

# Rediscovering Sabina: Terror and the Primitive Sexual Transference

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## Whakarāpopotonga

Putā ake ai tēnei mea te wehi i runga i te matakū ki te mate me te ngākau nui tonu rānei ki te pupuri ki te koiōra. I roto i ngā mahi puea ake te wehi i te wā whakawhitinga, ko te wero ki te kaihaumanu ko te mau ki te mauri tau ā-tinana, ā-mātauranga, ā-hinengaro, ā-wāhi katoa, nā te mea he tino kaha te tōpana ō te wehi ki te whakatimana i te tōpana taurite o te hā kare-ā-roto ā-hinengaro, ā-tinana. Ka huraina e tēnei tuhinga tēnei wero mā te huri whakamuri ki te aka o te tātarihanga hinengaro me tētahi pepa i tuhia nei e Sabina Spielrein i te tau 1912: “*Destruction as the cause of coming into being*/Kaiākiri; te take o te koiōratangaa.” Mai i te mahi a Pierereina, ka whāia he mātauranga whakahōhonu ake i tāna whakahau e hono nei i te whakawehiwehi ki te whakawhitinga taera. Ko te mea hai kapo ko te kite i te noho wehe o te tūrōro me te kaiwhakaharatau ka hari ai ki roto i te whanaungatanga haumarū. Ka pā atu ki te wāhanga o te whakawehi me te wehewehe i roto i te hāpori whānui, o namata ki nāianeī.

## Abstract

Terror arises on the one hand from the fear of death and on the other the passion for life. In working with terror as it manifests in the transference, a challenge for the practitioner is to maintain homeostasis in its physical, intellectual, emotional and relational aspects, as terror is a strong force for tipping the balance of emotional regulation with consequences mentally and physically. This paper will explore this challenge, starting by going back to the roots of psychoanalysis and a paper written by Sabina Spielrein in 1912: “*Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being*.” Building on Spielrein’s work, it will attempt to deepen understanding of her theory linking terror to the primitive sexual transference. Of particular interest is the recognition of dissociation in both patient and practitioner and working with it in the therapeutic relationship. The presence of terror and dissociation in the wider community, both currently and historically, is touched on.

**Key words:** Terror, transference, dissociation, emotional dysregulation, symbolism, social structure, evolution, population genetics

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## Introduction

Terror is the experience of the catastrophic failure of the balancing act which is living in the present. It is the fragmentation of the sense of self; of the sense of “going on being,” as Winnicott (1960) put it. Even when not fragmented, our sense of self can still be weakened when our awareness of the impact of our past on our current feelings and behaviour is lessened and leads us, in effect, to live in the past unconsciously. This can lead to fear of change (the future) and can generate anxiety. When we are able to observe our past with equanimity we also become able to accept the process of change that is an inevitable part of our future. Psychotherapy can be seen as the process of re-establishing balance through the acknowledgement of the ways in which our past influences our perception of the present and through the establishment of dynamic stability (homeostasis) as we address our future.

The process of relating to the past is different for each individual; it is a personal journey of rediscovery. This is also true for our understanding of psychotherapy. Freud (1917/1953) saw himself as a kind of archaeologist, rediscovering ideas. He encouraged those interested in psychoanalysis to engage in a similar journey of rediscovery, saying of the work: “I shall not however tell it to you but shall insist on you discovering it for yourself” (p. 431).

When reading the theme of this conference, “Terror in the Transference,” I recalled an article written in 1912 and reprinted in 1994 in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology* by Sabina Spielrein, “Destruction as the Cause of Coming Into Being.” What first attracted me to her paper was the fact that unlike later writers, including Freud (1920/1961), she did not split the concepts of sexuality and death and oppose them to each other. She says:

Throughout my involvement with sexual problems, one question has especially interested me: Why does this most powerful drive, the reproductive instinct, harbour negative feelings in addition to the inherently anticipated positive feelings? (Spielrein, 1912/1994, p. 155)

As she explores this question, Spielrein (1912/1994) develops an understanding of the source of these powerful feelings and, as a result, ways of holding them in the transference without dissociation and splitting. She places their origin in the tension that arises between the individuating ego and its source in history. The integrating factor that contains these she places in the biology of sex. She sees sex as both contributing to new life (the developing ego) and also as destructive. An example of the destructive aspect she gives is that of the egg and sperm, which both must both be destroyed in order to create the zygote.

