

Refinding the Object and Reclaiming the Self



The Birth of the Self in Therapy

David E. Scharff M.D.

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THE BIRTH OF THE SELF IN THERAPY

Internal objects are born into the relationship with the analyst. The analyst is experienced as the background facilitator, the parent of opportunity and of space for growth. The patient also experiences the analyst as the object of desire and hate, the object mother and father. In the confusion and synergy of these two lies the patient's struggle. In exploring the relationship between them, the patient may find his or her self.

The process of therapy or analysis delivers the internal object as a focus of study and revision. Thus within the safety of therapy or analysis, we hope to provide a haven and creative work space for the recovery and revision of the repressed, hidden, and often lost internal world of the patient.

We have already noted that it is within the arms-around holding of the mother that the infant is free to find itself, to become and then to have a trial of *going-on-being* as Winnicott (1971a) has put it. Just as the mother provides the arms-around holding to the child, so the therapist provides the therapeutic space within which the patient can explore and develop.

The process of therapy, from an object relations point of view, occurs by an

examination of the patient's objects and object relations. Initially, the analyst or psychotherapist provides the context in which this revelation and examination of the objects occurs. Together, therapist and patient look at the objects the patient has delivered into the arms of the transference where they can turn them over and around and begin the process of looking also at the patient's relationship to them. In this derivative form, the therapist begins to find out about the part of the patient's self that is revealed by implication through the verbal description of the object. The therapist's preliminary comments about aspects of the self that are indirectly revealed often need to be couched with tact, especially if the patient is narcissistically vulnerable and easily wounded.

The experience of transference and countertransference that accrues as the work proceeds is the other source of information about the patient's self. At first, the therapist is generally treated as a parental holding object, one that is expected to facilitate the process and to be sympathetic to the patient. As noted in Chapter 3, when the patient makes the therapist the early focus of projections of discrete internal objects, that is, the target of a focused transference, the most important information he or she provides for the therapist concerns the patient's fear of the deficits in the therapist as a provider of holding.

Only later, in the security of a stable and proven container for the therapy, should the process naturally lead to the projection onto and into the analyst of the discrete internal objects

that are in intimate relationship with parts of the patient's self. This heralds the middle phase of a long-term intensive psychotherapy or a psychoanalysis, which is supported by the tempered but flexible steel of the holding object, the therapist who has the confidence of the patient won slowly in their arduous and time-tested working relationship.

**DELIVERING THE
SELF:
THE CASE OF
FERNANDO GONZALES**

The patient does not so much deliver the object into the nest, as deliver his or her self into a nest by finally trusting the therapist enough to put the object into the therapist. The patient asks the therapist to provide the holding, and later to house the patient's internal object, allowing for

the emergence from camouflage of the self that had been in hiding behind the previous description of internal objects. This reversal marks a qualitative difference between early exploratory psychotherapy that deals with problems of the self indirectly through discussion of the object, and later, more intensive work that focuses more directly on the self as it emerges. The therapist is actually experiencing the life of the internal object because it has been thrust into him or her through projective identification, and the therapist has introjectively identified with it.

From the standpoint of the patient, both internal object and this part of the self have equal standing as parts of the self or ego. Intrapsychic organization recognizes some of these parts as parts of the self, and others as

internal objects that carry a legacy of the external objects (Fairbairn 1952, Ogden 1986).

The patient I describe here was unusual in a respect that became a dominant theme of his long analysis: he had no particular feeling about or for me. He mentioned this not long after beginning the analysis, when I first wanted to say something about the transference. At the time, I wondered if perhaps I had prematurely pressed his lack of feeling, as though it were my issue, my wish that he care for me. But it gradually became clearer that his absence of positive feeling for me was an extension of his incapacity to feel positively for anyone in an intimate, long-term relationship. This patient exhibits the way that fundamental early difficulties in a maternal-child relationship can later form the nuclei of a perverse and

homosexual organization (McDougall 1985, 1986). In the description of this man, and especially of the session we will examine in detail, I want to illustrate his use of the therapist to define his forming self.

Fernando Gonzales

"Do you think I'm homosexual?" Fernando asked, almost out of the blue during the evaluation.

"I don't know what you are. You don't seem to have conviction about whether your sexual partners should be men or women," I answered.

Fernando found my statement curiously encouraging. He latched onto it. "I've never given up hope for a wife and family, even though I've always found men more exciting than women."

