

These two books were sent to me just as a group of us from the IPA Societies in Los Angeles were embarking on a year of what we called intercultural dialogues, these especially with colleagues in the Latin American community. Keenly aware that psychodynamic theories are, like all theories, intermeshed with the world view that prevailed in the times and places of their origins and of their emergings, we wished to explore their reach and possible limits in enabling us to understand and work with persons of different cultures, classes, and races to discover in what ways analytic concepts might be mended to be more truly universal. We hoped to avoid two dangers: either excessive psychologizing or excessive sociologizing, but to work toward frameworks which would let us be more keenly conscious of the eternal dialectic between “outside” and “inside.” Something of the same motives are evident in Altman’s book and that by Perez Foster et al.

In both The Analyst in the Inner City and in his chapter in the Perez Foster book, Altman’s goal is to place social phenomena within the psychoanalytic frame, to show how the psychological is inherent in the social, and vice versa. Unlike most psychoanalysts, who have tended to stay in private practice, treating persons like themselves—highly educated, of middle class, and of European descent, Altman has had extensive practice in the public clinic. Like a good social worker, he asserts that context is an inextricable part of the psychoanalytic field. Indeed he has found himself in situations most familiar to many social workers, dealt with by clients as “a representative of the entire social welfare system.” He recommends “psychoanalyzing the context” whatever it may be, in order to stay conscious of its effects on the transference-countertransference patterns that develop. He is hopeful about the currently developing models that accommodate the analyst’s subjectivity as part of the field. A two person model depends upon the capacity of a particular dyad to use an interpersonal relationship flexibly; this is a somewhat different criterion for “analyzability” than the old one of capacity for verbal articulation and insight. Like many mental health professionals today, he views managed care as a threat, and he believes strongly that the survival of psychoanalysis is an essential counter force, an alternative
vision of human possibilities, not limited to eradication of symptoms, but attending to the personhood of those who suffer them. Managed care will, he predicts, render private practice much more like public practice, with its paperwork, lower fees, long waiting lists, pressures to do short-term treatment, regulation by the agency. Altman endorses Kernberg’s (1992) model of a “psychoanalytic-open systems-theory approach.” in which patient, analyst, and institutional context influence and define each other in circular fashion. He interprets it poetically with words from William Blake; there can then be a sense of finding “the world in a grain of sand, eternity in an hour” (p. 133).

In Reaching Across Boundaries of Culture and Class, ten authors offer chapters on the importance of widening the scope of psychotherapy. Rose Marie Perez Foster urges a multicultural perspective. Echoing Altman’s sentiments, she declares that psychoanalysis has had definite views about how life should be lived, and that poor and foreign people do not fit the picture of self-actualization. She makes it clear that the authors in this volume are not advocating so-called parameters, these would suggest value-laden or condescending compromises. The goal is instead to develop a method that would accommodate a wider spectrum of living activity as viable data for the therapeutic frame. She too sees the evolving theories as more promising, especially the recognition that analysts are “neither neutral screens nor simple clay for transference transformation” (p. 15). She offers several clinical vignettes to illustrate the use of analytic interpretive metapsychologies and their relevance to understanding of the cases of non-native Americans.

Michael Moskowitz’s chapter on the social conscience of psychoanalysis asserts that psychoanalysis is a radical procedure that harbors the potential for decisive influence not only on individual but on social structures. Moskowitz is interested in thinking about the unconscious meanings of social processes and institutions, including the ways that, in class societies, the ruling class makes its ideology the ideology for all. In the United States, the American Psychoanalytic Association dominated psychoanalysis for years and molded it into “a moralistic, puritanical, materialistic organization that was accepted for a time by our culture” (p. 32). And there persists, even today, a sort of intrapsychic-interpersonal divide that is partly the heritage of this period. Moskowitz notes that psychoanalysis was most influential and culturally mainstream when it was most reactionary. However, alongside elitist psychoanalysis, there has developed a “shadow,” a progressive, socially involved, clinically diverse version, and he views the present suppression of psychoanalysis—under the auspices of managed care and biological psychiatry—as due not to the failure of psychoanalysis but to threats posed by its success!

In a later chapter, Moskowitz notes that “analyzability” is no longer an issue. Diagnostic labeling is increasingly seen as iatrogenic, and the wide array of technical approaches render it more likely that the therapist can flexibly choose a workable mode without uneasiness that he has violated orthodox principles. This author sees a considerable advantage when the patient has an opportunity to choose a therapist; matters auger less well for the public clinic patient who is randomly assigned. Research findings however do not support the claim that ethnic minorities do worse in therapy or that racial matching is desirable (Sue, 1998). We can respond to the diversity of potential patients, but is imperative that we attend to our own ethnicity and to issues of language. We are limited, Moskowitz declares, only by our inability to love and be loved across all boundaries of culture and class.

Mario Rendon offers a view of psychoanalysis in an historic-economic per-