

How the Psychoanalytic Use of Object Constancy and Internalization Can Inform Our Understanding of the Teacher/Student Relationship

ELIZABETH DANZE

University of Texas at Austin

Keywords: design studio, psychology, the relational aspect of teaching

In looking at the discipline of Psychoanalysis, we might better understand concepts around basic human development such as object constancy and internalization as ways of informing how the mentoring or teaching relationship is focused on the growth and development in the other person— our student. Object constancy and internalization enable an individual to preserve a stable, subjective representation of an object (the psychotherapist, for instance) in the face of complex or contradictory affects. This paper looks at this through the lens of the psychoanalytic dyad— the relationship between psychoanalyst and analysand (patient)— as a vehicle for envisioning how we might better educate our students, especially in the intensive, hours-long design studio.

In Hans Loewald’s important paper, “On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis,” he expounds on the parent-child relationship and how the empathic parent holds a vision of the future child and in various ways mediates this vision to the child. The child, in identification with it, can then grow. By internalizing aspects of the parent, the child also internalizes the parent’s image of the child. While a teacher is not participating in the role of parent or psychoanalyst, a primary concern for an analyst, parent, or teacher is the aiding in the growth and development of another. The idea that the parent/analyst/teacher’s capacity to imagine future growth, anticipate something for the child or patient or student, hold that in mind for them, and offer that vision is a reflective way of expanding possibilities and potentialities for them. Perhaps in this way, the successful, authentic, and autonomous student begins in the mind of the teacher.

We understand that the psychoanalyst seeks to understand and “take in” the analysand, to help organize thought processes and mindset. Then, working alongside the analysand, the teacher helps to organize the student’s design approach and process. The teacher then “hands back” organizational and other insight through interpretation to the student, who must bring meaning and understanding to the changing project— and to themselves, the developing designer. In addition to object constancy and internalization, by looking at the writings and clinical work of Winnicott, Ogden, Kohut, and others,

we will explore related notions of receptivity, projective identification, concordant transference, and co-construction and ask how they might be understood within the teacher/student paradigm in this context.

Lastly, in an analysis, realizations and understandings continue to occur and develop long past the end of treatment. It is a fluid and ongoing process, with multiple mechanisms extending beyond the limits of the analysis. The successful design student may internalize the relationship with her instructor, aiding the student in positive self-constancy long after the design studio is over and the instructor is gone. By understanding how to employ some of these ideas, we might better appreciate our role as teachers in aiding our students in a life-long quest for growth and mastery.

Architectural design instruction is challenging. It brings together a dynamic process, combining elements of both practical considerations and problem solving with creative artistic expression. If we believe there is no single approach to doing this, then how does one effectively teach others to become authentic designers? In looking at the discipline of Psychoanalysis, we might better understand concepts around basic human development such as object constancy and internalization as ways of informing how the mentoring or teaching relationship is focused on the growth and development in the other person— our student. Object constancy and internalization enable an individual to preserve a stable, subjective representation of an object (the psychotherapist, for instance) in the face of complex or contradictory affects. From my point of view as architect, teacher, and candidate at a psychoanalytic institute, this paper looks at this through the lens of the psychoanalytic dyad— the relationship between psychoanalyst and analysand (patient)— as a vehicle for envisioning how we might better educate our students, especially in the intensive, hours-long design studio.

Auchincloss, in *The Psychoanalytic Model of the Mind*, points out that object constancy is one of the most important concepts in thinking about the psychoanalytic model of the mind. She defines object constancy as “the ability to maintain a positively tinged feeling toward the mother (or anyone else) in the face of feelings of frustration, anger and/or disappointment.”¹ Elaborating on this from an infant development perspective, Alvarez-Monjaras and her colleagues say, “the representations of self, other, and

