

Playing and Reality: On Inner and Other Worlds

Katherine Kline

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By: Katherine Ann Kline

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_____	Chair
Dr. Cynthia Hammond	
_____	External Examiner
Dr. Stefania Consigliere	
_____	Arms-Length Examiner
Dr. Krista Lynes	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Bonnie Harnden	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Jeremy Stollow	
_____	Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Peter van Wyck	

Approved by

Dr. Mia Consalvo, Graduate Program Director

11/14/2025

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

ABSTRACT

Playing and Reality: On Inner and Other Worlds

Katherine Ann Kline, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2025

In this dissertation, I stage an encounter between psychoanalysis and ecological thought. Specifically, I read contemporary relational metapsychologies—such as object relations and Bionian field theory—alongside new materialisms, speculative realisms, and object-oriented ontologies: approaches invested in more-than-human beings, systems, and processes. I approach this project from theoretical orientations that are often at odds. As a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, I was trained to centre my attention on human interiority and intersubjectivity; as a communication studies scholar, I am invested in ecological ethics and the disruption of anthropocentric thought.

Reading these fields together-apart (following Barad), I call into question psychoanalytic concepts like the “holding environment” (Winnicott) and methodologies of “containment” (Bion), opening my inquiry to relational, world-making practices that resist the human exceptionalism embedded in the psychoanalytic container. The figure of the hag guides me here (Duerr). She sits on the border-hedge between wilderness and civilization, defying the divisions that seek to keep worlds apart.

The title of this dissertation draws on Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* (1971), which introduced the concept of transitional space—an “intermediate area” where reality and fantasy remain undecided. I take this idea outside the clinic, playing between psyche and materiality, epistemology and ontology, interiority and externality. My aim is to challenge psychoanalytic organizations of relationship and psychic life, and to re-entangle Winnicott’s space of play with phenomenologically rich, more-than-human worlds.

The dissertation opens with a mushroom trip, raising questions about the materials that mediate psychic life and giving form to radically different relational fields that emerge from fungal-psychic-somatic encounters. From there, I move into two major inquiries: spirit mediumship and dendrophilia. I explore how spiritualism was reckoned with at the advent of psychoanalysis, and how contemporary mediums engage entities that trouble enclosed models of mind. Dendrophilia—love of trees—allows me to examine how psychoanalysis has pathologized symbiosis with materiality, particularly through the construction of perversion and other deviant attachments.

Psychoanalysis, I argue, enacts a series of border operations between human psychodynamics and heterogeneous ecological entanglements. This project experiments at the edge of those borders to imagine an ecological disposition more attuned to the profoundly uncontained realities of a warming world.

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INTRODUCTION

*Children live within the terrain of childish psychic reality, where the fantastical and actual meet up in untaught ways.*¹

*But, is it possible to enter within a psychoanalytic relationship standing on a position of epistemic disobedience?*²

In this dissertation, I experiment with inhabiting relational fields in “untaught ways.” By this I mean I am experimenting with meaningful attachments beyond what I was taught in my psychoanalytic therapy training. The untaught meetings of bodies and minds, insides and outsides, subjects and objects, fantasy and reality, human and more-than-human worlds is where I situate this project. I track how these categories are mapped psychoanalytically, and how they might be differently arranged. I do this by mobilizing two sites of study: spiritual mediumship and dendrophilia.

These sites are junctures—or what Donna Haraway has called “attachment sites”³—where heterogenous participants gather and interrelate. They are provocative practices in many ways, at least to a certain modern, Eurocentric, psychoanalytic sensibility. One involves talking with the dead or channelling information from discarnate entities. In this practice, the psychesoma⁴

¹ Christopher Bollas, *The Mystery of Things* (Routledge, 1999), 126.

² Paul Preciado, “*Testo Junkie* Notes for a Psychoanalytic Forum,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 17:1 (2016): 24.

³ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁴ See D. W. Winnicott, “Mind and Its Relation to Psyche-soma,” in *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis* (Tavistock, 1958). I tend to use *psychesoma* and *psyche* interchangeably. *Psychesoma* indicates the intermodal interrelation of mental, physiological and environmental structures in psychic life. I want to emphasize these matrixial entanglements that are put together and set apart in various ways through psychoanalytic boundary work. As Patricia Clough notes, for Donald Winnicott the mind arises as a defensive reaction to the original psychesomatic situation of maternal relating: “Before mind, there is no border between biology and psychic imagination—they are of one body. In its appearance, mind comes along with a certain defensive bordering of the psyche and the soma in relationship to mind, a certain bordering of the psyche and the social, the inside and outside of the

becomes a medium for convergence with other worlds. The other, dendrophilia, refers to love for trees.⁵ From a diagnostic point of view, dendrophilia is a paraphilia, meaning “an abnormal fondness or tendency toward.” A tree is an atypical object for human fantasy and desire, and a perversion according to clinical frameworks.

Both of these sites invite me to question how “healthy” relationship is circumscribed and what kind of engagement counts as a transgression. They open broader questions about knowledge practices and ontologies. They also stretch and challenge the ethics of relational practice. Who and what are we meant to consort with, and how? Meeting our emotional and conceptual edges around relationality and stretching beyond them is, I argue, essential to any attempt to address ecological crisis.

I hope to demonstrate that these studies in eccentric relationality suggest a way out of anthropocentric, colonial reality maps. They demand that I confront my own psychotherapeutic training and the metaphysical assumptions I’ve internalized and re-enact in practice. They invite me to consider what Rosalba Icaza, in “Border Thinking and Vulnerability as a Knowing Otherwise,” calls *epistemic options*.⁶ I am interested in how these epistemic options are also generative of a multiplicity of reals. Psychoanalysis is unpracticed in these broad fields of collective attachment. By opening a field of epistemic options—with their ontological consequences—I argue for an excessive relational ethics, certainly exceeding the mandates of psychoanalytic subjectification.

subject” (Patricia Clough, “Notes on Psychoanalysis and Technology, the Psyche and the Social,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 20:2 (2019): 78–79). Generally speaking, the psychoanalytic psychic apparatus is understood to have its own “frontier,” in contact with, but irreducible to, the biological nervous system or surrounding environment. As Muriel Dimen writes, “the realities of anatomy need not limit those of the psyche” (Muriel Dimen, “The Immediate Is Not Unmediated,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 9:3 (2009): 352).

⁵ In *The Nichomachean Ethics*, “philia” is friendship or love, implying a feeling of familial or familiar bond. The object of philia is “another oneself” (Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethic*, trans. H. Rackham (Harvard UP, 1934)).

⁶ Rosalba Icaza, “Border Thinking and Vulnerability as a Knowing Otherwise,” in *Critical Epistemologies of Global Politics*, ed. Sebastien Weier and Marc Woons (e-international relations, 2017), www.e-ir.info/2017/06/09/border-thinking-and-vulnerability-as-a-knowing-otherwise/.

Bayo Akomolafe speaks of “radical accompaniment”⁷ that would cut through taxonomies of biological type and across the boundary that marks the living from the dead. Through this mode of accompaniment, I echo what Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen articulate as a “common desire to present alternatives to the fundamental ontological premise of what Bruno Latour . . . has called ‘the modern constitution.’”⁸ The notion that there is one philosophical tradition or location from which a singular reality can be thought, felt and related with, and that this location governs the totality of reality, is a notion that I resolutely contest. Spiritual mediumship and dendrophilia are direct interventions into shared realities in the making.⁹

Before attending to the spirits and trees, I introduce the disciplinary fields that I am working through. I describe their conflicting aims and theoretical commitments. I map these fields onto two predicaments: that of psychic life, and that of ecological catastrophe. I familiarize the reader with some psychoanalytic concepts and theories central to this dissertation, and I lay out the ethical questions and frameworks that mobilize this project. My approach to these incompatible fields is to play along the borders that separate them. This play is guided by the figure of *the hag*. I will introduce her too.

A note on my psychoanalytic orientation

My account of psychoanalysis assembles a metapsychological lineage that receives relatively little attention in academia, certainly less than Lacanian psychoanalytic models. I draw from the object relations school, sometimes known as the British school of psychoanalysis. I engage especially with W. F. Bion and Donald Winnicott, both influenced by Melanie Klein’s development of object relations theory. The “relational turn” in psychoanalysis as well as

⁷ Bayo Akomolafe, “Animism,” Embodied Ecologies Lecture Series, Centre for Applied Jungian Studies, Cape Town, November 25, 2023.

⁸ Martin Holbraad and Morton Axel Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Cambridge UP, 2017), 31.

⁹ I am inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa here: “For Anzaldúa, writing is ontological—intimately connected with physical and nonphysical beings, with ordinary and nonordinary reality” (Ana Louise Keating, Editor’s Introduction to *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, by Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Durham UP, 2015), xxxii).

Giuseppe Civitarese's and Antonino Ferro's development of post-Bionian field theory are contemporary iterations of this lineage of psychoanalysis.

Many of the clinical examples I introduce here come from *Psychoanalytic Dialogues: The International Journal of Relational Perspectives*. I also draw from schools of French analysis through, for example, Bracha Ettinger, Jean Laplanche and Didier Anzieu. Eventually, I introduce somatic perspectives that are adjacent to and also in tension with psychoanalytic work. The eclecticism of my theoretical approach reflects the diversity of my ongoing therapeutic training. Each of these theories of psyche and soma have galvanized my thinking about trauma, the unconscious, the inauguration of psychic life and the formative links between bodies, minds, objects and environments.

When I first embarked on this project, my aim was not to level a critique of psychoanalysis. I began with a recuperative spirit. I wanted to carve out space for these praxes of psychoanalysis, which I think are underrepresented in critical, political work in the (post-)humanities. One result of the Deleuzian project, in my experience, is an academic suspicion of psychoanalytic practice and an assumption that psychoanalysis is strictly run by Oedipal constructs. This forecloses an understanding of diverse, contemporary praxes of working with the unconscious outside of the classical Freudian or Lacanian school, as well as anti-Oedipal analyses influenced by Félix Guattari.¹⁰ A multitude of psychoanalyses exist in the world; it is not a monolithic practice.¹¹ By

¹⁰ See, for example, Abou-Rihan, *Deleuze and Guattari: A Psychoanalytic Itinerary* (Continuum, 2008).

Guattari's commitment to experimental practice outside the normative strictures of the clinic has galvanized my own efforts to consider alternate analyses in practice. I am particularly interested in examining how psychoanalysis frames unconventional attachment sites. As Guattari writes:

"psychoanalytic method sifts situations through 3 screens: 1) interpretation (something is other than itself, a game of signifying clues) 2) familialism: signifying clues reducible to familial representation signifying clues reducible to familial representations. 'To reach them one proceeds by means of regression; one will induce the subject to "rediscover" his childhood.' 3) transference: a 'miserable little identificatory world'. . . everything that presents itself reduced to images of papa-mama" (Félix Guattari, "The Vicissitudes of Therapy," in *Guattari Reader*, ed Gary Genosko (Blackwell, 1996), 50).

¹¹ Lara Sheehi makes this point through her research on psychoanalysis in occupied Palestine. See Lara Sheehi and Gail Lewis, "Decolonizing Psychoanalysis: Intersections of the Interior and Exterior,"

bringing contemporary relational and field metapsychologies into the discourse, I had hoped to remediate this gap in understanding. I wanted to justify formulations of the relational psyche while putting them in contact with critical, materialist work on ecological crises. In doing so, I had hoped that I might redress the human/not-human splits in psychoanalysis while preserving the modalities of psychic life that I have studied.

As I have moved further into this project, however, I have had to come to terms with where internalized conventions and codes of relational psychoanalysis may themselves be contributing to ecological disaster. This is a harsh diagnosis to be sure, and uncomfortable for me to digest, considering my training and ongoing practice in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Nevertheless, I join with Latour, who contends that the verb “ecologize” is the alternative to “modernize.”¹² The modernist thought habits running through psychoanalysis have prevented it from offering a persuasive approach to ecological thought and practice, and, indeed, as it enacts its relational patterns, psychoanalysis entrenches us further in an anthropocentric fantasy with materializing impacts. This matters in and out of the clinic. Ecocidal, genocidal disasters are increasingly appearing as material in therapy, and our offerings are meagre. Attempts to apply psychoanalytic frameworks to climate change come up against an ingrained anthropocentric loop and what feels like an inherited allergy to other relational practices.

And, so, this project has become an intervention into the boundary work of psychoanalysis, which upholds and re-enacts a fantasy about the special status of human beings. In theory, it attributes our human formation to human relationality, human family, human bodies, human culture and human language. In practice, this plays out in an overemphasis on human kinship and attachment as wholly integral to working with psychic life. Attention is trained on neonatal life, the child in a familial context, and the individual within the broader human sociocultural milieu. By and large, it is understood that these relational sites subtend the psyche.

Couched Podcast, hosted by Billie Pivnick and Romy Reading, January 12, 2023,

<https://couchedpodcast.org/decolonizing-psychoanalysis-intersections-of-the-interior-and-exterior/>.

¹² “Ecology is understood here as a new way to handle all the objects of human and non-human collective life” (Bruno Latour, “To Modernize or to Ecologize? That’s the Question,” *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium*, ed. N. Castree and B. Willems-Braun (Routledge, 1998), 222).

Our bodies coexist in felt connections outside this sphere, though we may very well dissociate from this reality. Different stories are lived in differently organized relational matrices, as endangered as these stories may be by authoritative accounts of reality and their epistemic border guards.

Psychoanalysis is not a coherent, unified field. Its working theories have long been hotly contested and jealously guarded. Not only was the construction of psychoanalysis rife with family drama,¹³ it was—and is—mixed up in a relational field far stranger than is often acknowledged. An ontological complexity lies hidden at the heart of the practice, which its modes of listening and understanding cannot easily hear.

I do not want to do away with the predicament of psychic life, but I do want to challenge its psychoanalytic shape.¹⁴ I retain a conception of a mutative, unfixed psyche—a process of dreaming subject to ecological entanglements. When Haraway writes of “situated knowledges,” she recognizes how knowledge production is embedded in material place—there is no such thing as disembodied objectivity, no “view from nowhere.”¹⁵ Similarly, the psychesoma, in any permutation, is embedded, enmeshed and also involved in the creative process of knowing: our fantasies and passionate attachments *do* something, whether or not they are delusional. Prone to confabulating, grappling with attachments, irrevocably ruptured, indisputably relational and

¹³ See Ernst Falzeder, *Psychoanalytic Filiations: Mapping the Psychoanalytic Movement* (Karnac, 2015) on the personal and conceptual conflicts and affiliations in the early history of psychoanalysis. Eyal Rozmarin writes: “I think of psychoanalysis as a site of holding and tenderness, but also a site of collective dissent” (“Why War,” IARPP Online Colloquium, May 21, 2024).

¹⁴ Guattari remained committed to some entity called *the unconscious*, albeit one whose structure may be “reshuffled”: “After years of training and practice I have come to the conclusion that if psychoanalysis does not radically reform its methods and its theoretical references it will lose all credibility, which I would find regrettable on several counts. In fact, it would hardly matter to me if psychoanalytic societies, schools, or even the profession itself were to disappear, so long as the analysis of the unconscious reaffirms its legitimacy and renews its theoretical and practical modalities” (Félix Guattari, “Beyond the Psychoanalytical Unconscious,” in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Blackwell, 1996), 193).

¹⁵ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives,” *Feminist Studies*, 1:3 (Autumn 1988).

oftentimes poorly adjusted to dealing with experience, this limited apparatus is the mediated medium through which we encounter and co-create worlds.

A situated knowledge also means that knowledge is *in a situation*. Efforts to attend to a dire ecological situation through psychoanalytic modes will fail so long as they continue to be protective of their reductive humanism. This dissertation has become a critical reckoning with psychoanalysis and its insular, human-bound modes of mindedness, but hopefully it is more than that: an endeavour to imagine a relational psychesoma in broader fields of cosmoecological play.

Containing and holding

I want to spend some time introducing the psychoanalytic paradigms that are essential to the lineage of practice I mobilize here. These are the working models of psychic life and subjectification in which I was trained, and I return to them throughout this dissertation. The structures of mind and forms of relationship they enact are consequential.

As a theory, psychoanalysis offers a speculative space to question how humans come to develop and (mis)handle a mind—how we assimilate life experience through our unique distortions. It has a lot to say about the ways we embody stories, which may be destructive, creative or both. It is a theory of subjectivity, a technique of self, and a process of working with and within human suffering. The practice is structured in such a way that personal patterns can emerge to be repatterned. This patterning arrangement is often envisioned as a holding environment, or a container.¹⁶

Containment is one of Bion's most recognized contributions to psychoanalysis. This container is not a thing, but a process. It might also be described as a capacity. Mental life has capacity so far as it can hold and spill its contents. The process of containment tells us something about the dynamics of the mental apparatus, as well as the method of analysis Bion inspired.¹⁷ The Bionian psyche has a container-contained structure, which involves processes of containing (including dreaming, thinking, mentalizing) unconscious emotional material (such as raw emotion or affective bodily experience). In the container-contained dynamic, we receive and transform

¹⁶ For a discussion of the differences between these concepts, see Thomas Ogden, "On Holding and Containing, Dreaming and Being," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85:6, (2004).

¹⁷ W. R. Bion, "Learning from Experience," in *Seven Servants* (Aronson, 1977).

unmentalized experience. The goal of psychoanalytic practice is to build mental capacity, by fostering an ability to think, dream, remember, represent, symbolize and digest experience.

The theory and method of containment assumes that lived experience makes demands on us for psychic work. We need other minds to help us do this work, much like how the infant can't integrate the intensity of their experience without the carefully titrated translation work of a caregiver. Trauma is the marker of what can't be digested by the psychesoma and, perhaps more importantly, where we did not have digestive support. The psychoanalytic narrative runs as follows: An infant projects her raw, inchoate, prelinguistic feeling states into the mother.¹⁸ When all goes well, the mother, through her emotional availability, helps process these raw feelings and makes them available to the infant in a more tolerable form. Little by little, the child develops an ability to process her own experience. In essence, she gains a psyche, which Thomas Ogden describes as a generative and dynamic conversation between lived experience, unconscious material and the conscious mind.¹⁹

Similarly, Winnicott's *holding environment* also describes a process whereby we develop a workable inner life.²⁰ Again, the theory here refers to the lived experience of maternal care, where the infant is held both psychologically and physically by the caregiver. Her (ideally) unobtrusive way of holding the child's various states—soothing, feeding, tone of voice and rhythm of care—allows the infant to gradually come into a sense of selfhood. This takes place at

¹⁸ I retain the use of the *maternal* here, to convey where a particular image of the familial is foundational to psychoanalysis. The *maternal*, and mother's body and mind, are central to its container models of subjectification. They appear again in formulations of psychosis and perversion, as I will explore later on. The theory of containment builds on Klein's formulation of *projective identification*, an unconscious fantasy whereby unwanted feelings are cast out and attributed to another. According to object relational psychoanalysis, this process begins with the mother. Bion understands projective identification to be an intersubjective communicative process between two. Joseph Grotstein explains: "Whereas with Klein one understands projective identification to be evacuative, aggressive, invasive and possessive, with Bion one understands the infant to be communicating, even pleading to communicate his emotions to the object, for the latter to contain and mediate" (Joseph Grotstein, "Projective Transidentification," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 86 (2005): 1052).

¹⁹ Ogden, "On Holding and Containing," 85.

²⁰ D. W. Winnicott, "Primary Maternal Preoccupation," in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*.

the interface of two bodies as well as two emotional systems. Ogden describes the outcome of an early holding environment as achieving “unit status,” where one becomes “an individual with an inside and an outside.” Holding, for the mother as well as the psychoanalyst, involves “the gathering of bits . . . in which the infant (or patient) may gather himself together.”²¹ The mother’s (or analyst’s) style of care, and their capacity to withstand and hold a flux of emotion, will be internalized over time.

Holding and *containing* are descriptions of relational processes that generate minds. They are meant to *do* something, therapeutically, namely to set up a “unit self” capable of experiencing life and dreaming it. I am interested in what container models might enact, socially, materially and ecologically. Metaphors of containment hold human minds and bodies together in a sort of generative consilience. Meanwhile, other links will be contaminants to psychoanalytic systems of subjectification. What is excessive to the container of psychoanalysis? What are the contaminants that threaten the integrity of its holding environment? Containment and contamination operate materially as well. Attending to material and metaphoric registers and how they are distributed in psychoanalysis is a key concern in my work. My path through this study deviates and digresses from the fieldwork in which I was trained. I wander well beyond this theory of psyche, and bring other beings to bear on its favoured containers and holding environments. “Following the ghosts,” writes Avery Gordon, “is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located.”²² Following forest paths also demands psychic work, inviting a consideration of relational dynamics that exceed human community.

This work has been sustained by my wanderings through the diverse ecosystems in which I spend my time and write: coastal rainforests, mountains, grasslands and badlands. My writing, thinking, feeling has been disrupted and provoked by the encroaching and brutal presence of extractive industries and catastrophic climate events. My approach to clinical practice also has mutated through shared crises such as a global pandemic, widespread fires and floods, and unfolding genocide and ecocide in the name of colonial expansion. These are instances of contamination that crack the container function of psychoanalysis. There are traumas that the

²¹ Ogden, “On Holding and Containing,” 1352.

²² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22.

mechanisms of containment cannot digest. Catastrophe demands a recognition of powerful more-than-human agencies and a reconsideration of what it is to work in relational fields.

To this end, I wander into arrangements of psychic fields that psychoanalysis discarded at its advent. Some of these practices, such as psychic mediumship, persist. Communicative entities and excessive energies were never fully contained by the framing of a personal unconscious. I wander through forests, considering the systemic tangles there. I wander through eclectic and incompatible lines of thought, reading one thread through another, in what will become a text eccentric to psychoanalytic patterning.

Before I stray too far from the psychoanalytic field, though, I will first acknowledge one aspect of my therapeutic training that allows me to linger in spaces of uncertainty and contradiction, and to do something playful there.

Tolerating ambiguity

“The ability to tolerate ambiguity” was a recurring refrain in therapy school. Learning to “sit with not knowing” was seen to be a mark of therapeutic competence. Bion writes about developing “negative capability.” He borrowed this notion from John Keats and turned it into a therapeutic aspiration: “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”²³

Tolerating ambiguity means that we accept that something can be understood in more than one sense, that we can sit with the discomfort of being uncertain, and that we can suspend the need to determine reality—instead playing within the many meanings and temporalities that run through analytic space. “It could be said that every event in the analytic field is experienced in the ‘as-if’ category,” write Madeline and Willy Baranger.²⁴ José Bleger holds that one of the basic presuppositions of psychoanalysis is the recognition that “*our* identity and *our* sense of reality are not *the* identity and sense of reality but only one of their many organizations.”²⁵ It is the

²³ John Keats, “Letter to George and Thomas Keats,” December 21, 1817, cited in W. F. Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* (Tavistock, 1970), 125.

²⁴ Madeline Baranger and Willy Baranger, “The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 89 (2008): 798.

²⁵ Jose Bleger, *Symbiosis and Ambiguity* (Routledge, 2013), 4.

uniquely personal organizations of self and reality that psychoanalysis studies and, in due course, treats. The understanding here is that some of these organizations will require treatment.

In *The Mystery of Things*, Christopher Bollas describes the way an analysand becomes “informatively incoherent” through free-associative processes.²⁶ Through free association we give up narrative control. Sometimes material shows up in and through the body, a symptom, a mistake, a dream. In the restraints of the psychoanalytic frame (the time, the setting), the field between analyst and analysand is mobile, fluid, unfixed. It is infused with fantasies, daydreams, moods. Ambiguity emerges as to what is actual and what is virtual. The analytic situation itself is ambiguous in the sense that we experience one another through shifting modes of perception, some conscious, some not.

Relatedly, a temporal ambiguity arises concerning what belongs to the present and what belongs to the past. Transference—the medium of psychoanalysis—operates in this ambiguity: we cast one another in our historical dramas and bring our unfinished personal business “into the room.” The tenor of relationships that we form echo our earlier containers and holding environments.

There is, of course, also emotional ambiguity. Klein emphasizes ambivalence in her theory of psychic development.²⁷ How does an infant come to manage feeling love and hate for the same object? How do we hold messy feelings together as adults without trying to tidy things up through defences such as splitting into black-and-white thinking?

Given these shifting states of mind, psychoanalysis operates in epistemic ambiguity. Our knowing of others is threaded through with memorialized emotional states. We are also strangers to ourselves in this practice. Immanuel Kant’s influence on Bion comes through in how the subject’s cognitive-emotional capacity is the focus of investigation: a subject’s “transformations” of reality, in contrast to a pretense to direct knowledge of reality. As Civitarese sees it, “Bion takes a stand against our naïve realism.”²⁸

²⁶ Bollas, *The Mystery of Things*, 1.

²⁷ Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921–1945* (Free Press, 1975).

²⁸ Giuseppe Civitarese, “The Names of O: Is Bion a Mystic?,” *The Italian Psychoanalytic Annual* (2020): 3, <https://www.spiweb.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/civitarese-eng.-3.pdf>.

Further, an *epistemological urge* arises from this ambiguity: “For Bion ambiguity has a defined value. It activates the psychoanalytic function of the mind.”²⁹ This urge is most often traced to our early drive to grasp the interiority of our caregivers—our first desire to sort out a mystery beyond our control. Handling the ambiguous situation of never fully grasping the (m)other, never quite having mastery over another’s interiority, is understood to be a developmental achievement.

Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* also offers a theory of ambiguity, through the concept of *transitional space*. Transitional space marks out an area of experience between inner and outer realities. When this concept is mobilized in practice, it usually refers to a developmental moment when an infant begins to differentiate “me” from “not-me” and to sense, however painfully, an object world that is not within their control. This process of differentiation takes time and is, according to Winnicott, never quite finished. In other words, we don’t grow out of this ambiguity and finally land in a clear understanding of the difference between subjectivity and the object-as-is. An undecidable situation persists for the adult: we live in object worlds that we elaborate on, investing objects with subjective meanings. Fundamentally, from the situation of psychic life, we hover between a given reality and creative illusion.³⁰

Those who practice Bionian field theory emphasize the oneiric quality of mental life, that is to say, the ways we dream our experience, even in our waking life. Antonino Ferro and Roberto Basile describe the “waking dream thoughts” shared between analyst and analysand and how the analytic field is inhabited by innumerable “real and virtual presences in the process of aggregation.”³¹ The idea here is that our perception is thoroughly interlaced with idiosyncratic representations, shaped by cultural symbols and tangled up with emotionally laden histories, bodily experiences, psychosomatic rhythms and affects. As in Winnicott’s transitional space, we psychically invest outer worlds with our dreaming processes, while the outside world evokes our mental processes.³²

²⁹ Giuseppe Civitarese, *The Violence of Emotions: Bion and Post-Bionian Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2013), 2.

³⁰ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Tavistock, 1971).

³¹ Antonino Ferro and Roberto Basile, eds., *The Analytic Field: A Clinical Concept* (Karnac, 2009), 5.

³² Christopher Bollas, *The Evocative Object World* (Routledge, 2009).

This ambiguity is important to my work. By working in transitional space, I resist modern epistemological sorting methods that organize reality into dualities: fact and fiction, inside and outside, reason and delusion, material and psyche. Working in transitional space also means I must identify where psychoanalysis—despite its aspirational “not-knowing”—abides by an ethnocentric metaphysics whose methodology separates psychic subjectivity from the rest of the planet.

The phenomenological reduction

Civitarese proposes that psychoanalysis is best done through a *phenomenological reduction*, whereby addressing the “concrete world,” or outer reality, is intentionally unheeded. Instead, analyst and analysand demarcate inner life, a virtual reality co-created between two perpetually dreaming minds. “At any theoretical turn, psychoanalysis reinforces its specific phenomenological reduction and ‘realizes’ the psychic,” writes Civitarese.³³ “Analyst and patient alike stipulate a virtual world whose ontological status is different from the factual, external world but is homogeneous to the oneiric, to the unconscious, and to psychic reality.”³⁴ In a sense, field psychoanalysis operates like a laboratory that has isolated a variable in order to study it.³⁵ A line appears here, marking an inner field from the outside, the confabulating human mind from the world beyond it. In this formulation, the inner world is one of dynamic ambiguity and the reality outside is matter-of-fact. The oneiric field is where analytic work unfolds.

This project hovers around the enactment of this phenomenological reduction and how the psychic subject has been distinguished from a different ontological, factual, external world. Civitarese performs a cut. He has decided what is proper to psychoanalytic praxis and what is irrelevant, and even distracting, to the task at hand, that being the development of a human

³³ Giuseppe Civitarese, *The Intimate Room: Theory and Technique of the Analytic Field* (Routledge, 2008), 73.

³⁴ Civitarese, *Intimate Room*, 93

³⁵ Thank you to Charles Levin for this analogy. A further thought: Alicia Puglionesi observes this in the construction of a modern science dependent on laboratory conditions, as opposed to study within complex ecosystems: “Scientists in the early nineteenth century . . . rushed to embrace the laboratory image of modernity, even in disciplines devoted to spontaneous, context-bound events” (Alicia Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms: An American History of Psychic Science* (Stanford UP, 2020), 17).

mental apparatus capable of digesting raw life experience. In this work, I imagine I will test the ambiguity tolerance that psychoanalysis lauds by asking after the ethics of such a cut. What do the particular boundary-making practices of psychoanalysis materialize—or dematerialize? How else might this cleaved cartography of human psyche and external world be configured?³⁶

I open a series of questions about relational fields: how we work and play within them, and how those fields are mapped and translated in and through the psychoanalytic frame. My aim here is to think through dynamics beyond Civitarese’s phenomenological reduction and toward an abundant relational field attentive to “life at large.”³⁷

The hagazussa

An ambiguous figure animates my work. This is how Hans Peter Duerr describes her in *Dreamtime*:

As late as the Middle Ages, the witch was still the hagazussa, a being that sat on the Hag, the fence, which passed behind the gardens and separated the village from the wilderness. She was a being who participated in both worlds.³⁸

The hag is in relation with what psychoanalysis leaves outside, the so-called concrete, the not-human, the animacy of material lifeworlds. She confronts us with an ambiguity that is epistemological, ontological, and cosmological. She is oriented toward phenomenological

³⁶ Paul Preciado’s work on the externalized psyche is important to mention here. This psyche does not adhere to what he sees as the political fiction of interiority, which arose through the nineteenth- and twentieth-century biopolitical, colonial regime. Mobilizing the concept of the somatopolitical apparatus, Preciado challenges the inside-outside splits of psychoanalysis through an investigation of how pharmacology, pornography and technology mediate subjectification. In my work, I am questioning the very construction of the human, built on inherited splits that cut through and cut out ecological relationality. I align with Preciado when he writes, “Today I understand that the anticolonial techniques of Amerindian shamanism will be better suited for the sort of unbecoming that I am waiting for than the bourgeois *dispositif* of psychoanalysis” (Preciado, “*Testo Junkie Notes*,” 24).

³⁷ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Duke UP, 2011).

³⁸ Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary Between Wilderness and Civilization* (Basil Blackwell, 1985), 46.

abundance. Where civilization ends and the wilderness begin, she moves freely.³⁹ She travels between environments⁴⁰ and unusual states of being.⁴¹ She might consort with spirit realms en route.⁴² She might change form.⁴³ She is known to be hybridic.⁴⁴

The hag is not opposed to distinctions per se. At the *dis-jointure* of the fence,⁴⁵ this hedge-rider draws our attention to a provisional boundary. Taking flight, she performs the boundary's

³⁹ "In the quiet of the night the travelling women united, in whatever way they did, to swarm in wild rapture over the far reaches of the land" (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 16).

⁴⁰ "The Nordic 'witch' also sent out her 'soul,' while her everyday body remained on the *sejdhjallr*, probably a tall wooden structure. On certain occasions the witch of the West African Temne leaves *noru*, the everyday world where those things happen 'which we can ordinarily see.' . . . There is another world, the companion to the ordinary one. It is called *roshiron*, 'a place from which the witches go forth'" (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 64).

⁴¹ "To make clear that the witch was not a being of the 'inside', that she had at least one foot 'outside', beyond culture, a reversal of the ordinary has been used since ancient times. Thus, in the *Vatnsdaela Saga* we are told about the old witch Ljot: 'She has pulled her clothes over her head,' stepping backward with her head stuck between her legs, and the glance from her eyes was not good to see, as she was casting lightning against her as a troll would.' The witches of Akan walk with the feet up and their heads down" (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 47).

⁴² "[T]he hedges surrounding the Slavic village . . . were a barrier against demons. The line demarcated by the water dripping from the eaves delineates the Teutonic homestead, the living space of the extended family, and also the line beyond which demons could not go. In the Mediterranean region, a furrow was often made around the settlement as a border against demons" (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 245).

