and cultural perceptions embodied in language, art, daily rituals, and the law itself, I shall refer to as "the cultural third." These too influence the mother-child dyad and the entire familial space. They define, in light of these values, how children will be raised, whether they should primarily be individuals, or alternatively, loyal members of the family, tribe, or nation. What is the relationship between the individual and collective components in their lives, and how will these be expressed in the practice of child-rearing? Is it permissible to hit children? Do children sit at the same table as adults? Are children expected to be creative? Obedient? Loyal? Free? Are girls expected to play with dolls and wear pink? How overt will the discontent be if they do not do so? These cultural values are encoded in every familial connection, in every mother-child play, in every family meal, and even in every breastfeeding of an infant. The cultural DNA replicates in many variations, creating a unique "known that is not considered" for each family and even changing with every child, yet inevitably bearing the genetic imprint of the "great father" - the cultural third.

The Cultural Third in Dictatorial Regimes

The influence of culture and its penetration into every individual and every family is a well-established fact. However, it is also worth noting here the function of the "cultural third" as a shell. Under conditions of 'cultural health,' the cultural third primarily serves as a protector and organizer; however, in conditions of cultural illness, such as in dictatorial regimes, it may also become invasive, suffocating, and even persecutory. In such regimes, there is a collapse of the triadic space, as well as of the tension between separateness and unity, creating immense pressure to suppress the existence of diverse and varied perspectives. This is similar to what Ogden (1994) described as "the enslaving analytic third". In this state, the third serves as a catalyst for projective identifications with coercive and violent power. The tension of separateness-unity that sustains the third then collapses toward the pole of engulfing unity.

In my clinical experience, I have seen this primarily in therapy with individuals who have immigrated from countries where the regime is not democratic: they experience a toxic absence of boundaries, deeply infiltrating the familial structure. This structure is often characterized by demanding and totalitarian parent-child symbioses that 'capture' the individual self or exhaust it regarding its separateness. This war leaves the individual perforated and permeable to corrosive guilt and even to magical thinking about the power of the 'great other'

- the parent, society, regime - and a constant fear of its destructive vengeance. The truth is always absolute and always aligned with and in favor of the great parent or regime. While the individual or child wrong and sometimes even betrays! Yet this truth is not trustworthy, capricious, and even insane. The fragility of the narcissistic parent and regime is mired in fear that their weakness and/or lies will be exposed, and then they will be abandoned. This fact is experienced as abandonment, turning into a constant despotism where coercion and the terror of victims are intertwined. The struggle for individuality and sanity that migration to a democratic state allows may result in a traumatic rupture from parent-past-homeland, and even from parts of the self.

The Therapeutic Room: Between the Cultural and Analytic Thirds

The therapeutic dyad is not immune to these influences. This dyad is also enveloped in the outlines shaped by the cultural third. It is defined by the space it creates and is constrained in spaces that the cultural self denies. The concept of dynamic therapy based on psychoanalytic understanding requires foundational assumptions about cultures, such as the sanctity of the individual and his right to internal freedom and authentic life. Values such as truth, freedom, and the sanctification of individuality are not present in totalitarian or collectivist cultures.

This matter is much deeper than the simple notion of "the safe space" that we are accustomed to thinking of as a therapeutic structure. It is clear that therapy cannot exist if, for example, the patient feels that his secrets are not kept, or if there is eavesdropping in the therapy room. Could it be that the therapist is an agent of the regime seeking traitors? These are self-evident parameters of "gross" boundaries without which therapy cannot occur. However, the essential issue is even more profound. The existence or absence of a protective social third penetrates the "inner walls" of the self of both the therapist and the patient and shapes the analytic third that is created between them. This does not only refer to the physical walls of the therapy room, which must be stable and secure.

In circumstances of social health, the existence of the social third is not felt at all. Freedom of expression is taken for granted. The patient generally trusts, without a second thought, the health department that granted a license to his therapist to practice mental health care. It is presumed that the therapist has been trained for the profession (of course, in the case of licensed professions). The patient also assumes that his therapist holds more or less democratic values, which render the patient highly valued, simply by virtue of being a person - regardless of whether he is male or female, Eastern or Ashkenazi, religious or secular.

In conditions of relational social health, the political tensions between the groups, whatever they may be, sometimes also infiltrate the room. However, they cannot destroy the

value of the sanctity of the individual and his dignity, or the value of the sanctity of the mental truth that the therapeutic dyad can cultivate.