Fernando Gonzales was a 39-year-old economist, the son of South American

parents; his father was a diplomat who had married the beautiful daughter of a wealthy Latin family. He came to me because he could not maintain erections in homosexual relationships. He had been exclusively engaged in homosexual sex for the past seven years, but previously had emotional and sexual relations with both men and women, having been engaged as a young man before breaking it off because he could not face the marriage. Nevertheless, he had continued sexual relationships with women as well as men through the next several years, and then after the failure of a previous psychotherapy, had slowly slid, as he experienced it, into homosexuality.

Fernando's social relationships had remained long lasting with both men and women. His many close friendships lasted over many years, but he could not link personal intimacy with sexual intimacy. His sexual relationships with men were fleeting and unsatisfying. The men he wished would show an interest in him did

not, and those he pursued were compromised objects. He was driven toward men for sex in anonymous, furtive encounters that he found degrading.

Gradually, we came to understand that Fernando's lack of feeling for me was more than coincidental. It echoed the affective withdrawal from his mother whom he resented and accused. He held her responsible for the impositions and constraints of a lifetime, the discouragement of his masculinity, the interruptions in his attempts to develop other significant relationships—and most especially for getting in the way between Fernando and his father. Fernando described his worldly father as meek and passive at home, belittled by his wife's pettiness and controls, reaching out weakly and infrequently to his son. Fernando's longing for his father had been submerged by the resentment and fury at his mother, and could scarcely be found. In the transference, it was embodied in the lack of positive feeling for

me. He had no difficulty being angry at me over my fee, cancellation policy, my belongings, and lifestyle. He had no trouble voicing his respect for me, his desire that I would be able to help him fashion fundamental changes for which he had not dared to hope prior to analysis, and his gratitude that I was willing to confront him man-to-man over many issues. But he emphasized repetitively that he did not feel any warmth for me. Slowly, we began to understand that the absence of feeling for me was linked to his inability to feel erotically for anyone in an intimate relationship.

Eventually we understood that it was not actually the same as the fear of intimacy with women, but that it constituted the object relationship of feeling he had no father with whom to identify, no father to guide and back him. I had been the missing father. Warm feelings for me were impossible because he despaired of a father who could

receive and reciprocate them. This was the basis for his desperately urgent homosexual search, but the objects he sought were younger men to whom he was a father, or else men turned into disembodied penises-blow jobs in the woods or at a sex bookstore, pickups with no future. He longed to get a penis from a man, to get a penis that would magically make his own penis erect, because he despaired of getting a fatherly object who could live inside him. Without this, he despaired of being a man who could love a woman and whom a woman could love in return without dominating and extinguishing him.

A dream heralded the transition between despair and collaboration. He dreamt that he was sodomizing a man who was having intercourse with a woman at the same time. The dream, he felt, was bizarre and exciting, frightening and revealing. He could get an erection from the experience with another man and could then reach out through the man

into the woman. In this way, the other man did the sexual relating for him while Fernando was not in danger of being engulfed by the woman. I felt the dream also held the hope that the man would put his penis into Fernando so that Fernando could take the other man's power, but it was this longing that Fernando was blocking. He could let neither man nor woman inside himself—that is, he could not experience the desire for male or female objects—lest they take him over.

This was the transference. Although I sat behind him in the literal arrangement of the analytic consulting room, emotionally Fernando stayed behind me, hoping to steal my erection from behind or to enter intimate relationships without letting me enter him. By entering me without letting me enter him, he could take from me what he needed to become potent himself, or at least he could get to the woman vicariously through me. The longing for a relationship with a woman was still filtered through me, still

distanced by his use of me. I had become the self he longed to be.

Fernando still could not have reliable erections, even in masturbation. In the initial evaluation before beginning analysis, tests had indicated that his erectile difficulty was primarily psychological. I doubted this. His capacity for intimate relationships was initially so limited that we agreed to hold off any physical medical intervention until such time as he could sustain an emotionally intimate relationship. In the first months after he moved away from men, he was so frightened of the women with whom he began relationships that he lost his erections. Although analysis lessened his fear, the erectile difficulty persisted. Fernando attributed this to embarrassment about the unreliability of his erections. I still wondered about an organic component and said that I thought it was time for a second urologic consultation for the organic aspect of his erectile failure. This time, two consultants

agreed about the organic origin of the erectile difficulty. One recommended pelvic vascular surgery; the second suggested instead that Fernando try papaverine injections into the body of the penis, an approach that had been standardized over the previous few years (Virag et al. 1984). Fernando chose papavarine injection therapy and regained his capacity for reliable erections, with some improvement in his capacity to maintain erections even when not using the papaverine.

