

The intersubjective interaction in psychoanalysis: Enlightenment from Martin Buber' s philosophy of dialogue

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Abstract

Since the late 1970s, many schools of psychoanalysis have undergone an intersubjective turn. Among these, Buber' s dialogical philosophy offers important insights for understanding intersubjective interaction in psychoanalysis, yet this exploration remains to be deepened. After integrating the discussions of numerous phenomenologists, Buber' s distinction between the 'I-It' relationship and the 'I-Thou' relationship can be regarded as two of the most fundamental interpersonal relationship patterns. In psychoanalysis, the 'I-Thou' relationship is primarily manifested as: (1) both parties in the interaction can fully engage in the present dialogue, respond with their whole being, and achieve attunement at both nonverbal and verbal communication levels; (2) when conflicts arise, both parties can negotiate their disagreements, and even strive to repair the relationship after rupture. This intersubjective interaction pattern can be observed in secure attachment and some good therapist-client relationships. The 'I-It' relationship more often implies unidirectional manipulation of others to satisfy one' s own various needs (such as security needs and narcissistic needs). In the extreme 'I-It' relationship pattern, the other is merely an extension of the 'I' , and various emotions, ideas, and behaviors beyond the 'I' s needs and expectations are often disregarded. This intersubjective interaction pattern is common in maladaptive individuals such as narcissists, psychopaths, hysterical clients, manic individuals, and obsessive individuals, and also widely exists in daily life. The manipulation process of the 'I-It' relationship can be accomplished through language, emotion, and bodily action, among other pathways. Furthermore, the three stages Heidegger described in the transition from 'ready-to-hand' to 'present-at-hand' (conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy) can be used to understand the change in interpersonal manipulation from success to failure, providing a turning point for clients to replace maladaptive interaction patterns. Future psychoanalytic research can explore this further on this basis.

Full Text

Preamble

The Intersubjective Interaction in Psychoanalysis: Enlightenment from Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue

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Abstract: Buber's distinction between the "I-It" and "I-Thou" relationships offers a valuable framework for understanding intersubjective interaction in psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis, the "I-Thou" relationship manifests primarily in two ways: (1) Interactive partners can devote themselves fully to the present dialogue, achieving coordination at both nonverbal and verbal communication levels. (2) Interactive partners can negotiate effectively and repair their relationship following interruptions and ruptures. The "I-It" relationship typically involves one-way manipulation of the other to satisfy one's own needs, such as safety and narcissistic requirements, through verbal, emotional, and physical actions. Furthermore, Heidegger's description of the transition from "readiness-to-hand" (Zuhandenheit) to "presence-at-hand" (Vorhandenheit) can illuminate the shift from successful to failed interpersonal manipulation, potentially providing a turning point for replacing clients' maladaptive interaction patterns. Future psychoanalytic research can build upon this foundation.

Key words: psychoanalysis, intersubjective interaction, "I-It" relationship, "I-Thou" relationship, nonverbal communication

1. Introduction

"For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally." –Buber (2004, p.5)

Since the late 1970s, numerous schools within psychoanalysis have undergone an intersubjective turn, with particularly profound influence in North America (Bohleber, 2013; Kirshner, 2017; Zhang, et al., 2022a). Consequently, terms such as "intersubjectivity," "two-person interaction," and "interpersonal relationship" have become familiar topics for many analysts.

During this transformation, intersubjective theory from philosophy has played an important role. For example, inspired by Husserl and Heidegger, Stolorow and his colleagues attempted to introduce more phenomenological implications into psychoanalysis. They criticized Freud's "Cartesian isolated mind" and argued that psychological phenomena can only be understood within an inseparable intersubjective system. Accordingly, psychoanalysis needs to abandon many structural concepts (e.g., id, ego, and superego) and replace them with phenomenological descriptions of subjective experience (Atwood & Stolorow,

2014). According to Aron and Benjamin, the realization of mutual recognition mentioned by Hegel marks the capacity for intersubjectivity—that is, understanding that the other is another relatively independent subject with their own unique internal world and perspective (Benjamin, 2018). For many French analysts (e.g., Green and Roussillon), the acquisition of subjectivity is inseparable from encounter with the other and is shaped by the other’s desire (Zhang et al., 2022a). Starting from Buber’s “dialogical stance,” Binswanger and Levinas, Frie (2010) emphasizes that the other is not a generalized abstraction but a unique, living, and concrete person. Only by recognizing otherness can we maintain a compassionate attitude and become sensitive to the other’s needs, possibilities, and limitations in the treatment process.