Connecting the development of the ego to the past, she says:

An event is feeling-toned for us only to the extent that it can stimulate previously experienced feeling-toned contents that now lie hidden in the unconscious. (p. 157)

Despite the background which we all share, like being born and having a mother, the more our ego develops, the more it differentiates from other egos. Spielrein says of this:

The closer we approach our conscious thoughts, the more differentiated our images; the deeper we penetrate the unconscious, the more universal and typical the images.

The depth of the psyche knows no “I,” but only its summation, the “We.” It considers the ego to be an object to be observed and subordinated to similar objects. (p. 160)

And:

In this Great Mother (the unconscious), each differentiated image will be dissolved, i.e. it will be transformed into an undifferentiated state. (p. 158)

This destructive process is paradoxically also a potentially creative one. She says:

The collective psyche wants to assimilate the more recently developed personal psyche while the ego — indeed every part of the ego — strives for self-preservation in its present form (inertia). The collective psyche denies the present ego and, directly through this denial, creates anew. The floundering ego-particle, inundated with new, more richly adorned images, begins to re-emerge. (p. 162)

I would add here that the “floundering ego-particle” can also be a source of destruction as it attempts to preserve itself. This is a primary source of terror.

Regarding this, Spielrein consolidates the sexual foundation of the interaction between individuation and destruction, naming the conflicted nature of our sexual foundations.

In its nature, preservation of the species is ambivalent. Therefore, the impulse of the positive component simultaneously summons forth the impulse of the negative component and opposes it. (p. 174)

The attempts of self-preservation of the ego can reflect the developmental periods in which this struggle has peaked. The results of these developmental conflicts are then reflected in the ego structure of the individual. Spielrein touches on these briefly; of the oral stage she says:

There are concrete practical experiences that, through sexual impulses, can often substitute the process of eating for coitus. (p. 159)

And of the masochistic stage she notes:

In our depths, there is something that, as paradoxical as it may sound, wills self injury while the ego counteracts it with pleasure. (p. 160)

But it is of the schizoid phase that she is most descriptive:

As you know, when one begins to suffer, strong feelings arise. In patients with dementia praecox who transform ego-images into objective or collective images, inadequate affect, indifference, appears. This decreases when we succeed in establishing a relationship with the ego. For example, a patient said “The earth became dirtied with urine” instead of “I became dirtied by the sexual act.” Therein

lies my concept of symbolic expression. The symbol is analogous to the painful image, but less differentiated than the ego-image. (p.161)

And:

Thoughts become depersonalised and ‘affect’ the patients since they come from outside the ego, from the depths that already have transformed the “I” into a “we” or perhaps a “they.” (p.162)

In my experience it is this level of primitive sexual transference, dissociative in its nature, that can evoke the strongest experience of terror in the therapist.

In the wake of the Christchurch terror attack, a client who had followed the alt-right online said: “Kill all Muslims, kill all Jews, kill all Communists, kill all feminists, they want us dead.”

The floundering ego particle, attenuated and struggling, expresses itself in the dissociated and generalised language of the undifferentiated self, still merged with, and struggling hopelessly to separate from the “Great Mother,” who it experiences as destructive — the vagina dentata (toothed vagina).

## Terror and Dissociation

We are all capable of entering this schizoid space in the face of terror. The therapeutic task is to relate to this place in ourselves rather than occupying or denying it and I think that an awareness of its sexual underpinnings helps.