Fernando was soon able to try a sexual relationship with a woman who had been hovering in his life for many years. He felt his potency confirmed with her, but she was not the woman he would have chosen. Grateful to her for the first sustained sexual relationship in twenty years, he broke off with her nevertheless to see if he could manage relationships that he found more satisfying beyond the sex. In this time of stretching his

boundaries, he felt a tentative and frightened hopefulness.

The hour that is the focus of this chapter occurred in this time of hopeful but uncertain transition. It began with a dream that gave a picture of Fernando's experience of the therapeutic holding relationship as a matured place for work and growth and of what I had come to mean for him. A new woman had appeared on the horizon, but when this hour occurred, it was still unclear whether they would be able to consummate an intimate relationship. That new relationship did ultimately mature. It ripened into the first relationship of his life which was both sexually and emotionally satisfying. But at the time of this hour, he could not be sure it would proceed. He was doing his best to hope in a time of uncertainty.

In the following session, Fernando frequently used the word "you" to mean *himself*. Since grammatically *I* would have

been the "you" in the room, I believe this use of "you" was in the service of using me as an object through which he was building a self. Embedded in the grammatical ambiguity was a penetrating confusion between himself and me that characterized his search for a self. I have italicized those parts of the hour that illustrate this process.

Fernando began the hour with a dream: "I dreamt of a building, as I so often have. There was renovation going on, and there was a man there who was part of the scene, a secure part. It wasn't sexual. He was helpful, in the background. I don't really remember the dream well.

"I have two thoughts about the dream. I wonder if perhaps I don't remember the dream so well because there is something homosexual in it, and I suppressed that. But it could be that it's a fine dream—that the man in the dream is you. I have a secure relationship with you

and it makes me happy. The renovation is my search for a home, my psychological renovations. But I don't know if it's true. This is what I've dug up. It may not be, but it is what has come to mind."

I said, "You're worried. You hope the dream is a sign of the positive, of the hard-won good feeling for me and for yourself, but there is also the lurking bad feeling, your suspicion of a homosexual element, which carries the conflict you're still in."

He was silent for a few minutes. "I took your comment as though I had no reaction, no feeling. That's the 'no feeling' I had about you for so long. I think I don't want to hear that I'm still in conflict. I want out of this!

"My friend Ted lost his job a few weeks ago. He's deeply depressed, and then yesterday his wife said she might ask for a divorce. He said he's so deeply unhappy about the way his life is going that he can't even have much of a

reaction about the latest downturn. It's a feeling I'm familiar with. *You're so tired of being the way you are, so burdened by it.* I read that Freud said that sometimes symptoms just die of exhaustion, wear themselves out. I feel like that myself sometimes."

When he first used "you" to mean himself or someone in his position, I felt jolted, as though he had reached right into me to get a self. As he continued over the next few minutes I felt I almost *became* him.

"I do want to jettison my burdens. But that's not the right image. It's like . . . *You have a space inside. It's filled with effort, filled with things that have cost you something. The effort was a drain. Or that space can be filled with things that give you energy, a source that fills you, gives you strength instead of making you weak. So it's not just getting rid of a burden, but it has to be replaced with something that gives you something positive.*"

Then at times he let me go, speaking to me of the ambiguity about his self, almost as if allowing me my own skin again.

"I see that as being the relationship with you. I continue to insist that I don't have that point of reference inside my own personality that gives me dignity. I don't have a model or standard. So what I have is a mish-mash of things. Some things I believe in, some I don't. Some are things that reveal themselves just by repetition.

"I allowed to Mary Ann the other night that I'm a diamond in the rough. I didn't have a theology, a code, a right-or-wrong. No, I *do* have a right-wrong code, but I don't know why. All the evidence, all the resources are there, but I don't feel it. I don't know my own weight and form, my substance. And I miss that. I envy people who just seem to have it. I never had it as a child and I don't as an adult. That's what I want from or through you-an adult point

of reference, something that will let me know how to function in the world.

Now he began using "you" for himself again, dizzily alternating "you" and "I."