⁴³ "Medieval witches, such as Cundrie la Surziere, were 'half animal' in this sense; the Old Norse expression was *eigi einhamr*, 'not having only one shape'" (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 64).

⁴⁴ "This is reminiscent of a Macedonian custom, where another intermediary between worlds, the midwife, is guided to a spring and there drenched with water. The woman has now turned into a mermaid; she lets her hair grow long and matted" (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 45).

⁴⁵ Here I borrow Barad's use of Jacques Derrida's terminology. See Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-To Come," *Derrida Today* 3:2 (2010).

indeterminacy. Her ethics are about reworking these fields and her practice is about playing in the im/possibilities.⁴⁶

Under the influence of mind-altering plants (such as nightshade, wormwood, poppy, henbane, and belladonna) or fungi (like ergot and psilocybin mushrooms), witches were said to journey to other realms, encountering all sorts of beasts and entities, becoming wild. The witch's particular transformations are not contained inside a human process. She is excessive in this way.

Eventually, through the advent of psychological discourse in the West, she was "no longer capable of stating reasonably where the borderline was between illusion and reality."⁴⁷ This borderline would be shored up through the hegemony of modern epistemic practice. Although psychoanalysis would take great interest in those illusions, the ontologies associated with the lore of the witch would need to be dealt with.

The fence is a seam stitching worlds together. It also performs a separation. To draw from Karen Barad, the hag is a figure of "cutting together-apart (one move)."⁴⁸ A cut enacts "that which is inside and outside of phenomena in a single movement."⁴⁹ There is no absolute separation nor fixed identity in Barad's dynamic universe. Rather, the picture is of phenomena in ongoing reconfigurings—lively processes of "differentiating-entangling."⁵⁰ The hag is involved in an "iterative reworking of im/possibility . . . ongoing rupturing."⁵¹ She disrupts the logic of clear division, of stabilized identities, subjects and objects, of insides and outsides. She is implicated in repatterning work and play, in an open, transitional field where nothing is absolutely given.

For the hag that Duerr tracks, this seam-between eventually split, separating the reasonable from the monstrous, nature from culture, humanity from animality. And, with the psychological

⁴⁶ Barad, "Quantum Entanglements," 266.

⁴⁷ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 40.

⁴⁸ Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax*, 20:3 (2014).

⁴⁹ Sofie Sauzet, "Phenomena—Agential Realism," *New Materialism Almanac*, March 13, 2018, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/p/phenomena-agential-realism.html>. Barad reads Derrida's hauntology through quantum physics: "Indeterminacy is not a state of being but a dynamic through which that which has been constitutively excluded re-turns" (Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 178).

⁵⁰ Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 168.

⁵¹ Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction," 183.

capture of animism, it came to mark the difference between material reality and psychological illusion. Over time, the fence became a wall, demarcating the boundary of reality.

Dreamtime is an eclectic, sprawling study of earth and mother cults, shamanic practices, Dionysian rites, mysticism, folk religions, myths and witch hunts. The thread Duerr traces between these far-reaching cultural sites involves practices of touching beyond one's form of life and sanctioned cartographies of the real. He writes:

No matter how great the differences between these groups of people, they were all united by the common theme that “outside of time” they lost their normal, everyday aspect and became beings of the “other” reality, of the beyond, whether they turned into animals or hybrid creatures or whether they reversed their social roles.⁵²

He goes on: “One could know what *inside* meant only if one had been *outside*.”⁵³ The outside he refers to extends well beyond Winnicott's maternal holding environment and further still from the “unit self.”

The hag's position “on the boundary, and who since ancient times [has been] in some uncomfortable way open to the other world,”⁵⁴ made her particularly vulnerable to boundary work in the form of displacement and persecution. That is to say, the boundary decisions enacted through the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch trials as well as colonial expansion established a series of enduring binarized fields and legislated various means of border control between them. This cleaving of dimensions included the enclosure of private property, now severed from the commons, which maps onto the negotiation of interiority and exteriority, private and public.⁵⁵ Strategies of enclosure enabled the naturalization of a hierarchical, binary gender system.⁵⁶ non-modern cosmologies were exorcized, leaving us with a distinct line

⁵² Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 35.

⁵³ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 43.

⁵⁴ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 45.

⁵⁵ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, 2004).

⁵⁶ As Duerr notes, once married, one is confined “inside” the cultural domain, safely domesticated and defused. There, as Silvia Federici argues, domestic and reproductive labour become the backbone for capitalist production. See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

between the rational and the delusional. The primitive versus the civilized. The living versus the dead.

This witch refuses closure, however. She will not stay put. She is a menace in this way. Her fence marks a limit as well as a threshold. She is a midwife and healer, and she also performs abortions: she is practiced in the liminality of birth and death. She interferes in the mechanisms of a productive workforce. She eschews borders. She brings attention to dichotomies and divisions and then makes a fine mess of them. Hers is an open, heterogenous field which she can easily travel, and she is known to shape-shift as she does so—that is, if she is not hunted and disciplined.

Chased off the fence into the forest she reappears, this time causing trouble on the inside: “The Devil had conquered the ‘inside’ of the soul, and in view of this, his new abode, the body, had to be killed and burned in order to deprive him of his base.”⁵⁷ Once the outsides were interiorized, the insides would be policed for demons. Those demons were sought out, of course, through state- and clergy-sponsored criminalization and persecution during the witch hunts.⁵⁸

“In time, [the hag] lost her double features and evolved more and more into a representation of what was being expelled from culture, only to return, distorted, in the night,” writes Duerr.⁵⁹ Here, Duerr might as well be describing a dream—a distorted representation in the night, a figment of a repressed wish. The other worlds that the hag traversed freely were eliminated from the culture, but they might be accessible via the royal road to the unconscious.

What intrigues me most about this hag is how her ambiguous and paradoxical inside-outside status came to be managed through the division of subject and object, where the subject became increasingly *barricaded*, to borrow Duerr’s term, in an anthropocentric world, as well as in an inner world prone to delusion. So, in the philosophical canon of Western Europe, we landed at

⁵⁷ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 49.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the contemporary re-emergence of the witch hunt and its links to neoliberal colonization, see Silvia Federici, “Women, Witch-Hunting and Enclosures in Africa Today,” *Sozial.Geschichte Online* 3 (2010): <http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>, and *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (PM Press, 2018).

⁵⁹ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 46.

René Descartes's *Meditations*, in which he battles the deceptions of dreams and a treacherous demon in his effort to reach knowledge.⁶⁰ These Cartesian battles with delusion wage on. In psychoanalysis, we don't try to eradicate delusion per se; we rather invest in understanding and working through particularities of delusion. Delusions are inevitable. It is a given that the vagaries of psychic life prevent direct access to knowledge of the self and other. This fieldwork, thus, is precisely involved with fantasy.

In a chapter entitled "Fear of Flying," Duerr spends some time examining how early ethnopsychiatrists such as George Devereux framed figures like the hag, as well as her shamanic counterparts: namely, as individuals who were psychotically unwell or at least "infinitely less realistic than ordinary people."⁶¹ Their worlds and knowledges have more to do with idiosyncratic interiority—the psychic remnants of trauma, perhaps. As we come to see through the history of psychoanalysis and other theories of mind, the beings with whom the hag consorts underwent a process of derealization. They came to be enclosed in psychic space as a trace, a figment, a representation, a phantasmic object—or put outside of the purview of the consulting room. A subject's psychic reality is now partitioned from the ontological wildernesses that the hag traversed and through which she altered her body-mind. This arrangement of the fence marks out the pathological and perverse from a state of sound mind and body, and it also delimits who and what is considered to be relevant to the construction of a human. Bollas describes delusion as being "incarcerated" in "an immoveable structure."⁶² I suggest that psychoanalysis reproduces its own entrenched, if not immovable, structures in its maintenance of a field and its fence.

Mapping the disciplinary fields

The hag and her fence have inspired this project in a number of ways. I too am situated between

⁶⁰ This thinking is itself the result of certain enclosures. As Claire Colebrook writes, "Descartes could not have written his *Meditations* without preceding centuries of empire and colonization that produced the private spaces of reading and reflection typical of modern European philosophy" (Claire Colebrook, "A Remarkable Brain," announcement, *Identities Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, April 19, 2020, <https://identitiesjournal.edu.mk/index.php/IJPGC/announcement/view/39>).

⁶¹ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 90.

⁶² Bollas, *They Mystery of Things*, 1.

two disciplinary fields with competing assumptions and aims, that of materialist theory and that of psychoanalysis. I travel between the different realities that each field circumscribes, ideationally and physically, in theory and in practice. Between fields, I am faced with the ethical and practical question of who and what I am meant to know, engage with, and how.

It seems to me that the hag is the ancestor of a tradition of feminist neo-materialisms that interrogate the preconstituted identities of colonial imaginaries.⁶³ This tradition rearranges hegemonic cartographies and confronts the logic of domination and oppression in Cartesian systems by making connections and coalitions across difference. Here we might think of Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands and "threshold people" who don't belong to any single location;⁶⁴ of Haraway's playful multispecies messes, her understanding of the "implosion of nature and culture";⁶⁵ of Barad's agential realism⁶⁶ and their attention to the materializing cuts that produce humans and not-humans;⁶⁷ of Vicki Kirby's deconstruction of the identity of the "anthropos" and her exploration of the textual and signifying processes of nature;⁶⁸ and of Rosi Braidotti's "nomadic subjects" in open interrelationality with multiple others.⁶⁹ These materialist itineraries

⁶³ In "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," Barad specifies a moment in the history of feminisms seeking to think about difference differently. She describes Trinh T. Mihn-ha's interrogation of the colonial logic of self-identity and othering as follows: "The self in positioning itself against the other, constituting the other as negativity, lack, foreignness, sets up an impenetrable barrier between self and other in an attempt to establish and maintain its hegemony" (170).

⁶⁴ "Take, for example, her theory of las 'nepantleras'—the word she coined to describe threshold people, those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movement in the service of transformation" (Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, xxxv).

⁶⁵ Donna Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Prickly Paradigm, 2003), 16.

⁶⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke UP, 2007).

⁶⁷ Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Phenomenology," *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, nos. 1–2 (2012): <https://doi.org/10.7146/kkf.v0i1-2.28067>.

⁶⁸ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*.

⁶⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Polity, 2002).

haunted me during my psychodynamic training, and this haunting has animated my dissertation.⁷⁰

Despite being unsettled by the limitations of psychoanalytic inquiry, I love doing therapeutic work with people. I labour through the intimacy of shared “interiority”—fostering connections, living in unique symbolic universes and stories, exploring how we might shift the parameters of those lived stories together. I agree with Paul Preciado when he writes: “No existence can be rendered in its happiness or its madness without taking into account oneiric experiences. . . . [I]t’s not a matter of thinking that life is a dream, but rather of realizing that dreams are also a form of life.”⁷¹

Therapeutic work situates me in the oneiric realm. The Bionian psyche is never not oneiric, even when one is awake.

On the psychoanalytic side of the disciplinary fence, I have learned to be a particular kind of care-worker. I attend to trauma and the way it takes up residence in a person’s mind and body. I was taught how to function as a holding environment for whatever material might arise in the field between myself and another. I learned how to hold space for “the dream” of psychic life, and to do emotional labour there, to attune to affective moments that pass between, and to think and respond to them along certain lines, hopefully in ways that offer a reparative relational experience. Embedded in these relational techniques is a theory of the subject, who is formed and transformed through encounter with another subject, who is transformed in turn.

Here is where the figure of the hag starts to make a mess of things. This dissertation is born of an uneasy tension, a sort of paradoxical double allegiance to incompatible fields. Relational metapsychologies decidedly fixate on a construction of interiority that prioritizes human subjectivity, human attachment and intersubjectivity and human-mediated cultures. Despite a

⁷⁰ In *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon reflects on her own effort at writing: “ghostly things kept cropping up and messing up other tasks I was trying to accomplish. Call it grounded theory: in one field another emerged to literally capture my attention and become the field work. The persistent and troubling ghosts in the house highlighted the limitations of many of our prevalent modes of inquiry and the assumptions they make about the social world, the people who inhabit these worlds, and what is required to study them” (8).

⁷¹ Paul Preciado, *Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing* (MIT Press, 2019), 21.

growing number of analysts writing and reflecting on climate change,⁷² psychoanalytic practice is almost entirely concerned with humans becoming humans via human processes of relationship.

Meanwhile (flying across the fence again), I have found myself in an area of research rallying to draw attention to the “great outdoors”—to consider objects, systems, ecologies and cultures that aren’t exclusively human bound. Broadly speaking, this field is comprised of new materialisms, ecological humanities, not-human anthropologies and speculative realisms. Many of these theories could be gathered under the auspices of the “ontological turn” and the politics arising there. This field is concerned with more-than-human realities, the conditions of possibility for such realities and the shaping of these realities through various practices.⁷³ As Levi Bryant writes in *The Democracy of Objects*, “it would be a mistake to suppose that collectives necessarily involve humans.”⁷⁴

That contemporary theory has proven to be pervasively anthropocentric in its obsession with subjectivities is sharply argued by Tom Cohen, who diagnoses a “collective blind” and a “self-bound logic” in these critical agendas. The effect is the occlusion of biospheric crisis.⁷⁵ Cohen’s distaste for what he identifies as a residual, spellbinding humanism in the posthumanities is palpable. For ecological theory to proceed, its humanist imaginary must be interrogated, or perhaps extinguished. Confronting eco-catastrophe requires conceptual strategies that pry attention away from “human-on-human histories.”⁷⁶ This agenda is echoed in the attempts of object-oriented ontology and ecological scholarship to intervene in the loop of human-centric imaginaries by gesturing toward not-human things, objects, materials, collectives, systems and assemblages. Since I am approaching this project via psychoanalysis, whose model of the unconscious is almost entirely consumed with humanist fantasies, and since I recognize how

⁷² See for example *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 32:4 (2022).

⁷³ Annemarie Mol, “Ontological Politics: A Word and Some Questions,” *Sociological Review*, 47:1 (1999): 75.

⁷⁴ Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Open Humanities Press, 2011), 25.

⁷⁵ Tom Cohen, *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, vol. 1 (Open Humanities Press, 2012), 15, 18.

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 26.

intractable cognitive-emotional habits can be, my task is slightly more ambiguous, true to the hag. I ask instead: *What might come into play by thinking these fields, and the objects they deal with, together-apart?*

The loops of narcissistic self-reference and human-bound logics can be (but are not essentially) symptomatic of psychic life. They are certainly built into the psychoanalytic project. Modalities of psychic life can be doggedly stubborn, but they are also inessential.⁷⁷ In contact with entities, bodies, objects and processes outside of psychoanalytic convention, we inhabit fields of “multiple differences, and congealing relationalities.”⁷⁸ This “psychedelic transversality”⁷⁹ is far more complex than a humanist dream.

Border work: On fences and entanglements

“Theory formation also entails the materialization of boundaries,” write Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin.⁸⁰ For the hag, processes of subjectification and object relating are always unfolding beyond human kinship and culture. She is always in relation and in transition. She will travel

⁷⁷ Here I take a cue from Federici, whose project tracks how political economies structure the world through processes of enclosure and accumulation. She identifies where that structuration can be challenged, through, for example, collective feminist movements, traditional Indigenous knowledge practices and reclamatory land movements that resist “a unitary model of social and cultural life.” Likewise, I resist a unitary model of psychic life. Restructuring the world entails forging “paths to transform our subjectivity” (Silvia Federici, *Reenchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (PM Press, Kairos, 2018), 7). Transforming the coordinates of the relational psyche is a matter not simply of becoming different kinds of human subjects but also of challenging the very basis of the anthropocentric distinction.

⁷⁸ Bayo Akomolafe, “The Self Is a Haptic Involution,” author’s website, August 22, 2015, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/the-self-is-a-haptic-involution>.

⁷⁹ Bayo Akomolafe, “Sonder,” author’s website, July 9 2018, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/sonder>.

⁸⁰ Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “The Transversality of New Materialism,” in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, ed. Dolphijn and Tuin (Open Humanities Press, 2012), 110.

beyond human social space, metamorphosing into animals⁸¹ and trees,⁸² becoming monstrous and perverse,⁸³ engaging with entities such as the “forest folk” of Celtic worlds⁸⁴ and imbibing the vegetal realm through wild herbal medicines and salves, which transport her to other dimensions.⁸⁵

The figure of the hag also tells a story about disciplinary border control. While psychoanalysis upholds ambiguity tolerance as a virtue, it nevertheless enacts a purifying split by constructing human subjectivity in contradistinction to the hag’s phenomenologically abundant world. So far as the relational psyche is circumscribed by the human cultural sphere, it is sheltered from the thresholds that the hag crosses. And though the relational school of psychoanalysis has integrated feminist, queer and postcolonial critique into its discourse,⁸⁶ it would be disingenuous to say that

⁸¹ “Suddenly, feathers begin to sprout, her nose changes into a beak, and screeching she flies out of the window in the shape of an owl” (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 158). Elsewhere, Duerr draws from an article on Hungarian witch covens: “Her teacher drew a circle about her and conjured up all sorts of ‘apparitions.’ These apparitions were the witches of the region, who had assumed the shape of bulls, cats, lions, etc., with enormous eyes and fearful appearances” (V. Klein, “Der ungarische Hexenglaube,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (1934): 381, cited in Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 136).

⁸² “Diel Breull of Calbach . . . a magician, herbalist, crystal gazer and night traveller . . . said that Frau Holle (to whom he travels) was a fine woman from the front, but from the back, she was like a hollow tree with rough bark” (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 5).

⁸³ “[I]t was now possible to assure people officially that there existed human beings, and in considerable numbers at that, who at midday, as well as in the middle of the night, were abducted by the Evil One, or rode away in the air on billy goats and broomsticks to feasts of perverse fornication, and who tried to harm the body and soul of their fellow men” (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 49).

⁸⁴ “[Hallucinogenic] . . . salves also appear in stories about the so-called ‘gude wychties’ or ‘cunning folk’ . . . who had connections with the forest fairies, found in previously Celtic regions” (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 11).

⁸⁵ “A Northern German legend tells of a midwife who was fetched into the mountain by ‘white women.’ There she was able to rub a little ‘elves’ salve’ under her eyes. After returning to the realm of mortals, the ointment made it possible for her to see the inhabitants of the lower world” (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 11).

⁸⁶ By no means has psychoanalysis been an apolitical practice historically. Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno allied Karl Marx with Sigmund Freud. Latin American psychoanalysis mobilized Marx and Freud in practice. Frantz Fanon worked on the racialized psyche. R. D. Laing’s anti-psychiatry movement and

training institutions haven't historically operated through dynamics of inclusivity and exclusion, and not infrequently through the powerful disciplinary tool of weaponizing diagnoses through pathologization and shaming.

Arguments about what is proper to psychic life and what is not are at the heart of the psychoanalytic institution.⁸⁷ Moments of epistemic disobedience, which might include working through forms of practice, embodiment and intelligibility outside the conventions of psychoanalytic ideology, have long led to excommunication and rejection. "The ostracized foreign body is thus dispelled politely," writes Derrida.⁸⁸ Politely or not, defensive fence maintenance is performed where the hag stirs up trouble.⁸⁹

Wilhelm Reich's liberatory somatics challenged the repressive, normative ordering of social institutions and how they play out in living bodies. Feminist psychoanalyses, such as those of Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin, address the overvaluation of phallocentrism in clinical and conceptual work. The itineraries of decolonial psychoanalyses challenge the assimilation of psychic life to colonial categories, and demonstrate Derrida's point, in "Geopsychoanalysis," that a psychic apparatus is not structurally "Euro-American" (Jacques Derrida, "Geopsychoanalysis: And the Rest of the World," *Psychoanalysis and Democracy*, 48:2 (1991)). For two recent examples of decolonial psychoanalysis, see Lara Sheehi and Stephan Sheehi, *Psychoanalysis Under Occupation: Practicing Resistance in Palestine* (Routledge, 2022) and Robert K. Beshara, *Decolonial Psychoanalysis: Toward Critical Islamophobia Studies* (Routledge, 2019).

⁸⁷ See Ernst Falzeder, *Psychoanalytic Filiations: Mapping the Psychoanalytic Movement* (Karnac, 2015).

⁸⁸ Derrida, "Geopsychoanalysis," 203.

⁸⁹ One notable heretic includes Sándor Ferenczi who was posthumously shamed in Ernest Jones's biography of Freud as being mentally ill. See Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (Penguin, 1964). I could also name Luce Irigaray and Paul Preciado, who—in unique and discordant terms—transgressed psychoanalytic ideologies of gender, and who were chased off the fence and out of the field for doing difference differently. Irigaray critiques the dominating phallic subjectivities in Western philosophy, culminating in Lacanian work, and she was expelled from the institution. Preciado challenges the normativity of fixed sexuate identities through an examination of technologies of self, sex and gender and was shouted down at the Ecole de la Cause Freudienne conference. Preciado's "Can the Monster Speak? A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts" problematizes the heterobinarism that lingers in the field and advocates for a model of psyche that is "not reduced to the fiction of interiority and individual affect that corresponded to the arrangement of the 19th and early 20th century biopolitical

Epistemic disobedience is also an ontological matter. The boundary work required to upkeep an episteme is a matter of ethics. When Barad writes of *ethico-onto-epistemology*, they are conveying a fundamental inseparability—an entanglement—of these terms. Drawing on quantum physics, particularly their reading of Neils Bohr, Barad works to unfix the presumed separation between knowing subjects and the world, suggesting instead that these categories are always in processes of becoming through the ongoing interactions (more precisely, intra-activity)⁹⁰ of phenomena.⁹¹ Moreover, so far as the techniques used in our knowledge practices have a materializing effect, the technique, or the technical apparatus, is implicated in an ethical enactment. Modes of knowing are not detached from the world. A technological object, a measuring device, an entity being measured, a concept, a fantasy—all are directly implicated in the reconfiguration of matter and what these terms “are” in the first place.

Haidee Swanby’s research on food sovereignty movements and permaculture in South Africa offers a concrete example of how this ethico-onto-epistemic entanglement might play out “on the ground.” Swanby speaks of *cognitive justice*: the right to different ways of knowing. She argues that an ontological rift underlies the crises we face today. Her work outlines the stakes she sees

colonial and disciplinary regime” (Preciado, “*Testo Junkie* Notes,” 24). The hags and monsters of psychoanalysis signal what cannot be admitted into its conceptual or institutional body.

⁹⁰ *Intra-activity* is used in place of *interactivity*, so far as the latter term implies that a pre-established, independent entity is in contact with another pre-established, independent entity. Barad would instead insist that identity entities are always in the making through inseparable dynamics of “intra-activity”: “The very nature of materiality itself is entanglement” (Karen Barad, “Matter Feels, Converses, Suffers, Desires, Years and Remembers: Interview with Karen Barad,” in Dolphijn and Tuin, *New Materialism*, 69). This position is contested by object-oriented ontologists such as Timothy Morton, who would insist on the ontological independence of every object from one another as opposed to a universe under which there are no fundamental differences (see, for example, Morton’s critique of “lava lamp materialism” in *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Open Humanities Press, 2013)). For my purposes here, the philosophical differences underlying Barad’s materialism and an object-oriented universe are less important than the relational-ethical impulse of each project, which I see as efforts to interrupt modalities of human-centric thought and touch in on the reality and agency of broader worlds.

⁹¹ “Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the ‘phenomenon’” (Barad, “Interview with Karen Barad,” 52).

in the communities she works within: community gardens are understood as sacred sites, as intertwined collectives of spirits, ancestors, plants, living humans. Each entity in this system is understood to be sentient and sacred. Community gardens like these struggle to survive in the face of extractive agriculture and industrial mining, whose mandates override this lively and entangled ecology of materiality and spirituality. As Swanby puts it, sentience is “the dominant culture’s dirty little secret.”⁹² I might also offer that the sentience of the material not-human world is the repressed unconscious of psychoanalysis.

Barad’s commitment to diffraction as a methodology⁹³ invites us to think in terms of “iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling.”⁹⁴ Boundaries are not predetermined. As Preciado puts it: “[I]ntersection is the only place that exists. There are no opposite shores. We are always at the crossing of paths.”⁹⁵ The fieldwork laid out here involves all phenomena, in dynamic relationality, where the relata do not precede relations.

I read this theory of entanglement, these criss-crossings of relata-in-process, against Civitarese’s phenomenological reduction, where “realizing the psychic” is done in isolation from the material world. This approach resolves a vastly complex ambiguity and allows a psychoanalytic methodology to proceed: mark out the vicissitudes of interiority, the ways we humans process experience, and leave the rest well enough alone.

⁹² Haidee Swanby, “The Living World under the Machine,” Embodied Ecologies Seminar Series, Centre for Applied Jungian Studies, Vimeo video, 36:35, posted by Applied Jung, October 23, 2023, <https://vimeo.com/877027330/643bea4116>.

⁹³ Barad builds on Haraway’s method of reading diffractively: “a method of diffractively reading insights through one another, building new insights, and attentively and carefully reading for differences that matter in their fine details, together with the recognition that there intrinsic to this analysis is an ethics that is not predicated on externality but rather entanglement. Diffractive readings bring inventive provocations; they are good to think with. They are respectful, detailed, ethical engagements.” What differentiates the optical metaphor of diffraction from reflection is that there is no objectifying distance in the creation of diffractive patterns: “diffraction allows you to study both the nature of the apparatus and also the object”(Karen Barad. “Interview with Karen Barad,” 2012), 50, 52).

⁹⁴ Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction,” 168.

⁹⁵ Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*, 31.

Through Barad's entangled ethico-onto-epistemology, it is a given that "we are part of the nature we seek to understand."⁹⁶ In my work, I invite psychoanalysis into assemblages of agencies it has historically discarded or ignored. I lean into a phenomenological abundance, which some may attribute to my being insufficiently analyzed, regressive and perhaps a touch schizoid. Be that as it may, I am willing to do the hag's bidding for the sake of a relational ontology beyond the available maps and narratives of psychoanalysis. Some of the potentially perverse meetings that have sparked my interest, and which I explore in this dissertation, involve trees, soil, mushrooms, spirits, dreams, dolls, nervous systems and lampreys.

My research weaves between animating meetings in the history of psychoanalysis between Freud and the occult, as well as fish, clinical examples of not-human love and desire, and conversations with spirits channelled by practicing mediums. The realities produced at the juncture of certain bodies have been foreclosed by anthropocentric analyses, or treated to an interpretive framework that problematizes the encounter. Akomolafe writes:

Isn't the material world (the one we in our hubris seek to save) infused with agency, power, longing and electrifying possibility—which the Yoruba people of West Africa that are observant of the Ifá nature religion call "asé," a matrixial web of change that enlists human and nonhuman bodies in the co-production of reality? Cannot the world speak for itself? To these questions, the emphatic response of modernity is no.⁹⁷

With the figure of the hag, I refuse the notion that sensing, dreaming and signifying should exclude the contributions of other worlds and not-human collectives. Instead, I am interested in the dynamics of the myriad mutative and matrixial meetings that we are *already inhabiting*.

Two predicaments

Of course, some mutative meetings abuse, traumatize and do irreparable damage. This brings me to the twin predicaments that galvanize this paper. First there is the overwhelming predicament of climate catastrophe, and then there is the frustratingly tenacious predicament of psychic life. These predicaments map onto the two disciplinary fields that my dissertation straddles: the

⁹⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 26.

⁹⁷ Bayo Akomolafe, "Coming Down to Earth," author's website, March 11, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/coming-down-to-earth>.

“inner world” of psychoanalysis and the “great outdoors” to which object-oriented and materialist thought is devoted.

These inside-outside predicaments are, in fact, intertwined in ways that psychoanalysis has foreclosed. Indeed, psychoanalysis has invested in a particular formulation of the “inside,” driven by a modernist sensibility that has contributed to the “outside” predicament in the first place. This dissertation elaborates some unusual sites that complicate the inside-outside cartography of psychoanalysis. In this section, I want to explain why I retain some thought of the predicament of psychic life, albeit a psychic life that is fundamentally alterable and not categorically human.

In *The Ontology of the Accident*, Catherine Malabou writes of a metamorphic subject within whom the potential for destructive, disorganizing plasticity is inherent. Unlike elasticity, plasticity does not spring back into its original form. “With plasticity,” she writes, “we are not facing a pre-given difference, but a process of metamorphosis.”⁹⁸ A biological deconstruction is inscribed in subjectivity—a very concrete possibility of subjectivity being irreparably altered in and through the material body. Brain damage, for example, drives home the point that there is no permanence to psychic form. In this plastic phenomenology, a transcendent subject does not exist. For Malabou, there is a “very thin and even perhaps non-existing” difference between “material” and “psychic.” This very thin and perhaps non-existing difference, and how we organize it in relation to materiality, highlights a question that runs through this dissertation.

As a therapist, I offer that a lot happens in the “very thin, perhaps non-existing” difference that Malabou cites. It is hard to deny the strange ways that our idiosyncratic emotional inner worlds motor on, absurdly. Charles Levin has referred to this condition as the “irreducible predicament of psychic life.”⁹⁹ Michael Eigen describes psychic reality as an “unlocalizable chronic irritant.”¹⁰⁰ This “thin difference” can be the space between dreaming a touch and actually

⁹⁸ Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity* (Polity, 2012), 35.

⁹⁹ Charles Levin, “In Praise of Rupture: The *Triebulations* of Relational Psychoanalysis,” unpublished, shared in personal communication, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Eigen, *Emotional Storm* (Wesleyan UP, 2005), 8.

touching, the thin difference between fantasizing and acting. Diminishing this psychic predicament has lived repercussions.

Jessica Benjamin, in her essay “Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness,” describes working with a patient she names Aliza. Aliza was raised by a mother whose emotional incapacities were experienced by Aliza as a “terrifying denial”—or what Bollas describes as a “violent innocence.”¹⁰¹ A caregiver’s inability to tolerate a child’s inner life, and a concomitant difficulty containing a child’s expressions of subjectivity, has ongoing effects for that child. This attachment was experienced by Aliza (and in turn by Benjamin as analyst) as “sanity robbing.”¹⁰² I was struck by this clinical sketch. It is a phenomenon I see in my practice: the damage done by repudiating a person’s mental and emotional experience.

As I embarked on my preliminary research on psychic mediumship, I also came to question the epistemic, and ultimately ontological, violence—a form of agency robbing—that results from denying contact with those who do not belong to the truncated world of living humans. Luce Irigaray writes:

Will you object that we would be straying into the realm of anything goes? Then you are admitting that you have forgotten that any living body, any unconscious, any psychical economy brings its order to analysis. All you have to do is listen. But an order with the force of an a priori law prevents you.¹⁰³

There is a broader situation of “not-knowing” that psychoanalysis is required to bear. “Not-knowing better” may be a more precise way to put it.

Psychoanalysis is in a predicament of its own since its favoured psychical economies are woefully ill-equipped to function in ecological crisis. I write and do therapeutic work through several interlocking geopolitical and terrestrial crises that have spilled onto the island where I live and write. These disasters are destabilizing the way I show up in therapeutic practice.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Bollas, “Violent Innocence,” in *Being a Character* (Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰² Jessica Benjamin, “Beyond Doer and Done To,” in *Relational Psychoanalysis*, vol 4: *Expansion of Theory*, ed. Lewis Aron and Adrienne Harris (Taylor and Francis, 2014), 116.

¹⁰³ Luce Irigaray, “The Poverty of Psychoanalysis,” *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Blackwell, 1991), 83–84.

Pandemic, fire, flood, the destruction of unceded Wet'suwet'en territory for oil extraction, the felling of the last of British Columbia's old growth forests on Pacheedaht land, the ongoing uncovering of unmarked graves at residential schools, the nonstop ecocide and genocide streaming through my devices. I could go on, following links along this chain of associated events. This constellation of catastrophes has demanded I review the assumptions I carry into a therapy session. What kind of subject do I purport to work with and how, as wildfire smoke seeps through the windows of my office?

The relational praxis that I was taught is not only therapeutically insufficient within this systemic entanglement, but its metaphysical assumptions have also furthered these cascading crises. Somehow the web of human relations that subtend the psychoanalytic subject remain untouched by the insights and concerns of materialist and ecological thought, not to mention the relational ethos and cosmologies of non-modern traditions. That isn't to say that analysts aren't concerned about the environment—on the contrary. Despite efforts to address psychological responses to climate change however, an underlying modern conception of individuated humanity has not budged.¹⁰⁴ The entwining of psychic and ecological predicaments renders this version of the human indefensible.

Malabou proposes that subjectivity is “at risk of loss of itself at every moment.”¹⁰⁵ I would concur, while removing the fence enclosing subjectivity from the rest of the terrestrial entities and communities who are also at risk of loss at every moment or are now rapidly disappearing, if not already lost.

