Illuminated Silhouettes—Freud, Bion and “I”:
Psychoanalysis; Footnotes and a First-Person Work

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This Division III work exists in two parts, but I do not mean to use one to comment on the other. Rather, I see the different alleys of both parts lying along side each other to form a city, the way one analytic session relates to the others along nonlinear, weaving lines, creating a wildly incomplete “whole.” This purported whole does not represent some kind of resolution, but appears in the flux of some loose-ended associational process.¹

I also imagine here an ever-present eclipse, following each person like a shadow. No matter where we look, no matter how hard we look, what if we could only see the peripheral light surrounding darkness? Would we even recognize that dark center as eclipsed? It seems inevitable that we will take this peripheral light as the sun itself; it is the continual process of re-directing our eye to the dark, over and over, that interests me. This is the work of analysis, which I here write about not from the perspective of analyst, but from the other side of the couch. In that sense, both the theoretical and experiential aspects of this Division III ask only the questions of a dreamer, dreaming life anew.

¹ In this work the rolling joke, of course, is the footnotes—I often thought to a question proposed by David Dodd (2007) in an online introduction to his Annotated Grateful Dead Lyrics: I've always wondered what would happen if, every time you ran into any kind of reference to a book or a person or a work of art you weren't familiar with, you had to go find out about that thing before you continued with what you were doing: would you ever finish anything? (Introduction to the Project, para. 6)
Acknowledgements

Thinking back to the year before my Division III began, I am indebted to Professors Lourdes Mattei and Gail Hornstein, for the ways in which working with them inspired the present endeavor. It was during two independent studies with Lourdes that I first discovered my capabilities for exploring analytic theory in the context of in-depth literature reviews; it was truly a pleasure working with her, and I benefited greatly from her vast theoretical knowledge within contemporary and classical psychoanalysis.

Taking Professor Hornstein’s literature-psychology course, First-Person Narratives of Madness, impacted me in two powerful and related ways. Professor Hornstein encouraged us not to simply accept the theoretical perspectives espoused by doctors (including psychoanalysts) about what “madness” is. It was Professor Hornstein’s deep respect for first-person experience that inspired me to write of my own experiences, in what became the second half of this Division III. (In this same regard Annie Roger’s book, The Unsayable, also impacted me in a great way, and in turn provided the courage for me to write some of my own story, and it has been a real pleasure to work with someone I respect so much as my committee chair.)

Professor Hornstein’s class also marked the first time I was really pushed to engage with literature in an academic way; she required us to read a book a week, demanding thoughtful reading. Likewise, taking classes from and working with Mary Russo, my committee member, helped me to further develop my process of literary analysis. I am grateful for Mary’s candor, providing a kind of honesty that was by turns painful, humorous, and encouraging, but always valuable. She was a wonderful
complement to Annie’s somewhat quiet demeanor. It was a real pleasure to meet so frequently with both Annie and Mary; during the many cloudy days of this year’s long winter, the three of us would gather in Annie’s office to think and drink “real tea,” meanwhile laughing often. Annie and Mary provided incredibly useful feedback throughout this process. They showed great flexibility in accommodating the winding whims of my work. I certainly plan to stay in touch, but will nonetheless miss working in such close capacity with them.

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1. Unconscious as Undifferentiated

Requiring a tolerance for roundabout proceedings, this paper revolves around a series of images, surrounding an important question: how does one make an analytic interpretation about that which is not conscious? I propose that meaning is not set-in-stone, simply waiting to be revealed. It is the application of this notion, directed toward the individual psyche, which is one of the key clinical contributions of psychoanalysis.

What does that look like? I hope that is clearer in my creative work, but as Bion once said to an analysand:

I have just given you an interpretation about your anxiety, and you seem to feel that it was correct, but in fact we shall never know the source of it. It is not to be known. We can only approximate it—or really, learn what it is not. (Bion, as cited in Grotstein, 2007, p. 32)

This work of approximation and “learning what it is not” is difficult to explain theoretically—but not entirely impossible—because in the course of analysis it is a

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As an intellectual idea, this may seem obvious. But in our personal lives we are continually duped by that which seems obvious, and it is this realization—I have hitherto been duped by unconscious smokescreens—that leads a person to undergo analysis (to understand the meaning of particular symptoms). In other words, the problem may start with I know what this means—the problem may be rooted in that which seems certain (and is therefore static), as conscious narrative works to hide that which is unconscious.

On the other hand, implicitly operating as if meaning were “set-in-stone” relates to the kind of object-based mental functioning that I address in later essays.

My paper also addresses a lay audience here, wherein the general (dismissive) opinion is that psychoanalysis does work with meaning as set-in-stone (i.e. by uncovering repressed material). This paper lends itself to a more contemporary understanding of the unconscious, wherein repressed material is no longer of central importance: whereas psychic material can only be repressed if it is first formulated (conscious), I am here concerned with unconscious psychic material that is unformulated (and has therefore never been formulated).
process that takes hour upon hour, adding up to many years. Donnel Stern (1983) does well to explain this constructive aspect of psychoanalysis, which can feel like building a house atop swampland:

When a patient is finally about to think about a previously unaccepted part of life, seldom are fully formulated thoughts simply waiting to be discovered, ready for exposition. Instead, what is usually experienced is a kind of confusion—a confusion with newly appreciable possibilities, and perhaps an intriguing confusion, but a confusion or a puzzle nevertheless. Unconscious clarity rarely underlies defense. On the evidence of our observations of them as they emerge in awareness, the perceptions, ideas, and memories we prefer not to have, the observations we prefer not to make, are most often murky and poorly defined, different in kind than they will be when the process of completion has progressed to the level of words. (p. 71)

This is quite different from the cartoonish image of an all-knowing psychoanalyst-oracle who simply cures by revealing the patient’s unconscious “secrets.” Whereas countless Psych101 professors (and subsequently, their students) have accused psychoanalysis of rather crudely interpreting everything as an unconscious manifestation

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4 In the present paper I do not discuss how it is that was formerly unconscious unfolds over time (and is therefore difficult to explanation succinctly). Nonetheless I hope that in the present collection of papers, my style of writing (along with creative work) can transmit some spirit of this particularized unfolding process.

5 Although I make only one direct reference to the work of Donnel Stern in the present paper, my thinking here is indebted to his 1983 paper “Unformulated Experience, —From Familiar Chaos to Creative Disorder.” I would also refer the reader to Stern’s later (2003) theoretical developments in this arena, as found in his book Unformulated Experience: From Dissociation to Imagination in Psychoanalysis.
of Oedipus, this is no longer (and in many ways, never was). Even the story of Oedipus has changed.\(^6\)

**Two Parents**

(A) *A baby cries and mom shushes her. Mom wants the crying to stop. Perhaps mom is concerned that the baby is upset, perhaps mom is tired of hearing crying; whatever the reasons, mom responds to the crying by shushing, with the goal of stopping the crying.*

(B) *A young son is in love with mom. He thinks they could have the perfect relationship, if not for dad getting in the way. Yet dad really is in the way and the son, fearing dad’s retribution, has to relinquish the possibility of marrying mom.*

We could say that (A) is pre-Oedipal, which would mean that the primary story is Oedipal (B). But this can only be known anachronistically; in other words, it is our knowledge of the Oedipus complex that informs our recognition of “pre-Oedipal” dynamics. On the other hand, one could propose that (B) is merely a new expression of the original, (A), which is about parental demand versus a child’s desire. That would be a part of separation-individuation, but not explicitly a matter of Oedipus.\(^7\) But this new interpretation might be hard to imagine—if you are cloud-gazing and see a train in the sky, it might be possible to then discover the same cloud to also be a whale, but it is very

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\(^6\) Given the image of an all-knowing oracle-analyst, it is ironic to think that the fate of Oedipus was in fact first prophesized by the oracle at Delphi.

\(^7\) In a way, the Oedipus complex is the conscious/pre-conscious narrative, not the unconscious; a patient brings in material related to “the Oedipus complex” because she thinks that is what the analyst wants to hear. (My thinking here is inspired by a conference presentation of Willy Apollon, March 1, 2013, at his conference entitled “Listening for the Unconscious: The Lacanian Psychoanalytic Experience.”)

It could also be noted that Klein was interested in pre-Oedipal dynamics (i.e. Klein, 1945).
difficult to unsee that original train. That does not, however, mean that the train is a more “correct” interpretation of the cloud.

Take it from Loewald

In 1979 Hans Loeswald published what would become a landmark paper, entitled “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex.” In this paper Loewald notes (and perhaps heralds) the then receding of “psychoanalytic interest in the oedipal phase and oedipal conflicts,” which was being replaced by “the predominance of interest and research in preoedipal development, in the infant-mother dyad and issues of separation-individuation and of the self and narcissism (in the recently elaborated sense of these terms)” (Loewald, p. 753). However, rather than Loewald himself turning away from Oedipal interest, he attempts to reconfigure how one interprets the Oedipal struggle. Thus where Freud primarily saw a sexual rivalry, Loewald emphasizes the Oedipal power-struggle as part of separation-individuation:

In an important sense, by evolving our own autonomy, our own superego, and by engaging in nonincestuous object relations, we are killing our parents. We are usurping their power, their competence, their responsibility for us, and we are abnegating, rejecting them as libidinal objects. (p. 758)

By growing up, the child commits a coup; as the child gains more autonomy, the parents’ ruling is overturned. This is especially felt during the terrible twos and in adolescence (but it might also be noted that individuation is a markedly Western/U.S.-held ideal). Furthermore, to understand the “superego as heir to the Oedipus complex” (as
commonly stated by Freud\textsuperscript{8}), Loewald continues, stating that because the child feels guilty over such parricide, he therefore seeks atonement by establishing the parents as internal (superego) objects.

Now, as stated, I am not particularly interested in whether Loewald or Freud is more “correct” in their renderings of the Oedipus complex. Rather I mention Loewald’s version to show how the same case material might be interpreted in entirely different ways. As Thomas Ogden (2006) writes, “I do not view Loewald's version of the Oedipus complex as an updated version of Freud's. Rather…the two renderings of the Oedipus complex constitute different perspectives from which to view the same phenomena” (p. 664). (And in a sense, Ogden’s reading of Loewald and Freud actually constitutes a third perspective.)

\textbf{An Albino, a Mosquito, my Libido}\textsuperscript{9}

The classical stances holds that the son’s original wish is to have sex with his mother, but he must either sublimate or neutralize this wish (or face the consequences of extreme repression). But what if the sexual expression of libido is already a sublimated form of expression? That is to say, what if the unconscious energy is not inherently sexual, or even directed toward mom. For it seems to me that sexual expression, and

\textsuperscript{8} As discussed in Laplanche & Pontalis (1973a), Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex extends throughout many years. Seedlings of theory can retrospectively be found in an 1897 letter to Fliess (as cited in Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973a), but Freud left no definite treatise on the matter. Rather, like most of Freud’s theories, the Oedipus complex remained constantly in flux, growing to incorporate later psychoanalytical developments such as the death drive and super-ego. Since this paper’s foremost concern does not lie in tracking Freud’s development of Greek mythology, I here make use of a very generalized understanding of Oedipus complex (which loosely refers to the Oedipus complex as it appears in \textit{The Ego and the Id}, which Freud referred to as “the first shibboleth of psycho-analysis,” 1923a, p. 13).

Furthermore, it should also be noted that given the gender-bias of the classical Oedipus complex, I refer here to the Oedipal child with male pronouns. In later sections of my papers, I use female pronouns, as well as gender-neutral language.

\textsuperscript{9} (Cobain, Grohl, & Novoselic, 1991, track 1)
directional aim, requires a kind of differentiation that is not necessarily present in unformulated “unconsciousness.”

I turn first to Freud. In the second appendix to *The Ego and the Id* (1923a), James Strachey writes of “a primitive state of things in which the id and the ego are still undifferentiated” (p. 65), which Freud (1940) also discusses in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*: “We picture an initial state as one in which the total available energy of Eros, which henceforward we shall speak of as ‘libido,’ is present in the still undifferentiated ego-id” (p. 149; also cited in Freud, 1923a, p. 65). Here Freud suggests that what we call “libido” is something differentiated and expressed. But perhaps it is through expression that this force emerges from the non-differentiation, and takes the (sexual) shape of this phenomenon called “libido.” Likewise, in his highly speculative 1914(c) paper, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” Freud wonders again at the “differentiation of psychical energies,” concluding:

to begin with, during the state of [primary] narcissism, they [the psychical energies] exist together…[but] our analysis is too coarse to distinguish between them; not until there is object-cathexis is it possible to discriminate a sexual energy—the libido—from an energy of the ego-instincts.\(^{10}\) (p. 76)

Freud (1914c) continues, first supposing that “from the first [there is] a separation between sexual instincts and…ego instincts” (p. 78), then adding:

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\(^{10}\) It should be noted that in the *Standard Edition* of Freud’s works, James Strachey has translated the German word *Trieb* as “instinct.” Like many analysts, Annie Rogers (personal communication, March 25, 2013) believes that a better translation for *Trieb* is the English word “drive.” Strachey comments on the differences between *Trieb*, *Triebrepräsentanz*, and *Instinkt* in the editorial notes of Freud, 1915a. The part to note is that *Trieb* is not a matter of biology—for Freud, Strachey, and Rogers alike. But for the sake of simplicity, I have left Strachey’s translation as is, while myself referring only to psychical energies, and to libido.
It may turn out that, most basically and on the longest view, sexual energy—libido—is only the product of a differentiation in the energy at work generally in the mind. But such an assertion has no relevance. It relates to matters which are so remote… (p. 79)

As Freud continues with his characteristically extensive disavowal of an idea he himself proposed only briefly, I am left to wonder what such avid yet unprompted negation is really about. But pseudo-analysis aside, I think the question of whether or not psychic energy exists unconsciously in a differentiated state is of great importance. But how definitively can one know about the “unconscious”? Freud seems ambivalent on the matter, at times postulating great mystery, as seen above. Yet at other times he denies this sense of wonder, writing in his “Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream Interpretation”:

> What conclusions can one draw from a correctly translated dream? I have an impression that analytic practice has not always avoided errors and over-estimations on this point, partly owing to an exaggerated respect for the ‘mysterious unconscious.’ (Freud, 1923b, p. 112)

Nonetheless, it does seem true that we can only examine what was once unconscious by shining the light of consciousness; it would seem, however, that once a thing is made conscious, it can no longer be regarded as a truly unconscious artifact. In other words, whereas a sculptor can carve a (differentiated) statue from the uncarved (undifferentiated) marble block, is it possible to look then at that completed, carved
statue, and reconstruct the shape of that original block? Furthermore, how does one learn to know about that original cave from whence the marble first came?\(^{11}\)

**Not-a-Thing**

I have just referred to the unconscious as an uncarved block, but this is a problematic metaphor. First, this makes the unconscious seem like a blank slate, which it is not. It is simply less formulated than those things seen in the differentiated state of consciousness. The next issue is one involving the language of “things”; by speaking of the unconscious as an uncarved block I have used a “thing” metaphor (which is actually quite difficult to avoid). But this implies that the unconscious is like a thing, concrete and physical.\(^{12}\) This is an interpretation I seek to avoid. As Bion (1962a) writes of the phrase “differentiating conscious from unconscious”:

> This use of terms is typical of the difficulty of using ambiguous terms when no more precise terms are available. I do not mean “the” conscious or “the” unconscious because that would imply that an observer would be required to differentiate two objects. Yet I do not wish to exclude that shade of meaning because when elements have been differentiated, some becoming conscious and

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\(^{11}\) In other words, unconscious material is unique to each person’s own unconscious (as discussed further, below).

\(^{12}\) Related to the *image* of carving marble, I think to Freud (1930): “It shows us how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms” (p. 71). On the other hand, in the next paper I will discuss how, at times, Freud (1916b, pp. 109-110) posits that image-based dreams constituting a qualitatively different form of mental activity than symbolic thought. See also my discussion of “the presentation of the thing” (Freud, 1915b, p. 201) in the second part of “Disturbing the Mental Life.” In later essays I also will discuss how certain psychic material is treated/related to physically.
some unconscious, it is reasonable to say there is an unconscious if such a concept is valuable.\footnote{Bion, p. 100, fn. 7.3.1}

**Freud’s Un-Analyzed Third**

Returning to Freud’s unconscious, in the same year that Freud (1923b) warned against “exaggerated respect for the ‘mysterious unconscious’” (p. 112), he also alludes to quite an intriguing kind of “unconsciousness,” which I will discuss now: Freud (1923a) begins *The Ego and the Id* with a run-of-the-mill announcement, that there are “two kinds of unconscious—the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious” (p. 15). The former of these unconsciouses is easily accessible, like a familiar memory that is not currently being recalled: this is the latent unconscious, which is deemed preconscious. Dream-thoughts, conversely, are presumably embedded in the second kind of unconscious, as they can only be recalled through “much ado,” such as the associative process laid out in *Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900). Hence this material is not preconscious, but unconscious.

However, not content with only two distinctions, Freud (1923a) then postulates a third unconscious, which he relegates to the ego’s domain (i.e. since this unconscious is “acted out” in real-life, such acting out must be mediated through the ego, albeit

\footnote{I have also made some reference to Bion’s unique perspective on the unconscious, in my “The Alimentary Model.” A related topic, which I also explore in the present collection of papers, is Bion’s (1962a) desire for new psychoanalytic terminology, to avoid the established/misunderstood meanings of words like “unconscious” (which suggest that the unconscious is a thing, and that psychoanalysis is a matter of making the unconscious conscious, along the lines of merely lifting the veil of repression to reveal fully formulated “unconscious” material). Freud (1914a) addresses some of these issues, and the need for analytic construction of never-conscious fantasies, in “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” and again with his late paper (1937), “Constructions in Analysis.”}
unconsciously). But Freud, always self-conscious about his best ideas, is reluctant to call this “third Ucs., which is not repressed” actually “unconscious,” lest “the characteristic of being unconscious begins to lose significance” (p. 18). (For the sake of this discussion, however, I will refer to this “third unconscious” as such.) Describing the shape of this unconscious, Freud (1923a) writes:

We have come upon something in the ego itself which is also unconscious, which behaves exactly like the repressed—that is, which produces powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious…[Thus] we recognize that the Ucs. does not coincide with the repressed; it is still true that the repressed is Ucs., but not all that is Ucs. is repressed. (pp. 17-18)

Before a memory can be repressed, the memory must first be experienced consciously (in other words, the memory has to have first been lived), for repression, it could be said, is what makes the conscious unconscious. But when Freud (1923a) writes “not all that is Ucs. is repressed” (p. 18), I take it to mean that there are feelings which are not in fact felt. My favorite example of this is the person who shouts I’m not fucking yelling. I do not think a man is lying when he asserts this (that he’s not yelling). But rather, the unconscious is being enacted when a man (the actor) yells without conscious awareness of the fact that he is yelling. This is true despite what is quite conscious from

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14 As Annie Rogers (personal communication, March 25, 2013) highlighted for me, in the present paper I at times discuss Freud’s view of non-differentiated states existing in the infant’s mind, but when dealing with an unconscious domain of the ego, this implies a stage of development later than infancy. But it is outside the scope of this paper to untangle the unconscious’ course of development, as I merely mean to show briefly how Freud’s thinking on these subjects was not unified. For me, the most illuminating parts of Freud’s thought lies in these lesser-developed, more radical possibilities, as shown above.

15 As Symington (2012) writes (in the same paper from which I quote, below):

Bion said that there is pain which is not felt, guilt which is not experienced. He is right that these things were there but they were not there as individual existents but rather guilt, shame, pain, loneliness, jealousy, greed were there as a compacted entity. (p. 402)
the vantage point of the listener (and the man will likely still be held responsible, by others, for the effects of his yelling).  

This unconscious yelling is one reason why Freud suggests that the unconscious “produces powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious” (Freud, 1923a, p. 17). But it should also be said, if it is not already clear, that the “special work” of making the unconscious conscious is not a kind of archeological recovery, as if the unconscious were something buried deep inside the earth. Rather it is an imaginative process of construction. This is not a merely made-up story, however, but rather an individualized creation informed by great personal depth.

**Curves of the Road**

“Bion said in one of his Brazilian lectures that the psycho-analyst’s task was to introduce the patient to himself,” writes Neville Symington (2012). But how could it be, that I have not been introduced to myself previously? Is living as myself different from being aware of—knowing—who I am? For now, I will respond with a clinical vignette from the same paper by Symington:

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16 Another kind of experience could involve confusion between subject and object. For example, in the example of *I’m not yelling*, the yeller could believe that the yelling is caused by an externalized force overtaking him, *i.e. I don’t know what overcame me.*

17 Psychoanalysis may have started out largely as a kind of archeological dig but it is no longer—which analysts have forgotten the true unconscious and are therefore not in fact practicing “real analysis.” This unfortunate kind of competition seemingly finds a voice within every psychoanalytic school. On the other hand, if I were to perpetuate another kind of divide, perhaps it could be said that the need for psychoanalysts to feel distinguished in their ways is a response to the current anti-analytic witch-hunt, which is funded by insurance and pharmaceutical companies and led by their so-called “evidence-based” colleagues.

18 Actually, Bion (1990b) said that psychoanalysts work to introduce the patient: to a character which we [the analysts] think it would be worth his [the patient’s] while to respect, namely, himself: either himself as he was once, or to introduce what he was once to himself as he is today. These two people dislike each other and do not want to be introduced. Not only do they hate each other, but they hate this psycho-analyst who is trying to introduce them. (p. 90)
An intelligent and cultured man avoided intimacy with the opposite sex. Why? It was not clear until he propositioned a woman whom he knew had not done further education and had a job as clerical assistant in a government office. He also knew that she was closely involved with a young man who was an electrician whom she saw regularly. So he propositioned her and . . . guess what? She rejected him and he felt lonely. At that moment he knew he had been lonely all his life but now he was aware of it. Loneliness was now a companion whose shape he could feel. (p. 402)

Now this man (who I will call L) did not just have a magical epiphany about this loneliness one day. It was “through a relationship that he [L] had with another man…a psycho-analyst” (p. 402) that L cleared a path, toward recognizing his loneliness.\(^{19}\) As Symington explains, it is not—and could not be—that the analyst simply said to L, “I think you are lonely, you know” (p. 402), for would that have even worked?\(^{20}\) No. I

\(^{19}\) Here Symington is adding what could be considered an interpersonal/relational twist to his paper, which otherwise bears a deep Bionian impression. On the other hand, this could a relational perspective achieved through Bionian, as many psychoanalytic schools seem to arrive at similar conclusions by way of very difficult “theoretical” routes (or at least that is the case in my reading of these different schools). As Grotstein wrote of Bion:

Bion often referred to how dependent on companionship and relationship man is. He would over and over again stress that man will always be a “dependent creature. Man is a dependent creature no matter how autonomous he becomes.” He seemed to accord it instinctual status. (Grotstein, 2007, p. 31)

\(^{20}\) I am reminded of an anecdote from Stephen Mitchell (2001) about “the phobic attitude toward advice giving, derived from the [analytic] ideal of nondirectiveness” (p. 188):

One of my most vivid and fondest memories of professional analytic meetings took place a few years after I graduated. The speaker was a guest from another institute who was known for bending usual analytic techniques. He discussed giving advice to patients, which he defended as sometimes useful. It caused quite a stir. One by one, the senior analysts of the institute, whom I knew from personal and secondhand experience to be quite free themselves in offering advice to anyone who would listen, including patients, rose to condemn this heretical idea as shockingly incompatible with true analysis, as a crude manipulation of the patient by misusing the analyst's influence. The speaker was getting creamed and had trouble defending himself. A hand went up in the back of the room, and a lowly candidate said something like the following.

“I don't really understand why advice giving is so dangerous. I mean, I'm trying to think about how giving advice works in my life and to whom I give it. I give advice to my wife, my kids, my friends, and no one listens to my advice! I really don't understand why we need to be so
think that L’s realization is not simply a paltry intellectualized narrative, but rather represents his experience feeling the *depths* of loneliness. Symington (2012) continues:

> When I start to feel something it means that it has changed its status. The loneliness was there before but in a different state. It is not in fact correct to call it loneliness until it is felt. It was there but in a different form. (p. 402)

Symington goes on to say that emotions like loneliness or guilt are “individual existents” but prior to individuation they exist as part of a “compacted entity” (p. 402). We are talking again about an undifferentiated “unconscious”:

> It is that these different entities—loneliness, guilt, and shame—have been congealed and now the creative principle has fashioned them into separate realities of which the person is now aware. We speak of them as ‘unconscious’ but we often seem to suppose that they have been in existence but just out of sight, as it were, but in fact they are ‘unconscious’ [sic] because they did not exist. They have come into existence through the act of creation. (Symington, 2012, p. 402)\(^{21}\)

Psycanoanalysis is one such “act of creation.”\(^{22}\) When Freud (1923a) proposed his third kind of unconscious only to reject it, he neglected a vital aspect of analysis. For I

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\(^{21}\) As discussed with Annie Rogers (personal communication, April 1, 2013), in the present collection of papers I have largely left out what Lacanians often refer to as “the logic of the unconscious” (see also Matte-Blanco, 1988). But it is important to note that the unconscious, although unformulated, is not universal. Existing uniquely for each individual (and in response to their earlier life experiences, relations, and fantasies), the unconscious is highly particularized to *that* specific individual. In the clinical example I used, L would not have learned that he *had been guilty all his life but now he was aware of it*. In other words, unformulated experience is not the same as a blank slate, nor is it some kind of universal archetype seeking expression.

\(^{22}\) This creation is necessary, for John Lennon said: “Reality leaves a lot to the imagination!” (as cited in Grotstein, 2007, p. 8).
hold psychoanalysis’ creative process to be one of its most important aspects—and the impact of this process is made even greater by the reality that analysis makes way for individuals to access this creative force whilst suffering from severe pathology (and therefore in need of the intensive psychotherapy that constitutes three to five sessions a week). But perhaps such a statement relies on a fuller understanding the constructive process of psychoanalysis, which I have not fully laid out. For now I will just say once more that a man lived in such a way as to avoid intimacy. He did not—could not—really think about why this might be. But through a psychoanalytic relationship, this man saw himself anew, and “at that moment he knew he had been lonely all his life but now he was aware of it. Loneliness was now a companion whose shape he could feel” (p. 402). It might sound trivial but to the man experiencing it, perhaps that was of great importance.

For in that moment of awareness, I suspect, this man actually became intimate with himself, in a new way; perhaps it was his first time.

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23 Although there is still work to be done here, as psychoanalysis generally serves only the privileged white echelon of society. Likewise, it is unfortunate that many psychoanalysts lack the ability (and willingness) to treat severe psychosis, and I also think we need more analysts working with (figuring out how to work with) persons who commit acts of violence (i.e. the would be prison population).

24 As Symington (2012) points out, the heart of psychoanalysis is not “contained” within psychoanalysis itself, but rather, psychoanalysis accesses a deeply human process.
2.

Disturbing the Mental Life, Part I: Sleep

Let us begin again with dreams. Of central importance within Freud’s thought, not only are dreams the topic of psychoanalysis’ second major treatise (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900), but as James Strachey notes, “There is…scarcely one of [Freud’s] writings in which the topic did not emerge” (in Freud, 1916b, p. 83, fn. 2). As Freud (1916b) wrote, “the study of dreams is not only the best preparation for the study of the neuroses, but dreams are themselves a neurotic symptom, which, moreover, offers us the priceless advantage of occurring in all healthy people” (p. 83). If dreams are then the quintessential psychoanalytic subject, giving a full overview of Freud’s vision of dreaming would perhaps encompass an overview of psychoanalysis in its entirety, a project of which I will certainly stop short.

For in this two-part essay, I am mostly interested in (1) adumbrating key aspects in Freud’s understanding of dreaming, for the purpose of (2) then outlining a few qualitatively different possibilities for the nature of that mental activity most commonly

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25 Furthermore, a quick review of the literature on PEPweb reveals that fifteen of Freud’s works refer to dreams and dreaming in their actual titles (see Freud, 1900; 1901; 1907; 1908; 1911a; 1911b; 1913a; 1913b; 1917a; 1921; 1922; 1923b; 1923c; 1925; 1929).

26 Dreams reveal neurotic symptoms in the same way that the body reveals (is the medium which houses) neurotic (hysteric) symptoms. But what does it mean to say that the dream is a neurotic symptom, when such dreams also occur “in all healthy people” (Freud, 1916b, p. 83)? Perhaps in “health,” dreams are simply the symptoms of humanity’s “common unhappiness,” as I am reminded here of Freud’s (1893b) famous quote:

When I have promised my patients help or improvement by means of a cathartic treatment I have often been faced by this objection: ‘Why, you tell me yourself that my illness is probably connected with my circumstances and the events of my life. You cannot alter these in any way. How do you propose to help me, then?’ And I have been able to make this reply: ‘No doubt fate would find it easier than I do to relieve you of your illness. But you will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed against that unhappiness.’ (p. 305)
revealed through dreaming (and which is posited here as different from the processes that dominate in waking thought). If the first aim (1) of this two-part paper seems unnecessarily long for the purpose of addressing (2), it is because (1) also sets the stage for another of my papers (“Thomas Ogden’s Dream,” which examines how Wilfred Bion, 1962a, and Thomas Ogden, 2005c, each re-develop the psychoanalytic concept of dreaming anew).

Unlocking the Doors

_The Interpretation of Dreams_ begins with an impressive work of scholarship, wherein Freud (1900) spends over a hundred pages reviewing “The Scientific Literature on Dreams.” (Undoubtedly a comprehensive literature review,27 Freud’s research is particularly impressive when considering that he couldn’t even rely on Wikipedia for guidance!) At the conclusion of his research, Freud (1900) writes, “the scientific theories of dreams leave no room for any problem of interpreting them, since in their view a dream is not a mental act at all, but a somatic process signalizing its occurrence by indications registered in the mental apparatus” (p. 96). Freud, of course disagrees, finding some solace within “lay opinion…[which while] admitting that dreams are unintelligible and absurd, it [lay opinion] cannot bring itself to declare that they have no significance at all” (p. 96).

27 But is Freud’s literature review exhaustive? Such a question is outside the scope of this paper, but I refer the reader to Makari’s (2008) _Revolution in Mind_ to see how Freud evolved directly (not magically) from his contexts and intellectual contemporaries. In this light, Freud was a brilliant theoretician, but much of his inspiration lacks citation; for example, Makari claims that “On Narcissism” (1914c) was written largely in response to debates between Freud and Adler (and to a lesser extent, Jung), but Adler is not cited anywhere in Freud’s paper (neither is Jung). This kind of un-cited debate remains common within psychoanalysis—for example, despite the fact that Kohut (i.e. 1972; 1979) and Kernberg’s (i.e. 1974a; 1974c) theories on narcissism are largely defined through their respective opposition to each other, readers are hard pressed to find a paper by the former that cites the latter even once.
Within such “lay opinion” Freud identifies two common and related methods for interpreting dreams: one is based on symbolic interpretation, wherein the Pharaoh’s seven lean kine symbolize seven years of famine (in a strictly analogous way); the other method is based on decoding, wherein dreams are “a kind of cryptography in which each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key” (Freud, 1900, p. 97). And despite Freud’s (1900) claims of a new method, cartoonish depictions of psychoanalysis subscribe to this latter “lay” method, wherein the symbolic cigar is unequivocally a penis (and the analysand who refuses such interpretations is doomed to suffer at their own fault, like Irma and Dora).²⁸ Freud’s more innovative method is, of course, the psychoanalytic investigation of dream-material, as employed through the process of free association. I will return to this discussion later, but for now want to explore Freud’s theoretical implications of dreaming as they relate to primary and secondary processes, as well as the pleasure and reality principles.

Wish Upon a Stimuli

In the Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Freud (1916b) takes up the question of dreams by asking again, “What, then, is a dream?” (p. 107). Freud’s answer begins with “Aristotle’s definition…Dreaming is evidently mental life during sleep—

²⁸ This method of psychoanalytically decoding symbols has historically been employed by not just by New Yorker cartoons on the couch, but by real life analysts as well. Most notably, psychoanalytic symbolism is supported by Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams dream-work section, “E. Representation by Symbols” (p. 363-414), and appears again in the tenth of his Introductory Lectures, “Symbolism in Dreams” (Freud, 1916b, p. 183-208).

As for the famous Freud-ism “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar”, Elms (2001) has sought to verify this quote—as actually coming from Freud—but to no avail. However, it is through Elms’ scholarship that I learned—and in fn. 2, was able to quote from—the origin of Freud’s comment about hysterical misery and uncommon happiness. In reference to this paper’s title, Freud writes in his 1914(b) “History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement” of the moment wherein he (Freud) “understood that from now onwards I was one of those who have ‘disturbed the sleep of the world’” (p. 21). A footnote in Freud’s (1914b) text reveals that this is a quote from Hebel's Gyges und sein Ring (as cited and translated in Freud, 1914b).
something which has certain resemblances to waking mental life but which, on the other hand, is distinguished from it by large differences” (p. 107). Perhaps intuiting the occurrence of dreams during REM (rather than in deep sleep),29 Freud continues, “dreams seem to be an intermediate state between sleeping and waking” (p. 107), and writes further that the “the biological purpose of sleep seems…to be rehabilitative, and its psychological characteristic [is] of suspense of interest in the world” (p. 108). Thus during sleep, attention is withdrawn from external stimuli, and a womb-like state is re-created. But dreaming, Freud thinks, is contrary to this goal of withdrawal:

Why does mental life fail to go to sleep? Probably because there is something that will not allow the mind any peace. Stimuli impinge upon it and it must react to them. A dream, then, is the manner in which the mind reacts to stimuli that impinge upon it in the state of sleep. And here we see a way of access to an understanding of dreams. We can take various dreams and try to discover what the stimulus was which was seeking to disturb sleep and to which the reaction was a dream. (1916b, p. 109)

In this light, dreams are an interruption to sleep. But what is it that interrupts sleep? Here Freud’s economical model (implied in the physicality of “impinging stimuli”) meets with the view of dreams as wish-fulfillment (as first laid out in Freud, 1900, and which I will explore more, later). To show how Freud views the same dream

29 This now commonly accepted fact was first studied by Aserinsky, & Kleitman (1953).
material from the vantage point of the pleasure and reality principles,30 I quote “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning”31:

I suggest that the state of psychical rest was originally disturbed by the peremptory demands of internal needs. When this happened, whatever was thought of (wished for) was simply presented in a hallucinatory manner, just as still happens to-day with our dream-thoughts every night. It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable. This setting-up of the reality principle proved to be a momentous step. (Freud, 1911c, p. 219)

Implicit in Freud’s statement is an entire model of psychological development, wherein the infant initially lives in a self-contained world of primary (libidinal) narcissism. In this state, wishes (and needs) are fulfilled through hallucination. It is only over time that the infant comes to realize the inherent illusion of such hallucinatory omnipotence—one’s mother (and father, more generally) is the actual “fulfiler” of wishes/needs.32 This is the beginning of the reality principle, which in my reading has a

30 The notion of viewing the same material from different theoretical vantage points was discussed in my previous paper.
31 In my next paper, “The Alimentary Model,” I write about how this work (Freud, 1911c) plays a significant role in Bion’s (1962a) Learning from Experience.
32 As Laplanche & Pontalis (1973c) highlight, the notion of primary narcissism is complicated for Freud. First using the term in “On Narcissism,” Freud (1914c) initially refers to a childhood state wherein there is
kind of evolutionary purpose, so to speak. Since the mother and father are unable/unwilling to perpetually satisfy every need for a child, by way of the reality principle children must learn how to satisfy their own needs, with the implication being that children will one day become adults who take care of their own incapable infants.33

Notable to the present discussion, Freud (1911c) suggests it is not just the parent-child relation that dictates the need for the reality principle. But there is also something inherently unsatisfactory in hallucinatory wish-fulfillment (which, unbeknownst to the infant, such dissatisfaction actually occurs because of the inevitable parental inconsistencies that prevent eternal and perfected infantile fulfillment): “It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination” (1911c, p. 219). Given this unsatisfactory nature, wish-fulfillment becomes contrary to the pleasure principle, for what is pleasurable about disappointment? Thus in this theory, hallucinatory wish-fulfillment is largely superceded by development (of the reality

33 Freud (1911c) offers a version of this process, p. 219, fn. 4.
principle), wherein an individual becomes capable of satisfying her own needs. In one’s more mature years this means dealing with hunger on one’s own, for example, by preparing food and eating it. Such a capability is predicated on a capacity for delayed gratification (thereby delaying the removal of the hungry stimuli), and therefore the tolerance of frustration (which in this case I mean as “unsatisfied need,” or the build up of “hungry” stimuli).