"It seems to me it comes down to a search. My lack of self-confidence, poor self-image, it all revolves around an empty point. Where does your personality start? The strength emanate from? Your conviction? Your self-confidence? When you get down to that point for me, it's empty! So parts of my personality are like hungry dogs circling around an empty food bowl—hungry and lost. It's supposed to be there, but there's nothing there to eat. I have all these ideas and parts of my self, but nothing holds them together. Nothing gives me that consistent conviction I can refer to when I am shaken. I'm offered choices and I don't know what to do. I look for it in church, but I haven't found it there either.

"I'm fortunate to be here, in analysis, searching for something to fill it. I'm not a

scientist, but I have this image of loose atomic particles zigzagging in a defined space without coordination or coherence. *Then you do something to that space, zap it, give it order. Then they establish an order.* I feel like I'm an atom and I've been smashed. All these particles whirling around, not knowing what to do."

I felt drained, used to "zap" him with a self, as though he had committed a sexual act of extracting his self from me.

I said, "I don't think you heard yourself using the word 'you' to mean yourself instead of referring to me. Do you feel you need me inside to form yourself? Am I the father whose zap you want?"

He paused. "I have a fundamental desire for a center, a home, a father-'a master's voice,' an image I can feel I am coming from! That is to say, a father. And I can't do that. That's where the conflict comes from. I'm fighting as hard as I can with and for a father. There was so little in my father I want to be like. But in many

ways I am like him and I don't like it: his timidity, his passivity. I scream against it! I don't want to be that way.

If you're screaming and fighting with all your might against something that is supposed to be your source, what do you do? How do you stop the fighting and acquire the source you want? All my life you try to build without him, which you can't do! You have to accept him for what he is. You don't have to be like him. I don't have to be like him! But what do I put in his place other than the person who was naturally supposed to be there?"

I said, "The struggle isn't over. If I'd be your father and your source, you're afraid I'd take you over, use you for my own purposes."

"That conflict is still there, and it's key because *I will not be like him!* And I'm committed to that, but then I don't know what else to do. How do I keep him out and still keep someone or something that a father is supposed to be? Perhaps I lay

too much on my father. I try to describe what I want. It may not come from him. I guess you'd argue it can't. But I don't have to accept that I can never have self-confidence. I'm here because I believe that I don't have to be like him. I can be competent and productive. Yet, I can't resolve the two. I can't get rid of the fear of being like him. And I can't give up on the wish for a father, for a God. That's why I go to church. It's another part of my search for something I haven't found yet."

We were near the end of the session. I said, "It's still a mystery to you how you can find a satisfying self-image. You still feel you have to find out what and who you need to make up for the feeling you didn't have, the father you missed for so long. Without him, you can't find yourself, that zap that will bring you together around a point. You want it from me but it terrifies you."

"Yes!" he said. "Practically speaking, I think sex could help, like with Mary Ann, a

woman who cares about me and who I can stay with to care for her. Over time it would help establish my self-image. There were times I began to feel it with Helen last year before I felt I had to break up with her. Before then, we'd have sex for a few days and I'd begin to feel a source of power. I don't have a source of power. I broke up with Helen because I began to feel I no longer needed to be captive of the weaknesses in both our personalities. But the source of the strength was sex with her. I don't regret breaking up with her. It was healthy, but it's left me in limbo, and I haven't replaced the source of strength I had in the sexual part of the relationship with her."

Both of us experienced this session as an hour of confirmation. In this hour, Fernando summed up the leading edge of the transference, the relationship with his father, which was its major precursor. And he clarified the analytic situation for me in words that were beyond my own, yet that fit with my experience of our work.

The hour began with his dream of a building in renovation, with a man identified with me who was a helpful part of the background. Fernando often dreamt of buildings, an image he viewed as his personality, his search for himself. There was some lack of clarity in the dream, but, as he told it, he was clearly saying that I was the helpful man. He had a secure relationship with me, and he felt a dramatic shift from the years of having no positive feelings for his father or for me.

This is the description of his finding me as the contextual parent, embodied in the father who could hold the situation and provide Fernando space in which to live. The discovery made him happy.

Yet there is a partly repressed conflict. He is worried that it is a homosexual relationship. During the hour, I thought of the years in which he sought a father and an identity through a search for homosexual relationships. He was

embarrassed and threatened by those longings now, but they are still a feature of his feeling for me as the provider of holding. He is still haunted by his unsatisfactory defense of sexualizing the relationship with the contextual parent as his way of dealing with the kind of despair he described early in the hour in terms of his friend Ted —no job, no one there for him.