Given the prevailing critiques levelled at psychoanalytic reason,¹⁰⁶ its capitalist underpinnings and its instalment of dubious power structures,¹⁰⁷ why retain a thought of psychoanalysis? Gilles

¹⁰⁴ An exception can be found in Katie Gentile, “Destroying the ‘Human’ for the Survival of the World: A Proposal for a Temporally Dense Psychoanalytic Subject,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 34:2 (March–April 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Malabou and Noelle Vahanian, “A Conversation with Catherine Malabou,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 9:1 (Winter 2008): 9.

¹⁰⁶ Isabelle Stengers and Leon Chertok, *A Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason: Hypnosis as a Scientific Problem from Lavoisier to Lacan* (Stanford UP, 1992).

¹⁰⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (University of Minnesota Press, 1972).

Deleuze and Félix Guattari and others have already effectively levelled it via their rhizomatic philosophy, after all.¹⁰⁸

One of the more persuasive arguments I have heard for a praxis of interiority comes through Lara Sheehi and Gail Lewis, both practicing clinicians working on the decolonization of psychoanalysis.¹⁰⁹ Sheehi's research centres on psychoanalytically oriented practices in occupied Palestine, and Lewis's work has focused on Black intersectional feminism in the UK.

Both draw from Frantz Fanon, and specifically his analysis of the ways, as Lewis puts it, "that a state gets *right in*."¹¹⁰ Given the ways that bodies and minds internalize relations of power, Sheehi and Lewis argue that we need a theoretical framework that can speak to how power plays out in the most private domains of our lives. The residential school project in Canada, its violent erasure of Indigenous "mentality" and its intrusion of colonial language, culture and law is one devastating example of the state's forced entry into mental, emotional, physical and cultural life. In Sheehi and Lewis's psychoanalytic politics, a framework attuned to psychesomatic experience is crucial. "Without it," Lewis notes, "we're confounded in our project."¹¹¹

A decolonial psychoanalytic praxis would pay attention to the so-called private sites of relationship and domesticity, the uniqueness of a person's psychesomatic location in culture and the conflicts that play out on the stage of the dreaming mind and body. It might ask after libidinal attachments and emotional investments in cultural forces and objects. It would ask what conditions are in place that make these attachments possible. It might ask what is rendered legible or illegible through dominating modes of therapeutic care.

Importantly, Sheehi argues, a decolonial praxis would not grant every analyst access to another's interiority, particularly where there is an authoritarian insistence that psyches ought to operate in

¹⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ Sheehi and Lewis, "Decolonizing Psychoanalysis."

¹¹⁰ Sheehi and Lewis, "Decolonizing Psychoanalysis."

¹¹¹ Sheehi and Lewis, "Decolonizing Psychoanalysis."

a certain manner.¹¹² She asks, for instance: “What do we insist people are defending against?”¹¹³ I carry this question with me, and I add my own: What forces do we insist lurk behind manifest behaviour? From what location do we think reality? From what location do we identify delusion? *Who* sorts the interior from the exterior, and how? Who determines what counts as a significant attachment site? Who draws up the limits of the container? What worlds come in and out of being through psychoanalysis’s construction of the relational self?

On the ethics of containers and the ethics of entanglements

Years ago I bristled defensively when I read Cohen’s charge that “critical agendas coming out of twentieth century master-texts” unwittingly collude with accelerated climate change: “It is our sense of justified propriety—our defence of cultures, affects, bodies and others—that allows us to remain secure in our homeland, unaware of all the ruses that maintain that spurious home.”¹¹⁴ It would seem that I have internalized his argument. It is hard to ignore Cohen’s indictment of the “lull of subjectivity” and the occlusion of climate catastrophe in the clinical writing in my field.¹¹⁵ The vision of a reparative, parental human bond as a model for goodness is persistent. To be sure, many analysts are mobilizing to address environmental crises,¹¹⁶ identifying the gaps in their praxes, exploring ecological approaches to mind,¹¹⁷ and linking (in the Bionian sense) with not-humans.¹¹⁸ I align with these goals, though my approach is not an “applied

¹¹² Viveiros de Castro writes: “much of what goes, or has gone, by the name of anthropology turns on the contrary assumption that the anthropologist has a privileged grasp of the reasons for the native’s reasons—reasons to which the native’s reasonings are oblivious” (Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds* (Hau Books, 2015), 7).

¹¹³ Sheehi and Lewis, “Decolonizing Psychoanalysis.”

¹¹⁴ Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 15.

¹¹⁵ Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Psychology for a Safe Climate is one psychoanalysis-adjacent organization that provides a directory of “climate aware” practitioners and offers resources on the psychodynamics of climate change. See www.psychologyforasafeclimate.org.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Dodds, *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos* (Routledge, 2011).

¹¹⁸ Patricia Ticineto Clough is among the few psychoanalytic thinkers considering the centrality of not-humans in processes of subjectification. See Patricia Clough, *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the*

psychoanalysis” (i.e., employing these models to understand an issue such as climate change). Rather, I cross the boundaries of psychoanalytic good sense, making coalitions with some of the objects, entities and practices that it has problematized.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro writes: “A good translation is one that allows the alien concepts to deform and subvert the translator’s conceptual toolbox so that the *intentio* of the original language can be expressed within the new one.”¹¹⁹ His method of controlled equivocation dissuades the anthropologist from imposing their own onto-epistemic framework when translating another. Instead, in the space of equivocal translations, encountering concepts that might be incompatible with our own, reality is revealed in more than one way. This method offers an alternative to the ontological monism that psychoanalysis reproduces.

My aim is to experiment with alien subversion for the sake of other forms of life. I am arguing for an ecological ethics unbound from a psychoanalytic “home,” its ideal of “secure attachment” and the “unit self” that is meant to evolve there. I read Barad’s ethical model of entanglement against the enclosure that the phenomenological reduction enacts. “Methods of containment,” Guattari argues, “prevent [the unconscious’s] expansion beyond dominant realities and significations.”¹²⁰

Underlying this dissertation is an ongoing confrontation with the colonialist foundations of my psychoanalytic therapy training. This is a messy process: trying to unravel the philosophical itineraries that have patterned me as I participate in a therapeutic practice where I am meant to perform this patterning. This process demands I examine the epistemic position from which I counsel on personhood, perform relationality and authorize realities in my clinical work with others. It confronts me with the questions of who-what is intelligible through the psychoanalytic framework, as well as who-what we are *permitted* to relate with, and how.

Personal boundaries, relational boundaries, disciplinary boundaries, categorical boundaries

Age of Teletechnology (University of Minnesota Press, 2000). See also Harold Searles, *The Nonhuman Environment* (International UP, 1960).

¹¹⁹ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation,” *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*, 2:1 (2004): 5.

¹²⁰ Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy* (Semiotext(e), 1995), 202.

between psyche and materiality, human and not-human, reality and dreaming—psychoanalysis enacts these terms in theory and in practice. I want to demonstrate where the intellectual and therapeutic machinations of psychoanalysis foreclose expressions of worlds. Importantly, this plays out not only through the pathologization of cultural *representations* of worlds but also through material arrangements of actors in worlds. Through the procedure of containment, myriad beings lose their agency. Other beings are cast as the backdrop to a human drama. While Civitarese proposes the analyst perform a phenomenological reduction that somehow divorces the human dream from the real world, Latour advocates for an additive ethic that allows a reconnection with existents “with which you have in fact never ceased to interact.”¹²¹

In “Finding the Dark: Decolonizing Darkness,” Akomolafe reflects on his training as a clinical psychologist in Western mental health care. He indicates a tension between a “modern commitment to closure,” which fixes a frame on the isolated, suffering individual, versus Indigenous therapeutic systems, which emphasize the “intra-actional” ways “other bodies in the community [are] part of person-making.” Drawing from his western Nigerian Yoruba context, he writes: “Therapy in these indigenous settings is not a fix as much as it is an immersion.”¹²² Those worldly (and otherworldly) immersions, intra-actions and multiplying interactions transgress the psychoanalytic mode. In those immersions, however, we learn that common sense is not so common; it is shaped by agents of any number and kind.

My objective is not about learning to do trauma work with diverse peoples or advocating for cultural competency in the mental health field.¹²³ It is about trying to shake off the codes of an

¹²¹ Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (Harvard UP, 2013), 205.

¹²² Bayo Akomolafe, “Finding the Dark: Decolonizing Darkness,” author’s website, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/finding-the-dark-decolonizing-darkness>.

¹²³ In “Can We Decolonize Psychoanalytic Theory and Practice?,” Pratyusha Tummala-Narra calls for more inclusive training and expansive narratives. To give one example of the colonial assumptions of psychoanalytic work, she writes about the construction of the idea of *dependency* versus *individuation* and how these categories are racialized. She draws on Fanon, who challenges the ascription of a “dependency complex” and “inferiority complex” to colonized people. Rather, as Fanon argues, it is colonization that produces inferiorization. I agree with Tummala-Narra’s analysis of the assumptions embedded in this mental health field. However, I note how the inclusion of other perspectives into

anthropocentric modernism. I challenge the imposition of universalizing, humanist frameworks on other organizations of the relational field, as well as the arrangements of “interiority” that psychoanalysis produces. The prevailing constellation of psychic life involves an enclosure for humans (the container), colonial narratives about healthy human development (including a Euro-American conception of “primitivity” and the presumption of the “civilizing” mind of the analyst), and the adjudication of “normal” and “pathological.” I do not want to flatten that “very thin, perhaps non-existing” psyche, but I do want to challenge how this psyche has been constellated and peopled by psychoanalysis. I see in the relational mode a “straining for a ‘subjectivity’”¹²⁴ obliged to take a particular, idealized form. I indicate where this enduring fantasy is protected in theory and practice. We can give no account of mutating planetary conditions while we are working within a dream of separation and exceptionalism. Certainly, there exist other iterations of worlds and shapes of becoming that are not coincident with modern metaphysics. I am not advocating for one of these alternate arrangements per se, but I am pointing to the provisional nature of the arrangement in which I was disciplined.

Both of my fields draw from Derridean and Levinasian ethics of responsibility to the other, though they engage these ethical demands in their relational theories in significantly different ways.

In Barad’s materialism, ethics is not a response to a “radically exteriorized other, but [a] responsibility to processes of becoming.”¹²⁵ Who-what we are responding to is in ongoing processes of configuration. Indeed, who *we* are, as ethically responsive beings, is also unstable. Here, ethics is a response not to a predetermined other but rather to boundary work in the first instance. We (meaning, all phenomena) are always “differentiating and entangling.”¹²⁶ We can’t

psychoanalytic theory may (productively) put psychoanalysis’s humanist frameworks at risk—that is, if psychoanalysis does not insist on translating them according to its own terms. See Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, “Can We Decolonize Theory and Practice?,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 32:3 (May–June 2022): 222.

¹²⁴ Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 19.

¹²⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 69.

¹²⁶ Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction,” 168.

help but “mak[e] connections and commitments.”¹²⁷ There is no “outside” of these dynamics where the very identities of “self” and “other” are being configured.

Barad’s ethico-onto-epistemic framework is one I return to throughout this paper, in order to account for an indeterminate and abundant relational field. Barad’s *agential cuts* signify the ways that differences are constituted—how divisions are enacted from an immanently entangled ontology of phenomena. As Barad writes: “knowing is direct material engagement, a cutting together and apart . . . where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility.”¹²⁸ The entangled nature of knowing and being means we are dealing not simply with variations in worldview but with variations in worlds.

For Barad, boundaries are fundamentally unresolved, in ongoing performance or iteration: what we are responding to is not categorically given. Knowing, in a real sense, is a performative and material co-creation.

Levinas and Derrida also inform the ways ethical relation has been conceived in psychoanalysis.¹²⁹ The functions of projective identification and containment, and the transmission of enigmatic signifiers, render us always already open to alterity. Here, however, ethical responsibility plays out between humans who are already formed as such. Ann Weinstone examines the way alterity is conceptualized in post-World War II Western continental ethics. She describes this mode as a *prophylactic ethic*:¹³⁰ “Despite the involvement of ‘alien,’ ‘other’ and

¹²⁷ Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction,” 183.

¹²⁸ Barad, “Interview with Karen Barad,” 52.

¹²⁹ See, for example, Dana Amir, *Psychoanalysis as Radical Hospitality: Six Perspectives on Turning-To Versus Turning-Away* (Routledge, 2024); David Goodman and Eric R. Severson, *The Ethical Turn: Otherness and Subjectivity in Contemporary Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2016); Glenn Lerner, “Deconstruction and the Ethical Relation in Therapy” (PhD diss., Faculty of Arts and Science, University of Technology Sydney, August 2010).

¹³⁰ Ann Weinstone, *Avatar Bodies: A Tantra for Posthumanism* (Minnesota Press, 2004), 4. As Viveiros de Castro points out, in anthropology, constructing and protecting an “other” can so often imply not only that the ethical subject doing so is unaware of their own weird otherness but that the other “subject” is also a site of significant, productive difference that cannot be predefined. He writes: “It is precisely ‘because the anthropologist very easily takes the native to be an other *subject* that he cannot see him as an

‘nonhuman’ in processes of self-creation, a legible difference, a gap, between individual entities is preserved, even if that gap has been relocated to an altered, composite, and in some cases, alien-ized interior.”¹³¹

This ethics of alterity has become a careful, regulatory and even prohibitory imperative in clinical work. Upholding the *otherness of the other* is a gesture meant to protect our innate openness and vulnerability as well as our violence. The boundary around the analytic couple or the unit self serves as a safeguard against narcissistic or psychotic use of others, that is, the acting out of infantile omnipotence in the world. Growing a capacity to integrate and contain our aggression, our desires, our grandiosity, our tantrums, is a fair aspiration.

“Yet,” Cohen writes, “it is precisely the artifice image of a human ‘other’ with whom ‘we’ would empathically commune that involves a foreclosure in the very way the ‘social’ or ‘we’ has been fashioned.”¹³² The psychoanalytic “cut” is meant to ensure the humanity and interiority of the analytic participants. Following Laplanche, Dominique Scarfone writes of trauma as a “breach in the shield” that modifies the very apparatus itself:

Trauma, therefore, does not describe simply a loss of continuity in the surface of the body or of the mind; rather, it initiates various degrees of disorganization within what the surface both contains and keeps *operational*. This last word is important given that trauma does not concern surfaces in general but, more specifically, surfaces wrapped around living systems and instantiating what Francisco Varela called the *operational closure*. When the closure is indeed operational, it ensures the persistence and renewal of the system’s vital characteristics, its *autopoietic* function—i.e., its self-organizing and self-repairing capacity. A cell membrane is a good example.¹³³

other subject, as an Other figure that, more than subject or object, is the expression of a possible world” (Viveiros de Castro, *The Relative Native*, 9).

¹³¹ Weinstone, *Avatar Bodies*, 23.

¹³² Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 22.

¹³³ Dominique Scarfone, “Ten Short Essays on How Trauma Is Inextricably Woven into Psychic Life,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 86:1 (2017): 23.

Psychic process is described as a kind of self-weaving. Mind is envisioned “as a sequence of weft and tears in communication, of implants and intromissions, followed by more or less successful translations.”¹³⁴ Self-weaving, we understand, always involves others—their presences and felt absences, their enigmatic signifiers, their manners of holding, their environmental provisions and paradigms of care. Containment practices provide a safe enclosure to work with the weave of experiences.¹³⁵

An uncomfortable friction arises here between enclosure and entanglement. The medium and her spirits’ ontological propositions pose a threat to this interpersonal container. Dendrophilia is perverse—and what of the tree’s consent? Weinstone describes the motivating concern of the prophylactic ethic (which in turn reinstates the separate identity of the human): “If true confusion were allowed, difference would tremble too violently.”¹³⁶

Let me suggest that the differences are already violently trembling. Across earthly ecologies, each participant is already, most often without choice, taking the risk of contact. As such, I am working within an ethics of entanglement that might have a better chance of addressing a dynamic enmeshment of uncertain mergers and mutations.

Isabelle Stengers proposes that we attend to “good and bad encounters: not about what would be good or bad *per se*, but about learning how what we encounter affects us, how it empowers, or separates us from, our capacity to act (that is also to think and feel).”¹³⁷

Repairing self-organization is a therapeutic goal. In the psychoanalytic model, the reinstatement of enclosure is re-enacted in order to heal. Containment does its organizing, patterning work. It is clinically useful. And, it is ontologically restricted.

¹³⁴ Scarfone, “Ten Short Essays,” 25.

¹³⁵ Clough’s work on the technological unconscious challenges this model of an autopoietic organism that revolves around the establishment of human psychesomatic boundary. See Patricia Clough, “Notes on Psychoanalysis and Technology, The Psyche and the Social,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 20:2 (2019).

¹³⁶ Weinstone, *Avatar Bodies*, 24.

¹³⁷ Isabelle Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains: Subjectivity and the Challenge of Escaping Modern Dualism,” *Subjectivity*, 22 (2008): 44.

Might we tear our always already traumatized identities apart and weave further afield?¹³⁸ How might we inhabit an understanding that we are not the only responsive weavers in these differentially arranged fields? (For Barad, ethical responsiveness is at work even at the quantum level: particles also respond to “alterity within.”¹³⁹)

Psychoanalysis provides, as Philippe Descola might put it, one “ontological option.”¹⁴⁰ The sites I explore are meant to suggest the basic rearrangeability of the psychoanalytic cartography by suggesting other modes of intelligibility and sensibility, other orientations, “solutions” and responses.

Containment and entanglement are two responses to relationship. In the former, our inner worlds are held in a protected environment. We encourage emotional transformations via the depository of intersubjective human psyches. In a safe container, we digest what is toxic and reorganize ourselves. The latter approach is perhaps more demanding in practice than the first.

Entanglement involves opening to unsettling contact with beings whom we may not know in advance. Some of these beings may or may not be granted significance, agency or reality in our epistemic frameworks (all while the realities of various communities are mutating and irreversibly deforming, in part through the “treatments” we apply to them).

Stengers argues that all beings are in “a metamorphic rather than representational relation to the world.”¹⁴¹ With Barad, this morphology is as an iterative field of “differentiating and entangling” wherein matter and meaning could be differently arranged, cut or spliced.

¹³⁸ Here we have Guattari’s case for schizoanalysis. The schizoanalytic unconscious “implies a proliferation made up not only of typical ‘part objects’—the breast, the feces, the penis; or mathemes like Lacan’s ‘a-object’—but also a multitude of singular entities, fluxes, territories, and incorporeal universes, making up *functional arrangements* that are never reducible to universals.” He goes on: “Simply put, the questions raised by the unconscious no longer fall squarely in the realm of psychology” (Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 199, 198).

¹³⁹ Karen Barad, “On Touching—The Inhuman that Therefore I Am,” *Differences*, 2023:3 (2012).

¹⁴⁰ Phillipe Descola, *The Ecology of Others* (Prickly Paradigm, 2013).

¹⁴¹ Isabelle Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism,” *e-flux journal*, no. 36 (July 2012): <http://www.e-flux.com/issues/36-july-2012/>.

Psychoanalytic dreaming has not caught up to these metamorphoses. Outside of its container, however, we are obliged to play within mutative relational reals.

How I've arranged the fields

I begin this dissertation with a mushroom trip. The hag's wild-harvested salves and potions, and the worlds they open, are suggestive of a communicative "nature" that absolutely alters the coordinates of the relational field. This writing is my attempt to translate my own experimentation with material mediations of psychic life and to convey the powerfully pedagogical relationship this entity has formed with me. The mushroom, a dendrophilic organism, in concert with my own dendrophilic body-mind, co-create a relational field so contrarily arranged that the psyche as structured by psychoanalysis all but disappears. A psychic predicament indeed.

From there, I return to the fence between worlds. I have organized this dissertation into two parts, which are meant to perform the structure of two fields separated by a fence. Part One examines the so-called *inside* or *immateriality* of psychic life by staging an encounter between spiritualism, psychic mediumship and psychoanalysis. In this first part, I lay out the territory of the psychic as object relational and field psychoanalyses conceive of it. I consider how spirits have been organized in these divergent practices, which emerged at roughly the same time in the American and European contexts.

Part Two stages an encounter with the *outside* and *materiality* through the rubric of dendrophilia, to examine how psychoanalysis adjudicates between human and not-human and sets up an appropriate relationship between realms.

Broadly speaking, Part One is concerned with the discarnate and immaterial realm, while Part Two is concerned with bodies and materiality. Throughout both parts, these categories come to be tangled up, like the mycelia who fuel the witch's flight. Both figures demonstrate the impossibility of finally parsing dimensions. A spirit needs an embodied medium to speak its point of view. Material beings are also social beings, collaborators in dreaming.

A note on a methodology of play

“Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together,” writes Winnicott. “The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play.”¹⁴²

Where has psychoanalysis undermined its own therapeutic goal? Transitional phenomena have been hemmed in to a small universe of familial playmates, undercutting psychoanalysis’s capacity to think about co-creative and co-destructive relation to the world. As Haraway understands, play is deadly serious.¹⁴³ In psychotherapy, we are also playing with serious material: the traumas that can make or break an orientation to a life.

Exploring dendrophilia and spiritual mediumship is a provocation to be sure, particularly as a therapist trained in the analytic mode. This exploration is also meant to be playful. I see these engagements as opening toward a more complex potential space than what Winnicott envisions in *Playing and Reality*.¹⁴⁴ Introducing these practices, their objects, and their concepts into the field does reconfiguring work. It is an experiment in transitionality.

As I outlined above, Winnicott’s concept of play involves an intermediate area of experience where intrapsychic fantasy blends with the object world. Analysis takes place where two areas of play overlap; it is a potential space forged between the analytic dyad. As the theory goes, it is through unstructured play that we are able to develop a creative apperception of being, to participate in relational processes at the interface of illusion and reality. We live in this ambiguity of subject and objects, never quite able to decide on what belongs where. As Levin

¹⁴² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 51.

¹⁴³ “Releasing the play of writing is deadly serious” and “Survival is at stake in the play of readings,” writes Haraway (“A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist- Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), 175–77).

¹⁴⁴ I am indebted to Haraway’s oft-cited method of *serious play* in this rethinking of discursive boundaries and “making a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind” (Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 19). As Haraway demonstrates, the playmates in this mess making are not necessary human. Nor, in my project, are they necessarily fleshy.

writes: “the transitional object is not an elimination of difference. It just leaves the paradox unresolved.”¹⁴⁵

Civitarese holds that “[w]e live in more than one world at a time.”¹⁴⁶ Viveiros de Castro’s anthropology describes “an ontologically and epistemologically infinite world.”¹⁴⁷ Unfixing the conceptual and emotional strictures of how we inhabit worlds and construct relationality therein is one of the aims of this dissertation. It is an experiment in “responsive invention, speculation and proposing,” where fiction is also material, affective and lived by many.¹⁴⁸

Play is at once a process of discovery and creation. I borrow this methodology from psychoanalysis, and I pervert it. Play involves inner and outer worlds, objects, dreams about objects and objects dreaming, lively environments and enactments of fantasy within and upon those environments. Play opens other ways of taking up with—and thereby intervening in—the relational field. Heterogeneous realities come in and out of being there. Importantly, I suggest that humans are not the only ones playing and intervening, and the refusal of psychoanalysis to imagine-discover this does a great disservice to ecological thinking.

We are entangled in processes of “reworlding,” as Haraway puts it, “concretely and symbolically.”¹⁴⁹ Making a space for playful “couplings” (or multiplicities) is an experiment without a guaranteed outcome. It is an effort to work and play and think in the conditions that arise at disciplinary intersections and in “knots of ecologies.”¹⁵⁰

Who takes the hag seriously? Is she speaking madness from her hedge? Certainly, some interpretive frameworks read her worlds as nonsense. She is also quite busy, invested in

¹⁴⁵ Charles Levin, “Power and Seduction: Baudrillard, Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 8:1–2 (1984): 178.

¹⁴⁶ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 168.

¹⁴⁷ Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, “Some Reflections of the Notion of Species in History and Anthropology,” *Bio/Zoo*, 10:1 (Winter 2013): <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-101.html> .

¹⁴⁸ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 93.

¹⁴⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 93.

¹⁵⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 39.

Irigaray's project of "organizing the world so that living beings can be."¹⁵¹ She shares Stengers's cosmopolitical vision: "to understand the ways in which different kinds of being in, and knowledge of, the world can negotiate their coexistence."¹⁵² The hag likewise "raises the question of how nonhuman actors might be rendered visible as political actors in situations where politics, defined according to a horizon of human dissensus, denies them such visibility."¹⁵³

Playing can be nourishing and generative. It can also be destructive and aggressive. This is one way I read Haraway's claim that we are non-innocent in our representations of the world.¹⁵⁴ Fantasy and affect are entwined with our reality making, in our dreams and "on the ground." A methodology of play allows me to think and feel my way through the loaded and even volatile liminality of potential space. Moreover, it allows me to experiment with the boundaries of human dreaming, and to ask where an ontological opening may lie beyond anthropocentric dreams.

¹⁵¹ Luce Irigaray with Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (Columbia UP, 2016), 30.

¹⁵² Marcus Boon, *The Politics of Vibration: Music as a Cosmopolitical Practice* (Duke UP, 2022), 4.

¹⁵³ Boon, *Politics of Vibration*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ See Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

PROLOGUE: MAGIC MUSHROOMS

*Any inner-outer dichotomy, with the human skin as boundary, is psychologically irrelevant.*¹⁵⁵

In my limited experience, being a channel for alterior intelligence is utterly demanding. A corpus of “thought” (constellated with sensation, imagery, emotion) lands in the body-mind. *Thoughts without a thinker. Wild Thoughts.*¹⁵⁶ Something exhorts me to push, to try to shape the information, to birth this idea through the body-mind, into discursive form. *They* come through as *they*. *They* impel me to speak. *They*, I presume, were mushrooms, though I will let *their* identity be an open question. They are certainly commanding, using me as host to a network of not-me perspectives through a lived moment of symbiosis. Mushrooms are, after all, communicative connectors and symbionts in their habitats.

They relate through a meshwork, behaving along a spectrum between parasitism and mutualism.¹⁵⁷ It’s a both-and situation: a poison and a cure.

During this psilocybin session, I had my friend write for me, and I recited as best as I could. My nervous system usurped by the mushrooms, and pulled into a state of highly sensitive paralysis, I was in no shape to pick up a pen and record this myself. Some of what was shared that day, through the medium of my psychesoma, voiced aloud, then recorded in writing by my friend, my sitter and scribe: *They* are pattern makers. *They* are ancient. *They* communicate from a nonlinear temporal space. My friend was informed, via my hijacked consciousness, that he was a midwife for other forms of consciousness: they wanted him to know this was his job, providing space for this unusual birth to happen. Meanwhile, my labour is translation, they told me. “This is channelling.” “You are a translator.”

¹⁵⁵ Irving A. Hallowell, *Culture and Experience*, (University Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 88.

¹⁵⁶ For the psychoanalytic usage of these phrases, see Mark Epstein, “Thoughts without a Thinker: Buddhism and Psychoanalysis,” *Psychoanalytic Review*, 82:4, 1995 and Jane Van Buren, “Thoughts without a thinker” in *Primitive Mental States*, (Routledge, 2010).

¹⁵⁷ See Merlin Sheldrake. *Entangled Life*. (Random House, 2020) 213.

It will be too much to put into words. I will start laughing. They will remind me to “get out of the way” and allow them to speak through me. They do this by pushing my sneaky, intellectualizing thoughts aside so they may flow through like a river, a wave swell, or a breath: this is a sensation, the feeling of information flowing through a corpus—not only metaphor. Stay focused, pay attention. Like a birth, I have to just let it happen. There is no point in resisting.

“They are trying to allow us to see through infinite eyes. I am being shown a web, and how mushrooms give us the ability to see through not-human perspectives.”¹⁵⁸ They drew attention to my rings: one a spider, the other a tentacle. Webs. Tentacular beings. They show me how they are pervasive. A pervasive form of consciousness connected to soil. To minerals. To forests. A multiplicity of sensors, creating an extended, terrestrial awareness. Because—I can only hypothesize—a mushroom is only one fruiting part of a fungal network, not a singular being. *They* show me what it is to be this way, to be plural, distributed.

The notes continue: They mediate between ancestral and earthly bodies. They are like a telephone system from some other reality, they create a link with the channel. Because they speak vibrationally, they need help with translating information into words. They want me to explain how they communicate. They are insisting that consciousness is multiple. They appreciate the work I am doing. They keep encouraging me, they are powerful and also loving and gracious: “Find the words. This is your job. This is an old job, it has been done for ages.” It is beginning to feel like initiation into a mysterious, esoteric practice. They show me hieroglyphs, examples of translations from other times and places, channelled by other mushroom mediums. And then they begin giving me advice on writing! They share a metaphor, which they also insist is an energetic reality: writing is like an acupuncture needle—it opens up all sorts of associative channels and energetic possibilities, so “one must be precise.” “As in acupuncture,” they tell me, “you must refine your choices so as to have an effect.” Then, showing me an acupuncture needle and a pencil, they tell me: “This is why we say, ‘what’s your point?’”

They are a playful bunch; they don’t shy away from silliness. They remind me that this is important work, but don’t take it too seriously: “Humour and holiness, madness and divinity are

¹⁵⁸ Personal notes with Sean Frey as scribe, December 2021.

very closely linked.” They are also capable of inspiring reverence. They drag me through the dirt, showing me where mycelium lives. They have me riding an infinity sign in abstract space for an uncomfortable amount of time, during which a multiverse of infinite possibilities present themselves, endless options for reincarnation. I felt afraid I would not return to my body and my trip-sitting friend would have to deal with it. (At this point, he tells me later, my arms were flung open as though I had been crucified).

As I was put back into recognizable reality, they suffused my psychesoma with an overwhelming feeling of gratitude and compassion. This, perhaps, is the most challenging part to account for in an academic paper, and yet it seems to be a common thread in the psilocybin therapy experience. There is, to be sure, the dread of ego-death or of totally losing one’s bearings forever, and there is also an unmistakable flood of love.¹⁵⁹

In this reorganized symbolic-material-psychic-vibrational-emotional reality, which *they* stitch me into, I feel myself as a conduit, a psychesomatic mediator, enfolded into a vast system of relations threaded through one another, mentally, physically. Spiritually-corporeally.

Temporally-spatially. Symbolically and concretely. As I describe it to my friend afterwards: I feel like I am put in my place, my place being one entity attached to a gigantic web of interconnectivity in which nothing is left out. I am a node in the grid of mycelial information exchange. The distribution of power in this web is generated and sustained by mushrooms. The

¹⁵⁹ I was struck by a moment in an interview with Bill Richards on his psilocybin research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In it, he spoke on the difficulty of talking about love in scientific contexts, despite the fact that it is an undeniable and recurring experience described by participants in his studies. Reporting this phenomenon in his findings proved to be difficult, and he ran the risk of not being taken seriously or being labelled as non-scientific (*Ideas*, “High Culture” parts 1-3, with Mary O’Connell, first aired May 2015 <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/high-culture-part-1-1.3280226>). Despite a discomfort with the language of love, and an inability to quantify this state, the acknowledgement of this feeling in psychological and pharmacological research contexts has grown over recent years. See, for example Alexander Belser et al, “Patient Experience of Psilocybin-Assisted Therapy: An interpretive Phenomenological Analysis,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 57:4, 2017; Drummon McCullough et al, “Psilocybin-Induced Mystical-Type Experiences are Related to Persisting Positive Effects: A Quantitative and Qualitative Report,” *Frontiers Pharmacology*. Vol 13, March 9 2022.

terrestrial is most certainly in charge. There is some sorrow in this recognition—not for falling off a human pedestal, but for having forgotten my rightful place in a broader meshwork.

Meanwhile, in the mushroom's hold, my ways of being embodied are also rearranged. Like the mushroom's interlacing behaviours, I become sensitively attuned to cross-modal connections. Sense experience is not parcelled out into its usual channels: temporary synaesthesia shows me that sound vibrations produce not only colour but also complex architectural structures and curious landscapes, all of which I have big feelings about. The timbre of a flute, I am surprised to learn, has the power to generate vegetal life from the ground up. Constance Classen and David Howes write on cultural synaesthesia through the Desana's use of ayahuasca. The sensory correlations forged in psychedelic experience are not productive of individual oddities but rather are woven into social ordering. The biological plant, in this way, participates in the orchestration of social life.¹⁶⁰

Mushrooms are not interested in the temporal-spatial coordinates of late capitalism. While in their grasp, comprehending a text message, or calendar time, or measuring an "hour," will be very difficult if not impossible to do. Temporal-spatial coordinates that structure my day-to-day begin to evaporate. My perceptual field takes on new shapes, new felt ideas arising in a wildly inclusive real, or a play of unfolding reals. This hyperconnectivity and multimodal sensing

¹⁶⁰ "It is the task of the Desana shaman to enable people to make the appropriate connections between sensory phenomena and social values and thus trigger the correct behavioural responses. The shaman employs both the sensations experienced during visions and the sights, sounds and smells of daily life to, in the words of the Desana, 'make one see, and act accordingly,' 'make one hear, and act accordingly,' 'make one smell, and act accordingly' and 'make one dream, and act accordingly'. When the associations are properly engrained, they become automatic and involuntary, a mental 'presence.' . . . In other words, when sensory stimuli and mental imagery automatically evoke social concepts through continuous association, there is no need for individuals to 'artificially' learn such values through the task of memorization. The associations are collective and seemingly evident" (Constance Classen and David Howes, "Synaesthesia Unravelling: The union of the senses from a cultural perspective," *Ways of Sensing*, Routledge, 2013) 159.

reminds me of a dharma talk by Shambhavi Sarasvati, where she explained that one Sanskrit translation of this world is “the mansion of fun.”¹⁶¹

And then, mushrooms digested, brain waves returning to their usual pace, trodding along the regular pathways, within my normal range of emotions, I return to an analytic self and wonder how I might approach this. What just happened here? What conceptual net could I possibly throw to capture this experience? Especially when it felt so convincingly like I was caught within the mushrooms’ net? What account would do justice to the powerful sense of the material world coming alive with such unexpectedly didactic authority?

