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Almost Buber: Martin Buber's Complex Influence on Family Therapy

In 1923 when Martin Buber's *Ich und Du*¹ first appeared, Freud's psychoanalytic thinking had just entered its final phase of restructuring. While many if not all of Freud's cases involved complex and troubled family relations, no one at the time entertained the notion that these relations could be altered directly in a therapeutic fashion. Freud himself had pronounced, "Families, I don't know what to do with them."

It took another three or four decades and another world war before mental health professionals began to approach Freud's ironic and frustrated question—"what to do with families?"—in a systematic and practical manner. Buber's dialogical thinking has passed in and out of the Family Therapy movement. I will demonstrate here first the central theoretical place that Buber's thought could occupy in formulating the core of family therapy. Second, I will outline important crossroads at which the emergent theory of family therapy stood face to face with Buber's approach. Third, I will offer some reflections on how the manner in which Buber did and did not influence family therapy sheds light both on family therapy and on Buber's thought.

Differentiation and Dialogue

One of the founders of the Family Therapy Movement in the United States was a psychiatrist named Murray Bowen who worked at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Bowen was nearly unique in suggesting to family therapists that they engage in therapy with their own families, as he himself did and reported². Over four decades Bowen elaborated a theory for family therapy which has become quite central in North American family therapy, partially due to the sheer mass of Bowen's many trainees now in practice³. Bowen defined his cen-

1 Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1983 [1923]), and Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

2 Murray Bowen, *Family Theory in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978).

3 Peter Titelman, ed., *The Therapist's Own Family* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1987). See Alan Flashman, "Review" of *101 More Interventions in Family Therapy* by Thorana Nelson and Terry Trepperin (New York: Haworth, 1998), *Society and Welfare* 20(2000): 4 (Hebrew).

tral theoretical concept as "differentiation of the self in the [family] system." Using an analogy from the biological science of embryology (since well before Freud, psychology has been both enriched and sometimes muddled by the importation of concepts from the physical sciences), Bowen tried to define a scale of the health not of individuals but of the quality of their relationships. Bowen used the term "differentiation" in two ways. First and more readily appreciated, he suggested that higher level differentiation is characterized by the ability to separate thinking from emotion and engage each of these spheres of human experience more or less independently. In the more central and enigmatic way, Bowen tried to delineate the ability of each individual to maintain his own "self" integrity while also maintaining significant emotional ties with other similarly differentiated individuals in the family. It is to this second level that I now turn.

Bowen attempted to operationalize his concept of differentiation by describing three elements of praxis by which a level of differentiation could be determined. The first two elements of this praxis achieved clear conceptual definition in his work; the third element of praxis is clearly described in his work but left without conceptual clarity.

The first two elements of praxis are "I-position" and "triangles." Bowen suggested that in families with a higher level of differentiation, individual *commerce* communication with each other speaking each from an "I-position." Here we have an analogy imported from classical ballet. "First position, second position," and here "I-Position." Bowen meant that each individual begins to communicate by expressing in a relatively full and authentic manner his own experiential world, his needs and desires. These are expressed in an atmosphere of openness to a similar expression from the side of his partner in communication. In low differentiation, individuals limit the fullness of expression of themselves or of their partner. Rather, an individual may attempt to placate his partner by expressing only what the partner finds easy to hear. Alternatively, the individual may force his wishes upon his partner, without willingness to entertain the difference in experience or desires coming from his partner.

A somewhat stylized illustration may help concretize this point. Take for example a fourteen year old girl and her mother. The girl wants to stay out until 4:00 AM on a Saturday night, while mother agrees only to 2:00. The girl's "I-position" amounts to her explanation that she needs to stay later in order to gain acceptance with the "cool" girls in her crowd, something she has been working on for a year and something her mother does not oppose in principle. The mother's "I-position" amounts to her expression of her personal trouble in tolerating her anxieties regarding her daughter's safety as the night deepens. Each takes responsibility for her own experience and desires, and each takes an interest

and listens to the world of the other. A conversation has begun. At a lower level of differentiation, the girl may relinquish her social needs in order to placate her mother, or force her will without listening. Or the mother may swallow her anxieties without honestly talking with her daughter about her difficulties, or force her will without listening to the girl's social situation. There has been no place for two "I-positions" to commence genuine communication.

