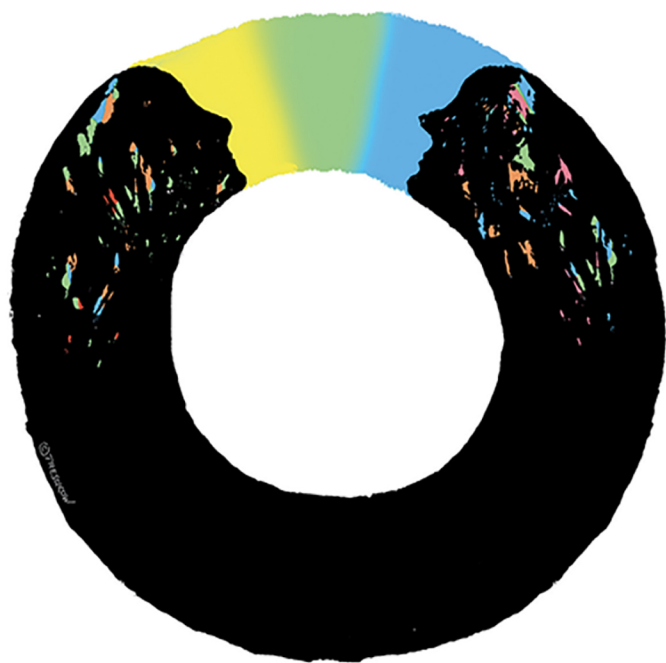


A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION ON SAMENESS AND OTHERNESS

Beyond Babel?

EDITED BY
ANNE-MARIE SCHLÖSSER



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“Rarely have I read a collection of such stimulating and suggestive theoretical and clinical essays by a range of scholars and practitioners of contemporary psychoanalytical psychotherapy for various mental illnesses understood in the context of ‘dis-eases’. Drawing on the work of several traditional and modern schools of thought, these authors consider the constraints and restraints of body, mind, and society in the context of what group analysts call the ‘tripartite matrix’, with its emphasis on interpersonal relations, values and norms, and perhaps above all patterns of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. I was profoundly moved to realise the extent of the growth and development of a European federation of organisations, colleagues, languages and ideas, which augurs well for our continuing cooperation in the service of the well-being of our patients and clients, even in adverse political and economic conditions.”

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A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION ON SAMENESS AND OTHERNESS

In dialogue with the most famous myth for the origin of different languages – The Tower of Babel – *A Psychoanalytic Exploration on Sameness and Otherness: Beyond Babel?* provides a series of timely reflections on the themes of sameness and otherness from a contemporary psychoanalytic perspective. How are we dealing with communication and its difficulties, the confusion of tongues and loss of common ground within a European context today? Can we move beyond Babel?

Confusion and feared loss of shared values and identity are a major part of the daily work of psychoanalytic psychotherapists. Bringing together an international range psychoanalytic practitioners and researchers, the book is divided into six parts and covers an array of resonant topics, including: language and translation; cultural identity; families and children; the cyber world; the psychotherapeutic process; and migration. Whereas the quest for unity, which underpins the myth of Babel, leads to mystification, simplification, and the exclusion of people or things, multilingual communities necessitate mutual understanding through dialogue. This book examines those factors that further or threaten communication, aiming not to reduce, but to gain complexity. It suggests that diversification enriches communication and that, by relating to others, we can create something new.

As opposed to cultural and linguistic homogeneity, Babel is not only a metaphor for mangled communication, alienation, and distraction, it is also about the acceptance or rejection of differences between self and other. This book will be of great interest to psychoanalytic psychotherapists and researchers from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Anne-Marie Schlösser is a psychologist and training and supervising analyst with the IPA, DPG, and DGPT, working in private practice after many years at the Department of Medical Psychology at the University of Goettingen. She is a member of German committees for the development of psychotherapy, an expert for psychoanalytic treatment in the German Health Services, past president of the DGPT and EFPP, and has offered training in psychoanalytic psychotherapy in Shanghai. She is Editor-in-Chief of the EFPP Book Series published by Routledge.