self-with-other, within the child and the mother change as the infant develops. The child is developing the internal psychic structures towards object constancy, which in turn allows cognitive processes to flourish (Blatt, 1991a). In these moments, the mother is both (1) developing new schemas about her child, and (2) progressing back and forth between previous modes of functioning and attempts towards her own self-constancy (Blatt & Luyten, 2009).² If we think of the design process from the point of view of our students as one that contains uncertainty, failures, frustrations, vulnerabilities, dead ends, and a range of other emotions and reactions, the ability to recall the words and positive relationship of a tutor or teacher are useful to the designer. As the student learns to work more independently, this internal attachment to the teacher is employed. The attainment of object constancy is a lifelong, ongoing process that ebbs and flows as new teachers, mentors, peers, and colleagues become “objects” to our students. Eventually, and over time, self-constancy is achieved. Again, Auchincloss defines this as the “capacity to sustain a unified self-representation even in the face of conflicting experiences of the self.”³ In other words, the ability to maintain a positive self-representation, even in the face of failure or other threats to self-esteem, is something we can easily understand.

When we begin to imagine that our student might internalize their relationship to and with us, we see how influential our relationship might be to the learning process. *Internalization* is a concept borrowed from biology. As Auchincloss says, “Internalization is an organism’s tendency to take in aspects of the external world.”⁴ As architects, we understand much about the dynamics and complexities of the external world. This reference by Auchincloss refers specifically to our internal world taking in aspects of the external— including others (objects). Relatedly, *identification* is defined by Auchincloss as “a modification of the self-image that results from internalizing the traits of others.”⁵ Here there is much to say about how our ego and our sense of self are influenced by others.

Hans Loewald, in his paper “On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis,” writes about the psychoanalytic dyad and the psychoanalytic process that leads to structural changes in the patient’s self-understanding. He looks to the parent-child relationship, where ideally the parent has an empathic relationship with the child, understanding the child’s particular stage of development, while also being “ahead” in their vision of that child. This “more” that the parent sees and knows is mediated to the child so the child can identify with it and grow.⁶ In the psychoanalytic dyad, “the patient, who comes to the analyst for help through increased self-understanding, is led to this self-understanding by the understanding he finds in the analyst. The analyst operates on various levels of understanding. Whether he verbalizes his understanding to the patient on the level of clarifications of conscious material, whether he indicates or reiterates his intent of understanding, restates the procedure to be followed, or whether he interprets unconscious, verbal

or other, material, and especially if he interprets transference and resistance— the analyst structures and articulates, or works towards structuring and articulating, the material and the productions offered by the patient. If an interpretation of unconscious meaning is timely, the words by which this meaning is expressed are recognizable to the patient as expressions of what he experiences. They organize for him what was previously less organized and thus give him the ‘distance’ from himself which enables him to understand, to see, to put into words and to ‘handle’ what was previously not visible, understandable, speakable, tangible. A higher stage of organization, of both himself and his environment, is thus reached, by way of the organizing understanding which the analyst provides.”⁷ The analyst then holds this higher organization and mediates it to the patient. If we look to the teacher-student relationship, when the teacher is *attuned* to the student, this higher stage of organization occurs not only literally in the critiquing of the design studio work itself, but also within the student. The student observes the way the teacher organizes information about the project being designed and how the teacher synthesizes that information and re-states it in a more understandable, tangible, and coherent way. Hopefully the project is better, but is still very much of the students making, driven by the student’s intentions. This “existing first in the teachers mind” does not negate the inherent autonomy of the child/patient/student, instead, it is meant to foster genuine independence and autonomy.

Primary caregivers carry for the child not only a sense of the baby that he once was— and in part still is— but also a sense of the man or woman that he will become and *is in the process of becoming*. Students are similarly in the process of becoming. Perhaps in this way, the successful, authentic, and autonomous student begins to form, or at least could well and abundantly exist, in the mind of the teacher. This is not to overtake or replace the students’ self with what the teacher wants the student to be or supposes the student to need, but through attunement, direction and guidance *from the student*, as is the case with a thoughtful and good analyst with their analysand. Ideally, the instructor envisions the student designer operating successfully as an independent, creative person, capable of observing and extracting meaningful lessons on their own. For example, a design assignment might start with research around building precedents. We might expect the student to work with initiative in researching, then instigating, applying, and testing design propositions that integrate precedents they bring to the table. During one-on-one interaction, it is possible to direct the student toward certain examples based on their leading the discussion about what they value, and to demonstrate how historical or morphological meaning is extracted and applied. But the lesson is not merely the teaching of a conventional methodological design process. Rather— and hopefully— it is an encouragement to grow in knowledge of self and in curiosity toward the outer world, in this case in the form of understanding why a particular building resonates with them at this time. It is also important to keep in mind what a successful project might be for this student

