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## **SAMBA, TANGO, PUNK: Reflections on Steven Knoblauch’s “Contextualizing attunement within a polyrhythmic weave: The psychoanalytic samba**

Submitted draft

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*Humans perceive and move continually during every waking minute, and much of this has an emotional valence. (Thelen, 2005, p. 262)*

### **Introduction: Falling in**

It was in a moment of unwanted stillness that the familiar, urgent, and subtly deadening pace of speech between analyst and analysand collapsed and set the analytic dyad careening into unexpected inner spaces. This was not the sanctioned silence of traditional analytic technique--the carefully crafted restraint and receptive unspeaking of the analyst—but a silent *falling*. The security of the ongoing enactment of mutual pressure and gratification suddenly fell into an unbidden and unexpectedly intimate place of quiet.

It is this moment of unplanned silence within many hours of psychoanalytic discourse with his patient, Warren, which Knoblauch elaborates in his discussion of a polyrhythmic weave. He describes his participation in the characteristically high paced, animated dialogue sustained by Warren. But Knoblauch notices that Warren’s “mask-like-optimistic-gets-it-done-kind-of-guy-smile” (p. ) suddenly and severely collapses. Warren doesn’t seem to notice this shift, but Knoblauch does, and his noticing has an immediate impact of an “internal ‘mindlock’ where [he] can find no thoughts and no words” (p. ).

Knoblauch’s silence is not welcomed by Warren. It does not seem that Warren quite registers the change within himself, but he definitely registers the change in his analyst’s familiar pace, this too-long wordless pause. Warren does not like it. He panics, “Are you li.....li.....listening?” (p. ) in a

tone Knoblauch describes as weak and high pitched like that of a scared little boy. Warren's voice shakes, his words fail. Knoblauch, too, falls into his own, unspoken countertransferential realm of sensation/reverie/memory evoking failed analyst/failed parent/failed son:

Countertransferentially in this moment, Warren is my father disappointed.....no infuriated that I have not met his expectation for emotional closeness that he demands.....an emotional closeness that he does not initiate or reciprocate himself. I am able to wonder, am I in the transference Warren's father or mother or both? Does my pause feel like narcissistic fury or possibly worse, annihilating indifference? This "long" moment is out of control and terrifying for Warren. And for me?  
...Am I out of control, terrified? Well, I am uncertain, at first, without thoughts or words to understand, contain or modulate Warren's emerging pain. (p. )

As Knoblauch is able to tolerate and embrace his countertransferential tumble, a space begins to open up first *within* Knoblauch and then *between* them, a space without words. "What fills this space then, is a form of 'language'..., communicating meaningful affective state and state change, a communication that is not possible to articulate in the language of words at this point." (p. )

Knoblauch's paper is a prime example of the clinical discussions that are increasingly emergent in the psychoanalytic literature signaling a gradual, but deepening recognition of how much of our communications and understandings are not derived through verbal and symbolic processes (Anderson, 2008; Aron & Anderson, 1998; Bloom, 2006; Bucci, 1997a, 1997b, 2005, 2010; Cornell, 2008, 2010; Gentile, 2006, 2007; La Barre, 2001, 2005; Knoblauch, 2000; 2005). Within the past couple of decades psychoanalysis has become better at keeping the body in mind, but Knoblauch's paper is an important contribution to the growing analytic literature that is recognizing that the body has a mind of its own, that the body is a fundamental and life-long means of knowing and organizing the self (Bucci, 2008, Cornell, 2008).

### **Nonconscious and subsymbolic organization**

The Freudian legacies of *the* Unconscious and of unconscious experience, rather like the concepts of transference and countertransference, have been stretched, knocked about, and revised almost to the point of meaninglessness. I would argue for the retention of the term *unconscious* to refer to those realms of psychic organization that, for whatever reason and function, are held out/split off from conscious awareness. For the purposes of this discussion, I will be using the terms "non-conscious" and "subsymbolic" to refer to those realms of somato-sensory experience that are often out of conscious awareness and not organized

