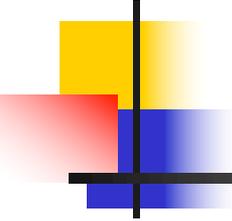


# Role of the Therapist in Transference/Countertransference Dynamics

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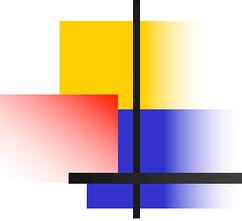
International Psychotherapy Institute  
Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Couple Therapy  
James L. Poulton, Ph.D.  
[jloulton@mac.com](mailto:jloulton@mac.com)



# Outline for Today's Presentation

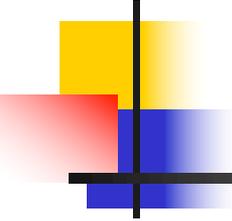
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- I. Case of Dan and Carol
- II. Reciprocal Cycle of Projective and Introjective Identification in Couples
- III. Projective Identification as the Foundation of Transference
- IV. Types of Transference in Couple Therapy
- V. The Therapist's Use of Countertransference
- VI. Working Between the Individual and the Couple



# Case Example: Dan and Carol

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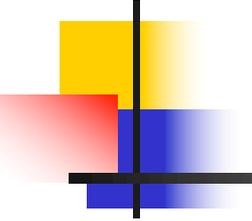


# Projective/Introjective Identification (PI/II)

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- Primary means of unconscious communication
- Primary steps:
  - Frightening or unacceptable part of Partner A is repressed, split off
  - Split-off part is projected into Partner B
  - “Object induction”
  - Introjective identification (II) by Partner B, depending on valency

(Klein, 1946, 1952; Scharff, J., 1992)

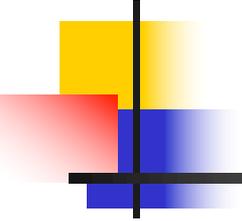


# Mutual Participation in PI/II

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- Projected elements from Partner A are internalized and introjected by Partner B
- Projected elements from Partner B are internalized and introjected by Partner A
- ““Through the reciprocal interaction of interlocking projections and introjections, internal conflicts of each of the marital partners have become translated into concrete modes of perceiving and behaving within the marital relationship.”

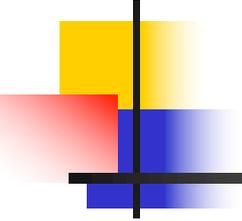
(Meissner, 1984)



# How Mutual PI/II Works

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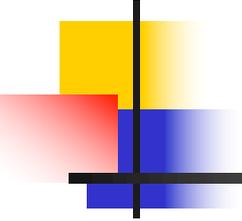
- Unconscious emotion (or desire, defense, etc.) creates atmosphere of ambiguous origin, felt by both partners
- Because the emotion is linked to anxiety and its origin is unidentified, it feels persecutory, heightening each partner's anxiety and sense of danger
- When both partners contribute unconscious emotions, each partner's anxiety escalates the other's, building up *shared* anxieties, frightening objects, and pathological defenses



# Joint Marital Personality

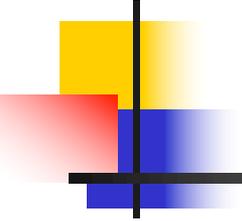
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- Mutual PI/II creates “joint marital personality”:
  - “Joint ego boundaries” (Dicks, 1967)
  - Joint personality can be seen in shared or complementary objects, anxieties, defenses, resistances, models of marriage, phantasies (Dicks, 1967; Ruzczynski, 1993)
  - Double doses of fear, pain, anger
- The partners “complement each other’s dominant pathogenic object relation from the past” (Kernberg, 1995)



# Dan and Carol's Shared Objects, Emotions, Defenses, Phantasies

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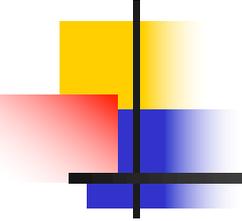


# Projective Identification as Foundation of Transference

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- Transference = the urge to transfer unacknowledged early object relations, infantile experience and emotions onto treatment and the therapist.
- Splitting, repression and projective identification are essential components of transference

(Klein, 1952)

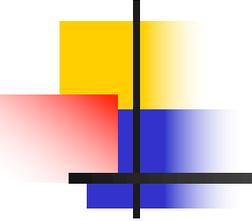


# Subtypes of Transference

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- Contextual
  - Related to Winnicott's 'environment mother': arms-around relationship, creating a safe or unsafe holding environment
- Focused
  - Related to Winnicott's 'object mother': mother offers herself to be used as an object by the infant as the focused subject of its love and hate

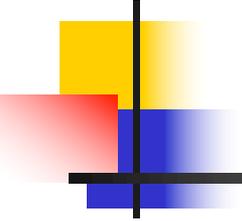
(Scharff & Scharff, 1987)