The Restraints

Now it should be said, that in the preceding paragraphs I have reportedly dealt with “an entire model of development” (my words). But I have in fact dealt mostly with my synthesized understanding (of Freud). By doing this, I have combined the Freud of different time periods; 1911-Freud has spoken to 1900-Freud here. There are complications from this kind of anachronistic reading (which I address in my paper “Meaning, Hot & Alive”), but in a very basic way this is how Freud gets remembered, a hundred years later. As the sake of simplicity mixes with the shaping powers of memory, Freud’s theories inevitability combine into a generalized meta-theory over time (this is not true within intensively precise scholarly pursuits, but the present paper is not that

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34 Initially referring to “the supersession of the pleasure principle by the reality principle” (Freud, 1911, p. 222), in the following paragraph Freud remarks:

Actually the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time. (p. 223)

35 See my Bionian discussion of Freud (1911c), in next paper, and also the passage quoted below (Freud, 1911c, p. 221).
exactly). Furthermore, it is in many ways this generalized knowledge to which contemporary psychoanalytic innovations respond.  

I have spoken about the infant learning to satisfy her own needs, which Freud (1911c) refers to as “the appropriate alteration of reality” (p. 221). This requires, however, a delayed gratification, as “restraint upon motor discharge (upon action)” (Freud, 1911c, p. 221). For one cannot always eat when hungry or have sex when horny. This is true not only because of occasional scarcity in regards to food and mating partners, but also because of the societal prohibitions (and ideals) that relinquish meals to the lunch break and sex to the privacy of one’s own home (with willing partners only). The mediation of such desire is the “new function” (Freud, 1911c, p. 221) that stands in contrast to the earlier hallucinatory states of things. For hallucinatory wish-fulfillment actually “served as a means of unburdening the mental apparatus of accretions of stimuli,” which was enacted not just psychically—i.e. through dreaming—but physically too, “by sending innervations into the interior of the body (leading to expressive

36 An example of this occurs in my fn. discussion of “primary narcissism”; we remember this as a term coming from “On Narcissism” (1914c), meanwhile using the term itself in the way implied by a later text (“Introductory Lectures,” 1917b).

37 Throughout this paper, I have oft drawn on Freud’s 1911(c) paper, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning.” It could be noted that Bion’s (1962a) Learning from Experience relies heavily on sections of this text as well (Freud’s), and therefore offers another example of Freud being developed through newer innovations. I therefore couch the present two paragraphs of my writing (the one to which this footnote refers, and the one following that) amidst Bion’s responses Freud. That is to say, while continuing to discuss Freud’s theory here, I have drawn on some of the specific quotations that are later echoed by Bion in very interesting ways. For the sake of the present paper’s progression I will not highlight here how Bion responds to these quotes from Freud, but would encourage the interested reader to compare the encapsulated Freud quotes with the discussion of Learning from Experience in my paper, “The Alimentary Model” (and to a lesser extent, “Text as Transmission, Part I”). Upon such side-by-side reading, I think the correlative echoes from Freud to Bion will emerge quite obviously. (It might be noted that echoes are different from direct relation, however, like when Freud’s word “alteration” resounds alongside Bion’s “modification.”)

movements and the play of features and to manifestations of affect)” (Freud, 1911c, p. 221).

But immediate hallucinatory satisfaction being ultimately unsatisfactory, and since there is trouble ahead if one always unburdens hunger by modes other than eating, the reality principle intervenes, the child learns to think about other, more satisfactory solutions to the problem of hunger. It is not, however, only that the child navigates reality through thinking, but rather for Freud (1911c), thinking is actually “endowed with characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increased tension of stimulus while the process of discharge was postponed” (p. 221). When put this way by Freud, it seems as if the secondary process (thinking) holds in check (delays/restraints) the hallucinatory primary process (which was hitherto dominated solely by the pleasure principle).

Yet despite such restraint, the reality principle does not overtake all areas of mental life unilaterally. Hallucinatory wish-fulfillment continues in the more primary state of dreaming, wherein one can be satiated (i.e. fed) without the work of reality (i.e. cooking). This, of course, relates to Freud’s central thesis in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that dreams are wish-fulfillments.

The importance of dreaming is elevated upon realizing that—leaving aside for the moment sublimation and neutralization—not all libidinal desires can be granted satisfaction. Wishes that are subject to the resistance of censorship/repression cannot be

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This is for Freud most true in sleep, even sans dreaming: “The state of sleep is able to re-establish the likeness of mental life as it was before the recognition of reality, because a prerequisite of sleep is a deliberate rejection of reality (the wish to sleep)” (Freud, 1911c, p. 218, fn. 3). Preceding this (1911c) conception of the reality principle, Freud (1900) first describes this “wish to sleep” in *Interpretation of Dreams*, wherein we encounter a tension between the psychically disturbing (unconscious) wishes that impinge on the wish to sleep (albeit in a disguised form).
fulfilled consciously, for how would I fulfill a (repressed) desire if I were unaware of even wishing for that? This is a problem not only in waking life, but during sleep as well. Say, for example, I consciously wish to cuss out my in-laws. As their visit during Christmas progresses, “the accretions of stimuli” build, but I cannot “discharg[e]” this desire to yell and swear—at least not through immediate “motor action” (Freud, 1911c, p. 221), lest my wife have a fit too. But such an example refers only to the case of a conscious wish, wherein the built up tension can also be discharged consciously, say, by drinking quite heavily during said in-laws’ visit. But when “accretions of stimuli” arise in relation to a desire that is prohibited even from consciousness, the hallucinatory discharge must likewise be properly disguised before reaching even psychic satisfaction. (The classic repressed wish in need of such disguised satisfaction relates, of course, to the Oedipus complex.)

**Train I Ride**

In other words, before discharge can be realized, a prohibited desire must first “evade the censorship” (Freud, 1900, p. 507), and this is done through what Freud calls the “dream-work” (i.e. 1900, section VI, “The Dream-Work,” pp. 276-508).⁴⁰ Find that

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⁴⁰ In one conclusive paragraph, Freud (1900) summarizes the entirety of “The Dream-Work,” his largest chapter in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Many of his key contributions are summoned by name (i.e. displacement; condensation), whereas others (i.e. secondary revision) are referenced indirectly (and as such, unpacking the totality of what is represented by Freud’s dense statement is outside the scope of the present discussion):

the dream-work makes use of a displacement of psychical intensities to the point of a transvaluation of all psychical values. The thoughts have to be reproduced exclusively or predominantly in the material of visual and acoustic memory-traces, and this necessity imposes upon the dream-work considerations of representability which it meets by carrying out fresh displacements. Greater intensities have probably to be produced than are available in the dream-thoughts at night, and this purpose is served by the extensive condensation which is carried out with the constituents of the dream-thoughts. Little attention is paid to the logical relations between the thoughts; those relations are ultimately given a disguised representation in certain formal characteristics of dreams. Any affect attached to the dream-thoughts undergoes less modification
the dream-work makes use of “memory trace[s]” (p. 565) and “the day’s residues, among which we may now class the indifferent impressions,” which serve to express “the instinctual force which is at the disposal of the repressed wish” (p. 564), Freud develops free association, as a means for “interpretation en détail and not en masse” (p. 104). Thus Freud (1900) is concerned with understanding all of the associational content that stems from examining each particular dream-element. (This method is illustrated throughout *The Interpretation of Dreams.*) Through this process of examining the sources of every association, “the essential dream-thoughts…usually emerge as a complex of thoughts and memories of the most intricate possible structure, with all the attributes of the trains of thought familiar to us in waking life” (p. 312). It is through analyzing these “essential dream-thoughts” that the dreamer can discover the particular wish concealed within the dream, thus undoing the work of censorship (by decoding that which was censored).

**The Mental Life of Dreams**

Implicit within this interpretative method for analyzing dreams is the idea that the central dream-thoughts are created the same way as waking thoughts (but are withheld from consciousness, due to censorship), through “a highly complex intellectual function, operating with almost the whole resources of the mental apparatus” (Freud, 1900, p. 590).41 Freud supposes, however, that in the construction of dreams, “the train of thought than their ideational content. Such affects are as a rule suppressed; when they are retained, they are detached from the ideas that properly belong to them, affects of a similar character being brought together. Only a single portion of the dream-work and one which operates to an irregular degree, the working over of the material by partly aroused waking thought [through the process of secondary revision], tallies to some extent with the view which other writers have sought to apply to the entire activity of dream-construction. (Freud, 1900, pp. 507-508)

41 Freud (1900) seems to waver on this matter, here writing that dream-thoughts use “almost [but not all] the whole resources of the mental apparatus” (p. 590, emphasis mine) and later writing:
undergoes a series of transformations which we can no longer recognize as normal psychical processes and which lead to a result that bewilders us—a psychopathological structure” (p. 595). Nonetheless, this implies still that the dream-thoughts are secondary process entities (i.e. products of abstract and symbolic thought), which undergo a kind of primary process alteration. In this case, interpretation is then about undoing such alteration. In part two of this essay, however, I will explore what Robbins (2004) calls Freud’s other “potentially more revolutionary hypothesis” (p. 356) about dreaming. Namely, I will discuss the possibility that rather than representing a complex alteration to the otherwise normal secondary process, perhaps dreams are actually indicative of a separate, non-pathological and non-regressive form of mental functioning, which is qualitatively different from that of representational thinking, and yet (to paraphrase Robbins, 2011) exists alongside thinking throughout one’s life.

There is no need to assume, however, that this activity of thought is performed during sleep—a possibility which would gravely confuse what has hitherto been our settled picture of the psychical state of sleep. On the contrary, these thoughts may very well have originated from the previous day, they may have proceeded unobserved by our consciousness from their start, and may already have been completed at the onset of sleep. (p. 593, emphasis mine) Freud (1900) does believe that dream-thoughts originate during the day (as they are attached to desires during the day), but he seems less certain as to what exactly goes on during the night.
3.

Disturbing the Mental Life, Part II: A “Revolutionary Hypothesis”

In the first half of this paper, I explored the primary process of hallucinatory wish-fulfillment as related to the pleasure principle. I do not equate the two as the same, but perhaps the functions of each intersect like a Venn diagram, i.e. both the pleasure principle and hallucinatory wish-fulfillment work to discharge psychic stimuli (immediately). This occurs in dreams, and later I will explicate another related kind of discharge that occurs by way of psychic evacuation (in my paper “The Alimentary Model”; and as laid out in Bion, 1962a). (And although psychotic mental functioning is not the primary concern of my papers here, I think there are important connections between hallucinatory wish-fulfillment and psychosis too.) In the present paper (this second half), I link the primary process with a kind of mental functioning that is body-based and different from symbolic thought. This other form of mental functioning is often understood as pervasive in pathology, infancy, and dream states, but I also think that it exists throughout non-pathological (healthy) waking life.

On the other hand, I explore in subsequent essays how mean-making is dependent upon symbolic (secondary process) thought, and the related reality principle. I will likewise discuss this ‘secondary process’ as connected to thinking, psychoanalytic constructions, dreaming (Ogden, 2005c), digesting and modification (Bion, 1962a). This ‘secondary process’ is also related to differentiation (as discussed in the previous paper) and the work of psychoanalysis (as discussed in later papers). Again I do not think that

42 I use this term here in a loose sense.
these mental functions (represented by the ‘secondary process’) are all the same, but rather they operate together, or in similar fields (this is a complicated relationship, but I do not mean to say that these mental functions depend on actual psychically-physical events, in the positivist sense of it; nonetheless, there is some usefulness in that kind of psychical-physical metaphor, as I discuss later). And while it is not unusual to write about the secondary process, I propose (somewhat uniquely) that the primary and secondary processes are not actually sequential. In other words, I propose that the so-called secondary process does not ever replace the primary process, developmentally. Thus I flip the classical equation, to say: representational thought is suppressed during dreaming, and thus this other form of mental activity (i.e. the primary process) is most readily revealed (sans representational thought) during dream states, but this other form of mental functioning is not suppressed during the day—it instead occurs alongside/in tandem with representational thought.\(^43\) Now I do not fully flesh out the complex relationship between representational thought and this other form of mental functioning, nor do I definitively describe the exact nature of each/the differences between the two. Rather, I draw on the theories of Freud, Klein, Bion, Robbins,\(^44\) and Ogden, to raise questions and possibilities about the nature of mental functioning.

\(^{43}\) On the periphery of this conversation is the premise that psychotic mental functioning plays an important role in the mental lives of all persons. This notion persists in the shadows of my essays (and is also found in Bion, 1957, 1962a; Ogden, 2005c; and Robbins, 2011).

Another line of thought could explore how the content and logic of the unconscious relates differently to these forms of mental functioning.

\(^{44}\) To begin this paper I call on Robbins’ readings of Freud and Klein, as well as his own theories, but I do not espouse solely to understandings of mental life. He and I do seem to read Freud similarly here, but I hold his conception of mental functioning only as a possibility, which complements (as well as contradicts) some of the other possibilities proposed in this paper.
The Mental Life of Sleep

In the previous paper (the first half) I adumbrated Freud’s view of dreaming, briefly mentioning his method for analyzing dreams, which emphasizes discovering a dream’s central dream-thoughts, as a means of decoding the otherwise censored dream-wish. But as Michael Robbins (2004) writes, “The classical technique of dream interpretation is predicated on the assumption that dreaming and waking languages are qualitatively similar entities, each consisting of associatively decodable representational elements that have unconscious referents” (p. 356).45 Likewise, Freud (1900) also writes that dreams reveal “primitive modes of activity which are suppressed during the day” (p. 591), namely “modes of activity” that are other than abstract and symbolic thought. Thus despite Freud’s method of analyzing dreams to discern their representational (secondary process) material, in his “Introductory Lectures,” Freud (1916b) again posits a qualitative difference between the commonly understood representational thought that occurs during “waking life” (p. 109) and that which is experienced during sleep46:

Mental processes in sleep have a quite different character from those of waking life. We experience every sort of thing in dreams and believe in it, whereas nevertheless we experience nothing, except, perhaps, the single disturbing

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45 Indeed Freud (1900) does propose an analogous correlation between “the dream content” and “the dream-thoughts” (the latter of which, Freud suggests, are created during the course of the day, and subsequently revealed through analysis):

are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. (Freud, 1900, p. 277; as also cited in Robbins, 2008, p. 190)

46 I do not mean to say that there is nothing representational about dreams (as that would contradict the conception of dream-thoughts), but the representational mental functions are diminished during sleep. On the other hand, below I will show how I view waking life differently than Freud (as also discussed in the introduction to this paper).
stimulus. We experience it predominantly in visual images; feelings may be present too, and thoughts interwoven in it as well; the other senses may also experience something, but nonetheless it is predominantly a question of images.

Part of the difficulty of giving an account of dreams is due to our having to translate these images into words. ‘I could draw it’, a dreamer often says to us, ‘but I don't know how to say it.’ This is not, however, a reduced mental activity, like that of a feeble-minded person as compared to that of a genius: it is qualitatively different, though it is hard to say where the difference lies. (pp. 109-110, emphasis in original)

Again this refers to what Robbins (2004) deems Freud’s “potentially more revolutionary hypothesis[,] that dreaming represents a primary mental process involving hallucinatory actualization that is qualitatively different from the secondary process of representational thought that characterizes waking life” (p. 356). The key, in Robbins’ emphasis, is that this “qualitatively different” form of mental activity is not just experienced by adults during their dreams, to be suppressed the rest of the time. But rather Robbins (2011) holds that even in waking adult life there is “a normal primordial form of mental activity that operates continuously from the inception of life alongside and in relation to thought” (p. 1). While rooted in Freud’s conception of primary process, this hypothesis is, Robbins (2008) holds, underdeveloped by Freud:

Freud never revised the model [of primary process] to keep pace with his later discoveries such as the structural theory, the dual instinct elaboration of the economic viewpoint, and the dynamic (conflict) point of view. Although he used terminology derived from psychosis (e.g., hallucinatory wish-fulfillment), he
never elaborated his assertion that the model could be useful in understanding such illnesses.⁴⁷ (p. 178)

In other words, Freud’s understanding of primary process resides within the realm of the economical model (i.e. hallucinatory wish-fulfillment), which is concerned solely with the “unburdening the mental apparatus of accretions of stimuli” (Freud, 1911c, p. 221). In the same way that Freud did not fully develop the clinical relevance of the primary process (nor did he incorporate this mental process into his later theories), throughout much of contemporary psychoanalysis, the clinical applicability of Freud’s economic model is now considered antiquated, i.e. this model is rarely taken as literally physical, and it is even dismissed (or forgotten) entirely as a superfluous aspect of Freud’s theories.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Robbins (2008) nonetheless contradicts this reading of Freud, highlighting some of his (Freud’s) later discussions about primary process. But even these developments still support Robbins’ central argument: At times he used the term primary process as a synonym for all unconscious mental content and function, augmented in subsequent phases of development by what is actively repressed, so that what is unconscious has two distinctive aspects, primary and secondary. In such a conception primary process activity continues throughout life, a conclusion supported by the persistence of dreaming. When he wrote from a structural/developmental perspective that ego eventually replaces id, however, he seems to imply that in the normal course of events primary process functioning is supplanted by and perhaps transformed into mature thought. (Robbins, 2008, p. 181)

⁴⁸ To cite a single example from Neville Symington’s (2012) contemporary Bionian perspective, speaking of “Freud, disciple of Brücke [the positivist],” Symington writes: “in Freud himself there are those insights of genius which germinated psycho-analysis, its very substance, but also there are background beliefs to which he was attached which betray psycho-analysis, betray his own insights” (p. 404). On the other hand, the economic viewpoint has perhaps always held importance for many neo-Freudians. In three papers published in 1995, Meissner (1995a; 1995b; 1995c) sought to “reformulate economic principles and recast their role in the theory, divorcing them from their traditional connection with psychic energy” (1995c, p. 262).
The Non-Symbolic Body

Various psychoanalysts have at times theorized about forms of mental activity that stand alongside the representational thinking that characterizes Freud’s secondary process. While it is true that an individual’s secondary process capabilities do not exist fully at birth but are developed in the early years of life, and in that sense at least provisionally overrides the primary process. But like Robbins (2011), I hold that the qualitatively different forms of mental activity that I here plan to discuss are not regressive, but rather co-exist alongside representational thought, throughout adult life. (Again, continuing with a reading of Robbins and now Klein, my discussion here is not meant to be exhaustive nor conclusive, but rather I hope to raise possibilities.)

While finding that Freud’s primary process and Klein’s (1946; 1952) paranoid-schizoid position are rarely examined side-by-side, Robbins (2008) writes, “The activity of the paranoid-schizoid position that is expressed as phantasy is motivated, as in Freud's model, by the need to restore a feeling of satisfaction in the absence of actual satisfaction” (p. 182). It should be noted though, that for Klein (1930), “symbolism come[s] to be the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation but, more than that, upon it is built up the subject's relation to the outside world and to reality in general” (p. 26, italics mine), which complicates Robbins’ equation that Klein’s sense of phantasy is akin to a primary process-like mental activity, as distinctive from symbolic thought.

49 It is regrettable that my knowledge of Lacan is so insufficient; I suspect he would contribute much to what follows.

50 I will briefly illuminate the nature of the positions, below. For now unfamiliar readers might simply note that for Klein (1952), the paranoid-schizoid position roughly entails the first four months of life.

51 In a sense Robbins (2008) responds, stating that contradictorily: [Klein’s] descriptions of infantile phantasy employ a conceptual language derived from what the analyst imagines (fantasizes) or projects, in mature thoughtful language, to be the subjective mental state of the infant. Intentionally or not, such language suggests that infants are capable of
Nonetheless it is important to consider how Klein (1930) understands the development of symbolic thought, as she offers case material of a four-year-old boy who exhibited a stalled capacity for symbolism and “symbolic relation” (p. 30, sic). Commenting on Klein’s paper Hanna Segal (1957) writes: “Symbol formation starts very early, probably as early as object relations” (p. 393). Although Klein (1952) believed that the infant first recognizes the breast (as a part-object) before acknowledging the mother (as a whole object), unlike Freud (1914c; 1917b), “For Melanie Klein…object-relations are contracted from the very beginning.” Thus for Klein, to say that symbol formation begins early, this means during the very first stages of infancy (i.e. beginning with breastfeeding). But this early formation occurs in a form that is very different from mature symbolic thinking:

The early symbols, however, are not felt by the ego to be symbols or substitutes, but to be the original object itself. They are so different from symbols formed later that I think they deserve a name of their own. (p. 393)

Segal (1957) deems these archaic symbol forms as “‘symbolic equation’” (p. 393), which again highlights their symbolic capacity, but what strikes me is the non-symbolic perspective of the infant, wherein these mental objects are initially “felt…to be the original object itself” (p. 393). As I will address in my paper “The Alimentary

thinking or imagining in terms involving self, other, impulses, feeling states and motives, body parts and functions that are so specific as to imply thoughtful mental representations. (Robbins, 2008, p. 186)

Likewise, Klein (1946) herself acknowledges: “The description of such primitive processes suffers from a great handicap, for these phantasies arise at a time when the infant has not yet begun to think in words” (p. 102, fn. 5).

Contributing to the ongoing periphereal conversation about primary narcissism, I quote here the full sentence from Laplanche & Pontalis (1973c): “For Melanie Klein, there is no justification for speaking of a narcissistic stage because object-relations are contracted from the very beginning; it is only legitimate to evoke narcissistic ‘states’ characterised by a turning round of libido on to internalised objects” (n.p.).

The term “ego” here does not refer to Freud’s sense of the ego, which comes developmentally much later than infancy.
Model,” Bion (1962a) also notes that with the absence of thinking (alpha-function), an infant experiences psychic objects (beta-elements) that “are not felt to be phenomena, but things in themselves” (p. 6). While this absence of thinking is discussed mostly as Bion by way of pathology (alpha-function failure), Bion is also describing here an early developmental state infancy (see Learning from Experience, ch. 12, pp. 32-37). And likewise, when analysts speak of psychosis (as Bion generally intends to, through his conception of alpha-function failure), they often refer to psychic material that is felt to be “concrete,” as if it was a thing. But at present I have mostly discussed only the mentally non-symbolic as either pre-symbolic (existing in infancy, and eventually giving way to symbolic thought), or otherwise, as pathological (in psychosis). Before continuing, I would like to change gears for a moment, turning to a very different critique against the classical understanding of the primary and secondary processes:

The theory of consciousness is weak, not false, because by amending it to state that the conscious and the unconscious thus constantly produced together do function as if they were binocular therefore capable of correlation and self-regard. Because of the manner of its genesis, impartial register of psychic quality of the self is precluded: the “view” of one part by the other is, as it were, “monocular”. For these reasons, and others arising from clinical experience of psycho-analysis of that class of patient in whom the psychotic part of the personality is obtrusive, I find the theory of primary and secondary processes unsatisfactory. (Bion, 1962a, p. 54)

Bion seems to suggest here that while conscious thinking can view the unconscious through “correlation and self-regard” (p. 54), the unconscious cannot
likewise employ such thoughtful reflection. In that sense, the unconscious is precluded from, and other, than (secondary process) thinking. Additionally, by referring to “patients in whom the psychotic part of the personality is obtrusive” (p. 54), Bion seems to suggest that there are persons who also have a “psychotic part of the personality,” but in a non-obtrusive way, as if the two parts of personality (psychotic/non-psychotic) co-exist even in persons who are not diagnosed as “psychotic.” This becomes relevant here if we roughly equate the psychotic part of a personality with a form of mental activity that is other than representational thought. In other words, I mean to suggest that if there are psychotic (and non-psychotic) mental functions at work within all persons, perhaps this is another way of viewing some (but maybe not all) of the different mental functions that exist throughout life, alongside and as distinguished from representational thought.

**Different Strokes**

Freud (1915b) also refers to “conscious presentation compris[ing] the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone” (p. 201). This implies that the unconscious (non-symbolic) things and (symbolic) words exist throughout life separately, but alongside each other. In this sense, rather than one developmentally replacing the other, development involves some co-existence between the two. While Robbins (2011) discusses the possibility of integrating these two different forms of mental activity, it is not exactly clear to me how such integration would take place. (Nonetheless, I will

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54 In a oft-cited 1957 essay, Bion also describes psychotic and non-psychotic parts of the personality that exist side-by-side, but such co-existence is largely described (by Bion) as occurring in persons who are being treated for psychosis. When I examine Bion (1962a) and Ogden’s (2005c) conceptions of dreaming in a subsequent paper, I will discuss further how Bion’s theories can be applied outside the treatment of psychosis. This conversation also lurks within the next paper, about Bion’s alimentary model.
address more of Robbins’ theory below, but I refer the reader to his work directly for a fuller picture).

Now to think in line with Bion (1962a), perhaps there is a “monocular” (p. 54) integration between the non-symbolic and the symbolic, in that the latter can be incorporated into the former’s realm, but not the other way around. In other words, one can (consciously) employ symbolic mental functions to write poetry in service/evocative of the (unconscious) non-symbolic, but I don’t think that the non-symbolic can in turn write poetry in service of symbolism. (The baffled idea of *what on earth is non-symbolic poetry about symbolism?* further proves that this is an impossible feat.) On the other hand, my statement of impossibility is complicated when we consider the ingenious expressiveness of the unconscious; it shows up everywhere, consciousness be damned. It is problematic, therefore, to analogously equate the non-symbolic with what is unconscious, and the symbolic with what is conscious. There is some kind of relationship here (and even *some* potential overlap), but it is not clear what that relationship looks like exactly.

On the other hand, I have hitherto referred to these two forms of mental functioning as existing “alongside” each other, and likewise, this is a central premise in Robbins’ (2011) book *The Primordial Mind in Health and Illness*: that there exists always “a normal primordial form of mental activity that operates continuously from the inception of life alongside and in relation to thought” (p. 1). Since this interactive relationship is largely the subject of an entire book, I will simply outline the basic tenets of these two different mental activities, as Robbins’ conceives of them. I do not make use of his theory as definitive but rather mean to develop the conversation further, in an
evolving and open-ended way. (And shortly, I will highlight Ogden’s, 1989, unique contributions to this general subject). Now starting with Robbins’ view of thought:

Thought involves self-observation and objectification of experience, and the capacity to make comparisons and contrasts…Experience has meaning that is derived not only from its immediacy but also from reflection, objectification and evaluation on a timeline held in memory, and with contemplated future experiences…Language can be used either expressively in its literal or formal sense or communicatively in its metaphorical symbolic sense to exchange meanings and ideas. (p. 52)

Generally speaking, what Robbins calls “thought” seems similar to the secondary process, except that the linear relationship between the primary and secondary process is here disrupted, as Robbins’ conception of “thought” does not replace that which he calls PMA or “primordial mental activity” (p. 53), which he characterizes as:

Psychosomatic, i.e. body-based mind. It is driven by affect and somatic sensation. Meaning is related to sensation, perception and action. The subjective quality of experience is that of immediacy, actuality, belief, a happening, rather than something to contemplate…The narrative quality of experience depends on somatic sensations and affect, and the immediate snapshot quality of experience is chained together with a series of “and thens.” PMA calls upon the same sensory-perceptual acuity as thought, but words are used in a way that is formal or concrete rather than symbolic.55 (Robbins, 2011, p. 53-54)

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55 In addition to such qualitative descriptions, Robbins (2011) also references some neuroscientific findings that support the existence of PMA, although his argument there is relatively brief (pp. 195-204).
Thus Robbins sees PMA as containing the immediacy implied in “hallucinatory wish-fulfillment” as well as retaining the physicality of “thing-ness.” With some evidence from traditional cultures (like that of the Piraha56), Robbins explores what PMA might have looked like in antiquity, amidst the non-pathological absence of abstract thought (i.e. Robbins, 2011, p. 84-88). Now what Robbins’ calls PMA seems in some ways similar to what Segal (1957) refers to as “‘symbolic equation,’” (p. 393) and what appears with Freud (1915) as “thing…presentation” (p. 201). Bion also (1962a) seems to speak of something similar, as “beta-elements” (p. 6), which I discuss further in my paper “The Alimentary Model.”57

In examining the applied distinctions between thought and PMA, Robbins (2011) holds that dreaming (sans anachronistic secondary revision) is a way of accessing PMA more directly. He also believes that shamanism in traditional cultures (Robbins conducted interviews and research within traditional Maori culture), artistic creativity, and psychoanalysis are all ways of integrating thought and PMA. Conversely, I would think that a suppressed lack of PMA creates states of dissociation (from the perspective of dissociation). (Likewise, in another essay I will explore how Bion, 1962a, warns against over-reliance on abstraction, as this can separate ideas from their much-needed concrete meaning.) On the other hand, in psychosis Robbins holds that there is what could be called an obtrusion of non-integrated PMA (and to discuss this, Robbins relies extensively on first-person material written by his patients). And finally, through this process of integration, Robbins contends that in health, “primordial mental activity and

56 Linguists have shown interest in researching Piraha culture for a number years, given that their language does not involve recursion (see Robbins, 2011, pp. 173-175).
57 In the rough equation of the two, perhaps it could be said that the evacuation of beta-elements is also a way of evacuating PMA; see my paper “The Alimentary Model.”
thought…combine to produce the richness of our human experience, meaning and social interaction” (2011, p. 213).

But it remains somewhat unclear to me how thought and PMA are integrated with each other, as they seem to somewhat contrary (and in that sense, learning to think seems to represent a sequential, developmental departure from PMA-dominated infancy). On the other hand, I think there are (at least) two sorts of mental functioning that exist together throughout life, and I think Robbins does well to describe some of the key differences between these. But perhaps these mental functions exist together in dialectal tension, like a unique twist on classical conflict theory. Or maybe PMA and thought represent two different frameworks from which we view experience: For example, in a moment of extreme anger, I might experience palpable physical sensations and lack the ability to “think” clearly (i.e. can’t see straight); in such a moment, it seems that PMA is dominating. Conversely, while listening to a thought-provoking interview on NPR, I am much more inclined toward the contemplative process of, well, thought. But to contradict myself by speaking again about how symbolic thoughtfulness relate to the non-symbolic realm, psychoanalysis could be seen as a way of applying thought to that which otherwise seems unthinkable. I do not mean here the work of conscious narrative creation, but rather I refer to that which unfolds (a process which is hopefully evoked in the literary aspect of these essays, as well as in the creative pieces that follow.)

Seeing is Believing

Now undoubtedly, in the present paper I have not explored Robbins’ (2011) work thoroughly enough to convince the reader of PMA’s existence, as Robbins conceives it. I
hope, however, to have opened up for the reader a possibility that there exists some kind of mental activity that exists alongside thinking, non-pathologically. I would like for a moment to explore some additional perspectives on what such a mental activity could be, by returning to the topic at hand, that of dreaming.

First, I would like to return to Freud’s (1916b) comment in the “Introductory Lectures”:

Mental processes in sleep have a quite different character from those of waking life…We experience it predominantly in visual images; feelings may be present too, and thoughts interwoven in it as well; the other senses may also experience something, but nonetheless it is predominantly a question of images. Part of the difficulty of giving an account of dreams is due to our having to translate these images into words. ‘I could draw it’, a dreamer often says to us, ‘but I don't know how to say it.’ This is not, however, a reduced mental activity…it is qualitatively different, though it is hard to say where the difference lies. (pp. 109-110, emphasis in original)

Given Freud’s emphasis on the experience of visual images—images, which as Annie Rogers re-iterates, “sometimes resist language” (personal communication, March 25, 2013)—the above quote evokes for me the title of Temple Grandin’s (2006) autobiographical account of living with autism, Thinking in Pictures. Her book begins:

58 I alternate between descriptions of mental functioning, activity, and processes somewhat arbitrarily, and yet with some intention. There may be differences between general activities and the particular functions performed, but I think that our current state of knowledge is as-to-yet too imprecise to differentiate fully between these two possibilities. And likewise, I cannot say whether “thought” is actually one process, or if it is actually compromised of many different functions. Furthermore, my use of the numbers here (one, two, and many) does not refer to literal quantity. Most simply, I just mean there is that which is other than thought.

59 I do not mean to “analyze” the meaning of autism here; I am merely riffing on some free associations (mine) in hopes of bearing fruit.
I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head. When somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures. Language-based thinkers often find this phenomenon difficult to understand, but in my job as an equipment designer for the livestock industry, visual thinking is a tremendous advantage. (p. 3)

Through crude analysis we might surmise that Grandin’s “translation” (p. 3) is like the production of visual dream-thoughts, to which Freud (1916b) refers. But through such crude analysis, I am not presumptuous enough to claim whether the kind of translation described by Grandin is qualitatively different from representational thought, simply a different representational system for thought, some combination of the two, or something other entirely. (Nor do I mean to say that autism is a product of PMA or any other kind of non-symbolic mental process as discussed.) Nonetheless, I hope here to raise questions for the reader.