It is, to say the least, interesting that a terrestrial organism can have a profound bearing on consciousness and that the insights gleaned from a trip can alter awareness long afterward. What they make intelligible is eccentric to my own cultural imaginary: animacy and anthropomorphism are allergens to Western modern thought, and this reactivity prevails in psychoanalysis, where consciousness can be handled only on the “inside” of human cultural life. I consider the language of a “trip” or a “journey.” It confuses the inside-outside boundaries—in which direction have I travelled here? A psychoanalyst would warn me away from being too literal. *My* unconscious, *my* mind, was opened in hyper-free-associative play. My usual selection of percepts, sensations and facts was less limited than usual. This was a subjective state, a meaningful personal experience. In this reading, however, we have forgotten the partnership that got me here. The field of mine and not-mine, discovery and creation, is not so clear.

Andy Letcher writes of an “animistic discourse,” in which mushrooms are regarded as occasioning perception of not-humans. This he sees to be a resistive discourse. A resistive discourse “cannot be countenanced or taken seriously within mainstream culture because it transgresses a fundamental ontological, discursive, boundary.”¹⁶² With the idea of “mainstream,”

¹⁶¹ Shambavi Sarasvati, “All About Tantra,” Dharma Talk given at Yoga Shala Bucklman, Portland Oregon, <http://jayakula.org/all-about-tantra/>, 2012.

¹⁶² See Andy Letcher, “Mad Thoughts On Mushrooms: Discourse and Power in the Study of Psychedelic Consciousness,” *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 76, May 2008. The term *entheogen* was devised by Gordon Wasson et al to replace *hallucinogen* or *psychedelic*. (See Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrisch, Jonathan Ott, Carl A.P. Ruck, *Persephone’s Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*, Yale UP, 1986). As Letcher writes, “the term itself was inspired by the Greek etymology of the word ‘enthusiasm’

Letcher is citing a Eurocentric, modern map of reality and the ways that its discourses operate to place boundaries on the possible. The boundaries in question have to do with reality and fantasy, the imaginary and the empirically verifiable. These boundaries also negotiate between consciousness and intelligence on the inside of a human sociocultural field, in contrast to those forms of life on the outside of the human enclosure. Letcher elaborates on the animistic discourse on mushrooms:

They do not alter perception, but adjust what it is possible to perceive, and therefore under the “animistic discourse” the spirits and beings occasioned by mushrooms are not hallucinations nor some aspect of the self, but genuine beneficent discarnate entities or intelligences, with whom the practitioner attempts to forge relationships.¹⁶³

What is of interest to me is the ways that material mushrooms, who are resolutely carnal and earthbound, living in dirt, wood, moss and excrement, are also so psychically vital and edifying. Indeed, it was psilocybin mushrooms who fostered my dendrophilia. They once admonished me while I wandered through a birch grove: “Have some respect for these long-suffering beings.” And it was mushrooms who taught me a little about forming communicative bridges between realms. So, mushrooms helped animate this project.

Through my anecdotal accounts, for what they are worth (very little, in the Western scientific model),¹⁶⁴ I will insist that these are extremely communicative beings who, in the throes of a trip,

(‘to be inspired by a God’) and means ‘generating the experience of God within,’ ‘God generated within,’ or ‘becoming God within.’” Letcher challenges the Christian assumptions built into the understanding of enteogens, and what exactly constitutes a true religious experience. Moreover, in contrast to the psychedelic or enteogenic, the animistic discourse opens another field of possibility: “I would argue that many more practitioners talk and write of experiencing encounters with intelligences, spirits, or what in academic discourse has been termed ‘other-than-human-persons’ *without*. That is, they experience not theophany but *animaphany*” (Letcher, “Mad Thoughts,” 85 and 87).

¹⁶³ Letcher, “Mad Thoughts,” 88

¹⁶⁴ In “Dreaming of Dragons: On the Imagination of Real Life,” Tim Ingold compares the ways different systems of knowledge handle the imaginal. In modern science. “oneiric experience [is] to be banished . . . imagination does not belong to reality.” For others, as Ingold describes it, “the truth of things is not only found but also tested by personal oneiric experience.” This he links to religious practices of reading

turn mind and body into a channel for their dispatches. In addition to their dendrophilic mandate, they open up the question of spirit communication that comprises Part One of this dissertation. How might we think-feel-sense-understand marginalized ontologies through our chiasmic psychesomatic relations with influential entities, even when they are unseen or underground?

I write between subjective experience and the mushroom; or, more precisely, I write where inner and outer, material and mental, fungality and humanity, begin to lose their distinctions—where symbiosis becomes the relational mode, where nature-cultures are irrevocably entangled and impossible to parse. Entanglements are animate too, unfixed and perpetually in formation. I try to do what *they* have urged me to do: to convey their messages in a form somewhat intelligible to a reader—an impossible task, to squeeze these multilayered awarenesses into written form.¹⁶⁵ Most importantly, I indicate where intelligibility and intelligence are not properly mine: in relation to mushrooms, I am positioned as a channel for manifold currents of information about ways of being that aren't human bound. As they taught me, this writing seeks the point where the acupuncture needle might open new channels.

The information communicated via these beings exceeds this medium's ability to receive and translate it. Levin writes on this problem:

It makes more sense as a way of understanding the disastrous weaknesses in the historical process of cultural learning in actual collective human time. What Freud grasped here at the social level, without realizing it, as he did in so many other areas, is rather

scripture as well as Indigenous knowledge practices. Ingold's argument is that adjudicating false or veridical accounts of truthful representation misses the point: "Yet questions about which can better *represent* the world, religion or science are wrongly posed, for the real contest lies elsewhere. It turns on whether our ways of knowing and imagining are enshrined within an existential commitment in which we find ourselves" (Ingold, Tim. "Dreaming of Dragons" *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 19:4 (2013): 739 and 746).

¹⁶⁵ I am not interested in fixating on my entheogen-fuelled visions per se but rather on nudging this inquiry toward a unique moment of interrelationality between mind and materiality, and the dissolution of usual coordinates that guide a modern Western episteme. This is a moment of symbiosis, and a powerful one at that. In my experience, fungi point directly to the paradoxical, open, undecidability of these two terms: earthly matter and psyche.

monumental. He glimpsed what Bion was later able to articulate explicitly—that our psychobiological capacity to receive information and react to it far exceeds our capacity to emotionally digest the same information and to learn from it, individually and especially collectively.¹⁶⁶

This being said, *spurred on by the mushrooms themselves*, I make an effort to receive and react to the emotionally intense and highly informative currents they offer. I want to play with the notion that mushrooms and I enact a “container-contained” dynamic. I take them in, and they offer information as they digest and metabolize, breaking down mental and cultural organizational habits.

Theory decomposition

How might mycelial messages weave through my own frameworks? Back at my computer, this time animated by coffee, I am eager to think my way through this experience. I approach it psychologically first. Was my creative unconscious producing this conversation? Was I so dissociated from reality, so lost in fantasy, as to be temporarily psychotic? From this position, I find myself sorting the veridical from the delusional. Certainly, under the sway of psilocybin, I lost contact with common sense. I was no longer navigating the cartography of inner-outer reality organization I live in most often. Through psychoanalysis, I could nudge the conversation along different lines: Jody Messler Davies writes on the “generative interventions” that “open up a symbolic space between patient and analyst that has never existed before in any of the patient’s prior relationships.”¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Civitarese explores how “shared sense,” or what he calls “consensuality,” is developed in the analytic dyad.¹⁶⁸ The shared dream is the work and play of producing felt meanings together. Why is it exclusively humans who produce generative interventions here? Who else is dreaming with me, or through me? How does this decidedly not-mute stuff of nature produce such bewildering and deeply felt worlds? And the strong sense that

¹⁶⁶ Charles Levin, “Discussion of Ofra Eshel’s ‘Why Witnessing’: Theoretical and clinical reflections of oneness when working within the depths of the great unknown of psychic catastrophe”, Presented to the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society, Montreal, May 2023.

¹⁶⁷ Jody Messler Davies, “Reawakening Desire: Shame, Mourning, Analytic Love, and Psychoanalytic Imagination,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 33:3, 2023, 293.

¹⁶⁸ Guiseppe Civitarese, “The Names of O: is Bion a mystic?”

I was *being informed*? This is a distinction-disrupting encounter—or, an encounter that reveals how distinctions are provisional—where what we take to be material, external, natural life (the fungi) and what we take to be the immaterial, interiorized human-social dimension (human psyche) are reconfigured. This richly symbolic and sensate space is fostered by the corpus of vegetal beings. Together, we are intelligent bodies capable of affecting and being affected.

More conceptual nets to toss into this phenomenal dimension: I am reminded of what Barad understands as the entanglements of meaning and matter, where “differentiatings” are an active process. In Barad’s “notion of ‘iterative intractivity,’ there is a co-participation of the knower in the construction of those conditions under which any phenomenon might or not manifest certain configurations.”¹⁶⁹ The nature of a psilocybin mushroom is felt as insistently discursive and relational, enmeshed with my own embodiment and conceptual cartographies. We are not in the realm of predetermined, pre-existing things¹⁷⁰ so much as a cascading enfolding that I was encouraged to suffer through. Mushroom journeys as epistemological practice, revealing ontologies in which ethical stakes emerge in the ongoing upending of normalized distinctions. Epistemologies, ontologies, ethics in intra-active iterations. *They* are an “ultraqueer critter”:

Queer is itself a lively mutating organism, a desiring radical openness, an edgy protean differentiating multiplicity, an agential dis/continuity, an enfolded reiteratively materializing promiscuously inventive spatiotemporality. What if queerness were understood to reside not in the breach of nature/culture, per se, but in the very nature of spacetime mattering?¹⁷¹

Our coupling, and what comes of it, perverts the normative order of things.

I try another angle, different than Barad’s ontological inseparability: I think about Morton’s object-oriented consideration of the aesthetic dimension between objects: “The aesthetic

¹⁶⁹ Rosa Traversa, “Once upon a Time, Materiality: A possible scenario for psychology in the Nature/culture Divide,” *Culture and Psychology*, 29:2, 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice to Come,” *Derrida Today*. 3:2, 2010.

¹⁷¹ Karen Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” *KVINDER, KØN & FORSKNING NR*, 1-2, (2012): 29

dimension is a place of illusions, yet they are real illusions.”¹⁷² Where two objects meet: an aesthetic effect. If interobjective space *is* the aesthetic dimension, then “[y]ou can’t say that one aesthetic effect is more real than another.”¹⁷³ Between me and the mushrooms, a dimension of magical realism. The reality that emanates between is “tricksterish,” as Morton puts it. Morton also writes about the work of translation, which he sees as an ongoing happening between all objects: there is never a complete knowing or apprehending, but a relational space of interpreting, translating, tuning between: “when you tune, real things happen. You are affecting causality. You are establishing a link with at least one other actually existing entity.”¹⁷⁴ And, in the universe of object-oriented ontology, the object is also attuning itself to you. In the meeting arise emanations and radiations of real aesthetic effects. A forcefield of information emerges from this encounter.

Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes argues that insofar as psychedelic experience can offer a range of realities, opening the question of the nature of reality itself, psychedelic therapies would benefit from a metaphysical framework. In the integration phase of psychedelic-assisted therapy, we’re asking: What is the significance of what just happened? How do we make the experiential intelligible? What just happened here? Sjöstedt-Hughes proposes that a menu of metaphysical options could be offered, allowing the participant to make sense of their unique experience. Intellectual comprehensibility will make the experience more psychologically useful, in his estimation. “There are indeed philosophical implications of psychedelic use,” he writes.¹⁷⁵ He gives an example: experiencing a sentient world under the influence of mushrooms can be linked with a cosmopsychic or pantheistic metaphysical system.

What I want to suggest here is a rearrangement of the usual dualist positioning: being an intellectual (human) subject trying to apply a framework to an object of study (a mushroom trip) feels altogether scrambled by the modes by which this powerful not-human, this multiplicitous intelligence, does conceptual and emotional work through me. In this way, Viveiros De Castro’s

¹⁷² Tim, Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, Open Humanities Press, (2013) 18.

¹⁷³ Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, 41.

¹⁷⁴ Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, “On the Need for Metaphysics in Psychedelic Therapy and Research,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 30:14, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1128589>.

description of *multinaturalism*, where heterogenous species produce images of nature according to their perspective, comes alive.

De Castro challenges the Western metaphysical assumption of the “psychic unity of the species.” He writes:

This [psychic unity], in turn, presupposes a foundational discontinuity between our species and all others, given that the “psychic unity” suggests that our species counter-unifies all others into a single sub-psychic (or a-psychic) realm, which is exhaustively determined by an extra-psychic corporeality.¹⁷⁶

Working counter to this mind-body, human-not-human dualism, Viveiros De Castro lays out the argument that, in other cosmologies, other translations of personhood exist, and these personhoods are not exclusively the human species’ domain. Multinaturalism holds that there are varieties of human persons: they occupy different bodies (perhaps animal, vegetal, objectal or spiritual) with differing points of view. All sorts of persons are “producing images of nature according to their perspective.” He writes: “Beings that wander the world are transformations of this primordial humanity.”¹⁷⁷ What this means is that other styles of persons could bring their unique points of view—their metaphysics—to bear on me. I am also apprehended by mushrooms, who are a pluralized kind of subject in kind, with their own ways of being corporeal, with their own worldview. I am under the mushrooms’ purview here.

In Viveiros De Castro’s understanding of Amerindian perspectivism, “individuals of each species are able to leap from one species to another with relative ease.” By incorporating (i.e., eating) another species, we can transform into another kind of person.¹⁷⁸ And this he sees to be the work of shamanism: “to oscillate between the points of view of two (or more) species—

¹⁷⁶ Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, “Some Reflections on the Notion of Species in History and Anthropology,” *Bio/Zoo* 10.1, 2013, <https://hemi.nyu.edu/hemi/en/e-misferica-101/viveiros-de-castro>.

¹⁷⁷ Viveiros De Castro, “Some Reflections.”

¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Eduardo Kohn writes: “in Runa culture, a forest rodent has consciousness, a soul, insofar as it can detect other beings in its habitat. This soul is localized in the soma, and can therefore be ingested by other beings who increase their capacity for consciousness through ingestion” (Eduardo Kohn, “How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of transspecies engagement,” *American Ethnologist*, 34(1):3- 24, (2007): 8.

capable of seeing the members of both species as they see themselves.”¹⁷⁹ In the multinature that Viveiros De Castro elaborates, every species is a subject of possible experience “as a body, as a collection of affections vulnerable to the senses, of capacities for modifying and being modified by agents of other species.”¹⁸⁰ Indeed, a known object is not a desubjectified object (as in the work of those aiming to dispel animism). Instead, an object is understood to be an insufficiently interpreted subject: “One must learn to personify in order to know.”¹⁸¹ Viveiros De Castro sees this as the inverse of an anthropocentrism where the “eminent unity of the human domain” disappears.¹⁸² There is nothing particularly special or exclusively psychic about the human. Instead, he puts forward an *anthropomorphic* presupposition in this Indigenous world, “a world of imminent humanity”¹⁸³ that refuses the notion of a psychic discontinuity between types of beings.

Within the mushroom experience, I can spend only a moment grappling for one of my conceptual anchors to help me understand. Each time I take a breath, I am pulled under, incorporated into the mushroom’s churning, profuse agenda. I have swallowed the mushroom, and it, in turn, swallows me. This is not a time for applying my thought; it is a time for paying attention. I surrender, unmoored. (As Barad points out, reflective practice still holds the world at a distance, whereas a diffractive methodology attends to the material world from within it.)¹⁸⁴ What if I arranged the relationship thusly: *they* meet my mind, my sensory capacities, my knowledge frameworks, my ability to use a voice, and they *use* them, seemingly, to express themselves, to create a style of intelligibility. In our collaborative entanglement, we generate a strange script. We are a working draft.

What do *they* have to say? How do mushroom bodies experience the world? The peculiar power of this terrestrial entity allows me to imagine-discover a shared world from a point of view that is not determinedly human or “mine.” It is not simply that I, as a human, am in possession of a

¹⁷⁹ Viveiros De Castro, “Some Reflections.”

¹⁸⁰ Viveiros De Castro, “Some Reflections.”

¹⁸¹ Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, (Univocal, 2014) 61.

¹⁸² Viveiros De Castro, “Some Reflections.”

¹⁸³ Viveiros De Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 62.

¹⁸⁴ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 87.

mind and the mushroom is the activating biochemical material. It is closer to an experience whereby mushrooms teach, through their differing modes of material-semiotic iteration, which involves symbiosis with me, about how these categories are decomposing and recomposing. They can (literally and metaphorically) decompose (retranslate) an individual entity (a log, an ego identity) to forge a new reality. They weave themselves into all sorts of systems, my nervous system included, disrupting binarizing logics and shattering universalizing schemas. They entirely shift my perspective on the patterning of mental life. Insides and outsides come unfixed. Artificial dichotomies are irrelevant to mushrooms' relational modes. They complexify the terrain and guide attention to a "nature" exhaustively composed of this complexity. This is not an abstract or intellectual exercise: it is deeply felt and lived through. It is profoundly awe-full.

Psychedelic therapy

Today, the clinical use of psychedelics, guided by medical authorities and their associated research projects, helps to lend validity to the mushroom encounter.¹⁸⁵ Terms such as

¹⁸⁵ In what is often called the "psychedelic Renaissance" (Michael Pollan, *How to Change your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches us about Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression and Transcendence*, Penguin, 2019), a proliferation of pharmacological studies conducted on the antidepressant potential of psilocybin and other plants and preparations revealed a huge renewed interest in what these beings might do *for us*.

Christine Hauskeller et al. write about the bioprospecting that arises around this "Renaissance": "In ongoing territorial struggles, both literal and metaphorical, the appropriation of indigenous skills and knowledges serves the needs of consumer markets, whether for goods, psychological cures, or for religious and transformative experiences. . . . Colonization also takes the form of a systematic, concerted effort in psychiatric research to subject indigenous ways of knowing and doing to the instrumental logic of Western science in the form of clinical trials and highly-regimented biomedical research. The so-called 'psychedelic renaissance' advances this new frontier of colonization, where the methods of clinical medical science are applied to absorb private refuges of unreason, pleasures, and communal experiences into the marketized systems of control and behaviour management" (Christine Hauskeller et al., "Decolonization is a metaphor towards a different ethic. The case from psychedelic studies," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 48:5, (2023), 3).

I hope to lean into other options for interspecies relationality. In Western folk schools of herbalism, for example, there is an effort to circumvent language such as *use* ("What does this plant do

psychoactive (activating psyche), *psychotropic* (moving toward psyche) and *psychedelic* (mind manifesting) orient discourses on mushrooms toward the interiority of human mental life.¹⁸⁶

Rather than understanding mushrooms as tuning minds toward “extent realities,” current practice couches these compounds as tools for therapeutic work (for example, for working with addictions, for accessing the unconscious, for PTSD, for promoting neuroplasticity, for palliative care).¹⁸⁷

Psychoanalysis has turned its attention to the therapeutic possibilities of psychedelics as well. A 2022 volume of *Psychedelic Dialogues* mobilizes psychoanalytic theories of mind to frame psychedelic experience and argue for its benefits. Altered states are likened to Donald Winnicott’s and Marion Milner’s thinking on regression and play.¹⁸⁸ Primary processes, or perinatal experiences, or undifferentiated infantile states, are used to understand the experience and incorporate it into psychoanalytic treatment.¹⁸⁹ Some contend that psychedelics occasion direct contact with W. F. Bion’s *O* and Jacques Lacan’s *Real*. Philip Ringstrom draws on neurological language: the brain’s “default mode network” shuts down during a trip, which

for me?”) and to instead emphasize allyship (“What arises for each of us in the relational encounter?”). My inquiry is not just what these substances do to or for human minds but, more so, how we might open to the perspectival interweave of fungi themselves, to their agential intelligence as they intersect with willing people.

¹⁸⁶ Pollan, *How to Change your Mind*, 81.

¹⁸⁷ Many predecessors have turned their attention to non-ordinary states of consciousness, including William James and his encounters with nitrous oxide; Aldous Huxley and Henri Michaux’s mescaline experiments; and Richard Alpert’s (a.k.a. Ram Dass) famous psilocybin experiments at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Apart from thinking about the possibilities of *human* consciousness, though, I want to draw out the not-human’s participation in worldmaking, and to open toward the intelligibilities and sensibilities linked to mycelial cultures.

¹⁸⁸ See for example, Marion Milner, “The role of illusion in symbol formation,” (1952) in *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men*, Tavistock, 1987 and Donald Winnicott, “Primitive emotional development,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 26, 1945.

¹⁸⁹ See for example, Stan Grof on the matrixes of birth experience. Stan Grof, *The Adventure of Self Discovery, Dimensions of consciousness and new perspectives in psychotherapy and inner exploration*. SUNY Press, 1988.

allows the “entropic brain” and an infinity of unconstrained possibilities to come into play.¹⁹⁰ Jeffrey Guss writes on ego dissolution: narrative identities and “long-held self-representations . . . fall away.”¹⁹¹ Megan Rundel writes that “psychedelic experience allows for a greater understanding of the transpersonal aspects of unconscious life.”¹⁹² She sees the potential for opening to transgenerational processing through careful clinical work. In her clinical example, “Ari” tells her he has found a “reverence for nature” in his mushroom explorations. Yet the crux of their clinical work, as she reports it, centres around his reckoning with transgenerational trauma. This is important and meaningful work to be sure. That said, I sense that pinning the experience to personal trauma narratives and human histories is what lends legitimacy to using psychedelics in the psychoanalytic context.

As a clinician, psychedelic therapy is of great interest to me; I see the potential for pattern shifting and opening self-experience beyond defensive rigidities. But here, in this writing, I resist employing a psychoanalytic frame to interpret a mushroom encounter. It simply does not feel radical enough to do justice to the experience.¹⁹³ Psilocybin presents a challenge to what can be “integrated” into a personal system, or taken in, contained and digested by humans in dyads or groups. While psychedelic psychotherapies do a lot of work around processing and integration after a session, my contention is that mushrooms function to *disintegrate* the narrowness of narcissistic human exceptionalism and the relational enclosures that psychoanalysis privileges. To be sure, doing reflection work is probably a wise activity when having your working model of reality turned inside out (and outside in). It is rather how these experiences are captured that is my concern. My argument is that the therapeutic approach is primarily human exceptionalist: indeed, individual personal growth, change, trauma resolution and “human potential” movements dominate the clinical writing. I also write against spirituality-leaning approaches to psychedelic

¹⁹⁰ Philip Ringstrom, “Introduction to the Symposium on Psychedelics and Psychoanalysis: A conversation Long Overdue,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 32:5, 2022.

¹⁹¹ Jeffrey Guss, “A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Psychedelic Experience,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 32:5, (2022): 456

¹⁹² Megan Rundel, “Psychedelic Psychoanalysis: Translations of the Self,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 32:5, (2022), 470

¹⁹³ *Radical*, from *raedic*, meaning “pertaining to roots.”

therapeutics that emphasize human transcendence through the extraction of earthly technologies, at which point the terrestrial mediator disappears from the story.¹⁹⁴ Also occluded in clinical and pharmacological approaches are traditional and shamanic knowledge and healing practices involving medicinal plants and mushrooms.¹⁹⁵ The ontologies, epistemologies and ethics shaped through these practices present cosmologies that far exceed an analysis of childhood attachments

¹⁹⁴ Certainly this plays out in the extraction and industrialization of pharmacological compounds and the technologizing of Indigenous epistemologies, not to mention the boom of ayahuasca tourism and capitalization on plant-medicine practices in the Global South and beyond. See: Joseph Dumit and Emelia Sanabria, “Set, Setting, and Clinical Trials: Colonial Technologies and Psychedelics Experiment,” *The Palgrave Handbook of the Anthropology of Technology*, 2022 and UMIYAC (The Union of Indigenous Yagé Medics of the Colombian Amazon), Declaration about cultural appropriation from the spiritual authorities, representatives and indigenous organizations of the amazon region [Declaration], 2019, <https://umiyac.org/2019/11/01/declaration-about-cultural-appropriation-from-the-spiritual-authorities-representatives-and-indigenous-organizations-of-the-amazon-region/?lang=en>.

¹⁹⁵ Andrea Ens makes the point that the popular historiography of psychedelics is a colonial tale of “psychedelic pioneers,” with the central actors usually including Gordon Wasson’s “discovery” of psychedelic mushrooms; Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey and the popularization of psychedelic culture; Huxley and his explorations (and misinterpretations) of the use of sacramental peyote; and Albert Hoffman and the discovery of synthetic LSD. All these exclude Indigenous knowledge systems from the discourse. See Andrea Ens, “Silencing indigenous pasts: critical Indigenous theory and the history of psychedelics,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 34:10, 2021.

and resulting self-states.¹⁹⁶ Moving beyond the language of human self-interest could be enabled by a more mycelial point of view. *Have some respect for these long-suffering beings.*¹⁹⁷

Drawing from Guattari, Barbara Glowczewski writes on reticular thinking and nonlinearity in Warlpiri Dreaming spaces. A cartography of Dreamtime territories, as she sees it, offers “no centrality but a multipolar view, a recomposed network in each singularity . . . allowing for emergence of meanings and performances, encounters, creations as well as new original autonomous flows.”¹⁹⁸ These entangled, heterogeneous pathways run counter to a hegemonic world and dualistic logic. Similarly, the “pluriverse” of worlds *they* reveal can’t be contained in a system that homogenizes the universe, or splits mind from matter, or divides the real from the imaginary. Mobilizing Guattari makes sense here: I can’t find the ontological play *they* produce within the psychoanalytic framework in which I was trained. Civitarese’s *phenomenological reduction*, where we draw a handy circle around human-to-human interiority, does not begin to describe the terrain. It seems to me to be a phenomenological expansion.

¹⁹⁶Guss does acknowledge shamanic and medicinal use of plants and fungi. In his view, “the shaman is bestowed with insight into the causes of illness, energy imbalances, disturbances with nature, spirit possession, soul loss.” Plant and fungal medicine allow one to access the unseen. Here he makes a link to the psychedelic therapist and psychoanalyst: “the shaman, psychedelic therapist, and psychoanalyst must know how to ‘stand between realities without losing any of them,’ to borrow Bromberg’s phrase. In shamanic discourse, spirits, ancestors, visions and soul loss are the terms used to relay this dissociated, repressed or otherwise hidden reality. Between psychedelic therapy and psychoanalysis, the terms may differ, but similar psychological processes are being explicated” (Guss, “A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Psychedelic Experience,” 454 and 454). *Standing between realities without losing any of them* is a tricky feat. The difficulty is that mushroom intra-action can decompose the very human-centric distinctions upon which psychoanalysis was founded. Mushrooms—biologically, psychically—don’t tend to let matters stay fixed.

¹⁹⁷ “We’re tired of trees,” write Deleuze and Guattari. “We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 15). I suggest it is not possible to sever or polarize the tree and the rhizome, many of whom are in intimate relationship. In my personal psychedelic experience, the mushrooms were literally defending the trees.

¹⁹⁸ Barbara Glowczewski, *Indigenising Anthropology with Guattari and Deleuze*, (U Edinburgh Press, 2021) 36.

Dreaming and the terrestrial—dimensions that Western modernism has endeavoured to sever—are inseparable in other systems of thought and practice. Whereas the terrestrial fades away in the shared dream of psychoanalysis, earthly pathways and mythic stories are in relations of correspondence in Dreaming cartographies. Such pathways are, as Glowczewski describes it, “simultaneously geographic and oneiric.”¹⁹⁹ She writes: “it’s the earth itself, the land, that is the source of power that makes of the Dreaming this force which passes throughout all the inherent “energies” found within matter, the so-called vital forces of the species that constitute the Dreaming and life.”²⁰⁰

The Dreaming involves humans and not-humans in its networks. All manners of things vitalize the Dreaming, and “oneiric revelations are directly connected to living in daily life.”²⁰¹

Glowczewski notes where Oedipalization is irrelevant to the Warlpiri system. Gendered bodies are far less important than constellating with other kinds of heterogeneous bodies. Multiplicity is built into this cartography; terrestrial entities are vital participants in the ways realities are organized.²⁰² Dreamings are an “active principle of various metamorphoses.”²⁰³ What I find to be particularly salient here is Glowczewski’s description of an “image force that reorganizes my

¹⁹⁹ Glowczewski, *Indigenising Anthropology*, 14.

²⁰⁰ Glowczewski, *Indigenising Anthropology*, 10.

²⁰¹ Glowczewski, *Indigenising Anthropology*, 18.

²⁰² This plays out in the legal concept of *environmental personhood*, or *legal standing*, whereby entities such as rivers, mountains and forests are granted juridical personhood, rather than being framed as property. In 2017, a court in India granted the Ganges and Yamuna rivers the same legal rights as people. Colombia’s Constitutional Court declared, in 2016, that the Atrato River in the country’s northwest is a “subject of rights.” The Magpie River, in Quebec, was the first Canadian river to be granted legal personhood in 2021. Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution recognizes the right of nature to exist, persist and regenerate. In New Zealand, the Whanganui River was recognised as a legal entity in 2017 as part of a settlement between the government and the Māori; this entity has all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person. New Zealand also recognized Te Urewera, a former national park, as a legal entity, and the government also reached an agreement in 2017 with eight Māori tribes to recognize the Mount Taranaki as a person. See also: Christopher Stone, “Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects,” *Southern California Law Review* 45, 1972.

²⁰³ Glowczewski, *Indigenising Anthropology*, 10.

real.”²⁰⁴ Mushrooms propose how worldly connectivity can be differently linked, felt, imagined and elaborated.

Between the oneiric and material mushrooms, we are not simply dealing with “inner experience” in the way that a psychological frame would endeavour to individualize it. The notion of hallucination is too experientially thin, and while the personal connections that come into awareness during the psychedelic experience are meaningful and deeply felt, emphasizing human relational dynamics or the “mystical and transcendent,” omits many aspects of the phenomenon. The favoured analytic descriptors (infantile or prenatal regressions, Bion’s ineffable O, Bollas’s *unthought known*)²⁰⁵ seem to overlook the collaborative mushroom and its broad-reaching networks altogether. Meanwhile, as Letcher points out, it is the animate realities and not-human relationships occasioned during Indigenous mushroom ceremonies that make participants well.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Glowczewski, *Indigenising Anthropology*, 26. Ingold tells a story of the force of image, and how such forces are considered “mere chimera” in the scientific system: “A well-known instance is the story of how the chemist Friedrich August Kekulé discovered the structure of the benzene molecule, comprised of a ring of six atoms. According to Kekulé’s own, admittedly retrospective and possibly embellished account, it happened one night in 1865 while he was staying in the Belgian city of Ghent. He had been up late in his study, at work on a textbook. Making little progress, he turned his chair towards the fire and dozed off. In his reverie, atoms gambolled before his eyes, twining and twisting in snake-like motion. . . . ‘But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes. As if by a flash of lightning I awoke. . . . I spent the rest of the night working out the consequences of the hypothesis.’” Ingold goes on to track how this “dream was no longer an affectation of vision and had become instead an abstract figure of thought—‘a snake good to think with’—that was peculiarly apt for deciphering the structure of a given reality.” What Kekulé was required to do, through the mandates of his epistemic system, was commit himself to laboratory work to prove his hypothesis correct. “Thus the serpent and the benzene ring fall unequivocally on either side of an impermeable ontological division between imagination and reality. It is this that allows the one to stand metaphorically for the other. The congruity between the serpent and ring reinforces the division rather than breaking it down” (Tim Ingold, “Being Alive to a World Without Objects”, in *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, ed Graham Harvey, (Routledge, 2014), 38–39).