or expressed primarily in language. I use non-conscious (Cornell & Landaiche, 2008; Mancina, 2007) to convey the fact that our bodies and minds, without defensive intentions, receive and process phenomenal amounts of internal, environmental and interpersonal stimuli with no conscious effort or awareness. This is quite consistent with Bucci's discussions (1997a, 2008) of the traps of the traditional Freudian metapsychology and her conceptualization of subsymbolic processes, which include sound, imagery, and smell (Owen, 2010) as well as motoric, visceral, and sensate experiences. Bucci sees these modes of experience as dominant in emotional communication and many of our non-cognitively based learnings. These are predominantly unlanguage modes of experience and psychic organization, not as much primitive as Freud suggested, but providing a foundational intelligence that is frequently below conscious awareness. Recent years have witnessed various efforts to capture and convey these realms of experience in theoretical language, as in Berne's script protocol (1963), Bollas's unthought known and countertransference readiness (1987), Stern's unformulated experience (2003), or Lyons-Ruth's implicit relational knowing (1998), to name a few examples.

This does not mean that nonconscious or subsymbolic experience cannot be brought into language, but it is to suggest that the experience is not necessarily enhanced or better expressed through language. For example, I recently bought an unfamiliar jar of tomatillo salsa, as my favorite brand was out of stock. Rather hesitantly, I tasted it, expecting to be disappointed. It was terrific. Then I read the label, which rhapsodized, "Not unlike the time of day when the sun and the moon share the sky, [this salsa] is perched precariously between relentless heat and refreshing cool. An intriguing, enigmatic balance that flows together as gracefully as its name." While evoking the disquieting search for the subtle hints of rust and chestnut that one is supposed to relish in the allegedly lingering aftertaste borne by a fine cabernet, reading the label did not in actuality enhance or inform my experience of the salsa.

Analysts have long been careful to listen to the multiple layers of meaning, conscious and unconscious, to *what* is being said. Now we are learning to attend to the *how* as well as the *what*. Knoblauch, a jazz musician as well as a psychoanalyst, is particularly attuned through sound and rhythm. Like La Barre, who writes of "the distinct *physicality of conversational patterning in the analytic setting*" (2005, p. 254, emphasis in the original), Knoblauch's primary mode of subsymbolic experience seems to be through sound and rhythm. The centrality of rhythmic matching and mismatching has been demonstrated repeatedly in contemporary infant research (Beebe, Knoblauch, Rustin, & Sorter, 2005; Downing, 2004; Panksepp & Trevarthen, 2009; Tronick, 2007; Trevarthen, 2009).

There is vast potential for understanding and emotional contact when we open ourselves to *how* something is said to us, as well as *how* we respond in pace,

tone, postural shifts, facial expression, etc. For example, Sonntag (2006) writes compellingly of her use of tone and rhythm in her efforts to reach the impact of early trauma in her patient, Olivia. While Olivia's speech in session is "sprightly" and robust, she writes poetry to Sonntag to communicate a very different sense of self. Encouraging Olivia to read her poetry aloud in session, Sonntag hears a very different tone, "expressing both deep sadness and hatred, quieted to a less pressured, frenzied rhythm. I heard a voice in Olivia never spoken before" (p.321). Perhaps even more important, Sonntag does not see this as a unidirectional communication but one in which she must also be engaged in her responses:

I quiet my thoughts and let words become rhythms, sounds, shapes, and colors. Hatred pounds, blood sings, vaginas speak, and feelings move out from behind shadows—they whisper, they cry, and they scream. (pp. 330-331)

In opening herself to the sensate realities of her patient's raw and scarred body, Sonntag is able to communicate a lived sense of a shared, if horrifying, reality, when—as Olivia says it—"Words just don't cut it" (p. 330).