at this moment in their development and what a successful designer they will become, no matter how far they are from it at this time. Ultimately these skills and abilities would be self-initiated by the student without instigation by the instructor. This is neither the conventional student-teacher relationship, nor the old-school notion of master-apprentice. It is not driven from the top down from an all-knowing teacher, but from within the student themselves. If we substitute “student” for “patient,” Winnicott reminds us that ultimately, “it is the patient and only the patient who has the answers.”⁸ But the student is under the close watch of the teacher, who adopts an analytic, acclimating mind alongside images of the transforming, emergent designer coming more fully into themselves.

Frank Summers states, “The Analyst’s vision, implied in the aim of self-realization, brings the future dimension into psychoanalytic thought.”⁹ The analysis is then viewed as a “way of opening new modes of self-expression that may create new categories and add the dimension of the future to the analytic craft.”¹⁰ By looking again at parental empathy, if there is an appreciation for the child’s stage of development, Winnicott presents the concept of the spontaneous gesture. It should be noted that while Winnicott and other psychoanalysts believed that Freud neglected infancy as a state, psychoanalysis has always had a developmental perspective founded on the principle that early experience, particularly within the mother-child dyad, underlies the shaping of personality. Here Winnicott states, “The spontaneous gesture moves the child towards the acquisition of new knowledge, mastery, and exploration of the world. The mother’s empathy therefore goes beyond appreciation for who the child is to the facilitation of the child’s movement toward the future. The mother is ‘behind’ in following the child’s spontaneity by meeting it with a response of her own.”¹¹ The parental response both engages the child’s spontaneity and adds to the vision the parent constructs from it to the child’s experience. It’s this standing *behind* while adding a vision to the one already being put forth by the student that is interesting and relevant to us as teachers. Similarly, in the analytic dyad the analyst is allied with the patient’s latent possibilities. We might think of the alliance between patient and analyst or the alliance between teacher and student existing in this very place - in the realm of what is possible— for growth to take place. This vision of the future self, held by the analyst/ teacher, has what we could consider to be a spiritual side. The patient/student must be appreciated for who they are in order to bring their full potential into fruition. One fear is that an analyst or a teacher might seek to mold the patient or the student in the image they have envisioned, perhaps meaning well, but viewing the patient or student through a biased, even (and probably) an unconscious one. But the analyst or teacher “behind” the patient or student protects against this kind of intrusion, as does the student’s vision when formed from their authentic expression.

Much like a patient’s identification with the analyst, a student may identify with you, their teacher. Related to a group of

mechanisms known as internalizations, “Identification is a psychological process whereby an aspect of the individual’s self-representation becomes modified to resemble aspects of an object representation.”¹² The identification of “I’m like you in this way” is an internalization of a part of the teacher that the student seeks to “hang their ego on.” A student can interact with their instructor and then interact with themselves in the same way. The teacher is an object— attentive, respectful, understanding, interpreting content— that enables the student to look at themselves more fully. They identify that “she’s with me.” The student effectively metabolizes the teacher. This identification is then incorporated into a self-object that resides inside the student. Self-analysis is the general assumption that, after sufficient time, patients develop higher levels of object constancy and are able to internalize the psychoanalytic process to the point of continuing self-reflection on their own. This is working towards the self as an inner authority. To identify with the new object, one must have a working rapport. “A capacity to use an object is more sophisticated than a capacity to relate to objects; and relating may be to a subjective object, but usage implies that the object is part of external reality.”¹³ With Identification with the analyst or teacher, one can have the capacity to hear the critique (or even better, accept it with curiosity), moving towards insight to induce understanding and learning.