It seems that the impact of World War I may have been one of the factors that turned Freud away from an integrated sexual theory, causing him to modify it by developing the concept of thanatos, the death instinct, which he saw as opposed to libido, the sexual drive (Freud, 1917/1953). Such a polarisation can be seen as a form of dissociation, something that Spielrein had avoided.

I think it is useful to look again at Freud’s sexual theory, prior to the dissociation of libido and thanatos, from a current scientific perspective.

Humans’ ability to learn and socialise in complex ways has evolved concurrently with the physiology that undergirds behaviours related to sexuality and sexual development. As Freud elucidated by taking up the Oedipus myth, our lifelong search for understanding about the world and human relationships is directly related to sex (as was that of Oedipus) and specifically involves a journey that negotiates the attractions and perils of incest and exogamy. Furthermore, this journey begins at birth or before (as it did for Oedipus) and potentially involves physical, emotional, and social trauma inflicted by both ourselves and others. It also involves a logical approach (Oedipus’s search for answers) and a symbolic one (his visits to the Oracle).

To summarise the Oedipus myth here; King Laius and Queen Jocasta produced a son, and as was the custom, asked the Oracle what was to become of him. The Oracle replied that he would kill his father and marry his mother. In shock, Laius commanded a servant to kill his son, but the servant instead hung him by his foot in a bush on the edge of the kingdom

for the vultures to find. The foot of the infant swelled up as a result — hence his name Oedipus or swollen foot. Symbolically and bioenergetically the foot is linked to the genitals and, as we shall see later in this myth, to the eyes. The servant of the king and queen of the neighbouring country found Oedipus still alive and took him to them where he was raised as their own son. When Oedipus became a young man, he went to the Oracle to ask what his future held and was told that he would kill his father and marry his mother. In shock, he banished himself into the neighbouring country which, unbeknownst to him, was the kingdom of his birth parents, Laius and Jocasta. On the narrow road his party was confronted by another party who refused to give way, as did Oedipus. A fight ensued and Oedipus killed the stranger, who was his birth father Laius. Oedipus continued his journey to the capital and was confronted at the gate by a sphinx, with the body of a lion and the head of a woman. The sphinx was demanding, as rite of passage, an answer to the riddle, “What walks on four legs in the morning, two at midday and three in the evening?” Failure to get the correct answer resulted in being devoured by the sphinx, and the remains of those who had failed lay about the sphinx as a warning. Oedipus however, recognised the allusion to the developmental process and gave the answer “Man.” The first man who got the answer correct got to marry the widowed queen, so Oedipus unwittingly married his mother. He was curious however, about who had killed the king, and his researches led him inextricably to his own guilt. Shocked, he blinded himself and set off as a wandering mendicant, guided by the daughter he had had with his own mother.

We can link back here to Spielrein’s approach, and see how Oedipus was, in effect, destroyed and transformed through his relationship with his mother, finding his core self and moving forward guided by the daughter who was the result of this union and a symbol of integration. We see one important aspect of dissociation in this story which is the impact of shock to the “floundering ego particle,” both of Laius and of Oedipus. As a result of that shock, both men went “into their heads” and disconnected with reality in an attempt to control things. By combining the creative and destructive aspect of sexuality, Spielrein speaks to this story.

Like Oedipus, we all have a tendency to inbreed, facilitated by the way we learn which limits our social contacts. One example of this is the way we acquire language, becoming limited to our mother tongue as time progresses unless we are exposed to other languages. In turn this limits our ability to relate to others who do not speak our mother tongue. Language is one among many factors which give rise to a chaotic pattern of group formation (the social structure of the world) that has a sexual basis. Among those speaking the same language, many other factors such as education and politics also contribute to group formation. Grey (1970/2017) noted:

The data supporting the hypothesis of homogamous selection range in content from premarital residential propinquity to similarity in race, age, religion, social status and physical and psychological characteristics. (p. 9)

As the Oedipus myth lays out, this process of group formation and maintenance is full of conflict. At its peak, its incestuous nature constitutes warfare with those who are or have become members of another group, and it can also manifest within a group as interpersonal

conflict of greater or lesser intensity. Power struggles can be seen as the outcome of (sexual) competition and a means of symbolising and stabilising conflict within and between groups.