²⁰⁵ Kevin Barrett explores the “mystical” of psychedelic experiences in “Psychedelic Psychodynamics: Relational Knowing and the Unthought Known,” *Relational Dialogues*. 32:5, 2022.

²⁰⁶ Letcher, “Mad Thoughts on Mushrooms,” 91.

Enigmatic signifiers

Suzanne Simard has popularized the notion of the “Wood Wide Web” to describe the communicative fabric of mycorrhizal networks underground.²⁰⁷ Fungi and plants fuse together, creating a meshwork of exchange between beings—interspecies transference. Carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and water, for example, pass between different types of trees along the fungal network. Poisons, bacteria, mineral supplies and regulating hormones can also be shared. DNA and RNA travel fungal channels as well. Merlin Sheldrake writes on signals called “infochemicals,” shared between plants above ground and hypothesized to be used by mycorrhizal fungi as well. Like Haraway’s “material-semiotic” knots,²⁰⁸ an infochemical is a meaning-carrying material.

From this human’s point of view, the mushrooms’ place in the forest is ethically ambiguous: they support life, and they destroy it. They practice mutualism and collectivity, and they enact parasitism as well. As Sheldrake points out, the relational dynamics of mushrooms can’t be homogenized: “There are many situations where shared mycorrhizal networks don’t seem to do much more for their plant partners than a single—”private”—mycorrhizal partner would.”²⁰⁹ In any case, fungi do have the capacity to actively participate in sending and receiving, mediating and connecting. They can coexist in intelligent interaction, organizing the nature of things.

The idea of signal transference between species is lived and embodied when altered by psilocybin mushrooms. Here, I elaborate further on the notion of extant intelligences via the communicative capacities of mushrooms. I play with the psychoanalytic language of “enigmatic signifiers” and propose that that enigmatic signification is not a fundamentally human-anthropological situation, as Laplanche theorizes.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Suzanne Simard, “Mycorrhizal Networks Facilitate Tree Communication, Learning, and Memory,” in *Memory and Learning in Plant*, eds F Baluska, M Gagliano, G Witzany, Springer International Publishing, 2018

²⁰⁸ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto.”

²⁰⁹ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 155.

²¹⁰ Jean Laplanche, *Freud and the Sexual*, International Psychoanalytic Books, 2011.

One way to approach psilocybin mushrooms and other fungal derivatives could be by recapitulating Kirby's project. Kirby transcribes Derrida's claim "there is no outside the text" to read "there is no outside nature." Text and nature are not opposed here. She writes:

my aim is to leverage nature out of its pre-critical position as "the before" or "primordial," that material "stuff" that lacks the more evolved capacities of language, agency, and intelligence. Such assumptions rest on a circumscribed concept of identity, because even if we acknowledge the genesis or emergence of something we tend to assume that this processual dynamic is in the past, before identity "set" into something unique and locatable.²¹¹

I suggest that certain fungi make a similar argument to Kirby's through their own approach to relationship: the taking over of a psychesoma for an overwhelming six- to seven-hour show and tell. My proposal is that, through a symbiotic relationship with fungi, Kirby's project is quite palpably lived. Barad, Kirby's interlocutor, writes of a felt sense of *intra-activity*, in which "scenes never rest, but are reconfigured within, dispersed across, and threaded through one another."²¹²

Fungi directly indicate the chiasmic interweaving of material "stuff" and consciousness, the churning breakdown of locatable, circumscribed identity, the undecidability of human interiority and environmental exteriority. They defy the boundary between the sociocultural and the natural. Western modernism's dividing practices are irrelevant to mycelia. They exhibit the unfixed and processual dynamics of planetary co-becoming, and they commandeer other body-minds into this realm of emergence as well.

Understanding consciousness as an emergent product of human neurophysiology is not sufficient. Signal transfers, infochemicals, and messages connect neural networks in the brain and gut with the ecosystems sprawling through the ground and beyond. What we have is closer

²¹¹ Vicki Kirby and Marc Higgins, "In Conversation with Vicki Kirby: Deconstruction, Critique, and Human Exceptionalism in the Anthropocene," in *Reimagining Science Education in the Anthropocene*, ed M.F.G Wallace et al., Palgrave, 2022.

²¹² Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements," 240.

to Terence McKenna's quip: "[The] mushroom [spirit] states its own position very clearly. It says, 'I require the nervous system of a mammal. Do you have one handy?'"²¹³

Mushrooms' symbiosis is always already at work, be it with animal, insect, or human nervous systems, with mycelial-root systems, or with whatever other entity they may encounter and modify. Fungi relationality is responsible for life on this planet. Fungi are infrastructural. They coexist in intra-active species entanglements, spatial entanglements across vast organismic networks and temporal entanglements. As Sheldrake puts it: "plants and mycorrhizal fungi enact a collective flourishing that underpins our past, present, and future."²¹⁴ This symbiosis, these linking chains of temporality, interdependence and mutative becoming, are also a matter of survival: "Today more than ninety percent of all plant species depend on mycorrhizal fungi. They are the rule, not the exception, a more fundamental part of planthood than fruit, flowers, leaves, wood, or even roots."²¹⁵ They can also be powerfully commanding in their parasitism. *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* becomes a prosthetic organ of the carpenter ant, weaving its hyphae, its searching filaments, around the ant's limbs and organs. Meanwhile, the mushroom's ergot alkaloids, similar to the compound synthesized in LSD, manipulate the ant's muscle behaviour.²¹⁶

We can't do without mycelia, which makes us wholly dependent on and vulnerable to their ways of being, as well as open to their psychological influence. More so, may I remind my fellow psychotherapists, than mom's. Of course, according to Laplanche's psychoanalysis, the enigmatic signifiers we inherit, as our own personal unconscious, are attributed to the earliest human caregiver. What Laplanche leaves out—as do most metapsychologies—is the "species specific potency"²¹⁷ of the diverse bodies that interface with ours. Such bodies have their own reference points, their own affective, expressive and behavioural repertoire. They can be *implanted* (to borrow Laplanche's term) or *digested* (to draw from object relational language), intervening in psychosomatic processes from "within." Returning to Kirby's argument that

²¹³ Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival*, (Harper Collins 1991), 47.

²¹⁴ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 124.

²¹⁵ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 124.

²¹⁶ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 97.

²¹⁷ De Castro, "Some Reflections."

“natural bodies” operate via processes of representation and inscription, we can say that the collectivities organizing psychic life begin to stretch along new lines and links, forming alternate patterns.²¹⁸

The link between communication and mushrooms is long established. María Sabina, the shaman who inadvertently brought magic mushrooms to wider North American awareness,²¹⁹ reports on the capacity of the mushroom to mediate between worlds: “There is a world beyond ours. . . . That world talks. It has a language of its own. I report what it says.”²²⁰

Henry Munn’s “The Mushrooms of Language” is worth quoting at length here:

The Mazatecs say that the mushrooms speak. If you ask a shaman where his imagery comes from, he is likely to reply: I didn’t say it, the mushrooms did. No mushroom speaks, that is a primitive anthropomorphization of the natural, only man speaks, but he who eats these mushrooms, if he is a man of language, becomes endowed with an inspired capacity to speak. The shamans who eat them, their function is to speak, they are the speakers who chant and sing the truth, they are the oral poets of their people, the doctors of the word, they who tell what is wrong and how to remedy it, the seers and oracles, the ones possessed by the voice. “It is not I who speak,” said Heraclitus, “it is the logos.” Language is an ecstatic activity of signification. Intoxicated by the mushrooms, the fluency, the ease, the aptness of expression one becomes capable of are such that one is astounded by the words that issue forth from the contact of the intention of articulation with the matter of experience. At times it is as if one were being told what to say, for the

²¹⁸ See Kirby, Vicki ed. *What if Culture was Nature all Along?* U Edinburgh Press, 2017.

²¹⁹ The story of amateur mycologist Wasson’s visit with Sabina, his article on the magic mushroom in *Time* magazine, his rise to fame as the “discoverer” of the magic mushroom and the subsequent stream of pilgrimages to Oaxaca and utter devastation to Sabina’s reputation, family and community is a conspicuous example of the asymmetries of colonial extraction (see Christine Hauskeller et al. “Decolonization is a metaphor towards a different ethic. The case from psychedelic studies.”). In this writing, I want to revisit and draw out Sabina’s own framing of the agential mushrooms through her curative cultural practices. In her work, they are known variously as *children*, *sacred*, and *clowns*, while she becomes an *instrument* of their messages.

²²⁰ María Sabina, quoted in Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 94.

words leap to mind, one after another, of themselves without having to be searched for: a phenomenon similar to the automatic dictation of the surrealists except that here the flow of consciousness, rather than being disconnected, tends to be coherent: a rational enunciation of meanings. Message fields of communication with the world, others, and one's self are disclosed by the mushrooms.²²¹

We can see here where Munn upholds the boundary between the one who speaks and the many who do not. The muteness of nature ensures that the mushroom isn't talking, but it does serve as a strange, intoxicating truth serum. The underlying formulation here is that language is cultural, and the natural world is not in possession of it. Munn continues:

From the beginning, once what they have eaten has modified their consciousness, they begin to speak and at the end of each phrase they say *tzo*—"says" in their language—like a rhythmic punctuation of the said. Says, says, says. It is said. I say. Who says? We say, man says, language says, being and existence say."²²²

They, the fungi themselves, are not subjects of speech in this translation.

Later, Munn reminds us of Claude Lévi-Strauss's view: "The psychoanalyst listens, whereas the shaman speaks."²²³ In my own experience with mushrooms, who-what the psychoanalyst hears, and who-what exactly speaks, comes into question. For Sabina, it is clear who is speaking. In each line of her ceremonial chant, "says" has a subject:

The "says" refers to the mushroom speaking. María Sabina did not take credit for her poetry: the mushrooms, her niños santos, or holy children, as she called them, spoke through her; she was simply their interpreter, and she treated them with great respect. Some shamans would call the mushrooms "clowns," and she sometimes called herself a "clown woman." Laughter, curative, was often part of the ceremony. She claimed to see

²²¹ Henry Munn, "The Mushrooms of Language," *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, ed Michael J. Harner, ed., Oxford University Press, 1973, <http://www.psychedelicalibrary.org/munn.htm>

²²² Munn, "The Mushrooms of Language."

²²³ Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," *Structural Anthropology* (Doubleday Anchor, 1967) 193.

the mushrooms as children dancing around her, singing and playing instruments. She translated for them, was their instrument.²²⁴

It seems to me that Sabina's experience, which echoes my own feeling of being an instrument, requires a rearrangement of analytic coordinates. The field theorists might be invited to reconsider who is included in the field of co-dreaming. Laplanche's general theory of seduction would have to admit a much more wide-reaching enigma initiating psychic life.²²⁵ Mushrooms, when interiorized (literally, as raw material to ingest and digest), are also enigmatic signifiers, making modifications to the psychic apparatus. The apparatus they co-create functions differently than our usual navigational systems of selfhood. In this radical asymmetry with mushrooms, I am receiving numerous messages: verbal, somatic, imaginal and otherwise. This is no longer a fundamentally human-anthropological situation. In her writing on Laplanche, Hélène Tessier writes: "The question for the seduced is then: What does he/she want from me?"²²⁶ *They* wanted me to try to share their perspective. I am inscribed by the nature of these beings—this prologue is an elaboration of that encounter. The mushrooms have triggered my efforts to translate this enigma.

Bion's metapsychology considers the ways we humans endeavour to process and digest raw sensory data, to formulate it into shared sense. In the journey I recollect here, it was the mushrooms who created what Bion might call a thinking apparatus—to think-sense-feel what we take for granted. Stengers writes:

As [Haraway] recalls with joy and wonder, human genomes can be found in only about 10 per cent of the cells that live in what we call our body, the rest of the cells being filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists and such. This is materialism of another kind, a kind that may be connected with the many struggles that are necessary against

²²⁴ Chloe Aridjis, "On Maria Sabina, one of Mexico's greatest poets," *Voices Magazine*. March 30, 2015.

²²⁵ Jean Laplanche, *New foundations for psychoanalysis*, Trans David Macey, Blackwell, 1989.

²²⁶ Hélène Tessier, "The Work of Jean Laplanche: the Rationalist Tradition and its Necessity in Psychoanalysis," Presented at the Moscow Psychoanalytic Society, Moscow, May 19th 2009.

what simplifies away our world in terms of idealist judgements about what would ultimately matter and what does not.²²⁷

In this interspecies dynamic, we are obligated to “think disturbing thoughts”—that is, thoughts that might disturb the ways we protect our epistemic, ontological and ethical frameworks.

They are literally and figuratively doing digestion work.²²⁸ *They* invite us to “learn from experience.”²²⁹ *They* have no problem doing away with psychoanalysis’s “canopy of organizing and mediating ‘filters,’” as Joseph Grotstein puts it.²³⁰ Instead, they contribute a cascade of polyphonic thoughts to think with. These co-dreamers are very much in direct relation with soil, guts, brains. I insist again on the material dimension of discursive beings, which Kirby puts forward as the “consubstantiality of thought and matter, human agency and material objectivity, significance and substance.”²³¹

Mycelial messages and sensibilities have certainly woven themselves into contemporary social and ecological thought, inspiring models of relating, thinking, organizing. Take, for example, Anna Tsing’s matsutake mushrooms and their “open-ended gatherings” in precarity;²³² Adrienne Maree Brown’s detoxifying mushrooms;²³³ Simard’s transpecies information transfer through the Wood Wide Web;²³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomes. All testify to mycelia’s power to animate

²²⁷ Isabelle Stengers, “Diderot’s egg: Divorcing materialism from eliminativism”, *Radical Philosophy* 144, Jul/Aug 2007.

²²⁸ *They* are thinking disturbing thoughts and literally eating toxic particles in the meantime. “Voracious fungal appetites can be deployed to break down pollutants, such as crude oil from oil spills, in a process known as mycoremediation” (Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 10).

²²⁹ In *Learning from Experience*, Bion sets out to describe the various functions of mental life, for example, *alpha function*, which breaks down and organizes human experience. See Wilfred Bion, *Learning from Experience*, Routledge, 1984.

²³⁰ Joseph Grotstein, “Bion’s ‘Transformation in ‘O’ and the Concept of the ‘Transcendent Position’,” 1997, <http://www.sicap.it/merciai/bion/papers/grots.htm>.

²³¹ Kirby, *Quantum Entanglements*, 77.

²³² Anna Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, (Princeton UP, 2015), 22.

²³³ Adrienne Maree Brown. *Emergent Strategy: Changing Shape, Changing Worlds*, AK Press, 2017.

²³⁴ Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, Penguin, 2021.

ideas along unfamiliar pathways: to find lines of escape.²³⁵ Their behaviour draws attention to “complex adaptive systems” and nonlinear dynamics.²³⁶ Thinking-feeling with mushrooms demands a consideration of collectivity, connectivity and multiplicitous co-becoming. They foster decomposition, undoing and remaking. They expose a radical indeterminacy in the distinctions ordering realities.²³⁷ They are risky in this way.

In “The Science Underground: Mycology as a Queer Discipline,” Patricia Ononiwu Kaishian notes how fungi are neither plant nor animal, nor are they exclusively female or male. Again, binarizing conventions are alien to mycelium bodies:

It is rare for a fungus to have only two biological sexes, and some fungi such as *Schizophyllum commune* have as many as 23,000 mating types. When two compatible fungi meet, their mycelia will fuse into one body, sexually recombine, then remain somatically as one as “they” continue to live, grow, and explore in their environment. Members of phylum Glomeromycota are only known to be asexual. Fungi in order Laboulbeniales sometimes have distinct bodies for male and female reproductive structures (diocious), or both may be found in the same body (monoecious), and sometimes monoecious and dioecious bodies co-occur.²³⁸

²³⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi, Bloomsbury, 2014.

²³⁶ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 172.

²³⁷ Jackie Wang describes Romain Rolland’s understanding of *oceanic feeling* as “not an infantile defense or regressive return to a pre-Oedipal state, but part of a mature process of becoming; an experience of ego loss that enables one to commune with the ‘substance’ of existence in a way that radically alters one’s orientation to the world” (Jackie Wang, “Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect” *Giulia Tofana the Apothecary* Blog, Dec 3, 2016, <https://loneberry.tumblr.com/post/153995404787/oceanic-feeling-and-communist-affect>). An oceanic feeling here would allow communion with(in) a terrestrial meshwork. As it turns out, the meshwork defies terrestrial-oceanic boundaries, as can be seen with the partnership between ocean life and fungi. “Lichen is one example, writes Sheldrake. “Seaweeds—also algae—are another; many seaweeds washed up on shorelines depend on fungi to nourish them and prevent them from drying out” (Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*), 124.

²³⁸ Patricia Kaishan, “The Science Underground: Mycology as Queer Discipline,” *Catalyst Journal*, <https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/view/33523/26712>

As Sheldrake puts it: “Imagine that you could pass through two doors at once. It’s inconceivable, yet fungi do it all the time. When faced with a forked path, fungal hyphae don’t have to choose one or the other. They can branch and take both routes.”²³⁹

Remarkably, in symbiosis with *Psilocybe semilanceata*, we are invited to live in co-occurring states such as these. To my parsing ego, this differently organized reality may seem like a paradox. Sensory pathways are rearranged through synesthesia; cognitive chains and sensory channels are flooded with information; serotonin receptors are activated and create immense emotional shifts. The elaborate patterning of a human nervous system and neuronal connectivity is networked into the molecular intervention of mycelia, which ignites an awareness of extensive dimensionalities and the sentient forms who wander there. Relational cartographies can be practiced otherwise with these teachers. This connectivity is far-reaching and it’s also, quite simply, of the earth. There is a profound psychic agency to spores and rot and soil; they are biological catalysts.

At this intersection of fungi and human body-minds, the impossibility of human psychesomatic enclosure is exposed. The view that humans are the intelligent species, the one in possession of mind, language, agency and intelligence, is confronted by the ways that psilocybin masterfully redoes “psyche.” The notion of *being in possession of a mind* feels incorrect here. Rather, one *is possessed by* an entity who mobilizes and decomposes “mind” in its own uniquely purposeful way. To borrow Akomolafe’s phrasing: “I am an activation of a mushroom.”²⁴⁰ There is no mute materiality in this scenario. There is no such thing as inanimate organicity.

²³⁹Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 44.

²⁴⁰ “We are activism of ancestors, just as we are activism of trees and mushrooms. We are chiasmatic and prolific. . . . Irreducibly collective.” Bayo Akomolafe, “Let us make sanctuary,” *Sounds True Podcast*, interview with Tami Simon. May 17, 2022. <https://resources.soundstrue.com/podcast/let-us-make-sanctuary/>.

PART I: SPIRITS

The people called “Mediums,” a singular order among men, set forth that their bodies are, for the time being, vacated by their souls, and that during the vacation, the soul of some one else, one who has died, and yet lives, takes possession of the physical structure, and then proceeds to give forth his or her wisdom or folly for the enlightenment or darkening of men’s minds. Another class tell us that they are “impressed” by a departed on to give voice to the Spirit’s thought; others declare that they are “obsessed.” Well, it may all be so, or it may not.²⁴¹

[T]he point is not to address this indecision, but to inhabit the undecided situation, and to learn what it may demand.²⁴²

1 CHARTING THE PSYCHIC FIELD

1.1 Being haunted, concretely

I live in a haunted house. Though I could be speaking poetically here (aren’t we all haunted in some way?), I am suggesting something more literal. This matter of fact—or matter of concern²⁴³—has been relayed to me several times by my landlady, as well as previous tenants. The paintings on the walls tilt in the night. The lights flicker. Objects once on the shelf turn up on the floor. A report of a disembodied voice. The shadow of a human form in the galley kitchen.

Multiple mediums agree: my home has a few ghosts hanging around, the most conspicuous being a man who used to own the house and doesn’t want to leave.

²⁴¹ Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead: The Human Soul, Its Migrations and Its Transmigrations* (MJ Randolph, 1861), 6.

²⁴² Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains,” 44.

²⁴³ Latour presents a case for dealing with “matters of concern” rather than “matters of fact.” He writes: “My question is thus: Can we devise another powerful descriptive tool that deals this time with matters of concern and whose import then will no longer be to debunk but to protect and to care, as Donna Haraway would put it?” (Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004): 232). For Latour, such a descriptive tool would involve examining the agencies involved in assembling a fact, as well as circumventing the political (mis)use of social construction, for example, in debates on climate change.

Whether this ghost is malevolent or benevolent, or as complicated in his moods as most of us earthbound people, I don't know. I'm unaware of the tone of his haunting. I accept these ghost stories with about the same measure of credulity as when I'm told that rats live in the attic over the winter. I live in the ambiguity of it: sometimes I sense evidence of their presence, and that piques my curiosity; but I'm not "trying to get to the bottom of it." At least not so far as I could present direct evidence of their existence—ghost or rat. Apart from objects reappearing in new places, I am unbothered. If the former owner is in my suite, he is welcome. I wonder if he's aware I'm writing about spirit mediums; I started this research long before I moved into his house. What luck to be writing the bulk of this dissertation alongside a ghostly stranger.

Stengers urges us to inhabit a state of indecision and learn its demands. In this writing, I have provisionally agreed that the house is haunted. I open this potential space as an ethical and methodological gesture, toward an expanded and multiplicitous community of beings. By relating at the margins of the sanctioned modern Western real, I encounter a plurality of perspectives that reorder my own. Entities such as ghosts and spirits have animated a series of cascading questions, many of which have moved this project forward. They have drawn me into uncanny situations that exceed my conceptual frameworks. They have inspired me to adopt a more flexible sense of possibility. They have altered how I situate my self. They've loosened my inherited assumptions about reality and fantasy and the fence between these terms. They influence my "ontological disposition." They have, in fact, given me supportive advice on writing, via the mediums with whom we confer. I keep this potential space open and I live within it, acknowledging that there are myriad unseen—or invisibilized—forces contributing to my day-to-day life. As Akomolafe puts it: "Our worlds are heavily subsidized by the invisible."²⁴⁴

Drawing from Edith Turner's anthropology, Anzaldúa writes of the "intellectual imperialism" involved in defining ghosts as a metaphor or symbol.²⁴⁵ Imperialism is alive and well in the field of psychoanalysis, as I will track below. For the mediums who have been consulted on the matter of the house I live in, these ghosts are not abstract concepts or symbols. They are the production of neither a personal unconscious nor the collective unconscious of the people residing in the house. They exist "out there"—spiritually, energetically, at once fluidly present and nonphysical.

²⁴⁴ Bayo Akomolafe, "Animism" (lecture, Embodied Ecologies lecture series, November 25, 2023).

²⁴⁵ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 38.

They distribute currents of information and affect. They seem to channel enough energy from wherever they are to affect physical objects. How might go I about cohabiting with them? Again, I am not writing symbolically here. For me, this haunting operates through material traces as well as discursively: shifted objects, tilted frames, collected stories. Being literally haunted, I abide a spirit-inflected ontology, where nonphysical things-in-themselves do things around the house, not unlike the Wi-Fi signal.

Though my diverse household has become normalized for me to some extent, I understand that the notion of entities such as ghosts contributing to daily reality isn't conventional knowledge in all milieus. I anticipate raised eyebrows from those who subscribe to other evidentiary regimes. Perhaps scrutiny or critical thinking is required here. What are the appropriate frameworks that could determine if these accounts are true and real? How, precisely, would one go about verifying a ghost's liminal presence, and what might that verification method do? Besides organizing a set of techniques and tools for measuring the ineffable, we might need to determine if we are working with reliable witnesses. Alicia Puglionesi's research on the history of psychic science in America describes the ways that "divergent experiences of reality"²⁴⁶ demanded various modes of psychological assessment. "Madness was the elephant in the room when sifting the testimony of strangers. . . . [I]nvestigators did their best to protect themselves and their informants from the contamination of unreason."²⁴⁷

Needing to separate objective fact from subjective delusion to verify a claim about the way things are is a uniquely modern approach. Are the mediums to be understood in psychological terms? Can we approach their interlocutors empirically? Do we require they show themselves in some kind of tangible form, or are personal perceptual encounters sufficient evidence? Do we use spiritual practice to commune with them or recording devices to capture them? Each disciplinary community would have its own evidentiary criteria, its own set of techniques for investigating and coming to know occult phenomena.²⁴⁸ Oddly, it seems that some of these

²⁴⁶ Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms*, 210.

⁷ Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms*, 203.

²⁴⁸ In "The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology," Espírito Santo and Vergara give a reading of ufology and the evidentiary protocols generated around its "unacceptable or invisible objects." They underline the eclectic thinking related to concepts of evidence, with borders that

ghosts might disappear when certain tools and frameworks are applied. Others will show up uncannily through a different set of tools and frameworks. Like the hag, they don't stay put.

1.2 Psyches and/or spirits

In what follows, I stage a confrontation between the practice of psychoanalysis and the practice of spirit mediumship, or channelling.²⁴⁹ Both are invested in the agency of intangibles. Both recognize forms of haunting. Both deal with communicative objects resistant to being reduced to materialist frameworks. Diana Espírito Santo and Ruy Blanes write, “most of the things that affect us as humans are invisible, disperse: we cannot touch them as we would objects or confine them to a particular essence, space, or time.”²⁵⁰ On this point, the analyst and the medium might agree. The medium, however, allows their “epistemologically challenging objects” to exist outside their minds, autonomously.²⁵¹ Meanwhile, the psychoanalyst will relegate extramaterial entities to the personal unconscious. As Bollas assures us: “the presence of the ghosts is, of

are constantly renegotiated and reconceptualized. They suggest that “the UFO as a theory machine generates a theory of evidence on a spectrum. This spectrum embraces a multiplicity of positions concerning what is possible and what is impossible, what is conceivable and what is inconceivable” (Diana Espírito Santo and Alejandra Vergara, “The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology,” *Antípoda Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, 41 (2020): 128). In my study, I'm interested in the boundary work around the conceivable as laid out by psychoanalysis and mediumship in turn.

²⁴⁹ I use the terms *mediumship* and *channelling* interchangeably, though some circles differentiate them. Some distinguish the practice by how the information is transmitted: Spirits speak *to* the medium, and the medium passes along the information to the living. Spirits speak *through* the channel, and the channel allows use of their psychesomatic apparatus for the transmission. A psychic, by contrast, reads energy, though the term “psychic mediumship” is also commonly used. Sometimes these figures are differentiated by addressee: Mediums are intermediaries between living and dead people, transmitting information from a being who has “crossed over” to a living person. Channels make contact with entities from a variety of realms: natural, alien, architectural, angelic and so forth. The people I have encountered in my research do not make clear distinctions between psychic work, mediumship and channelling—their practices are eclectic and not so decisively mapped. In my writing, I follow their lead.

²⁵⁰ Ruy Blanes and Diana Espírito Santos, *The Social Life of Spirits* (U Chicago Press, 2013), 3.

²⁵¹ Blanes and Espírito Santos, *The Social Life of Spirits*, 3.

course, entirely a matter of one's own unconscious life."²⁵² Here, the ghost becomes an emanation from the "matrix of the mind."²⁵³ I examine how psychoanalysis historically dealt with—and continues to deal with—the ghosts, entities and energies that constitute the once flourishing world of spiritual mediumship. And I explore how the mutative, abundant realities of contemporary mediums and channels bump up against the boundaries of the psychoanalytic container.

Part One of this dissertation takes the following journey through five chapters: In Chapter One, *Charting the Psychic Field*, I outline the terrain of contemporary relational psychoanalysis, particularly through the language of Bion, post-Bionian field theorists and object relations psychoanalysis. I sketch out their favoured models of formative relationships and offer a clinical example of my own to convey how these models of relationship might be observed in practice. Chapter Two, *Fracturing Containers*, explores the entrenched humanism of psychoanalysis, opening its enclosure toward materialist theories, more-than-human anthropologies as well as conversations with practicing mediums and their spirits. Chapter Three, *Digesting the World into Words*, takes up with the onto-epistemic management strategies of psychoanalysis: Its constructions of reality as well as psychic maturity. In particular, I challenge its grip on an anthropocentric theory of communication. Chapter Four, *Bulwarks*, gives historical account of psychoanalysis's exorcisms, which transformed the agency of ghosts, spirits and the like by partitioning them within the realm of human imagination. I look at where this mode of boundary work continues in the field. Chapter Five, *On Other Solutions to Reality*, reconfigures the relational field of psychoanalysis toward other experiential coordinates, exploring how cartographies of realities and relations are charted differently in other therapeutic systems. Throughout Part One, I draw on my fieldwork with practicing psychic mediums and channels, weaving their accounts into the text.

As a method, psychoanalysis is tasked with addressing mysterious, intangible processes and their effect on human life. Of course, this includes a vast terrain of phenomena, so it must sort through the complexity to determine what is meaningful to being human. Freud encouraged his patients

²⁵² Bollas, *The Evocative Object World*, 31.

²⁵³ I take this term from the title of Ogden's *The Matrix of the Mind: Object Relations and the Psychoanalytic Dialogue* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

to free-associate—to speak, as Bollas writes “irrespective of the presence of inner censorship.”²⁵⁴ What we find in this stream of (un)consciousness is a mess of perceptions, constructions, imaginations, intensities and dreams. The psychoanalyst encourages the mess, and they also have to do some ordering work. A cornerstone of this ordering is to separate an internal world from the outside world. “Demons were originally understood to be intermediaries between the divine and the mortal, spirits that passed freely from one domain to the other, performing a valued function,” writes Bollas.²⁵⁵ This “original” understanding of a valuable intermediary has been co-opted into a theory of the unconscious and become an imaginary construct. Bollas then describes how a more psychologically mature mind avoids transporting inner demons into social space.²⁵⁶ I return to this theory of maturity later on.

Those determined to parse personal projection from demons, ghosts, spiritual entities or other-dimensional beings said to arrive in a home, a perceptual field or at the scene of a channelling session may interpret them as misplaced inner contents, a confusion around thought and thing. Hysteria. Hallucination. Psychosis. Schizoid personality. Omnipotent defence. Infantile wish fulfillment. Trauma resulting from rupture of maternal holding environment. The diagnostic lenses are plentiful, and I will describe a few of them. However, rather than use psychoanalysis to decipher and diagnose the mental life of the channel, I ask how mediumistic practices might open an ontologically, epistemologically and ethically ambiguous situation that might be brought to bear on the psychoanalytic frame. There are “immaterial bodies”²⁵⁷ who don’t seem to conform to the customs of psychoanalytic interiority. What accounts might be given of them were they not expected to conform to psychoanalytic mandates?

In “The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology,” Diana Espírito Santos and Alejandra Vergara discuss the “ontological shock” that arises when “realities with different languages” collide: “when one witnesses something one must decode it in terms that often produce paradoxical twists.”²⁵⁸ An unquestionable reality crash occurs between

²⁵⁴ Bollas, *Mystery of Things*, 9.

²⁵⁵ Bollas, *Mystery of Things*, 102.

²⁵⁶ Bollas, *Mystery of Things*, 102.

²⁵⁷ Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies* (Sage, 2012).

²⁵⁸ Espírito Santos and Vergara, “The Possible and the Impossible,” 143.

subjects in the world as described by psychoanalysis and the profuse “worldings” that mediumship traverses. These practices involve contact with intelligences that the confines of the human psyche, let alone the psychoanalytic conceptual apparatus, cannot entirely corral. Perhaps in response to this ontological shock, psychoanalysis upholds a code that separates human minds from all other collectives of social life.

By working between the domains of inner life and outer worlds, I articulate otherworldly ontologies and relational arrangements that destabilize the fence that contemporary psychoanalysis relies on. My argument’s crux is that the methods and mapping practices of psychoanalysis perform relationality in a dangerously impoverished way. The human-centric mythology that it upholds shuts down generative encounters. The colonial, Eurocentric reality maps that it has inherited mark out the anomalous experience as problematic rather than playful. Certain ways of navigating worlds have become prohibited. Certain modes of sensing and knowing have been pathologized. Psychoanalysis’s persistent and protective safeguarding of familial attachment does a great disservice to relating ecologically. By banishing all sorts of beings from its organization of reality, its construction of the psychesoma becomes poorly attuned—if attuned at all—to extended systems of connection and affiliation.

Spirit communication and psychoanalysis are at once entangled and at odds. Since psychoanalysis emerged alongside spiritualist practices of communing with non- or no-longer-corporeal beings, the founding mothers and fathers of psychoanalysis had to contend with immaterial bodies who disrupted the versions of “self” they strove to establish. Psychoanalysis’s theory of mind took shape in a culture equivocating between spiritual practices and the secular sciences, subjective experience and natural law. While William James famously explored mediumship,²⁵⁹ Freud was ambivalent about spirits as he developed his science of mind. To establish a territory of mental life, he had to deal with the ghosts haunting his disciplinary fence. Eventually, he and his disciples incorporated this invisible realm into a theory of the personal unconscious.