If we use the example of a teacher giving a student a desk crit, the student explains the project to the teacher and waits for the instructor to respond. Perhaps the student has formulated a question, which is the best scenario, as the student is actively leading, not passively waiting. Often the student is expecting the instructor to give an overall impression and provide insight about what the student is doing in their project. If we pause and look briefly again at the relationship between caregiver and child, first, we see the caregiver is (hopefully) in a positive relationship with the child, and second, the child acknowledges the caregiver as a separate subject outside of themselves. Then, when the caregiver makes an observation about the child, or an affect surrounding the child (perhaps the child is excited about tying their shoelaces for the first time) the caretaker’s reaction is more meaningful and readily taken in. When a student knows that their project is not “perfect” and needs work, and if the teacher has a positive relationship with the student at the desk crit, instead of experiencing doubt, vulnerability, shame and fear, the student is able to hear, see, and accept as *real* the comments and take them in more easily. In other words, the teacher has another perspective and is separate, but because of the interpersonal relationship has made *real* what is already known by the student at some level, conscious or unconscious. The teacher anchors insight into reality so that it can be metabolized and the student can continue to work creatively. In relational psychoanalysis, construction or co-construction relates primarily to the co-construction of experience within the therapeutic dyad “where efforts are aimed at understanding the mutual influences between patient and analyst in the here and now.”¹⁴ Additionally, the expression, excitement and genuine curiosity

of the teacher are important here, as the teacher and student form a partnership working together “utilizing their respective actions, reactions, and interactions.”¹⁵ This is strikingly similar to the studio experience between instructor and student. If we also think of the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student as having a kind of “permeable” boundary, the connectedness is a mutual process— one of “we-ness” where the student and teacher know each other in a professional sense as collaborators seeking the same goal: the strengthening of a sense of self as a designer and as a person.

While the teacher has set forth the agenda for the studio with an intention that students confront certain methodological and representational approaches and other concerns, in addition to engaging these prompts, the teacher has the opportunity to deeply influence the way the student sees themselves. With a greater sense of self-understanding as developing individuals and as designers in the context of the work they produce, like the therapeutic alliance, “each (analysand/analyst) implicitly agrees and understands their working together to help the analysand (or student) to mature through *insight*, progressive understanding, and control.”¹⁶ As Loewald explains, the analyst works with the patient so that the patient might create distance from *themselves* when they are getting in their own way, or not seeing themselves clearly in a given situation. This self-understanding from a distance enables them to recognize and to see what was previously not visible, understandable, or tangible.¹⁷ This is what the teacher can help the student to do in their design work by removing themselves from the intimacy of the making of the work and moving towards critiquing it from a more objective point of view, for instance.

Power dynamics in the student/teacher relationship ought to be addressed when thinking about object constancy and internalization of the other. As bell hooks writes in her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, many professors are not self-actualized and “they often use the classroom to enact rituals of control that were about domination and the exercise of power.”¹⁸ As hooks elaborates, the studio can be hierarchically coercive where the voice of the professor is the “privileged” transmitter of knowledge. This most often originates from a pedagogical position on the teacher’s side but can also be an expectation of students. In its extreme, this is antithetical to a healthy studio environment where every student is genuinely valued, especially within a diverse group of students. “The call for a recognition of cultural diversity, a rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies, and the concomitant demand that there be a transformation in our classrooms, in how we teach and what we teach, has been a necessary revolution—”¹⁹ A good teacher will engage interest in the uniqueness of each student and their work. Such teachers approach students with the will and desire to respond to each with a recognition of the whole person, a union of mind body and spirit. The studio lends itself to this approach as this “whole person” knowledge is embedded in design, the ways people interact with the buildings and spaces

our students are designing, and in the person of our student themselves. As bell hooks writes, “students want us to see them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge.”²⁰ We might not be prepared, or we may resist taking on this task, but it is in the best interest of our students to engage in this kind of relationship. The knowledge received will enrich and enhance both teacher and student, and support a healthier model of studio culture.