Riding an associational train, I am here reminded of Thomas Ogden’s 1989 paper “On the Concept of an Autistic-Contiguous Position.” Here Ogden proposes a (non-pathological) position that in health supercedes the dominance of Klein’s (1952) paranoid-schizoid, and later depressive, positions; to make sense of this, allow me to first discuss Klein’s initial two positions. To speak very broadly, each position is defined by a distinct “constellation of anxieties, defences, object-relations and impulses” (Hinshelwood, 1991a, n.p.). Now Klein “adopted the term ‘position’…to get away from the idea of stages or phases of development, which she had shown were not clear-cut but

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60 The paranoid-schizoid position is characterized by introjection, projection, part-object splitting between the good and bad breasts, and persecutory anxiety; the depressive position is characterized by whole object depressive anxiety related to object loss/the potential of object loss.
overlapping and fluctuating” (Hinshelwood, 1991, n.p.), but Ogden is somewhat (but not entirely) unique in his understanding of each position, including the new one he proposes, “as a developing and ongoing mode of generating experience as opposed to a phase of development…[and each position] as contributing equally powerfully to the dialectic constituting human experience” (p. 127). Thus as discussed previously in other ways (i.e. in Robbins, 2008; 2011), Ogden does not necessarily see the positions as indicative of sequential development, from some “primitive” state to a secondary (and then tertiary) one. Rather, he (Ogden) views the various positions as continuously contributing to “human experience” (1989, p. 127) throughout the course of one’s life. I agree with this, and likewise see this dialectical tension as in some ways similar to the tension between thought and PMA (as discussed, above). For instance, the paranoid-schizoid position lacks representational cohesiveness (hence splitting between part-objects) and is related to imminent fears of destruction, which seems like a particularized expression of the hallucinatory immediacy of PMA. On the other hand, during the depression position, anxiety is related to (the potential for) whole object loss and this may relate to the development of symbolic thought, as it only through representational linking that a person can piece together what would otherwise be part-objects. Likewise, it is the employment of such symbolism that allows a person to psychically incorporate objects, internaly, which is on the one hand a defense against object loss (i.e. Klein, 1930

Segal, 1957).

But to speak conversely of the differences between Robbins and Klein, while the conceptions of PMA and thought merely elucidate two generalized mental activities

61 Similarly, Klein (1946) writes of a patient in “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms”: “If he could build up [introject] again the good breast inside himself, he would strengthen and integrate his ego, would be less afraid of his destructive impulses, in fact he could then preserve himself and the analyst.” (p. 107, fn. 11)
(which are employed in many different ways), Klein’s positions present an elaborately networked (and specified) picture of mental life. Thus while PMA, for example, might be play a role in explaining key qualitative aspects of the paranoid-schizoid position, Klein’s theory presents a much more unified of what is actually coming on intrapsychically. In other words, to speak of PMA and representational thought describes the frame (psychic structure); it is the positions that paint the picture (psychic content).62

Turning fully now to Ogden’s (1989) newly introduced position: unlike Tempel Grandin’s description of autism, while adumbrating his conception of the autistic-contiguous position (which is developmentally different from adult autism, as discussed by Ogden, 1989, pp. 131-133), Ogden does not emphasize the visual experiences of this state. Rather, he characterizes the autistic-contiguous position as constituting of
“experiences of sensation, particularly at the skin surface, that are the principal media for the creation of psychological meaning and the rudiments of the experience of self” (p. 128).63 Although it could be said that there is a link between visual experience and “experiences of sensation” (p. 128) in that both are forms of sensory-experience, what I want to highlight here is yet another bodily-based vision of early mental activity. Ogden

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62 I do not mean that Klein’s theories are definitively true, but she does present a detailed picture—take what you will and leave the rest.

63 In support of this claim, Ogden quotes Freud:
   ‘The ego [the “I”] is first and foremost a bodily ego’ (Freud, 1923, p. 26) … ‘i.e. the ego [the “I”] is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body’ (Freud, 1923, p. 26), (fn. added in 1927). (as cited in Ogden, 1989, p. 128, parenthesis in original)

Likewise, noting that each position involves a different form of “anxiety…related to the experience of disconnectedness (disintegration) within that mode of experience” (p. 133), Ogden (1989) proposes that within the autistic-contiguous position, the anxiety therein relates to “the disruption of sensory cohesion and boundedness” (p. 133). Conversely, it is interesting to wonder how unconsciousness relates (initially) to body-based experience (and certainly within the history of psychoanalysis, the theory of the unconscious was born in the body, a la hysteria.)
certainly emphases different aspects of this bodily-based mental activity than Robbins (2011), but nonetheless it is interesting to note some of the theoretical similarities.

Like Robbins (2011) in the crude sense of it, Ogden (1989) also refers to the autistic-contiguous position as “pre-symbolic” (p. 131), stating that it is only during the paranoid-schizoid and later depressive positions wherein symbolic thought becomes possible. In a sense, the existence of a position prior to that of the paranoid-schizoid position would also resolve the previously discussed contradiction highlighted by Robbins (2008), that the paranoid-schizoid position depends on a symbolic kind of conflict but at developmental time prior to the infant’s mental (symbolic) capabilities for experiencing such conflict. But if the autistic-contiguous position is furthermore understood as an ongoing aspect in “the dialectic constituting human experience” (Ogden, 1989, p. 127), it seems we are again faced with the need for understanding an ongoing kind of body-based, non-symbolic mental activity, which is neither infantile nor pathological.

I will illuminate more possibilities for body-based psychic experience, which stands in opposite to self-referential meaning, in the next essay.

Despite what I have written previously, in his later writings Freud (1930) does purpose that “in the mind” there is “a preservation of all the earlier stages [of mental life] alongside of the final form” (p. 71), which is not solely accessed through dreaming or severe pathology. Here Freud refers to the capacity for experiencing an earlier “‘oceanic’ feeling” (p. 72), a capacity that persists throughout one’s life.

But Freud links this “‘oceanic’ feeling” to “something like the restoration of limitless narcissism” (p. 72), which implies that accessing such states means regressing to a form primitive mental life. Thus in the larger discourse of psychoanalysis, there has been an ongoing debate about the value or pathology of the oceanic feeling. See for example the conversation between Werman (1986) and Harrison (1986; 1989); and Simmonds’ (2006) literature review. But as Grotstein (2007) writes of Bion, “[Bion] often referred to man’s ‘religious instinct’, stating that Freud never really understood the power of man’s religious instinct—that it may be even more powerful than the libidinal instinct” (p. 31).
Shining Seas

Existing alongside representational thought, throughout this essay I have at times alluded to this other mental process as akin to a persistent but non-pathological a form of hallucinatory wish-fulfillment/“psychotic part of the personality” (i.e. Bion, 1957). At others time I have alluded to this other process as more concrete or otherwise bodily-based. Without suggesting how these pieces might fit together (if they do at all), I return now with another alluded to other, that which was paramount in the beginning: I had spoken earlier of the associational method of interpreting dreams, employed in order to understand the central dream-thoughts. I had stated that, when conceived of in such a way, these dream-thoughts seem to serve a representational purpose—to express, in a hidden way, otherwise prohibited wishes. On the other hand, I have explored ways in which Freud’s conception of dreaming can also be read to see dreams as indicative of a form of mental activity qualitatively different from thinking. As stated also, this is at odds with Freud’s main method of interpretation.

Freud (1900) himself made two particular comments about the limits of such interpretation, comments that are so interesting, I would be negligent to end a paper on The Interpretation of Dreams without mentioning them. Yet in his trademark way, and as is the case for many of his most revolutionary ideas, Freud mentions these electrifying possibilities only briefly, dismissing them promptly. I as well will merely run by the two of such possibilities in Interpretation of Dreams, without giving them due credit, though not so much as a matter of haste, but because a little mystery never hurt anyone.

The Navel. As stated earlier, Freud (1900) employed free association to dreams, as a means of “interpretation en détail and not en masse” (p. 104, emphasis in original).
In other words, rather than deducing the dream’s overall arch, Freud meant to understand the dream-thoughts—and the day residues, to separate the two—within every single aspect of the dream, bit by bit. However:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium. (Freud, 1900, p. 525)

In the latter half of this statement, Freud is again reiterating the way in which the essential dream-wish “mushroom[s] out of its mycelium” (p. 525) dream-thoughts. But the beginning of Freud’s statement is more complicated, and is echoed in an earlier footnote regarding the condensation of three women in his (Freud’s) “Specimen Dream” (also referred to as “Irma’s Injection”):

If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me far afield.—There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown. (p. 111, fn. 1)
On the one hand, Freud is saying that “the navel of the dream” is not *worthy* of exploring for associational content, for it would take the interpreter “far afield” (p. 111) while “add[ing] nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream” (p. 525). Contrarily, however, Freud is also saying that “the dream’s navel” (p. 525) is in fact “unplumbable” (p. 111). If this “point of contact with the unknown” (p. 111) truly “cannot be unravelled” (p. 525), and is therefore inaccessible to any associational exploration, how exactly does Freud know that further exploring this unknown would lead “far afield” (p. 111)? Perhaps we reach the navel as *qualitatively* different from that which constitutes the dream thoughts. I do not mean again that this is a form of mental activity necessarily, but perhaps there is here what could be called unconscious. *The unplumbable navel.*
4.

The Alimentary Model: An Application of Bion

*To blurt it out, to speak without thinking, using words as objects, passing gas to relieve anxious butterflies in the stomach, the catharsis of confession; hitting your pillow, running to cool down, eating your emotions and then purging them; holding stress in the shoulders and cracking the neck to get rid of this, cutting to feel the pain; to spew or regurgitate useless information, a kind of verbal diarrhea.* These acts strike me as ways of discharging psychic tension, by way of physical expression. This stands in opposition to another mental process, which is signified by *ruminating, absorbing, and digesting*. I call that latter mental process “thinking,” but in doing so, use that word in a specific way, otherwise deviating from the term’s generally broad implications. In the present paper I will propose how these acts might be recognized within the framework of clinical psychoanalysis, applying a model adapted from Wilfred Bion (1962a).

In his landmark 1962(a) *Learning from Experience*, Bion wrote, “‘Thinking’, in the sense of engaging in that activity which is concerned with the use of thoughts, is embryonic even in the adult and has yet to be developed fully by the race” (p. 85). It would be difficult to say whether such cynical social commentary is true, but it is clear that Bion distinguishes what he calls “thinking” from everyday abstraction, criticism, imagination, and memory-recall (all of which are fairly common in “the [human] race”, p. 85). But the functions of thinking, like abstraction and imagination, are used in psychoanalysis uniquely, in a way that is somewhat rare.
To distinguish “thinking”\textsuperscript{66} (or at least what I, and maybe Bion, mean here by the word\textsuperscript{67}) from other seemingly similar mental processes, in this paper I explore Bion’s (1962a) three alimentary metaphors, wherein psychic material undergoes: (1) digestion; (2) indigestion/constipation; or (3) evacuation, via vomit and diarrhea.\textsuperscript{68} This model of mental functioning might sound economical—as if psychic material were actually quantitative “units,” to be sent through or rejected by some processing machine—but rather I speak of abstract metaphor, which is freed from the mutually exclusive limits of physicality, wherein something must either be sent down the intestinal tubes or thrown up. The same way that the topographical model does not exclude the tripartite model but rather is a different way of theorizing entirely, on the one hand I do not intend here to discuss mental digestion’s concrete occurrence in the body (i.e. as some kind of brain function). On the other hand, since the beginning of psychoanalysis it has been understood that psychic material does have very real physical effects (i.e. Studies in

\textsuperscript{66} I do not intend here any kind discourse from philosophy of mind, but rather, I am interested in the course of psychoanalytic treatment, wherein this mental process (here referred to as thinking) is likely lacking at the beginning of treatment, only to become subsequently \textit{experientially} present, during the course of analysis. I do not hold that “psychoanalysis” has the corner on “thinking”, but the analytic dyad is, however, in a unique position to watch the development of this very particular process, directed toward a very particular and somewhat unusual end. I would also hold that what I describe as “thinking” further involves a relationship between the two different forms of mental functioning outlined in the previous paper, and as discussed by Robbins, 2011.

\textsuperscript{67} Below I will show that my word choice (of “thinking”) is relatively arbitrary. For it is a \textit{kind} of thinking to which I refer, which is quite different from some of the ways we employ conscious thought. I could have just as easily used the word “analyzing” or “dreaming” (the latter being Thomas Ogden’s word of choice, as discussed in the next paper); any word would still have its helpful and unhelpful “penumbra of associations” (Bion, 1962a, p. vii; see also “Text as Transmission, Part I”). To escape the problems of such distinctions, I hope shortly to begin \textit{showing} what is this process to which I refer, thereby doing away with the need for an inadequate words.

\textsuperscript{68} I may subsequently refer to (1) as “digestion” while referencing both (2) and (3) as “non-digestion”; in the present paper, however, I deal mostly with (3) and to a lesser extent (1), addressing (2) in the next paper as the inability to dream. (1) is related to thinking, and the construction process of psychoanalysis—although Bion (1962a) does not connect this theory to such application directly, it is inferred (as least from my perspective, and from Ogden’s; I discussed the use of analytic construction in my first paper, “The Unconscious as Undifferentiated.”)
Hysteria, in Freud, 1893a), and in that sense, my reading here does include the actual discharge of psychic material through physical means.

And while I speak of this alimentary metaphor as belonging to Bion, he only explores this metaphor in the densest of theoretical ways. I hope here to contribute an applied way of understanding psychic evacuation, as it occurs concretely. In the next essay, I will also turn to Thomas Ogden, 2005c, to explore how he understands the concrete qualities of “thinking” (which he refers to as dreaming). And while working throughout the present collection of papers to trace Bion’s associational train through the tangle of Freud’s thoughts (especially as they occur in Freud, 1911c), here I work to adumbrate how Melanie Klein influenced Bion as well.69 (For a closer reading of Bion’s Kleinian roots, I point the reader toward Anderson, 1992; Meltzer, 1998; and Diem-Wille, 2011.)

69 Not surprisingly, Melanie Klein’s influence can be felt throughout Learning from Experience, and yet Bion (1962a) largely neglects to reference her directly. Bion underwent analysis with Klein (and Rickman), but in the introduction to his collected works, Seven Servants, Bion (1977) wrote, “I had forgotten how much I learned from John Rickman and Melanie Klein” (p. i). Nonetheless, at the beginning of Learning from Experience Bion (1962a) wrote: “Certain theories of Melanie Klein and her co-workers will be considered; I list them here. They are: Splitting and projective identification; the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position and vice-versa; symbol formation and some of my previous work on the development of verbal thought” (p. 5). Noting that citations are extremely rare in Bion’s work, for these theories he (Bion) references (in order): Klein 1946, p. 300; Klein 1946, p. 293; Klein, 1930, p. 236; and again Bion, 1957 (the page numbers are replicated as cited in Bion, 1962a, p. 100, fn. 2.5.1-2.5.4.—I believe the pagination refers to Klein’s papers as they appeared in Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, 1948).

Conversely, through his writing Bion begins to re-write the way any future reader can encounter Klein’s texts (i.e. one cannot think of Klein’s projective identification without thinking of Bion’s later developments). I discuss this kind of anachronistic effect in my paper on “Meaning, Hot & Alive.”

Furthermore, continuing our peripheral conversation about psychosis, in his 1957 “Differentiation of the Psychotic from the Non-Psychotic Personalities,” Bion states that his theoretical thinking about psychosis derives primarily from Freud’s (1911c) paper and from two papers by Klein. The first of these papers (1928) offers Klein’s “description of the phantasied sadistic attacks that the infant makes on the breast during the paranoid-schizoid phase” (p. 266), and this connects to Bion’s well-known paper about psychotic “Attacks on Linking” (1959), which is essentially the failure of/attack on alpha-function (as outlined in Bion, 1962a). Related to the subject of evacuation, the second of Klein’s papers (1946) mentioned by Bion (1957), takes up the subject of projective identification, which I will briefly address again, below.
Who Digests the Breasts?

In *Learning from Experience*, Wilfred Bion (1962a) frequently models a “mental alimentary system” (e.g. p. 62), and my thinking about digestion/non-digestion is derived largely from this text. This alimentary model implicitly evokes Melanie Klein’s (1932; 1935; 1946) description of early part-object relations, for it is ultimately through digestion (i.e. nursing) that the infant relates to the breast—as Klein (1935) writes, “From the beginning the ego introjects objects ‘good’ and ‘bad’, for both of which its mother’s breast is the prototype,” (p. 145; see also my discussion of the paranoid-schizoid position, in the previous paper). In Bion’s theoretical work, psychic digestion occurs through the process of “alpha-function,” which he (Bion) likewise describes as beginning in infancy (as discussed further, below). According to Bion, alpha-function is what allows a person to think thoughts, and to “learn” from (digest) experience. Alpha-function is also instrumental in the creation of dream-thoughts, and for the creation of consciousness as

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70 But as stated, the application of this model is not elaborated by Bion (1962a) but rather suggested here by me. It could be noted that Bion writes in a strangely paradoxical way that is both very precise and also unclear. Thus another one of my contributions in the present paper is untangling some of what remains unclear in Bion (i.e. the role of awareness and the nature of sense impressions in alpha-function, see below). It could also be noted that Bion encouraged others to contribute to his thought in this way, saying, “I try to give you a chance to fill the gap left by me” (as cited in Grotstein, 2007, p. 11).

71 For Bion (1962a), “thoughts” are regarded as epistemologically prior to thinking and that thinking has to be developed as a method or apparatus for dealing with ‘thoughts’” (p. 83). Bion also seems to refer to such (pre-thought) psychic material as “these primitive elements that are proto-thoughts” (p. 84). To put this metaphorically, the infant is born with a head full of psychic popcorn kernels (proto-thoughts), which can only pop after the development of alpha-function (thinking). I will discuss this more, below.

As stated above, alpha-function is also essential to the dreaming of “dream thoughts,” which Bion regards as secondary to these “proto-thoughts.” Writing this way, Bion uses and actually re-defines the terms “thinking” and “dreaming” in new ways (as also discussed in “Thomas Ogden’s Dream”).

72 Alpha-function is, according to Bion (1962a), even responsible for the function of repression although this is not fully explained (see p. 56).

73 In the first paper of my paper on “Disturbing the Mental Life,” I wrote about Freud’s (1900) method for analyzing a dream’s “essential dream-thoughts” (p. 312). I now write that Bion (1962a) sees “alpha-function” as that which “makes the sense impressions of the emotional experience available for conscious and dream-thought” (p. 7). In the next paper I will discuss briefly Bion uses the term “dream” (p. 7) in a
well as unconsciousness.\textsuperscript{74} Alpha-function is not necessarily a specific mental process, but rather it could be a conglomerate of processes. Moreover, in truth, alpha-function is merely a hypothetical term Bion (1962a) coined with provisional purpose in mind:

The object of this meaningless term is to provide psycho-analytic investigation with a counterpart of the mathematicians variable, an unknown that can be invested with a value when its use has helped to determine what that value is, [but] it is important that it should not be prematurely used to convey meanings, for the premature meanings may be precisely those that it is essential to exclude. (p. 3)

\textsuperscript{74} It is somewhat mysterious how Bion (1962a) views the creation of the “unconscious” and the function of the dream:

the “dream”, together with the alpha-function, which makes dream possible, is central to the operation of consciousness and unconsciousness, on which ordered thought depends. Alpha-function theory of the “dream” has the elements of the view represented by classical psycho-analytic dream theory, that is to say, censorship and resistance are represented in it. But in alpha-function theory the powers of censorship and resistance are essential to differentiation of conscious and unconscious and help to maintain the discrimination between the two. This discrimination derives from the operation of the “dream”, which is a combination in narrative form of dream thoughts, which thoughts in turn derive from combinations of alpha-elements. In this theory the ability to “dream” preserves the personality from what is virtually a psychotic state. It therefore helps to explain the tenacity with which the dream, as represented in classical theory, defends itself against the attempt to make the unconscious conscious. Such an attempt must appear indistinguishable from destruction of the capacity to dream in so far as that capacity is related to differentiating conscious from unconscious and maintaining the difference so established. (p. 16)

Alpha-function is therefore responsible for “the establishment of conscious and unconscious and a barrier between them” (p. 17) (this barrier being what Bion calls a “contact-barrier,” p. 17). Since it is the failure of alpha-function that accounts for the accumulation of beta-elements, beta-elements “cannot be made unconscious” (p. 8), because without alpha-function there is no unconscious. \textit{Thus a failure in alpha-function renders one “incapable of dream thoughts, consciousness or unconsciousness, repression, or learning from experience”} (p. 56, italics mine). (But is alpha-function failure all or nothing? I take up this question, below). To return to the question of what, in Bion’s usage, is conscious and unconscious, Bion (1962a) footnotes the phrase “differentiating conscious from unconscious” (p. 16, quoted above) to say:

I do not mean “the” conscious or “the” unconscious because that would imply that an observer would be required to differentiate two objects. Yet I do not wish to exclude that shade of meaning because when elements have been differentiated, some becoming conscious and some unconscious, it is reasonable to say there is an unconscious if such a concept is valuable. (p. 100, fn. 7.3.1)
Now given such a warning, it is strange to realize that Bion (1962a) proceeds to define “alpha-function” repeatedly throughout the book wherein it occurs—although if Bion had his way, perhaps it would be more correct to say that the term is used to mean much in *Learning from Experience*, but it does not definitively mean anything.\(^{75}\) Nonetheless, it is only through alpha-function’s applied meaning that we can discuss Bion’s (1962a) early contributions to psychoanalysis. And yet given the obscurity of Bion’s writing style—where meaning is slowly revealed over the course of an entire book—there is perhaps no clear way to initiate a discussion about what alpha-function is exactly. As I have said, alpha-function is what allows one to think thoughts, and it could also be said that alpha-function is what digests; it is what derives “nutrients” from the food of (emotional) experience:

Alpha-function operates on the sense impressions, whatever they are, and the emotions, whatever they are,\(^ {76}\) of which the patient is aware.\(^ {77}\) In so far as alpha-function is successful alpha elements are produced and these elements are suited to storage and the requirements of dream thoughts. If alpha-function is disturbed, and therefore inoperative, the sense impressions of which the patient is aware and

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\(^{75}\) On the other hand, alpha-function has come to refer to something definitive, in the sense that it has subsequently been employed by Bionian psychoanalysts (i.e. Grotstein, 2007; Ogden, 2005c; Symington, J. & Symington, N., 1996). I discuss Ogden’s (2005c) contributions to the conceptions of alpha-function and the process of dreaming, in the following paper. To use Bion’s (1962a) language, it could be said that a working application of “alpha-function” is not the *purpose* of *Learning from Experience*, but rather it one of the text’s “fringe benefit[s]” (see Bion, 1977, p. 1).

\(^{76}\) As Bion (1962a) later adds, “The emotions are likewise objects of sense” (p. 6), and it should be noted that “emotional experience” is the particular kind of experience mentioned by him most.

\(^{77}\) In my reading, this notion of awareness is complicated. It seems to me that alpha-function requires awareness, and likewise, beta-elements are found when “the sense impression of which the patient is aware and the emotions which he is experiencing remain unchanged” (Bion, 1962a, p. 6, italics mine). Thus a person could be provisionally aware of beta-elements (in somewhat of a preconscious way), but as “undigested facts” (p. 7) beta-elements remain unavailable “for thought” (p. 7). The ability to think about experience is then seen as different from simply being aware; in other words, a person could be aware of that which they cannot think. Thus, it seems, when alpha-function fails, it is meaning that fails, as one is stuck with experience (impressions) that cannot be rendered meaningful (through thought/digestion).
the emotions which he is experiencing remain unchanged. I shall call them beta-elements. (p. 6)

In Bion’s words, alpha-function is what digests “alpha-elements,” which are largely defined by standing in contrast to “beta-elements”: “Beta-elements are stored but differ from alpha-elements in that they are not so much memories as undigested facts, whereas the alpha-elements have been digested by alpha-function and thus made available for thought” (p. 7). In his commentary, Thomas Ogden78 links “beta-elements” with “raw79 ‘sense-impressions related to an emotional experience” (Bion, 1962a, p. 17, as cited by Ogden, 2005c, p. 2), but in my reading, “beta-elements” are at times distinct from raw experience/“sense-impressions.”80 Thus I think Ogden exhibits the fallacy of the undistributed middle by the equating the two as synonymous (and I will explain my reasons for highlighting the differences between the two in the next paragraph). But Ogden’s commentary is nonetheless quite helpful for succinctly locating key differences between alpha- and beta-elements: Ogden (2005c) “roughly” likens the beta-elements to “‘snow’ on a malfunctioning television screen in which no single visual scintillation or group of scintillations can be linked with other scintillations to form an image or even a meaningful pattern” (p. 46). On the other hand, Ogden describes alpha-elements as “elements of experience that can be linked with one another [through alpha-function] in the process of conscious and unconscious thinking and dreaming (both while we are

78 Ogden, it should be said, has worked hard to make Bion’s work digestible, by writing about Bion in a way accessible to even persons outside of the analytic community.
79 It should be noted that the term “raw” is entirely Ogden’s; it does not appear at all in Learning from Experience even once.
80 Bion alternates between hyphens, employing both “sense-impression” and “sense impression,” as well as “alpha-element” and “alpha element.” There is no explicit reason I can find for this, save to note that Freud’s 1911(c), paper “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” makes use of the hyphenated “sense-impression” once (p. 220), in a passage that factors heavily into Bion’s text. I will explore Bion’s use of this paper (Freud’s) shortly.
awake and asleep)” (p. 2, emphasis mine). It should be noted, however, that the
description of “unconscious thinking and dreaming” belongs to Ogden (a point which I
discuss in my next paper).

Returning to the difference between sense-impressions and “raw” experience, in
my understanding of alpha-function, sense-impressions are either stored as alpha-
elements or as beta-elements. Beta-elements “remain unchanged” and yet their status as
“undigested facts” suggests to me that they have at least entered into the psychical
“alimentary system.” In a sense, beta-elements are like psychical marbles; no matter how
many marbles a child swallows, the objects will never be digested, for there is no
nutritional value there. As Bion states, “In contrast with the alpha-elements the beta-
elements are not felt to be phenomena, but things in themselves” (p. 6). I emphasize

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81 Bion (1962a) “attribute[s] the appearance of beta-elements...to the failure of alpha-function” (p. 54), supporting my stance that beta-elements are an altered version of something else (the actual “thing-in-itself” perhaps, as I discuss further in the main text). But if alpha-function failure were a light switch—absolutely either on or off—then how would one subsequently re-develop alpha-function, through analysis? In other words, likely there is never complete failure of alpha-function; some capacity for alpha-function must always remain, lest there be no possibility of therapeutic change.

82 In a 2008 interview James Grostein seems to agree with my reading here, while also saying that he (Grotstein) thinks Bion was “wrong” about beta-elements in other respects (some of which is omitted here with the ellipsis, as irrelevant to the present discussion):

> Beta-elements are what alpha function “says” about beta-elements — that it didn't want them to enter the mind. It's a discreditation ahead of time...What I see on a gradient from the most primitive elemental pre-conception to its most sophisticated descendant — logical thought — there is always an alpha-element. If we can't stand it, we turn it, secondarily, into a beta-element. But a beta-element doesn't know it's a beta-element! (Grotstein & Franey, 2008, p. 99)

In other words, Grostein views alpha-function as “monocular,” in the sense meant by Bion (1962a, p. 54) and as discussed in the previous paper.

83 To explain this sentence, Bion (1962a) offers the following footnotes (3.2.1 and 2): “I use the term ‘phenomena’ to cover what Kant called secondary and primary qualities. The term ‘things-in-themselves’ I hold with Kant to refer to objects that are unknowable to mankind” (p. 100). But I believe Bion is mistaken here in attributing primary and secondary qualities to Kant, as these are actually concepts put forth by Locke (1689) in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. However, while Locke does deal with “things themselves,” discussion of “things-in-themselves” is a central tenet within Kant’s (1781/1929) Critique of Pure Reason. This is further explored by Kant in connection to his use of the term “noumena,” as distinguished from “phenomena”—Bion (1962a) uses the latter term repeatedly, but does not employ the former. Bion also consistently refers to “things-in-themselves” and “thing-in-itself” (again with irregularity in hyphenation). Further discussion about the connections between Kant and Bion (and Locke) are outside the scope of this paper—as well as outside of the scope of my knowledge—but Mancia, Longhin, & Manic...
here the word felt as descriptive of how the beta-elements are perceived by the subject. In the loosely Kantian sense, if beta-elements are marred by perception, then they are no longer truly objective “things-in-themselves.” Likewise, perhaps sense-impressions prior to their impressing (i.e. “that which is sensed”) are “things-in-themselves,” but once they have “impressed,” they are no longer be objective objects as such.

Now as stated earlier, alpha-function operates directly upon sense-impressions to create alpha-elements, but if alpha-function fails, then the sense-impressions become beta-elements. I find it important to emphasize that this becoming is an active process (“reversal of alpha-function may be the method employed”, Bion, p. 101, fn. 10.2.1). Sense-impressions must be operated on, to become beta-elements. In other words, if alpha-functioning fails, this failure must be actively maintained (or in Bion’s usage, employed).

So while a person actively stores beta-elements, they nonetheless remain as “undigested facts.” Sarcasm that is not recognized as such could be a very simple kind of non-digested fact, except here (in the case of beta-elements) I believe that there is a certain reason why that joke goes unrecognized. Now defenses are developed in response to particular (painful) psychic experiences, and it could be said that there exists a potential appeal to avoiding (not digesting) certain painful “facts” of experience. But the

(2000) continue the conversation. Also related is Neville Symington’s (2012) wonderful paper, wherein he seeks to distinguish the “noumena” of psychoanalysis from its “phenomena.”

Nonetheless, in “Text as Transmission, Part I” I discuss the communicative importance of such concreteness. This also relates to the discussion of interpersonal projective identification (below), which also depends on the transmission of concrete thing-ness.

It should be noted that, for Bion (1962a), alpha-function failure is related to psychosis, wherein Bion evokes the common psychoanalytic perception, that in psychosis words are considered to be objects. I think this relates again to felt experience (i.e. words perceived to be actual objects). As I will discuss below, for psychic material to be evacuated through physical means, the material must first be treated as physical object.
baggage of unprocessed beta-elements is far from a state blissful ignorance. As Bion (1962a) writes:

A central part is played by alpha-function in transforming an emotional experience into alpha-elements because a sense of reality matters to the individual in the way that food, drink, air and excretion of waste products matter. Failure to eat, drink or breathe properly has disastrous consequences for life itself. Failure to use the emotional experience produces a comparable disaster in the development of the personality.\(^{86}\) (p. 42)

Now despite Bion’s grim warning above, at this point you may be wondering what are the clinical applications of this work. On the one hand, I have not fully elaborated the role alpha-function plays on meaning-making, but clearly it is important for a person to feel that their (emotional) experience has meaning. Whatever illuminates this process, or otherwise seeks to remedy failures in this process (as the theory of alpha-function seeks to do) is clearly important. (I also believe that Learning from Experience is structured in such a way as to replicate the meaning-making process; see “Text as Transmission, Part I.”)

But Bion (1962a) leaves out a clear explication of psychic evacuation’s clinical application. As stated in the beginning of this paper, I would like to propose an applied way of actually perceiving, first hand, the evacuation of psychic material. Because if a person is able to recognize when they are evacuating psychic material, then that person becomes able to ask the question, why? And from here, the whole of analysis proceeds. And, if perhaps with an analyst’s help, the analysand learns to recognize the contours of

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\(^{86}\) Grotstein (2007) states that Bion “frequently alluded to man’s ‘quest for truth’, where / [Grotstein, emphasis in original] accord truth the status of an instinctual drive” (p. 31). I would say that what Bion calls alpha-function plays a central role in human meaning-making.
evacuation, then that analysand has found a way into that which is not accessible by thought (and by this I mean that there is some kind of unconscious involved); when a person becomes able to recognize the process of evacuation as occurring, *in the moment*, then that person becomes able to see—glimmer by glimmer—into the defensive *maintenance* of the unconsciousness, as it occurs moment by moment.\(^87\) If this seems unclear now, I suggest that the reader continue reading, returning to this paragraph after the completion of this essay. But before further suggesting an application of Bion’s abstractions, perhaps I need first to continue explicating his model (and its influences) more.

**Bion’s Kleine Anerkennung**

When alpha-function fails, the accumulation of beta-elements must in turn be dealt with through the process of evacuation. But if alpha-function is restored, beta-elements can become subject again to alpha-function; this happens when the analyst lends her (the analyst’s) alpha-function to help digest the patient’s beta-elements. Likewise, the infant is born unable to digest his own experience, and thus requires the help of the mother. In other words, “assuming alpha-function [is] that which makes available to the infant what would otherwise remain unavailable for any purpose other than evacuation as

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\(^87\) I think here to a passage in Gail Hornstein’s (2005) biography of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and the Chestnut Lodge: Frieda understood that a patient can stay psychotic for a long time only by continually recreating her symptoms. The label “chronic” masks the active part of this process, as if once manifest, a behavior continues on its own maintainence. (One of Freud’s greatest insights had been to recognize that symptoms require constant energy; we don’t need to embrace his nineteenth-century physics to see this as a correct statement.) In recording her sessions with Miss N, and later analyzing filmed interactions with Bateson and his colleagues, Frieda was trying to figure out how patients managed what sociologists later called “the manufacture of madness.” She thought that if she could catch them doing it at a particular moment, she might be able to slow the process down to understand how it worked. (Hornstein, 2005, p. 254)
beta-elements” (Bion, 1962a, p. 36), the infant is initially incapable of alpha-function, and therefore relies on the mother’s alpha-function in order to develop it (alpha-function) himself. Within this conception is Bion re-developing Klein’s understanding of early object relations again, by “supposing that projective identification is an early form of that which later is called a capacity for thinking” (Bion, p. 37; “thinking” is here equated with the digesting/alpha-function). For Klein, projective identification is closely associated with the paranoid-schizoid position, [and] consists in the phantasied projection of split-off parts of the subject's own self—or even his whole self (not just partial bad objects)—into the interior of the mother's body, so as to injure and control the mother from within. (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973b, n.p.)