# Transferences in Couple Therapy

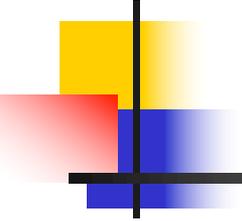
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- Each partner has, individually:
  - Contextual transference toward the couple and the therapy
  - Focused transference toward the other partner and the therapist
- The couple transference
  - A shared transference (contextual and focused) toward the therapist
  - Based in the joint personality (shared objects, defenses, anxieties, etc.)
- Couples move rapidly between multiple types of transference



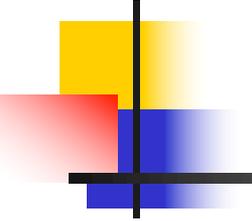
# Dan and Carol's Shared Focused Transference

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# Dan and Carol's Shared Contextual Transference

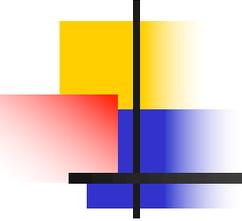
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# Goals of Couple Therapy

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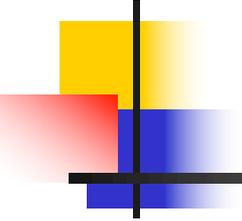
- Provide setting in which the unconscious projected elements in the couple (individual and in the joint personality) can emerge
- Identify, understand and work through those elements (therapeutic containment) so they can be felt to be less terrifying
- Facilitate the creation of a 'marital container,' in which both partners 'can feel free to explore in the other the projected aspects of themselves in order slowly to re-own them.' (Cleavelly, 1993)



# Evaluating the PI/II Cycle: How to Listen

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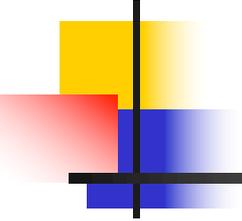
- Reverie
- Play
- Evenly suspended attention
  - Direction-less listening, removed from theoretical presuppositions and therapeutic goals
- Negative capability
  - “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” - John Keats
- Listening through the “magic filter” (Ferro, 2009)



# Evaluating the PI/II Cycle: Transferences

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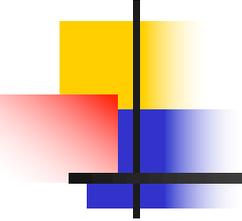
- What are each partner's primary internal objects?
- What causes the appearance of anxiety, aggression, helplessness?
- What aspects of their internal world is projected into their partner, the couple's interactions, and the treatment?



# Evaluating the PI/II Cycle: Joint Personality

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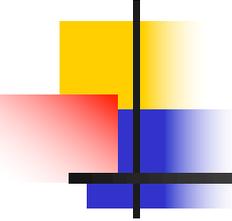
- How does each partner's PI trigger/reinforce the other's?
- How rigid and unchanging is the PI/II cycle?
- How does the PI/II cycle distort each partner's understanding of the other?
- What resources does the couple have to contain the emotions generated by the PI/II cycle?



# The Therapist's Use of Countertransference

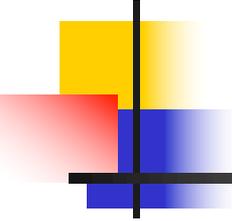
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- Countertransference is an “instrument of research into the patient’s unconscious” (Heimann, 1950)
- Based in trial identification (cf., Meissner, 2010) with the couple’s transferences
- Container/contained model: Through use of CT, patients’ unconscious projections are given back in metabolized form
- Therapist’s and patients’ unconsciouses are in continual interaction



# Dan and Carol: Countertransference Responses

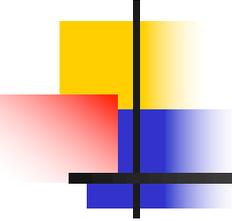
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# Working Between the Individual and the Couple

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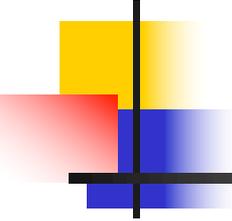
- All transferences are in play in any session
- The therapist tracks what kind of transference is operating at what point, and focuses the couple's attention on important transferences (whatever their origin)
- The therapist explores both individual transferences and joint transferences (between the partners and toward the therapist)
- 'An assumption that everything is shared denies individual differences just as much as the assumption of individuality disregards the essential relatedness of experience' (Clulow, 2001)



# Working Between the Individual and the Couple, Cont'd.

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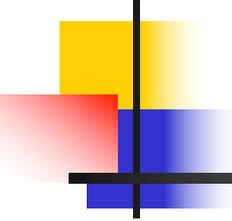
- Focus on shared transferences (i.e., elements of joint personality) is essential and fundamental
- Individual transference analysis is done in the context of shared transference analysis
- In this way, the therapist:
  - Emphasizes that both partners have a role in the couple difficulties
  - Contributes to creation of the couple as 'marital container'
  - Facilitates differentiation and individuation



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