In the process of the intersubjective turn, Buber’s philosophy of dialogue has influenced some psychoanalytic researchers (Benjamin, 2018; Bohleber, 2010; Bradfield, 2013). However, this interdisciplinary application remains far less extensive in psychoanalysis compared to its influence in humanistic psychology. The reasons may be as follows: (1) Buber criticized several tendencies in Freud, namely, “too reductionist and mechanistic, too inclined to reify the unconscious, and too dismissive of religious experience” (Orange, 2010, p. 15). This has led some of Freud’s successors to adopt an attitude of exclusion. (2) Buber’s views carry a certain religious coloration and sometimes appear mysterious, as seen in his discussions of the relationship between humans and God (Buber, 1970). Nevertheless, the views of some analysts (e.g., Winnicott and BCPSG) show a high degree of agreement with Buber, even when his work is not explicitly mentioned (Orange, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to enrich our understanding of intersubjective interaction in psychoanalysis through the two relationship modes distinguished by Buber.

2. Two Basic Relationships: “I-It” and “I-Thou”

Buber maintains that the “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships constitute the most fundamental patterns of human interaction, with everyone residing in one or the other. The “I-It” relationship is a unilateral relationship of cognition, control, utilization, and possession. In this relationship, “I” stands at the center, and others are objects of cognition or tools to be manipulated. In extreme cases, this relationship can lead to degradation of the other’s status and alienation of the self. In contrast, the “I-Thou” relationship is an equal dialogical relationship between subjects. In this relationship, both “I” and the other are subjects, and both parties alternate between speaking and listening (Buber, 1970). In Kant’s (2012) words, humans are ends rather than means. To enter this type of relationship, both parties must respond to each other with sincere attitudes and achieve a form of intersubjective encounter (Friedman, 2002; Orange, 2010).

On this basis, Buber criticized two views of transcendence (or two pictures of the world): The first is “self-deflation theory,” which places a finite self into the infinite world to achieve self-transcendence and gain eternity, where “I” am overwhelmed by the world. The second is “self-aggrandizement theory,” which

incorporates the vast world and other beings into “me,” thereby realizing my sublimation and immortality, where the world is swallowed by “I.” In Buber’s view, these two methods represent resistance to materiality but are insufficient for achieving true transcendence. Only in a mutually open relationship can “I” and “Thou” achieve sublimation and transcendence (Buber, 1970).

These two views of transcendence can be understood as a “tug of war” between “I” and “world” : In the former extreme, the center of gravity is pulled completely to the “world” side; in the latter extreme, it is pulled completely to the “I” side. Applying this picture to the matrix of interpersonal interaction yields the following: “I” and the other exist in dialectical tension, with the center of gravity moving between them in this tug of war. The “I-Thou” relationship represents a nonconfrontational balance between the two parties, while the “I-It” relationship represents a situation where one party dominates through confrontation. Under this framework, many researchers’ discussions (e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer) of interpersonal relationships provide new understanding.

Let us first examine Sartre, who continued Hegel’s master-slave struggle model (Chen, 2017). For Sartre, only an unequal and asymmetrical relationship exists between me and the other: Either I objectify the other, or the other objectifies me. This is evident in Sartre’s analysis of shame: “When I am immersed in peeping at the other through the keyhole, I am a pure consciousness of things” (Sartre, 2003, p. 283), possessing nonpositional consciousness. However, when I hear footsteps and realize someone is watching me, I become a positional consciousness-object in the other’s eyes. In the other’s gaze, “I am seated as this inkwell is on the table...I am leaning over the keyhole as this tree is bent by the wind” (Sartre, 2003, p. 286). I feel ashamed, and this shame “is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the other is looking at and judging” (Sartre, 2003, p. 285). “On the other hand, I can also look at the other in turn. In this way, I try my best to resist being objectified, escape and liberate from the domination of the other, and make an object out of him” (Sartre, 2003, p. 385). In short, in Sartre’s understanding of interpersonal interaction, individuals have only two choices: to look at the other or be looked at by the other; “hell is other people” and “engendering the death of the other” constitute the keynotes of interpersonal relationships.

Sartre’s interpersonal relationship theory represents a typical “I-It” relationship model. In fact, beyond this “Medusa’s gaze” (Medusa being a snake-haired banshee in ancient Greek mythology whose eyes turn beholders to stone), various types of gazes exist: the charitable and loving gaze of parents, the affectionate gaze of lovers, the encouraging and comforting gaze of friends, and the suspicious gaze of strangers. The gaze can contain hostility, aggressiveness, dismissiveness, faultfinding, and disappointment, or it can be mixed with passion, joy, admiration, affection, and self-assurance. Among these gazes, we find not only Sartre’s mode focusing on confrontation between the other and I but also the mode of equal dialogue lacking in his theory—the essence of the “I-Thou” relationship.