As Knoblauch unfolds and elaborates the clinical moment with Warren, he takes the reader to Brasil for a samba lesson and stresses the polyrhythmic weave of a psychoanalytic samba. In a similar fashion, combining sound, rhythm and actual movement, Bucci offers a vivid description of the tango as her vehicle for conveying a sense of the nonverbal, bodily communications that go on in the analytic dyad. She writes in a rather tantalizing metaphor for analytic engagement:

...the interaction occurs primarily in the subsymbolic bodily mode; verbal guidance is too slow, too limited, violates the flow of the dance. ...We must delight in our partner as in a delicious meal of grilled meat; we must feel our partner, not just love and delight but a far more complex range of feelings including aspects of dominance and submission and their consequences. (2010, 235-236)

Bucci rather successfully conveys the rich and enlivening potential of a multi-modal feast—to be infected, affected, shaped, and literally moved by one's partner/patient.

As I read Knoblauch's discussion, I thought of a series of interchanges with my first psychoanalyst, classically trained in the 1950's and in his 70's when I began working with him. A kind, soft-spoken man, he would often frame *his* associations by quoting lyrics from Broadway show tunes, sometimes even, with a bit of humor, singing them to me. While I appreciated his rather novel effort to communicate something that was evoked in him in relation to me, the lyrics landed in my psyche with a dull thud. For a long time, I was too polite to say anything. I simply accepted his offering and made of it what I could. But there

was one thud too many, and I made him an audio tape (this was well before the days of burning a cd or downloading into an iPod) of songs that spoke to my psyche: Patti Smith and Lou Reed. He listened and then returned the tape with a quiet, "Well. I see. So I guess I'll be keeping the show tunes to myself". But he didn't stop there. He talked with me of realizing a great deal about me simply in hearing the tone, the intensity, and the aggression of the music that formed me in *my* times. The crude and passionate belligerence of this punk revolution was woven into my way of being. He came to see that my directness, my aggression, and my outsider position was not merely a defiant defense against parental passivity but a kind of personal awakening in keeping with my generation. We spoke more openly of our generational differences, which were significant at both conscious and subsymbolic registers, opening another channel for analytic discourse.

### **Cracks in the "fundamental law": speaking to the somatic underpinnings of enactment**

Knoblauch vividly conveys the compelling enactment that accompanied an analysis that, while productive on many levels, created a "relatively conflict free collusion of pseudo-competence" (p. ). He goes on, "...I have been coordinating with Warren's rapid flow in an embodied sense of connection, an exhilarating glide narcissistically fulfilling sense of power and triumph" (p. ). In the pivotal session that provides the basis for this article, the unconscious enactment unexpectedly *cracks*. This is not a crack created by interpretation or insight but by silence, a non-conscious shift in the style of speaking, in the rhythm of their enactment, rather than through the content of their speech.

Decades before the identification and appreciation of unconscious enactments in the analytic literature (Jacobs, 1986; McLaughlin, 1991; Chused, 1991), Berne used the term "protocol" to underscore the unconscious patterns of *how things are done* within the structures of relationships. For Berne, what was said in session could be a defense against a more fundamental, unconscious (and often unbearable) protocol that was expressed through action and the behavioral structure of the therapeutic relationship, here described in his typically humorous way:

Each person has an unconscious life plan, formulated in his earliest years, which he takes every opportunity to further as much as he dares in a given situation. This plan calls for people to respond in a desired way....The original set of experiences which forms the pattern for the plan is called the protocol....Partly because of the advantages of being an infant, even under bad conditions, every human being is left with some nostalgia for his infancy and often his childhood as well; therefore, in later years he strives to bring as close as possible a reproduction of the original protocol situation, either to live it through again if it was enjoyable, or to try to re-

experience it in a more benevolent form if it was unpleasant. (1963, pp. 218-219)

Steven and Warren were unconsciously enveloped in a highly desired way of responding to one another, a “benevolent” and compelling style of relating that held their attention away from a far more fundamental grief and disturbance.

