

especially with regard to the details, potential impacts, and uncertainties of the outcomes of the education and training that we offer and through which many of us earn substantial portions of our own living.

Author Biography

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Psychodynamic Psychotherapy with Transactional Analysis: Theory and Narration of a Living Experience

Anna Emanuela Tangolo

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It is, perhaps, the subtitle—"Theory and Narration of a Living Experience"—to Anna Emanuela Tangolo's new book that captures the heart and spirit of the author's beautiful reflections on her experiences in her practice of transactional analysis. She writes this in her introduction:

Listening is a deep process. It means meeting the other person, with his attitude, clothes, and smell, the way he looks at the world, sighs or keeps silent. Then comes the tale, the narration: a brief story, a problematic event or the story of his life. At this moment, the patient himself is the narrator and the professional. I learn, smell, feel, try to have access to the world of meanings, emotions, feelings, in the film or novel I'm being introduced to. (p. xvi)

The reader gets an immediate sense of the unique voice of this author and recognizes that this book is not just another overview and repetition of basic transactional analysis theory and technique. Tangolo's voice is alive and personal throughout, and we readers are invited into a living experience of her thinking and work. Her voice is more often poetic than didactic, evoking images, memories, fantasies, wishes, and dreads.

Tangolo characterizes the roles of the therapist as those of "a scientist and an anthropologist, a doctor and a shaman." She describes the rich interplay of intuition, observation, analysis, and diagnosis so that "like a doctor of the mind, the therapist leads the patient to restructure and reorder emotions and interpretations of human experience" (p. 12).

This book presents transactional analysis not so much as a theoretical frame of reference but as a working structure. Several of the opening chapters consider fundamental aspects of the TA treatment structure—the setting, the clinical interview, contractual treatment, and basic techniques—richly

illustrated with case vignettes. Tangolo makes it clear that theory in and of itself does not guarantee effective treatment, pointing out that the minds of counselors and psychotherapists are as full of queens, kings, dragons, and theaters awaiting action and drama as are those of our clients. She argues that “only good psychotherapy and a constant personal and professional growth through supervision and professional updating can enable therapists to provide the tools to identify and keep under control their own instincts and archaic parental or childish levels” (p. 54).

Be they in the professional or the client, Tangolo does not shy away from acknowledging the darker corners of the work we do: “It is very likely that, as we approach the deepest phases of therapeutic work, we are bitten and attacked by the demon. . . . An expert therapist knows that the demon is just a frightened child that bites. However, he or she does not underestimate how dangerous impulses are” (p. 99). The author offers clear examples of the actively protective stance she takes during risky periods of treatment, not only confronting or interpreting risky or life-threatening behaviors but also providing protective interventions and structures outside of the therapy sessions.

What is most outstanding and exciting to me about this book is the way Tangolo places group treatment back at the heart of transactional analysis. Her first reference to her perspective on groups comes in the introduction:

Then, entering a group helps me break the spell of interminable therapy. . . . I particularly like working with groups; I consider groups as a privileged laboratory for change and a pathway to healing. . . . There is the possibility to share food with brothers and there are brothers to play with, to spend time with, explore together, and sleep embracing each other [I suspect the original Italian was siblings, rather than brothers]. In the group, one goes back to the archaic, primordial state in which desires and fears re-emerge. (pp. xviii-xix)

Tangolo is clearly wary of the potential seduction of the therapeutic dyad and sees group treatment as an essential element in long-term, in-depth treatment. She observes:

Shifting from individual setting to group setting is particularly important for those who are stuck and cannot help looking back or keep reproducing, with the therapist, the drama of their primary dramatic experience. . . . The group is a shock, it means being thrown into the world, or school, or children's games, or adolescent's games, or sexual dynamics connected with one's growth. “I am no longer the only one, I'm not your only focus, I'm not so special for you.” It represents loss, and the child drastically lowers his expectations and fantasies. But at the same time: “I am no longer alone when you're not there, I'm with people of my own kind, I can look in the mirror, play, spend my time, learn. (p. 103)

Tangolo articulates the shift from the primarily vertical structure of individual, dyadic psychotherapy, with its emphasis on parent/child relationships, to the lateral relationships of siblings and peers. She stresses that groups draw us out of the nest of parental relations—be they good, bad, ugly, or indifferent—into the world of the lateral and the layers and meaning of belonging among others like ourselves. These are the relationships that accompany and permeate every developmental transition over the course of life. Reading this book, I was reminded of van Beekum's (2009) writing about groups. Like Tangolo, he has addressed ways in which groups evoke our histories and projections with regard to lateral relations. He has reminded us that they are many and unavoidable:

Arguments between a brother and a sister, play of children, lovemaking, dancing with someone of a different race, fighting between men, men working together, women watching men, working with my sister, children learning together, speaking with a peer . . . being part of a generation, dangerous siblings all sitting in a room and being handed a stick, feeling curious or frustrated with another, being left out of the fun. (p. 134)

The list goes on. I am sure most of us can add to this list from our own experiences in sibling and peer relationships. I suspect that the wounds, rejections, passions, and uncertainties of our lateral relationships are a major factor in our enduring ambivalence toward group treatment and the fading of group treatment from the transactional analysis literature. Tangolo places group work back at the center.

Chapter 11 begins to address her work with dreams. I say “begins” here, because I found the chapter rather incomplete. On the one hand, I welcomed it, as this is another area of undertheorized work in transactional analysis, but on the other hand, I had the distinct sense that Tangolo has much more to say on the topic than what she conveys in this short chapter.

Psychodynamic Psychotherapy with Transactional Analysis seems directed primarily toward a professional audience. I think all transactional analysts, be they beginners or experienced, will learn and profit from this lively and personal book. Professionals from other disciplines will find in it a rich, spirited account of transactional analysis in practice. At the same time, I can readily see offering it to clients who are interested in having a deeper, fully informed accounting of TA. Tangolo has given us a wonderfully rich addition to our expanding literature in contemporary transactional analysis.

Reference

- van Beekum, S. (2009). Siblings, aggression, and sexuality: Adding the lateral. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 39, 129–135

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