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Edited by Anne-Marie Schlösser

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PREFACE

Joachim Küchenhoff

How should we interpret the subtitle of this remarkable book? What does the formula ‘Beyond Babel?’ indicate? Does it address our present situation, asking whether we are still in Babel or whether we have left behind the Babylonian confusion of tongues? Does it imply a search for a future perspective: the possibility to go beyond Babel? Or the alternative of always being forced to stay within Babel? Does it ask for an ethical reflection in which we have to take sides: should we leave Babel and go beyond, or should we accept Babel as the right place to be?

In the title, the formula is preceded by the two words ‘sameness’ and ‘otherness’. These words serve as a specification of what Babel is meant to be and what the myth of Babel conveys: if I cannot easily grasp what you say, and vice versa, what will I do? Will I hold on to my own language, my own culture, will I build a wall to defend myself against the other threatening my sense of identity, or will I become curious as to the possibilities of getting to know, or even understand, the other? Can I accept the plurality of tongues as cultural enrichment, or do I undertake every possible effort to establish monolingualism, the rule of only one language or a dominant way of living?

These guiding questions might help to define the overarching aim of the book and to situate the various contributions within its overall scope. At first sight, the multiplicity of topics seems confusing. They include (among others): diversity in psychoanalytical theory; linguistic issues such as the benefits of bilinguality in psychotherapy or the limitations of translation; concepts of identity in general or specific identity problems, for example, for women, migrants, or for adolescents exploring cyberspace; cultural differences and how to deal with them; the use of supervision to enhance understanding and to allow emotional speech in psychotherapy. In the process of reading through the book, you might feel as if you are guided through the suburbs of Babel itself. All the different pathways are fascinating and allow new insights. At the same time, the perspectives tend to change rapidly, too rapidly sometimes, and readers might feel lost. But, time and

again, they will forget about the other contributions and let themselves become acquainted with the current author's peculiar 'tongue'. And, by and by, they will gladly realize that the diversity of perspectives and arguments slowly builds up patterns that allow orientation while resisting quick and easy answers. Thus, the reader slowly feels at home in this Babylonian book, and begins to realize that maybe he or she might be invited to feel at home in Babel as well.

The book addresses the topic of sameness and otherness that is most important for psychoanalysis. In general and on principle, psychoanalysis favours difference and otherness. It values the omissions, the slips, the infralinguistic subtext of an encounter and talk, and other manifestations of the unconscious as enrichments to self-awareness and understanding. Dealing with unconscious levels of thoughts, representations, and perceptions, psychoanalysis is, on principle, concerned with a confusion of tongues, either intrapsychically or interpersonally, or, rather, with a multiplicity of perspectives.

Intrapsychically, the self is an other, as Arthur Rimbaud put it: "Moi, c'est un autre", and never merely the same. Not only psychoanalysis, but also many scholars of philosophy, such as Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida and Hellmuth Plessner, have stated that it is not possible to understand oneself completely, to get hold of the origin one has evolved from, etc. The notion of the unconscious entails that the conscious mind is not able to totally govern one's thoughts, inclinations, actions, and emotions. Therefore, identity in psychoanalytical terms cannot be regarded as sameness and a trait over time; it always includes the otherness or the 'othering'.

As to *interpersonal relationships*, the psychoanalytic cure allows analysands to become aware of their object images which they have built up throughout their early years and which they tend to project on the persons they are actually in contact with. Eventually, the otherness of the other will be realized more readily and may be accepted as well. But, again, this self-reflective state can be reached only momentarily, only for a while; it will not be durable. The other will again become the object of one's desire or fear and will be identified with one's object representations.