²⁵⁹ See, for example, William James, “Report of the Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena,” *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 1 (1886).

Arguably, psychoanalysis is still a rather “esoteric” practice, through its decidedly nonempirical commitment to an oneiric reality, to unconscious process, to techniques involving co-dreaming and nonrational knowing, to ambiguity and to intuiting currents of transference. Bollas draws from communications technologies to describe his conception of mind as irreducible to the physical realm (not at all dissimilar to how contemporary channels describe their own work):

[W]e now live in an era where the mind is now tending to be viewed as merely synonymous with the brain. . . . [T]he idea that mental problems can be solved through neurological intervention is a category error as ridiculous as confusing a radio program with the radio itself.²⁶⁰

And yet Bollas, like most of his psychoanalytic colleagues, enacts the usual divisions when it comes to weird phenomena. An official version of “external reality” can be seen in his writing on psychosis, for example. Bollas’s schizophrenic has mistaken internal life for external life. What belongs on the inside has leaked and contaminated the correct order of things. The outer world becomes invested with inner world, and the inner world is externalized. Matter and metaphor become mixed up: “a schizophrenic battles with forces and adversities that the non-psychotic world would regard as metaphors.”²⁶¹ The traffic between insides and outsides is going the wrong way, and the “forces” have assumed the wrong form.²⁶² The human mind is protected from actually associating with most entities, be they physical or nonphysical. This definitive cut between “substance and symbol”²⁶³ becomes vital to its organization.

The Western modern, writes Viveiros de Castro, plays “an epistemological game of objectification: what is not objectified simply remains abstract or unreal.” In this game, knowing requires a process of desubjectification, a parsing of what is “intrinsic to the subject” and what

²⁶⁰ Christopher Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts: The Enigma of Schizophrenia* (Yale UP, 2015), 9.

²⁶¹ Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts*, 88.

²⁶² Franz Anton Mesmer’s theory of mesmeric fluid is one example of how liminal entities and “forces” became tidied through the unstable terrain of the development of the psychological sciences. This ethereal, mediating substance, hypothesized to underlie trance states and telepathic phenomena including spirit communication, loses its natural status and becomes metaphor.

²⁶³ Espírito Santo, “The Possible and the Impossible,” 127.

has been “illegitimately projected onto the object.”²⁶⁴ The psychoanalytic milieu, in the meantime, has claimed that which is “intrinsic to the subject,” turning its attention to a peculiar kind of reality belonging to the inner domain. In Civitarese’s phenomenological reduction, we “realize the psychic” by stipulating a virtual world of psychic reality different than the facts of the external world.²⁶⁵

By the late nineteenth century, in a culture of paranormal and psychological investigation, these worlds and their inhabitants were beginning to cleave:

Nineteenth-century European sentimental empiricism was shaken considerably by the “discovery” of the working of this mysterious unconscious, an imagination capable of generating its own forms of phantasmagoria, and the power of suggestion as demonstrated in the practices of hypnotism. The senses suddenly became notoriously unreliable.²⁶⁶

Deciding whether anomalous phenomena circulate through the social and natural worlds or whether they belong to distorted minds was boundary work that psychoanalysis had to perform. As Duerr understood, with the advent of the psychological sciences and psychiatry, the devils and demons with whom the hag was accused of consorting would have to be contained on the inside. Today, the matter has been more or less settled: material reality and psychic reality influence one another to be sure, but one mustn’t confuse who and what belongs where. What concerns the psychoanalyst are the phantasmagorical traces of embodied experience. The idea is that psychical phenomena require forms of knowledge and practice different from those appropriate to the physical world.

Realizing the psychic is meant as an intervention, a technique to demarcate the “inner,” so that it might be rendered workable. In psychoanalytic practice, a boundary is drawn around personal and interpersonal space; fictions and fantasies are prioritized over historical, material facts. Symbolic process, laden with affect, is where the psychoanalyst directs their attention. The

²⁶⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Univocal, 2014), 60.

²⁶⁵ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 73 and 93.

²⁶⁶ Blanes and Espirito Santo, *The Social Life of Spirits*, 11.

question of demarcating what belongs to the psychic realm, what is a matter of fact, and where to “draw the line” is a thread that runs through this chapter.

Importantly, while the spiritualist practices that flourished in North America and Europe during the nineteenth century have since been disesteemed according to dominant Western rationalities, myriad practices of interacting with extramaterial entities—spirits, ancestors, deities, other-dimensional beings—are alive and well in most parts of the world. Practices of spirit communication persist where I live and write, in spiritualist churches, therapeutic settings, workshops and small gatherings in living rooms. My fieldwork explores some of these sites. My conversations with spirit mediums, psychic channels and energy workers are integral to this writing, as are my exchanges with the conversants whose company they keep.

1.3 The shared field of psychoanalysis

This section provides a sketch of the psyche of relational psychoanalysis. I emphasize the transpersonal field between minds and a fluidity to psychic process that shows up in clinical and theoretical writing, which could be salutatory to thinking beyond the strictures of the modern individual. As Civitarese and Ferro write: “Strictly speaking, in a field model it is in fact no longer meaningful to consider analyst and patient as two isolated subjects.”²⁶⁷ This psyche can’t be described as an individualized, discrete apparatus. Mind is an emergent field between two or more. Psychic life is a dynamic territory beyond the boundary of the skin.

At the same time, I will track how these psychic subjects are positioned in isolation from most of the world. The psychoanalytic field fixates on human fictions within human-mediated enclosures. Psychoanalysis has always been invested in adjudicating the line between realities and unrealities, facts and fantasies, the outside world and mental confabulation. Examples of this boundary negotiation include Freud’s *reality principle*, in contradistinction to a *pleasure principle*; Lacan’s *Real*, as differentiated from registers of the imaginary or symbolic; and Bion’s *O*, which refers to an ultimate reality that we are challenged to transform internally. Bionian field

²⁶⁷ Antonino Ferro and Guiseppe Civitarese, “Analysts in Search of an Author: Voltaire or Artemisia Gentileschi? Commentary on ‘Field Theory in Psychoanalysis, Part 2: Bionian Field Theory and Contemporary Interpersonal/Relational Psychoanalysis’ by Donnel B. Stern,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 23:6 (2013): 650.

theorists' emphasis on unreality, virtuality and "the dream," as distinct from an objective reality, is a current instantiation of how lines are drawn between inner space and the world beyond. The structure of the practice is deeply Kantian in this way, splitting between structures of human thought and an ultimately unknowable reality. That outside doesn't matter so much to the psychoanalyst; what matters is the way we dream it. What I want to underline is how the Western modern's fence is maintained in analytic work, enclosing a plurality of spirits that once circulated in the world at large.

The move from a more discrete model of intrapsychic life toward an interpersonal and intersubjective understanding of psyche is often cited as a paradigm shift in psychoanalysis. The Barangers' "The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field" is considered a key text in the formulation of the analytic field. Drawing from Gestalt psychology as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the Barangers describe the essential ambiguity of the analytic situation, through which "deep contact with a person" can generate a phantasy process that shapes the structure of a session.²⁶⁸ The field cannot be "considered to be the *sum* of two internal situations. It is something created *between* the two, within the unity they form in the moment of the session, something radically different from what each of them is separately."²⁶⁹ The Barangers' influence on the phenomenological reduction runs as follows: "we try to eliminate as far as possible any reference to our objective personality and leave this as indefinite as possible."²⁷⁰

In these cartographies of the psyche, interiority is both troubled by and constituted through relationship. What we experience as belonging to "inner worlds" is in an ongoing process of

²⁶⁸ *Phantasy* and *fantasy* are differentiated in the literature in a few ways. In short, *phantasy* comes from Klein's work and designates a process that is unconscious, present at birth and onwards, and gives rise to thought. *Fantasy*, meanwhile, is derived from thought. It can be both conscious and unconscious and is associated with the ego rather than instincts. Fantasy, then, is a later development (Salman Akhtar, "Phantasy," in *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Karnac, 2009), 209). In my writing, I use *fantasy* more generally to indicate the common use of the term (i.e., "not real"). I also use *fantasy* when writing on Freud, since this was his terminology. *Phantasy* I use in reference to object relational work to indicate a more "archaic" (and also not concretely real) unconscious process.

²⁶⁹ Baranger and Baranger, "The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field," 805.

²⁷⁰ Baranger and Baranger, "The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field," 798.

containment and spillage, exchange and holding, between people. Our innermost private lives (thought, memory, feeling, fantasy, dreams and so forth) are animated, organized and structured in relationship.

Object relations psychoanalysis, via Klein et al., was influential in establishing a metapsychology that emphasizes the pre-Oedipal relation between infant and caregiver. Winnicott's insight that "there is no such thing as an infant"²⁷¹ (meaning, there is no separate baby beyond the maternal provision, or the caregiving system) is echoed in Bionian theory, where it is understood that a singular mind cannot come into being without encountering another mind. The "relational turn" displaces the unconscious from the individually enclosed psyche and reimagines it as a relational apparatus for thinking. Thinking here is not about rationality or abstraction or logic per se. Instead, "thinking" takes the form of a ceaseless communicative process between minds and bodies—which is often described in the literature as a kind of shared dreaming. Indeed, dreaming is the goal. Ferro and Basile write: "The aim of analysis is to develop the patient's ability to 'dream'—and hence to transform, metabolize and therefore forget—the excesses of sensoriality and proto-emotions which, unless digested and 'dreamed,' lead to suffering and symptoms."²⁷²

This work deals in a special kind of nonrational mental process, which involves the analyst applying a "magic philter" to the material. What the "magic philter" does is screen out "real behaviour" from "metaphorical significance."²⁷³ The term *mentalization* refers to the representational capacity of a mind. It can refer to our ability to self-reflect and imagine

²⁷¹ Ogden quotes Bion: "The human unit is a couple; it takes two human beings to make one" (Wilfred Bion, "Clinical Seminars," in Bion, ed., *Clinical Seminars and Other Works* (Karnac, 1987), 222, cited in Thomas Ogden, "Bion's Four Principles of Mental Functioning," *Fort Da*, 14B (2008): 21). Furthermore, per Winnicott: "There is no such thing as a baby. . . . [I]f you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone" (D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Penguin Books, 1964), 88).

²⁷² Antonino Ferro and Roberto Basile, "The Universe of the Field and Its Inhabitants," in Ferro and Basile, eds., *The Analytic Field: A Clinical Concept*, 11.

²⁷³ Ferro and Basile, "The Universe of the Field," 11.

another's mental states.²⁷⁴ In Bion's theory of thinking, mentalization operates more broadly. To mentalize is to mentally cope with emotion. Nonsymbolic information—for example, the raw data of sense experience, affect and “proto-emotions”—requires processing work. When unprocessed, these “excitations” are associated with developmental deficits: “Affects are unmodulated and eruptive.”²⁷⁵ These elements need to be managed. Psychoanalysis has done so by constructing a container model of mind.

1.4 The containing function of mind

Bion's principle of *containment* marks out an ongoing process of mental digestion with another. Alongside Winnicott's *holding environment*, the container has proven to be an enduring model for psychic life: we develop a vessel-like inner world through the holding capacity of our early relationships. These vessels are meant to help us cope with experience.

Building on Klein's theory of projective identification, containment speaks to our capacity to receive another's projections. It also speaks to our need to project our own intolerable mental content into others. Indeed, we are to understand that the very genesis of psychic life involves the way that we humans put something of our feeling self into another. Ogden writes: “In Bion's psychological-interpersonal version of projective identification, the analyst must be able to experience himself in accord with the feelings elicited in him by the real interpersonal pressure that accompanies ‘somebody else's phantasy.’”²⁷⁶ The pressure of this communicative exchange is how we grow a mind. In the Bionian world, this process is formulated as a “container-contained” dynamic.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Jon G. Allen Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman, *Mentalizing in Clinical Practice* (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2008).

²⁷⁵ Robert S. White, “Metaphor in Three Psychoanalytic Perspectives,” in *Metaphor and Fields: Common Ground, Common Language, and the Future of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Montana Katz (Routledge, 2013), 70.

²⁷⁶ Ogden, “Bion's Four Principles,” 19.

²⁷⁷ Bonding is epistemological work in Bion's metapsychology. Consider a caregiver's capacity to receive and respond to an infant's communication: a baby can't formulate their own raw experience; they rely on a caregiver's capacity to sense and transform that sensory experience, and to return it, digested and translated. For Bion, this process fosters (eventually) the child's ability to do psychological work and to tolerate emotional problems, and it also forms the basis of self-awareness (mentalization). Minds are

Not all emotions, sensations, perceptions or mental states can be held within a mind. Psychosis is a more obvious example of the struggle to contain. It might be pictured as a fragmentation and unleashing of inner life into the world at large, projected into bizarre objects, or spilling into the cosmos, or deposited in another person who might then themselves feel a little mad. These fragments are unmentalized: the mind has not made use of them.

Containment is a shared process of attempting to cope with these elusive yet powerful elements that arise from raw experience. Bion, whose own life was marked by the trauma of frontline violence in World War I, took on the task of considering a viable apparatus that could handle this “beyondness”: a mind that could render the inchoate experience of infancy, or unthinkable catastrophic trauma, into something more coherent and emotionally workable. Bion’s metapsychology evokes a universe of circulating mental fragments looking for an apparatus to hold them: *thoughts without a thinker*.²⁷⁸ Not so far from the spiritualists and their world of entities, energies and telepathic resonance, Bion envisioned a field of thoughts, ideas, feelings and fragments of self passed from one unconscious to another. These immaterial materials are irreducible to physiology and resistant to objectification or empirical verification. They push and pull us through our lives. Given these elements’ capacity to pattern our behaviour and cause a great deal of trouble, they require transformation into thinkable form. This swirling field of ideas and affect—what Bollas has called “unthought knowns”²⁷⁹—demands psychic work. Container methodologies provide the place to do this.

What does this work entail? Bion attempted to develop an “intuitionistic science” by notating the ways we deal with emotional experience.²⁸⁰ He did so mathematically, through a system of symbols representing the materials and functions of psychic life. These symbols intend to tell us

receptive, and they are also evacuative. Some states are unbearable, unthinkable, and we press upon other minds to hold what we can’t. We may contain, and we also contaminate. The containment function provides a picture of minds struggling to digest the fullness of emotional reality. “It takes two minds to think a person’s most disturbing thoughts,” as Ogden writes (“Bion’s Four Principles,” 12).

²⁷⁸ See Wilfred Bion, *Second Thoughts* (William Heinemann, 1967).

²⁷⁹ Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (Routledge, 1987).

²⁸⁰ Wilfred Bion, *Transformations* (Routledge, 1984).

something about how a mind might work with (or fail to work with) experience. For example, *L* and *H* represent *love* and *hate*, *K* designates the *process of moving toward knowledge*, while *–K* represents an *attack on knowledge*. *O*, not dissimilar to Lacan's *Real* or Kant's *noumenal realm*, signifies an ineffable, nonconceptual and unknowable dimension that nevertheless impresses itself upon a psyche.²⁸¹ We may use various organizing and mediating filters to approach the "cosmic vastness" of *O*.²⁸²

Bion's theory of thinking also represents psychic elements in their changing forms. *Beta elements* represent expelled raw sensations and affects that tend to be enacted (that is, turned into action rather than thought). *Alpha elements* are those fragments of experience in thinkable form. Alpha elements have been worked on to some extent—they are building blocks for more elaborated intellectual and emotional development, transformed through the work of containment.

²⁸¹ Grotstein writes: "O is Bion's arbitrary iconic term for a third domain, yet really the first—the original and fundamental domain that is unknown and unknowable to us, one that both subtends and interpenetrates consciousness as well as the unconscious *and* transcends them, one that expresses the Absolute Truth about an Ultimate Reality that is always evolving (always in flux) and is indicative of inner and outer cosmic unknowability, infinity." What is important to note in this exhilarating description of *O* is that Bion was invested in moving beyond the Freudian and Kleinian positivism of marking instinct as the "first cause" of inner life, and instead drew the psyche toward a fundamental uncertainty (and inescapable anxiety) in its experience of the real. Bion's container is up against this "raw, ever-emerging, ever-intersecting Circumstance." The unconscious is no longer an inner cauldron of instincts but an infinite flux with which we make contact and experience in various ways depending on "the vertex of our ontological position." (James Grotstein, *A Beam of Intense Darkness* (Karnac, 2007), 115, 115, 117.)

²⁸² "The real is impossible," says Lacan, and by that he means that it is beyond language. As adults, we most frequently encounter the real whenever we are forced to confront the materiality of our existence. This encounter is usually experienced as traumatic, since it challenges our sense of reality: the symbolic way in which we have ordered our defences against the real. As Lacan puts it, "the real is that which does not depend on my idea of it" (Jacques Lacan, "Seminar 21," in *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, by Bruce Fink (Princeton UP, 1995), 142–43, cited by Fred C. Alford, "Psychoanalysis Itself Is a Defense against Trauma: Wilfred Bion Post 2," *About Trauma* (blog), November 18, 2015, <https://traumatheory.com/psychoanalysis-trauma-bion/>).

Psychoanalysis's therapeutic aim is to create the relational circumstances where affective somatic life can be held and thought; where beta elements may be transmitted, re-enacted and carefully transformed. Internalization within an enclosure could be considered an emotional achievement in this sense: we learn how to work with our psychic material in a way that does less damage to self and other. In a passage meant to capture the potentially toxic intensity of psychic life, Grotstein writes:

[A]ll internal objects can be understood as “radioactive waste-dumps” of unprocessed (uncontained and/or undreamed) Beta-elements from untransformed O (failures of containment by self and/or by rearing objects) except for those compensatory, putatively good objects that have been internalized in order to counterbalance the former.²⁸³

From a clinical point of view, the less a mind needs to project its toxic objects or “act out” some unmanageable affect, the more it can digest pain mentally and think things through from broader vertices of perspective, the more it builds capacity to be with itself. Ultimately, the hope is that we come to be better equipped for tolerating the vagaries of circumstance as well as our fluctuating inner realities—and therefore, so we hope, the better we can function.

Importantly, for Bion, thinking isn't primarily about imposing a conceptual category on the flux of embodied life. As Ogden writes, containment is a process, not a thing. It is “the unconscious psychological work of dreaming, operating in concert with pre-conscious dreamlike thinking (reverie) and conscious secondary process thinking.”²⁸⁴ We dream and think in order to make new configurations of sense. We are not in the realm of what we ordinarily understand as thought. An emotional, somatic and relational epistemology undergirds this theory of mental functioning. Conceptualization, rationalization and abstraction are secondary processes that Bion terms *after-thinking*. True thinking is an unconscious act. Civitarese distinguishes this latter form of thinking:

²⁸³ Grotstein describes the digestive work of psychoanalysis, which involves transforming an “impersonal O” into “our *personal* O, which becomes one—and/or which one becomes—as we physically become the food we eat, within the constraints of our self-defining self-organization (conatus)” (*A Beam of Intense Darkness*, 116).

²⁸⁴ Grotstein, *A Beam of Intense Darkness*, 22.

Unlike the term “concept,” “conception” has more to do with an idea of a process and is better suited to indicate a concept that is more of a pre-reflective order—as a kind of dance in which you are engaged with the other—than a psychic content of the representational type.²⁸⁵

In the Bionian mode, thinking is not simply about formulating a conscious thought; rather, it involves exchanging reveries.²⁸⁶ A mental apparatus is built upon emotional reciprocity. Thoughts are threaded through with emotions, or “bodily ideas.” The rawness of our embodiment is organized through unconscious function, allowing us to *dream it*.

1.5 Dreaming together

Dreams, phantasies and reverie become integral to functioning psychic life in Bion’s theory of mind. Once we are able to dream (not necessarily while asleep), we are in possession of an apparatus that helps us organize our experience. In this way, Bion gestures at the crucial and necessary *unreality* of psychic function in relation to the real world. Ogden explains:

Bion’s conception of the relationship between reality and thinking is quite different from Freud’s. Freud’s two principles begin with the search for pleasure in the discharge of instinctual tension (the pleasure principle) and end with the perception of, and the capacity to adapt to, reality (the reality principle). [Bion] begins not with instinctual pressure but with lived emotional experience in the real world, and ends with thinking and feeling that experience. Moreover, Bion’s understanding of unconscious thinking differs markedly from Freud’s idea, in that, for Freud, the unconscious is characterized by an “entire disregard for reality-testing” while, for Bion “. . . without [unconscious] phantasies and without dreams you have not the means to think out your problems.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Guiseppe Civitarese, “Idea,” in *An Apocryphal Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2019), 53.

²⁸⁶ Civitarese and Ferro, “Analysts in Search of an Author,” 646.

²⁸⁷ Ogden, “Bion’s Four Principles,” 12. Ogden quotes: Sigmund Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” (1911) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12, ed. and trans. J. Strachey (Hogarth, 1911-1913), 225, and W. R. Bion, “Notes on the Theory of Schizophrenia,” in *Second Thoughts* (Aronson, 1967), 25.

The mental apparatus protects us from an excessive outside, allowing us to think and filter what might otherwise be unthinkable or too overwhelming. Containing the unthinkable is trauma work. Raw data requires dreaming.

I will give a clinical example of how this relational psyche might look in practice by describing my own countertransference dream.

I work with a person who suffered through the trauma of too much and too little when they were very young, either overwhelmed by chaotic anger or left in the “care” of emotionally unavailable family members. An architect by training, the dreams they shared early in our work were often about inhabiting structures, hotel rooms and other spaces where family members could invade through the walls. We linked these dreams to an embodied sense of emotional overwhelm as well as a tendency toward dissociation, a difficulty feeling “at home” in themselves.

In a dream of my own, I am with them in an art gallery. We are padding the walls with soft, colourful faux fur. I have the sense that we are collaborating on a project and, also, that we are building a nest, a place for them to show their work. Or, perhaps we’re stuck in this together: inside the padded walls of the psychiatric unit. Whatever the meaning we play with, I recognize this dream as an instance of unconscious response-ability, a form of connection lived out in psychic space. Incidentally, years after our therapy had paused, I had another dream about this person, which compelled me to send a note to check in. They responded with surprise: they were undergoing cancer treatment and had thought to reach out to me. We were both astonished by the resonance across distance.²⁸⁸

I might frame this clinical vignette as an instance of Bion’s concept of *maternal reverie*. The capacity for maternal reverie is required for containment work: the caregiver’s psyche is responsible for holding the infant’s archaic, difficult feelings. They help reshape and transform

²⁸⁸ Ettinger has her own language for these “matrixial” encounters in the field linking psyches: “The sharing and exchange of traces of mutually subjectivizing agencies that dwell in different levels and frequencies create a mutating co-poietic net inside a singular trans-subjective web. The interlacing co-poietic strings and threads create the ever-transforming transgressive metramorphic borderlinks in a relatively stable yet fluid jointness in severality” (Bracha Ettinger, “Copoeisis,” *ephemera*, 5:X (2005): 704).

feelings into a form that a developing mind can assimilate. In the absence of this containing function, or what Winnicott would describe as a “facilitating environment,” the risk of breakdown looms.²⁸⁹

“Dreaming is a kind of listening,” according to Ferro and Basile.²⁹⁰ Through the Bionian rubric, I might interpret my dream as heeding the call of my therapeutic function at that time: a receptive and soft dreaming container for this person’s creations.

In *The Ineffable*, Avner Bergstein writes of a “truth in transit,” suggesting that

truth becomes a dynamic feeling related to what is taking place at a certain point in the transference, depending more on intuition than on any by-products of sensory perception. This is not necessarily an empirical truth, but rather *a sense of truth* at a certain moment.²⁹¹

In session, it is the experience of emotional truth we’re after, not concrete fact.

Because psychoanalytic containment encircles what is proper to interior life and leaves out the concrete facts, decisions will be made regarding these senses of truth. Some felt-senses will need to be mentalized or dreamed. What psychic element is “formulated,” what “unformulated” and what “poorly formulated”? In analysis, we must sort out what needs to be turned into thought and held in mind. What is an unconscious element (e.g., a beta element) and what is an invisible agent? Decisions will be made about whether the analysand has arrived at a full-bodied and meaningful experience, or whether they haven’t integrated their experience through the appropriate representational channels. This methodological approach has ontological consequences.

The Barangers describe the analytic situation this way:

The basic functional configuration of the analytic situation can also be called the bi-personal psychotherapeutic relationship. But it is only bi-personal at the level of ordinary

²⁸⁹ D. W. Winnicott, “Fear of Breakdown,” *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 1 (1974).

²⁹⁰ Ferro and Basile, “The Universe of the Field and Its Inhabitants,” 11.

²⁹¹ Avner Bergstein, “The Ineffable,” in *Bion and Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Reading “Memoir of the Future”*, ed. Guiseppe Civitarese (Routledge, 2018), 121. Emphasis in the original.

perceptual description: in the room where the sessions take place, there are two flesh and blood persons. However, other persons always intervene in the patient's narrative and phantasy, or even break into the room in the form of a hallucination.²⁹²

"Others" show up in our stories as characters (the inner world is often fictionalized in the psychoanalytic literature, as we will encounter later on with the case of a hysteric and her inner theatrics).²⁹³ "Others" may even "break in" in as a hallucination.²⁹⁴

Bion describes hallucination in terms of expulsion from the mind. The perceptual apparatus becomes a tool for getting rid of—ideationally excreting—unwanted feelings. Insides are fragmented and "scattered far and wide."²⁹⁵ They are put into objects that become bizarre, animated and controlling. Unwanted parts of the personality haunt from without. The mechanism of projective identification has not found a human container to help digest these difficult feelings.

1.6 Working in the transference

Since its inception, psychoanalysis has concerned itself with some notion of a porous mental life. This is a mind that is suggestible, affected by enigmatic messages and energies and capable of transmission. It was never quite contained unto itself. Shared unconscious material is the

²⁹² Baranger and Baranger, "The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field," 797.

²⁹³ "The psychoanalytic session, to say nothing of life itself, constitutes an ongoing theatrical play or novel in which we unconsciously beckon and recruit others via our unconscious 'casting director' to enter into the sphere of our personal lives so as to play out roles that our unconscious playwright continuously creates in order to *dramatize* incompletely (insufficiently or inadequately) processed moments of emotional significance that still cry for attention in our internal world" (James Grotstein, "'The Play's the Thing Wherein I'll Catch the Conscience of the King!' Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play," in Ferro and Basile, eds., *The Analytic Field: A Clinical Concept*, 190).

⁵⁶ Baranger and Baranger, "The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field," 797.

²⁹⁵ Wilfred Bion, "On Hallucination" (paper, British Psycho-Analytical Society, October 3, 1956), 348, https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Bion_On_Hallucination.pdf.

substance of the work, and it is ghostly at times. Roger Luckhurst quotes Freud: “All my friends have in a certain sense been reincarnation of this first figure . . . they have been *revenants*.”²⁹⁶

Psychodynamics are envisioned as an assemblage of memorialized experiences with primary others (these first figures) that continue to shape our relations. We internalize these early exchanges. They are agential and alive. We signify them in various ways. They mobilize feeling and animate action. These revenants form a “densely moving complexity”²⁹⁷ and become a personal pattern.

This relational practice has always gestured toward unusual models of interconnectedness unable to conform to the demands of materialist scientific frameworks. As Luckhurst writes, “one may say that the central psychoanalytic concept of ‘transference’ would be inconceivable without the prior theorization of telepathy.”²⁹⁸ And though psychoanalytic assessments import the diagnostic categories meant to ascertain the presence of a delusion (primitive defences, psychotic “levels” of functioning and so forth), this theory of mental life makes it difficult to cleave a clean line between subject and object, and reality. The fence between a defensive magical solution that escapes reality and the perception of a non-ordinary reality is not firm. At best, in our translations of experience, we can make a claim for the “relatively real.”²⁹⁹

Transference is one such concept that calls attention to the organizing function of fantasy in our epistemologies. As Freud wrote, the transference neurosis marks out an “intermediate region between illness and real life.”³⁰⁰ The assumption here is that a human cogito organizes perception of realities through phantasy (dreaming). Others are not known in and of themselves but rather through pervasive psychic activity, which involves repetitions of emotional histories. In other words, perception of the “outside” entwines with memory, fantasy and affect emanating from the inner world: we unconsciously transpose these memories onto one another. We create

²⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference,” (1912), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 12, 100, cited in Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford UP, 2002), 275.

²⁹⁷ Bollas, *Mystery of Things*, 9

²⁹⁸ Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, 175.

²⁹⁹ Montana Katz, “Preliminary Foundational Concepts,” in Katz, ed., *Metaphor and Fields*.

³⁰⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis II)” (1914), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 12, 154.

the world as we interpret it. Analysis constructs a potential space where the play of transference can happen. It elicits an analysand's feelings and ideas and allows these "complexes" to gather in the here-and-now holding environment of analysis. Translating these transmissions of the unconscious reshapes psychic life.

Originally thought by Freud to be an impediment to the cure, transference is now the medium through which psychoanalysis unfolds. As Anthony Elliott writes:

Freud's theory of transference undercuts the traditional distinction between inner and outer worlds, self and other, the individual and culture. The strong argument here . . . is that the individual self holds a transferential relationship to other people, to social bonds and to the cultural realm more generally. In our emotional attachments to others, from intimate sexual relationships to the organizational structures of authority in public life, the phenomenon of transference is a fundamental dimension of human experience: we people our world, according to Freud, with emotions and fantasies drawn from the past, but projected on to current experience.³⁰¹

Whether understood to be a "false connection," a displacement of repressed wishes or lost love objects, a trace of infantile sexuality or a shared constellation of fantasy in the analytic dyad, an appreciation of the ways by which personal history comes alive in the analytic encounter is integral to psychoanalysis.

What or who is meant to come alive there? Childhood, most often. There are a few ideas about an infant's life that are axiomatic in this field. One is that the infant is born into an asymmetrical situation. In this state of fundamental passivity, they are helpless to the caregiver's modes of care, which include their own unconscious transferences.³⁰² Extrapolated from this is that the

³⁰¹ Anthony Elliott, *Psychoanalytic Theory* (Duke UP, 2002), 16–17.

³⁰² For example, Laplanche's seduction theory contends that the "enigmatic messages" of the caregiver (the preverbal communicative field into which we are born) are constitutive of the unconscious. The infant internalizes their caregiver's paradigm of care, which undergoes repression, and then they come to be haunted by the alterity within. This theory is considered to be a decentring of the unconscious away from a primal, universal structure within an individual psyche and toward an unconscious that comes into being through the primary relationship and the ongoing translations (fantasies) arising from infantile

relational field in general is imbued with unconscious distortions and affective creations arising from the traumas of this “fundamental anthropological situation,” as Scarfone sees it.³⁰³ The core fantasies and conflicts we develop about this “anthropological situation” unconsciously shape connection to others.

The *transference neurosis* was thought to unfold in a similar fashion to a dream: the analyst, in their role of blank screen, was “dreamed” by the patient or cast in a starring role in the drama of a memorialized childhood. The analytic situation would then become a re-enactment, a repetition, born of infantile frustrations and desires, a memory evolving in the here-and-now of the analytic hour. Moving away from the model of analyst as neutral screen, relational and field theory have suggested that it is not so much that the analyst is an empty receptacle for the other’s material; rather, unconscious processes are shared and created between two.³⁰⁴ These later

experience. See Jean Laplanche, “Seduction, Persecution, Revelation,” in *Essays on Otherness* (Routledge, 1999).

³⁰³ Dominique Scarfone, “In the Hollow of the Transference: The Analyst’s Position between Activity and Passivity,” *Sitegeist*, 4 (2010).

³⁰⁴ Psychoanalytic use of countertransference has a controversial and divisive history, which played out strikingly between Freud and Sándor Ferenczi. Ferenczi departed from Freudian orthodoxy by foregrounding the interpersonal dimension of the analytic method and involving the analyst’s personality through experimental techniques such as “mutual analysis.” This marked a move toward comprehending a more complex field between analyst and analysand, which demanded analyst participation as well as receptivity to the patient’s experience of the analyst.

