

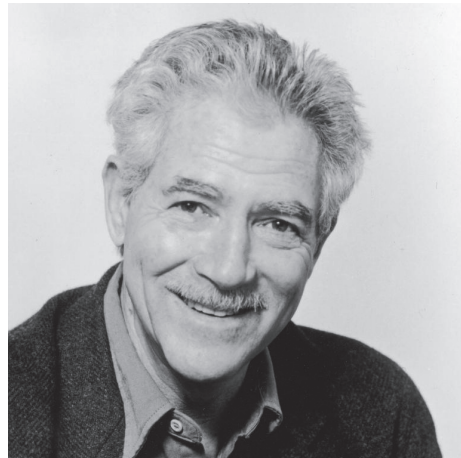
Obituary

Daniel Stern (1934-2013)

Jennifer Re

AUT UNIVERSITY, AUCKLAND

Daniel (Dan) Stern was an American psychoanalytically trained child psychiatrist whose careful research of infant–parent interaction led to groundbreaking new ways of thinking about the infant, infants’ capacities and development, mothers and the infant–mother and patient–therapist relationship. He was a pioneer in the field of studying videotaped interactions between mothers and babies. Early in his career, Stern made observations of infants and mothers using video, later analysing these records as part of his research project. He brought to light the intimate interactions



of infants and their mothers, the findings of which subsequently led to his theory of development of the self occurring within a social context.

Stern’s contribution applied new understandings and techniques from developmental psychology to the problem of understanding early subjective experience. By using these micro-analytic methods with nonverbal data, he shed new light on how to frame questions relevant to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

He was an imaginative and creative thinker who used his observations to imagine how an infant might use his mind to build a subjective world/realm of self and other. He then described the infant’s lived experience in a present moment and how the infant might build a sense of “ways-of-being-with” others over time. Stern commented: “this biologically designed choreography will serve as a prototype for all his later interpersonal exchanges” (Stern, 1977, p. 1).

Stern’s theory challenged the stages models of development such as those of Freud and Piaget. He proposed instead a non-sequential, complex, layered model comprising the “accumulation of senses of the self, socio-affective competencies, and ways-of-being-with-others” (Stern, 2000, p. xii). He asserted that all of these domains remain active throughout our lives, interacting dynamically with one another. This idea brought

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questions about how traditional psychoanalytic psychotherapists work with their patients to effect change, for instance he contested the psychoanalytic view that early psychic organisation may only be available through a regression.

Stern's proposition that there was self/other differentiation from birth, or even earlier, meant that he also challenged the prevailing view in psychoanalytic theory that the developmental task was to achieve separation of self and other. He argued that his research showed a process of creating ties with others, thereby increasing relatedness (Stern, 2000). This area of difference remains a controversial theoretical issue amongst psychotherapists and is directly relevant to clinical practice. His theory has been a productive model for elucidating both normal and pathological development, especially for furthering understanding of autism.

Daniel Stern also made a significant but controversial contribution to thinking about internalisation and internal objects, central concepts of psychoanalytic theory. He famously clashed intensely with André Green, a French psychoanalyst. Green criticised Stern's theory as behavioural, and as dispensing with the unconscious, and, thus, that the infant observation upon which Stern based his theory was irrelevant to psychoanalysis (see Sandler, Sandler, Davies, & Green, 2000). For his part, Stern argued that infant observation was highly relevant to psychoanalytic theory and research as it could generate hypotheses for future research. He demonstrated (Stern, 2008) how infant observations contribute to current clinical and theoretical understandings, including:

1. A paradigm shift from intrapsychic to intersubjective and interpersonal processes and, thus, from a one-person to a two-person psychology.
2. How infant development and approaches to treatment have been profoundly influenced by the theory of attachment and its elaboration in research.
3. A re-examination of the concept of the unconscious and how it relates to early preverbal experience and implicit knowledge.