And while Laplanche & Pontalis (1973b) suggest, somewhat confusedly, that projective identification is not solely about the infant’s bad part-objects, the term was first introduced in Klein’s 1946 “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” as “a particular kind of identification which establishes the prototype of an aggressive object relation” (p. 102; also cited in Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973b, n.p.). The general idea is that early on the infant encounters bad part-objects, which stem from the infant’s inborn aggressiveness as well as the frustrations of the external world (i.e. the breast/mother who

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88 As Hinselwood (1991b) also highlights, “in 1957 Klein suggested that envy was deeply implicated in projective identification, which then represents the forced entry into another person in order to destroy their best attributes” (n.p).

89 In truth, Klein’s early conception of “projective identification” is not so clear-cut; for instance, the term appears only once in “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms.” Nonetheless, the perspective of Laplanche & Pontalis (1973b) seems to reflect how the original concept of projective identification is now understood (in other words, retrospective commentaries solidified what was once a somewhat nebulous concept, and thus Klein, 1947, is generally read in this anachronistic way now).

Hinshelwood’s (1991b) extensive entry in A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought discusses how the term was developed over time, by Klein, by the first generation of Kleinians (like Hanna Segal), and by the later generation of post-Kleinians.
is inevitably unavailable sometimes). But the infant rejects these part-objects as not-me, through the process of projective identification. In other words, the infant uses projective identification to create the bad breast as a seemingly external (but actually intrapsychic) container for his aggression, and such splitting is what allows the infant to identify himself as wholly good, as he begins to introject the good breast as a part of himself (hence the development of object relations).

In Bion’s “radical extension and revision of Klein's concept...projective identification was extended from its exclusivity as an unconscious phantasy in the one-person model into an intersubjective process involving both participants” (Grotstein, 1999, p. 646). In other words, for Bion projective identification is no longer an event occurring solely within the infant’s intrapsychic phantasy, as the phantasy is actually transmitted into and experienced by the mother as well. In this sense, the infant evacuates his psychic material as if it were an actual, concrete thing (see “Text as Transmission, Part I”). Such transmission is dependent upon what Bion (1962a) calls “reverie,” which is that state of mind which is open to the reception of any ‘objects’ from the loved object and is therefore capable of reception of the infant’s projective identifications whether they are felt by the infant to be good or bad. In short, reverie is a factor of the mother’s alpha-function. (p. 36)

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90 See Spillius (1992) for further clinical comparisons between projective identification as laid out by Klein, and Bion.

91 As with Klein’s phrase “projective identification,” Bion’s (1963a) use of the phrase and likewise his term “reverie,” appear only as vague notions in *Learning from Experience* (occurring almost exclusively within a single chapter, 12, pp. 31-37). Thus Bion’s theory here has also developed in a largely anachronistic manner (as seen in Ogden, 1996; 1997; 2005).
In other words, the infant learns how to think by transmitting his undigested beta-elements\textsuperscript{92} to the mother, who converts them (the beta-elements) into alpha-elements for him. Conversely:

If the feeding mother cannot allow reverie or if the reverie is allowed but is not associated with love for the child or its father this fact will be communicated to the infant even though incomprehensible to the infant. Psychical quality will be imparted to the channels of communication, the links with the child. What happens will depend on the nature of these maternal psychical qualities and their impact on the psychical qualities of the infant, for the impact of the one upon the other is an emotional experience subject, from the point of view of the development of the couple and the individuals composing it, to transformation by alpha-function. (Bion, p. 36)

And just as the infant relies on the mother’s reverie to develop alpha-function, the analysand likewise relies on the analyst’s reverie. Clearly, this is a different kind of projective identification than that which was outlined by Klein. However, Klein’s conception is felt within Bion’s description of beta-element evacuation (in the adult alpha-function failure sense of it). For alpha-function failure is not simply an inability to think/digest, but it is an active \textit{attack} on thinking (and meaning-making). As previously discussed, beta-elements are unlinkable because alpha-function failure consists in “the destructive attacks [that] the patient makes on anything which is felt to have the function

\textsuperscript{92} I previously discussed how the adult must actively operate upon the sense impressions to convert them into beta-elements. The infant, however, probably encounters a truer kind of raw sense impression (before the development of conscious/unconscious), but Bion refers to such infantile psychic material as beta-elements nonetheless.
of linking one object with another” (Bion, 1959, p. 308). Clearly, this is a return to Klein, as Bion (1959) writes: “I shall discuss phantasied attacks on the breast as the prototype of all attacks on objects that serve as a link and projective identification as the mechanism employed by the psyche to dispose of the ego fragments produced by its destructiveness” (p. 308). Thus Bion echoes but also modifies Klein, adumbrating projective identification as an interpersonal process conceptualized in two different ways: (I) as a developmentally necessary form of communication (a prerequisite for alpha-function); and (II) as a pathologically aggressive attack on alpha-function.

Freud’s Factors Echoed

Now while outlining his conception of alpha-function—which in one sense, spans the entirety of *Learning from Experience*—Bion also ties a central thread between Klein and Freud. The first sentence in ch. 12 reveals Bion’s seamless handiwork: “The activity we know as ‘thinking’ was in origin a procedure for unburdening the psyche of accretions of stimuli and the mechanism is that which has been described by Melanie Klein as projective identification” (p. 31). Ending as a statement about Klein, the sentence actually begins with an allusion to Freud ("unburdening the psyche of accretions of stimuli"), wherein Bion is modifying Freud’s 1911(c) paper “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning.” Before explaining this specific reference further, I must backtrack to set the scene: while re-working the same few sentences (from Freud)

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93 Admittedly, I quote here Bion’s 1959 paper to explain his 1963a concept of alpha-function—another anachronistic reading. For discussion of such readings, see my paper “Meaning, Hot & Alive.”

94 For Bion, alpha-function failure is a psychotic form of mental functioning. Perhaps this explains schizoid experience, wherein the subject’s ability to form object relations—a symbolic kind of internal linking—is compromised (i.e. Klein, 1930); splitting and projective identification also speak to the experience of paranoia. On the other hand, alpha-function failure does not account for psychotic experiences of grandiose delusion.
throughout *Learning from Experience*, we first encounter Freud a la Bion in Chapter 2, pages 4-5, wherein Bion foreshadows the upcoming twists and turns of his text while highlighting the echoes and alterations of Freud:

1. Describing the institution of the reality principle Freud said, “The increased significance of external reality heightened the significance also of the sense-organs directed towards that outer world, and of the consciousness attached to them; the latter now learned to comprehend the qualities of sense in addition to the qualities of pleasure and pain which hitherto had alone been of interest to it.” I emphasize, “the latter now learned to comprehend”; by “the latter” Freud presumably means “the consciousness attached to the sense impressions”. The attribution of comprehension to consciousness I discuss later. Of immediate concern is the function of comprehension itself; comprehension of the sense impressions and comprehension of the qualities of pleasure and pain are both investigated in this discussion. I treat sense impressions, pleasure and pain as alike real, thereby discarding the distinction that Freud makes between the “outer-world” and pleasure and pain, as irrelevant to the theme of comprehension. I shall however discuss the bearing of the Pleasure principle and the Reality principle on the choice that a patient can be seen to make between modifying frustration and evading it. (Bion, 1962a, p. 4)

Here, with a subtle shift of emphasis, Bion has radically altered the intended direction of Freud’s (1911c) paper. Implied within the title itself, “Formulations on Two Principles of Mental Functioning” is concerned with the reconciling the pleasure principle and the reality principle, and understanding how one shifts from hallucinatory
wish-fulfillment (and cathected libido) to successfully navigating the external world, in order to meet one’s needs (makes object-libido cathexis possible). In a sense though, Bion (1962a) does not directly respond to Freud’s original paper, but rather free associates from it, taking Freud’s original terms and imbuing them with new meaning. When Bion writes of “the function of comprehension itself” (Bion, 1962a, p. 4), he re-writes Freud’s text to include the concept of alpha-function. Furthermore, Bion equates “modifying frustration” (p. 4) with the reality principle; “evading” (p. 4) frustration is then equated with the pleasure principle. Alpha-elements are in turn related to the former procedure (modification), whereas beta-elements are evaded through evacuation. This is not in Freud directly, but Bion makes it seem as though it were.

Since Bion very rarely references any other works, much less quotes them, the passages quoted here, where Bion discusses Freud, stand out to the reader as striking (and important). For that reason, and because I am interested in tracing the effect of Freud’s writings on Bion, I have chosen to reproduce so much of Bion’s text here. On the other,

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95 See my previous two-part paper for a discussion of hallucinatory wish fulfillment and the primary process. In “Part I” there is also a brief discussion of libido cathexis as it relates to primary narcissism. 96 Perhaps I could also do well to reproduce the following passage of Bion, as it is relevant to the development of thought:

In his paper on Two Principles of Mental Functioning Freud says “Restraint of motor discharge (of action) had now become necessary and was provided by means of the process of thought, which was developed from ideation. Thought was endowed with qualities which made it possible for the mental apparatus to support increased tension during a delay in the process of discharge. It is essentially an experimental way of acting, accompanied by displacement of smaller quantities of cathexis together with less expenditure (discharge) of them.” He continues “For this purpose conversion of free cathexis into ‘bound’ cathexis was imperative, and this was brought about by means of raising the level of the whole cathectic process.” He continues “It is probable that thinking was originally unconscious, in so far as it rose above mere ideation and turned to the relations between the object-impressions, and that it became endowed with further qualities which were perceptible to consciousness only through its connection with the memory traces of words.” Implicit in Freud’s statement is the part played by intolerance of frustration in producing tension, and then its relief, by the employment of thought to fill the interval between the need to unburden the psyche of accretions of stimuli and the actual unburdening. (Bion, 1962a, p. 28)
more relevant, hand, it should be noted that the following passage also reveals where
Bion gets his logic of evacuation from:

Freud said thought provided a means for the restraint of motor discharge (Two
Principles); it was no longer concerned with unburdening the mental apparatus of
accretions of stimuli but was now employed in the appropriate alteration of
reality. According to this, thought is a substitute for motor discharge although he
does not say that motor discharge ceases to function as a method of disburdening
the psyche of accretions of stimuli. But through projective identification thought
itself takes on the function previously entrusted to motor discharge—namely
ridding the psyche of accretions of stimuli; like “action” it may be directed to
altering the environment, depending on whether the personality is directed to
evasion of frustration or modification of it. (Bion, 1962a, p. 83)

At the end of this passage Bion outlines the two kinds of mental activity already
discussed: (a) the evasion of frustration, or (b) the modification of it. (In Freud, psychic
stimuli is a build up of tension that requires release, and believing this delayed release to
be the “frustration” that Bion speaks of, I have referred to the evasion/evacuation of
psychic material directly as such.) As discussed, for Bion thoughts exist “prior to
thinking”; “thinking has to be developed…for dealing with ‘thoughts’” (Bion, 1962a, p.
83). In my understanding, when Bion quotes Freud to talk about the modification of
frustration (psychic material), this is the development of thinking. But the modification of
frustration, which is effected through the process of alpha-function, is only made possible
by the tolerance of frustration (or the tolerance of built up of psychic material). Such
tolerance involves a process other than hallucinatory wish fulfillment. The ability to think
is thus preceded by the capacity to think (and Bion, 1962a, adumbrates how this capacity is developed in infancy, and again in the analytic dyad in ch. 12, pp. 32-37).

On the other hand, alpha-function and thinking are impossible when “intolerance of frustration [is] so pronounced that alpha-function [is] forestalled by immediate evacuation of the beta-elements” (p. 35). (Such evacuation of beta-elements is tethered to the pleasure pleasure’s hallucinatory wish-fulfillment, and is likewise associated with Freud’s primary process). Now I hope the reader can see here the clinical relevance of these concepts, which lies in the following two statements: (i) “Only beta-elements are available for whatever activity takes the place of thinking and beta-elements are suitable for evacuation only” (Bion, 1962a, p. 13); and, (ii) “In contrast with the alpha-elements the beta-elements are not felt to be phenomena, but things in themselves” (p. 6). What I understand here is that when psychic stimuli is treated as if it were physical, ways of evacuating such stimuli/psychic material (beta-elements) includes, but is not limited to, the list of actions with which this paper began:

To blurt it out, to speak without thinking, using words as objects, passing gas to relieve anxious butterflies in the stomach, the catharsis of confession; hitting your pillow, running to cool down, eating your emotions and then purging them; holding stress in the shoulders and cracking the neck to get rid of this, cutting to feel the pain; to spew or regurgitate useless information, a kind of verbal diarrhea.

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97 Perhaps confusingly, Bion (1962a) holds that the pleasure principle and the reality principle are not “sequent” but rather “co-exist” (p. 29), and yet there exists “a chronological priority to beta-elements over alpha-elements” (p. 35). Conversely, Bion does say that projective identification occurs prior to the development of thinking. Also of relevance here is my discussion of the primary and secondary processes, as they may relate to the psychotic/non-psychotic parts of the personality (in “Disturbing the Mental Life”).
Such idioms are all (potential\textsuperscript{98}) examples of actions a person can actually perceive, in real time—which serve the purpose of what? Returning to the other terms employed at the beginning of this paper this evacuation, this not-digesting hinders “thinking.” But to what end? By merely seeing the mechanics of \textit{how I avoid intimacy}, I do not necessarily learn \textit{why I avoid intimacy}. It remains mystery for now, but nonetheless a mystery that has been evoked—the beckoning enigma that drives analysis. And for the analysand who, despite complaints of constant loneliness continually refuses to acknowledge their own role in avoiding of intimacy, the gift is in the seeing. This, I propose, is an important possibility for clinical application, but which was underdeveloped within Bion’s own densely theoretical (non-clinical) writing.\textsuperscript{99}

### Better Living through Modification

Returning again to Bion’s (1962a) original formulation, what does it mean to \textit{modify} psychic stimuli? I think he actually gives the term two different meanings, without clearly distinguishing one from the other. Bion’s more pessimistic view of modification could be what Freud (1930) refers to in the second section of \textit{Civilizations and Its Discontents} (pp. 74-84), wherein he (Freud) addresses people’s “methods of averting suffering” (p. 78); as Freud writes, “Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense

\textsuperscript{98} I would not suppose that any action always and for everyone serves the same purpose. Some common examples can, however, be discussed.

\textsuperscript{99} It could also be noted the physical evacuation of psychic material has a relevance for understanding hysterical symptom formation (see my discussion of hysteria as a psychotic process in the next paper). It should be said, however, that unless we subscribe to the economic model of Freud (and used by Bion) it is not clear \textit{how} this process of happens between the mind and body, in the mechanical sense of it. But one need not know the nitty-gritty mechanisms of gravity before learning key lessons from gravity’s application.
with palliative measures” (p. 75). The other more hopeful meaning of modification entails the development of thinking, and allows for digesting and learning from experience. This is a lived process. Rather than writing theoretically about this process in *Learning from Experience*, Bion (I think) attempts to transmit the felt experience of this process, through his writing. So strange as it is given his densely theoretical style, I come away from Bion’s writing most affected by that omitted part (which is certainly conveyed, nonetheless). So what is the alternative to merely evacuating experience? Psychoanalysis would be one possible answer—a word that does not mean much, maybe. But like Bion, I hope to transmit, in a small way, these acts of thinking and learning from experience within my own narrative work, which is found after the present collection of papers. May that be a better answer.

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100 Bion (1962a) begins to explore this process theoretically with his concepts of “reverie” (which is “a factor of…alpha-function”, p. 36) and the “container-contained”, but this discussion (Bion’s) is quite brief. See for example ch. 12 of his text, pp. 31-37. Furthermore, I see this chapter as factoring heavily into Ogden’s (2005c) work.
Thomas Ogden’s Dream

That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
—Shakespeare, 1600/2008, p. 255-256

In my first paper I wrote about the unconscious. In “The Alimentary Model” I wrote about what Bion (1962a) tentatively termed alpha-function, relating this to a mental function called “thinking.” Now sometimes “conscious thinking” and the “unconscious” (as it is explored in psychoanalysis) are presented as being at odds with one another. That is to say, the conscious narrative work of cognitive-behavioral therapy, for example, is seen as somehow contrary to the psychoanalytic method. However, in analysis there is an active—and in that sense consciously employed—method. But to call it a “method” implies that there is some rulebook one follows; psychoanalysis is more organic than that.\(^{101}\) Likewise, to speak of “analyzing” conjures the image a dryly-intellectual endeavor, as if analysis meant merely collecting the hard facts about one’s childhood, to be organized along some Dewey decimal system. I think one of the things that sets analysis apart from other activities is the sense of time; whereas an insurance company might pay for “solutions” within the course of ten weeks, analysis requires persistent attendance over the course of many years. But to say, as I have, that analysis is creative makes it sound like one is writing a personalized fantasy novel, which is not accurate either (Bion’s, 1990a, science fiction trilogy, *A Memoir of the Future* notwithstanding). Likewise, to speak of construction leaves out the cyclic ebbs and flows

\(^{101}\) At a Lacanian conference I recently attended, one of the supervising analysts said, “Psychoanalysis is not a method, it is an experience…You cannot apply the method. You have to do the experience yourself, then you have to listen to the patient” (Danielle Bergerson, March 1, 2013).
of regression; analysis is different from building a house, different from the linear idea that one first lays a foundation and calls in the inspectors last.

Thus there is no good word for describing psychoanalysis, but if there were, it would be a verb. But to say “a verb” implies that there is one singular and specific “thing” going on, which is not the case in this work. And it is, after all, hard work. It is not a forced or forceful kind of work, but a work of active receptivity—a particular way of listening, to the sounds that both emerge from and sink deep into one’s bones, at turns melodic, cacophonous, and even avant-garde minimalist. It is, as Thomas Ogden (2005c) calls it, a kind of dreaming, maybe even a way of “dream[ing] one[ ‘s] self into being” (Ogden, 2005c, p. 23). Thus advancing yet another provisional set of descriptors for communicating the work of “psychoanalysis,” it is with this dreamy terminology of Ogden (2005c) that the current paper is concerned.

But it is difficult to talk about Ogden’s conception of dreaming directly, because in This Art of Psychoanalysis, Ogden (2005c) often cloaks his own original ideas within the fabric of Bion’s thought. In other words, Ogden makes it seem as if he is discussing the work of Bion, whilst actually proposing his (Ogden’s) own theories. This is further complicated given that Bion likewise cloaks his (Bion’s) own ideas within the fabric of Freud’s thought. Thus before turning to Ogden directly, I begin here by briefly differentiating how Bion modified Freud and was subsequently modified by Ogden (as related to the conception of dreaming, specifically). This paper concludes with an understanding of dreaming as Ogden (uniquely) conceives it; in other words, I discuss here Ogden’s (2005c) response to Bion’s riddle about what it means to (not) dream. I rely

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102 As explained further, below, for both Bion and Ogden dreaming (and not being able to dream) is a mental function independent of the physiological state of sleep.
heavily on Ogden’s own writing (rather than my responses to him) in hopes that the reader will see the real poetic beauty within Ogden’s theoretical writing—for what are analytic interpretations if not some cousin to poetry?¹⁰³

Can’t Stomach It

I have said that The Interpretation of Dreams begins with Freud’s (1900) review of the existing scientific literature on dreams, concluding that “the scientific theories of dreams leave no room for any problem of interpreting them, since in their view a dream is not a mental act at all, but a somatic process signalizing its occurrence by indications registered in the mental apparatus” (p. 96). This view is also espoused by the “popular saying that ‘dreams come from indigestion’” (Freud, p. 22). Freud himself, on the other hand, believes that dreams are derived chiefly from psychical causes. But in his own way, Bion (1962a) begins Learning from Experience by echoing the popular saying and Freud’s theory, while twisting both their meanings¹⁰⁴:

It used once to be said that a man had a nightmare because he had indigestion and that is why he woke up in a panic. My version is: The sleeping patient is panicked; because he cannot have a nightmare he cannot wake up or go to sleep; he has had mental indigestion ever since. (p. 8)

Bion (1962a) speaks here in a very unusual way. How could “the sleeping patient” be unable to “wake up or go to sleep” (p. 8, emphasis mine)? He calls this

¹⁰³ In the two papers that succeed this one, I hope to show more of what Ogden (2005a) calls “the literary genre of analytic writing” (p. 15), not only through the work of Ogden, but also with that of Bion (1962a), and Loewald (1979).

¹⁰⁴ Bion (1962a) is a master at echoing past ideas while also re-imbuing them anew. I explored this briefly in relation to Freud’s (1911c) work in “The Alimentary Model,” and will take up the subject again here; I will undertake a fuller discussion of how Bion develops meaning throughout Learning from Experience in the first part of my final paper.
“mental indigestion” (p. 8), but to what does that refer? What is Bion calling here a nightmare, and how does he understand dreaming? To pursue such questions, one could certainly turn to Learning from Experience, and to Bion’s (1962a) conception of “alpha-function” (p. 7), but reading Bion’s highly speculative work often leaves the reader with more questions than answers. On the other hand, writing forty years after Learning from Experience, Thomas Ogden (2005c) has drawn on Bion’s thought extensively to develop his (Ogden’s) own unique set of ideas, which serve as potential answers to Bion’s original questions; I refer here to what Ogden (2005c) calls “dreaming,” as a way of describing the analytic scene.  

You Say Tomato…

Even Ogden’s unique use of language (i.e. how he defines dreaming) takes a cue from Bion—for Bion not only shifts the meaning of words within psychoanalysis’s specialized lexicon (i.e. dreaming; and psychosis, see below), but he (Bion) also alters the meaning of every day words, changing what it means to sleep and wake up. In light of this, it should be noted that Ogden (2005c) reads Bion in a way that is clearly “Ogden-
ian.” The precedent for such personalized reading is actually set by Bion (1962a), who wrote of his dense style in *Learning from Experience*: “The reader may find the effort to clarify these for himself is rewarding and not simply work that has been forced on him because I have not done it myself” (Bion, p. vi); Ogden responds to this passage:

> if the reader is to engage in something more than “merely reading” this book *[Learning from Experience]*, he must become the author of his own book (his own set of thoughts) more or less based on Bion’s. Only then will the reader have generated the possibility of learning from his experience of reading. (Ogden, 2005c, p. 78)

Thus Ogden’s (2005c) book, *This Art of Psychoanalysis*, is exactly one such text, “more or less based on Bion’s” (p. 78). It is confusing, however, when Ogden does not clearly differentiate his thought from Bion’s. But when Ogden (2005c) writes that “Bion's work of dreaming allows conscious lived experience to become unconscious (i.e. available to the unconscious for the psychological work of generating dream-thoughts and for the dreaming of those thoughts)” (p. 100), this is not really a statement about

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107 Focusing again on Bion’s departures from Freud, Ogden (2005c) writes:

> For Bion, dreaming occurs both during sleep and waking life: ‘Freud [1933] says Aristotle states that a dream is the way the mind works in sleep: I say it is the way it works when awake’ (Bion, 1959a, p. 43)…Bion's (1962a) conception of the work of dreaming is the opposite of Freud's (1900) ‘dream-work’…In short, Freud's dream-work allows derivatives of the unconscious to become conscious, while Bion's work of dreaming allows conscious lived experience to become unconscious (i.e. available to the unconscious for the psychological work of generating dream-thoughts and for the dreaming of those thoughts). (Ogden, 2005c, p. 100)

And while Ogden’s passage provides a useful metaphor (of consciousness and unconsciousness) for explaining how Bion and Freud differ in relation to dreaming, it is not the most accurate depiction of Bion’s theory (but rather, this is the thought of Ogden himself); Ogden’s (2005c) comparison between Freud and Bion implies that they both operate under the same mnemic model, but I think Bion’s (implicit) model shifted from Freud further than that. As discussed in “The Alimentary Model,” for Bion (1962a) alpha-function is responsible for “the establishment of conscious and unconscious and a barrier between them” (p. 17); alpha-function is thus predicated on awareness (i.e Bion, 1962a, p. 6), which Bion must understand as somehow different from that which Freud refers to as “conscious” (and as distinguished from “unconscious”; see also Bion, 1962a, p. 100, fn. 7.3.1). Thus the above quote (from Ogden, p. 100) does not address Bion directly but rather reveals Ogden cloaking himself in the work of Bion.
Bion’s “alpha-function.” Rather, it is a statement about how Ogden understands “dreaming” (drawing more or less from the theories of Bion).

**Dream a Little Dream**

Turning directly to Ogden’s vision of what it means to dream, and what it means to lack in dreams, *This Art of Psychoanalysis* begins with two dense italicized paragraphs, which Ogden (2005c) refers to “the analytic process, as I conceive it” (p. 1):

A person consults a psychoanalyst because he is in emotional pain, which unbeknownst to him, he is either unable to dream (i.e. unable to do unconscious psychological work) or is so disturbed by what he is dreaming that his dreaming is disrupted. To the extent that he is unable to dream his emotional experience, the individual is unable to change, or to grow, or to become anything other than who he has been. (p. 1-2)

Now I have said that Ogden (2005c) is not concerned here with the physiological state of dreaming necessarily. In Ogden’s sense, dreaming “is an ongoing process occurring in both sleep and in unconscious waking life” (p. 3). In other words, dreaming

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108 In the first part of “Text as Transmission,” I will discuss more how Bion (1962a) encouraged his readers, and his analysands, to think independently.

109 To avoid confusion, and to understand more fully how Ogden (2005c) conceives of “dreaming,” it might be most helpful if the reader forgets the original definitions of Freud and even Bion, at least partially. In other words, I suggest the reader follow Bion’s oft-quoted advice to analysts (i.e. Grotstein, 1990; 1999), to “abandon memory and desire”; in other words, read Ogden with fresh eyes here.

It could be noted that while Bion (1970) discussed “eschewing” and “refraining from memory and desire,” (p. 31), I believe it is actually Grotstein (i.e. 1990; 1999; 2000) who popularized this specific phrase—abandon memory and desire—but while attributing it to Bion (although perhaps the specific phrase was in fact communicated in person, to Grotstein by Bion).
occurs continually, throughout life, except when a person is unable to dream.\footnote{Ogden (2005c) writes “conversely, not all psychic events occurring in sleep (even visual imagistic events) warrant the name dream” (p. 3): Psychological events occurring in sleep that resemble dreaming, but are not dreams, include “dreams” for which neither patient nor analyst is able to generate any associations, hallucinations in sleep, dreams consisting of a single imageless feeling state, the unchanging dreams of post-traumatic patients and (as will be discussed) night terrors. These “dreams” that are not dreams involve no unconscious psychological work, nothing of the work of dreaming. (p. 3) In discussing this work with Annie Rogers (personal communication, November 12, 2013), I have come to think that whereas her Lacanian perspective on recognizing an actual (night time) dream’s enigmatic “unplumbable…navel” (Freud, 1900, p. 111, fn. 1) is a way of encountering the unconscious, this navel is not what Ogden (2005c) refers to as the psychic material that “neither patient nor analyst is able to generate any associations” (p. 3). Rather, I think this material which cannot be associated with is similar to what Lucin Cantin (2002) refers to as “delusion,” which is contrary to the “dream”; “to bring a psychotic subject to dream implies a breach of that knowledge…that the psychotic is developing in the delusion” (Cantin, p. 87). Given the unique (and strange) meta-psychologies of both Bion and Lacan, it would be very interesting to compare Bion and Ogden’s theoretical work for treating psychosis to that of the “388” clinic in Quebec, which has developed a Lacanian way of treating psychosis (i.e. as in Hughes & Malone, 2002). Such a comparative project, however, is certainly outside the scope of the current paper.} But perhaps confusingly, in explicating why “a person consults a psychoanalyst” (p. 1; p. 4) Ogden does draw on the “metaphorical value” (p. 124: ch. 1, fn. 2) of night terrors and nightmares, and in order to utilize the two experiences as metaphors, Ogden first explains the actual phenomena: Night terrors proper are experienced not during REM, but in “deep, slow wave sleep” (Hartmann, 1984, as cited in Ogden, 2005c, p. 124, fn. 2), and so “from the point of view of brain-wave activity, the person having a night terror does not wake up from the experience nor does he fall back to sleep after being calmed” (Daws, 1989, as cited in Ogden, 2005, p. 4).\footnote{Continuing to describe the literal phenomena of night terrors, Ogden (2005c) writes: On “awakening” the next morning, the child has little or no recollection of the night terror or of having been comforted by his parent…The child does not evidence any fear in going to sleep the subsequent night. There is seemingly no conscious or unconscious memory of the experience…In Bion's terms, night terrors are constituted of raw sense impressions related to emotional experience (beta-elements) which cannot be linked in the process of dreaming, thinking or storage as memory. The child having night terrors can only genuinely wake up when he is able to dream his undreamt dream. (pp. 3-4) (See my paper on “The Alimentary Model” for a discussion of beta-elements.)}

In the context of psychoanalysis, Ogden writes, “Some patients who consult an analyst might be thought of as suffering from (metaphorical) night terrors. Without being aware of it, they are seeking help in dreaming their undreamt and undreamable
experience” (p. 5). This kind of night terror/undreamt dream is experienced as “amorphous, ominous, unimaginable threats to one’s sanity and one’s very being. (Winnicott [1967] described this sense of foreboding as a ‘fear of breakdown.’)” (Ogden, 2005c, p. 24). A literal nightmare, on the other hand, is:

an actual dream (which occurs in REM sleep) that ‘awakens the person with a scared feeling’ (Hartmann, 1984, p. 10, my italics)…Consequently, the individual is often able to remember the manifest content of the nightmare on waking and able to think and talk about it…and, because he can remember having had a nightmare, is afraid to go back to sleep that night, and commonly for weeks or months afterwards. (Ogden, 2005, p. 4)

Speaking again in terms of analysis, during nightmares “the individual’s emotional pain is subjected (to a significant degree) to unconscious psychological work” (p. 4), with the dream itself constituting this work, “However, that dreaming is disrupted at a point where the individual’s capacity for generating dream-thoughts and dreaming them is overwhelmed by the disturbing effects of the emotional experience being dreamt” (p. 4) and so, in this sense, “the patient awakening from a nightmare has reached the limits of his capacity for dreaming on his own” (p. 5). Ogden (2005c) calls this a “yet to be dreamt dream” in that the dreaming/psychological work has begun (the work of dreaming), but the dreamer awakens, with nightmarish fear, before the dream (work) can be finished. Later I will return to the nature of “unconscious psychological work” (p. 4), but for now I want to examine a little further Ogden’s two categories of dream trouble.

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112 Culling phrases from Robert Frost, Ogden calls this kind of nightmare an “‘interrupted cry,’” which requires “the mind of another person [the analyst]—‘one acquainted with the night’—to help him dream the yet to be dreamt aspect of his nightmare” (Frost, 1928, as cited in Ogden, 2005c, p. 5).
The Question of Diagnosis

In “Disturbing the Mental Life” I outlined how Bion (1957; 1962a) shifts the established meaning of psychosis, proposing instead that there are co-existing psychotic and non-psychotic parts of the personality even for those persons not diagnosed as psychotic,¹¹³ and Ogden’s (2005c) understanding of psychosis is likewise unique (also see Ogden, 2007b, for a reading of psychosis in Bion). At one point in This Art of Psychoanalysis, Ogden (2005c) distinguishes an interrupted cry (nightmare) as “a neurotic or other type of non-psychotic phenomenon” (p. 5), while referring “an undreamable dream…[as] a psychotic phenomena or one associated with psychic foreclosure” (p. 5). Perhaps confusingly, however, in both instances “the patient is unable to dream on his own” (p. 5).¹¹⁴

¹¹³ There a few times when Bion (1962a) equates alpha-function failure with psychosis. For example, he writes:

As alpha-function makes the sense impressions of the emotional experience available for conscious and dream-thought the patient who cannot dream [because of alpha-function failure] cannot go to sleep and cannot wake up. Hence the peculiar condition seen clinically when the psychotic patient behaves as if he were in precisely this state. (1962a, p. 7)

But what is psychosis, for Bion? Consider the following statement from Bion (1962a):

“‘Thinking’, in the sense of engaging in that activity which is concerned with the use of thoughts, is embryonic even in the adult and has yet to be developed fully by the race” (Bion, 1962, p. 85). If we take Bion at his word—equating alpha-function with one’s ability to think thoughts—and hold that the failure of alpha-function results in psychosis, then the preceding statement (about ‘thinking’) must imply that the psychotic part of the personality actually plays a surprisingly large role in most people’s mental functioning. In other words, as a diagnosis perhaps psychosis is the result of extreme alpha-function failure, but psychotic mental functioning (i.e. as a part of the personality) exists even in the mental life of persons otherwise not viewed as psychotic.

Likewise, Bion’s stance that there is an unexamined pervasiveness of psychotic mental functioning (throughout the human race) is also echoed in Bion’s (1962a) warning about “the accepted scientific method…its weakness may be closer to the weakness of psychotic thinking than superficial scrutiny would admit” (p. 14). It is interesting to note that Bion’s thinking here is similar to Freud (1930), except Bion sees civilization as psychotic rather than neurotic:

If the development of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilization—possibly the whole of mankind—have become ‘neurotic’? An analytic dissection of such neuroses might lead to therapeutic recommendations which could lay claim to great practical interest.

(Freud, 1930, p. 144)

¹¹⁴ Describing the difference between such neurotic and psychotic phenomenon (terms here nightmares and night terrors), Ogden (2005c) writes:
But while describing night terrors further, Ogden (2005c) blurs the definition of psychosis:

undreamt dreams [night terrors, psychotic phenomenon] of such patients persist unchanged as split-off pockets (or broad sectors) of psychosis\(^{115}\) (Bion, 1962a) or as aspects of the personality in which experience is foreclosed from psychological elaboration...Among the disorders characterized by such foreclosure\(^{116}\) are the psychosomatic disorders...[and] ‘dis-affecte’ states (McDougall, 1984) in which patients are unable to ‘read’ their emotions and bodily sensations. (all as cited in Ogden, 2005c, p. 5).

Since the very beginning (Freud, 1893a), psychosomatic hysteria has been the classical neurotic symptom (and later Freud, 1918, even adds that “hysteria...is regularly to be found at the root of an obsessional neurosis,” p. 75.). Why then does Ogden refer to

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The former [a “nightmare”] is a dream in which the individual's emotional pain is subjected (to a significant degree) to unconscious psychological work that issues in psychological growth.