Sameness and otherness are intimately linked to each other, both in intrapsychic and interpersonal terms: the sameness of the self is not complete and, thus, never complete and available. The otherness of the other will again and again be reduced to the needs and wishes of the self. Yet, identity is, nevertheless, a target in our personality development that we cannot dismiss, the acknowledgement of the other is an ethical demand for interpersonal relationships. Obviously, dialectical thinking is necessary. However, it is difficult to conceive of sameness and otherness as poles that cannot be isolated from each other and cannot be reached individually.

Returning to the Babel metaphor, in the end, we all live at the threshold of Babel: always going outside, trying to leave the confusion of tongues, and going back again to experience the multitude and the richness of voices that tend to be mute outside. We commute between places inside and beyond Babel. The book at hand is an important vehicle to enable this dialectical movement.



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PART I

Translating, understanding and language confusion



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1

INSIDE BABEL¹

Anna Ursula Dreher

Babylonian language confusion?

In our analytic context, often characterised as ‘Babylonian’, there are definitely many problems, but there are also potentials worth realising before looking for solutions ‘*beyond* Babel’. The title “Inside Babel” should elucidate which pole of the field of tension between ‘Inside and beyond Babel’ this chapter is located on. The Bible story of the Tower of Babel, with the consequence of language confusion among human beings, is understood, in religious interpretation, as a punishment of God for human presumptuousness. The plan, to rise up to God physically, to enter heavenly spheres through the high tower, alludes to an old motive – the aspiration to be God-like – which we find again in manifold ways in the sciences today. However, scientists are, above all, seeking insight and knowledge, that is, to decode God’s creation plan of the world through science. Some physicists want to have already discovered ‘God particles’ and some neuroscientists claim to be able to watch the psyche working by using a scanner. Others are looking for universal natural laws, which can give a causal explanation of all our behaviour and actions. As we know, the God of the Old Testament was ‘not amused’ by the Tower of Babel and, as a consequence of his punitive action, the negative impact of the difficulty in communicating ensued: chaos, violence, flight and dispersal all over the world – phenomena that are ubiquitous still today.

In psychoanalysis, we are currently living in and with this language diversity, thus we are living ‘Inside Babel’ in times long after the tower was built. This language diversity does not result only from the many languages that are due to the worldwide distribution of psychoanalysis, but also to the many analytic ‘dialects’, which are in the background of this chapter. This diversity is, of course, not due to God’s punishment, but to the scientific, historic and socio-cultural developments inside and outside psychoanalysis. And it was not our aspiration to rise up to God; our aspiration was and is much smaller, yet not immodest: we want

to understand how the human psyche functions, why it is disturbed and how it can be healed. The *language diversity* in psychoanalysis is experienced by many as *language confusion* because one can easily lose the overview. However, one has to distinguish: confusion can, of course, arise when matters become too complex, too contradictory and too unwieldy, but also when there is unwillingness to tolerate, acknowledge and cope with the diversity of other language games. Which aspect is working in the individual case is sometimes difficult to say.

In the Bible story, it is said that there were many conflicts in the time after the tower was wrecked because of the disturbance to communication. But they certainly do not have to be as extreme as those narrated in some Hebrew variants of the Babel mythology, where workers on the tower speaking with other tongues were slain because they no longer understood work orders (Ranke-Graves et al., 1963). The use of language is by far not always as harmless as it might appear. “Flags are optical keywords. National anthems are musical keywords. But the deadly weapon of man is language”, Arthur Koestler wrote (Koestler, 1975: 98, translated for this edition). Only think of the sad notoriety that the German word ‘Untermensch’ has gained; or of the usage of language as a weapon in the yellow press; or only of the highly sensitive nature of an aspect in the enduring argument between the Western world and Russia as to whether the taking of the Crimea may be called ‘annexation’ or not. The list of the usages of language as a weapon could be arbitrarily continued. Koestler writes further: “Each language acts as a connecting force within the group, and as a repelling force between different groups” (p. 104, translated for this edition) and he sums up pessimistically that, in the course of the history of our species, aggressive, disintegrating forces have always triumphed over those that seek to connect us (p. 104). Regrettably, this is the case. And it is indeed difficult to be optimistic in a world in which the destructive forces are as dominant and ubiquitous as we are currently experiencing. Nevertheless, at least in psychoanalysis, I would want to give the forces of connection a chance and, through that, to the possibility of understanding on the basis of the positive potentials of diversity, not least because we have a common ground worldwide: studying the ‘human psyche’ through our specific access to psychic phenomena – above all but not only – in the analytic situation.