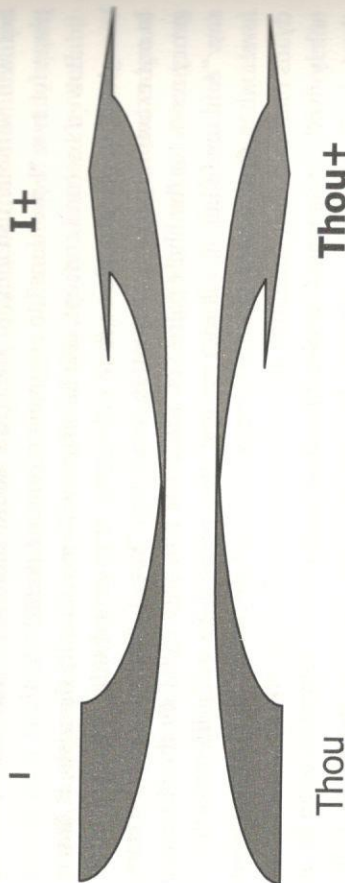
Bowen's second concept, one he shares with most family theorists, is that of triangles. Two people enlist a third rather than engage in dyadic communication. In our example, perhaps the mother would say, "Your father will need the emergency room for the chest pains you will cause him after 2:00." Or the girl might say, "And my father agrees with me that you are too anxious." Differentiation is lower when dyads communicate through a third. Differentiation is higher when dyads maintain their communication directly. Since families and systems are not solely dyadic, this would involve the robust existence of communication in all three dyads of a central triangle, but one at a time. In other words, in higher level differentiation the girl and her mother, after completing their dyadic communication, will continue each in a separate dyad with father. This should not be seen too concretely. Often the three may be talking all together, but within this logistical framework there is room for each dyad to communicate directly.

Here the reader may be puzzled. If two individuals begin communication from "I-positions" and refrain from triangulation, what exactly do they do next? This question brings us to the third part of Bowen's praxis, which he demonstrated but failed to conceptualize. In my teaching for the past twenty years, I have been referring to this praxis as "mutual creation". I am now pleased to adopt Daniel Stern's recent coinage, "co-creation."⁴

To continue with our example, the girl suggests that she call her mother every hour. Mother says that her anxieties become unbearable after twenty minutes. The girl says she cannot embarrass herself by calling her mother so frequently. But she suggests that she could feign a call to a fictitious 17 year old cousin who is at an even "cooler" party, and when she speaks this fictive cousin's name into her phone after dialing her mother, the mother will know from this code that she is alive and well. Mother wants time to consider this proposal. "Co-creation" here has meant that both girl and mother have grown a bit via their face to face honest communication, and their relationship has grown as well. Such "co-creation" constitutes the essential moments of growth in families.

⁴ Daniel Stern, *The Present Moment* (New York: Norton, 2004).

The following scheme (a metaphorical importation from enzymatic activity in biochemistry) will illustrate this co-creative process, especially if the reader will imagine the two arrows becoming complete from left to right simultaneously:



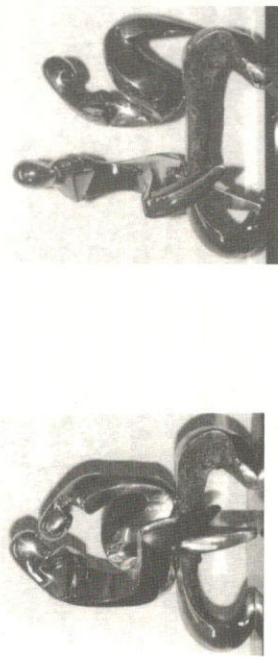
It is interesting to note how this "co-creation" is implicit in Bowen's praxis but did not reach conceptualization. Bowen reported in 1967 in a Family Research Conference how he created a "tempest in a teapot" within the family in which he was raised – he himself was more than 50 years of age at the time – in order to make room for "I-positions" without triangles. He then describes in wonderful emotional depth the new conversations that took place. For example, he found a new closeness with his father and was able to "talk about the full range of important subjects without avoidance or defensiveness, and we developed a far better relationship than we had ever had. This experience brought a new awareness that I simply did not know what constitutes a really solid person-to-person relationship. ...I believe that I had done something to change my relationship with my father, which in turn changed his relationship to all he contacted"⁵. These are the sorts of relational innovations that I refer to as "co-creations." I believe that Bowen practitioners would recognize these unconventional experiences as central to Bowen's practice.

I wish to add a personal note here. When I first began to teach Bowen's theory in a systematic way, I needed to conceptualize the co-creation in his practice in order to explain differentiation fully to my students. At that time I became aware that this "co-creation" was uncannily familiar to me, but not from the family therapy literature. I then browsed my shelves and rediscovered Buber's *I and Thou*. Since then, I have always taught selections from Buber's work together

⁵ Murray Bowen, *Family Theory*, 517.

with Bowen's. For twenty-five years my students have learned with me that families with higher levels of differentiation are families that create moments of "I-Thou" relating, within which people grow and change face to face. I would add here that I have consistently been impressed that the sometimes strident, technical or gaming tone of family therapy students becomes softer, more rounded, more humane, after working through and assimilating Buber's concept of dialogue.