When the boundaries of a group or individual are challenged, symbols can help facilitate the recovery of healthy relationships but can also contribute to violence if they become concretised (a regressive and dissociative process). Spielrein (1912/1994) names this in terms of both the symbol's place in artistic creation and communication and also as its genesis in a response to pain. I think here of Tame Iti in 2005 shooting the New Zealand flag with a shotgun during a powhiri for the Waitangi Tribunal in the Urewera; a symbolic act of great power, demonstrating the need for entering into the destructive process of "The Great Mothers" (1912/1994, p. 158) and also an expression of the suffering of Tuhoe at the hands of the Crown. This was, and was seen to be by the Crown, a breach of the sanctity of the flag, and dissociation set in. When this happened, the other (Iti) was demonised and seen as worthy of attack by the Crown and its representatives, and relationship became lost. Beyond this event however, Tuhoe continued a process of recovering Mana of their land and autonomy.

## Vignette 1

Intrapersonal dialogue from the 2020 NZAP Conference:

I watched online as the conference began to unravel and felt both frustrated and deflated when local presentations, one of which I was to deliver, were cancelled. I turned up to the venue early, not knowing what to expect but wanting to offer what support and help I could to the planning committee. I helped setting up chairs for the powhiri and was encouraged by Cherry to speak if the opportunity arose. I spoke in Te Reo of the earth, the ancestors and the house, Whaia Pu Aroha, and Mother Aubert. For me the ancestors continued their presence from the belly of the earth, both supportive and challenging. As Tangata Whenua spoke of Mother Aubert's encouragement for us to live in the present, I found myself thinking of Maui, and how his attempt to find eternal life could be seen as the challenge we all have to live in the present and adapt to change. His death in the pounamu teeth at the entrance to the womb of Hine Nui te Po was close to the theories of Sabina Spielrein I had been exploring in my paper. His companion Piwakawaka, the fantail, had led to Maui's death when he awakened Hine Nui te Po as Maui tried to enter her womb as a Namu (sandfly) larva, and she crushed him with the pounamu teeth of her vagina dentata. I thought of him as a schizoid structure, his injury being abandonment at birth by his mother Taranga, which led to his ongoing search for her in the underworld.

Larry, the keynote speaker, isolated in his hotel room, spoke by Zoom from the big screen, and as he did so Piwakawaka (a fantail) came into the room and flew about, calling out. I felt fear come upon me, who was going to die? Several possibilities passed my mind, including myself and Larry. I noticed Larry blowing his nose and feared he might have the virus.

My voyage into the symbolic realm in the presence of Larry and the virus and its consequences chastened me and renewed me, helping me accept the “death” of the conference and my presentation.

The mechanisms behind the formation of groups include violence and terror and arise from their sexual source. As psychotherapists, our task is to help our clients negotiate and understand the impact of this process of group formation on their own lives, in part by joining them on their life’s relational journey. This helps us build a relationship with the client’s history and its narrative and lessens the chance of re-enacting the past. Re-enactment occurs when the historical narrative is experienced as actual rather than historical/symbolic (essentially a dissociative process) and contributes to aggression at group, individual and intrapsychic boundaries. When we retain a present-centred perspective, we avoid or lessen the conflict, and if we are aware of our own historical narratives and can relate to them, this can help us ground ourselves in current reality and avoid re-enactment.