Next, let us examine Heidegger. Heidegger (1962) believes that individuals live together with others in the world. While interacting with others, the individual may “arrange” the affairs that the other must complete, providing great help. However, because of this help, the other forgets their original responsibilities, loses themselves, and becomes dependent or controlled. This will “leap in and dominate him” (einspringen). Another possibility is that the individual allows the other to worry about the things they are about to face and allows the other to exist for themselves. This seemingly “indifferent” approach is precisely real concern for the other, enabling the other to gain freedom; this will “leap forth and liberate him” (vorspringen). In daily life, people often exist between these two extremes, such as opposing each other, being unrelated, missing each other, and not caring for each other. It can be seen that “leaping in and domination” constitutes manipulation of the other and represents the “I-It” relationship, while “leaping forth and liberation” constitutes an equal relationship that can be regarded as the “I-Thou” relationship. The many forms between these two extremes result from the “tug of war” between the “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships.

Now let us consider Levinas’ s discussion. Levinas (1979) pointed out that when I meet with the other face-to-face and attempt to construct, objectify, and grasp the other with the “Medusa’ s eyes” of Sartre’ s theory, three different types of relationships emerge: First, submission. In this mode, my power completely “rules” the other, who is exposed to all my power, succumbing to all my tricks and crimes. Second, real resistance. Here, the others resist me with their power, freedom, and resources. Third, ethical resistance. This is the type of relationship Levinas is most concerned with. In this situation, other people show their faces, opposing me beyond all scales with their own naked, direct, and absolutely candid gaze (Zhu, 2016). In other words, what I see is not a physical mask, not an object that can be controlled and materialized, but a living face. It is not an entity that refuses to be contained, grasped, and merged, but the original expression. “It brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinnggebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power” (Levinas, 1979, p. 51). Levinas even goes further, believing that in my interactions with the other, I must be entangled by the other, respond to the other’ s needs, be responsible for the other, and eventually become hostage to the other.

By analyzing these three relationships, we find that the first type is the “I-It” relationship, and the second type represents fierce resistance by the other to dominate the “I-It” relationship. The third type reveals that the vivid face of the other presents me with a “person” who is alive and cannot be materialized, calling me to an “I-Thou” relationship of equal dialogue. The hostage position vis-à-vis the other risks moving toward inequality and may become another version of the “I-It” relationship, where “I” becomes the object of use and “I” becomes “It.”

Finally, Gadamer’ s views on intersubjective interaction can also be included in this discussion. Gadamer bluntly stated that Buber’ s theory has an important influence on him. From Gadamer’ s perspective, my relationship with the other

can be divided into three types: In the first type, I see the other as a tool to be known and used, trying to “discover typical behavior in one’ s fellowmen and can make predictions about the other on the basis of experience” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 352) to gain knowledge of human nature. This is actually a scientific cognitive attitude. In the second type, I regard the other as a person, but the two interactive partners claim “to know the other’ s claim from his point of view and even to understand the other better than the other understands him” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 353). In other words, I and the other stick to our own opinions and ask each other to accept our position. This type of relationship is essentially a reflective relationship, so there is always a “gulf” and a distance between the two parties. In the third type, I admit that the others are equal subjects like me and open to the other with a completely open attitude. “I” listen to what “you” say, respond to “your” opinions and requests, and even accept something against me. In contrast, if one party firmly believes they are superior to the other and talks in a condescending manner, they fall into a type of paranoia, and the atmosphere of dialogue is destroyed. In such situations, free dialogue cannot be produced, and agreement and consensus cannot be achieved. The result can only be that the opinions or will of one party are expanded while the ideas of the other party are ignored or oppressed, forcing them to yield.

It can be seen that the first two relationships are actually what Buber calls the “I-It” relationship, while the third relationship is equivalent to Buber’ s “I-Thou” relationship. The difference is that Gadamer has enriched the “I-It” relationship by adding a confrontational situation. In summary, the “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships can be regarded as two basic modes of interpersonal interaction. Under the “tension” of these two relationships, more colorful interactive modes can evolve. In Fromm’ s (1976) theory, this corresponds to the having mode and being mode. In Lewis Aron’ s (1996) words, it involves “struggling” between complementarity and mutuality. Application of this idea to the field of psychoanalysis might provide new inspiration.

3. “I-Thou” Relationship in Psychoanalysis: The Therapist-Client Relationship

In psychoanalysis, the parent-child relationship and therapist-client relationship are the most frequently discussed relationships. These two are often placed together for comparison and were once considered “equivalent,” where interaction represents a “complete repetition” of parent-child interaction (Mitchell, 1988). Although many contemporary analysts increasingly pay attention to the “novelty” of current experience (Delgado et al., 2015), the similarities between these two relationships remain a key part of psychoanalysis. In these two-person interactions, the “I-Thou” relationship means treating the other person as a relatively independent subject, making otherness fully manifest. This involves fully understanding the differences between the other and I and accepting that others have different thoughts, feelings, abilities, and needs. In Frie’ s view, this means adopting a “dialogical stance” —when facing a unique, living, and concrete per-

son, we need to maintain a compassionate attitude and become sensitive to the other's needs, possibilities, and limitations (Frie, 2010). In the words of Hegel and Benjamin, it is mutual recognition (Benjamin, 2018). From this perspective, even when there is asymmetry in capabilities and responsibilities in parent-child and therapist-client relationships (i.e., the mother and analyst usually assume the role of "helper") (Delgado et al., 2015), an "I-Thou" relationship can be established. More specifically, this "I-Thou" relationship interaction primarily involves two aspects: First, both sides fully participate in the current interaction, respond wholeheartedly, and strive to build equal dialogue; second, when conflict arises, both parties can negotiate their disagreements and work to repair the relationship after breakdown.