The following artistic illustration has often helped students to visualize the I-Thou and I-It moments. The two pictures show two positions of the kinetic sculpture *Multiform* by the French-Israeli sculptor Jonathan Darmon.⁶ I-Thou involves a direct second person address, I-It a third-person relationship. These plastic figures often help students of family therapy to imagine real turning to and from direct meetings.



Three Near Misses

Buber then would seem to have exercised a significant influence on family therapy theory and practice. Three pieces of historical contact between Buber and the emerging field of family therapy indeed point to Buber's seminal role.

The first historical fact was Buber's delivery of the William Alanson White Memorial Lectures Washington School of Psychiatry in 1956. The Washington School was famous for developing the "interpersonal school of psychiatry" whose foremost proponent and founder was Harry Stack Sullivan. The following account of Buber's acceptance of the invitation is instructive:

The most remarkable event at that time was the visit of Martin Buber, who in 1957 delivered the fourth William Alanson White Memorial Lectures and also gave a series of evening sem-

⁶ Jonathan Darmon, *Multiform* (1995), photographs by Alan Flashman.

inars to especially interested faculty members... I was delegated to call upon him. It was an experience I shall never forget. It made me somewhat uneasy to be calling a "holy man" (as I thought of Martin Buber) on the telephone, but I did. I was to meet him in an apartment house with a large private foyer or waiting room, where I waited for an uneasy five or ten minutes. Buber was a short man, no taller than I was, with extraordinarily alive brown eyes and a white Santa Claus beard. He greeted me without any social smile whatsoever. He merely looked at me very intensely, and my uneasiness dropped away completely. I think I have rarely felt so much at ease, so much myself. Still without any social smile, he said, "Come over here in the light where I can see you better." And so I did, without any self-consciousness. One of the first things he said was: "When one is 80 years old, one has to choose carefully which places one will go to. There isn't so much time left. I want to come to the Washington School of Psychiatry because I think it is one of the few places which keep the questions open." I recall that he elaborated on this, indicating he meant that there was a spirit of inquiry, not dogmatism, at the School. I have never forgotten the phrase "keep the questions open" and I think the School has never been paid a greater compliment.⁷

What is most significant for this discussion is the fact that many of the graduates of the interpersonal school, both at the Washington School and at the William Alanson White Institute in New York City were responsible for the development of group and family therapies in the 1950s, at first together, as interpersonal practices, and later as separate disciplines. Many of these founders of family therapy would have been avidly following the White Lectures, and the innovative journal *Psychiatry* published by the Washington School, in which three of Buber's papers were published. The three, "Distance and Relation," "Guilt and Guilt Feelings," and "Elements of the Interhuman," were soon collected by the omnipresent Maurice Friedman into a popular volume, *The Knowledge of Man*.⁸ Prominent among those founders of family therapy who would have been exposed to Buber's work was Don Jackson, who studied with Sullivan before becoming a collaborator with Gregory Bateson in developing cybernetic systems theory.

The second historical fact involves Gregory Bateson himself. Bateson, an anthropologist, biologist and innovative cybernetic thinker was the undisputed high priest of family systems theory in the United States from the 1950s to his death in 1987. Bateson collected his essays on cybernetics into his challenging *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* in 1972. This work makes reference to Buber's I-Thou relationship as one that could evolve between an individual and his community or ecosphere.⁹

7 Margaret Rioch, "Fifty Years at the Washington School of Psychiatry", *Psychiatry* 49 (1986):11 from http://www.wspdc.org/Rioch_history.pdf

8 Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

9 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 446.

Bateson makes a cameo appearance in the third historical fact. By 1982 family therapy was more than two decades into its development, and had separated from group therapy with the creation of its flagship journal *Family Process*, created by Don Jackson together with Donald Bloch and Jay Haley. Time was ripe for a transparent discourse over the essence of this now middle-aged field, and the March, 1982 issue of *Family Process* published what was to become famous as the "great epistemological debate." Two of the four major papers in this debate make reference to Buber, and here full quotations are in order.

Bradford Keeney and Douglas Sprenkle's lead paper, "Ecosystem epistemology: critical implications for the aesthetics and pragmatics of family therapy" saw Buber as the Nestor defining two main approaches:

It might be argued that therapists can be differentiated on the basis of their commitment to aesthetics or pragmatics. Those who exclusively practice (and teach and evaluate) particular sets of skills and techniques as the royal road to therapeutic change would then be characterized as pragmatics "technicians." Such therapists occasionally imply that therapy is analogous to fixing a car or repairing a broken chair, and sometimes suggest that any focus on "the personal life of the therapist" is a distraction. They may even harshly criticize training contexts that spend time on the "personal growth" of the therapist. For technicians, their work is a craft involving useful skill- a representation of an "i-it" operation: "I will cure it."