On the international scale Campos (2014) described the role polarised (dissociated) thinking plays in conflict leading to war, citing as an example US President George W. Bush’s statement in 2001 regarding the invasion of Iraq: “If you’re not with us, then you’re against us.” This can be recognised as a regression to a primitive ego state which is vulnerable to the fracturing evident in such splitting. This is the infant’s experience around birth that leads to early ego state formation and includes his or her introjection of the world, experienced at the time as either nurturing or dangerous. When we act from this ego state, such expressions can foster the ungrounded process of denigrating and objectifying others. Characterising them in this way places them outside the group and unavailable for relationship.

The ego and the body are the product of developmental experiences and as such are a reflection of the past as Spielrein (1912/1994) describes (p. 157). By building a relationship with the past, we are less likely to be captured by it and regress. The Oedipus myth refers to this developmental process when in answer to the sphinx’s riddle, “What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?” Oedipus answers, “Man.”

Another aspect of the past that resides in our ego states and our bodies is repression. Repression can be understood as repression of sexual energy in the way that Reich (1942/1972) described.

Man’s authoritarian structure — this must be clearly established — is basically produced by the imbedding of sexual inhibitions and fear in the living substance of sexual impulses. (p. 30)

The processes of denigration and objectification that can result from repression may block grounding and relationship and feed the cycle of violence described by Widom (1989).

Denigration and objectification are not just primitive regressed processes but also processes that impact us from the outside (i.e., we are objectified), and this is often internalised as part of our ego state structure. If we identify with that internalised or introjected ego state structure, then we act by repressing others or ourselves — a dissociative process. The individual can discount, for example, his or her ability to contain his or her

angry feelings or discount the ability of the other to act autonomously in a safe manner. This discounting becomes culturally imbedded in such forms as misogyny and racial or cultural prejudice.

Where there is repression, there is frustration. With frustration the sympathetic nervous system kicks in, for better or worse. This is a major source of fighting. Another manifestation of frustration is anxiety, which can lead to attempts to deal with a situation by acting in an idealistic and ungrounded manner.

Reality is a dynamic, relational process, and any freezing or concretising of it results in a loss of grounding and a simultaneous loss of contact with reality. The myth of Narcissus, also rediscovered by Freud, speaks of this in terms our need to become attached to our own image (the floundering ego particle described by Spielrein) and our willingness to reject those who cannot relate to this image meaningfully. A partial reflection (as provided by Echo to Narcissus) is not enough. If the need to become attached to our ego can be recognised, it can be transcended. To me, this describes my job as a therapist fairly well: an understanding of my ego states enables me to transcend the need to become attached to my own image or group image. I am thus less likely to become caught up in the processes of regression, repression, and frustration. By not avoiding the positive and negative aspects of erotic transference and countertransference, I am better able to deal with conflict.

An understanding of the client based on sexual theory can help to integrate the primitive merging transference, described by Sills (2001) as the “need to be met and understood by a calm, competent other that arises from the unresolved infant need to have the other be a soothing and powerful extension of self” (p. 230). However, this merging transference can have a terrifying erotic shadow of the vagina dentata, that is, the destructive component of regressive and merging desire referred to by Spielrein (1912/1994).

## Vignette 2

Further intrapsychic dialogue from the 2020 NZAP conference:

At the end of his second talk, Larry asked us to speak of ways in which we had been profoundly affected by the coronavirus and his talk. I remained silent.

I had woken early worrying about the paper I had written and was not able to deliver. As I watched Larry on the big screen, I found myself feeling slightly judgemental about what I experienced as his stiff delivery and disconnected headiness. I was irritated by what seemed to me to be his repeated promotion of his books and upcoming workshop.

His partner then turned his laptop around so that Larry could see us on screen and he named his relief and softened noticeably. I felt my judging of him fade and was able to listen to him more fully.

In response to his request to speak, as people began to share their experiences, Larry remained strangely non-responsive. With regard to questions seeking clarification



about the early sources of terror he said he would be talking about that for six hours on Monday (in a presentation outside the conference) and gave no answer.