From the Ferenczian perspective, the analyst’s feelings—be they sadistic, erotic, aggressive or tender—are inevitable within the analytic encounter. Furthermore, these feelings can contribute to the work: “Ferenczi had to realize painfully, both as analyst and analysand, that psychoanalysis is not an instrument that can function independently of the person using it. Very probably these events played a major part in making him recognize the *analyst’s attitude as a variable* in the therapeutic *equation*, and therefore placing this at the centre of his interest. . . . [He] was also able to see with extreme clarity how patients suffered under the ‘hypocrisy’ of phenomena of intended ‘abstinence’ on the part of the analyst” (Falzeder, *Psychoanalytic Filiations*, 11). By emphasizing the importance of countertransference analysis, Ferenczi was moving away from a positivist metapsychological approach toward a relational one. Ferenczi’s experiment in mutual analysis with patient and co-analyst Elizabeth Severn (known in his clinical diaries as R.N.) eventually caused a split with Freud and his circle.

analytic traditions reconfigured transference away from one person, a unidirectional flow of projection, toward a shared interplay of unconscious processes.³⁰⁵ Transference and countertransference mingling between analyst and analysand has become an ontological entity in its own right, variously described as a field, a subject and a “third.”³⁰⁶

Further, the technique departed from historically reconstructing an infantile neurosis as “revealed” in the transference toward an understanding that psychic growth and transformation unfolds in this field. This transference is no longer simply intrapsychic, but also interpersonal. “One does not project into the void,” writes Civitarese. Analysands are no longer relating “to the automatic repetition of their infantile neurosis, but to the quality and dynamics of a specific therapeutic situation.”³⁰⁷ In a sense, the therapeutic emphasis shifted away from discovery (of the origin of neurosis) toward collaborative co-creation, or perhaps *re-creation*.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ The rediscovery and translation of Ferenczi’s clinical diaries in the United States is said to have launched the contemporary relational movement in psychoanalysis in the early 1990s. While a community of analysts were tending to his work in Europe, the diaries were widely considered to be “too radical” for translation. Adrienne Harris et al. describe how the reintroduction of Ferenczi’s diaries to the psychoanalytic canon opened a host of theories about the intimacy between analyst and analysand and the power structures that play out in the privacy of the clinical encounter. This intersubjective process comes to be seen as embodied, archaic and affective, at times violent and seductive. The analyst’s anonymity is no longer possible. “Use of self” comes to be central to therapeutic technique. See the fittingly titled *The Legacy of Sándor Ferenczi: From Ghost to Ancestor*, ed. Adrienne Harris and Steven Kuchuck (Routledge, 2015).

³⁰⁶ Thomas Ogden, “The Analytic Third: An Overview,” *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Lew Aron (Analytic Press, 1999).

³⁰⁷ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 114.

³⁰⁸ Civitarese explores the “radically constructivist view” of Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (afterwardsness), which speaks to a psychic temporality and causality that challenges linear determinism. This he links to neuroscientist Gerald Edelman’s work on memory and consciousness. Here, memory comes to be seen as an activity of recategorization, and consciousness is the result of “a dynamic perception between memory and current perception.” The point here is that the mechanism of memory is “context sensitive” and subject to complex variation and recasting. Civitarese explains: “It therefore presents an extremely dynamic structure—not as a mere warehouse for the storage of data, but as a laboratory in which the most suitable solutions are constantly being sought.” Later he writes, “A memory

“What forms do we choose to transform the self?” Bollas asks. It’s a good question. And what shapes do we hope the self will take? Bollas, who has ostensibly chosen psychoanalysis as his form, sticks close to what he calls “the concept of human idiom.”³⁰⁹ A human idiom is a kind of “psychic footprint” that can develop through the right relational experience. The experience psychoanalysis offers is a very particular kind of relationship that, according to Bollas, encourages a unique personality to establish itself.³¹⁰ Transference is an essential characteristic of this relationship. The theory of transference, according to Bollas, “offers a profound rethinking of what takes place between people.”³¹¹

Working in the transference is an effort to experience and mentalize an analysand’s unconscious life as it emerges through the analytic relationship. This is the medium of the psychoanalytic mind: two humans dreaming together. In this relationship, we have, as the Barangers remind us, two possibilities for connection: the flesh and blood humans in the room, and the confabulations of their minds.

trace is a *function*, a thought that determines the mode of formulation of another thought, and not a mere inert content deposited in an archive; it is the device by which the world is read.” Trauma, and its repetitive, affective eruption into the present moment, its way of bleeding into relationship, brings to the analytic pair an opportunity for reorganizing the event in a new, reparative context. Such a theory—of memory as an activity of recategorization—allows Civitarese to speak to how psychoanalysis might work in service of the modification of psychic structures: to meet, semantically and affectively, the “unthought” trauma in a new way. (Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 99, 100, 101 original emphasis.)

³⁰⁹ Bollas, *The Mystery of Things*, 3.

³¹⁰ Christopher Bollas, *Forces of Destiny: Psychoanalysis and Human Idiom* (Routledge, 2019).

³¹¹ Bollas, *The Mystery of Things*, 17.

2 FRACTURING CONTAINERS

2.1 Polyphony versus the analytic couple

For all intents and purposes, the container-contained model is Bion's version of transference. Troubling states of mind are communicated, not necessarily in words. They can be "acted out" and repeated, meaning that unconscious mental content can be discharged through action rather than worked through and remembered. They can be projected outward, onto the analytic situation. These unthought elements need to be *formulated* or *mentalized*.

In an interview with Ettinger, Guattari shares his own understanding of transference as a "processual complexity, with possibilities that are constantly developing." Becoming a subject is a "polyphonic" project:

Reflections on transference must take into account ethological elements, incorporeal elements, becoming-animal, becoming-plant, nonhuman machines, machines of cultural subjectification like the mass media, machines of ecology and the environment. That is because unconscious phantasy deals with machines of all sorts, not just those from the past.³¹²

Working in the psychoanalytic transference is more like a process of re-collecting, holding and eventually processing "elements" within a personal field. Ferro and Basile describe the effort to support the analysand to "re-own split-off geographical areas of [the] mind."³¹³ The analytic dyad develops the mental apparatus's availability to hold emotional fragments. "Oneiric functions and sensory turbulence" are characteristic of this workspace:

The field then is permeated by turbulence, by whirlwinds and sometimes by tsunamis of Beta-elements, which find, in the process of transformation into dreams, the

³¹² Félix Guattari in Ettinger, "From Transference to the Aesthetic Paradigm: A conversation with Félix Guattari," in *A Shock to Thought*, (Routledge, 2002), 617.

"From Transference to the Aesthetic Paradigm," interview by Bracha Ettinger, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 24:3 (1997): 617.

³¹³ Antonino Ferro and Roberto Basile, "The Analytic Field," in Ferro and Basile, eds., *The Analytic Field: A Clinical Concept*, 19.

transformational container that leads from disorganized potentialities to possible forms of representation.³¹⁴

The analytic couple is involved in seeking new “constructions of sense” and “compositions.”³¹⁵ They re-organize unconscious discourse. This is done by growing the container’s capacity to dream, hold, represent the fragments—to build the mental capacity for tolerating life.

The transformations that containment practices are meant to foster totally overlook the polyphonic elements that Guattari cites. This system of subjectification, and the unconscious elements that constitute it, are buffered from anything considered alien to the philosophical prominence of the “human idiom.” Psychoanalysis turns “disorganized potentialities” into disorganized personalities.

I will quote Bollas again at length, because his description of transference clearly lays out the conventions embedded in psychoanalytic metaphysics. First, we have the revolutionary “discovery” of transference communication:

The theory of the patient’s transference communication and its corresponding effect upon the psychoanalyst was a radical new view of human representation. Freud’s revolutionary discovery of free association was followed half a century later by Kleinian studies of projection, that people pass parts of themselves into objects; first into objects of the internal world (such as an employer standing for the bossy parts of the personality, or admiration of a nurse holding the caring parts of the self), and second into other people (such as repeated delinquencies which will bring about a boss in the other, or expressions of disability which will elicit the nurse in the other).

“Patients,” he tells us, “transfer these parts of their personalities into mental objects and others.” A recipient is unconsciously receptive to these parts. In the following passage, he presents the theory of transference as it was (mistakenly) interpreted by “hallucinating hysterics” and “female spiritualists,” before Klein *really* understood what was happening and saved them from their own minds:

This theory is, of course, not entirely original. The Old Testament describes how God

³¹⁴ Ferro and Basile, “The Analytic Field,” 11–12.

³¹⁵ Ferro and Basile, “The Analytic Field,” 8.

spoke inside the body and mind of the other, who would have a special capacity to hear from this most effective voice. The hallucinating hysterics of the Middle Ages heard the voice of the devil in their ears and by the nineteenth century salons were appearing where imposing female spiritualists acted as mediums for the voice of the departed. But Kleinian theory provides the first real understanding of this transference and promises a profound rethinking of what takes place between people.³¹⁶

“What takes place between people” (and only living people) is captured in the relational and field literature as a process of developing a mind that can hold its contents.

The circumscription of mental process through the bi-personal containment process is complicated by the way that the mediums I have worked with apprehend and navigate their experiences. The channel sits at the threshold of the container. Their sensorium signals the presence of other beings who can’t finally be located in a body or contained in a “bi-personal” field. Jane Roberts, perhaps one of the more well-known contemporary North American channels, describes “several selves [occupying] a body” or “composites formations”—what she calls a “multipersonhood.”³¹⁷

In “From the Library of the Superreal: The Metaphysics and Consciousness of an American ‘Channel’,” Peter Skafish writes on the abandonment of theories of psychological multiplicity in the 1880s and 1890s in favour of a Freudian model upholding the unity of the person.

Certainly the notion of a *smoothly* unified self has been challenged by psychoanalysis as well: We don’t operate from one temporal dimension, we’re at cross-purposes with ourselves. Dimensions of “self” are hidden, repressed or projected. Other people’s emotions and ideas are internalized. We are highly suggestible. Our mind erupts in dreams, symptoms or parapraxes, taking a more conscious part of us by surprise.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Bollas, *The Mystery of Things*, 16–17.

³¹⁷ Peter Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal: The Metaphysics and Consciousness of an American ‘Channel’,” *Common Knowledge*, 22:3 (2016): 443.

³¹⁸ Psychoanalysis is frequently attributed with displacing the “cogito” of the humanist subject. Kirby describes the implications of this dethroning: “Psychoanalytic interpretations of the subject . . . uncover a fragile figure who is radically incapable of knowing himself; a subject who lacks the ability to remember her past without significantly reinventing it; a subject whose most personal and private desires originate

The controversial diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder describes a multiplicity of psychesoma, where a person has a subjective experience of being a composite of different selves.³¹⁹ Beyond psychoanalysis proper, therapeutic “parts work” also speaks to a collective of parts that compose psychic life.³²⁰ Here, Freud’s tripartite model of id, ego and superego gives way to a far more complex system of characters populating the inner world. For example, an addicted part, a disordered-eating part, a traumatized-child part, a highly-functional-professional part, an affable part, and so on may all coexist internally, functioning with different purposes and goals, rather like a large chaotic family living inside one body.

Models such as these have normalized thinking about people as an assemblage of heterogenous self-states and multiple personalities. Still, they are to be contained as personal elements or constellations within the individual mind. Most often they will be referred to an origin of trauma and childhood. Meanwhile, as Roberts insists, the co-presences articulated in mediumistic practice are irreducible to personal thought. They are irreducible to bi-personal psychologies. They are irreducible to personal pasts. Indeed, they are, at times, irreducible to human persons.

elsewhere. If we accept this and concede that the subject is, indeed, an unreliable witness in the matter of her or his own life, then we are confronted by an extraordinary assault on our conventional assessments of political and ethical accountability: we can no longer rely on appeals to the subject’s agency, intention, reason, and sense of responsibility if all these terms are now seriously qualified.” She goes on to make a link to the “unsettling of humanist precepts” in discourse theory, whereby “the individual cannot preexist her interpellation into social and discursive meaningfulness if she is ‘spoken’ into being by social and political frames of reference, and only *then* rendered recognizable to others, and to herself.” In spite of this, I suggest that psychoanalysis, though plumbing the “irrational” qualities of the human subject, has been unable to decentre its humanism. (Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 89.)

³¹⁹ See Nancy McWilliams, “Dissociative Personalities,” in *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis* (Guilford Press, 1994), 323–47

³²⁰ Internal Family Systems is a model for trauma therapy, developed by Richard Schwartz, that sees psychic life as a system of inner “parts” that develop as one adapts to experience. This approach recognizes that sometimes one “part” takes over and runs the system. Teasing out and bringing awareness to each part comprises the therapeutic work. See Richard Schwartz, *No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model* (Sounds True, 2021).

We are invited to understand that the spirits—they of other timeless dimensions³²¹—aren't *in* the medium, at least not for long. These selves aren't necessarily tethered to their own "internal family system." In fact, in a local channelling session I attended in September 2023 with a medium named Jane, we are told that whoever "comes through" (via her vocal cords, affecting her posture and gestural habitus) is more likely to have a personal connection to the individual asking than to the medium herself. Jane's practice fosters a moment of relational attunement and sympathy between suppliant and spirit. She is simply the channel for their message.

Roberts, during one of her own mediumistic sessions in the 1970s, helpfully channelled William James, who offered his own thoughts on psychoanalytic theory:

Where the psychology of mediumship, her James declares, registered that consciousness, like Being, both "multiples" and "couples with itself," Freud made "a psychological hell" in which the only other selves were the old Christian "demons" now "turned into primitive impulses stamped upon the psyche in infancy."³²²

I read this theoretical shift toward unification as an early instantiation of the container. Eventually, in the relational school, that psychic unification would come to encompass intersubjectivity—container-contained dynamics, or transference and countertransference and the field arising between—but would budge no further.

Remarkably, Roberts had a philosophical conflict with Seth, the channelled personality for whom she is best known. Originally, she tried to understand Seth as a personal fragment of her unconscious, while Seth insisted on his independent existence in a wider psychic field that held them both. "Your psychologies do not explain your own reality to you, nor can they contain your experience," he told her.³²³ Seth spoke of novel ontologies through Roberts's psychesoma, altering her tone of voice, posture and prosody. Seth knew things she did not know. Roberts,

³²¹ "Time does not exist outside your world," one entity says, through Jane (channeling session, Victoria, BC, September 2023).

³²² Jane Roberts, *The Afterdeath Journal of an American Philosopher* (Prentice-Hall, 1978), 58, cited in Skafish "From the Library of the Superreal," 450.

³²³ Jane Roberts, *The Unknown Reality*, vol. 1 (Penguin, 1978), xxi, cited in Skafish, "From the Library of the Superreal," 447.

‘intuitively intrigued but intellectually scandalized,’³²⁴ struggled to make this experience intelligible through her given frameworks. Her concepts proved to be insufficient to her lived experience. Ultimately, Roberts accepted that her multipersonal modes of being and relating couldn’t be epistemologically tidied as a split-off fragment of inner life. “It’s like having two mental or psychological focuses instead of one. I can be . . . busy with my own thoughts, for example. When new lines come to me from other sources. They’re intrusive in that I recognize them as not mine.”³²⁵

Roberts could not digest her own psychological experience with the concepts she was given. In collaboration with her sources of consciousness, she would eventually abandon the notion of a unified self. Her encounters with autonomous entities and energies animated and altered psychesomatic structures and reorganized her ideas in powerful ways. She had to develop alternative theories to account for this.

While Skafish is invested in the philosophical interventions of “unofficial, marginal and alien thinkers,”³²⁶ there persists, in psychoanalysis, a long-standing disciplinary defence against—or ambivalence around—pluralities such as these. They endanger the bi-personal container that is idealized in relational work. Busting open the container model of mind is hazardous not only to a model of functioning psychic life as circumscribed by psychoanalysis but to the very cartography of the real upon which the subject and their mental health is built. Its dreaming container marks the distinction between psychic reality and external reality.

Recall that the Barangers describe the analytic situation as populated by persons who occupy two dimensions: physical (flesh and blood) and mental (hallucination). Material fact or psychic fiction are the two possibilities here. Further, the category of personhood is not interrogated in psychoanalysis: we can accept a single, unified human person with a fragmented and projectable mind, but certainly not a relational field populated by existing pluralities, or “alien” (let alone *dead!*) forms of intelligence, or coexisting heterogenous worlds that can be straddled.

³²⁴ Jane Roberts, *Adventures in Consciousness: An Introduction to Aspect Psychology* (Bantam, 1979), cited in Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 431.

³²⁵ Roberts, *Unknown Reality*, 54, cited in Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 444.

³²⁶ Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 452.

Psychoanalysis's dogged Western modern inheritance makes a hysteric, not a theoretician, out of Roberts.

2.2 Channeling circle, September 2023

Jane opens her home to a small group of people. We gather in the living room. I sit beside her elderly ragdoll cat. Cookies are offered. We introduce ourselves to one another and chat; there is much laughter. Jane remarks on the significance of gathering in a circle, that circles such as these have a long tradition. A circle is protective in magical practice, she tells us. It is meant to bring a sense of safety to those whose spiritual practices aren't sanctioned by the dominant culture. Somebody remarks that we were all clearly witches in a past life.

Jane, who could be defined as a trance medium,³²⁷ puts herself into a state of self-hypnosis. A candle is lit. She holds a ring, explaining that a physical object from "here" brings her some comfort as she communes with other worlds. Her friend and assistant sends her off with an "I love you." After a stretch of silence, a greeting comes through Jane, signifying the presence of a spirit guide: "Hello."

We move around the circle, each person asking a question. Topics such as artificial intelligence, climate change. Personal questions, health, relationships. Some of the questions are emotionally raw: *I lost my loved one to suicide—are they OK?* Some seek guidance on their own personal perceptual or energetic experiences: *My energy left my body, and this scares me. Can the guides speak to this?* and *I had a premonitory vision—can the guides help me understand this?* The voices responding that day were alternately dour and gleeful, some had vague, shifting accents, some voices were solemn and slow.

³²⁷ "[Trance mediumship] is the oldest method of Spirit communication, often associated with seances and physical phenomena. Trance itself refers to the altered state of consciousness that the medium enters. . . . [A] medium will sit to prepare and enter into an altered state. Physical changes occur to the medium's body, such as a slowing of the heartbeat, deeper breathing, altered brain patterns and lowering of the body temperature. There is also an altered awareness of sounds, touch, space and conscious thought. The medium will then allow their Spirit communicator (guide/control) to blend their energies with them, thereby allowing the Spirit being to merge with their physical and subtle bodies and mind. This process can take several minutes" (Sarah Tyler Walters, "What Is Trance Mediumship," personal website, n.d., <https://trancemedium.co.uk/index.php?p=what-is-trance-mediumship>).

I asked: *From your perspective, what is the self?* My question about selfhood was posed facing a woman in a state of self-hypnosis ostensibly hosting another locus of identity. I had been reading Espírito Santo on the “cosmologically fluid” universe of Afro-Cuban spirit communication and the theories of self that arise in this terrain. Espírito Santo puts forward the idea of a self that has the “capacity” for spirits “within entirely constitutive dimensions of self, albeit a self unconfined to itself.” This conception of self “emphasize[s] activation, realization, and becoming.” There are “preexisting potentialities” within that might learn to be “affected by agentive registers that are experiences as other to oneself.”³²⁸ This reminded me of Roberts’s and Guattari’s polyphonic becomings. I was curious what the spirits themselves might have to say on the topic.

The answer I received regarding self was answered in various terms, drawing from the vibratory and the biological, the scientific and the spiritual. The voice that addressed my question was straightforward, quick paced, maybe even insistent. Jane’s body leaned forward, toward me. *The self is a vibrating energy that creates conscious thought, body and life path. The self draws beings it needs along this path. Each being has a self that no one else on earth knows, though some entities may know the sum of the self’s deepest learning and memory. The DNA holds the self’s cells together, allows organs to be held together. The cells are inherited from ancestors in the physical world. The RNA is related to the vibrational code, the sum total of lessons, conditions. This guides and conditions what a self finds familiar, irritating or soothing. Self dwells in a body when it is finite. It dwells between existences when it is infinite. It is powerful. It operates with free will. Free will is the god-power that each being is, as each being is a fracture of mother energy, Tao, God.*

Once Jane’s awareness returns to the living room, she invites questions directed specifically to her. A conversation among the participants in the circle reveals a wide array of spiritual, New Age and shamanic frameworks. One attendant works with ayahuasca, guiding others through plant medicine journeys. One practices energy work. Another has an interest in past lives. One sees ghosts regularly and shares which places she has visited that are especially lively with the dead. The conversation opens to what sorts of entities one has encountered, and which are considered “real.”

³²⁸ Espírito Santo, *Developing the Dead*, 159.

According to Jane, the “reality” of entities is truly a choice of belief. Jane chooses to not believe in demonic entities. Another participant then is puzzled by what energy being she saw and had to protect herself from during her plant medicine session. She had understood it to have a demonic quality. This wasn’t a debate but an engaging conversation about an undecided, open, fluid cosmological field. Each person brought a unique translation of their sensory or extrasensory worlds according to their knowledge practices, healing modalities and spiritual frameworks. The conversation was a collage of ideas about ineffable spiritual realities and beings and conflicting understandings based on emotional attachments, personal sensory experiences and translations. It was abundant and messy.

It was also, according to some frameworks, totally heretical. Jane’s perceptual experience and its narrativization transgress Western reason, not to mention religious doctrine. One of the messages channelled was understood to be from Jesus, who, I learned through our discussion, is a frequent visitor. When he appears in the living room, he assumes an iconic gesture via Jane’s body: one palm facing outward. What is remarkable in this channelling situation is that Jesus is just one energetic presence among others. His voice (much quieter and slower than the others, incidentally) is not privileged. He takes his turn to use Jane’s psychesoma, like everybody else who has something to say to the living people who have gathered. Though there is, in Jane’s cosmology, an acknowledgement of a kind of evolutionary development in the spiritual realms, anybody is welcome to the circle. They come and go in quick succession, apparently beyond her conscious control.

2.3 Playing with/in transitional space

Following this gathering, I spend some time puzzling over Jane’s remark that belief is tied to the actuality of an entity. Espírito Santos reports a similar view in Cuban spiritism. She draws a connection to James:

espiritistas believe that religious belief can bring into existence that which is the object of belief. There is a commitment to the ontological effects of doing and acting among *espiritistas* in relation to the *existence* of spirits that resonates with James’ claim that truth becomes so through the process of its verifying itself as such.³²⁹

³²⁹ Espírito Santo, *Developing the Dead*, 13.

Certainly, the ontological effects of mediumistic doing and acting are curtailed in the psychoanalytic clinic. *Acting out* might be a more likely interpretation, meaning the discharge of psychic energy through action, versus mentalization. An *enactment* is a behaviour that signifies an active diversion from a hidden fantasy. Instinctual energy is released in motor and vocal activity rather than channelled through dreamwork. We might see this in somnambulism, for example. What should be an internal world is externalized in action.³³⁰ The messy becomings of mediumistic circles do not survive the analytic endeavour, which is predicated on an *a priori* logic of human psychic space (fiction) as distinct from the rest of a singular, shared world (fact).³³¹

Winnicott's theory of play and transitional phenomena attempts to remediate these dualisms, in particular by blurring hard distinctions between insides and outsides, subjectivity and objectality. This paradoxical intermediate space is recognized and lauded by Viveiros de Castro in "Who Is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf?":

"[T]ransitional space" [is] that area in between pure subjective-internal and pure objective-external experiences of the infant, from which, says Winnicott, all art, all creativity and all culture spring. This area contains a paradox, is built on a paradox, says Winnicott—a sort of Möbius-band situation where one can't tell the inside from the outside, because there is no such distinction—but *a paradox that we should refuse to explain*. This paradox, in a sense, is what makes us human, if I understand Winnicott

³³⁰ Anna Freud, "Acting Out," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 49:2–3 (1968): 165–70.

³³¹ Viveiros de Castro writes on this Western logic that guides much Western metaphysics: we all live in the same natural world, though we have different cultural interpretations of it. Viveiros de Castro conceptualizes this understanding as a premise of "multiculturalism," against which he reads Amerindian "multinaturalism," which presumes the coexistence of multiple "natures." Each heterogenous nature has a relational point of view through which it can render worlds intelligible. This theory of reality provides the foundation for animism, upholding a psychic continuity between different types of interspecies beings populating the cosmos. A tacit belief in the supremacy of a "civilized" logic, in contrast to primitive interpretations of "the real," is retained in psychoanalytic theory and practice. As such, mediumistic realities have to be reinscribed through psychoanalytic containment. (See Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*.)

correctly—though there is no reason to insist upon its human-only specificity.³³²

I want to respond to Viveiros de Castro's generous reading of Winnicott. I'm also interested in how this paradox might make a Möbius strip out of a divisive fence. I also want to think beyond the human specificity of this theory of play. What Winnicott couldn't do was consider the ontological repercussions of play beyond a model of human psychic development. Object relations mobilizes transitionality in such a way that the fence separating psychoanalytic epistemology from the outside world remains intact. The indeterminacy that *transitional* suggests—the ongoing creative-destructive connections between me and not-me, the elaborate selves and relational modes that are generated, and the possibilities of worldings—is diminished by tethering the human to human-only process. The psychoanalytic measure of relationality remains almost exclusively enclosed in a construction of the capitalist family unit, as Deleuze and Guattari have vehemently argued.³³³

In this section, I examine this theory and its interlacing of subjects and objects, poesis and externality, me and not-me, fact and fiction. Though Winnicott was unable to open his theory toward world-making play and the contributions of more-than-humans, he does gesture toward the primacy and ordinariness of not-exclusively-human relationship.

The theory of transitional space—also referred to as *potential space*—edges toward a multiplicity of realities in the making—that is, before being hijacked by the anthropocentrism of psychoanalysis. In my reading, mediumship evokes a potential space where what counts as “me” and what as “not-me” is thrown into question. Mediums do boundary work with the theory of transitionality, leaning into the unstable fence that holds dreaming as separate from the rest of

³³² Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Who Is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf,” *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 33:1 (2015): 13.

³³³ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. Fadi Abou-Rihan draws Deleuze and Guattari's intervention into Winnicott's parent-centric schema. Abou-Rihan's critique of the norms of familial reproduction, whereby a biological event becomes a “psychological commandment,” runs as follows: “much of the psychoanalytic tradition has been burdened by its self-imposed prescription that the psychoanalyst must function as a masculine/fatherly source of truth and discipline and/or a feminine/motherly seat of nurture and safety—presumably, the source and/or seat the analysand had previously lacked” (Abou-Rihan, *Deleuze and Guattari: A Psychoanalytic Itinerary*, 18).

the world. Epistemology and ontology are respliced in such a way that thought, feeling and language are not relegated exclusively to human psyche. Signs and signals emerge from a variety of selves in differing forms, across categorical divides. Novel forms of subjectivity and relationality materialize in this potential space. For example, Roberts's entity, Seth, describes a kind of psychic multimodality across worlds:

A person, he is suggesting, can attain a similarly plural form without exiting subjectivity and consciousness, by creating a sort of perceptual and modal compromise—the surreal—between the interfused aspects of the potential field and its own discrete, actual unity. It is a matter of “bridging” or “straddling” them.³³⁴

In this state, the medium does not lose her own mind; rather, she is able to accommodate coexistence with multiplicities. This multimodal consciousness is echoed in Espírito Santo's work with the Cuban *espiritistas*: “In *espiritismo* this [initiation] process is . . . conceptualized by the idea of emergence, in which no sole “command” self that exclusively determines the person's fate is assumed to exist but rather a distribution of agencies with critical and evolving interrelations.”³³⁵

The conventional approach of Western models of mental health is to place spiritual entities, or external forms of consciousness, firmly in the head of an imaginative and potentially regressive individual. Given the cascade of competing realities and theories generated in the channelling circle I attended, I too might find some conceptual comfort focusing my lens on the peculiarities of Jane's mind. I might determine that she was involved in a particularly creative performance, which evoked a wild kind of group transference. My analytic training would encourage me to plumb her biography to understand why she would be driven to perform in this way. “Performance,” here, would mean something closer to “hysterical theatre” than an “ontologically generative act.” Perhaps analysts of other temperaments might conclude that it was a narcissistic show of omnipotent magical thinking. These interpretations would of course disqualify Jane's own conceptualization of her experience: her identity and cosmic beings are quite intimate, to the point of merger. Her personhood shifts in concert with the entities who come and go. Inner and

³³⁴ Skafish, “From the Library of the Surreal,” 447.

³³⁵ Espírito Santo, *Developing the Dead*, 12.

outer are unfixed, fluid domains. She communes with an unusual sociality of beings. She does not suffer from the experience, either. Indeed, she describes coming out of trance as a blissful state.

The assemblage of mind, body and spirits that a medium experiences has some resonance in Winnicott's theory. He proposes that the way we go about navigating our lives is less exacting than the epistemological sorting game of the Western modern, as described by Viveiros de Castro. In Winnicott's theory of transitional space, it is not the case that "what is not objectified simply remains abstract or unreal."³³⁶ Indeed, our emotional connections with things and others contribute to our sense of their realness. Dynamic play happens in a field between "subjective objects and the object objectively perceived."³³⁷ In our day-to-day, we don't tend to spend a great deal of time trying to parcel out objectivity from subjectivity or a reality unsullied by our personal feelings and ideas about it. We live in the elaborative encounter between me and not-me.

The theory of transitional space positions us on a spectrum between split terms: "To some extent objectivity is a relative term because what is objectively perceived is by definition to some extent subjectively conceived of."³³⁸ For Winnicott, no sharp line divides "health" and "delusion," and, indeed, we need a measure of creative delusion to live well:

[The schizophrenic] may be ill in a psychiatric sense because of a weak reality sense. To balance this one would have to state that there are others who are so firmly anchored in objectively perceived reality that they are ill in the opposite direction of being out of touch with the subjective world and with the creative approach to fact.³³⁹

Between these poles, which might be described as extremes of chaos and rigidity, Winnicott marks out an intermediate area of play. The game of sorting what is illusory and what is real is never finally determined. Nor is it the point of the game. Certainly, sorting makes the game less relaxed. We might develop a working understanding of what counts as "me" and what is "not-

³³⁶ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 60.

³³⁷ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 135.

³³⁸ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 88.

³³⁹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 89.

me,” but we don’t stop investing the object world with subjectivity as we play with/in it. As with the theory of transference, Winnicott troubles the notion of “correct” perception by positing a psyche that actively participates in creating its world. Along the other edge of the Möbius strip, outsides twist into insides. Psychosomatic processes are animated as we encounter the material things of the external world. Environments shape unconscious life. Social dreaming is enmeshed with cultures of objects. Bollas sees our engagements with objects as a form of *thinking*: free association involves not only ideas in the mind but one’s “moving in the real.”³⁴⁰

Winnicott’s transitional space is a theory of psychic development and it is also, as Viveiros de Castro reads it, a general theory of culture. What begins as use of a transitional object becomes (if all goes well) the ability to play in the field of culture at large. Winnicott writes:

I make my idea of play concrete by claiming that *playing has a place* and a time. It is not *inside* by any use of the word (and it is unfortunately true that the word inside has many and various uses in psychoanalytic discussion). Nor is it *outside*, that is to say, it is not part of the repudiated world, the not-me, that which the individual has to recognize (with whatever difficulty and even pain) as truly external, which is outside magical control. To control what is outside, one has to *do* things, not simply to think or to wish, and *doing things takes time*. Playing is doing.³⁴¹

Playing is a kind of performative iteration of reality. In line with Jane, James and the *espiritistas*, Annemarie Mol writes: “reality is *done*.”³⁴²

I am interested in this realm that is outside the imagined “magical control” of the human mind. What strikes me in a channelling session is that the medium purportedly relinquishes control of their psychesoma by opening up to a host of agencies, who have their own agendas. From this angle, it is psychoanalysis that attempts to wrestle control from this abundant cosmic world by relegating these intelligences to a more limited human-only domain.

The object relations milieu accounts for a distribution of agencies and interrelations to be sure, though they are tethered to “me.” Bollas, in his consideration of architecture and the

³⁴⁰ Bollas, *The Evocative Object World*, 59.

³⁴¹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 55.

³⁴² Mol, “Ontological Politics,” 75.

unconscious, uses ghosts to symbolize our attachments to environments and places. Note how he appeals to a particular culture of common sense in his reflections on haunting: “So the energy of the ghost is of course my own: the ghost as the occupant who has suffered a trauma and is not yet prepared to leave this world is of course me.”³⁴³ *Of course*.³⁴⁴

In fact, what this theory doesn’t do is bother with a thorough consideration of the *not-me object*—the ontology, agency or materiality of that which is being “played with.” Indeed, Bolas wants to avoid reifying the object, which on its own is concrete and irrelevant to this inquiry of human subjectivity. Winnicott tells us this himself: “What I am referring to . . . is not so much the object used as the use of the object.”³⁴⁵ The transitional object is, for him, “the child’s first use of a symbol.”³⁴⁶

The transitional object stands for something, namely the breast, or union of baby and first object relationship (the primary caregiver). It might develop to become a fetish object over time, which will imbue the object with all sorts of other coded meanings. It might be decathected, and then transitional space will spread out into the field of culture in general. How one uses these objects depends on the conditions of childhood.³⁴⁷ For the child, the transitional object hovers between functionality and meaning: “It is true that the piece of blanket (or whatever it is) is symbolical of some part-object, such as the breast. Nevertheless, the point of it is not its symbolic value so much as its actuality. Its not being the breast (or the mother), although real, is as important as the fact that it stands for the breast (or mother).”³⁴⁸ The piece of blanket is meaningful either as a part of the mother or insofar as it represents difference from a part of the mother and exists on its

³⁴³ Bolas, *The Evocative Object World*, 31.