The special relevance of language is deduced from the well-known fact that we use language in manifold ways: we speak with and about our patients, we discuss our clinical cases, we write our papers, we formulate and modify our ideas, models, theories and *Weltbilder* (worldview). Thus, we communicate with the most different addressees: with ourselves, our patients, our colleagues, the insurance companies, the worldwide associations of analysts, the scientific communities of our competing human sciences, and, not least, with a broad public interested in psychoanalysis. That there can be various barriers to communication is obvious and simple solutions are certainly not in sight. Therefore, I shall attempt to make only a snapshot here, a kind of inventory of some aspects of our psychoanalytic discourse in Babylonian times. In this, I see our analytic Babel as an analogy to the mythological site Babel, within the walls of which a lot

of things can happen, constructive as well as destructive. I would like to stroll a bit through this, our town, walk through old and new neighbourhoods and across the squares, and collect impressions, and simply look at what interesting, pleasant, but also unpleasant things one can encounter there.

Reasons for the many voices in psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis, empirically, conceptually and theoretically, is working with one of the most difficult research subjects in existence: the human psyche. Difficult for many reasons: not least because, in the end, we have only our own psychic apparatus to know how the psyche works. Up to this day, there is no consensual definition of what precisely the human psyche is at all or how it is constructed and how it functions. In the sciences, there is not even consensus about its existence at all, despite it being the name giver of psychoanalysis, as well of psychology, psychosomatics or psychiatry. Even though the whole world often and readily speaks of 'psychic', many people obviously find it difficult to acknowledge an entity, 'psyche', as a scientific subject. 'Mind' has it much easier and even the good old 'soul' is having a comeback. In psychoanalysis, there is certainly a number of schools and traditions of thought, which, based on their specific models and ideas of the psyche, have developed their own dialects. By 'analytic dialects', I mean those tradition-specific language games which are, historically, one of the most relevant sources of our Babylonian diversity and which are apparent mainly, but not only, in the diversity of concept meanings. These dialects distinguish themselves from one another by having developed a number of their own specific concepts and by having given school-specific meaning variants to classic concepts. I think, for example, of the Kleinian concept of 'projective identification' which meanwhile has found recognition in various schools of analytic thought. Or of the 'transference as total situation', an understanding of transference which has remained regional up to now. Most of us, reading or hearing for the first time a text from a different school than our own, will have experienced great surprise upon encountering a concept hitherto unfamiliar to us. For instance, I was flabbergasted when I once heard in a lecture of the 'thinking breast' (Bion).

Behind the many voices in Babel is not only the multitude of specific analytic ideas or models of the psyche; this well-known source of language diversity refers mainly to our internal clinical and theoretical discourses. But, along with these inner analytic discourses, it increasingly also refers to the interdisciplinary discourses, definitely and especially then, when – in the canon of these sciences – psychoanalysis wants to be taken seriously, recognised and, above all, wants to be heard. The broad field of psychic disturbances, as this domain is called in both ICD and DSM, is being differently researched and worked with therapeutically. In addition, we are called more and more to present scientific evidence of the efficacy of our clinical interventions. Whether everyone likes it or not, psychoanalysis actually cannot afford *not* to participate in the field of scientific discourse. However, the different scientific worldviews are evident in this terrain, and they