I noticed myself leaving the conference a little abruptly and once home I felt exhausted.

I woke early the next morning with thoughts of the story of the Wizard of Oz. The coronavirus, like the tornado in the Wizard of Oz, had ungrounded me and the conference and there we were in the Land of Oz. Had I come to the conference to get a brain, a heart or courage, like the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion? Had I failed to find my way back to Kansas, like Dorothy? Toto had winkled the snake oil salesman out from behind the big screen and Dorothy had confronted him: "You're a very bad man!" He had replied, "No my dear, I'm a very good man, just a very bad wizard."

Again, as when Larry had relaxed when he could see us, I felt myself relax and become energised. The narcissistic, self-protective "floundering ego particle" can take the form of the wizard and I felt relief in recognising my good self (and Larry's) behind the wizard image.

## The Relational Nature of the Development and Maintenance of Affect Regulation

Neurobiologist and psychotherapist Allan Schore (2012) has studied how both the proto-self and the conscious self develop in the relationship between the infant and its primary caregiver. He spoke about Winnicott's concept of the isolation of the true self in a conversation with David Bullard:

Winnicott talked about the child in the second year achieving a complex developmental advance — the adaptive ability to be alone, and the creation of true autonomy. That is, to be separate, to be processing one's own individuality and one's own self system in the presence of another. The other is a background presence, so it doesn't get swept into the child. But they're literally both individuating in their presence together. And this is a kind of silent being together without having a need to take care of the other or support the other, of literally that kind of comfort. (Schore in Bullard, 2015, Section 8)

This state could be understood as Winnicott's (1960) state of "going on being" which I have suggested is the same as spirit (Sandle, 2016) and could be understood as living in the present. Schore (2012) has researched the relational development of neurophysiology which leads to this state. This is the development of what he calls affect regulation. When reading what Schore means by affect regulation, we can see that he is referring to more than the regulation of emotion, including other aspects of the mental and behavioural process in this term.

During spontaneous right brain-to-right brain visual-facial, auditory-prosodic, and tactile-proprioceptive emotionally charged attachment communications, the sensitive, psychobiologically attuned caregiver regulates, at an implicit level, the infant's state of arousal. (p. 124)

Through this process of relationship the infant develops a “right brain emotional-corporeal implicit self, the biological substrate of the human unconscious” (p. 126). This stable sense of self is developed in relationship and maintained in relationship. This is a living process rather than something structural, a process Winnicott (1960) called “going on being.” It is an emotionally regulated state, based in the present, from where the individual can look backwards and forwards with relative safety.

Neurologist Antonio Damasio (2000) describes this Self as “the feeling of what happens when your being is modified by the acts of apprehending something” (p. 10). This is based on mechanisms which maintain the body within a narrow range of conditions: homeostatic mechanisms. These have a non-conscious component, the proto-self, and a conscious component. The conscious component involves the regulation of the organism by actions in the world (p. 24), and can both maintain homeostasis and also cause imbalance. In terms of Spielrein's model, this imbalance arises from the actions of “the floundering ego particle” which is trying to avoid change. The loss of balance which this causes, when extreme, can lead to dissociation — the loss of contact with reality: this is the realm of terror.

## The Genetic Evolutionary Background Behind Emotional Dysregulation

This loss of contact with reality can be understood as serving the function of maintaining the small breeding group (Sandle, 2013) and is linked to the sexual nature and evolutionary context of the process that Freud rediscovered. When we inhabit a grounded and relational body, transitional phenomena, including myths such as that of Oedipus, become available to us as guides and help inform the relational dynamics with others and as psychotherapists with our clients. The myth of Oedipus also stands as a warning against trying to work things out with our heads alone, in that his attempt to do so led to him becoming further ensnared in the trap from which he was trying to free himself, that is, the trap of the past and consequent fear of the future. In the face of the probable terror he experienced on discovering his history, he could be seen to dissociate from his feelings and live in his head.