On the other hand, art, rooted more in aesthetics than pragmatics, is an "I-Thou" operation in which training and practice of therapy focuses on one's own character building. The skill is secondary and incidental to growth of self, as opposed to the technician's focus on acquisition of tools and skill, with the self remaining the same. Paraphrasing Bateson, art can be ecologically defined as the problem of judging the ecological implications of a course of action as it becomes incorporated and assimilated into the total context. Thus, for an artist, the ecological implications of a course of action that arise from the practice of a skill have importance only in terms of its ecological function in the larger contexts of which the action is a part- its effects on one's character and social context, as well as planet. "We" are affirmed through our relations of "I-Thou."¹⁰

Lawrence Allman's paper, "The aesthetic preference: overcoming the pragmatic error," gave Buber a different and even greater weight:

Aesthetic meanings come to us as therapists through our own intuitively sensed processes within the dialectic of what Martin Buber called the "I-Thou" relationship. Gregory Bateson was fond of the expression 'It Takes Two to Know One,' which embodies his fundamental belief that only through a lovingly playful sense of connectedness with others can we come to know ourselves as part of the aesthetic unity of the collective mind system. With the in-

10 Bradford Keeney and Douglas Sprenkle, "Ecosystemic Epistemology: Critical Implications for the Aesthetics and Pragmatics of Family Therapy," *Family Process* 21(1982):1-20.

creasing trend in family therapy to view family systems as "things" determined solely by structures and in need of mechanistic realignment, we are in danger of removing ourselves as therapists from our families and subsequently removing ourselves from ourselves.¹¹

Looking back on these two papers, we can note that they take two different approaches to Buber. Keeney and Sprenkle suggest that proper family therapy may involve "I-Thou" relationships ("aesthetics") or "I-It" relationships – the more "pragmatic" practical manipulation of activities. Allman, however, saw Buber as essential to family therapy generally in order to preserve a humane and respectful practice. The two papers share one decisive and surprising detail. While both quote Buber's "I-Thou" concept, neither cite *I and Thou* (nor any other work of Buber's for that matter) in their references. It would seem that at least in the United States Buber's thought had become ultra-condensed into iconic "I-Thou" and "I-It." Since these icons appear uprooted from their original literary context and not replanted into some explanatory matrix of meaning, for example the matrix of differentiation that I put forth above, it is doubtful whether readers of *Family Process* or family theoreticians could do very much with these terms.

Co-creational Reflections

That is what I propose to attempt now: to do something with Buberian concepts and family therapy theory. By reflecting upon a certain tension between the two, I hope to use each to shed further light on the other. Let me begin with Buber. One of Walter Kaufmann's chief criticisms of *Ich und Du* was that he saw Buber's thinking as too dichotomous. Kaufmann expressed this in the Prologue¹² to his translation of *Ich und Du* and later expanded the criticism to a central characterization of Buber among the "dichotomizing" thinkers whose works and lives were investigated in his monumental *Discovery of Mind*.¹³ Kaufmann seems to have taken quite literally the emotional, poetic, metaphorical statements in *Ich und Du* that suggest that I-Thou moments are absolute and complete, and that anything short of the ultimate meeting is doomed to the unredeemed experienc-

ing and using of the I-It. I suggest here that while this objection is plausible, it is unnecessary, ungenerous, and unproductive. There are statements in Buber's later writings¹⁴ that suggest that Buber understood very well that there could and must exist a grey area, a range within which I-Thou moments could be more or less complete. What is more important, I think, is the fact that one loses nothing from the precision or power of *Ich und Du* by seeing this range of relative completeness as present, even if Buber did little to emphasize it. Thinkers who make enormous efforts to see something in a new light are not necessarily best defined by what they saw only dimly. I think of this range of relativity as just beyond Buber's reach, but as the next point on the vector he describes. I am proposing to add the next point as part of a continuation of Buber's conceptual path, with gratitude.

I would then add one further additional point on this vector. Once we have a relative range of completeness of I-Thou moments, we are able to pass this range through time and create a *developmental* spectrum for the growth of I-Thou moments. I would propose that such growth in the sphere of I-Thou could provide a way of conceptualizing the emotional growth within relationships, of the relationships themselves. In a relationship that is growing, I-Thou moments that take place become increasingly full and complete.