are a further source of diversity, but mainly just another source of confusion. In the same way, how psychoanalysis is scientifically positioned, whether it is a science at all, is seen differently. And even if it is supposed to be a science, there is dissent: what kind of science it is, natural science or human science, cultural or social science, or even a species of its own. And from this stem the controversies about which research methods and aims are the right ones, and which data are relevant at all. This becomes especially obvious with the understanding of what ‘clinical research’ is, which, since the beginning, has been one of our most important research disciplines. The bow ranges from the traditional understanding of the Freudian ‘conjunction research’ – the analyst is also the researcher and his research takes place mainly in the analytic situation using analytic methods – to diverse research understandings orientated towards other scientific worldviews, coming from empiricism through hermeneutics up to the neurosciences, which research with scanners, no longer from behind the couch.

Diversity of theories and world views, which is evident in the diversity of discourses as well as in the spoken dialects, is actually quite normal in living sciences and there is no reason why this should be different in psychoanalysis. Different scientific socialisations, different clinical experiences, different reception of analytic and scientific trends, new ideas and findings influence our dialects, which are, moreover, interwoven with the societies and cultures in which they are spoken. And by society, I am not only referring to the regular geopolitical units, but above all to our diverse regional analytic associations. Historically, psychoanalysis was and still is under pressure to continually calibrate and adjust its ideas about the psyche, as well as the ideas about how psychoanalysis can help people. Also, our understanding of the development, diagnostics and therapy of psychic illness was always in competition with, initially, that of medicine, and today also of genetics, of behavioural science and the neurosciences. This has always been the case and will always be that way, certainly for as long as we want to participate in interdisciplinary discourses and keep striving for better solutions – not least of all in the interest of our patients and clients (Dreher, 2014a). We do not treat our patients analytically because we are analysts, but we are analysts because we are convinced that psychoanalysis can help the patients, and that it is definitely not worse than other procedures.

Constructive and destructive aspects in analytic Babel

If you like, you can refer to this ordinary run of things in psychoanalysis, as in all other sciences as ‘Babel’ – ‘Babel’ understood in the sense of a never-ending competing *multi-voicedness*; there will never be an ‘end of history’ in this respect. Competition, however, can have many faces: from bitter rivalry, even hostility, to the constructive search for communication and greatest possible agreement. Babel can be both a fighting arena for dominance and a place for fertile controversy.

If one is optimistic, one can experience the diversity of voices as a resource and the attraction of difference as enrichment. As is familiar to us from the regulation mechanisms of closeness and distance, being constantly confronted

with the voices of others not only shapes one's own position with a strengthened identity, but also bestows an increasing readiness to open oneself up to a critical and stimulating dialogue. If one is pessimistic, one can regard the diversity as a barrier at which often unfair battles are fought, which also can often end in emotional injuries due to the devaluations and insults that are exchanged. In this field of tension between sameness and otherness, we encounter different kinds of danger: the impasse of anxiety, defence and exclusion; the danger of fusion and, thus, loss of identity. This dialectic between constructive and destructive moments in all scientific discourses, as well as in our analytic Babel, does not surprise us. At any rate, many of us have been living in this town long enough and want to continue to stay there. It would not be bad if we all got along well, with all our various forms of thought and life, our various beliefs and mentalities. In the German-speaking area alone, all members of so many analytic societies, who have gone through various scientific and analytic socialisations and are working within countless institutions and many fields of practice, belong to the 'psychoanalysts in Babel'. This complexity would increase considerably if we were to take the worldwide distribution of psychoanalysis into account, too. No one has an overview of the *entire* analytic Babel as a whole – we all have limited perspectives on it, as well as, by the way, on our subject, the psyche, even though there are, from time to time, those that act as if they knew 'everything'.