3.1 The Present Wholehearted Response

According to Buber, children in early infancy cannot yet use language, let alone say "I," but the "I-Thou" relationship already exists (Buber, 1970). This has been supported by much research. First, this is reflected in the matching of nonverbal communication between mother and child. Specifically, when a baby makes an emotional expression through facial expressions, sounds, or actions, the mother receives and responds adequately, which is then seen, heard, or felt by the baby (Seligman & Harrison, 2012). Stern's research shows that three behavioral characteristics can be matched without imitation: intensity, timing, and shape, which can be further subdivided into absolute intensity, temporal beat, rhythm, duration, and shape. Among these three matching methods, intensity matching is most common, timing matching is second, and shape matching is least common. In most cases, more than one matching element is present. The matching ratios from highest to lowest are intensity contour (81%), duration (69%), absolute intensity (61%), shape (47%), temporal beat (13%), and rhythm (11%).

In these matches, what is important is not explicit behavior but the corresponding emotional state—that is, affective attunement. Therefore, matching differs from imitation: the former focuses more on communication and sharing of internal states, while the latter focuses more on external form (Stern, 1985). Following Stern, Beebe and Lachmann (2002, 2014) further enriched the study of mother-infant interaction. Using video analysis, they found that in interactions between 4-12-month-old secure attachment dyads, both sides showed relatively stable rhythm and predictability across all dimensions: (1) In the visual attention dimension, if the baby looks at the mother, the mother will also look at the baby; if the baby looks away, the mother will usually also look away, and the reverse holds true as well. (2) In the facial and vocal affect dimension, if the baby's mood changes, the mother's mood also changes, and vice versa. (3) In the facial-visual engagement dimension, regardless of whether the baby's gaze and emotions are positive or negative, the mother is also in the same state. However, when the mother's gaze and emotions show a positive or negative state, the baby does not change his state accordingly, suggesting that in this dimension, the mother functions more as a cooperative partner for the

baby. (4) In the touch dimension, if the baby' s tone is more positive and the frequency of touch is higher, then the mother shows more tendency to touch or touch emotionally, and the reverse is also true—that is, if the mother' s touch is gentler, the baby' s emotions become more positive. (5) In the spatial/head orientation dimension, the mother' s spatial orientation unilaterally affects the baby' s head orientation. Specifically, when the mother changes from a straight sitting position to leaning forward, the baby' s head changes from face-to-face to an arched position; when the mother returns to a straight sitting position, the baby changes back to a face-to-face head position. The reverse is not true, probably because the mother does not need to twist her head to complete the “fit.” In general, the interaction between babies and their mothers appears very smooth overall, like flowing clouds and water—a manifestation of full devotion and response (Beebe & Lachmann, 2014).

It must be pointed out that in the mother' s response to the baby, similarities and differences in experience are both indispensable. Togashi (2012) sees this as maintaining a dialectical tension between sameness and difference. Fonagy and his colleagues' mentalization theory describes this process as follows: When a baby expresses anxious emotions, if the mother wants to successfully regulate them, her feedback to the baby must involve more complex or “mixed” emotions of “markedness,” so these emotions can correspond to the original anxiety (e.g., fear) while also being incompatible with it (e.g., mockery). As a result, the mother conveys a message of being able to empathize (fear means “I understand you”) and cope (mockery means “nothing to worry about”). This type of “return,” which is similar to the infant' s emotional experience (i.e., the fear corresponding to anxiety) yet different (i.e., the “incompatible” mockery with anxiety), provides the infant with an ability to characterize anxiety and further develop self-regulation (Allen et al., 2008; Fonagy, 2001). In the words of Heidegger (1962) or Gadamer (2004), the similarity in the returned experience relates to preunderstanding, and this content makes understanding the infant possible; the difference means that the new experience differs from the preunderstanding and thus forms a new understanding. This is also reflected in an important feature of matching: matching mostly occurs across sensory channels. For example, the intensity and duration of the voice expressed by the baby matches the mother' s physical movements; the movement of the baby' s arms matches the mother' s voice (Stern, 1985). In short, the mother' s response is not a simple “copy” or “imitation” but contains a personal imprint that conveys to the baby “I understand you” and “I respond to you” (Zhang et al., 2022b).