I see such developments as crucial to family growth. If we return to our adolescent girl and her mother, the moment of "co-creation" we imagined above could be seen as one point upon a vector in which daughter and mother increase the fullness of the I-Thou moments between them, as they each bring a relatively more complete I ("I-position") to their confrontation. In the clinical setting, this often finds expression in my urging family members to say to each other *one more thing* that they have never taken the risk to say. Not every last thing – only a black and white I-Thou model would require this – but something more, that makes this meeting *relatively more complete*. Clinically, a significant I-Thou moment is one of growth, co-creation, in which this moment has achieved fuller presence of the two parties than previous moments.

At this point I import a notion from Gregory Bateson in order to expand the picture. Bateson, in his challenging *Mind and Nature* was concerned with cybernetic processes, and noted (after Mittelstaedt) that there are two "sorts of methods for perfecting an adaptive act"¹⁵. Bateson gave the example of regulating the temperature in a room by two different processes, one like calibration, which responds to the *results* of a change we have tried to make, and the other called

14 Martin Buber, *Knowledge*, 75, 85.

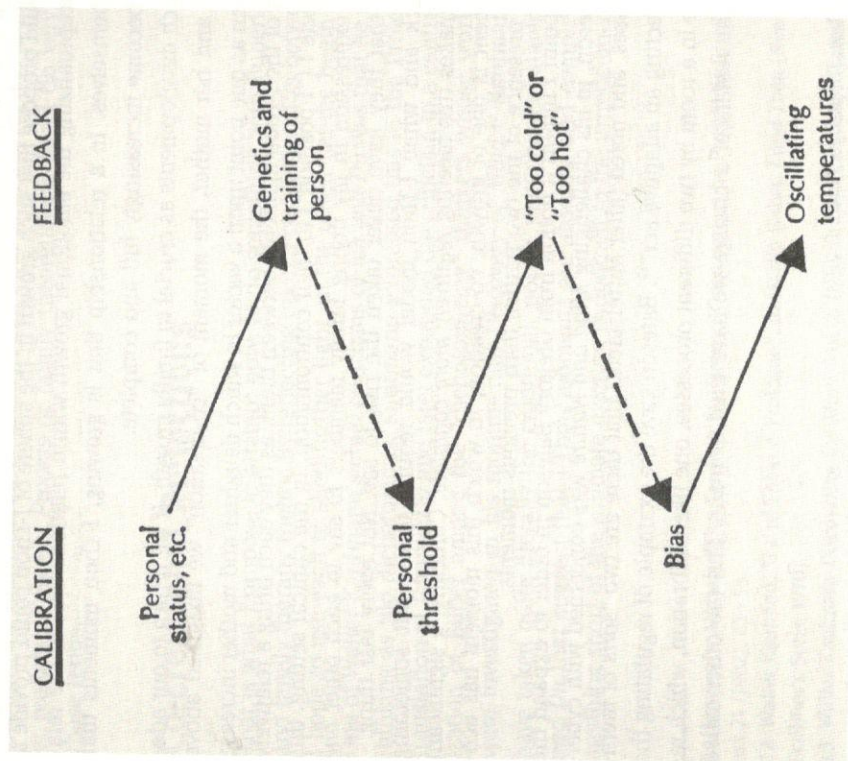
15 Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1979), 211.

11 Lawrence Allman, "The Aesthetic Preference: Overcoming the Pragmatic Error," *Family Process* 21 (1982): 43–56.

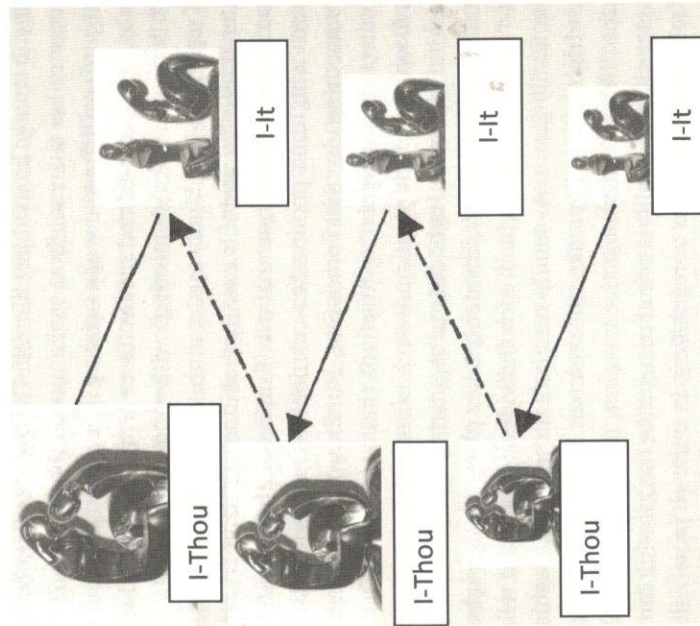
12 Walter Kaufmann, "I and Thou: A Prologue", in Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