What unites us analysts – apart from our historic descent from Freud's psychoanalysis, never mind how straight or winding these genealogical lines may have been – is that we are all workers on and with the psyche. What can divide us are differences in theory and practice, in mentality and culture, in world views and language games. Most of us speak that analytic dialect in which they were analytically socialised or in which they now feel at home by belief. As tends to be the way with dialects, they signal where you are from and offer a sense of home, a social and emotional 'Heimat'. In the development of our dialects a complicated genealogical tree presents itself. At its branches, one often finds important analysts with their ideas. I cannot trace this branching historically, but can only consider a few aspects of the 'here and now'. The dialects that have had the most powerful effects historically derive from our authorities of the founder generations. Therefore, we find in Babel the old Freudian centre of town, surrounded by a number of old-town quarters where Jungians, Adlerians, Kleinians, Lacanians, Bionians, Winnicottians, etc., live. Next to some of these old centres there are new neighbourhoods, where a 'post-' sign is over the entrance: for example, post-Kleinians. The prefixes 'post' or 'contemporary' signal that things continue slightly differently than has been historically passed on, but without a radical break from the original theories. The old city of Babel is mostly occupied by the diverse '-ians'. Around this old centre of Babel there are areas that are not named by persons any more, but after the dominant perspective on the psyche, whether their inhabitants be object relations or drive theorists, self- or ego psychologists, attachment theorists or intersubjectivists. And there are, of course, not only these relatively homogeneous quarters, there are innumerable single detached houses

where pluralists, eclectics, or solitaires live. In the past decades, in the suburbs of Babel, new construction sites can be found; mainly researchers have moved in there, who are dealing with psychoanalytic subjects (e.g., baby watchers, attachment theoreticians, psychotherapy researchers, trauma and brain researchers). Do they still belong to 'our' Babel at all? Are they analysts? Some long-time residents say no, others see them as enrichment. Up to now, they may have a limited influence on the *clinical* discourses in psychoanalysis with their ideas and results; however, they dominate the *scientific* discourses, because their understanding of science and research, of theory and the empirical is closer to the scientific mainstream than the classic psychoanalytic research understanding. Altogether, our Babel is a rather colourful city; its map reminds one more of the organic growth of Rome than of Manhattan's grid designed on the drawing board.

These labels, the analytic quarters in Babel, help us to structure and organise our analytic world. We all know that when we speak with colleagues hitherto unfamiliar to us, the use of some concepts has the function of passwords. Keywords often allow us to open a drawer and this can immediately signal familial closeness or, conversely, even an almost unsurmountable distance. If a speaker talks about "Alpha, beta or omega function", the Bion drawer opens at once. That this can happen even in the case of plain mishearing, a Freudian slip possibly, happened to me recently. When I told a colleague I was working on a paper for a conference titled 'Beyond Babel?', he sceptically asked: "So, are you a Bionian now, too?" He misunderstood 'beyond' as Bion. Anyway, I was able to calm him down: I do *not* live in one of the currently hippest quarters. If one has different beliefs, it is understood that one has to talk and argue with one another. In the field of science there exists, for this purpose, the traditional institution of 'scientific discourse': a rational and fair competition of arguments with the aim that the most well-founded position may succeed. This ideal is advocated again and again, but the lived reality is often so far away from that that we would talk about a disorder if such large discrepancies between ideal and reality showed up in one of our patients. For, mostly, it is not about the best solutions, but about something different: about power, money and dominance; many want to rule over their own little garden patch, and this little garden is supposed to become as big as possible and, above all, no competitor should be in it. The lived practice of scientific discourse, as well as that of analytic discourse, could actually be a subject for analytic social psychology; we find there the whole arsenal of the usual suspects, the well-known narcissistic gratifications such as money, positions, titles as well as the less pleasant motives such as envy, jealousy, or rivalry. It is useful to quote Freud from time to time, for he, of course, has also pointed out this 'dark side' of ours:

One has... to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, trends and that in a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behaviour in human society.