Significantly, the mutative process was not one of mutual, verbal reflection on the nature of the enactment and its undoing. Rather, more in keeping with McLaughlin (2005) and Black (2003), what seems to have been mutative was Knoblauch’s capacity to tolerate and attend to his own somatic/emotional rupture:

These effects of my pause and the dissociation that it both brings into focus and dissipates are not yet available to me for reflection. ...Rather, what I am describing in my narration occurs before reflection and symbolization can take place. Yet, what I am describing is so powerful in its affective resonance, that it becomes a significant mutative moment in which, not by attunement or interpretation, but through *experience on non-symbolized, non-verbalized dimensions of communication*, what I am here calling the polyrhythmic weave, Warren is shifted in his experience, his capacity to associate and begin to mourn the loss of responsiveness that he has previously dissociated, a dissociation that has left him feeling a continuing emptiness and loneliness. (p. , emphasis added)

Whether we conceptualize this experience through the language of protocol, dissociated states, disavowed psychotic spitting and projection, or whatever else, what is held in common here is the power of the nonverbal, somatic levels of communication that can unconsciously recreate the structures within our most dependent and intimate relations. These are states of being and ways of relating that tend to emerge through the “statements” of actions rather than words, so deeply embedded in our non-conscious patterns of organization as to be almost immune to verbal awareness. As we see in Knoblauch’s work with Warren, it is the psycho/somatic impact on the analyst at a nonverbal level that breaks the compelling enactments.

Out of her evolving understanding of the somatic underpinnings of her patients’ psychic structures and lived experience, Quinodoz (2003) tweaked the fundamental rule:

...instead of using the traditional formula at the beginning of an analysis “Say everything that comes into your mind”, I say only “Say everything that comes...”. I wish to avoid the risk of giving priority to the mind, and I leave the patient free to continue the sentence internally in whatever ways he himself hears it—what comes into his mind certainly, but perhaps also what comes into his heart, senses, and body. It is for him to feel not only *what* comes but also from *where* it comes. (p. 37, emphasis in original)

### **The body's myriad manifestations**

While Knoblauch focuses on sound, silence, and rhythm in his discussion of his work with Warren, his accounting is rich in other somatic details—facial expressions, posture, affect, and bodily disturbance. He sees the sudden looks of fear and pain in Warren's face, and this has an intense impact on him. Knoblauch also describes the change in his own face and gaze, but it is not clear whether he is out of Warren's range of vision or if Warren did not register as meaningful the change in his analyst's face. Knoblauch emphasizes the “non-symbolized, non-verbalized dimensions of communication” in this interaction with Warren, the emergence of a new “polyrhythmic weave”, characterizing this new weave as the mutative mechanism.

For Knoblauch the shift in rhythm itself seems to be the crucial, mutative communication. He says that Warren is able to speak about his childhood pain, tears flowing easily, in stark contrast to his typical mode of being always “on it”. Knoblauch describes his own new rhythm that “offers a pattern of lightly articulated beats, emerging in a non-periodic pattern, marking and/or echoing his rhythm with my accents of recognition and affirmation as he painfully recounts memories...” (p. ). He suggests that the unspoken poly-rhythms constitute a kind of Winnicottian holding or Kohutian selfobject transference, which allowed Warren's emergence from a “cocoon of fright and dissociation” (p. ).

Knoblauch briefly explores two alternative interventions he might have initiated, a verbal transference interpretation or a verbal inquiry into the anxiety he was observing in Warren's face and voice. He questions the efficacy of both, worrying that the shift to the verbal would have lost the immediacy and impact of the silence and the sudden shift in rhythms the stillness engendered, the reverberations of the broken prior pattern. He worries, too, that these verbal interventions would have imposed Knoblauch's intellectual meaning structure, rather than facilitating Warren's developing his own, a concern I also share.

However, I don't think the risk here has so much to do with the interventions being verbal, but in the focus of the verbal. In each of Knoblauch's alternative, verbal interventions, the shift would have been to direct Warren's attention toward a cognitive, symbolic mode, disrupting the unexpected shift to the affective and subsymbolic.

The analyst's words can also be the means to focus and deepen somatic, subsymbolic experience. Quinodoz (2003), for example, describes her use of “incarnate language,” which she defines as a “*language that touches* as one that does not confine itself to imparting thoughts verbally, but also conveys feelings and the sensations that accompany those feelings” (p.35, emphasis in original). Quietly, tentatively descriptive language on the part of the analyst is crucial here,

a speaking from the analyst's body in language that is experience-near, language that conveys a felt sense of one's interior and somatic states. Incarnate language is a kind of speaking *to* the analyst's body rather than speaking *about* it. In a similar spirit, Alvarez (1992) in her work with autistic children and adults, for whom the symbolic realm is frequently at best meaningless and at worst confusing and overwhelming, argues that the therapist's careful observing of and bringing language to the slightest the slightest body movement can facilitate a growing sense of intentionality and bodily agency. Alvarez' intention is to gradually help her patients develop a tolerance of fuller somatic experience while subtly inviting entry into the interpersonal world. This, I think, is closely akin to what Winnicott described as the indwelling of the psyche in the soma.