Returning to Spielrein's observation of the harbouring by the reproductive instinct of both positive and negative feelings, the dual nature of sexuality, I will explore the possibility that the genes underlying social behaviour have co-evolved with those responsible for emotional dysregulation. In other words, genetic selection may have favoured a tendency towards social behaviour that is genetically linked to emotional dysregulation. The function of the dysregulation is the fostering of genetic drift by effectively dividing a population into small breeding groups.

Sewell Wright (1945), one of the founders of the field of population genetics, pointed out that in a randomly breeding population, genes contributing to social behaviour would be lost through selective pressure, as on the individual level they are disadvantageous to

individuals bearing them. Wright saw a solution in the concept of neutral genetic drift, which is the process whereby a particular gene or group of genes can become fixed in a population in the absence of selective pressure. He proposed a model of a population structure which allows the selection of the genes behind social behaviour despite their disadvantages to the individual carrying them. This model, which has since been named the “island model,” is of a population divided into small, inbreeding groups. This allows genes behind social behaviour to become fixed in a small group on a chance basis, free of selective pressure, and by conferring their benefits to that group, increase its breeding success and their own prevalence. If there is a small amount of outbreeding the genes are then spread to other groups and can eventually become fixed in the population as a whole.

Emotional dysregulation is one mechanism which allows such a population structure to develop and be maintained. Social change can cause emotional dysregulation and lead to the behavioural avoidance of change, taking the form of conservative behaviour in an attempt to lessen change. This is Damasio’s (2000, p. 24) emotional regulation by means of actions in the world; a process which he describes as both contributing to homeostasis and disrupting it. In psychological terms it involves identification with, or cathexis of, an ego state that formed in the past. Such cathexis contributes to what Freud (1914/1950) called the repetition compulsion. This conservative behaviour can in turn magnify emotional dysregulation by preventing or slowing adaptation to a changed social environment, thus effectively maintaining the small breeding group by means of a spiralling of dysregulation, which has also been demonstrated to have a direct effect on reducing fertility (Whirledge & Cidlowski, 2010). Fertility is also reduced in this manner by the limiting of social contacts to those we are familiar with. In Spielrein’s sense this is a return in the direction of a merged state with the unconscious or more specifically the mother. Oedipus’ incest with his mother symbolises this. The cathexis of, as against the relationship with, an ego state therefore involves emotional dysregulation in the form of anxiety and depression. The earlier the formation of the ego state the greater the dysregulation and dissociation and the greater the experience of terror.

In summary, the ability to learn and socialise in complex ways can be seen to evolve concurrently with the physiology that undergirds behaviours related to sociality and sexuality. These behaviours involve mechanisms of cognition and emotion which both limit social contact and give the potential for limitless social contact. This contributes to the tendency to inbreed along with the potential to outbreed, giving rise to a chaotic pattern of small group formation that has a sexual basis. This process can manifest within a group as inter-individual conflict of greater or lesser intensity. It can trigger intrapsychic stress, which increases the likelihood of conflict occurring. The stress response, generated by conflict, causes hypervigilant behaviours that impact emotional and inter-individual dynamics. From the perspective of population genetics this can be seen as a mechanism that functions to keep the breeding group size small and that fosters the process of genetic drift, which enables the evolution of social behaviour in the way Wright (1945) describes.

## Dissociation and Repression

Terror can also come from outside; that is, we can be terrorised. One mechanism for this is repression which can be understood from the perspective of population genetics as another

mechanism that functions to keep the breeding group size small and that fosters the process of genetic drift.

Repression or oppression of another can generate dissociation and terror in them, but the act of repression almost always involves some dissociation on the part of the oppressor. In the Oedipus myth, Laius acts in an oppressive manner when he orders his son to be killed. Laius acted out of fear of the unconscious process which was communicated to him by the Oracle. His fear is strong enough to cause him to dissociate from his feelings of empathy and love for his son.