13 Walter Kaufmann, *Discovering the Mind*, Vol. 2. (New Brunswick (USA): Transaction Publishers, 1993).

"feedback" which denotes the *intention* that informs our actions. Bateson pointed out that calibration, by including results of all previous attempts, may be seen as a higher level of logical type. Bateson's singular contribution here was to realize that these different sorts of activities do not only oscillate, but inform each other. He proposed the accompanying scheme to demonstrate his point. At the lowest level, the thermostat will turn the heating element on or off depending upon the reading of the thermostat (i.e., "oscillating temperatures"). However, the thermostat itself was set (i.e., "biased") by the householder according to how he has felt the temperature (hence, a calibration). The bias itself is the result of the thermostat on the householder's skin (i.e., "too cold or too hot"), which is set by experiences of the householder with cold and heat, ("personal threshold"), etc. Bateson even suggested an evolutionary advantage to alternation between two processes, to protect each process from moving two levels of logical type at a time.



This would seem like pretty heady stuff from the depths of the Eswelt. However, Buber left us in *Ich und Du* the enigmatic picture of oscillation between the I-Thou and the I-It modes of relating, without indicating the manner in which this oscillation between the two poles affects the poles themselves. If we take the flat line of oscillation between the two poles and *pull it up accordion-like through time, and through the range of increasing completeness of the I-Thou moments*, we could place the seemingly flat oscillation into a developmental spiral, which borrowing from Bateson, would look like this:



In order to make fuller sense of this scheme, I will introduce one more set of concepts, which I find crucial in the teaching of just this point. The very same Daniel Stern of "co-creation" composed a highly influential work summarizing two decades of research in infant development called *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*¹⁶. There Stern proposed two major stages in the way the infant makes use of the "I" of the mother. During most of the first year, the mother serves as a "regulating selfobject". In this term Stern defined more precisely one developmental

¹⁶ Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

aspect of the "selfobject" earlier elaborated by Heinz Kohut¹⁷. Kohut's "selfobject" means quite simply the way one person makes use of the presence of the other in order to maintain the coherence of his own self. Stern's regulating self-object mother was used by the infant to maintain (and nurture) his own self, by getting fed, comforted, or stimulated. At this stage the baby has relatively little interest in the mother as a subject, what it is like for her to comfort him. He just makes use of what he needs. Towards the end of the first year and through the second year, Stern suggested that now mother becomes an "intersubjective selfobject". By this he meant that mother contributes the fact of her own subjectivity to the baby's ability to emerge as a subject himself. The baby now prefers to see through mother's eyes rather than solely to make use of her ministrations. Mother allows the baby to participate in appreciating her own subjectivity, and this allows the baby to appreciate and create his or her own subjectivity. The "self" or "subject" is created through meetings with other subjects.

Buber first entered my teaching of family theory at the juncture between differentiation and the inter-subjective, and it is exactly that juncture that I wish to employ in order to describe the schema traced above. Families with "low differentiation" are not failures who don't perform "co-creations" as expected. They are rather busy doing something else that comes first. Families of low differentiation are busy with protective and regulating functions that come first¹⁸. These regulations inform the *Eswelt* in which people use each other to protect the integrity of their family unit. However, caught *only* in regulating and protecting, they find it impossible to grow. Growth of individuals takes place through intersubjective moments of "co-creation" in which each individual grows, the relationship grows, and the family grows. As family members emerge from regulation and become less frightened, they take the risk of a relatively more complete meeting viz. the "I-Thou" intersubjective moment. As change is created, there is an enormous need to re-equilibrate and re-regulate the growing family. During this period relationships return to regulation, in order to protect the new growth. This would appear like a new I-It period, although a higher level of differentiation than the previous level. Once safely regulated, and perhaps developmentally challenged by changes inside or outside the family, family members

will seek another "I-Thou" intersubjective co-creation¹⁹. The next "I-Thou" would be one that now allows for a deeper and more complete meeting and a co-creation of relatively more complete dimensions. The family will then enter a regulatory phase to readapt to this now higher level of differentiation.

We would now be in a position to expand Bateson's speculation about the evolutionary necessity of oscillation between processes of different logical type. I would add to Buber's "wholeness" of the I-Thou the notion of a *rise in level of generalization of the relationship*. The I-Thou includes all I-It relations and in addition adds a new dimension to each "I." Therefore it could be conceptualized as at a higher level of logical type. The new dimensions of each "I" need protection from further change until they can be re-regulated into the matrix of other relationships, or perhaps allow other "I-Thou" meetings with other significant others. This post-creation re-regulating includes the new co-creation as well as all the other processes of relations and reality, and is thus of higher logical type. Once the regulation is adequate, a new, still higher logical type co-creation will be possible, and so on. One could say with Bateson that if the I-Thou creations outstripped the ability for regulating and incorporating changes, the changes would be either too unstable or too frighteningly distant from context, and the result would be a total inhibition of the co-creative process.