In addition to nonverbal communication, verbal communication between subjects can also realize “I-Thou” relationship interaction. As babies gradually learn to use language, they gain a tool to describe their experiences and ideas, making the ways of responding in the “I-Thou” relationship model richer. For example, the child happily shares a discovery with her mother: “Mom, look at this!” Then the mother smiles and looks at the child, feels sincerely proud, and praises, “It' s amazing” (Hagman, 2020). In this way, an “I-Thou” relationship interaction occurs. Similarly, in the treatment process, it is particularly im-

portant for therapist and client to achieve turn-taking: when the client speaks, the therapist listens carefully and shows concentration through visual attention; when the client falls briefly silent, the therapist comments, and vice versa. Both parties show predictability in the duration of vocalizations, pauses, and switching pauses (Beebe & Lachmann, 2020). Furthermore, when analysts shed their “professional role” and respond to clients with sincere attitudes, “moments of meeting” described by the Boston Change Process Study Group (BCPSG, 2010) and “heightened affective moments” described by Beebe and Lachmann (2002) may occur, allowing both parties to enter into the dialogue of the “I-Thou” relationship.

Notably, both Buber (1970, 2004) and BCPSG (2010) believe that nonverbal communication is often more important than language in realizing encounter. “Although language is increasingly incorporated into these encounters with development, the structure of the encounter itself may never be represented in words. It is simply enacted and grasped implicitly in its enacted form” (Lyons-Ruth, 2000, p. 94). This is probably because a key to encounter is the spontaneity and immediacy of emotional response, which occurs faster and more directly at the nonverbal level. Therefore, the encounter has already taken place before the “effect” of language communication, and descriptions of the encounter are often the result of reflection afterward (BCPSG, 2010). However, we must point out that as a wholehearted response, language and emotion cannot be completely separated. In fact, in communication after language acquisition, the equal dialogue in the “I-Thou” relationship is inseparable from language. It is based on language exchanges that individuals with very different backgrounds can describe many things unfamiliar to the other party (or even completely unknown), allowing both partners to overcome previous differences, create a co-shared background, and form an intersubjective field as described by many researchers (e.g., Atwood & Stolorow, 2014; BCPSG, 2010) and the “fusion of horizons” by Gadamer (2004). As BCPSG (2010) pointed out, the moment of encounter is critical in therapeutic change, but the role of the relatively “quiet moment” also cannot be ignored. Additionally, when language communication between the two parties is very smooth, language shows a type of “transparency” as if it does not exist (Bineham, 1995). At this time, language in the “readiness-to-hand” mode does not become an obstacle between the two parties but instead promotes mutual opening, sharing, and interweaving of experience. This role of language is well reflected in the “emotional dwelling” described by Stolorow: using language to accurately express understanding of the other’s traumatic experience, to accompany and participate in the other’s emotional pain, and thereby realize transformation of traumatic experience (Stolorow, 2013, 2014).

3.2 Negotiation and Repair

In actual interaction between subjects, “perfect response” cannot always exist. In fact, misattunements, disagreements, impasses, and broken relationships often occur. At such times, negotiation between the two parties and restora-

tion of the relationship become very important. In mother-infant interaction, a typical period of frequent disagreement exists in what Mahler described as the “separation-individualization” stage. In this stage, the baby swings back and forth between exploring the outside world and returning to the mother. On one hand, the baby is eager to “conquer” the world independently and gain a sense of ability and confidence. On the other hand, limited by immaturity, the baby needs the mother as a secure base for help. However, the mother may be concerned about the baby’s safety or cannot bear the loneliness of the baby leaving her, and therefore restricts the baby’s movement, forming a shadowing pattern. Another situation occurs when the mother cannot provide the care and support the baby needs in a timely manner, thus creating a darting-away pattern (Mahler et al., 2000). Subsequent attachment studies have reported similar observations (Powell et al., 2014).

However, the interactive mode of secure attachment can usually be reattuned after misattunement and repaired promptly after relationship rupture. Successful repairs often consolidate the connection between the two parties and further strengthen both parties’ confidence to work together: they believe that although interaction may encounter problems and connection may be destroyed, they will eventually release their suspicions and see “the sun shine again after rain” (Wallin, 2007). This is also supported by research: infants with more experience in rupture and repair use more adaptive strategies in interpersonal interactions and are more likely to form secure attachments (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002).