However, that dreaming is disrupted at a point where the individual's capacity for generating dream-thoughts and dreaming them is overwhelmed by the disturbing effects of the emotional experience being dreamt. A night terror is not a dream; no dream-thoughts are generated; no psychological work is done; nothing changes as a consequence of the psychic event. (Ogden, 2005c, p. 4)

But inasmuch as someone experiencing a nightmare is unable to continue dreaming, it would seem to me that the latter part of the dream (which remains not-dreamt) is inaccessible also to psychological growth/work. Is this not a kind of psychic “foreclosure” (in Ogden’s terms) despite occurring within “neurotic” phenomenon/dreams?

\(^{115}\) I am not sure what Ogden is referring to here, nor does he elaborate.

\(^{116}\) Ogden’s (2005c) full quote here reads:

Among the disorders characterized by such foreclosure are the psychosomatic disorders and severe perversions (de M’Uzan, 1984); autistic encapsulation in bodily sensation (Tustin, 1981); “dis-affecte” states (McDougall, 1984) in which patients are unable to “read” their emotions and bodily sensations; and the schizophrenic state of “non-experience” (Ogden, 1982) where the chronic schizophrenic patient attacks his own capacity for attributing meaning to experience thus rendering emotional experiences interchangeable with one another. In disorders involving psychic foreclosure, the patient’s thinking is largely of an operational sort (de M’Uzan, 1984). (all as cited in Ogden, 2005c, p. 5)

It is interesting to note that in “Slaves of Quantity,” de M’Uzan (2003, as it appeared in English translation) does not address matters of psychosis but seeks to “illustrate the features of...pervasive disorders, which are also linked to extreme psychosomatic states” (p. 711) and is concerned with “more clearly conceptualiz[ing] the distinction between neurotic and perverse modes of psychic functioning” (p. 711). (See also Simpson’s, 2003, introduction to de M’Uzan’s paper.) Certainly Ogden is discussing psychosis in such a unique way if even the other analysts he cites do not see eye to eye with him!
the psychosomatic disorders as a psychotic phenomenon? Perhaps because psychosomatic experience fits the description of psychic evacuation, as proposed by Bion (1962a; see also “The Alimentary Model”).

Nonetheless, Ogden clearly alters the classical meaning of psychosis/psychotic mental functioning here (as does Bion). Perhaps a key to understanding this alteration lies within McDougall’s (1984, as cited by Ogden, 2005c) definition of “dis-affected states”: “The patients of whom I am speaking do indeed use psychotic defense mechanisms, but they do not suffer from psychotic thought processes” (McDougall, 1984, p. 405-406).117 Thus we might differentiate between *psychosis* (which is the result of *extreme* alpha-function failure, perhaps118), and *psychotic mental functioning* (as found within the “psychotic part of the personality”). In light of this, psychotic mental functioning may be much more pervasive—to re-contextualize Bion (1962a)—“than superficial scrutiny would admit” (p. 14).119

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117 About her initial impression of such “dis-affected states,” McDougall (1984) writes:

> Although these patients had sought analytic help for a wide variety of reasons, they had one personality feature in common: they appeared pragmatic and factual, unimaginative and unemotional, in the face of important events, as well as in relationships with important people in their lives…Later, in view of their conspicuous lack of neurotic symptoms, I referred to them as “normopaths”; while clearly disturbed, they seemed to shelter themselves behind or, indeed, to suffer from a form of “pseudonormality.” However, I was unable to see further into this curious condition, except to conjecture that it was probably rather widespread among the population at large. (p. 387)

118 In “The Alimentary Model” I pointed out that Bion’s model of psychotic mental functioning does not work well to explain delusional grandiosity, and this may also speak to the difference between what McDougall (1984) calls “psychotic defense mechanisms,” as compared to “psychotic thought processes” (pp. 405-406). On the other hand, delusional grandiosity is not necessarily analogous with psychosis either, as it too is experienced by persons who are not markedly psychotic (as in the case of narcissism; see Kohut, 1966; 1968; Kernberg, 1974a.)

119 This could also re-frame my discussion in the second part of “Disturbing the Mental Life,” as related to the two qualitatively different forms of mental functioning I proposed existing side by side (i.e. what Robbins, 2011, calls “thought” and “primordial mental functioning”).
Where I Was, So It Shall Be

These matters of diagnosis aside for now, I hope it is clear to the reader what Ogden (2005c) means about not being able to dream. In my understanding, it is as if living in a world with stalled, or even devoid of, imaginative meaning; to be neither awake nor asleep to (an aspect of) one’s own experience/being; to be stuck in a nether land, or trapped with some sort of suffocating terror; to be so afraid that one can never leave the house, for fear of the lurking nightmares. Conversely what does it mean, in Ogden’s terms, to dream? I have already quoted Ogden (2005c) to say:

dreaming allows conscious lived experience to become unconscious (i.e. available to the unconscious for the psychological work of generating dream-thoughts and for the dreaming of those thoughts).\(^\text{120}\) (p. 100)

I find this notion of “unconscious psychological work” intriguing, but it remains unexplained with This Art of Psychoanalysis (Ogden, 2005c). I am, however, reminded of Freud’s (1900) discussion of the creation of dream-thoughts, wherein he (Freud) stated that dream-thoughts could be produced without the light of consciousness: “the most complicated achievements of thought are possible without the assistance of consciousness” (p. 593, emphasis in original). But Freud cites his proof for this as “a fact which we could not fail to learn in any case from every psycho-analysis of a patient suffering from hysteria or from obsessional ideas” (p. 593), and I am not sure that Ogden (2005c) would consider the production of neurotic symptoms to constitute “unconscious psychological work,” especially given that he (Ogden) already deems psychosomatic

\(^{120}\) True, the original quote by Ogden (2005c) reads, “Bion’s work of dreaming allows…” (p. 100) but it seems clear to me that this is actually Ogden’s (Bionian) thinking here, inasmuch as I have already discussed in previous papers how Bion (1962a) employs the terms conscious and unconscious but only rarely, and with reluctance (i.e. Bion, p. 100, fn. 7.3.1).
disorders to be a kind of foreclosure from dreaming (thereby foreclosing unconscious psychological work too).

Now while holding the idea that dreaming (for Ogden) involves not only the unconscious but also the movement from conscious into unconscious, I would like to conclude with Ogden’s analytic poetry, revealing how he paints the conscious (lived) experience of what it means (or rather, feels like) to “dream oneself into being” (p. 23)\(^{121}\):

The patient’s psychological growth, as I view it, involves the expansion of his capacity to experience the full range of his emotional experience, his “joys and griefs, and…shipwrecks too” (Goethe, 1808, p. 46)…A psychoanalyst must be able to realize with sadness and compassion that among the worst and most crippling of human losses is the loss of the capacity to be alive to one’s experience – in which case one has lost a part of one’s humanness.\(^{122}\) (p. 23)

\(^{121}\) In an earlier draft of this paper I had originally ended by comparing Ogden’s (2005c) sense of dreaming to what Loewald (1979) calls a kind of “self responsibility” which:

- involves appropriating or owning up to one's needs and impulses as one's own…Such appropriation…means to experience ourselves as agents, notwithstanding the fact that we were born without our informed consent and did not pick our parents…When I speak of appropriating our desires and impulses—which of course are active forces themselves—I do not mean repressing or overpowering them. I mean allowing, granting them actively that existence which they have in any event, with or without our permission. (Loewald, p. 761)

However, after receiving feedback from Mary Russo and Annie Rogers (personal communication, November 12, 2012) that this sounded like some kind of ego psychology “self fortification” I decided to leave Loewald out of it. But I do not think that Loewald was implying such simple development of ego strength—despite the fact that he is speaking of the consciously employed aspect of psychoanalytic work—it just seemed too complex to discuss yet another unusual use of common words. (It could also be said that Mitchell & Harris, 2004, suggest that Hartmann was largely misunderstood in this respect; for this re-reading, Mitchell & Harris point to the way that Schafer, 1970, 1997, reads Hartmann).

\(^{122}\) It could again be mentioned that the analyst’s (and the mother’s) capacity to be alive to the patient relates to a capacity for reverie (i.e. Bion, 1962a, pp. 31-37; Ogden, 1997), as I will discuss further, below. Although largely outside the scope of this paper, this is reminiscent of Winnicott’s (1971) “potential space,” which Ogden also writes about (i.e. 1985) and even compares to Bion’s work (Ogden, 2005c, ch. 7, pp. 93-108).
From here Ogden revisits the classical stance of psychoanalysis and writes, “the end of an analytic experience is measured not so much by the degree of resolution of intrapsychic conflict” (p. 24), for within the imaginative process of dreaming one change[s] the very terms of the dilemma [the conflict]. For instance, a patient may feel that he must choose between maintaining his own sanity and being loved by his mother. To alter the terms of this human dilemma may take the form of recognizing that love that requires giving up one’s mind is a form of love that is impersonal in that it obliterates who one is. (p. 26)

Now I have written against the (classical) idea that the unconscious contains mostly assembled material that must be somehow brought to light and thereby resolved. For who would even decide what such resolution, say of the Oedipus complex, looks like? The analyst? Or these days, is this determined by some representative of the pharmaceutical-insurance complex? What about the person whose life it is, shouldn’t their experience be the important factor? This is not resolution for the sake of meeting some “diagnostic” state of “health.” To dream is to stand there at the mouth of the river, where flows joys, sorrows, and shipwrecks. As Ogden (2005c) writes, “the end” of analysis is measured not by meeting some objective goal, but “by the degree to which the patient has become able to dream his experience on his own” (p. 24).

123 My thinking here is inspired by a comment made by Annie Rogers (personal communication, March 25, 2013), in reference to an earlier draft, “Why is ‘healthy’ important?...More compelling than health, for me, is struggle.”

124 “If you don’t—who else will?” (Hunter, 1990/1993, p. 364)—I offer my understanding of this sentiment in the next paper. The analysand’s lonely but important work arises of out the muck.

When it seems like the night will last forever
And there’s nothing left to do but count the years
When the strings of my heart start to sever
And stones fall from my eyes instead of tears
I will walk alone by the black muddy river
And dream me a dream of my own. (Hunter & Garcia, 1987, track 7)
6.

Meaning, Hot & Alive¹²⁵

Hoping that the connective arch between this paper and the others will be self-evident, I intend here a number of sketches, mostly from others.¹²⁶ As Hans Loewald (1979) began his paper, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex”:

Many of the views expressed in this paper have been stated previously by others in some form. To account for my omission (barring a very few exceptions) of specific references, I can do no better than quote from Breuer's introduction to his theoretical chapter…¹²⁷ (Loewald, p. 751)

¹²⁵ As William James (1901-1902) wrote of a psychology other than analysis:

If you ask of psychology just how…and why aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central, psychology has to reply that although she can give a general description of what happens, she is unable in a given case to account accurately for all the single forces at work. Neither an outside observer nor the Subject who undergoes the process can explain fully how particular experiences are able to change one’s center of energy so decisively, or why they so often have to bide their hour to do so. We have a thought, or we perform an act, repeatedly, but on a certain day the real meaning of the thought peals through us for the first time, or the act has suddenly turned into a moral impossibility. All we know is that there are dead feelings, dead ideas, and cold beliefs, and there are hot and live ones; and when one grows hot and alive within us, everything has to re-crystallize about it. (James, p. 201, emphasis in original, as cited in Symington, 2012, p. 402)


¹²⁷ Loewald’s (1979) paper continues with the following quoted passage (from Breuer & Freud, 1893-1895):

When a science is making rapid advances, thoughts which were first expressed by single individuals quickly become common property. Thus no one who attempts to put forward to-day his views on hysteria and its psychical basis can avoid repeating a great quantity of other people's thoughts which are in the act of passing from personal into general possession. It is scarcely possible always to be certain who first gave them utterance, and there is always a danger of regarding as a product of one's own what has already been said by someone else. I hope, therefore, that I may be excused if few quotations are found in this discussion and if no strict distinction is made between what is my own and what originates elsewhere. Originality is claimed for very little of what will be found in the following pages. (Breuer & Freud, 1893-1895, p. 185-186, as also cited in Loewald, 1979, p. 751)
In his commentary to this passage, twenty-seven years later Thomas Ogden (2006) responded:

Subliminally, a sense of cyclical time is created by the juxtaposition of Loewald's disclaiming originality and Breuer's virtually identical statement made almost a century earlier. Loewald, before discussing his ideas concerning the Oedipus complex, is showing them to us in our experience of reading: no generation has the right to claim absolute originality for its creations (see Ogden, 2003, 2005). And yet, each new generation does contribute something uniquely its own: ‘Many [not all] of the views expressed in this paper have been stated previously’ (Loewald); and ‘Originality is claimed for very little [but something]’ (Breuer). (all as cited in Ogden, p. 653, brackets and emphasis in original)

**Same Old Song**

Now my first paper examined Loewald’s (1979) perspective of the parent-child dynamic classically understood as the Oedipus complex. I discussed how Loewald situated this parent-child struggle as essentially a conflict over the child’s emerging autonomy. As Loewald (1979) states, by proving our own autonomy and therefore our lack of need for our parents, “we are killing our parents. We are usurping their power, their competence, their responsibility for us, and we are abnegating, rejecting them as libidinal objects” (p. 758). Yet, for Loewald, this death need not be a source of melancholia, because once the parricide has been committed, “What will be left if things

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128 In my paper “Unconscious as Undifferentiated,” I quoted Thomas Ogden (2006) to say, “I do not view Loewald’s version of the Oedipus complex as an updated version of Freud’s. Rather…the two renderings of the Oedipus complex constitute different perspectives from which to view the same phenomena” (p. 664). In a sense here I am reminded of the popular Motown lyric, “It’s the same old song [case material], but with a different meaning since you’ve been gone” (Four Tops, 1965).
go well is tenderness, mutual trust, and respect—the signs of equality” (p. 758). In earlier drafts of the present paper, however, Annie Rogers and Mary Russo (personal communication, November 12, 2012) responded that Loewald’s vision seems too “hunky dory”—if things go well. When do they ever go well? I will return to this point soon.

In my first paper I discussed Ogden’s (2006) “Reading Loewald: Oedipus Reconceived,” which is after all a commentarial reading of Loewald—thus many of the ideas (in Ogden’s paper) were stated previously (i.e. by Loewald). And yet, through his reading of Loewald, Ogden (2006) creates something new, which is as of yet unread (i.e. a new framework to view Loewald through). This creation exists in the present, but it also imbues the past. Thus having read Ogden, my reading of Loewald has been forever influenced. Conversely, Ogden (2006) writes that he (Ogden) has been influenced by one of Borges’s (1962) essays:

The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation the identity or plurality of the men involved is unimportant. (p. 201)

In this process of creating one’s own precursors, something out-of-time is evoked; in the papers at hand, Ogden directly alters Loewald’s past, claiming that by quoting Breuer, Loewald was “no doubt” (Ogden, 2006, p. 653) consciously echoing Plato:

129 I am, for example, evermore receptive to the perceived experience of a tender human continuum within Loewald’s (1979) writing, because Ogden (2006) has placed that continuum there quite elegantly: It had been well established by Freud (1909, 1910) that the Oedipus complex is not simply an intrapsychic event, but a set of living object relationships between the child and his parents. But Loewald does not stop there. For him, the fantasied murder of the parents that is played out in oedipal object relationships contributes to—is part of the process of—the parents’ dying. It is tempting to water down Loewald’s ‘blunt language’ by saying that ‘their dying’ is a metaphor for parents’ relinquishing their authority over (their authorship of) the life of the child. But Loewald is saying more than that: he is insisting that the living out of the Oedipus complex by children and their parents is part of the emotional process (which is inseparable from bodily processes) by which human beings grow up, grow old and die. (Ogden, 2006, p. 658)
Now I am well aware that none of these ideas can have come from me—I know my own ignorance. The only other possibility, I think, is that I was filled, like an empty jar, by the words of other people streaming in through my ears, though I'm so stupid that I've even forgotten where and from whom I heard them. (Plato, 1997, p. 514, as cited in Ogden, 2006, p. 653, fn. 3)

These pasts, presents, and futures all have important deterministic effects, and yet, there is something anonymously impersonal—but not necessarily cold—in their progression. By acknowledging, through Breuer, that even important ideas become displaced from their originators, Loewald is acquiescing that “what we do manage to create that bears our own mark will become part of the pool of collective knowledge and in so doing we become nameless, but not insignificant, ancestors to succeeding generations” (according to Ogden, 2006, p. 654). And so, children and parents live out their own dying until only great grandchildren survive, but a vital, continuous thread remains.130

130 I would like to comment on how Loewald (1979) conceives of the superego’s creation, as related to working through the Oedipus complex: “Insofar as human beings strive for emancipation and individuation as well as for object love, parricide—on the plane of psychic action—is a developmental necessity” (p. 758-759), but nonetheless, “this murder renders us guilty and calls for atonement” (p. 759). From here Ogden (2006) asks: “What does it mean to say that oedipal object relationships are internalized in the process of superego organization? Loewald responds to this question in a very dense passage that leaves a great deal unsaid or merely suggested” (Ogden, p. 659). Thus Ogden is left to extract clear answers from an unfinished source:

the organization of the superego represents an atonement for parricide in that, at the same moment that the child murders the parents (psychically), he bestows upon them a form of immortality. That is, by incorporating the child's experience of his parents (albeit, a ‘transmuted’ version of them) into the very structure of who he is as an individual, the child secures the parents a place, a seat of influence, not only in the way the child conducts his life, but also in the way the child's children conduct their lives, and on and on. (Ogden, 2006, p. 659)

In a sense, by emphasizing and expanding this passed down thread of psychological effect, Ogden is re-instating the phylogenetic source of Oedipal conflict, as expressed most fully in Totem and Taboo (Freud, 1913c). History having killed Freud’s pseudo-anthropology, Ogden finds new ground upon which Totem and Taboo can reign, albeit upon much more metaphorical terrain (i.e. the apple never falls far from the tree). Important for individuals and well as the species, “the differentiation of the super-ego from the ego is no matter of chance…by giving permanent expression to the influence of the parents it perpetuates the existence of the factors to which it owes its origin” (Freud, 1923a, p. 35).
Yet by discussing Freud and Breuer, as well as Sophocles and Oedipus, Loewald is actually re-instating these originators, and in the same way, Ogden re-instates Loewald and Plato. Thus it should be noted that Loewald’s (1979) paper, and Ogden’s (2006) commentary, serve as texts that are not merely about the process of inheriting the old and creating it anew. By evoking and honoring their intellectual ancestors, their papers actually are quite elegant and likely self-conscious examples of this generational process of meaning-making. For if we accept, like Breuer, that knowledge “pass[es] from personal into general possession” there would be no need to invoke the past. The act of invoking one’s predecessors thus becomes a voluntary act; existing beyond obligation, it is about a desire and willingness to remain connected to the past. Furthermore, honoring insures that the ancestors do not recede into invisibility: “The Oedipus complex is, in a sense, a process by which the child, in killing his parents (with their cooperation), creates his own ancestors” (Ogden, p. 657, fn. 6).

In this “if things go well” model, a person becomes an adult in order to live their own life; to love, do meaningful work, care for others, and to bring forth new life. These

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131 These men have put forth words to explain something (ancestry), but explanation is not the something itself (and in the literal sense, ancestry never was nor never will be a “thing”). But when Loewald evokes Breuer, we do begin to see this something itself; the writing actually transmits a felt experience involving the thread of ancestry, as “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex” and “Reading Loewald” become pieces of literature, and these ancestral Oedipal dynamics are given voice, not as self-conscious theoretical explanations of themselves, but as expressive creatures. By this I mean to say that literary art is actually alive.

132 This was more clear-cut in the time of Plato or even Breuer; issues of intellectual property, and thus the potential for plagiarism, are a relatively recent phenomenon. Opinions about these issues are very much in flux, as copyright law is questioned and the content industry scrambles to maintain control in a modern world where information can be transferred with increasing digital ease. Yet despite whatever modern ramifications, Plato and Breuer’s statements still ring true. For example, just look to the way language passes from metaphor to common cliché—who can say what first “rang true”?

133 As Annie Rogers (personal communication, March 18, 2013) pointed out, Loewald and Ogden’s professed ancestral lineages here are male-dominated (and likewise, Ogden still only employs the third-person singular as he/him, i.e. Ogden 2005c; 2006). (Rogers also encouraged me to include more of Melanie Klein in the main text of my papers while highlighting how Bion and Ogden largely forget this lineage, citing Klein work so infrequently.)
opportunities are colored by personal, social and cultural influences.\textsuperscript{134} Yet inasmuch as ancestral presence is felt, inasmuch as one’s ancestors have also struggled with what it means to live fully, the adult is carried by this thread. Thus past, present and future exist together within a continuum, each imbuing the other with meaning. I think here to the mythologist Michael Meade (2008), who writes and teaches extensively about the importance of youth and elders working together to vitalize a world where “those who are older have found meaning and purpose in the course of their lives [and so] they have something meaningful to offer…[and where] those who are younger feel invited into the mysteries of life and death” (p. 36). To feel invited into these mysteries is to be alive, in a mode predicated upon the conversation between time and timelessness:

\begin{quote}
On the verge of the great uncertainty
we allow the threads of meaning, cleverly hidden in the past,
to give us a future to enter.
Not the past ignorant of itself
not simple history, repeating itself blindly
but the past within the past,
still glowing with the art and beauty of human nature
ever trying to burst into the world on the fervent lips of youth
and from the dreams of elders working the Braille of memory.\textsuperscript{135} (Meade, 2006, disc two, track six)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{134} My thought here is influenced by Kernberg (1974b) who describes the meaningfulness of love in a similar manner; also of tangential note is the emphasis Kernberg places on “full integration of genitality into the love relationship—achieved by resolving oedipal conflicts” (p. 749). The idea of resolution, however, is somewhat problematic (see below).

\textsuperscript{135} This poem’s scope expands well beyond what is quoted, and the original recording wherein it is contained is worth repeated listening. Michael Meade has been an important elder/ancestor in my own life,
Murphy’s Law

This all sounds nice (and it is). But if growing up is a form of “killing our parents,” I wonder if it is realistic to speak of “What will be left if things go well...tenderness, mutual trust, and respect—the signs of equality” (Loewald, 1979, p. 758). When do things actually go well? This world being the realm of existence marked and marred by wounding, perhaps “going well” is actually predicated on a willingness to struggle, like Jacob wrestling with the angel; “wellness” could in turn be seen as a kind of willingness to struggle with one’s own lot. It should also be noted that killing one’s parents, i.e. separation-individuation, is a particularly Western ideal, perhaps valued most highly in the United States. In other words, this process is not mandatory, nor even universally valued. However, a person who seeks psychoanalytic treatment desires an intensive therapeutic intervention (i.e. three to five times a week, for a period of many years), within a treatment model that traditionally emphasizes how pathology is created

and in a Division III project reflecting my own intellectual coming-of-age, his presence is paramount. Thus invoking Meade directly, his partially improvised poem continues:

…One day I caught these lines, from an almost forgotten song
off a radio, an anonymous speaker, translating words by an anonymous writer
and retuning the world from the mind of the old people of West Africa:
‘Do not seek too much fame, but do not seek obscurity.
Be proud, but do not remind the world of your deeds.
Excel when you must, but do not excel this world.
Listen. Many heroes are not yet born, and many have already died;
to be alive, to hear this song, that is a victory.’
To be alive, to sing this song, that is a victory.
To be alive you see, to be singing, and dancing
with the great uncertainty of time, that is the victory.
To be fully alive when death finds us
that is the victory.
To be alive and not caught in the walking death
of too much fame or too much power or too much wealth
that is the victory from the view of the embedded soul
reporting on the naked state of the world.
To be painfully alive and hear the weeping of the trees
to catch the cautionary whisperings of the wind
to bow in earnest to the unseen presence
that is a victory that seeds the world again. (Meade, 2006, disc two, track six)
in childhood in large part due to painful parental relationships. For such persons, the need for separation-individuation may be particularly pronounced, but to speak here of familial “tenderness, mutual trust, and respect” (Loewald, p. 758), well, this might be nice wish for the next generation, but perhaps it is only that (a wish). Thus in my understanding, this is analysand’s ultimate quest to live my life meaningfully, as rightfully mine.\footnote{As discussed in the previous paper, this is my response to Ogden’s (2005c) vision, that the analysand’s quintessential task is “to dream one’s experience is to make it one’s own in the process of dreaming, thinking and feeling it” (p. 24, emphasis mine).}

Thinking of parent-child conflict, I think to that passage from Ogden (2005c) wherein he writes that rather than psychoanalytic treatment resolving conflict, an analyst might help their analysand “change the very terms of the dilemma” (p. 26).\footnote{As quoted in the previous paper, Ogden’s (2005c) passage continues: For instance, a patient may feel that he must choose between maintaining his own sanity and being loved by his mother. To alter the terms of this human dilemma may take the form of recognizing that love that requires giving up one’s mind is a form of love that is impersonal in that it obliterates who one is. (p. 26)} In a sense then, the quest of psychoanalysis is to put the (ancestral/familial) past in perspective, and in doing so, to become freed from its constraints. As Ogden (2005c) writes:

Patient and analyst are not in search of truth for its own sake; they are principally interested in what is true to what is happening in the transference-countertransference. The analytic pair is doing so for the purpose of creating a containing human context in which the patient may be able to live with his past and present emotional experience (as opposed to evacuating it or deadening himself to it). (p. 21)

A Strange Paper

I began this paper stating that I would most just recycle ideas here, and by now the reader likely believes me. But it may seem strange to champion the process of
“dream[ing] one’s experience…to make it one’s own in the process of dreaming, thinking and feeling it” (Ogden, 2005c, p. 24, emphasis mine) while simultaneously saying nothing of my own. It could be said, however, that the process of living with one’s own experience is not necessarily unique. For there is nothing unique, say, about a person growing up, or forsaking the kind of love that obliterates—many other people have struggled to do these things too. Likewise, there is nothing unique about simply quoting other people (nor is it an act of “one’s own”). But could I actually say anything unique or mine, even if I wanted to? (I certainly have no case material to bring to the table.) In a sense, this is also the question of Loewald’s (1979) paper, and it is a question of Bion too, who “often protested privately that everything he wrote had been said before and that he merely dared to restate those ideas in a way that might shed additional light on them so as to enhance their value” (Grotstein, 2000, p. 687).

Once again, I agree with Bion. I think Bion’s (i.e 1962a) style of writing is such that rather than attempting to elucidate himself fully the first time through, he lays out meaning slowly, over time, never fully elaborating in a finalized way. In my reading, this avoids redundancy; everything is always stated in a less than substantial way, and therefore never becomes a dead horse. Thus there is always a sense of wanting more. Furthermore, I think that this form of repetition, which causes meaning to be built over time, replicates how meaning actually works within one’s own life—we have an ongoing

138 Always revealing my tricks in the footnotes, I make a piss-poor magician: as the reader has perhaps noticed, I am quite fond of quoting idioms and even clichés (and likewise, many of my titles and subheadings evoke popular culture song lyrics). My aim here is to highlight how much meaning is already common knowledge (but forgetting to see that which is right in front of us, we don’t always realize this). This is like the unconscious, which is both invisible and in plain sight; if it was a snake it would have bit you.
relationship with meaning; \(^{139}\) when this relationship becomes static, such starved meaning dies. As stated, meaning is not a matter of uniqueness; Homer said nothing that belonged to him, and yet his words hold great meaning still. What matters is how one tells the story, and how one lives out this meaning. In analysis, this may be matter of shifting from *dead and cold* to *hot and alive* (see the first footnote of this paper). So I have said nothing new here, but have looked to some important ancestral threads for mean-making all the same. If the reader would like to hear my own meaning lived out—remembering that such living is not a process of finality—well, that is the aim of my creative pieces.

An Addendum for Freud

In the present paper, I have quoted Borges’ (1962) sentiment, “that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past” (p. 201). But I

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\(^{139}\) In *Learning from Experience*, Bion (1962a) suggested that when reflecting upon each analytic session, an analyst should be able to “establish the ‘key’ of the session” (p. 44), by knowing whether the subjective “emotional link” of the session was one of Hate, Love, or Knowing. (As Symington & Symington, 1996, write, “to define the key emotional link of each analytic session, that which underlies all the other statements and feelings [of the session, is] rather like [defining] the key signature at the commencement of a piece of music,” p. 29.) Now to discuss the purpose of these links is outside the scope of the present paper. I would, however, like to highlight how Bion’s (1962a) views an aspect of knowing, which is an “emotional experience [and therefore] cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship” (p. 42): Thus to experience K we must find it in relationships, such as x K y. In this relational context, K: does not convey a sense of finality, that is to say, a meaning that x is in possession of a piece of knowledge called y but rather that x is in the state of getting to know y and y is in a state of getting to be known by x…In so far as it is a statement meaning x is concerning himself to know the truth about y it corresponds to statements of relationship that are said to be informed by a scientific outlook. The techniques employed by those who have a scientific outlook have achieved most success when y is an inanimate object. (pp. 47-48)

Now in the quoted passage, we have actually only learned what K isn’t: I could peel an orange to see what’s beneath the skin; I might eat a piece to taste it; I could understand that there is a seed in each slice. Or, I could research oranges and visit an orange grove; my learning process could be rather involved; I could gather a lot of information, about the growing process, or about the history of oranges. But however detailed my encyclopedic analysis, I would still be faced with ‘inanimate facts,’ and thus lack a living relationship. Such information would not constitute what Bion deems K: in his own writing about Bion, Grotstein (2007) asks, “How does one really get to know another person except by one’s emotional response to them—in person? Those are ‘analytic facts’” (p. 32). What I mean to say here is that knowledge, in the psychoanalytic sense, is always relational, subjective, and fluid.
do not mean here to be totality in favor of such anachronistic reading. It is rather, just what happens; I cannot read about the Oedipus complex in Freud, for example, without thinking about—and even seeing, as it were, the pre-existing “traces” of—Loewald’s (1979) Oedipus complex. On the other hand, I would like to end this paper by quoting myself, in an unpublished paper (2011) that championed reading as much as possible in a non-anachronistic manner. In quoted instance, I am addressing how one might read Freud’s (1914c) paper “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” but I hope the reader’s interpretation will not be confined to such narrow applicability:

Reading this work, it is important to note the way in which Freud writes—he is clearly in the process of revising his past theories, foreshadowing future notions, and playing with concepts in the present. Part of the beauty of Freud’s work is his willingness to refrain from definitive writing. His writing is, as a result, alive with possibilities:

*The difference between a speculative theory and a science erected on empirical interpretation...[is that] the latter will not envy speculation its privilege of having a smooth, logically unassailable foundation, but will gladly content itself with nebulous, scarcely imaginable basic concepts, which it hopes to apprehend more clearly in the course of its development, or which it is even prepared to replace by others. For these ideas are not the foundation of science, upon which everything else rests: that foundation is observation alone.* [Freud, 1914c, p. 21]

Freud wrote of “a special psychical agency which performs the task of seeing that narcissistic satisfaction from the ego ideal is ensured and which, with this end in
view, constantly watches the actual ego and measures it by that ideal” (p. 37) and we can read this, saying to ourselves, “Ah, yes, here is (the basis for) the superego”—or, we can join Freud in the actual of present tense writing. We can slip into the time where he still lives amidst “observation alone” (p. 21) and take part in the sense of possibility, the sense of wonderfully “nebulous, scarcely imaginable basic concepts” (p. 21) still yet to be developed. Reading Freud like this also forces us to confront the often-contradictory implications present within his work. Approached this way, we can see the variety of ways in which Freud’s contemporaries read him, and we can begin to understand how their theories developed from their then-contemporary readings. (Pyle, 2011, p. 5-6, emphasis in original)\(^{140}\)

Freud is a master at this artistic style, and often the most exciting parts of his work occurs in the footnotes (i.e. see the end of “Disturbing the Mental Life, Part II” for my discussion of “the dream's navel,” Freud, 1900, p. 525). Likewise, it is the unplayed notes that make the music come alive, because this is where the music opens up to us, the listeners. In other words, to paraphrase Mary Russo, without the listener, there is no music, for it is this (unplayed) relationship to the music that makes it come alive.\(^{141}\) And of course I mean here not just music, but art also, which even theoretical writing can be when written well.

\(^{140}\) I add this beautiful quote, which I also cited in my 2011 paper (Pyle, p. 10, fn. 7):
Reading [“On Narcissism”] is like witnessing the creation of a work of art. Here, out of all kinds of raw materials, Freud carved the contours of the important developments to come without much regard for the rules of conceptual clarity. (Treurniet, 1991, p. 77)

\(^{141}\) What Russo actually said was more like without the reader, there is no text. Likewise, as Oliver Wendell Holmes is reported to have written “The best of a book is not the thought which it contains, but the thought which it suggests; just as the charm of music dwells not in the tones but in the echoes of our hearts” (see Marilyn, 2010).
And while it is true that I cite Freud quite frequently in the present collection of papers, this is not because I hold myself to be a Freudian. Far from it, I am simply and merely fascinated by the literary tradition of alive ideas, of which psychoanalysis is a part. This paper—and in many ways my entire collection of theoretical papers here—is an homage to that ancestry, to the palpable meaningfulness of being situated within a tradition, wild and full of disagreements, where “what we do manage to create that bears our own mark will become part of the pool of collective knowledge and in so doing we become nameless, but not insignificant, ancestors to succeeding generations” (Ogden, 2006, p. 654).
I begin this paper, perhaps simplistically, with a remark made at a graduation ceremony for the Oregon Psychoanalytic Center’s Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Program, wherein each graduate was celebrated with a short speech from one of the center’s faculty members (it was a small graduating class):

“Peter would always come in with these exciting insights like, ‘Oh, you’re actually supposed to listen to the patient.’” Lisa, the speaker, laughed. Then her tone deepened in sincerity. “And in that moment,” she continued, “what it means to ‘listen’ would sink in for both of us, in a new way.”

Now I suspect both Peter and Lisa already knew something about the importance of listening (as this is clearly a part of psychoanalytic work). Nonetheless, reflected in these comments was Peter’s changing understanding of what it means to listen. Prior to these “new” revelations, surely Peter understood the basic mechanics of listening: a voice forms words, to be heard by ears, and you are the one with those ears. Maybe Peter also understood that he “should,” as a therapist engaged in “listening,” speak with an inviting tone and ask open-ended questions. Maybe he understood that some basic therapeutic responses are not conducive to listening, like ignoring the patient, shouting at the patient, or falling asleep while the patient is talking. All of these things are a part of listening, things Peter already knew. So what then was Peter’s new realization?