Fernando's despair developed originally in the relationship with his mother by whom he felt dominated from the beginning. He felt that it was her intrusiveness that deprived him of his self, that she had scooped out the core of his self and had at the same time denied him access to others who might have provided him with the space in which to find a self. In this situation, he unconsciously developed the strategy of turning to men, not only for arms-around holding, which he desperately wanted, but for the insemination that he had come to feel was required for the birth of a

compensatory, new self. I believe that he was actually identified with his mother, who must at bottom have also felt that she needed insemination from a man to form a self. Frustrated with her passive husband, and probably with her father before him, she seems to have attempted to get a self from Fernando by taking his masculinity and personality from him, introjectively extracting it from him (Bollas 1987). What Fernando experienced as her control, I believe, was her attempt to get his liveliness into herself. Nevertheless, Fernando experienced being controlled. He felt that his mother tried to mold him in a rigid die and then stole his self from him.

In the hour, Fernando then discussed the internal corollary of the external holding space I provided for him. It is the space inside which he described as "filled with effort, with things which have cost you something ... or that space can be filled with things which give you energy, a source that fills you, gives you strength

instead of making you weak." This is the creative reservoir, the place inside the self that corresponds to the external transitional space that is Winnicott's "locus of creativity" (1971b). It is here that Fernando describes a positive self that derives from the external holding. He can identify what is growing in his self, but it is not yet secure. Once it is more securely installed, he will not look for ways to describe it. Analysts are most eloquent during their search for self.

Fernando then discussed the use of the analyst in building a secure self. "I see that as being the relationship with you ... I don't have that point of reference in my personality that gives me dignity ... a model or standard."

It still comes by outside reference, but increasingly, the outside is being installed at the core, partly by the analyst's role of being in the steady background and partly by being available as an object for identification who can be used through

introjective identification. But in another way, it is not only through taking in the analyst. Fernando wants to find his self, not the analyst's self. That was the trouble with his mother and father. He felt he kept having his mother's self and her preformed image of who he should be foist on and into him, so that she could extract it from him for herself. Meanwhile his father, a man of the world who was a shy violet in the family, offered too little to identify with.

Fernando wants to find his self, the things that "reveal themselves just by repetition." But to do so, he has to be helped to hold steady to find them. In this part of the search, I am the platform on which he stands to see the self displayed, which he hopes to assemble. He sees himself, now, in a new way, in a way he had hardly dared to hope for, as a "diamond in the rough," an unshaped gem that might have structure and integrity if it can only be found. "All the evidence, the resources are there, but I

don't feel it. I don't know my own weight and form, my substance."

What had brought Fernando to treatment was his desperate need to depend on others, on external objects, for a view of himself. Unconsciously, he fantasied that the longed-for erection would be the defining embodiment of a self. Now he no longer converts an image of a self into another man's erect penis, but he still feels he needs another man to help him see who he is. We all need our external objects to help us see and be ourselves throughout life. We realize that when Fernando says it, but he means it too literally. He has not yet internalized the sustaining function of the object, so he feels he must have a constant external supply of internal objects to confirm his sense of self. "That's what I want from or through you-an adult point of reference, something that will let me know how to function in the world." For many years, the disembodied penis had been the "adult point of reference" he imagined

would be the answer to his search, enter his center, and infuse him with what he needed to organize around it.

So he tells us: "My search ... revolves around an empty point. The place my personality should start is empty." And he then describes his ravenous search for the seed crystal of personality, which he, as so many others, envision as food: "So parts of my personality are like hungry dogs circling around an empty food bowl—hungry and lost. It's supposed to be there, but there's nothing to eat. I have all these ideas and parts of my self, but nothing holds them together. Nothing gives me that consistent conviction I can refer to when I am shaken."

BUILDING A RESILIENT SELF

Again, Fernando draws a picture of what would be necessary to form a self. He would have to introject something like

food to form the glue to his splintered, disorganized, lost self. And being left hungry for a lifetime, because he cannot feed himself and cannot maintain a relationship with those who could help him achieve cohesion, he remains not only hungry, but filled with a pack of voracious dogs who would destroy any food that came their way.

Fernando is still lacking in his capacity to derive benefit from feeding his others, helping others to establish their selves in a reciprocal way. His friends felt that Fernando actually did nourish them and that he did it better than most people—but he was unable to derive a reflected self-cohesion from these relationships because he felt giving to others emptied him. It emptied his self because he felt it was demanded by the internal needs of a controlling mother.