(Freud, 1927: 7)

Let us simply concede that we all have destructive tendencies, which can be observed quite well in our analytic Babel. The aim of communication, or even only an approach to it, is sometimes, unfortunately, not on the agenda – discourses derail much too often. “Bloody duels”, André Green calls them in the basic debate with Robert Wallerstein about the common ground in psychoanalysis (Green, 2005; Wallerstein, 2005a,b). In this argument, Wallerstein considers the language barriers in general between Anglo-Saxon and French authors as an important impediment to communication – but can they alone explain the sharpness of the dispute? Green does not think so and sees behind this – and I think rightly so – basic ideological prejudices. “French authors”, he says, are “considered as smooth talkers of no interest” (Green, 2005, p. 631). A remark by Otto Kernberg gives us a hint regarding the structure of these prejudices: “cultural dispositions toward empirical research... dominate in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries, in contrast to an openness to a more philosophically inspired, subjectivistically focused attitude in Latin countries” (Kernberg, 2006: 921). Then, this is not only about psychoanalysis, but also about different scientific worldviews: Anglo-Saxons are said to be disposed toward empirical research, obviously connected with the claim to generate objective knowledge. The Latins, in turn, are said to possess only subjectivistically focused attitudes. The first do science, the others are good for the arts section. The subtle implication that only one of them could actually be a ‘real’ scientist while the others are not is a similarly devaluating argument, like the statement that can sometimes be heard in our internal analytic debates, that someone has no ‘analytic identity’ – this is also a killer argument *par excellence*, because then one does not have to discuss anything further.

How much influence scientific worldviews can have on our analytic language becomes evident in the *Standard Edition*. For Freud’s original concepts, as Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt was able to show, the following applied: “in German, the psychoanalytic terminology hardly deviates from general language usage” (Goldschmidt, 2008: 44, translated for this edition). Ricardo Steiner (1994) examined the correspondence between Ernest Jones and Freud’s translators, the Stracheys, and has shown very clearly how much Jones wished for the translations of Freudian concepts to be rendered in the professional medical languages of the time, Greek and Latin. This is why, even now, we speak of ‘Ego’ and not of ‘I’, why we speak of ‘cathexis’ and ‘anacritic’. For it was important to Jones that psychoanalysis should present itself as a ‘science’ in the Anglo-Saxon sense, as a *hard* natural science. It should not belong to the *soft* ‘humanities’ or ‘arts’. He has, by the way, in his letters always capitalised the word ‘Science’, a spelling only customary in English for words such as ‘Lord’ or ‘King’ ... or ‘Queen’.

Another scientific utopia has left its traces in our language games. Similar to the great world religions, there are also strong monotheistic tendencies in the sciences in the form of the unity-of-science movement: one kind of explanation is sought for all empirical sciences, law-like, causal explanations. In order to achieve this, only a few methods are permitted: systematic observation and experiment. And, of course, research should be quantitative and the theories should be formulated

in a language orientated at logic and mathematics. The hope that leaving behind all communication problems by choosing the clarity of a formal language is, in fact then, like waiting for the Pentecostal miracle of understanding. As we know, Bion, too, found the idea of a formal language for psychoanalysis attractive; he explicitly formulated many of his concepts in line with these maxims.

Arguments about the ‘right’ scientific worldview are restricting, just as are many resources inner-analytically, as the controversies around the analytic common ground or around the ‘one right way’ of psychoanalysis show. It is too bad how much “anger and bitterness” – so says Green – is produced by this at a time when it would be so much more important to sharpen the profile of psychoanalysis to the outside world, towards other competing sciences and the interested public. And this would really be worth it. For, if one considers the other, the constructive aspect of the diversity of voices, it becomes clear how lively, interesting, and inspiring it can be in our Babel – and that there everyone could learn a lot, inside and outside of psychoanalysis.

Where exactly do the potentials of Babel lie?

In order to illustrate the potentials in Babel, I would like to apply to our analytic dialects a thought of Goldschmidt’s, which he had developed for languages in general. Goldschmidt discusses – against the background of the difficulty of translating Freud texts into French – some fundamental problems concerning the interrelationship of language, culture, and world. He writes:

The myth of Babel is the myth of the ‘unity’ of the human language: you would never know what a language is missing, what it turns away from, what it refuses to say, what is gradually lost, if there were not the others who spoke about it.