Thomas Ogden, too, has something to say on this when writing about the analytic third. “I believe that, in an analytic context, there is no such thing as an analysand apart from the relationship with the analyst, and no such thing as an analyst apart from the relationship with the analysand.... From another perspective there is obviously an infant and a mother who constitute separate physical and psychological entities. The mother-infant unity coexists in dynamic tension with the mother and infant in their separateness.”²¹ Similarly, the intersubjectivity of the student and teacher coexists in dynamic tension. They are separate individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, sensations, corporal reality, psychological identity, etc. *and* together they share in the subjective experience of the other.

Building on their project and their ego as a designer, some students are remarkably confident and resilient, while others are more sensitive and more easily defeated. We as teachers should always look for the ways in which the student is doing the best they can. In making it more real, with empathy, and through connectedness, we are empathizing with a state that the patient/student hasn’t made real yet themselves. How we listen is important and how we say what we say is significant. *How* we ask questions is also important. “Does this resonate?” “Is this a correct interpretation of what you’re trying to do?” “Is this what you are striving for?” “Is this what you have in mind?” “Is what you have created in alignment with your intentions?” We want to avoid a narcissistic or other injury because it is hard for many students to respond to or recover easily or quickly. On the other hand, one could argue that these kinds of psychic “wounds” in the context of the relationship/studio environment is a safe setting for learning to address these injuries that are inevitable in a creative discipline where one’s work is subject to public, and multiple kinds and levels of critique. Being empathically immersed while also holding a critical, analytic position and evaluating and discussing their work with a mind towards their future successful self is much for us to hold and keep in awareness.

A goal for our students is to expand potentialities and possibilities beyond learning the overt material and methods set forth by the instructor, and to better understand themselves and the latent qualities they possess. The nature of the relationship and the personality of the teacher are integrated into the psyche of the student. When student later calls upon the ethos and character of the teacher, the *relationship itself* is recalled. Research has

suggested that post-termination, the patient (student) does not have simply a reduction of symptoms or an internalization of an analytic function, as has been commonly proposed. Rather, the patient has internalized the therapeutic relationship as a soothing and helpful inner presence.²² Similarly, the caring, empathic, attuning relationship with the teacher is the device the student calls upon when confronted with similar dilemmas (design or other) after the teacher is gone and the studio is over.

ENDNOTES

1. Auchincloss, Elizabeth. *The Psychoanalytic Model of the Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015), 198.
2. Alvarez-Monjaras, Mauricio, Helena J. Rutherford, and Linda C. Mayes. "Personality Organization and Maternal Addiction: A Structural-Developmental Psychodynamic Contribution." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 36, no. 4 (2019): 321–27.
3. Auchincloss, Elizabeth L., and Eslee Samberg, eds. *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012), 173.
4. Auchincloss, *The Psychoanalytic Model of the Mind*, 135.
5. *Ibid*, 135.
6. Loewald, Hans. "On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 41 (1960), 20.
7. *Ibid*, 24.
8. Winnicott, Donald W. "The Use of an Object." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 50 (1969), 711.
9. Summers, Frank. "The Analyst's Vision of the Patient and Therapeutic Action." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2000), 548.
10. *Ibid*, 548.
11. *Ibid*, 549.
12. Auchincloss, Elizabeth L., and Eslee Samberg, eds. *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*, 106.
13. Winnicott, Donald W. "The Use of an Object", 715.
14. Auchincloss, Elizabeth L., and Eslee Samberg, eds. *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*, 220.
15. Baldwin, Michele, and Virginia Satir. "The Therapist Story." *Essay. In The Use of Self in Therapy*, 24. London: Routledge, 2013.
16. Hoffman, Irwin Z. "The Patient as Interpreter of the Analyst's Experience." *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 19, no. 3 (1983), 392.
17. Loewald, Hans. "On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis", 24.
18. hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.
19. *Ibid*, 29-30.
- 20.
21. *Ibid*, 15.
22. Ogden, Thomas H. "The Analytic Third: Working with Intersubjective Clinical Facts." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 75 (1994), 4
23. 22 Falkenström, Fredrik, Johan Grant, Jeanette Broberg, and Rolf Sandell. "Self-Analysis and Post-Termination Improvement after Psychoanalysis and Long-Term Psychotherapy." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 55, no. 2 (2007): 629–74.