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142 Communication is difficult. This may seem like old news to many, but it is relevant to the realm of psychoanalytic thought because in the throes of lonely madness, such struggle is paramount (i.e. Fromm-Reichmann, 1959/1990).
While certain kinds of listening may follow particular techniques, I suspect Peter’s revelation was not a matter of trainable skills, but one of new experiential depth. How to explain this new depth, however, is another issue, for there is at least one fundamental problem with conveying a new kind of listening: the available words (like “listen”) have not changed, but rather their definitions have been enriched, have grown more personal (there has been, for Peter, an evolving understanding of what it means to listen). Now if you asked the kind of doctor that sees three or four patients as hour, *Do you listen to your patients?*, he might likely respond, “Of course. They describe their symptoms, and I listen. How else could I offer a diagnosis?”

So this doctor and Peter both use the same word, *listening*, to describe two very different (emotional) activities—i.e., how could Peter communicate the *depth* of listening when such personalized meaning was not garnered through a dictionary, but by experience? Such meaning is largely incommunicable (but not arbitrary). This may seem obvious in the intellectual sense, but the work of it is one of the hardest obstacles in analysis (part of the challenge is continuing escaping the dryly intellectual ego narrative).

As the poet Jack Gilbert (1996) writes in his poem “Tear it Down”:

We find out the heart only by dismantling what
the heart knows. By redefining the morning,
we find a morning that comes just after darkness.
We can break through marriage into marriage.
By insisting on love we spoil it, get beyond
affection and wade mouth-deep into love.
We must unlearn the constellations to see the stars… (p. 9)
Gilbert’s poem expresses how meaning changes with experience; knowing happens *through* experience. At the end of the previous paper, I wrote about meaning that is not necessarily new, but presented in a way that feels *alive*. I hope the reader has felt that in the present collection of papers, the work of “dismantling” outdated or meaning, as well as the work of “redefining” the such meaning again as alive (and in that sense making it “new”). (The other option, of course, is possible to throw out an entire lexicon and simply build your own new one, but such an endeavor is usually quite lonely\(^{143}\)).

To take up the old words like *listening*, and re-imbue them in a way that is communicable to others; this is the challenge of presenting a new theory that builds off the old ones. This is the work of psychoanalysis, I think, and the work of literature too—both are an attempt to think or say something new, amidst the muddled rubble of old. And just like the years of analysis it takes for analysand to “realize” that her childhood contained very different meanings than that which was previously assumed, literature too must slowly work the reader over. It must be built. One way of building like this is through repetition, repeating the familiar but slowly changing out the old for that which is new, glimmer by glimmer. Once the reader has been guided into a whole new context, a writer’s words are there freed from old contexts, open to whatever now need be said.\(^{144}\)

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\(^{143}\) A person builds a new lexicon when the old one becomes outdated or static. Alternatively, a person in the dire grips of psychological struggle (i.e. psychosis) builds a new lexicon (of neologisms) because his experience does not feel explainable on anyone else’s terms. This is the loneliness of madness, in a world so privately strange it could not be communicated even if you tried.

This painful process is described exquisitely in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (Greenberg, 1964). As Frieda Fromm-Reichmann would say to Hannah/Joanne, “Every time Joanne disappeared [into her delusional world of Iria]...Frieda pleaded, ‘Take me along with you; take me there; show it to me’” (in Hornstein, 2005, p. 228). The creative work following these essays is another attempt, *to take you with me*.

\(^{144}\) I mean to follow the literary course here as well, *showing rather than telling*. 
Bion Obscured

It is interesting to note that while building something new through this kind of repetition, Bion (1962a) also creates a new lexicon, emphasizing the importance of a "system of notation" whereby "the analyst [can] provide a record that he himself can understand after a lapse of time, and that can be communicated to others without serious loss of meaning" (p. 40). (Accordingly, Bion’s book reads at times like a treatise on logic, and is concerned with epistemology, metapsychology, and with modifications of the scientific method.) As Grotstein (2007) writes:

Bion, the intuitionist, was almost obsessive about achieving precision in his ideas. That is why we went to the trouble of invoking so many models associated with mathematics, science, logic, and philosophy. He had become dissatisfied with the problem of communication between analysts about clinical data and was looking for a universal analogue language, a unified psychoanalytic field theory… (p. 15, emphasis in original)

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145 I mean the following section as a discussion of a particular kind of meaning-making. On the other hand, readers are encouraged to become familiar with Bion’s (1962a) text before using mine as a kind of reading guide.

146 Bion (1962a) sought a new lexicon to replace that which was outdated and therefore dead (meaningless) within psychoanalysis. Perhaps he also sought to defend psychoanalysis from those who attack it as "unscientific,"

147 It should be noted that this tenet of Bion’s emphasis did not last. Grotstein (2007) writes that Bion’s “faith in a scientific mathematical model [was] ebbing between 1963…and 1970” (p. 16) when:

Bion discovered that science and mathematics had their limitations, that mathematical certainty was an illusion, and the language of science was sense-based, suitable only for inanimate objects, not living objects. (Grotstein, p. 16)

Yet despite being published in 1962, even within Learning from Experience Bion is concerned about how to use abstraction effectively, without loss of meaning. And yet while relying on scientific models, he critiques the scientific method:

the capacity to think is rudimentary in all of us...It appears that our rudimentary equipment for "thinking" thoughts is adequate when the problems are associated with the inanimate, but not when the object for investigation is the phenomenon of life itself. Confronted with the complexities of the human mind the analyst must be circumspect in following even accepted scientific method; its weakness may be closer to the weakness of psychotic thinking than superficial scrutiny would admit. (p. 14)
But Bion’s (1962a) emphasis on exactness is a strange paradox, given that in *Learning from Experience*, he never says anything straight (i.e. on a few occasions, Bion refers to his theories as “adumbrated,” i.e. p. 52; p. 86; p. 95). Rather, Bion “repeats himself over and over again—differently—from different vertices and in different contexts” (Grotstein, 2007, p. 8), and while reading *Learning from Experience*, one has the sense of continually beginning, as if one is continually encountering each idea for the first time. For example, in my paper on “The Alimentary Model” it was very difficult to say the exact meaning of “alpha-function,” because Bion (1962a) seemingly never tires of (re)formulating it—he even continually redefines the root word “function” (and also the word “factor,” factors being a part of each function in mathematics). Now I have discussed already some connections between Bion (1962a) and Freud (1911c) in my paper “The Alimentary Model” but here would like to show two examples of Bion (1962a) re-imbuing old words with new meaning, by looking again to Freud’s (1911c) writing:

The increased significance of external reality heightened the importance, too, of the sense-organs that are directed towards that external world, and of the consciousness attached to them. Consciousness now learned to comprehend sensory qualities in addition to the qualities of pleasure and unpleasure which hitherto had alone been of interest to it. A special function was instituted which had periodically to search the external world, in order that its data might be familiar already if an urgent internal need should arise—the function of *attention*.

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Nonetheless, Bion’s achievement is quite remarkable. As Grotstein (2007) writes, Bion’s metatheory is “arguably the most far-reaching paradigm shift in psychoanalytic history” (p. 16), thereby agreeing with Joan and Neville Symington (1996) that Bion “achieved an understanding of mind that has not been surpassed by any other analyst” (p. 26). (But of course it should be noted that the authors quoted here are all quite particular to Bion.)
Its activity meets the sense-impressions half way, instead of awaiting their appearance. At the same time, probably, a system of notation was introduced, whose task it was to lay down the results of this periodical activity of consciousness—a part of what we call memory. (Freud, pp. 220-221, emphasis in original)

As discussed in “The Alimentary Model,” sense-impressions are essential factors within alpha- and beta-elements, but when Bion (1962a) speaks of “the need for a system of notation that is valuable both for recording analytic problems and working on them” (p. 40, italics mine) he is imbuing Freud’s phrase (see above) with an entirely different meaning; what was previously related to consciousness and memory (in Freud) now speaks also (in Bion) to the need for an exactness of language within psychoanalytic discourse. Likewise while discussing “functions” Bion (1962a) is again invoking mathematics, but echoing Freud’s (1911c, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” emphasis mine) word also, therein changing both contexts’ inherited meanings. Yet when Bion (1962a) takes familiar phrases and gives them new shapes, the phrases have not been stripped of their old contexts entirely. Rather, Bion’s words always carry echoes of former meaning, and that is exactly the point. And from these echoes, Bion (1962a) builds whole new sounds.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ I would like show this further, in a way that seems repetitive but also introduces a new element through the repetition (which is actually the style of Bion). Bion (1962a) writes, “Notation and the deposition of the results of attention are also phenomena to be investigated by the aid of the theory of alpha-function” (p. 5), and here notation is not only related to the need for psychoanalytic language, but retains the Freudian context inasmuch as the creation of alpha- and beta-elements are kinds notation—they are notations about sense-impressions (alpha-elements are notes available to thinking, whereas beta-elements are more disguised kind of notation, indecipherable to thought; but inasmuch as beta-elements accumulate psychically, they are notations nonetheless, like hysterical symptoms that are inaccessible and yet sealed in the body).

Thus Bion is aware of the intra- and inter- textual echoes, intentionally avoiding and evoking them. He employs “the term, alpha-function…intentionally, devoid of meaning…to provide psychoanalytic
I have spoken about the murkiness of Bion’s (1962a) writing. As Ogden (2005c) writes:

Reading [Bion’s] earlier work [i.e. Learning from Experience] involves experiencing a cycle in which obscurities are progressively clarified; those clarifications are then reopened to new confusions that demand further clarifications of a sort that lend coherence (at a greater depth) to the experience of reading, and so on… (p. 85)

But it is not simply Bion who clarifies himself, for in order to understand Bion’s text, the reader must work to clarify her own thoughts (in order to make sense of Bion’s riddle). But such clarity is only temporary, for as soon as the reader gets a grip on what it being said, Bion cycles back into more obscurity. Strangely, Bion (1962a) himself claims that Learning from Experience “is designed to be read straight through once without checking at parts that might be obscure at first” (p. vi), but such an act requires a tremendous tolerance for obscurity and ambiguity, as the text is thoroughly thorny. However, Bion (1962a) continues:

Some obscurities are due to the impossibility of writing without pre-supposing familiarity with some aspect of a problem that is only worked on later. If the reader will read straight through, these points will become clearer as he proceeds. Unfortunately obscurities also exist because of my inability to make them clearer. The reader may find the effort to clarify these for himself is rewarding and not
simply work that has been forced on him because I have not done it myself.\(^{149}\) (p. vi)

Thus in the current section, while I write about my reading of *Learning from Experience*, it should noted that because Bion’s work is so murky (and yet alive with possibility, like Freud at his best), it is hard to know exactly what he is saying, and what it is that *I* think (in associational response to his thoughts). Therefore, I lay claim to some of the ideas presented here, but attribute others to Bion. Perhaps closer reading could discern *where* exactly he ends and I pick up, but I think that this blurred effect (perhaps purposefully) resembles the reality that our relationships with one another are never so cut and dry, i.e. in close relationships, it is hard to say how we influence one another exactly—inanimate objects have hard and fast boundaries of where the chair ends and the floor begins, but such inanimate thinking is exactly what Bion (1962a) means to

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\(^{149}\) Commenting on this passage, Ogden writes:

if the reader is to engage in something more than “merely reading” this book, he must become the author of his own book (his own set of thoughts) more or less based on Bion’s. Only then will the reader have generated the possibility of learning from his experience of reading. (Ogden, 2005, p. 78)

Grotstein (2007), who is “the only person to have been in analysis with Bion who has ever written about him in a major way” (p. xv), writes that such an invitation was central to Bion’s style not only as a writer, but as an analysand: “Over and over again Bion would remind me that I should be more focused on my own responses to what he said rather than on him and his words” (p. 5). Grotstein readily champions this quality: “Like Socrates, [Bion] always insisted that he knew nothing or never wrote anything original but that every individual had within him/herself at the potential wisdom he or she would ever need” (p. 12), and yet, Grotstein acknowledges that “in much of Bion scholarship, including my own, there seems to be little ‘dialog’ or disciplined ‘debate’ with this ideas” (p. 10). Grotstein claims that he will not continue such blind scholarship in his own work (Grotstein, 2007): “I shall, on occasion, become a veritable Jacob wrestling with the angel” (p. 10). And yet, in this very claim, Grotstein is again equating Bion with “the angel”; “like Socrates” (p. 12); “he was...a ‘messiah-genius’” (p. 10).

On the other hand, writing the introduction to his collected works in *Seven Servants*, Bion (1977) offered his own humble perspective, stating, “I must have understood what I meant when I wrote it, but I do not understand what it means now” (p. 1). Bion then adds to this: “I thought I understood of what I meant, but in fact have only now begun to understand. In other words, some of what I said had an underlying significance that was not apparent when I wrote it” (p. 2).
As he writes about the need for new terms (like alpha-function) within psychoanalysis:

The problem is not merely the use of words already invested with a penumbra of associations to describe an unprecedented situation; it is that this penumbra of associations has been acquired in pursuit of the establishment of a mental relationship with concrete objects. (p. 53)

What I would call the echoes of meaning, as carried by words, Bion (1962a) refers to this again and again as a “penumbra of associations” (p. vii). In the scientific discourse of astronomy, the penumbra refers to a partial eclipse (the shadow revealed

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150 As Annie Rogers (personal communication, April 15, 2013) I do not wrestle much with Bion here in the way of disagreement. I think, however, that the struggle of separation-individuation is paramount, as the analysand necessarily constructs a personal sense of meaning (or of the past) that stands in opposition (sometimes totally) to that which is otherwise granted, by family, upbringing, and circumstance. The question, then, is how do we live amidst such conflict? This is not just a relational question, but the million dollar social question as well—if discordance was more livable, could there be less violence in the world?

151 Having mentioned Bion’s (1962a) emphasis on precision, it is strange to realize that he does not mean here to be precise exactly:

It may seem that I am mis-using words with an established meaning, as in my use of the terms function and factors. A critic has pointed out to me that the terms are used ambiguously and the sophisticated reader may be misled by the association of both words with mathematics and philosophy. I have deliberately used them because of the association, and I wish the ambiguity to remain. I want the reader to be reminded of mathematics, philosophy and common usage, because a characteristic of the human mind I am discussing may develop in such a way that it is seen at a later stage to be classifiable under those headings—and others. Nevertheless I am not discussing whatever it is that the function may become; my use of the term is intended to indicate that whether the person observed is performing a mathematical calculation, a walk with a peculiar gait, or an envious act all are for me functions of the personality. If I concern myself with the accuracy of his mathematics it is not because I am interested in his mathematics but because his mathematics, and the accuracy of his performance, are functions of his personality and I want to know what the factors are.

6. If the reader will consider the previous paragraph (5) again he will see that by claiming the use of the term function and wishing it to retain its penumbra of associations I leave it to be supposed that the term will be used by me in accordance with the rules and conventions by which mathematicians and philosophers regulate its use. If I fulfil this expectation I may be thought to use the term “properly”. But if I disappoint the expectation (aroused by the penumbra of associations of which I do not divest it) I may reasonably be said to mis-use the term. It is then open to me, if I agree with the criticism, either explicitly to divest the term of its penumbra of associations, or, to accept the conventions of use implied by its associations.

7. In fact I wish to follow neither course… (Bion, 1962a, p. vi-vii)

It could perhaps be said that Bion (1962a) desires precise language, but this language cannot yet be achieved given the as of yet “unknown” (p. 3) psychoanalytic variables (see my writing about alpha-function in “The Alimentary Model”).
within the eclipse itself is the “umbra”). I think that the process of greeting the
unconscious (which is eclipsed) is an encounter with one such penumbra. But in
referencing the associations that are peripheral to an eclipse, I think Bion (1962a) is also
suggesting that through the process of abstraction, certain psychoanalytic terms have
actually become eclipsed, because they have lost their original meaning. The
unconscious, for example, is one such word that has lost its original (alive) meaning (see
my first paper in this collection).\(^{152}\)

This is that strange paradox again. It could be said that the whole of *Learning
from Experience* is concerned with developing the mental process of abstraction.\(^{153}\) For
Bion, abstraction is fundamental to the process of meaning-making (alpha-function), and
without abstraction (also a part of alpha-function), a person lives in a totally concrete
world, where there is no possibility for change. Implicit is such a belief is the idea that
*meaning is not given*. In other words, no God has given humans meaning. There are no
hard and fast rules about what a person has to do—there are consequences for actions in
society, yes, but if a person *really* wants to kill someone, they can (physically and
psychically) do it. Furthermore, these rules and regulations are not *meaningful* but rather
work against the imagination, by stating what is and is not permissible in an irrefutable
black-and-white manner.

\(^{152}\) Symington (2012) holds that the word “psychoanalysis” itself has lost its meaning; it has become
associated with particular phenomena (i.e. the analytic couch, or the number of sessions) and therefore lost
connection to the *noumenon* for which it originally stood (although since the beginning, the work of
psychoanalysis has never been unified). I might confess also that I really don’t know what
“psychoanalysis” is, but when Symington writes about the thinking process (wherein the influence of Bion
is quite apparent), that I think I get.

\(^{153}\) Abstraction, for Bion (1962a) is “in contrast to that reverse process of concretization by which words
cease to be abstract signs but become things themselves” (p. 53). See also my discussion at the end of
“Disturbing the Mental Life, Part II.”
Conversely, meaning-making is an *imaginative* act. And while it could be said that children are usually born into meaning (by way of the family and society), the struggle for autonomy (killing one’s parents) involves a reckoning between one’s own imaginative desires, and the inherited and established (concrete) world. But in order to struggle in this way, a child must first have the ability to imagine (through abstract thought) possibilities other than that which is granted and assumed (and therefore concrete).

On the other hand, I also take Bion to be warning against new abstractions that eventually become too concretized.\(^{154}\) A push for exactness in the neologist speech of psychosis, for example, means that the psychotic person is unable to communicate effectively with others. But on the other side of this, if abstractions loses touch with their sense of concreteness, then those abstractions become a barrage of words with no meaning. (For this reason, Bion speaks of the need for “a model formed from concrete images,” p. 62.)\(^ {155}\) This is a common criticism of academia, for example, especially as espoused by undergraduate students—the fault of fancy theories that in the end say nothing new. Concretized abstraction, in this sense, can thereby eclipse the meaning for which it once stood (as when something becomes cliché).

\(^{154}\) I am reminded here of a philosophical Borges’ (1962a) character, “Funes the Memorious”:

Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch, would have its own name; Funes once projected an analogous language, but discarded it because it seemed too general to him, too ambiguous. In fact, Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it…I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence. (p. 65-66; Borges’ story is also discussed in Ogden, 2005c, ch. 4, “On Not Being Able to Dream,” pp. 45-60)

\(^{155}\) It is not entirely clear to me the relation between models and abstraction (in Bion, 1962a). It seems that in order for abstraction to maintain a sense of meaning, the abstraction needs to be in touch with the “model[s] formed from concrete images” (p. 62); on the other hand, it is very important that the abstraction or the model does not effectively become concrete itself. In other words, *thou shalt not worship false idols*: do not get so hung up on mere ideas that you forget to learn from actual experience.
Forgetting to Learn

Bion once quoted to Grotstein (at the end of an analytic session) a German letter from Freud to Lou Andreas-Salomé (1916a), wherein Freud wrote: “When conducting an analysis, one must cast a beam of intense darkness so that something which has hitherto been obscured by the glare of the illumination can glitter all the more in darkness” (as cited in Grotstein, 2007, p. 1). What is this “beam of darkness” and how does it relate to the eclipsed image of a penumbra? Learning from Experience, if taken as a piece of literature transmitting (rather than merely explicating) its effect, we see that Bion’s text weaves through an ever-opening field of meaning, where nothing is definitively solid. I.e. by incompletely introducing alpha-function at the beginning of the text, and subsequently developing the phrase’s meaning throughout (but without ever finalizing anything), the book actually exemplifies the process of learning from experience (because nothing is ever learned right off the bat). It is because of the darkness that this text works; it is an understanding of meaning as fluid, which keeps us learning.

Thus Bion’s murky style is actually a model for how one learns from experience. We do not learn all at once. We learn in a cyclical manner (although even that metaphor sounds too calculated). We learn murkily, glimmer by glimmer. But pride and perhaps

156 In a footnote (p. 8, fn. 1), Grotstein (2007) states that another translation of the same letter holds not “when conducting an analysis” but rather when “reading a book.” Grotstein states that Bion offers yet another translation of this same letter in Attention and Interpretation, where it appears as, “Freud said that he had to ‘blind myself artificially to focus all the light on one dark spot’” (Bion, 1970, p. 57; also referenced to by Bion, 1970, p. 43). The fuller quote, as translated by Tania and James Stern (in Freud, 1916a) reads:

I know that in writing I have to blind myself artificially in order to focus all the light on one dark spot, renouncing cohesion, harmony, edifying effects and everything which you call the symbolic element, frightened as I am by the experience that any such claim, such expectation, carries within it the danger of distorting the truth, even though it may embellish it. (Freud, 1916a, p. 312)

157 As Bion (1962a) wrote, “If there are only beta-elements, which cannot be made unconscious, there can be no repression, suppression, or learning” (Bion, 1962, p. 8; see my paper “The Alimentary Model” for a discussion of beta-elements). Now we know beta-elements to occur when alpha-function fails, and so, inasmuch as alpha-function is responsible for the creation of meaning, it is very interesting to think that forgetting (i.e. repression and suppression) are also central to learning.
that unconscious blind spot being what they are, we take this for granted. In other words, we are generally unaware of how much we don’t know. To say it simply like that, however, takes away from the depth of this darkness. Instead, Bion helps the reader to experience the darkness of that which is unknown, by transmitting an actual experience of learning. It is this kind of spirited writing that Ogden (2005c) refers to as “the literary genre of analytic writing” (p. 109), also citing Bion to say: “If we want to make a scientific communication, we shall also have to make a work of art” (Bion, 1978, p. 195, as cited in Ogden, 2005c, p. 109).
In what follows, the reader will likely be unable to forget what has already occurred. In other words, the reader may encounter here an echoing “penumbra of associations” (Bion, 1962a, p. vii), but I do not intend the present essay as an application of psychoanalytic concepts as previously discussed. Rather, I hope that the writing here (mine, but moreover Joyce’s) evokes the kind of situations that psychoanalysis also seeks to understand. At the heart of it, these situations are neither theoretical nor literary; they are experiential. Nonetheless, such experience can take place while reading, and in light of this I suggest the reader turn first to James Joyce’s (1914b) short story “An Encounter,” before approaching this essay. (It would help to read the preceding story in *Dubliners* as well, “Sisters,” 1914a). For those who skip this suggestion, I do provide large block quotations from Joyce’s story, as this is also necessary for close examination of the text.

**The Peripheries of Childhood**

It was Joe Dillon who introduced the wild west to us. He had a little library made up of old numbers of The Union Jack, Pluck and The Halfpenny Marvel. Every evening after school we met in his back garden and arranged Indian battles. He and his fat young brother Leo, the idler, held the loft of the stable while we tried to carry it by storm; or we fought a pitched battle on the grass. But, however well we fought, we never won siege or battle and all our bouts ended with Joe Dillon’s
wardance of victory. His parents went to eight-o’clock mass every morning in Gardiner Street and the peaceful odour of Mrs Dillon was prevalent in the hall of the house. But he played too fiercely for us who were younger and more timid. He looked like some kind of an Indian when he capered round the garden, an old teacosy on his head, beating a tin with his fist and yelling:

— Ya! Yaka, yaka, yaka!

Everyone was incredulous when it was reported that he had a vocation for the priesthood. Nevertheless it was true.

A spirit of unruliness diffused itself among us and… (Joyce, 1914b, ln. 1-19, p. 12)

Thus begins an eerie tale of adventurous exploration, Joyce’s (1914b) short story, “An Encounter.” Narrated by a young boy of unknown—although clearly younger—age, in the opening paragraph we mostly meet Joe Dillon. His prominence dominates, and yet, in the 280 lines that follow, he is not mentioned by name again (in other words, Joe Dillon only appears in the story’s first 19 lines). Now in this story about imagination, about what it means to imagine and to seek adventure, Joe Dillon is clearly credited with providing the imaginative impetus: the wild west. This is a concept, but in the world of fantasy-play, it is also a place. For when a young boy is lost in thought, doesn’t the fact of being “lost” imply the possibility of place-hood within thought? In a sense, Joe Dillon is the “ward” of the “wild west”; he is credited with introducing the place to the others, he is the bookkeeper of its library, and he “[holds] the loft of the stable” (ln. 5). More properly “he and his fat young brother Leo, the idler held the loft of the stable” (ln. 4-5), but the other boys’ defeat is marked not by the diminished, fat, young, idler Leo; nor by
Leo and Joe together; but by “Joe Dillon’s wardance of victory” (ln. 8-9). Reading these opening lines, it appears clear who this story is about: Joe Dillon, the fully-named character, stands out in contrast to an unnamed narrator who is thus far only mentioned through the anonymity of group membership (i.e., “introduced to us,” ln. 1; “however well we fought,” ln. 7; emphasis mine in both cases). Even Leo seems to receive his name from Joe, for it is assumed that these brothers share surnames but that is only an associational assumption—Joe’s “fat young brother, the idler” (ln. 5) is only defined by his proximity to Joe.

The Rules of Unruliness

Yet within a story seemingly framed by Joe Dillon, “A spirit of unruliness diffused itself among us” (ln. 19). This again implies some kind of “rule” to which “unruliness” stands in contrast, but when we encounter directly this spirit, the “ruler” has already been negated in some key way—Joe Dillon’s prominence shifts amidst the naming of another character: Mrs Dillon. It seems an abruption transition, or perhaps more properly it is an interruption: “all our bouts ended with Joe Dillon’s wardance of victory. His parents went to eight-o’clock mass every morning in Gardiner Street and the peaceful odour of Mrs Dillon was prevalent in the hall of the house. But he played too fiercely for us who were younger and more timid.” (ln. 8-12). We are “with Joe Dillon’s wardance of victory” (ln. 8-9) and suddenly there are others (“his parents,” ln. 9) in the line of thought, coming from (or going to) somewhere else (“eight-o’clock mass every morning in Gardiner Street,” ln. 9-10). Whereas we were involved in the “every evening after school” (ln. 3) battles, we are now in a different time zone, albeit another one that is
timeless a la “every morning” (ln. 10, emphasis mine). When meeting Leo he seems to stand only in relation to Joe Dillon—in the shadows, as it were—but how does Joe relate to “his parents” (ln. 9)? Perhaps we are also meeting the emergence of our narrator, as he now emphasizes a new kind of character (Mrs Dillon) and a new kind of relationship (what kind?). In my reading, this interruption in the narrative is echoed again in the following lines:

A spirit of unruliness diffused itself among us and, under its influence, differences of culture and constitution were waived. We banded ourselves together, some boldly, some in jest and some almost in fear: and of the number of these latter, the reluctant Indians who were afraid to seem studious or lacking in robustness, I was one. The adventures related in the literature of the wild west were remote from my nature but, at least, they opened doors of escape. I liked better some American detective stories which were traversed from time to time by unkempt fierce and beautiful girls. Though there was nothing wrong in these stories and though their intention was sometimes literary they were circulated secretly at school. One day when Father Butler was hearing the four pages of Roman history clumsy Leo Dillon was discovered with a copy of The Halfpenny Marvel… (pp. 12-13, ln. 19-32)

In this paragraph we can understand why the narrator has hitherto been cloaked in the anonymity of the group: “of the number of these latter, the reluctant Indians who were afraid to seem studious or lacking in robustness, I was one” (p. 13, ln. 22-24). Even the narrator’s individuality (“I was one”) is defined by group membership; he is “of the number of these latter” (ln. 22). His kind of membership is within the wrong subset, of
“reluctant Indians…afraid to seem” (ln. 23) as such. “Almost in fear” (ln. 22) the narrator bands together, but such compliance is complicated: “A spirit of unruliness diffused itself among us and, under its influence, differences of culture and constitution were waived” (ln. 19-20). Somehow it is this “spirit of unruliness” that causes “difference of culture and constitution [to be] waived.” The boys (narrator included) have “waived” their individuality (“culture and constitution”) in order to fit in—or perhaps more properly, in order to not stick out—but what is unruly about compliance? To be associated with “unruliness,” the boys (narrator included) are willing to pay the price of anonymous conformity. The tension of this contradiction surfaces in different ways throughout “An Encounter”—it sets the scene.

**After School Special**

At first the boys’ wild west “Indian battles” (ln. 4) are prefaced as occurring “Every evening after school” (ln. 3), and in a sense then, these “Indian battles” are *defined* by their being “after school.” Later in the text, the wild west again stands in contrast to the college when we learn that “these stories…were circulated secretly at school” (ln. 28-29). It should be noted here that the wild west has two different kinds of locality. One type of locality is in “the loft of the stable” (ln. 5), “on the grass” (ln. 7), and “in *his* back garden” (ln. 4, emphasis added). These are places within Joe Dillon’s domain (which is somehow framed by the relationship to “his parents,” ln. 9, and to “Mrs Dillon,” ln. 11, in particular). The other type of locality is within the space of stories. The wild west takes place within “*The Union Jack, Pluck* and *The Halfpenny Marvel*” (ln. 2-3); Joe Dillon may be the librarian of these stories, but they also exist independent of
him. Incidentally, in order to assimilate into the band of wild west Indians we know that
the narrator is “afraid to seem studious” (ln. 23), and yet it is he who points out that
“these stories[‘]…intention was sometimes literary,” ln. 29-30). He states, “The
adventures related in the literature of the wild west were remote from my nature” (ln. 24-
25, emphasis) and I must wonder, is our narrator’s “nature” in fact more “studious” than
that of the other boys? Is this part of his “constitution…waived” (ln. 20)?

By reading stories The Halfpenny Marvel, the boys are rebelling against school.
And yet in a moment, Joe Dillon has also become associated with school: “Everyone was
incredulous when it was reported that he had a vocation for the priesthood. Nevertheless
it was true.” (p. 12, ln. 17-18). In order to rebel against school (a “studious” place that he
at least in part identifies with, through literature) the narrator has conformed into a band
of boys who are in turn abnegated by Joe Dillon: “he played too fiercely for us who were
younger and more timid” (ln. 11-12). But as it turns out, Joe Dillon “had a vocation for
priesthood” (ln. 17-18) all along, and thus the rebel leader has once again become a ruler
(through his association with school158). In a nod to modern critiques of teenagers and the
“conformity of non-conformity” (i.e., the mainstream commercialization of punk rock),
the narrator has compromised his “nature” (p. 13, ln. 25) in hopes of “open[ing] doors of
escape” (ln. 26) only to find himself again being ruled. We furthermore see these two
ruling forces merge in another paragraph when the narrator writes, “The mimic warfare

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158 Undoubtedly our narrator attends a Catholic school, for what other kind of “college” (p. 13, ln. 42)
offers Roman history taught by Father Butler, whose pupils he holds in contrast to “national school boys”
(ln. 46)? These details carry the most meaning within Ireland—rather than say Paris, or even London—and
since “An Encounter” is contained within Dubliner, this Irish location (Dublin) is set via intra-textuality.

Echoed briefly here, another Dubliners story, “Grace,” takes up more fully the common Joycean
theme of the Irish conflict between Catholics and Protestants. In a link to “An Encounter,” the final scene
of “Grace” takes place in “the transept of the Jesuit Church in Gardiner Street” (p. 156, ln. 721), which
various scholars believe to reference Dublin’s St. Xavier Frances Church.

I am indebted to Daniel Block for initially helping me think about this relationship between intra-
and inter- textuality in Joyce (personal communication, October 29, 2012).
of the evening became at last as wearisome to me as the routine of school in the morning…” (p. 13, ln. 53-55).

From there the narrator continues: “…because I wanted real adventures to happen to myself. But real adventures, I reflected, do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad.” (p. 13-14, ln. 55-58). In this sentence, we see an emergence of the narrator’s self, as he is reporting on the state of affairs at home and then reflects on his own desire: “I wanted real adventure to happen to myself” (p. 13-14, ln. 55-56). Here the narrator’s sense of agency is in transition: he wants (active) something to happen to him (passive). By the end of the paragraph, however, we see his autonomy anew, as he realizes all the more actively that “real adventures…must be sought abroad” (p. 13, ln. 56-58, emphasis mine). Not only has the narrator identified his own desire, he has also realized his own capacity (and perhaps responsibility) to seek such desire.

The Emergence of Desire

I spoke earlier of an echoing interruption. I wrote that the narrator, within the storyline about Joe Dillon, was inserting his own emphasis into the narrative. In a story that first presents as a fly-on-the-wall account of someone, who is other than the narrator

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159 It might be remembered here that “morning” had hitherto been associated with Joe Dillon’s parents, who attended “mass every morning” (p. 12, ln. 9-10). Through both school and mass, morning thus retains its association with Catholicism (and perhaps therefore, rules), an association Joe Dillon also comes to bear.
160 What does it mean to go “abroad” (p. 13, ln. 58), rather than “remain at home” (ln. 56)? The narrator is again identifying himself as a liminal character; where he did not fit in with the other boys because of his studious nature—and his interest in “unkempt fierce and beautiful girls” (p. 13, ln. 28)—he again feels his desire for “real adventure” as being at odds with the place wherein he reportedly belongs (“home”). This need to leave home seems similar to the struggle for separation-individuation (in Loewald’s, 1979, Oedipal sense of it). The boy’s inherited world is too limited, too defined; subjected to the rulership of school and Joe Dillon, the boy imagines for somewhere he can be free, where he can dream his own dream (Ogden, 2005c; see “Thomas Ogden’s Dream” and “Meaning, Hot & Alive”).
(Joe Dillon), a seedling of the narrator’s self is born. The fly gets up and buzzes into another room:

all our bouts ended with Joe Dillon’s wardance of victory. His parents went to eight-o’clock mass every morning in Gardiner Street and the peaceful odour of Mrs Dillon was prevalent in the hall of the house. But he played too fiercely for us who were younger and more timid. (p. 12, ln. 8-12)

The fly may return for now to Joe Dillon, but he has in fact buzzed elsewhere as well. And to where does he buzz? In this first context, the interruption seems enigmatic: why are we encountering these details, now? Yet the interruption may become clarified retrospectively, when we face a similar kind of interruption again (the echo):

The adventures related in the literature of the wild west were remote from my nature but, at least, they opened doors of escape. I liked better some American detective stories which were traversed from time to time by unkempt fierce and beautiful girls. Though there was nothing wrong in these stories and though their intention was sometimes literary they were circulated secretly at school. (p. 13, ln. 24-30)

It is an interruption, but here the transition to is more fluid. The narrator has begun by talking generally about the “differences of culture and constitution” (ln. 20) within the band of boys and from this we learn more about the narrator’s (anonymous) group membership; slowly his personhood emerges. We hear first that group has “banded ourselves together, some boldly, some in jest and some almost in fear” (ln. 20). We further learn that “of the number of these latter, the reluctant Indians who were afraid to seem studious or lacking in robustness, I was one” (ln. 22-24). And thus, in the final
sequence of this sentence, “I” emerges. Now we can read the preceding lines over to understand more about who the narrator is: someone “banded...almost in fear,” perhaps “studious” and/or “lacking in robustness.” Through this backward inference, we realize that the narrator has been telling us more about his nature, his desire. Joe Dillon “played too fiercely for us” (p. 12, ln. 12), and although it is not clear how much of the narrator is included in that “us” (the sentence appears before the narrator’s individuality), we know now that the narrator is more interested in another kind of ferocity, found in “some American detective stories which were traversed from time to time by unkempt fierce and beautiful girls” (p. 13, ln. 26-28). Again the narrator is telling us something about himself: he likes detective stories and the kind of girls they contain (“from time to time,” ln. 27). But immediately after this sentiment, we encounter the interruption I spoke of, now highlighted because of its abrupt return: “Though there was nothing wrong in these stories...” (ln. 28-29). It could be read that “these stories” refer to the newly introduced ones, “some American detective stories,” or it could be read that the narrator is again discussing the wild west. Thus an ambiguous tension is created as the reader’s comprehension is temporarily displaced—which stories are we talking about? The narrator gives an example of how “these stories...were circulated secretly at school” (ln. 29-30) and again we deal with the wild west, as Leo Dillon is caught by Father Butler reading _The Apache Chief_.