In this way, family therapy practice would always be challenged to create a regulation that enables growth towards an intersubjective I-Thou meeting of co-creation and increasing differentiation. However, often families would need to be helped to complete a re-regulation from the previous co-creation before they can risk the next I-Thou. In family theory, the regulating was referred to as "first-order change" while the co-creations were called "second-order change."²⁰

These I-Thou moments are moments neither of luxury nor of superfluity. They are moments deeply necessary for relationships to be able to grow, and thus for all the individuals in the family to be able to grow. A family in which the risk of the inter-subjective is too unsafe is a family which suffers from its inability to be safe enough to take the risks of growth. This family therapist would need to spend no little effort helping families to become safely regulated, as a means to the ends of meeting the challenge of co-creations. Family therapy practice would need to alternate between the practice of regulation and the practice of the intersubjective, between one I-It" and the next possible "I-Thou." As the

17 Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), and Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977).

18 See Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2001).

19 Alan Flashman, "Adolescents and Families," *Therapeutic Communication with Adolescents* (Hebrew) eds., Alan Flashman and Hanna Avnet (Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Welfare, 2007), 143-178.

20 Lynn Hoffman, *Foundations of Family Therapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

level of differentiation increases, Buber's principle of dialogue could be seen as anything but incidental to such a process.

Obstacles to a Buberian Family Therapy

In this final section I offer some thoughts regarding the difficulty with which family therapy today appreciates Buber's fundamental relevance to its theory and practice. I see the main obstacles in four realms: the needs of clients, the experience of the therapist, the relinquishment of control, and the tendency to dichotomize.

Families who begin therapy with a lower level of differentiation require a great deal of attention to safe regulation. The intersubjective moments may seem so distant and threatening as to escape the notice of the therapist, especially where many emergency protecting maneuvers are required. I find that family therapists in the public sector, especially in areas of child protection or high conflict (i.e., low differentiation) divorce, find the Buberian formulations irrelevant or annoying. I would put it this way: It is hard enough laboring in the *Eswelt*, without being reminded about what is beyond it.

The second obstacle involves the experience of the family therapist. The notion of creating moments of I-Thou in therapy is easier to conceptualize than to practice. When two family members become ready for an intersubjective co-creation, many therapists feel that their presence in the therapy room is an intrusion. The therapist may feel the need to leave the family alone. Indeed, some therapists, including myself, will on occasion leave a therapy room so as not to distract from co-creation. However, there is a second aspect to this intimacy that is emerging in family therapy. I find that some therapists experience an overwhelming personal loneliness in the presence of family members' creating I-Thou moments. The intimacy of the clients engenders on the part of the therapist a desire for such co-creation for herself or himself. If such moments are too few and far between for the therapist personally, he or she may find it too difficult to bear their emergence between family members.

Family therapy has deep roots in the theory and practice of social control. Much of the social motivation and financial support for family therapy in the United States came from the post-World War Two failure to control two main social problems, mental illness and delinquency. The American theory was that the problem belonged to the family, and the goal was to create a fully definable operational goal of eradicating deviance by effecting family change. Buber's I-Thou cannot be operationalized, defined or controlled. It is nothing if it is not a theory

of liberation, perhaps co-liberation. Family therapy that seeks to control behavior will always be uncomfortable with its own relegation to the *Eswelt*.

In turning to the tendency to dichotomization I hope to suggest some constructive response to all these obstacles. The fact that Buber's *Ich und Du* was relegated to the dichotomizers by Kaufmann is instructive. Kaufmann's magisterial overview of the *Discovery of Mind*²¹ saw Germany's great thinkers divided between those who were limited in their own self understanding and therefore caught in defining how the world *should* be according to dichotomous categories (Kant was the first example) and those whose self-understanding allowed them to appreciate the world *as it is*, without dichotomous categories (Goethe especially). It is perfectly obvious that we have here a dichotomizing war against those who dichotomize. I bring this example to demonstrate how difficult it can be to apprehend and consider two different processes without falling into overly dichotomizing errors. In family therapy as well, there has been a tendency to see Buberian thinking as one part of a dichotomy. We saw this is Keeney and Spenkle's paper, dividing pragmatists from aestheticians. Mona deKoven Fishbane has written a fine survey of the Buberians in family therapy, especially Ivan Borsozormenyi-Nagy and James Framo.²² It is all too easy to split Buber between the *Eswelt* types and the *Ich-Du* heroes, something Buber recognizes as a likely error already in *Ich und Du*.²³ This split creates a formidable obstacle to incorporating Buber's full message into family therapy as a whole. The "Buberians" claim priority of the intersubjective, which is only part of the whole picture, leaving the "pragmatists" who are often struggling with regulatory functions to defend themselves "against" Buber(ians) rather than appreciate what they have to learn from Buber.