Similarly, in psychoanalytic therapy, many areas require negotiation. The scope of negotiation is very wide, including the nature of the therapist-client relationship, narrative style, client resistance, analyst interpretation, and can even involve psychological distance, emotional atmosphere, length of silence, and treatment cost (Aron, 1996). At the micro level, this negotiation can be reflected as interactive contingency—the extent to which therapist and client adapt to each other’s voice and duration of silence, more or less closely following each other, specifically manifested in the duration of vocalizations, pauses, and switching pauses. Research shows that switching pause interactive contingency is significantly related to warmth, empathy, and interpersonal attraction in adults (Beebe & Lachmann, 2020). In cases of disagreement, interaction between analyst and client may break down, and the analytic session enters an impasse and stalls. This is what Stolorow and his colleagues call intersubjective disjunction—that is, the content understood by the analyst deviates from the client’s true thoughts, and this interaction presents a crisis (Atwood & Stolorow, 2014; Stolorow, 1994). At this time, repair work led by the analyst’s example is critical. In Orange’s view, this requires a fallibilism position—that is, the therapist holds the belief: “we can always be wrong, that there is always more to learn, that our understandings are never more than partial and tentative” (Orange, 2011, p. 173). In this way, the therapist can maintain openness and curiosity and focus on exploring the client’s subjective world (Burg, 2018). From Benjamin’s perspective, when a relationship breaks during treatment, it is very important for the analyst to frankly admit mistakes and shortcomings and ex-

press apologies and regrets to the client. This means, first, that the analyst did not intentionally cause harm to the client nor avoid responsibility. Second, analysts can forgive themselves after making mistakes and discuss them instead of suffering from shame and guilt. Finally, the analyst can endure the client's scrutiny and even criticism, and clients can participate in the interaction as interpreters and interlocutors (Benjamin, 2018). Kohut also pointed out that empathy failure is inevitable. No matter how "cautious" the analyst is, it is impossible to fully understand the client's needs, especially when facing the deprivation needs of narcissists. When this happens, expressing apologies to the narcissist in person is an effective and feasible way (or even the only way) (McWilliams, 2011).

Similarly, BCPSG's (2010) description of moving from "a failed now moment" to "a moment of meeting" also reflects the importance of repair. Wallin's (2007) treatment of Randall and Eliot can also be considered a similar example.

4. "I-It" Relationship in Psychoanalysis

In the "I-It" relationship mode, the more extreme situation involves one party unilaterally squeezing and utilizing the other to satisfy various needs. When manipulation proceeds very smoothly, it may be difficult for the manipulator to perceive the various mental states of the other. This situation resembles what Heidegger (1962) called "readiness-to-hand"—that is, the smoother the manipulation, the less the other person appears as a subject. This situation is particularly evident in narcissists.

Many narcissists prefer to immerse themselves in their own fantasies, seeing the other as a tool to satisfy their own needs. In states of extreme narcissism, other people are merely an extension of me rather than subjects independent of me, possessing no emotions, thoughts, or behaviors independent of me. For example, when I need praise from the other, the other must surround me like stars holding the moon and provide corresponding applause (what Kohut called mirroring need). When I need to merge with the idealized other, the other must become a perfect idol and unconditionally establish an "unbreakable" relationship with me (what Kohut called idealizing need). When I need to rebuild my superiority after frustration, the other must act as my "punching bag," being humiliated and degraded by me without the slightest complaint. When I do not need the other, they must disappear from my field of vision and commit no actions that hinder me. In this process, the other party must fully understand what I mean and act according to my wishes even without my saying a word (what Kohut called alter ego or twinship need) (Diamond et al., 2011; Hotchkiss, 2003; Kohut, 1984). In contrast, the various emotions, ideas, and behaviors of the other outside the narcissist's "needs" and "expectations" are often ignored—in other words, the "differences" of the other that differ from "I" are erased. Similarly, for borderline personality disorder clients, manipulating the other through idealization and devaluation is a very common phenomenon (Clarkin et al., 2006). Additionally, maladaptive individuals such as psychopaths (sociopaths), mani-

acs, hysterical clients, and obsessive-compulsive disorder clients all exhibit this type of behavior to manipulate others and gain a sense of security or positive self-worth (McWilliams, 2011).

In implementing this “I-It” relationship mode, projective identification, as a covert form of manipulation, plays an important role. It is mainly realized through unconscious communication (Chen & Chen, 2015; Long, 2015; Nielsen, 2019). For example, narcissists project emotions (e.g., shame caused by “I’m not perfect”) and desires (e.g., the desire to merge with perfect lovers) that they do not accept onto their lovers and skillfully influence them at the unconscious level. When the partner identifies with these emotions and desires, she will unconsciously cooperate (e.g., “I should be ashamed of my own imperfection,” and then ask herself to meet the standard of a perfect lover) and be manipulated inadvertently (McWilliams, 2011). This situation is also common in therapist-client interaction: some narcissistic clients will idealize analysts and think that analysts are “saviors” who can magically solve all problems, so they are very “cooperative” with analysts and strive to be good patients (Haber, 2018). Under such pressure, analysts may experience a feeling of “powerlessness.” Once analysts fail to help the client as expected (e.g., failing to empathize accurately and responding incorrectly), they may be troubled by feelings of shame and guilt. For example, in the case of Daniel, the analyst felt trapped in a dilemma where he had to listen to the client endlessly and avoid direct conflict (Jaenicke, 2017). In the case of Marjolaine, when the analyst found it difficult to resonate with the client and his responses became dull, he fell into continuous struggle with shame and guilt (Richard, 2012).