But wait. In Joyce’s story, _The Apache Chief_ appears as story within _The Halfpenny Marvel_, and likely is an allusion to something historically true: _The Halfpenny Marvel_ was an actual storypaper, which published “Cochise the Apache Chief” in 1895 (Winston, 2009). Moreover, however, it should be noted that in addition to wild west
literature, *The Halfpenny Marvel* occasionally published detective stories. Could it be then that there are two secret readings going on here? As a group, the band of boys reads *The Halfpenny Marvel*’s wild west stories, and this must be kept a secret at school. As an individual however, the narrator reads “some American detective stories” contained within *The Halfpenny Marvel* and this is perhaps not only a secret kept from school, but a secret kept from the band of boys as well. I am reminded of the narrator playing with Joe Dillon and the other boys again but his attention wandering to reflect on how “the peaceful odour of Mrs Dillon was prevalent in the hall” of the house (p. 12, ln. 10-11). The attempt to fit in with the band of boys is interrupted by a different wish. For seemingly unlike his companions, the narrator desires the feminine. He may not, however, be a feminist—detective stories are filled with damsels in distress and femme fatales, the latter of which are more likely “fierce,” but objects of desire nonetheless. On the other hand, the narrator does seem more interested in the women themselves, rather than in the detectives who seek their mysteries.

Either way, there is certainly an alluring secret here. For this desire is contrasted with “the adventures related in the literature of the wild west [which] were remote from my nature” (ln. 24-25). But what then does it mean when the narrator later relays, “I began to hunger again for wild sensations, for the escape which those chronicles of disorder alone seemed to offer me…I wanted real adventures to happen to myself” (p. 13-14, ln. 51-56)? If the narrator is not speaking here about the wild west kind of adventure,

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161 What kind of a place is “the hall of the house” (ln. 11)? It is a liminal place, neither dining room nor kitchen nor bedroom. With his attention—and therefore his narrative—shifting away from the “Indian battles” (which take place outside of the house, but “in his [Joe’s] back garden” (ln. 4) the narrator finds himself separated (in thought) from the band of boys. And yet, he is attracted again to that netherworld place, the hall (and as Mary Russo, personal communication, October 15, 2012, pointed out, later we encounter another liminal space, the field).
is he perhaps seeking a different kind of disorderly “real adventure”? Turning away from the Joe Dillon who “played too fiercely for us for us who were younger and more timid” (p. 12, ln. 12), and turning away from the Joe Dillon who has nevertheless has (and therefore represents) “a vocation for priesthood” (ln. 18), is our narrator now wishing for that which is prohibited not only by school but by his band of brothers as well?^{162}

**The Wheels of Desire**

I have just offered this interpretive reading about the role of a particular desire in “An Encounter,” suggesting that our narrator’s personhood emerges on the wings of certain desire. To support this interpretation, I pointed to the way this desire interrupts the story’s narrative logic, and in that sense, my interpretation was an answer to the question, *from where does this desire emerge?* This is a question of *why*. I would like, however, to suppose that we do not actually know why—instead, we might simply notice the pattern.

*Ah, a pattern.* It could be meaningful or meaningless, I do not think that matters really.^{163}

What on earth am I talking about?

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^{162} In light of Loewald’s (1979) Oedipal separation-individuation, I notice here a similar matrix of experience, surrounding the birth of individual identification, as connected to emergent desire, but which is prohibited as such; when a boy not only encounters these prohibitions but also identifies with them internally, how does he reconcile this imaginative desire with such opposing “consciences” (p. 13, ln. 50)? (And what of the ensuing danger, when these prohibitions are not upheld?)

^{163} My thinking here is related to an essay about literary semiotics within *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Joyce, 1916). As Kenneth Burke (1964) writes:

> “Facts” are what was said or done, as interpreted in the strictest sense possible.

> The ideal “atomic fact” in literary symbolism is probably the individual word…In the extrasymbolic realm, there is usually a higher necessary percentage of “interpretation” or “inference” in a statement we call “factual.” We can but infer what the diplomat did. But we can cite “factually” some report that says what he did. People usually think that the nonsymbolic realm is the clear one, while the symbolic realm is hazy. But if you agree that the words, or terms, in a book are its “facts,” then by the same token you see there is a sense in which we get or view of deeds as facts from our sense of *words* as facts, rather than *vice versa*.

> …Suppose you were prepared to say *in advance* exactly what the recondite meaning the “image” of a tree might have, in its nature as a “symbol” enigmatically “emblematic” of esoteric meanings. (For instance, we could imagine a psychologist saying, “It’s not just a ‘tree’; it’s a father-symbol,
Picture Andy Goldsworthy’s famous arrangement of red and yellow rowan leaves (at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in England). I imagine these leaves coming together not because of an artist, but through the elemental patterns that emerge in nature. But by nature, I do not simply mean that place outside with the trees and squirrels. In the much larger sense, we see pronounced patterns emerging everywhere, in the spiral galaxies of outer space and in the natural fractals of Roman cauliflower. These patterns can be quite beautiful. But are they meaningful? In Joyce, the answer is sometimes yes, and often no. By replicating patterns in a discernible (but meaningless) way, Joyce showcases the elemental arch, of creation and repetition; he is revealing how patterns emerge and scatter, like the shadow puppets cast by fire’s crackling glow. (But these patterns do not lead anywhere; there are merely enticing shadows in the corner of your eye.)

For example, if we watch for the word green in “An Encounter,” we will see it six times (p. 14, ln. 18; p. 17, ln. 171, 176; p. 16 ln. 145, 147; p. 19, ln. 272). The first time we see this word it is nothing in particular, just a color used to describe the color of some

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164 As Winston Churchill (1930) writes:
I have noticed in my life deep resemblances between many different kinds of things. Writing a book is not unlike building a house or planning a battle or painting a picture. The technique is different, the materials are different, but the principle the same…The whole when finished is only the successful presentation of a theme. (p. 212)

165 My sense of “meaning” here includes that which is representational (i.e. related to the secondary process, as discussed in “Disturbing the Mental Life”). I discuss another kind of meaning, below.

166 I think to the neologism of psychotic speech, wherein a push for exactness in words renders the very language meaningless (because it becomes too concrete). See my discussion in the first half of this essay.
leaves on a tree. The second and third instances of *green*, however, occur with close proximity to each other:

I went to the stern and tried to decipher the legend upon it but, failing to do so, I came back and examined the foreign sailors to see had any of them green eyes for I had some confused notion.... The sailors’ eyes were blue and grey and even black. The only sailor whose eyes could have been called green was a tall man who amused the crowd on the quay by calling out cheerfully every time the planks fell:

— All right! All right!

When we were tired of this sight we wandered slowly into Ringsend… (p. 16, ln. 142-152)

We see here the narrator looking for something, for “some confused notion....” (ln. 145). What this means, we do not know. But we might remember that it was the narrator’s restless desire prompting this day of skipping school:

The mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome to me as the routine of school in the morning because I wanted real adventures to happen to myself. But real adventures, I reflected, do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad. (p. 13-14, ln. 53-58)

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We also see “green” and “gay” in close proximity, a pattern that is perhaps evoked later with by the “queer old josser” (p. 19, ln. 248):

It was a mild sunny morning in the first week of June. I sat up on the coping of the bridge admiring my frail canvas shoes which I had diligently pipedlayed overnight and watching the docile horses pulling a tramload of business people up the hill. All the branches of the tall trees which lined the mall were gay with little light green leaves and the sunlight slanted through them on to the water. The granite stone of the bridge was beginning to be warm and I began to pat it with my hands in time to an air in my head. I was very happy. (Joyce, 1914b, p. 14, ln. 80-89, emphasis mine)
Now because of *some confused notion*, the narrator looks for *green eyes* amongst the sailors. And who were sailors at the turn of the 20th century? Perhaps in the imagination of a young boy, sailors are the restless desirers, the ones seeking adventure abroad. Thus the narrator’s interest is piqued: he begins searching for something in the sailor’s eyes. Now we might remember here that the narrator was initially fascinated by the wild west too, but the whole point of this new school skipping journey is because “[t]he mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome to me as the routine of school” (p. 13, ln. 53-55). And so too, the narrator watches the sailor with green eyes, but “[w]hen we were tired of this sight we wandered slowly into Ringsend” (p. 16, ln. 151-152). The narrator is again bored with what initially glimmered interestingly.

Now in close proximity to these two instances of green (ln. 145, 147) there is one more thing I would like to highlight, that of the ellipsis: “green eyes for I had some confused notion....” (p. 16, ln. 145). We see seven ellipses in “An Encounter,” with the first four occurring while Father Butler chastises Leo Dillon (p. 13, ln. 34-47). The next ellipsis is found when Leo Dillon does not show up: “— Come along. I knew Fatty’d funk it. / —And his sixpence ...? I said” (p. 15, ln. 100-100). It could be noted that

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168 The passage reads:

One day when Father Butler was hearing the four pages of Roman History clumsy Leo Dillon was discovered with a copy of *The Halfpenny Marvel*.

—This page or this page? This page Now, Dillon, up! *Hardly had the day* .... Go on! What day? *Hardly had the day dawned* .... Have you studied it? What have you there in your pocket?

   Everyone’s heart palpitated as Leo Dillon handed up the paper and everyone assumed an innocent face. Father Butler turned over the pages, frowning.

   —What is this rubbish? he said. *The Apache Chief!* Is this what you read instead of studying your Roman History? Let me not find any more of this wretched stuff in this college. The man who wrote it, I suppose, was some wretched fellow who writes these things for a drink. I’m surprised at boys like you, educated, reading such stuff. I could understand it if you were ..... National School boys. Now, Dillon, I advise you strongly, get at your work or ..... This rebuke during the sober hours of school paled much of the glory of the wild west for me and the confused puffy face of Leo Dillon awakened one of my consciences. But when the restraining influence of the school was at a distance I began to hunger again for wild sensations, for the escape which those chronicles of disorder alone seemed to offer me. The mimic warfare of the evening… (Joyce, 1914b, p. 13, ln. 30-54, emphasis in original)
this ellipsis comes just after the image, “Mahoney used slang freely and spoke of Father Butler as Benson Burner” (ln. 97). We have then, another kind of repetition; Father Butler is the one who censors the boys, and: “This rebuke during the sober hours of school paled much of the glory of the wild west for me and the confused puffy face of Leo Dillon awakened one of my consciences” (p. 13, ln. 48-50). Now when we see again an ellipsis while the narrator is looking for green eyes—“I had some confused notion....” (p. 16, ln. 145)—is this also a kind of censorship? Is this the self-censorship of “one of my consciences” (ln. 50)?

I have adumbrated here a few competing forces. There is the boy’s desire, which interrupts the established narrative and routine. This is seen in a few ways—the boy desires something sensual and something “studious,” which is other than the “narrative” of the other boys and their imaginative play. The desire for the feminine also interrupts other points of the story (as discussed). The boy’s desire for adventure literally interrupts the routine of school, and the boy seems restless because too many things become wearisome; he desires to escape the rote routine.

I am beginning to make meaning again (by way of interpreting the interruption) despite having attempted to not do so—but meaning-making is hard to avoid. I meant simply to illustrate a few themes, as they occur not only in the story’s action but through the story’s language. That is to say, in “An Encounter” words like green seem to develop some kind of intratextual symbolism, inasmuch as they echo other words and themes in the story. But to call this symbolism is perhaps too much; I certainly do not mean the

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169 Is this undreamable? See “Thomas Ogden’s Dream.”
170 The boy lives in a world that feels suffocating (oppressive) on the one hand, and dead (rote) on the other. Thus he seeks that which feels alive, the sense of adventure. This is one possible solution to the dilemma of meaninglessness (i.e. “meaning” that just doesn’t feel right, is diminutive of one’s being). See my discussion in “Meaning, Hot & Alive.”
forced high school literary symbolism, like “green means adventure.” I mean that life inevitability involves patterns, and in Joyce we see these patterns come into being, and we also see them dissipate (like castles made of sand).

For example, reading “An Encounter” it does not strike one as a non-linear story, but consider: the story begins with Joe Dillon and the wild west, and only later does the narrator himself emerge. Then Joe is traded out for Leo, and the wild west is eventually dropped, for another kind of adventure, as sought by the narrator, but which Leo is dropped from. Mahoney then emerges, and well, the story ends very differently than it began. In such a short story, it would seem that detail counts, and yet when I recall the plot of “An Encounter,” I often only remember the second half, wherein the actual encounter takes place. This actually makes sense, because in a way, there is no linear plot here. Things do not necessarily build upon each other; it is not clear why we hear of Mrs Dillon, for example, nor do we know why Joe Dillon disappears from the text. But we think that the sailor is important, because he signifies some kind of green-eyed adventure. Likewise, in life we attempt to make meaning out of the repetitions that strike us as peculiar or important, when in reality there may be just patterns that emerge and pass away in a relatively random, non-purposeful and non-symbolic way.\(^\text{171}\)

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\(^\text{171}\) Imagine a resounding series of echoes, like the members of an orchestra tuning and warming up, each player individually running through the major motifs of the work—this eerie “music” can be quite intriguing, but what if the symphony never started? what if you left, thinking such tuning was the point? Imagine you heard the orchestra warm up for Beethoven’s 7th symphony, without ever playing it—the “meaning” of the piece would certainly be blurred, even lost. But when is Joyce tuning, and when does he begin the actual movements?
Tree Falls in the Forest

I have perhaps just written in favor of reading “An Encounter” by way of identifying themes rather than looking for meaning or following the plot. But to speak of thematic elements in a work (and in Joyce, it really does feel like elemental creationism)—well imagine for a moment that you ask a Hampshire College student what his Division III is about, and he says, “Literature and psychoanalysis.” Maybe you inquire a little deeper, and find out that he is writing about “Bion and Joyce.” Hearing these descriptions, you have actually learned very little about this Division III. In other words, merely stating the themes of a work (i.e. literature and psychoanalysis) is a less than thoughtful approach to communicating or understanding the meaning of a work. And in “An Encounter,” that is exactly the point, for this is a story that works precisely because it evokes that which is other than meaningful thought. In the absence of meaningful thought, there is this:

But I disliked the words in his mouth and I wondered why he shivered once or twice as if he feared something or felt a sudden chill…He gave me the impression that he was repeating something which he had learned by heart or that, magnetised by some words of his own speech, his mind was slowly circling round and round in the same orbit. At times he spoke as if he were simply alluding to

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172 This is a way of reading Joyce on his terms, I think, as much of his writing evokes such compelling patterns of non-symbolic meaningless (Joyce does not, however, evoke the void of nothing-ness).
173 In this essay I spoke meaning as symbolic, but there is another kind of meaning, the expressive meaningfulness of affect (which has, in essence, a sense of concreteness; see the first part of this essay). (And these two kinds of meaning—symbolic, and affective—may relate to my discussion of the secondary and primary processes, see “Disturbing the Mental Life, Part II.”) As discussed in “The Alimentary Model,” concreteness can be used to destroy meaning (i.e. through evacuation), but (shared) concreteness can also communicate meaning (i.e. the infant’s healthy use of projective identification). When there is no concrete, affective meaning, a boy might see this as a dead-end route (i.e. the over-abstraction of scientific language, in Bion’s usage); on the other hand, if he steps too far off the path of that which is symbolically thinkable, well… Perhaps this is the heart of “An Encounter.”
some fact that everybody knew, and at times he lowered his voice and spoke mysteriously as if he were telling us something secret which he did not wish others to overhear. He repeated his phrases over and over again, varying them and surrounding them with his monotonous voice. I continued to gaze towards the foot of the slope, listening to him.\footnote{I highlight here the man’s first appearance, before the speech quoted in the main text:  
There was nobody but ourselves in the field. When we had lain on the bank for some time without speaking I saw a man approaching from the far end of the field. I watched him lazily as I chewed one of those green stems on which girls tell fortunes. He came along by the bank slowly. He walked with one hand upon his hip and in the other hand he held a stick with which he tapped the turf lightly. He was shabbily dressed in a suit of greenish-black and wore what we used to call a jerry hat with a high crown. He seemed to be fairly old for his moustache was ashen-grey. (Joyce, 1914b, p. 17, ln. 169-178)  
Thus we see again two more instances of green, while the story is being situated in quite the liminal zone, an empty field (as pointed out by Mary Russo, personal communication, October 21, 2012). As the man’s speech continues (again, as quoted in the main text), we encounter once more the green colors, and of course, the uncanny ellipsis:  
I continued to gaze towards the foot of the slope, listening to him.  
After a long while his monologue paused. He stood up slowly, saying that he had to leave us for a minute or so, a few minutes, and, without changing the direction of my gaze, I saw him walking slowly away from us towards the near end of the field. We remained silent when he had gone. After a silence of a few minutes I heard Mahony exclaim:  
— I say! Look what he's doing!  
As I neither answered nor raised my eyes Mahony exclaimed again:  
— I say.... He's a queer old jisser!  
— In case he asks us for our names, I said let you be Murphy and I'll be Smith.  
We said nothing further to each other. I was still considering whether I would go away or not when the man came back and sat down beside us again. Hardly had he sat down when Mahony, catching sight of the cat which had escaped him, sprang up and pursued her across the field. The man and I watched the chase. The cat escaped once more and Mahony began to throw stones at the wall she had escaladed. Desisting from this, he began to wander about the far end of the field, aimlessly.  
After an interval the man spoke to me. He said that my friend was a very rough boy and asked did he get whipped often at school. I was going to reply indignantly that we were not National School boys to be whipped, as he called it; but I remained silent. He began to speak on the subject of chastising boys. His mind, as if magnetised again by his speech, seemed to circle slowly round and round its new centre. He said that when boys were that kind they ought to be whipped and well whipped. When a boy was rough and unruly there was nothing would do him any good but a good sound whipping. A slap on the hand or a box on the ear was no good: what he wanted was to get a nice warm whipping. I was surprised at this sentiment and involuntarily glanced up at his face. As I did so I met the gaze of a pair of bottle-green eyes peering at me from under a twitching forehead. I turned my eyes away again. (P. 19, ln. 237-273)  
Highlighting one more set of repetitions, it is interesting to note that as the second story in Dubliners, “An Encounter” carries echoes from that first story, “Sisters.” There we also have a young boy as the unnamed narrator (it is the same boy?, one wonders), and yet the story reads at times like a fly-on-the-wall account, although the main characters in the text are talking about the boy. Here again we encounter the relationship between a boy and a priest, which may be inappropriate, as alluded to through
“An Encounter” is a disturbing story because of what is not said. Now sometimes when a thing is unsaid, it is clear what it is that is being evaded. In other words, if I know that you are lying, it is because I have some sense of what is true and suspect that you are deviating from this. In such an instance, there is a formulated or at least knowable truth; the unsaid thing (that which the lie stands for) could be said, but just isn’t being articulated, at this particular moment. Even while remaining unsaid, that kind of thing is at least thinkable. But this is not what’s at stake in “An Encounter.” What is at stake in the ellipsis. Additionally, there are tiring stories, and a “paralytic” experience, which echoes the weariness and later frozenness of the narrator in “An Encounter.” Again, there is the question of what the narrator does not know and cannot understand (and according to the OED, the word “stirabout” refers not only to oatmeal, but also means “A bustle, a state of confusion”).

Now I do not mean to say that any of these themes have the same meaning in the second story (or even that they have definite meaning in the first story!), but the effectiveness of the final scene in “An Encounter” is in part because of the associational (and ambiguously disturbing) echoes that have previously been set up earlier in the text. To quote now from the beginning of “The Sisters,” as Old Cotter is discussing Father Flynn, the priest who has just died:

— No, I wouldn't say he was exactly .... but there was something queer ..... there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion. ....

He began to puff at his pipe, no doubt arranging his opinion in his mind. Tiresome old fool! When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, talking of faints and worms; but I soon grew tired of him and his endless stories about the distillery.

— I have my own theory about it, he said. I think it was one of those ... peculiar cases. ... But it's hard to say. ... (Joyce, 1914a, p. 3-4, ln. 19-28)

Old Cotter then continues, discussing Father Flynn’s relationship to the narrator (and note what the aunts, who seem to be responsible for raising the boy, are unaware of):

— I wouldn't like children of mine, he said, to have too much to say to a man like that.
— How do you mean, Mr. Cotter? asked my aunt.
— What I mean is, said old Cotter, it's bad for children. My idea is: let a young lad run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be. ... (P. 4, ln. 48-53)

For the sake of brevity, I might here more of the dialog, which is actually another interruption of Old Cotter’s narrative:

— But why do you think it's not good for children, Mr. Cotter? she asked.
— It's bad for children, said old Cotter, because their mind are so impressionable. When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect. ....

I crammed my mouth with stirabout for fear I might give utterance to my anger. Tiresome old red-nosed imbecile!

It was late when I fell asleep. Though I was angry with old Cotter for alluding to me as a child, I puzzled my head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences. In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured, and I understood that it desired to confess something. I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region; and there again I found it waiting for me. It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle. But then I remembered that it had died of paralysis and I felt that I too was smiling feebly as if to absolve the simoniacl of his sin. (p. 5, ln. 64-83)
“An Encounter” is created through repetition, but it is the kind of repetition that steps outside of think-able meaning. With symbolic communication, there is a kind of constructive process, i.e. I tell you a story and you picture it in your head. “An Encounter” stands contrary to this, by way of visceral effect. The heart of the story does not rely on symbolism, but rather the story actually transmits its feeling directly into the reader.\(^{175}\)

For when I first read this story, it was very difficult to determine whether or not there the man’s intentions were sexual. I felt unable to really think about this question. Likewise in a Hampshire course with Annie Rogers and Brown Kennedy, when the class read “An Encounter,” many of the students expressed their confusion reading this story—what is going on here? is this sexual? As the group conscience slowly assured ourselves that, yes, this old man is creepy, many people solidified their opinions, but with another kind of unthinkable word: “He’s a pedophile!” Now what exactly does it mean to be a pedophile? In a sense, this word does not mean anything. That is to say, the word pedophile does not work in the realm of symbolic, narrative-based communication. It is not a “thoughtful” conversation starter, but rather the word is so charged as to become a forceful command; it is an imperative speech act, one that incites outrage and disgust (and rightly so).\(^{176}\) In this sense, the word is used like an object rather than a symbol.\(^{177}\)

In other words, to merely call the old man in “An Encounter” a pedophile points to only

\(^{175}\) What exactly does this story mean? The expression stands outside of symbolism, and yet, is there something communicated here? The experience, between man and boy (and reader), is interpersonal—but why? Is something being rejected, or evacuated, into the boy? Or, is the man attempting to evoke something within the boy, by first placing it there (and if so, what might that ‘something’ be)? We do not know.

\(^{176}\) There were two other interesting perspectives in the class. One student was adamant that there was absolutely nothing sexual about the story or the old man. Another student, who did not grow up in the U.S., wondered genuinely, “Why are Americans so afraid of pedophilia?” I don’t think he meant to advocate in favor of pedophilia, but rather, he simply could not understand our reactionary responses.

\(^{177}\) See, for example, “Disturbing the Mental Life, Part II” and “The Alimentary Model.”
the peripherally disgusting aspect of this story, while still evading having to actually think about what exactly is so disturbing in this story.

The story’s effect stands outside of symbolic communication. It transmits a direct experience of what which is dangerous but nonetheless cannot be thought. It transmits a direct feeling of being stuck, without being able to react to (because a reaction, too, requires being able to think about one’s own experience). This is not only the experience of the unnamed narrator, but seemingly the old man is also unable to think:

He gave me the impression that he was repeating something which he had learned by heart or that, magnetised by some words of his own speech, his mind was slowly circling round and round in the same orbit…He repeated his phrases over and over again, varying them and surrounding them with his monotonous voice.

(p. 18, ln. 228-237)

Before the narrator is even able to register his own fear, he is stuck there, simply beholding this man whose monologue seems, on the one hand, routinely established (“monotone”), perhaps as boring as the hours of school (and Joe Dillon’s oppressive mimic warfare). On the other hand, while Mahoney runs away immediately, the narrator is actually magnetised by this man; the boy is pulled into the orbit of his (deadening) obsession, this obsession that works against thoughtful meaning (and yet, like meaning, this force is built upon through repetition—that is the work of Joyce). Our narrator, who emerges at the end of the story as Murphy, leaves home after growing tired of oppressive routines; as if enacting another siege, he battles against the inherited meaninglessness of home. But when he truly steps out into the liminal field where thoughtful meaning has been abandoned, well…
Perhaps the narrator learns and matures through this story, now understanding that the routine oppressiveness of home is actually defensive, guarding against the alternative. But what if this is not a coming-of-age story in that sense? is Murphy now a character in exile, unwilling to be suffocated at home, and yet rightfully afraid of the unrestricted alternative? And what of the boy’s imagination, his ferocious desire—how can he pursue that which feels alive? Say he continues to traverse beyond the sheltered bounds of familiarity in pursuit of that compelling adventure—what will he find out there on the other side
References


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Experiences, Dreamt

Some of what follows is strange, and disturbing. It should be said that these pages are born out of loneliness, the loneliness that is as ubiquitous as mosquitoes on a river in late August, but which feels like scalding hot water every time they bite. And yet, if there is romance in such sentiment, it is because I have chosen, often, this isolated world over yours. However, as it turns out, Dante was right: it is the frozen parts of hell that burn the worst, and such frozenness is what drives me to swim Lethe upstream now. From what you call the other side, I send now these messages.

178 In the work that follows, I make use of endnotes as a resource for readers unfamiliar with clinical psychoanalysis.
There are the normal ones
that masquerade as men
and there are those
that don’t even pretend. These monsters
don’t want for dark; they bump in the day.
Meeting Dr. Nelson
Here you’ve got this theory that literally all little boys want to kill dad and bang mom. Now this idea, in and of itself, always sounded preposterous, but it meant something else important, that somewhere out there were these people not only making space for the darkest parts of humanity, but actually calling that savage darkness developmentally natural. This made my frightful tremors seem normal, suggesting that maybe I didn’t have to keep so much hidden—maybe there was at least one psychoanalytic somebody I could talk to about the monsters. And to great effect, the first analyst I worked with provided me the space to be nuts in a totally normal way—and yet I was always embarrassedly whispering anyway, a rushing, hushed hoarseness: Are you listening? that faintly ringing ear, the high pitch only dogs can hear—do you hear it?

Whereas Dr. Nelson let me skirt around the noises, a later analyst, Dr. Reynolds, would pin me down; he and I were hunting fatherly graveyard ghosts, half-buried underneath the crawling maggot-swarm of decomposing murmurs

screams wrapped in cellophane.
It turns out that even a six-week-old puppy can swim.

But a smart dog goes right to the sandbank each time, his gentle paws on the silt.

Palm-sized I shot put him downstream again gone, hidden beneath gushing foam.

Play motherfucker.
I step to the water—

at 5,400 feet

the snowmelt is cold

even in July.

He emerges

a black wet fur baseball
dog-paddling.

Should I hold him under?
I am anxiously concerned now, a father’s basic training gone shell shock wrong. Wrapping him in my shirt and walking to the creek path, these snapshot Polaroids—undeveloped pictures reeling out. In the creek was only flashes of light, but now…next to a wooden bridge, bikers and joggers traffic by. *Have you ever seen soul depart the body?*
Telling Dr. Nelson this story—a lite version, eclipsed by the headlights of embarrassment—he simply remarked *You seem angry*. I free-associated toward a different subject, in later sessions remarking only rarely and briefly about my dog. A man of indiscernible age, he had big goofy ears; I suggested that this wife had died of cancer, that’s why he now worked twelve hours a day. Dr. Nelson interpreted very little of what I said. For instance, he knew that I would pee before and after every session, but I never pursued this awkward fact so neither did he. I always thought it an indicative act, referring to some kind of an unconscious, but knowledge was not worth the shame of bringing it up, since that meant being left to hang, in presence of his silence.
Lying on the couch I pictured his big
goofy winking grin.

Was he embarrassed too? *Maybe*,

I quickly mentioned. But

considering how I

arrived to those sessions, and

three years later what I left

without, maybe it was a working

silence after all.
I probably first walked into Dr. Nelson’s office without bending my knees, meaning to say I stumble-shuffled, limping without a clear notion of which leg hurt (neither—the tension was a knot in my shoulder, an omen from that unsayable source). Having to sweatily walk four miles to his office, each time I would self-consciously rinse out my armpits in the building’s third floor bathroom, scrubbing at the smell with wet paper towels. But despite my reddening cheeks when walking through the city—seeing in people’s glares the reflection of some less-than-human obstruction, me—I was largely unaware of the subtleties constituting that world of physical communication: Never wearing a hood even outdoors, upon entering a building normal people take off their hats and jackets. They rarely fall asleep in public places, except maybe on an airplane. When asked in coffee shops, What would you like?, normal people never stare blankly at the menu, forgetting why they came.
In a way, nothing changes through psychoanalysis: I always knew when my city skin would flush with embarrassment; I knew that I was always on the nod; I was spacey but whereas most people assumed it was because of drugs I just knew it was. This blind-eyed seeing is I think what William Stafford (1999) calls “cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.” What I’ve learned from psychoanalysis is that we rarely recognize ourselves clearly. And when the apparent can seem invisible, you must hunt the obvious with the use of subtle clues. I mean here to say there is an unconscious involved, perhaps. With psychoanalysis as a guide, I learned to be skeptical, to await new realizations rather than settle on any knowledge as established (and while initially a personal kind of knowledge, eventually this perspective extends onto others). There is that which escapes us, and that which we actively and unknowingly avoid; this is much of life, maybe. Walking in to Dr. Nelson’s office, I did not really recognize this downtrodden swagger as mine, mine in particular. I thought this grief-stricken weight was normal, a product of being alive, just something others hid better. Dr. Nelson never questioned this; not saying was the only problem, and whatever the story, simply stating was the cure. Fearlessly he let me speak uninterrupted, never expressing concern.
There was a lot nobody ever said anything about. Nobody ever wondered why Mick failed to register. One day, five of us chilling up in the bushes, only my boy Dusty and I saw the car rolling up across the creek. The same undercovers that had busted me and him in December, and behind them, a squad car—probably Davies, since the park was still her beat then. Now right as they come in on the northern part of the bushes, Dusty and I slipped out the south side. We were just headed up the park, anyway, going to the feed (where the church serves bread and soup). Walked off laughing like we were fucking bawling, dosed sweet tarts in his pockets, and in mine, the vile (plus eighteen hits of ecstasy—big pockets; I always wore cargo shorts).

Well, that day Popoff got cited for an open container and Mick went to jail again for failure to register. Davies didn’t fuck with Cara, just called her mom (You know, you’re daughter, she gave friendly yet inevitable forewarning, should really hang out with different people). Davies was everybody’s only favorite officer because rather than cite Cara for another pipe, she did farcical shit like that. But in this world, good parenting just means muted forbearance, because raising this kid and another—plus always leaving the door open for strays—what could Cara’s mom say? If you step on a nail you can sure as shit pull it out, but tomorrow everyone’s gonna keep walking, and, well, until he got released again nobody talked about Mick except the basic fact: “Failure to register.”
Anyway, I didn’t know Mick well because he mostly hung in his apartment, but the story I always heard was about him being schizophrenic: “He says the air tastes good. Licks it.” So Mick was a funny anecdote kind of crazy, not like the old grey corner dude, all day mouth drumming *bubbita bubbita*. That kind of crazy was more suspect to ridicule, and discussion—I always thought the dudes talking to themselves were undercovers. In the park, I made sure everybody knew about them and sometimes—when my pockets were empty—I’d make a point of mock-following the fuckers, like the month Cara and her brother Baruch had two plainclothes shadowing them daily, until finally Cara called APD and reported a couple of stalkers.
Dr. Nelson never paused to ask,

*Who are Popoff and Cara?*

When referencing certain important people
I would include alongside their name
an official title,

like “Dusty, the kid who stole two grand from me”
or later, “Lindsay, my girlfriend.”

Some stories are marked most
by his absence
Appetite for Destruction
Lindsay was understandably skeptical of Buck at first, him being older and looking like he looked. After rapping with the dude a few nights, however, Lindsay was taken by his good character—he used to beat up tweakers to rescue- steal their malnourished dogs, Lindsay said, and like any good papa Buck could also sit around and talk long about the litters he’d raised. But there was a narrative gap because all his dogs were dead save for the recently stolen and now pregnant Tinkerbell.

Buck’s girlfriend, Jo, was an old friend, so whenever Buck was in town for court, Lindsay always let them stay on the pull out couch. Sometimes they’d stink up the whole living room, but the house was always a bit grimy anyway. Rented from some realty company that specialized in the exploitation of willing college students, the house was five people over the town’s occupant-capacity limit, and well, it’s hard to keep a place clean when there’s mold in the ceiling and rain buckets on the floor, not to mention all the random brokedown metal shit surrounding the tin storage shack out back. It wasn’t a rundown house though, just looked like a spot where college kids party and smoke weed.