So I propose a different discourse in family therapy itself that I would sketch by the now familiar scheme:

²¹ Walter Kaufmann, *The Discovery of the Mind*, Vols 1,2,3, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991-1993).

²² Mona DeKoven Fishbane, "I, Thou, and We: A Dialogical Approach to Couples Therapy", *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 24 (1998):41-58.

²³ Martin Buber, *Ich und Du*, 78-9, and Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann 114.

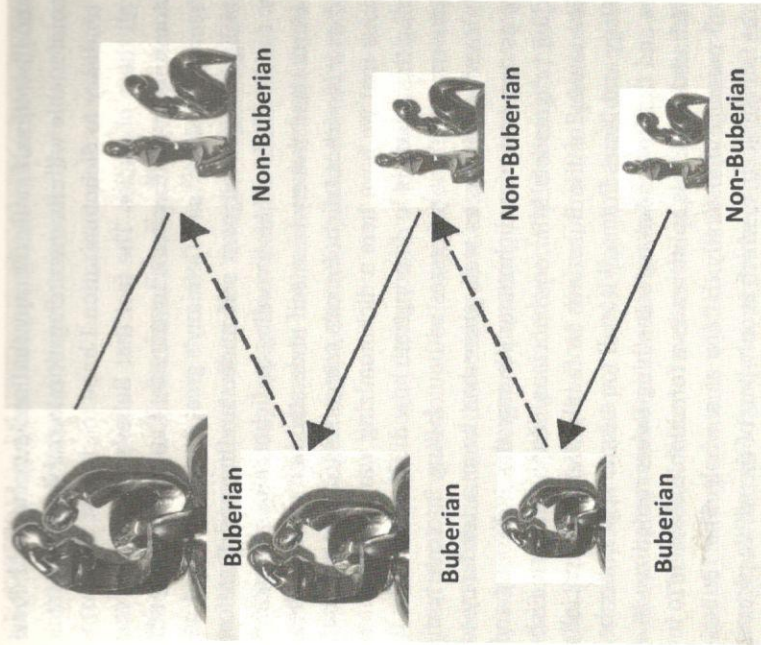
Dialogic Memory

Memory is double edged. It can both serve as medium for reconciliation, peace making and coexistence on the one hand and for rekindling conflicts by refueling hatred and revenge on the other. Whether it moves in one or the other direction is, of course, a matter of the social and political framework within which it operates. If we are interested in the positive potential of memory for mutual understanding and peace building, we therefore need to understand better the frameworks that determine the benign or malign quality of memory. This essay argues that memory has a transformative power that can help to improve hitherto divisive social and political relationships. In order to know more about the cultural frameworks of memories, I will look at external and internal factors that change memory and finally inspect more closely the shift from old to new policies of remembering which draw on the dialogic quality of memory in situations of political and social change.

From the modernist frame to the memory frame

The idea that memory has transformative power is a rather new one and was developed only during the last thirty years or so. This shift in our thinking became manifest in a new term that has surfaced in German discourse in the 1990s and has since become part and parcel of the trite stock of official and public rhetoric, namely: *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture). We have developed the great hope that memory can be conducive to changing human minds, hearts and habits and even whole societies and states in the process of overcoming a traumatic history of violence. Many people assume today that traumatic violence can be overcome by negotiating mutual strategies of memory and visions of the past. All over the world, the transformative power of memory is invoked to diffuse the pernicious fuel of violence. It is implemented after periods of autocratic and genocidal violence (the Holocaust, Latin American dictatorships, South African Apartheid, the Balkan War) as well as in response to the lasting impact of older genocides and crimes against humanity (such as European colonialism and slavery).

But is this assumption really true? What has made us so optimistic? What is our hope grounded on, or are we driven by an illusion? Let me start with a scholar who does not share this view. Historian Christian Meier has expressed his dissent in his book on "Das Gebot zu vergessen und die Unabweisbarkeit des Erinnerns", in which he argues for forgetting rather than remembering as a



In words, I think that an honest discussion between "Buberians" and "non-Buberians" would have much in common with moves from regulation to intersubjectivity in an ascending level of differentiation that would enrich the entire field. I think that Family Therapy as a discipline by necessity meets both I-It and I-Thou moments and that it might be better to define the discipline as learning how the different moments can be understood and enlisted in enhancing one another. Perhaps Buber would have called this "keeping the questions open."