Finally, the restraining power of the law itself also comes into play. The patient knows that the therapist will be punished if he exposes his secrets. Not only due to personal/professional ethics, but because the law dictates so. The patient knows that if the therapist attacks or sexually exploits her, she can lodge a complaint against him. The cultural norm from which the law has emerged, and to which it repeatedly defines, will cry out against this crime. The patient is not solely reliant on the goodwill and personal values of the therapist as a person, but there exists an unperceived "third" that does not need to be remembered in daily life (Brant 2023). This "third" exists only as a constraining airspace, transparent yet essential for normal life. It is a shared "psychic skin" that envelops and protects both the therapist and the patient (Anzieu 1995). This function, when the "fatherly" aspect - the supervising, restraining, norm-creating aspect - enables the existence of the "motherly" aspect - the accepting and containing one - effectively creates the "cultural third".

The law is a product of social norm. However, it is also created and shaped by the "known that is not considered" culturally. This is the deep normative climate that influences every individual and every interaction between them. What might happen if laws are enacted that continue to discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals? Or laws that dictate that women must sit at the back of the bus? That require separation in national parks? Gradually eroding personal status? How will a patient feel then in front of a male therapist, with him opposite her? Will there not be a subtle yet profound change? Even if the therapist himself holds established democratic values and was raised on the principles of relative equality between the sexes that has been achieved through many years of effort. And of course, he would never think of exploiting the patient or consciously treating her as a lesser human being. How will the awareness of the sharp social power gap between them affect the "analytic air" that the two breathe? Will this situation not necessarily distort the "analytic third"? Will it introduce fear, suspicion, surrender, control, sadomasochism, guilt over privileges, and more? And how will the "analytic climate" be affected with an LGBTQ+ therapist or patient, when the law views them as deviants and distorters?

Even if we assume for the sake of theoretical discussion that the therapeutic dyad will succeed, thanks to the trust existing within it, in isolating itself from the toxic climate prevailing outside, creating a dyadic-autarkic economy, detached from the general mental ecology. This may only be possible in the first generation (a generation that grew up on the principles of democracy denied to it). To what extent can isolated 'bunkers' of freedom be created in the

therapy rooms? Is there not an impossible contradiction in applying the concept of a "bunker of freedom"? Is it not the goal of our work to integrate patients into the fabric of the general social relations? And what will happen with the next generation? Will a patient agree to entrust her innermost secrets to a man? Or will she perhaps seek a female psychologist in his place? I will step back for a moment from this horror scenario, which I hope arises only from my own fears. I will turn to its more hidden operation. This one that protects, envelopes, or conversely. This one that threatens with the invasion of the "cultural third," transforming the delicate balances in the perception of the law from protected to persecutory - will constrict the breathing space of every therapeutic, couple, or friendship relationship. It will saturate connections with fear and unconscious or semi-conscious power relations. These already exist between men and women, or between privileged groups and those with fewer abilities. However, the democratic cultural third often prevents this tension from collapsing into its poles, thereby allowing and even nurturing personal, civic, and therapeutic functioning. The therapy room, protected by democratic values, opens the possibility for an almost infinite dialogical space, and at its developed edge, also a playful space. In this space, the fears, traumas, and suspicions (both personal and national) can express themselves safely, be contained, and even undergo processing and transformation similar to the mother-child dyad. Such work necessitates the existence of an external law, a cultural third, that ensures fears remain within the psyche, are processed as such, and do not become reality.

2. Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to describe the deep connection between the various types of 'thirds,' according to the understanding of psychoanalytic theory, their interdependent relationships, and their relevance to the transformations occurring in the country during this period. How the functions of the 'mother' and 'father' that create the first Oedipal 'third' for the infant geometrically outline a triadic thinking perspective, allowing for perspective. These functions are defined and shaped by the cultural-social third. All of these intersect in the therapy room in a manner that can influence the analytic third.

The analytic third needs to develop into a potential space. Even if this space initially lacks the capacity for play, it still requires the possibility to play. Play, as Winnicott (1971) taught us, is a delicate and magical encounter between imagination and reality, between the self and the other. It is a vital yet extremely fragile bubble, one that can only exist if the child feels protected from collapsing into the pole of imagination (psychosis) or the pole of reality and its demands. The mother is entrusted with the protection of this space, acting as a reliable and non-

intrusive shell. Winnicott argues that the father, who confronts the external world at this time while the mother is wholly invested in the infant, enables her to fulfill her role, serving as a shell for her.

I, further argue that the symbolic 'father' - the law - allows them to construct the mental and interpersonal space by functioning as a reliable protector, a fair restrainer, and not as an intruder or pursuer that tears apart the mother-child dyad. Together, the 'father' function and the 'mother' function ensure that the internal world does not spill into reality nor be harmed by it. Thus, the anger and fear are contained by the familial alpha function (Bion 1976), and the adults continue to be an observing eye, present, and guardians of familial balance.

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