Stern was a prominent contributor to the Boston Process of Change Study Group whose work casts light on the change processes in adult psychotherapy. It uses research findings about developmental change within the parent–infant relationship to show the importance of implicit knowledge within therapeutic relationships. The group proposed that “moments of meeting” were “the key element in bringing about change in explicit knowledge” (Stern et al., 1998). He himself expanded on these ideas in *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (Stern, 2004), while his final book, *Forms of Vitality* (Stern, 2010), demonstrated the relevance of the arts to psychotherapy

I have attended most of the World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) congresses since 2002 and recall Dan Stern taking a prominent role with keynote presentations and as plenary speaker over the years. I will never forget the heated debate between him and Bernard Grolsche, a French psychoanalyst at the Paris WAIMH Congress in 2006 in front of a packed auditorium. He countered Grolsch's classic psychoanalytic theoretical stance with his views about intersubjectivity, passionately and persuasively.

Stern wrote hundreds of papers and eight books:

The First Relationship: Mother and Infant. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Originally published in 1977, and republished with a new introduction in 2004, this is a readable, non technical overview of Stern's key concepts and main themes, and especially his thinking about mother-infant interactions.

The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Originally published in 1985, and revised for a second edition published in 2001, this is probably his best known book, and addresses dilemmas Stern encountered early in his career. He was "intrigued and disturbed" by a contradiction he saw in the prominent position of early development in psychoanalytic theories, but which played a speculative and obscure role when applied to the real person. Using a scientific approach to studying the non verbal infant in interaction with her mother, Stern then attempted to create a dialogue between the infant as observed and as clinically reconstructed in psychotherapy. In the original book he detailed his model of the development of the self and domains of relatedness, a model he expanded in the second addition.

Diary of a Baby. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Published in 1992, this book is an account of the baby's subjective experience, as imagined by Stern, using the voice of the infant. An objective commentary drawn from infant research accompanies the chronicle.

The Motherhood Constellation: A Unifying View of Parent-Infant Psychotherapies. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Published in 1995, this book explores the nature of parent-infant psychotherapies, gives an account of different therapeutic approaches to parent-infant difficulties and proposes a "unique form of organized mental life, the motherhood constellation" (p. 6).

The Birth of a Mother. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Written with his wife, Nadia Bruschweiler-Stern, and published in 1997, this book is based on an arresting premise: just as a baby develops physically in utero and after birth, so a mother is born psychologically in the many months that precede and follow the birth of her baby. The recognition of this inner transformation emerges from hundreds of interviews with new mothers and decades of clinical experience. This is an invaluable sourcebook for new mothers, validating the often confusing emotions that accompany the development of this new identity.

The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Published in 2003, this book examines the relation of present moments to the therapeutic relationship and issues of growth and change. He describes the nature, structure and duration of present moments, especially noting their intensity and their quality as a truly lived experience. He asserts that present moments reveal

the essence of what it is to be human in relation to another.

Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

In what was to be the last book he wrote, published in 2010, Stern explores the topic of “vitality”, the life-force in all living things. Vitality can be found in many different forms in our lives, the arts and in the psychotherapeutic relationship. Stern shows that it is possible to study vitality in real physical and mental operations, including movement and time, scientifically. He outlines a developmental view of vitality and discusses the implications of forms of vitality for psychotherapeutic theory and practice.

Change in Psychotherapy. London, UK: Karnac Books.

This book, edited by Stern and The Boston Change Process Study Group, also published in 2010, brings together the work of the Boston Group on the concept of change in psychotherapy. Since 1994, the Group has focused on how the study of infancy may be relevant to the psychotherapeutic process, and this edited collection comprises its seminal works on the topic of change in psychotherapy.

From the birth of a mother and the first relationship (between infant and mother), to the qualities of adult relationships and those inherent in all living things, Daniel Stern has changed the way we think about becoming and being human. With his passing we have lost one of the most important and creative minds in developmental psychology and contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

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JENNIFER RE

Dr Jennifer Re is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychotherapy at AUT University, and a Research Associate at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne, Australia.