(Goldschmidt, 2008: 25, translated for this edition)

In no single language can ‘everything’ be said about the world, each language has its omissions and empty spaces, its areas of clear sight, but also its blind spots. Each language adapts to just the culture in which it is spoken and lived, and, in its turn, shapes that culture. Each language has – if you look at it pragmatically – its strengths and weaknesses. What one language cannot grasp, another is well able to formulate, and what is lacking in one language, so Goldschmidt says, only becomes visible through the mirroring by another language.

I recognise a similar pattern in our analytic dialects, which centre around *our* subject, the psyche. Two questions can hardly be answered universally: in which language can one best speak *about* psychic phenomena; and, even more basically, in which language does the psyche *itself* actually speak? Henri Bergson tells us about the limited possibilities of the psyche to express in language what is happening *within* it.

Inner experience will not find a precisely fitting language anywhere. It will inevitably return to the concept, by adding, at the most, an image to it. But then

the language has to widen the concept, make it pliant and suggest – through the dissipating boundary with which the language surrounds it – that the concept does not contain the complete experience (Bergson, 1948: 61, translated for this edition). There is no ‘language of the psyche’, not even the *lingua universalis* postulated by Leibniz or the ‘language of thought’ postulated by computer linguists – as is known, both are conceived as formal languages. What exists and what we are well familiar with through the work with our patients is the often arduous, tentative, fragile and almost always inadequate attempts to first make tediously conscious and then grasp ‘in words’ what is happening intra- and interpsychically at the moment. Goldschmidt adds, referring to the first question, the possibilities of a best language game *about* the psyche, “All languages are equidistant from that which is meant, just in different ways” (2008: 56, translated for this edition).

Each of our dialects, each of our attempts to grasp the psychic phenomena in language, leaves gaps – one could say Goldschmidtian gaps – because no dialect can grasp everything and say everything about the psyche. Those Babel neighbourhoods mentioned earlier, which do not derive from historic authorities, but from views into the psyche, make this so particularly obvious. Their names already show us what is, respectively, in focus of their view of the psyche: drive, object relation, ego, attachment, or intersubjectivity. But, indirectly, this reveals clearly just what is *not* in focus; thus, which are areas of unclear sight. However, also with the others, the -ians, we tend to know fairly well which areas of clinical phenomena and experience they grasp with great sharpness and with high clarity – and what they see less clearly than others. Each of us is at home in his or her dialect. But when we describe a clinical case where our, up to now, acquired conceptual repertoire reaches its limitations, then we like to fall back on concepts from other dialects, depending on the peculiarities of this case – that is to say, we definitely use the potential of Babel in order to fill Goldschmidt gaps. With narcissistically needy patients, for instance, Kohut’s work on idealising transference comes to mind; with patients with oedipal intensity, drive-theoretical concepts come forcefully to the forefront; in heated affects in which yet other patients entangle us, we will surely think of the Kleinian concept of projective identification, etc. Such pragmatic handling of the diversity of our dialects, experiencing them as enrichment, as an asset, presupposes, however, some effort: one must first of all be curious about other beliefs. One must listen, read, and discuss. One must be able to acknowledge what others are saying, and one must be willing to assimilate ideas different from one’s own belief system; allow a mixing of one’s own dialect with new ideas and concepts. Incidentally, some Bible translations of Babel do speak about a ‘mixing’ of languages, while the Luther translation, very well known to us, uses the negatively connoted ‘confusion’ of languages.

Stefano Bolognini describes quite well in an interview which consequence this constructive handling of diversity has on the attitude of an analyst:

My idea is, that first, at the beginning of the analytic training, there is a split in every analyst between the conscious and official theoretical position and the real internal composition of his or her theory; and secondly there is