Spielrein talks about the generalised language of the destructive unconscious, the language of “we” and “they” rather than “I” and “you” and we can notice that the language of the oppressor takes this form. As Spielrein notes, the more we individuate, the more specific to us our experience becomes and the harder it is to communicate this experience to others. We can resolve this problem by allowing our ego to be modified by entry into the realm of the unconscious by way of metaphor. As long as we allow ourselves to inhabit this transitional world, we can communicate successfully with others, including those from a different background to ourselves, and allow our ego to continue to be modified. Belonging as it does to Spielrein’s (1912/1994) world of the “Great Mothers” (p. 158), however, this transitional world can evoke the fear of destruction of the ego with the consequent terror and dissociation that is evoked. One form this dissociation takes is the concretisation of the metaphor and its removal from the transitional world. In this way the generalisations that form the various prejudices that drive oppression are formed. As Freud reminded us, the Oedipus myth can be used as a universal transitional metaphor regarding the sexual nature of human development. It also carries within itself the description of the concretisation I have named above, when Laius orders his son to be killed and when Oedipus bans himself from what he thinks is the country of his birth. The first of these is an example of oppression and the second repression, both dissociative phenomena, and both a consequence and a source of terror.

## Clinical and Social Implications

A supervisee spoke of her feelings of disgust in the presence of a client. These feelings were so strong she was considering referring the client on. The client had survived significant trauma experiences both physical and social but presented in a polite and relational manner. The therapist had sought and received permission from the client to video sessions for the purposes of supervision and together we watched a session to see if we could identify the source of her feeling of disgust. By observing closely the verbal, emotional and physical behaviour in the client that led to the therapist’s feeling of disgust, we were able to identify multiple manifestations of dissociation as the source. The very recognition of this enabled the therapist to maintain her presence in the following sessions and as a result the client began to overcome the dissociation and process the trauma. The identification of the dissociation and the consequent countertransference allowed the therapist to stay in the present and observe this manifestation of the past as against becoming engulfed by it and the feelings associated with this engulfment. In my experience dissociation in a client can have an immediate and somatic impact on the therapist, which is felt by them if they do not dissociate themselves. By

relating to the dissociation in this way the therapist was able to facilitate the same in her client and enable the trauma to be remembered, felt and grieved for.

Similar phenomena occur on the social level, but are often harder to process because they stay stuck in mutual dissociation. This can manifest as positive idealisation of one's own social group and associated beliefs and negative idealisation of the other's.

How do we engage with the other who has become our "enemy"? Pure logic will not work as it can involve dissociation "into our head," much like Oedipus. Pure emotion will not work as it can lead to hypervigilant conflict. Somehow we need to maintain balance in the present moment and look at our own history and the history of the other with something approaching indifference or neutrality. In this way we can maintain a relationship with our history and that of the other, and if we are able to do this then the future can be seen in a creative and adaptive way. This involves allowing ourselves to face the terror of our own destruction in the "Mothers" and in so doing to lessen the chance that we will terrorise others and increase the likelihood of creative and adaptive change.

## Conclusion

In exploring the nature of terror and dissociation, I have looked at the place of the past, present and future regarding emotional regulation, suggesting that the ability to live in the present facilitates regulation. From the present we can look back on the past with fresh eyes and lessen the probability of blindly enacting it in the future. I have presented the work of one of the fore-mothers of psychotherapy, Sabina Spielrein, with the intention of enabling our past as psychotherapists to freshly inform our future with regard to the relational development of emotional regulation and dysregulation. I have presented my own thinking in this regard, expanding on Spielrein's observation that the reproductive instinct is both creative and destructive, by introducing ideas from population genetics and its implications for social structure. I have proposed that emotional dysregulation plays a part in the formation and maintenance of our social structure and briefly explored the implications of this for our work, focussing in particular on the nature and management of dissociation and terror in the transference.

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in us by these characteristics in people taking political action.