In fact, the interactive mode of the “I-It” relationship spreads across parent-child relationships, peer relationships, and intimate relationships. Individuals use this to satisfy various needs such as connection, security, and narcissism while alleviating and overcoming loneliness, fear, worthlessness, and other negative mental states. However, in relatively “healthy” individuals, this manipulation is not as extreme as in maladaptive clients. The implementation of manipulation can be direct or obscure with rich and varied means. In summary, the ways to achieve this manipulation can be divided into three categories: language, emotion, and physical action. Take the parent-child relationship as an example: when a child’s test scores are very bad and detract from the mother’s narcissistic needs, she can manipulate the child through language by criticizing, humiliating, or devaluing the child, accusing “you are too disappointing!”; or she can use verbal threats, “if you fail again, mother will not love you!” If the child wants to avoid this difficult situation, he or she may be forced to yield to the mother’s request, strive to improve grades, and become a “good boy” or “good girl” in the mother’s eyes. In addition, mothers can perform this manipulation by expressing negative emotions, such as silently looking at their children’s grades while showing anger or indifference. Through physical action, she can also impose physical punishment (e.g., hitting and pinching) to make the child yield to her requirements. Just as interpersonal communication can contain multiple forms, manipulation in the “I-It” relationship mode can also be

performed in multiple ways simultaneously, such as angry and brutal physical abuse of children accompanied by verbal humiliation.

In successful manipulation, the manipulator or dominator can satisfy their needs to a certain extent. In this way, this type of manipulation may be retained in the internal loop as a strategy of interpersonal interaction. When the individual has similar needs, this type of interaction will be implemented in the external loop and even generalized to interactions with other people (BCPSG, 2010; Siefert & Porcerelli, 2015). In this case, the emotions, thoughts, and actions of the other as subjects are usually ignored, often resulting in degradation of the subject's status. For example, the humiliated or degraded individual feels loss of self-worth and is plagued by negative emotions (e.g., shame) (Hotchkiss, 2003; McWilliams, 2011).

However, manipulation is not always successful. In fact, manipulation failures are very common. If manipulation fails, the individual may quickly switch to other methods and continue manipulation. For example, when a mother uses language to abuse a child and finds the effect unsatisfactory, she can use physical violence to make the child obey. This is similar to what Heidegger (1969) called the "conspicuousness" stage. If manipulation fails and the process of control cannot be quickly restored, the relationship between the two parties enters a transient state of "collapse," and the subjectivity of the other and the limitation of the manipulator appear to a certain extent. For example, the individual may find that their ability to manipulate is not always effective, and there is an "unfamiliar" aspect in the other simultaneously. This is similar to the "obstinacy" stage described by Heidegger (1969). If manipulation completely collapses and cannot be carried out at all, the individual may stop this activity helplessly and even perceive the entire pattern of "I-manipulate-Other," deeply understanding the subjectivity of the other and their own limitations, thereby changing the way of interaction. At this time, it is possible to enter a new relationship model. For example, Klein describes the infant's active repair after object destruction (Mitchell & Black, 1995), and Winnicott describes the mother who survived the infant's attack (Winnicott, 2005). This is similar to what Heidegger (1969) called the "obtrusiveness" stage to a certain extent (see Dreyfus, 1991).

It is not difficult to speculate that in these "I-It" interactions, the communication patterns of the two parties will show more mismatches. Take the mother-infant interaction as an example: mothers of ambivalent infants usually show different degrees of imbalance in the dimensions of facial-visual engagement, touch, and spatial/head orientation; mothers of disorganized infants show more serious disharmony, not only imbalanced in the above three dimensions but also in the visual attention dimension and facial and vocal affect dimension (Beebe et al., 2014). This is in sharp contrast to the interaction of secure attachment. Similarly, in the process of therapeutic alliance rupture, more interruptive and noninterruptive simultaneous speech will occur (Beebe & Lachmann, 2020).

5. Several Supplementary Notes

Regarding interaction between subjects in psychoanalysis, several points require clarification:

First, as Buber stated, the “I-It” relationship is indispensable, especially for infants who must rely on caregivers at an early stage. It is very urgent for them to “use” the other to satisfy their own needs. Researchers such as Winnicott describe this as the “relentless use” of objects by infants (Benjamin, 2018). If this need is not satisfied in the most basic way, it will cause various defects in individual development, like plants lacking sunshine and water (Mitchell, 1988). Therefore, in early parent-child relationships, the “I-It” relationship often occupies the primary role—that is, the baby “requests” support from the caregiver.