Like Lindsay, the kids living there were of a different ilk. Sure, they’d do coke on the weekends, but they were not animals—in ten years they’d be engineers and journalists, shit like that, meanwhile Jo had dropped out of college and Buck, well, he already was ten years older. So while Lindsay was still letting them crash on the couch, the other housemates were running out of hospitality. Tired of the way he smelt and still pissed about the time everybody woke up one 9AM, all of Buck’s ragged friends drinking beer in the backyard lawn chairs, this mistrust eventually spread onto Jo too. The first question about her, implicit perhaps from the beginning, was something like, “Why
would someone drop out of school just to be homeless?” I guess most people don’t see
the glory in spanging up enough for a few 40s en route to where-the-fuck-ever—people
will always look down on freedom, that’s why we been picketing normalcy since the first
settling of suburbia, circa the 1950s. But the part Kerouac never wrote about is what
really hung up the housemates—thinking about Jo’s single mom wiring bail money, yet
again and from an already overtaxed paycheck; when you start thinking you might be that
mom too but she aint even your daughter and it sure as fuck aint your son, well most
people then get stingy.
“What do you see in these people?” Dr. Reynolds would ask.

It was the dog that did it. These four month-old puppies in a duffel bag, their dad supposedly purebred pitt and mom a brindle boxer, the pups looked like black labs with lockjaw. Buck and Jo were back in Boulder for his pre-trial meeting. Jo was scruffy with chopped up hair and some out of place piercings, while he was big and dirty, made of that grit punk rock teenagers lack. Whereas those kids always look a little contrived buying their patches at Hot Topic, Buck was the thing come alive—a mom’s nightmare-special of who their kid might become. In school Buck probably stuck out the way rednecks do in the wrong place, with a crude fierceness and maybe not even wearing a backpack to class, but right out of mom’s belly he was probably enlisted in dad’s *don’t be a stupid bitch* boot camp, so you can understand if his eyebrows looked a little mean even in second grade. And well, all street kids call each other *family* but thirty years later—and despite him often living with Jo in her mom’s apartment—it was hard to imagine Buck having anything called home, and since me neither, we fit together that way.

Despite his name, physically Buck seemed somewhat like a bull, hoofing and snorting before a charge, but mostly he reminded me of a pig. And whereas Miss Piggy was said to be a truck driver who thought he was a woman, Buck was more like this cartoon character from Captain Planet named Hoggish Greedly, known for schemishly polluting with that grating squeal of humor. Buck talked abrasively, heavy with a lingering shrillness—“chuckle” would be too gentle of a word for his coarse laugh—like
when somebody oinks and your ears hurt hearing that sand paper scratch in their throat.

Buck was big boned and you could say tall but mostly I just thought of how one day he’d get the wrong kind of drunk and I’d be the one to get pushing with him (nobody else in the house was gonna do it). Maybe I’d swing a chair because then he’d be Goliath and me some kind of beanstalk Jack, just hoping the girls would call the cops before that knife got drawn off of his belt.

All that to say I recognized something familiar in Buck, something Lindsay wasn’t able to see in him, or in me. In many ways I felt more comfortable around him than with any of the other housemates. (As I would later tell Dr. Reynolds being around Buck also provided a dangerously important feeling of aliveness, like plummeting down winding mountain roads, no brakes.)

Dr. Reynolds remarked that I come from uncivilized territory but it’s not a matter of geography.
Me and Buck shared there a certain lexicon of experience, and in a house full of foreigners sniffing their noses at you, common tongue means a lot. One night up in Oregon at the boulder cliffs—the Acid Castles, as they were called—camping a fire with Cara and Baruch, we got to discussing it.

“We heard about it on the Discovery Channel. A whole episode about this brain disease that makes people have accents. All of sudden you start talking like you’re from somewhere else.”

“I’m from South Dakota and Baruch’s from Nebraska,” Cara added.

They’d hitchhiked all over the West Coast and even driven it once (in a stolen car), but none of us had ever been to the Midwest, so who knows about those localities per se. But the phenomena described is real—calling little Joel, we’d often say the same words, same inflexion, in unison: *Lovin’ you kid*—and while I looked up to Joel this was more than assimilating into a peer group, or even a culture. As if in our RNA (a brain disease), these shapes I never really recognized until seeing a block of the jigsaw assembled—a whole group of kids already looking, talking, and acting like me. Only then did I look to my edges and realize them as what they were, the hooks and tangles making me too a fitting puzzle piece. The same way politicians, preachers, and assholes flock together, it’s magnetism.
Dr. Reynolds would later comment that my language often reflected a particular kind of violence, and was based in bodily being: fucking, shit, piss, asshole. He saw this mode of expression as qualitatively different from thought.
Dr. Nelson would let me talk however, logical or not, kind or mean. His comments were just road bumps for which I would perfunctorily slow down before continuing along my same train of thought—I rarely digested his words, and I would sometimes comment on this fact even. It wasn’t much of a human relationship, but even a silent someone listening mattered. (Outside of the sessions I was a fly-on-the-wall too, a captive audience for men like Buck.) As for the effects of this method, I got healthier and sicker during our work together.
“Look at that shit,” Buck smirks at three double-sided pages. On the living room coffee table, an indictment followed by his rap sheet, with a dozen assorted misdemeanors: public intoxication; disorderly conduct; possession; nothing special for a street kid. But I was curious about the armed robbery.

“That was some funny shit man,” his words having a certain obtuseness, as if they were physical objects thrown roughly out of his mouth. The volume of his voice rises and falters as if tuning a radio dial, but with a particular rhythm there—his words like boulders tumbling to the cadence of rifle rounds.

“Back in Chicago,” he continued, and you knew already that this was the Chicago of Al Capone come fifty years, “when my little brother was still green, not knowing much, well, these fucking dudes used to rip him off”—his voice running an almost falsetto slide, to mark the paled illusoriness—“He’d go to their house and everything would be all cool and friendly—they’d, you know, let him hit the bong and shit”—his voice now highlighted by a crackling-boom—“But he’d bring home these fucking sacks that never looked quite right.”

I eyed his rap sheet partially, already pregnant with another question.

“So one day, my brother had just picked up a bag, and while one of my kids is over with a scale, we threw it on there. Sure as shit it was short, and well,”—something literal and definite approaching here—“like my mom always used to say, ‘I gave birth to
you. If family don’t beat you, sure as shit nobody else gonna.’’ He said that with finality. It could seem an obscure aphorism—I was a little puzzled—but the tone of pronouncement was free of crypticism, meanwhile heralding the story’s central point.

“So what it do,” his words slurring louder there, “we rolled up the next day with a couple of shotguns and cleared out the house.” The story becomes now something casual, the events unfolding predictably, but with humor. “One of the dudes was so scared he fucking pissed himself, and afterwards”—Buck scowls his way into a howling chuckle—“the motherfuckers called the cops. Drug dealers calling the cops, fucking idiots.”

He paused, and although it felt a little rubbery—prompted firstly by Buck’s glance—my small laughter punctuated his. “No shit they dropped the charges.”

At this point, my mouth has that jaw-cracking amphetamine-suck feel. I am assigned a scripted part here, to ask short questions and listen. Speaking to Dr. Nelson, I feel like a performer, telling this hopped up story but really at its whims, this train barreling down the track—Still holding the rap sheet, I tap the pages, they flicker a light ripple. “What about this identity theft?”

“My boy turned me on to it,” he starts after another unconcerned pig laugh. “We used to stick gum onto a fishing rod and pull letters out of those big blue mailboxes”—I’m not a visual person, but here the picture of a cartoon Porky the Pig scam is quite clear—“you know, looking for checks to the bank and that kind of shit.” I’m supposed to laugh here. I do find it funny, and yet, that contrived dry spit cottonmouth. “Crazy motherfucker, he’d do it right there on a street corner in the middle of the day, and well, one day a cop turns the corner just as I’m reaching in…”
War stories, they’re not a thoughtful thing. Like in the *Odyssey*, you don’t sit wondering how anyone was feeling when this shit happened. There isn’t time for that on a rollercoaster; like a good dirty joke this isn’t about emotional affect. It’s about a particular effect, the kind of thing that makes a room riot to Stravinsky—*buy the ticket, take the ride*:

“Me and this bitch,” to the charges at hand, the reason Buck’s in town now for court, “were down by the creek drinking whiskey one night,” oh shit, this story again, “and she just loses it.” Says loses with a particular hackling presence. “Tries to hit me in the fucking face, but I’m not gonna fight a chick.” (Some would get another mama to roll her instead.)

“I just got up and left,” Buck continues, “guess she stayed and passed out that night—Well the next week the fucking cops”—he talks of cops with a hushing urgency, neither incredulous nor nonchalant, but perhaps like the way a paranoia proclaims certain glaringly obvious conspiracies—“the fucking cops are all saying me and Crusty raped her.”
I read the report. *On 3-23-2010 at 0930 hrs, White, S., reported that she had been physically and sexually assaulted during the week prior, on March 16, 2010, by WILEY, W.B. and HENRIKSON, J.R. The incident occurred near Boulder Central Park, along the bike path, between 2000 and 2300 hrs. After knocking her over, they dragged her into the bushes and*
Buck picked up one of the puppies, Freight Train (a dog who hopped a train later that week, and woulda grown up *real big*, if not for dying shortly). Buck threw the thing up in the air a few times and catching it, the pig put his whole mouth round the pup’s snout, like a horse flapping its lips, blowing hot air directly into the dog. Playful Buck treating the animals rough, that I role modeled—later with ours, I’d blow like that and he’d lick the inside of my mouth, but I’d stop when his red rocket lip stick started coming out. Lindsay was envious, saying the dog loved me more, which didn’t make sense mostly, but it was true—him chasing me around the hallway, hopping spring-heel-happy whenever I’d been gone without him and now coming home.
Lindsay supposedly knew about raising dogs. She was seized by the animal’s innocence—Freight Train was twice our pup’s size, and while the rest of the litter bulldozed around he just lay there the runt, never getting enough milk. Open, those things were crystal balls of sadness—dangerously tender—but it disturbed me the way he kept those eyes closed, sleeping as if almost dead.

“He’s gonna have a hard life.” It was a prediction but also a predilection, or maybe a guarantee.

“Don’t say that shit,” Lindsay whined, scowling high on the last word.

“I’m just saying what’s true,” I said and she cradled the dog still. “What you wanna name him?”

“I was thinking Pigpen,” she beamed. But who the fuck names a dog Pigpen? That’s even worse than Tinkerbell or Freight Train. Lindsay, she liked the raunchy 60s Grateful Dead—“I’m a King Bee”; “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl”; “I’m a Hog for You Baby”—when their bluesy biker frontman was that same Pigpen, a dirty motherfucker who died at 27, with cirrhosis and internal hemorrhaging from 15 years of dedicated drinking. I always hated Pig’s crude and heavy words, their bloated bluntness somehow jagged with that fucked up sexuality.
A few weeks prior we’d wrecked my car in Mendocino, and as I years later told Dr. Reynolds, it was an event that symbolized the whole arch of my experiences on the road. I countered Pigpen’s name with another Grateful Dead reference.

“What about Jack Straw—we used to play for silver, now we play for life.”

The most dangerous feeling in the world is also the greatest.
That revelatory moment
losing control
of the wheel,
just before the crash

_in the hands of fate_

when you resign
to what will be
all the weight of living

lifts

and there you are

_naked_
dependent

on grace alone.

Dr. Reynolds didn’t understand.

“When your ideal state
is one of total irresponsibility,
relying entirely on others?”
I spent my life
seeking the sanctity
of that moment,
tracking tornados
for a hit
of divine wind

but put that way,
“irresponsible reliance”
didn’t sound
so glamorous.
I guess Dr. Reynolds was not one to believe the dreams of a gambler.
The Joker
Thoughts they don’t feel mine
internally, a monitoring audience

*murmurs*

Bodily voices (more intuitive than verbal)

Commands—a sunlight face, faltering stumble walk confusion
this hanging body mirage (mine)

*what the fuck do you want from me?*

a god that doesn’t respond.
The reasons we never kept a steady babysitter: Herb wouldn’t stop making fun of me (imagine that, a fucking kid named Herbert making fun of my name), and like a young King Arthur, those “smiling insides” reaching to the wooden block,

pulling out a knife, the big one.
My older brother left home then. Maybe that’s what inspired his later middle school track meets; running likely saved his life that day, or at least kept the skin on his ass. I was then six years old, left in the yard—not in the sense of “alone with my thoughts,” but without anyone ever mentioning it again, that kind of alone.
After Colin was arrested, I would lie up at night with Isaac and Abraham whispering about that knife in the kitchen (the big one). *I was excited,* Abraham admitted. (my sleeping parent’s bedroom, don’t let the door creak) *Magnetized,* nervous, giggling

a flashing eyelid vision

*When faith calls, how far will you follow?*
It was in the news: *Sixteen-year-old, accused of brutally murdering a woman by striking her 39 times in the head with a piece of crown molding, and then carving some kind of gothic cross into her back.* “That’s how you know the devil is real,” my brother said, “because no one does shit like that without being possessed.”

At his sentencing the judge said to Colin, “You had no affect the entire trial, except when viewing the photos of her corpse. Your jaw dropped then. You were fascinated by your handiwork.”
Let me try to explain that adventure. I once thought everyone felt this, it was just me who *knew* it (as if I was conscious of what you missed). I was the Joker, those “smiling insides” operating on a comical logic only, but a logic that is all around us. It’s in the glory of war: *fucking gooks everywhere and there I am BAM BAM BAM*. It’s here in the front-page photo of James Holmes, the Batman villain-shooter from Aurora, his smirking orange hair and bugged-eyed grin. It’s even in our words, *batty, nuts, mad*. All of it means someone *laughing all the way*. We’re fascinated by this. It’s disavowed, but look. *Just before the nausea*. Do you see it?
An embarrassed, cynical, what-can-we-do-but-chuckle.

“You’re not taking yourself seriously,” Dr. Reynolds would say. His stark voice not flat, but without niceties. A broken record, saying again that I needed to put things in their proper place, my past overwhelming the present.

History,
sown with
frozen grief,
reaps sorrow
every harvest.
Sure, many tides before that trial
there were nights when Colin cried—

maybe the problem is this,
thoughtfulness comes only
drop by drop

and salvation does not flood
the way suicide does
rushing down the canyon

(It takes years to build a city
one night to burst the dam)

Many a refuge
washed away.
I was anxious, calling Dr. Reynolds the first time. Who the fuck is this dude, listed online as a psychoanalyst—what does that guarantee? Well, from Google I learned that he had specialized in treating schizophrenia; the selling point was discovering that one of his books was graciously reviewed by James Grotstein.

Hoping for a voicemail, he surprised me by answering the phone. His frank tone—a voice that sounded distorted, as if melting in some grotesque way, like a Marilyn Manson sound clip on that creepy *Smells like Children* album. Dr. Reynolds wanted to know why I was calling, seemed to question whether I actually wanted psychoanalytic treatment, like I needed to make a case for myself.
That night I dreamt about the bridgeway whereon Luke Skywalker fights his father, Darth Vader. Walking across, the dream became markedly hallucinatory, like marshmallows strangely melting in a microwave. I collapsed there on the walkway.

I dreamt I was schizophrenic too. Now would Dr. Reynolds treat me?
The next day, our first session, this man waddle-struggled down the stairs, to a waiting room sandwiched between his house and the garage. His butt protruded in a way that must be painful—this strained old man, seventy-nine, losing his eyesight and maybe some memory too. He would laugh at himself sometimes but it seemed a frustrated embarrassment, saying into his datebook, “I can’t read what I wrote here.”

Anyway, that first day, me the defendant whose plea has already been decided, but hoping to dissuade his rejection, I gave the most shocking details. He said I was dissociated, telling such stories without any emotion. I called him an asshole; he accepted me as a patient.
It’s strange, because later it was Dr. Reynolds trying to convince me how much I needed therapy, to put things in their place. “People are not born hopelessly despairing,” he would say. He believed that my parents were culpable in a way I could not admit, saying things like, “You’re father knew you were thinking about killing him, and wasn’t concerned by this?”

“I knew you were afraid of harming us back then,” dad said, years after the fact. “But I know that a lot of people think about things without ever doing them.” I guess the answer to Dr. Reynolds’s question is yes.
Dad you knew this and never said anything? You couldn’t believe it would happen, but did you ever think how lonely that fifteen-year-old must be?

Little boy in the woods

wandering
didn’t believe that dinner bell ring
Speaking poetically in analysis never quite worked. The low self esteem of a poet can only survive if the audience claps, whereas Dr. Reynolds would just interrupt me with his aphoristic

*I don’t think I understand.*

but analysis only takes up a few hours of your week; to pass the time you got to do something else. So sometimes I write what otherwise can’t be said (and incidentally if you asked me for a diagnosis, maybe it would be this, an interlude)
Under the auspices of Witness Protection
my heart left the neighborhood

    many driveway-newspapers ago

Forgetting family and the furniture,
these unwatered plants

    joy, lust,     even

    grief and wonder

outdated mail

still shows up.
Having called of the search party
sometimes I still wander the cul-de-sac
   looking in storm drains
occasionally sprinting for a shadow,

Unknown love

and a hate I can’t recall,

these memories, residual and nagging.
Not really looking but
roaming

These roads at night

I don’t mind main st. empty (nor do I mind the cold
a radio playing above the restaurant window it’s the wind I can’t stand)
traffic lights running for no one other than
the gods of orderliness
Some delivery truck downshifts to a stop
and we wise crack

    away slip our sorrows

    in this stranger street pleasantry exchange

like how shining light obscures darkness

    staving off


      Your smile is infectious, he says

(yes, a disease

    like a cartoon anvil

    falling continuously)
as if make-believe,
masquerading as someone else—
an old aunt that Christmas,
drinking eggnog, dressed up
in sexy stockings

I imagine her laughter,
I remember her suicide
and in an unopened mailbox

this blank foreclosure notice,

me and my jolly aunt, laughing all the way.
The Watcher
In a bedroom that doubled as a hallway, I was lucky to have my own bathroom, but with a great big window easily large enough to crawl through, no blinds. An eight-foot fence enclosed our yard, but on the other side rose up a bushy incline, and surely someone out there was watching me, with a secret camera even.

Nervously taking off his pants and shirt and ritualistically wrapping a towel around the waist—only from behind the fogged glass could he throw the boxers over (onto the tile floor). The towel would then be slung halfway over the glass, hanging on both sides.

Later in elementary school, he liked to think that his crushes from school were the ones watching the camera footage and so, it became a sexy thing then. Like an internet webcam ad showing just the preview, he would saddle the towel and gyrate for the viewer—a coy something to-be-continued, his boxers remaining on until behind the fogged glass, again safe from the window—like a girl getting pimped out the first time, trying to mark her timidity as something to desired, to delay that forceful moment’s reach beyond willing complacency.
But when the watcher left, it was a sad coming of age, to realize that my diaries, even the mad pages of Cecil Taylor-like scribble, might never be published by Mark Reid archivists. A seventeen-year-old kid going to study writing in college, I had been a compulsive writer until those desires, which were never mine anyway, faded.

“It’s like I was spying on myself,” I could say, “never really engaged with experiences, but working to catalog them instead. When it felt imperative, I persisted through blind obedience, as if some outside sourcebook dictated that I must write. In fact, there were certain punishments for refusing. But freed now from those commandments, what is there to motivate me?”

“If you really feel like I’m stealing something from you,” Dr. Reynolds would repeat, “you need to seriously consider why you keep coming here.” It was a nasty trick. Was he trying to fire me? Or was it rhetoric, to trick me into sort of admission, Yes, I like coming here and it’s helpful...

But I mean, this loss—I’m not talking here about simple writer’s block. To be Joan of Arc one day and John Doe the next. Rather than burn me at the stake these psychoanalysts stole my visions and left me for dead, the kind of deadness that lulls you to sleep, no longer physically tired—lulled in that sense of when you are always strip-searched going in and out of the cell, what can you do except lay there inert instead, hoping that no more meaning gets confiscated.

It was so satisfying to crusade for God, the rewards great. But toward the end of that battle, it’s me or maybe Dr. Reynolds who says, you were imprisoned, just bread and water there, bloating your belly. An insatiable hunger despite the meal, this pervasive secret invisibly staining your skin, liberty becoming death.
Unfortunately I was never given a psychoanalytic receipt, and therefore can’t return the cure. There is no manager to whom I can explain, *Well, see, I never thought that the obsessional part of me was actually a problem, and therefore this loss is not actually a cure, but rather a robbery.*

*I don’t understand.*

Saying it, he means two things. One is an invitation to explain myself, to be direct rather than rely on his fallibly-supposed vicariousness (the thoughtful friend asks for clarification where the religious cult offers effortless ease). But what of your intuition? Dr. Reynolds seemed to have none, except that even outside of our sessions I could never tell from whence my good ideas came—did he plant them in my head?

On the other hand I expected Dr. Nelson to think for me, maybe—giving him my scraps of thought, expecting them to come back assembled and meaningful—that’s what Dr. Reynolds meant to avoid. Whereas Dr. Nelson was always silent, Dr. Reynolds feigned misunderstanding, a dirty trick to make me re-examine my logic.
Dr. Reynolds and I rarely ever agreed. Even if I could objectively reflect that his statements were true, they sounded like criticisms. Should I apologize?

_Asshole._

Sometimes we could agree, however, on our differences. “You believe that thinking creates meaning,” I once said, “but I believe that thinking destroys meaning.” On the other hand, after I similarly remarked to Dr. Nelson that there are things best not talked about, he retorted otherwise: “I am in a profession that believes in talking.”
But when you open the books
the trumpets of God go limp

so mostly I keep silent because

_Fuck your deaf ears_

(but psychoanalysis? Maybe
the art of telling
without negating that non-negotiable meaning

Maybe.)
What Remains
I don’t know if you ever felt the way a man sometimes does when his puppy is sick, but maybe you didn’t want the vet to do it because you felt responsible, so, trying first to smother him under a pillow but instead of ending his life it was just a dull absence with not enough pressure, like the heat of coals with no fire, and with those hard few gasps for air, you pulled off the pillow and held his jaws shut while the other hand tried to close the two sides of his esophagus together, but again he’s gasping, and it took longer than you could bear so you clenched harder only to release. You couldn’t do it and as his breath recovered he still slept in the bed that night with you.

This is not an ending.

There remains much unsaid—

I would like to tell you, what hasn’t yet come through the silences of analysis
I left out

the way psychoanalysis confuses you, the way it tears apart a family that was already broken maybe, but broken in the harmoniousness of amnesia, you now think. When the past becomes something new now, but it’s difficult to convince others of that, and so your words can become boulders, thrown to assault your parents, to squash them with all they’ve forgotten, all they’ve willfully ignored. It’s hard to live with their puzzled look, their bewildered *what the hell are you talking about?*
This is not an ending.

After I carved an X between my eyebrows and across my belly, let those who have eyes see was a nervous prayer from the school counselor just before calling my parents, probably wondering what else they didn’t notice that morning before dropping me off at the bus stop. She had promised me confidentiality, said she wouldn’t call, but that night I dreamt about crucifying myself on the school’s monkey bars as payback—don’t you fucking lie to me.

This is a boulder.

This is the battering ram, or maybe the hot oil—I can’t tell who’s defending? who’s attacking?

I don’t know.

(I can discern, however, a castle)
This is not an ending.

I’ve left out

the guilty bystanding—

but I don’t know if you’ve ever seen biggest, meanest kid you know
go through a Baskin-Robbins store window,

and while he’s bleeding out in the car, going to get stitches
dad’s still screaming.

It’s not the shrill kind of screaming from someone bereaved like a screeching mountain lion, but guttural, the same way Ken’s asthma coughs sounded. This is the long-time kind of suffocation, the way that scene in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest lingers, McMurphy on Nurse Ratched and he just keeps on, time stopped as if death was one long event. Well I don’t know if you’ve ever seen a puppy slink away after being thrown against a wall—but sometimes it just stays still, sinking into its own skin as if it could disappear behind flaps of loose flesh, and it always looks pathetic.

I know what happens

out in the woods
I don’t know if you ever built an outside pen for a puppy, and then just out of sight you’d listen for whimpering, and because he was the sleepy runt and too sensitive, whenever he cried you beat him and if he escaped from his cage you’d thrash his neck about the yard. But the one time we ate together, he made a dinner no seven-year-old could eat. The rice, the nori, the carrot sliver, all swallowed, but swimming now in a mouthful of spit, the revolting mushroom. That fucking mushroom, three-quarter of the whole sushi rool. Wouldn’t excuse us from the table, even after dinner, still chewing. He did it on purpose, to watch us squirm. *It’s just like the Olympics* he said.

*Don’t be a bitch.*
An ending?

I wish I could tell you about a kid who went out into the woods, just like every other boy. I come from there, just before cell phones, when your only supervision lay between two payphones; one sometimes ringing at the Kwik Stop and the other at Stanley Middle School, also the last place I saw Tim. He was one of few rollerbladers—derogatorily called fruitbooters but never in reference to Tim, at least not from our vantage point—a great big dude with gentle eyes and a wide frame, an ogre made kindly through loneliness, this all being a few years before he hung from the ceiling of his bedroom.

I was at the payphone calling mom that night around sunset, and with a silent nod he trusted me and Kurt not to tell anyone—the bathrooms flooding, clogged sinks overflowing and toilets running continuously—this tenderhearted ballerina gracefully crossing each foot over the other, doing backwards figure eights down those otherwise empty school halls. Despite the respect he commandeered from me, I now suspect others gave him shit, everyday, for being fat. But his comforting eyes were a soft lullaby amidst the weight of that sad, drooping face, and I wonder now, well,

have you felt the way skin sometimes softens during death?

Is that true for suicide too?
I know what happens.

This is an indictment of that

and also forgiveness

but it’s hard to apologize
when people won’t concede
how awful it was

I’m sorry.
This is what you’ve forgotten, what I may never know—the pain a kid causes when he’s blind, he can never say what that looked like. But I wish I could tell you about that kid, who went out into the woods just like every other boy. I wish I could tell you why he kept walking, why even when that dinner bell rang, he didn’t believe it, didn’t think it was rang for him, not really.

I wish I could tell you about all the strange cults in those woods, and how when you get to them you recognize this wildness. You know it as what lurks back in town, it’s just that in the woods people don’t lie anymore

I’ve said that when you get there

sometimes surrender

looks a lot like victory

but it’s strange to me

how back in town

people keep trying to love.
A metaphor for the psychoanalytic perspective of knowing is that of the penumbra. Whereas an umbra can be equated with a total eclipse, a penumbra is the peripheral light seen during a partial eclipse. In Freud’s topographical model of consciousness, the unconscious would be the umbra; the preconscious, the penumbra. Freud, however, distinguishes between two different kinds of unconscious. There is (1) that which is merely out of consciousness (latent), like a name you cannot recall right now, but which you will later remember; and (2), that which is now barred from awareness, because of the process of repression.

But psychoanalysis comes under scrutiny when attempts are made to verify the “historical” validity of these newly uncovered (formerly repressed) memories—like when children claim sexual abuse much to their parent’s bewilderment and dismay, who do we believe? One theoretical solution to this problem is the understanding that such uncovered material is not necessarily that of memory, but comes from hitherto unconscious fantasy. In other words, the psychoanalytic cure is then derived from making conscious hitherto repressed memories and fantasies. These memories and fantasies are discovered by the traces they leave in the psyche, and the body. In this way, symptoms are understood as placeholders for that which has been repressed. In classical psychoanalysis the symptom is used a clue, to discover that which has been otherwise repressed. In this way, symptoms are the partial penumbra light, revealing that there is more to this eclipsed moon than meets the eye.

On the other hand, Freud at one point postulated a third kind of unconscious, which is neither latent nor repressed. How is this possible? Contradicting the implications of repressed material hiding in some strange and otherwise forgotten warehouse, Bion suggested that the unconscious is not a physical “object” nor a definable psychical place. Perhaps this third kind of unconscious stands for that which is unformulated. Returning to our metaphor, whereas we can discern figures existing in the penumbra, the umbra proper is characterized by its darkness. Thus we cannot know the umbra directly. We might deduce unconscious “content” through preconscious material plus imaginative constructions, but by the time something becomes conscious, it is by definition no longer that unconscious dark matter. As Symington (2012) writes about a patient:

At that moment he knew he had been lonely all his life but now he was aware of it. Loneliness was now a companion whose shape he could feel…When I start to feel something it means that it has changed its status. The loneliness was there before but in a different state. It is not in fact correct to call it loneliness until it is felt. (pp. 401-402)

Prior to feeling the “shape” of loneliness, one might be plagued by a “congealed” (p. 402) mass of experience, some overwhelming but unnamable dis-ease. Thus the ability to differentiate “loneliness” as such is “an act of creation” (p. 402) (as opposed to “unrepressing,” as if one could unveil loneliness by merely opening the right warehouse box). Conversely, this unformulated blind spot is the essence of someone shouting, “I’m not fucking yelling!”

Augustine Dupin, the hero of Poe’s then brand-new literary genre, the detective story—like the ironic meaning behind Sherlock’s famous line (“Elementary, my dear Watson”), Dupin is renowned for his
seemingly magical intuitive powers, which Dupin himself attributes to nothing more than thoughtful deduction. When the gruesome “Murders in the Rue Morgue” baffle police and the public alike—because no one can figure out what kind of a human could commit such atrocities—it is only Dupin who can discern the obvious: the murders were not committed by a monstrous human, but by a true beast—an orangutan. Likewise, in “The Purloined Letter,” Dupin is recruited to find a missing letter. The police have searched everywhere in the thief’s house, brick by brick. But the police fail to see something so obvious; Dupin discovers the letter hiding in plain sight, on the thief’s mantel.

Once experience is no longer unconscious, one has the retrospective thought, “It was right in front of me all along…if it was a snake it would’ve bit me!”

These are admittedly shadows figures here: (1) The transient nature of street-kids makes for a host of disappearing characters: we are traveling, overdosing, getting arrested, or on the run. Sometimes we get clean. (2) As a result, few of these people have an established intrapsychic presence. (3) This is a story with many loose ends; there are parts not remembered, parts made up, parts incommunicable. It is my contention that “real-life” conversation involves many obscure references and gaps in understanding—people rarely seem to say, Wait, will you explain that?, but rather nod and murmur confirmations of understanding impulsively. (4) The nature of the psychoanalytic dyad comes as a long-standing conversation developed between two particular people. It seems unlikely that a fly-on-the-wall observer would understand even most of the content from a specific session.

In attempting to explore the disconnect between what one feels and what one can say while also working to minimize the reader’s potential frustration and confusion, there must still be some room for showcasing reality, a mysterious place wherein much is unclear. That being said, if you don’t know who certain character are, perhaps they are only psychic placeholders, pointing to some other importance. Perhaps this story is chiefly about isolation from one’s self, and in that realm there are hardly other beings; that’s exactly the problem. (And perhaps the thing of psychoanalysis is that by the time one can communicate a story directly, it is no longer true in the present—being able to speak means no longer suffering in the silence from which one first sought psychoanalytic escape.)

Dispute about the power of words can be found in common speech. On one side of the camp, sticks and stones can break my bones so relax, it’s only a joke. However, don’t even say that means, there are some things unspeakable, and furthermore don’t even think that, as if even a single thought can have profound effect. Personally, psychoanalysis has deepened my appreciation for the words. As Freud (1916) wrote:

Nothing takes place in a psycho-analytic treatment but an interchange of words between the patient and the analyst…The uninstructed relatives of our patients, who are only impressed by visible and tangible things—preferably by actions of the sort that are to be witnessed at the cinema—never fail to express their doubts whether ‘anything can be done about the illness by
mere talking’. That, of course, is both a short-sighted and an inconsistent line of thought. These are the same people who are so certain that patients are ‘simply imagining’ their symptoms. Words were originally magic and to this day words have retained much of their ancient magical power. By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair, by words the teacher conveys his knowledge to his pupils, by words the orator carries his audience with him and determines their judgements and decisions. Words provoke affects and are in general the means of mutual influence among men. (p. 17)

A teacher once told me, “Crack open any word and you’ll hear tears.” Even innocent words like “popcorn”, were acquired through conquest, he said, while crueler words, like “gypped”, have been inoculated during twilight sleep, their pasts lost. They might appear as dead words, written on tombstones, but words are always alive, and whatever is alive but seeking refuge within the weight of deadness has already and necessarily been marred by unbearable pain.

I am reminded here of a passage from Bion (1962) wherein he describes a kind of “rational thought characterized by a peculiar lack of ‘resonance’” (p. 15):

What he says clearly and in articulated speech is one dimensional. It has no overtones or undertones of meaning. It makes the listener inclined to say “so what?” It has no capacity to evoke a train of thought. (pp. 15-16)

I’m trying to figure out how a young boy comes to kill his parents. In the papers you read about this kid, “a little off but otherwise ordinary.” We’re all so shocked, says the principal. He seemed like a nice kid, someone remarks. Quiet, kind of a loner, the school counselor adds. People used to pick on him a lot, call him freak, says a former friend, We drifted apart a few years ago. A thousand reporters looking for some headline and that’s all they can find? When you stop to think, it’s remarkable how little anyone knew about this kid, how unnoticed he lived. The TV specials say this Joe Schmo is just like every other little Johnny, except incidentally Joe turned out way different than Johnny. It was the devil says the preacher, videogames says the liberal, his lack of feeling for humanity, inborn maybe, a senseless killing (so says the atheist). He weighed all the options, or maybe just woke up on a whim, who knows. It is, however, a mystery (shocking) without plot (no real cause). It just magically—mysteriously—happened one day. He’s monster and nobody-special, all rolled into one.

Or perhaps, and this is my thought here, as a society we are not able to discern the difference between people who in great emotion turmoil, and those who are not (and as a result, we regularly elevate disturbed persons to statutes as political leaders, left and right—I mean this seriously). Rather than this “guess it goes to show, you never can tell” bullshit, one of my creative interests lies in revealing another option: that no infant is born without feeling, coldly calculating to be evil. Rather, I believe that severe destructiveness has deep-rooted and yet seemingly invisible causes, occurring intrapsychically but outside
of conscious thought/feeling. I do not negate the importance of personal responsibility, but I do hope for proactive prevention for those who would cause even more intense suffering; only through courting the “unconscious” might we be able to recognize and intervene in a meaningful way, because if you can’t understand people, they will be lonely—and lonely people are dangerous when angry. (I put “unconscious” in quotes because this is ultimately a limited term, existing specifically for psychoanalysis; I don’t think psychoanalysis corners the market, but it can offer some useful theoretical frameworks.)