In the development of my own thinking, as a neo-Reichian trained, body-centered psychotherapist, I have come to emphasize the communicative intentions of bodily activity, utilizing the notion of interrupted gestures to supplant Reich's original stressing of characterological and muscular "armor". Winnicott coined the phrase "spontaneous gesture" to convey a sense of the sensori-motoric activities of the infant and young child which are perceived, received, and languaged by the parent (or analyst). Winnicott believed the repetition of this parental (or analytic) noticing anchored the True Self in the body and formed the foundation for nonverbal and subsequently verbal communication. This is a kind of "minding" of the body:

It is an essential part of my theory that the True Self does not become a living reality except as a result of the mother's repeated success in meeting the infant's spontaneous gesture or sensory hallucination. (1960/1965, p.145)

So a possible verbal/somatic intervention might be to say something to Warren like, "Something is happening here. I went quiet inside, like my words disappeared. Slowing down. You, too? There's a shift in the way you are speaking. Can you hear the tone in your voice? Something has changed between us. ....(pausing) A kind of disturbance. And a kind of slowing down. An opening up. My breathing has changed..... Your face. My face. Notice what's happening in your body..... Take your time. Just notice." The analyst's words are descriptive, slowly paced, exploring, wondering, inviting. The therapeutic invitation is for a kind of somatic attending, a kind of body-level free association, perhaps brought into words, perhaps not, but facilitated by both the analyst's words and the way of speaking those words. The analyst offers attention, recognition, rather than interpretation—a minding of the body.

Perhaps we have here a Winnicottian reinterpretation of Reich's challenge to Freud. Freud privileged mind over body, language over action and affect. Reich sought to reverse the Freudian order, declaring mental processes as often woven so deeply into the warp and woof of character defenses as needing to be



circumvented in his body-based interventions. Reich, often naïvely and idealistically, invested his therapeutic model in the supposed “wisdom” of the body. Winnicott, in his own way, saw somatic experience as being at the heart of health and vitality:

Here is a body, and the psyche and the soma are not distinguished except according to the direction from which one is looking. One can look at the developing body or at the developing psyche. I suppose the word psyche here means the *imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings, and functions*, that is, of physical aliveness. (1949/1958, p. 234.)

When Winnicott speaks of the mother/infant dyad, he is also evoking the analyst/analysand dyad as well. Winnicott’s transformation of the Freudian and Reichian premises is in his recognition of the necessity of an other’s repeated attention to and languaging of somatic experience that situates the mind in the body, the psyche-soma as the foundation for a robust sense of self in the world. Language can be in the service of the body rather than in place of or competition with it, facilitating an ease of flowing self-contact between the unlanguageed subsymbolic orders with those of the verbal, symbolic realms that have been so long the primary domain of the analytic endeavor.

Having long valorized the verbal and symbolic order as the desired state of the analytic exploration, the psychoanalytic “vocabulary” is expanding to include the visual, auditory, sensate, and visceral modes of experience and expression. Even the long forbidden domains of bodily movement (Bloom, 2006; Pallaro, 1999) and physical touch (Cornell, 2009a/b; Galton, 2006; Ruderman, Shane, & Shane, 2000; White, 2004; Shapiro, 2009) are becoming topics of psychoanalytic consideration.

Knoblauch’s moving and provocative accounting of his psychoanalytic samba with his patient, Warren, offers us another opportunity to examine the assumptions and protocols of psychoanalytic investigation. In so doing, he has made an important contribution to expanding the frame of what can be understood and utilized as aspects of the analytic and therapeutic endeavor.

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