Second, both the “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships can exist in internal and external loops. However, because the inner world contains more “mine-ness” and is largely “my world,” it is more likely to become one-way manipulation—that is, the “I-It” relationship. In fact, when an individual is unable to obtain satisfactory interaction in the external world, achieving control over the other in the fantasy of the internal loop becomes an “effective” strategy for temporary buffering. However, if an individual is separated from external reality for a long time and immersed in a closed system (Novick & Novick, 2013), they will be unable to establish good interaction with others in reality. At this point, analysts such as Mitchell (2000) and Aron (1996) criticize object relations theorists, considering their conception of only a “subject-object” relationship in the internal world inappropriate. In fact, when the “internal object” has both good and bad sides, it shows that the other in this internal world is not completely “fantasy” or “constructed” by me, which means that otherness has already been shown to a certain degree.

Third, materials accumulated in psychoanalytic clinical practice show that mal-adjusted individuals often use the “I-It” relationship mode in interpersonal interaction, which mainly results in three situations: (1) Manipulating others to make them become my appendage; (2) Being manipulated by others to make me a vassal of others; (3) Relatedness is cut off, leading to loneliness or pseudo-independence. As a result, the subjectivities of both partners are alienated, denied, or even eliminated to varying degrees. By contrast, well-adapted individuals mainly use the “I-Thou” relationship mode in interpersonal interaction, which can maintain a dialectical tension between relatedness and individualization (Zhang, 2022). Consequently, the subjectivities of both sides are highlighted (Benjamin, 2018). From this perspective, one goal of psychoanalytic therapy can be set as guiding clients from the “I-It” relationship mode to the “I-Thou” relationship mode, enabling them to exist as “subjects” in different interpersonal interactions and become more adaptable.

Fourth, whether in the internal or external circuit, the “I-Thou” relationship cannot be established once and for all. When interaction breaks down and

otherness is dispelled, the “I-It” relationship mode will enter the “arena” of interpersonal interaction. In other words, both sides may become caught in a battle for “power” (Benjamin, 2018).

6. Conclusion

Buber’s philosophy of dialogue provides a helpful perspective for understanding interaction between subjects in psychoanalysis. On this basis, this article interprets the “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships in psychoanalysis. The “I-Thou” relationship primarily means treating the other party as another subject relatively independent of oneself, manifested mainly as follows: (1) Both parties can devote themselves to the current dialogue and complete matching at nonverbal and verbal communication levels. (2) After interrupted and broken relationships, the two parties conduct good negotiation and repair their relationship. The “I-It” relationship involves more one-way manipulation of others to satisfy one’s own needs—for example, narcissists using others to satisfy their narcissistic needs. In terms of specific implementation, this can be accomplished through language, emotion, and physical actions. Additionally, the change from successful manipulation to manipulation failure can be illuminated by the three stages (conspicuousness, obstinacy, and obtrusiveness) described by Heidegger in the transition from “readiness-to-hand” to “presence-at-hand.” For psychoanalysis, guiding clients from the “I-It” relationship mode to the “I-Thou” relationship mode represents a valuable theme that can provide a turning point for replacing clients’ maladaptive interaction patterns. Future research can be conducted on this basis.

References

References remain unchanged from the original text.

Table 1. Examples of the Expression of the “I-It” Relationship

Domain	Language	Emotion	Action
Parent-Child Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism/humiliation/devaluation: “You’ re an idiot,” “You have no merit at all,” “No one will like you” • Refusing: “Don’ t bother me,” “Stay away from me” • Order: “You belong to me alone,” “I don’ t allow you to have other heterosexual friends” • Intimidation/threat: “If you keep doing this, we’ ll break up/divorce,” “If you leave me, I will kill myself” • Rationalization: “Obey me, if you love me” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger: To control obedience, comfort, or distancing oneself from another • Apathy: To force the other person to distance themselves and repress their needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical aggression: Different forms of hitting, pinching, and sexual assault, with or without tools • Restriction of freedom: To hold on to the other person and imprison them in a space

Domain	Language	Emotion	Action
Peer Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Criticism/humiliation/devaluation: “You’ re nothing,” “You don’ t deserve to be my friend”• Refusing: “There’ s no way I can help,” “I don’ t want to talk to you”• Order: “I won’ t have you leave me,” “You must depend on me”• Intimidation/threat: “I’ ll break off my friendship with you,” “I won’ t help you anymore”• Rationalization: “I paid all for you, can’ t you meet my wish?”	Same as parent-child relationship	Same as parent-child relationship

Domain	Language	Emotion	Action
Intimate Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticism/humiliation/devaluation “You have no merit at all,” “No one will like you” • Refusing: “Get out of here and leave me alone,” “I m not gonna hug you” • Order: “You belong to me alone,” “I don’ t allow you to have other heterosexual friends” • Intimidation/threat: “If you keep doing this, we’ ll break up/divorce,” “If you leave me, I will kill myself” • Rationalization: “Obey me, if you love me” 	Same as parent-child relationship	Same as parent-child relationship

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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