In the next moments of the session, Fernando gave another graphic fantasy of what I would have to supply to give him

coherence: "I have this image of loose atomic particles zigzagging in a defined space without coordination or coherence. Then you do something to that space, zap it, give it order. Then they establish an order. I feel like I'm an atom, and I've been smashed. All these particles whirling around, not knowing what to do."

Here is another image that gives a clue to the sexualized longing for a penis, the moment of creation of a self that is an atomic "big bang." He needs me to give him this bang, to "zap" his disorganized fragments. This is the form of his dream for the father who is "a center, a home, a father—'a master's voice,' an image I can feel I am coming from!" But this desire also leads to his dread that he is issuing an invitation for this object to exploit his craving to enter him and take him over at the core. It is here that his fight is against his father, to be not like him in refusing to be taken over by his mother as he feels his father was. He tries to be like the father he longed for, not like the one he

felt he had, through being in a relationship with someone while not taken over. He told me how much he wanted me to be firm so that he would not take me in deceptively, and yet that he did not want to have to be like me:

"I'm fighting as hard as I can with and for a father . . . If you're screaming and fighting with all your might against something that is supposed to be your source, what do you do? How do you stop the fighting and acquire the source you want? All my life you try to build without him, which you can't do! You have to accept him for what he is. You don't have to be like him. I don't have to be like him! But what do I put in his place other than the person who was naturally supposed to be there?"

The inextricable puzzle of how to identify with others without having to be them in their fallibility tied Fernando in a Gordian knot. He tried to solve this conundrum by the quick and anonymous

homosexual episodes that denied the individuality of the men through whom he nevertheless desperately hoped to get the "zap" he needed for formation of his self. With failure came desperation and futility.

But he found what he needs to begin the process of building a resilient self: "I can't resolve the two. I can't get rid of the fear of being like him. And I can't give up on the wish for a father, for a God. That's why I go to church. It's another part of my search for something I haven't found yet."

In the last minutes of the session, Fernando mentions two areas of continuing search. The first occurs in church. It was true, I thought, that his life-long search for God carried the same elements: a greater being who could contain and oversee his search for himself, who would love him without intrusion, and who would support his search for meaning and a relentless devotion to higher values and service to others, so characteristic of Fernando.

The second occurs in sexual expression. Like John Donne, whose religious and sexual longings were so intertwined that his sacred and profane poetry drew equally from sexual and religious sources, Fernando looked for a higher self in the gutter to which he was brought by the baseness of his longing. But in the renewal of a search for a woman who could offer what he wanted from his father, he fantasied the coming together of his longing to be a man who could penetrate, who could be the "zapper" organizing the other, like the father he longed for, with the external object who could reflect back to him the images of a fragmented self and integrate them in her holding gaze. Both religion and intimate sexual relating are like intensive therapy in offering opportunities for the coming together of self with its objects in moments of conjoined intensity, which at the same time support the separate individuality of both. In this way, they speak to Fernando's search for

objects that will help him become whole beyond the confines of his treatment.

It was an enormous relief to Fernando, and to me, that in the ensuing months he found a considerable degree of this in his developing relationship with Mary Ann.

REFINDING THE THERAPIST'S SELF

It is in the nature of our work that when it goes well, patients give us what we need for reassurance and confirmation. In this session, Fernando gave me the confirmation that something had been happening during the years of our work that had enabled him to change fundamentally. He was not made in my image—something I came to realize that both he and I feared was the only way out. He had found himself in the struggle with and against me. In

doing so, he helped me to find *my* self—the self who did not have to impose an identity on an emerging other, yet who could hope for a better way of life for him. A self who had not been a fool, as I had often felt I had been, for instance, when I said to him in our first meeting, "I'm not sure what you are."

And he gave me as beautiful a description of the ideas I had been struggling with as I could ever hope for. He described for me his need for a holding arms-around parent to provide the context for his growth, the contextual parent toward whom he had felt so cold and guarded through the first years of our work, but toward whom he could now feel warmly grateful. This was the parent by whom he wanted to be fed, to be held from the inside, and to be "zapped" by in

an organizing, integrating infusion of love for his emerging self.

But this self was also confused with the object parent by whom he wanted to be loved and whom he wanted to love and nourish in return. He wanted to be validated without feeling controlled.

Ultimately, the focused, loving, object-relating parent who holds and suffuses with love and meaning from the center turns into the contextual, holding parent. The quandary in which Fernando began is solved by learning that in surrendering to being defined by those we love, we find the context in which to find our self-definition. They must give our selves to us and we must give their selves back to them.

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