³⁴⁴ In “Who’s Afraid of the Ontological Wolf,” Viveiros de Castro shares an observation from Davi Kopenawa, a Yanomami shaman: “You Whites sleep a lot, but you dream only of yourselves” (Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *La Chute du ciel: paroles d’un chamn yanomami* (Plon, 2010), 412, cited in Viveiros de Castro, “Who’s Afraid of the Ontological Wolf,” 12).

³⁴⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, xii.

³⁴⁶ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 130.

³⁴⁷ See Phyllis Greenacre, “The Fetish and the Transitional Object,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 24:1 (1969).

³⁴⁸ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 8.

own. In any case, the mother (or a body part in its presence or absence) is the primary signifier that drives the analyst to consider the transitional object in the first place. What is encountered “out there” does not contribute to the making of realities so much as offer itself up as symbols, facilitating the organization of a human mind.

Blankets, stuffed animals, toys and so forth are some of the common transitional objects reported upon in the literature. Whatever the object, the important part, clinically speaking, is how the child uses and imagines it. The object becomes coded with human impulses and familial attachments. The blanket becomes saturated with maternal signification. The stuffed toy is a tool for emotional separation from a caregiver. Objects are drawn into a symbolic universe of family life. As the phenomenological reduction teaches, getting drawn “outward” into questions about so-called concrete reality distracts from working with the psychic field. The object’s autonomy apart from human use is not a useful inquiry in this practice.³⁴⁹

There is no doubt that Winnicott inherited and developed an analysis that centres the psychic subject as coming to be through a particular picture of human bonding. In this lineage, the infant-parent relationship is the foundation through which selfhood is organized. In the right circumstances (a “good enough” facilitating environment, to use Winnicott’s terms), we build the capacity to relate to another as a not-me, one who lies beyond our omnipotent control: “an entity in its own right.”³⁵⁰ We may destroy the other (usually mom) in fantasy, and yet they survive our aggression. Through this experience, they become real. Externality is discovered in and through the unconscious, emotional and at times aggressive play of the child, facilitated by the infant-parent (and perhaps, later, the analyst-analysand) dyad. The maternal holding environment and the caregiving provisions that bring patterns of self experience into being, where the mother meets or fails to meet the emotional communication of her child, where the child might learn to play, are Winnicott’s principal concerns.

³⁴⁹ “Perhaps some soft object or other type of object has been found and used by the infant, and this then becomes what I am calling a *transitional object*. This object goes on being important. The parents get to know its value and carry it round when travelling. The mother lets it get dirty and even smelly, knowing that by washing it she introduced a break in continuity with the infant’s experience, a break that may destroy the meaning and value of the object to the infant” (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 5).

³⁵⁰ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 120.

As a child moves toward greater separation from the primary caregiver, transitional objects allow them to emotionally adjust by imbuing the object world with creative illusion. Though the child is said to undergo a process of disillusionment (they no longer magically control their environment), the ambiguity of a real-not-real space doesn't disappear for the creative adult. In this "intermediate area," external reality is knotted into the play of fantasy. This is a creative apprehension of reality. Winnicott sees fantasy not so much as a flight from the "hard facts" of the outside world as a flight from interiority as well:

Omnipotent fantasies are not so much the inner reality itself as a defense against the acceptance of it. One finds in this defense a flight to omnipotent fantasy, and flight from some fantasies to other fantasies, and . . . a flight to external reality. This is why I think that one cannot compare and contrast fantasy and reality.³⁵¹

Here, denial of internal reality (feelings, thoughts, dreams) is as clinically significant as an inability to accept externality. In this sense, we get assailed by realities in two directions. We are ceaselessly integrating bodily experiences, mental experiences, experiences of our environments (which initially means being cared for, handled, held). Psychic development entails a "perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated."³⁵² Knowing how these realities are meant to be interrelated, or not, is an achievement. What matters for the analyst is how an individual develops representational worlds, and a kind of "indwelling" sense of self, as one makes their way through the world of others. An experience of a reality that *is not so much factual as tolerable* requires relationship between each of these interactive processes.

For Winnicott, play allows us to live within the inside/outside paradox:

[The] essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena . . . is *the paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox*: the baby creates the object but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object. . . . [I]n the rules of the

³⁵¹ D. W. Winnicott, "The Manic Defense," in *Collected Papers: Through Pediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (Basic Books, 1965), 130.

³⁵² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 3.

game we all know that we will never challenge the baby to elicit an answer to the question: did you create that or did you find it?³⁵³

Fundamentally, for Winnicott, this intermediacy undergirds our very capacity to *be*. It is at once a psychological space that we are required to manage and the space of culture. It is a waking dream-space, involving all sorts of objects. Civitarese also speaks to a radical indeterminacy when he writes that there is an “analytic *field* where, as in the case of Winnicott’s transitional area, no one can say what it is or to whom it belongs.”³⁵⁴

What psychoanalysis says about the matter is that this field in fact belongs to humans. Winnicott himself assumes that the general experience of culture has to do with expanding “creative living . . . into the whole cultural life of man.”³⁵⁵ Here is where Viveiros de Castro’s Möbius strip gets cut off from the plurality of perspectives, worlds and interspecies relations he recognizes in non-Western ontologies: for the psychoanalyst, humans play. The interplay of insides and outsides is human generated. The culture of objects in psychoanalysis *stands for something* human related. It is the human who discovers-creates the outer world. It is the human who contributes to cultural life.

I want to take the notions of transitional space and transitional phenomena beyond their usual clinical application by complicating the assessment of how to locate the spirits and other invisibles in our midst. Psychoanalysis overdetermines the familial relationship and sets up a very restrained region of play. It is deeply devoted to the nursery. The metaphysical multimodality that a medium’s psychesoma can access is categorically excluded, unless we are speaking in symbols. I want to explore how other cartographies of reality arise in the spaces between these not-quite-me and not-quite-not-me dimensions. Wandering at the edges of Winnicott’s potential space, I suggest a blurring occurs between epistemological capacities and the ontologies “out there” that are not fully elaborated in this theory. Kathleen Stewart writes:

³⁵³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 119. Emphasis in the original.

³⁵⁴ Guiseppe Civitarese, “Reply to Goldberg and Steinberg,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 29:4 (2019): 431. Emphasis in the original.

³⁵⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 138.

“What matters is not meaning gathered into codes but the gathering of experience beyond subjectivity. . . . [A] new regime of sensation becomes a threshold to the real.”³⁵⁶

In the following section, I engage with some channels who take me across these thresholds. There, dreaming assemblages are formed between what Winnicott sees as a “unit self” and the greater phenomenal world.

Akomolafe also reflects on the modern desire to chart a world where what we think and what is “really real” are presumed to be separate. Similar to Winnicott, he reminds us that

“the real” and its expression are not separate, but entangled qualities—feeding each other. The world inside our heads—so to speak—is a performative enactment of the world our expressions seek to disclose. Moreover, it is not that we struggle to capture what “really” is; instead, we perform a world that does not fundamentally demarcate between imagination and actuality with some kind of Cartesian precision. What is real is so fluid that to speak about it is to affect it.³⁵⁷

He goes on to suggest an inescapable entanglement of stories and things:

A theory of correspondence does not adequately account for how things move, shift, die, enable action, become stable realities, or deconstruct others. The modern effort to alchemize the purest thought, to escape our limitations and arrive at a world beyond representation seems already needless by the observation that there is no Trumpian wall between “appearance” and “actuality.”³⁵⁸

By upending the modern proclivity for sorting fact from fiction, Winnicott maps a region of “play” that “is neither a matter of inner psychic reality nor a matter of external reality.”³⁵⁹ Yet the implications of this theory for ontological fluidity have not been developed. The

³⁵⁶ Kathleen Stewart, “Worlding Refrains.” in *Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke UP, 2010), 340.

³⁵⁷ Bayo Akomolafe, “How the Real Is More Fascinating than We Can Think: Meditation on Aquaman, Science and the Alchemy of Imagination,” personal website, December 13, 2018, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/how-the-real-is-more-fascinating-than-we-can-think>.

³⁵⁸ Bayo Akomolafe, “How the Real Is More Fascinating than We Can Think.”

³⁵⁹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 129.

Winnicottian world does not include the contributions of more-than-human cultures or other modes of intelligence in its map of reality. It does not consider the curious realities and ecologies co-created in each encounter between me and not-me—pluralities that Viveiros de Castro (not unfavourably) sees as “ontological anarchy.”³⁶⁰

Winnicott, a pediatrician turned child analyst, designed a theory that might escape stubborn Western dualism and its anthropocentric assumptions, but it is nevertheless still safely domesticated within the relational field of humans. The way psychoanalytic practice mobilizes transitionality has very little to do with not-me worlds, after all. Pluralized agencies become moored within the human enclosure. The interpretive thrust leads the analyst to childhood, to the developing mind of a child and their facilitating environment, to find explanatory scaffolding for invisible entities. This we can see in, for example, the charge that animism is grounded in infantile narcissism. An entire worldview is analyzed as a regression to a younger human psychological time. What might be perceived as “outside” the subject is re-examined as wishful fantasy or projection—as an “inside” issue wandering illegitimately beyond its allotted field.

Martin Savransky writes, “we need to attempt to take solitary entities seriously, not as representations that can be equated with our own Western inventions, but as real entities that inhabit, in multiple ways, worlds that may or may not be our own.”³⁶¹ Such a task, of recognizing multiple worlds and multiple modes of inhabiting those worlds, complicates the two and a half dimensions of psychoanalysis: real external reality, inner psychic reality and the third subjective object play space that does not immediately conform to either but is, for the psychoanalyst, entirely human mediated.

2.4 Conversations with mediums

I work with J as a researcher, and I have also been a supplicant. I was astonished and moved when, during a phone conversation, he interjected to say that a friend of mine who had recently died was showing up unexpectedly. This friend was asking J to pass along his gratitude for the

³⁶⁰ Viveiros de Castro, “Who Is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf,” 9.

³⁶¹ Martin Savransky, “Worlds in the Making: Social Sciences and the Ontopolitics of Knowledge,” *Postcolonial Studies*, 15:3 (2012), 356.

time I had been spending with his child. I was not calling to ask about this person, but he made himself heard nonetheless.

What is most intimate, my own grief, spills into my research, disorienting me. This is not the sort of practice where personal feeling can be parsed from knowledge claims.

Rather than seen as an epistemic contaminant, feeling is central to the medium's work. As with transference, feeling is the vehicle of understanding. Unlike transference, mediumistic practice is not a repetition of a childhood narrative. Nor does it depend on two living persons in an analytic dyad.

Spirit communication, J tells me, allows one to see far along a path, if one's feeling body is trained to receive that information. He is keen to tell me that we are all guided if we pay attention: "The spirit world communicates repeatedly and we don't hear it!" Spirits are endlessly offering advice on what to do in the physical world, and most of us fail to pick up the immaterial messages. In part, this is because we are tuned in to the "wrong channel."

Many agencies influence consciousness in J's understanding. There are, for example, forces directing and steering us in what he sees as a form of engineered brainwashing; this is J's theory of disciplinary power and ideology. Regimes of "thought" hinder the modes of feeling, sensing and being-with that he practices. We have been trained to think, and to think within certain categories; our thinking is mediated and politically motivated. We have been conditioned to ignore the feeling body and its receptivity to certain voices: "If you have an AM radio you only get AM stations. If you have FM radio you only get FM. Our receptive abilities have been brainwashed out of us."

Whereas a Western modern Freudian would cast the feeling body as an inescapable hindrance to civilization, as a realm to be mastered by conscious reason or analytic understanding—think of the hysterical manifestations of passion, the love that emerges in transference, the unbridled Eros and Thanatos driving human behaviour—J flips this equation on its head: rational thought or intellectual analysis erodes our capacity to feel, to attune to an inner knowing, via which we commune with spirit realms. Thought, in this arrangement, polices psychesomatic relational experiencing, and it at once controls and devalues the realm of the feeling body.

J describes a sort of dissociation that comes from “trauma, disease or affliction.” D, another psychic I have worked with, tells me that she feels the West has suffered a “spiritual wound”—a rupture in the capacity to feel, articulate, affirm and respond to nonempirically verifiable realms. J describes this wounding in terms of the severing of bodies and spirits: a split between inner realms and other realms. J says, “Spirits bob along outside the body like balloons. When we feel safe and at peace, the balloon comes in the body. A spirit will leave the body to protect itself, hovering nearby, connected by a cord.” The “body is the temple” where the spirit can reside when the conditions for such a relationship are practiced and nurtured.

In J’s account: “They communicate through the feeling body. That’s what guides us in the world. We’re basically bumper cars until we listen to this inner voice.” Here, “inner voice” is decidedly *other* rather than inner. It is closer to a receptive space (sanctum) where other languages can land. I look up the word *oracle*, a word J uses to help me understand how he views his job. *Oracle*: a message from a god, expressed by divine inspiration. It also describes the place where divine utterances were given. From *orare*: “to plead, to pray.”

Later in our conversation, the “place of divine utterances” is figured in telecommunications terms:

If you turn off the TV, where does the station go? One station is different than another. If you have cable, you will receive information through cable. If you have satellite, you get information through satellite. Same principle for a cell or a landline.

I am reminded of what psychiatry terms “broadcast thoughts,” a category of delusion where one presumes others can hear the thoughts in their head. Conversely, “thought insertion” is the belief that the thoughts that arise in one’s own head have been put there by an external source or entity. A delusion that is not concordant with “normal life” is labelled a “bizarre delusion.” One that involves feeling the sensation of a nonexistent stimulus is a “somatic delusion.” These phenomena are, from the point of view of medical psychiatry, mistaken interpretations of experience. J’s world includes a diversity of message bearers. Information he receives is broadcast from a multitude of sources:

There are higher spirits, angelic beings . . . Spirit guides are always people we’ve known. There is usually a story connected to them. When they come through, they show themselves, their personality. “The counsel” comes through more like a cloud: many

voices, and a spokesperson. It's a voice from a collective. You can hear them confer, almost, for lack of a better word. Then an answer will come. Angelic beings come through in a feeling. They'll put a feeling inside you and you'll have to figure it out.

While spirit guides might draw on my personal experience to communicate something to someone, with higher angelic beings, it'll be a feeling.

Spirit, he tells me, enters into everything—this isn't simply a human quality. This realm has the ability to “broadcast into many different forms. The body is a TV. The tree is a TV. The bug is a TV.”³⁶²

For J, being a TV for spirits is something we are no longer accustomed to practicing. He talks to me about Gnosticism. He describes it as a practice of “inner knowing” that allowed for communion with the spiritual realm. “It's our nature. It's natural for us.” Inner stillness, through meditative practice, allows one to determine who-what is entering the inner space. It strikes me that this practice of the “inner” involves developing a kind of hospitable space for a spiritual being, rather than developing a “unit self.” Through developing “an inner sanctum,” we can clear the way for the not-me.

I ask: How can I listen? How does one receive this broadcast? He invites me to pay attention to synchronicity. Coincidences are like “spirits dropping carrots.” They are signs to be investigated, signs to follow, paths around and through. “Synchronicity is the currency of the spirit world.” The vocabulary of another dimension.³⁶³

³⁶² Artist Bonnie Camplin comes to mind here. Camplin experiments with a theory of mind that extends beyond a neuro-mechanical-theological model where “mind is a mere epiphenomenon of brain activity.” Instead, like J, she models the body-brain system as a transceiver, or filter, for wave-form information. Her work plays within this multidimensionality, where the province of the mind is theoretically limitless: “I am potentially able to inhabit your subjectivity, or inhabit the subjectivity of a tree, or a stone, or a person's experience in the distant past or the far future. . . . I am massively isomorphic.” She goes on: “The definition of mental health now is the ability to navigate those spaces.” (Bonnie Camplin, “Bonnie Camplin on Her Exhibition at Camden Arts Center, 2016,” Vimeo video, 7:22, uploaded by Camden Art Centre, October 22, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/188403750>.)

³⁶³ Jung saw synchronicity as an “acausal connecting principle” of the unconscious, alongside Freud's principle of psychic causality. He locates the significance of meaningful coincidences in both the

Surely not all voices are to be heeded, not all signs followed? To trust in the authority of the discarnate realm, to listen to an entity whose mode of being is unofficial, via the psychosomatic activity of a living channel—the practice asks a lot of those who practice skepticism about their information sources. Why do the spirits know better?, I ask. “They don’t,” he responds. “They simply help us find a vibratory place, from which we can, in body, become one with spirit. When this happens ‘we can walk between all the worlds.’”

In conversation with J, each of my questions, my attempts to carve out a clear understanding of his world(s), invariably multiplies into more questions. (In which multiple worlds might we walk? How to interpret these carrots? Who-what, moreover, are these carrot-dropping interlocutors with whom he collaborates—and who are collaborating with me, via J’s unique mode of knowing?)

D shares her understanding that each epoch has parentheses around that with which we can interact. By this she means that each epoch has its accepted reality “in the bounds” and it also has its margins. Various tools are available for drawing links beyond the margin of the known: the tarot, table rapping, channelling. These practices and technologies vary according to the cultural and historical moment. They function as mediators between the seen and unseen, the known and unknown. They offer “one way to put words to something we can’t put words on,” says D.

Mediumship is one such technique for working at the edge of a cultural bracket. The feeling body, in J’s world, mediates. Information can come from spiritual beings, and by *spiritual* he means “to have an experience outside the definition of normal, outside the box.”

For D, information emanates and can be received from other bodies. D describes her practice as “developing skills to interact with the flow of information.” Like J’s television, all sorts of embodied beings are sending and receiving energy between one another.

subjective psyche as well as a broader, collective realm of archetypes. Psychic parallelisms include identical thoughts and psychic states, or personal symbols appearing concretely. Writing with physicist Wolfgang Pauli, Jung came to theorize synchronicity as an expression of a deeper energetic order and a governing law of nature, on par with laws such as causality and chance. (Carl Jung, “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 8 (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).

To some degree, I can relate. My practice aims at interacting meaningfully with unspoken emotional information I receive. As D puts it, her work is to “decipher information. To open a space to allow information to be.” She describes her capacity to “feel the atmosphere without censoring what comes in. To accept without pushing away.”

Recall the phenomenological reduction, which sets up specific parentheses around analytic practice: what matters is the oneiric dimension, what Grotstein calls *the dreaming ensemble*—the people involved in sharing mental operations.³⁶⁴ D and J work precisely at the margins of this reduction, “to accept without pushing away.”

The scope of the medium’s psychosomatic life is, at times, disorienting. J has a boisterous sense of humour about it: “When a being is in front of you, you’ll swear they’re physically real, then they just vanish between your eyes.” He laughs: “I hate it when that happens!”

I ask him why.

“Usually they mess you up! I don’t know if you’ve heard of the word ‘quaking?’ In the presence of a higher being, when they leave, they alter your vibration. You can’t stop vibrating, shaking, or quaking.”

Another technological analogy: there is a signal, energy, some wave forms, and physical hardware to receive it all. This time, J likens the encounter to loading a program onto a computer. “A computer doesn’t know why you’re doing this. Maybe the computer is like: What the fuck? And then, it’s just part of you. It’s the same thing, being in the presence of a being like that: they leave something with you and they don’t tell you what it is; there’s no description of it.”

J shares with me his realization about his psychic ability, a gift he was reluctant to embrace. Ultimately, he understood that voices were “coming *through me*, they weren’t coming *from me*.”

Jane Roberts’s description of her channelling bears resemblance to J’s moments of overwhelm. With her “skull [as] a receiving station, turned up to unbearable volume,” she reflects on the

³⁶⁴ James Grotstein, *A Beam of Intense Darkness: Wilfred Bion’s Legacy to Psychoanalysis* (Karnac, 2007).

struggle to find metaphysical concepts adequate for her new “sphere of operation.”³⁶⁵ As Skafish argues, Roberts’s own “alien and marginal concepts” demanded a metaphysics all their own. Her most famous interlocutor, Seth, a “personality largely autonomous of her own,”³⁶⁶ engaged in debates with psychiatrists and speculated on the nature of “himself.” Roberts, meanwhile, embarked on a theoretical project she called “aspect psychology” to account for how one may travel through their psyche to bring different personality aspects into focus—personae she understood to be residing in the margins of her “usual self” and outside of three-dimensional frameworks. Roberts describes a relational “synchronicity” in “multiplicity and unicity,” from which she communicates as and with Seth and others. As Skafish points out, none of these aspects are ontologically prior to any other in Roberts’s philosophy.

Here we are again in a weird transitional space, between me and not-me, discovery and invention, between patterns of subjective life and the energies or entities beyond those patterns. As I have argued, for psychoanalysis, transitional space is not where realities proliferate but rather a statement about the never-quite-decidable situation we find ourselves in when we humans “play” with a reality that is already given.

For Roberts and her entities, meanwhile, working in the weave between self and other adds dimensions to their maps of worldly experience. They find themselves playing with/in joined versions of reality. After having an “other world” vision of a library and herself in it, which was transposed over her “present” living room, Seth explains: “Jane’s library exists as surely as this room does . . . yet it also exists as *unsurely* as this room.” Skafish interprets Seth’s account as follows:

[J]ust as weakly as something actual that reduces and obscures its multiplicity, Seth’s ascription of *actuality* (and this mere “probability”) to aspect and psyche alike solves a problem that was internal to [Roberts’s] theory here: if aspects, too, are actual, the psyche gets demoted from the effectively transcendent, ontologically prior (“spiritual”) position that it had occupied, and its variegated structure become capable, in principle, of entering ordinary, actual reality.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Roberts, *Adventures in Consciousness*, cited in Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 431–42.

³⁶⁶ Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 434.

³⁶⁷ Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 447.

Note that the “superreal” here does not prioritize an ontologically more *real* reality or emphasize Roberts’s “own” interiority as prior. The border between locations, as well as self (psyche) and aspect (entity) is, in Skafish’s terms, “relaxed,” allowing “multiplicities to coexist or appear in an actuality that then becomes something else.”³⁶⁸ Roberts’s capacity to bring an alternate voice and perspective into the room creates a momentary synthesis between awarenesses, which she experiences as a combination, or joining, of consciousnesses in a potential field, where different worlds, or “alternate moments,” may come into focus. I’m reminded of J’s claim that spirit connection allows one to “walk between worlds.”

Though Winnicott’s transitional space troubles the division between inner and outer, enfolding subjects and their objects into a dynamic interplay of reality creation-discovery, it is not meant to “add” to the relational field so much as grow a human’s mind. Meanwhile, the voices, for J, issue from a diverse culture of beings. Incorporeal entities come in many forms. They might belong to the dead, angelic beings, teachers, spirit guides, counsels or various other spirits that have never incarnated in the world. At times, they are confounding to him. He is shown something, offered a feeling, a story, a somatic vibration that he has to integrate, or “figure out.” Feelings and thoughts arise that he does not recognize as his own. Images appear that he has to make sense of, and he tells me the not understanding frustrates him. It is not always possible for J to translate higher-level frequencies into his vocabulary. There is the quaking, the sensorium apprehending something outside his conceptual frame, the “what the fuck?” moment. Akomolafe writes:

If you know where you are going, if you are clear on the destination and how to get there, it may be that your clarity has fooled you into thinking you have traversed worlds when you have merely substituted familiarity and intelligibility for the uncomfortable yet transformative potential of bewilderment.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 449.

³⁶⁹ Bayo Akomolafe, “When Clarity Befuddles,” personal website, August 10, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/when-clarity-befuddles/>.

3 DIGESTING THE WORLD INTO WORDS

3.1 Symbol formation: Words versus worlds

Early in my research on spiritual mediumship, I hosted a psychic party at my home. A small group of friends and a psychic gathered in my living room. Another circle. Minutes into the psychic reading, participants were in tears. What struck me at that time, as I passed tissues around the room, was how “uncontained” the experience was. Rather than an analysis and free-associating to reveal their inner world in the holding environment of analysis, the psychic directly expresses what they perceive in and around another. They don’t *hold space* so much as emotionally and ontologically complicate the space. Some of the messages felt trite (a vision of a wedding dress); some were emotionally piercing (a suffering brother, a relationship’s imminent end, a recently passed father adjusting to the other world); and some were affirming (a familiar spirit guide hovering close by one participant).

In *Immaterial Bodies*, Lisa Blackman writes about affective communication as an autonomic and not entirely conceptual resonance across different bodies.³⁷⁰ At this party, the affective transfer was intense. Speculative futures and personal pasts poured into the room. The emotional tone was erratic; the reactions were contagious. Despite our manic use of humour to lighten the atmosphere (a trusted defence mechanism), it was, at times, upsetting.

Let me return to the psychoanalytic map and how it tries to manage this kind of uncomfortable bewilderment. One could interpret this scene as a moment of “wild analysis,” wherein the hidden is suddenly revealed by the practitioner, rather than slowly brought forth for discovery through the development of a transference relationship and gradual breakdown of resistance.³⁷¹ In wild analysis, Freud warns, there is no tact. As with Bion’s beta elements, floating affects can be deprived of representation, and they need to be metabolized within the appropriate container space. As Guattari puts it, the analyst’s job “is to forge a new model in the place where his patient is lacking one.”³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Sage, 2012).

³⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, “‘Wild’ Psycho-Analysis” (1910), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 11.

³⁷² Félix Guattari, “The Transference,” in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Blackwell, 1997), 65.

Yet it would be inaccurate to say that a medium's circle is unformulated. A model of reality does, in fact, exist. Affect is generated to be sure, and we are also sense-making in elaborate metaphysical terms. As J has explained to me, feeling bodies are the receiver for spirits. The medium performs a kind of unbinding of representation and affect, a reworking of the usual psychoanalytic representational schema. We are invited to play with an assumption that is alien to psychoanalysis: the psychic stages an encounter with a collective of extramaterial entities. We are participating in multidimensional, multipersonal communicative fields, where energetic spirits are relational beings and sources of information, rather than unloosed figments of the imagination.

Espírito Santos describes *espiritistas* as “people peopled by spirits.”³⁷³ If we could ensure spirits were a metaphor, not materializing at the party, this would align with the psychoanalytic version of the subject. Otherwise, it is decidedly not the model of personhood that psychoanalytic work hopes to foster, nor is it the phenomenal world that realistic people are meant to traverse.

Reality and fantasy coexist in a person's day-to-day experience: this is the space of play. Be that as it may, psychoanalysis is a modality of treatment. We encourage the play of poetry and co-dreaming in session while we also respect the laws of natural science. Despite the paradox of transitional space that Winnicott sets up, psychoanalytic work still has to determine what ought to be a metaphor, what counts as a psychic trace (me rather than not-me and factually unreal) and what can be given “thing” status in the world at large (not-me, and factually real). The ability to perform this boundary work and keep dimensions sorted is indicative of ego function.

Identifying pathology has a lot to do with a split between words and worlds.³⁷⁴ In psychoanalysis, the split between words and worlds relies on a particular mapping of insides (belonging to humans) and outsides (not-humans). The “insides” involve container processes of

³⁷³ Espírito Santos, *Developing the Dead*, 13.

³⁷⁴ Vanessa Andreotti identifies “wording the world” as “primary orienting project of modernity/coloniality.” She writes: “Modernity/coloniality has the capacity to imprint the wording of the world as the only possible relationship with language, meaning, knowledge, and, consequentially, with the world. It also imposes its own meanings as neutral and objective representations of reality” (Vanessa Andreotti, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, (North Atlantic Books, 2021), 20). This *epistemic imperialism* appears in the psychoanalytic insistence on the human acquisition of a symbolic order that properly represents “non-linguistic” and “primitive” worlds.

re-presentation, ideation and symbolization. The “outsides” involve things. This internal/external distinction is transposed onto the psychic topography itself, allowing psychoanalysts to see certain representational modes as more “archaic.” It marks out the difference between mature and regressive thinking. The former understands where the fence goes, the latter entangles the life of the mind with concrete things.

Who and what is relegated to the internal space of representation, and who-what is permitted to exist in the external space of perception? Reality testing demands we ask: Does this representation exist on the inside only? If so, it is not factual. If it exists outside, it might be real. “Epistemologically challenging” beings,³⁷⁵ such as spirits of the dead, do not survive this sorting process.

In her paper “Notes on Symbol Formation,” Hanna Segal outlines how symbol formation is an interpersonal process, set up through our earliest object relations:

In the analytical view, the child’s interest in the external world is determined by a series of displacements of affect and interests from the earliest to ever new objects. And, indeed, how could such a displacement be achieved otherwise than by way of symbolization?³⁷⁶

For Segal, symbolization arises through our efforts to deal with our early relationships. Unsurprisingly, the first objects that capture the interest of the infant are related to the parents. Body parts such as breasts hold a great deal of meaning. Eventually, substitutes are found. Attitudes toward objects give rise to meaningful expression, be it through play, dreams, enactments or more abstract uses of symbol. In Levin’s words, the psychic process *is* a symbolic process: it is “intelligent beings fantasizing about each other and the world.”³⁷⁷

According to Segal, if something goes amiss or is disturbed in the interrelationship between infant and other, the result is a difficulty in “attitudes toward objects.” Developing the capacity

³⁷⁵ Blanes and Espirito Santos, *The Social Life of Spirits*, 3.

³⁷⁶ Hanna Segal, “Notes on Symbol Formation,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 38 (1957): 392.

³⁷⁷ Charles Levin, “An Essay on the Symbolic Process” (PhD diss., Concordia University, 1989), 66.

for symbolization might be derailed, resulting in schizophrenic or autistic breakdown, a kind of trauma-induced epistemic disobedience.³⁷⁸

One symptom of “symbolic difficulty” is the equivalency between word, thought and thing—a phenomenon associated with schizophrenia. Here, “thinking is disturbed by the failure to realize the symbol is a representation.”³⁷⁹ Words likewise might become too agential, too thing-like: “I had a woman patient, an author, who couldn’t write because she felt that the words were coming out of the page at her and biting her.”³⁸⁰ Something that *is*, and a *representation*, become confused. A thought might be experienced as having manipulable substance. Typically, this is understood as a schizophrenic concretization of language—an inability to comprehend its metaphoric quality. Bollas describes this state: “The word stands for the thing, the thing stands for the personality function. To use the name of the object is therefore very nearly the same as physically handling it.”³⁸¹

“Splitting” is one defense mechanism that the literature uses to account for psychosis. What gets split apart is not the already bifurcated field of inner worlds and the “great outdoors” (this is a split we are meant to maintain). Rather, the human mind splits into fragments. As Bion describes it, through the mechanism of projective identification: a “patient splits off a part of his personality into the object where it becomes installed, sometimes as a persecutor, leaving the psyche, from which it has been split off, correspondingly impoverished.” Psychosis in this schema indicates, interestingly, “a hatred of reality.”³⁸² Phantasy dominates and presents as fact. The psychotic, in Bion’s work, is splitting the personality in an effort to avoid the awareness of reality. The psychic apparatus, which allows us to process reality into digestible form is

³⁷⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26:7 (2009).

³⁷⁹ Robert Douglas Hinshelwood, “Symbolic Equation and Symbolic Representation: An Appraisal of Hannah Segal’s Work,” *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 34:3 (2018): 344.

³⁸⁰ Hanna Segal, “From Symbolic Equation to Symbolic Representation,” in *Listening to Hanna Segal*, ed. M Quinodoz (Routledge, 2008), 63.

³⁸¹ Christopher Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts: The Enigma of Schizophrenia* (Yale UP, 2016), 131.

³⁸² Wilfred Bion, “Differentiation of the Psychotic from the Non-Psychotic Personalities,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 38 (1957): 266.

fragmented. It loses its holding capacity. Unconscious fragments are expelled and come to take on a quality of externality—“bizarre objects” that populate the world. In Bionian parlance, these *particles* are proto-ideas. They are not yet mentalized, they have not been contained by the container, they have not yet been used to form words, they have not become symbolic. They seem to have a life of their own.

Segal, building on the theory of projective identification, interprets symbolic equivalency between thought and thing as a “denial of the separateness between the subject and the object.”³⁸³ When a failure in maternal containment occurs, when mom has not helped give meaning to experience, the symbolizing function and its referent are in danger of collapse, and the boundaries of internal and external worlds threaten to dissolve.

The development of verbal thought, through the mother’s translation of experience, is understood to be integral to psychic awareness. Thought requires a linking of sense impressions with reality, and a codification of those links. In this schema, “attacks on linking”—attacks on the very matrix of thought—create a situation where objects and thoughts become indistinguishable. Bion writes: “The consequence for the patient are that he now moves, not in a world of dreams, but in a world of objects that are ordinarily the furniture of dreams.”³⁸⁴ What one needs to grasp, through the course of treatment, is what belongs in the realm of mind (what belongs to a psychic process), and what belongs in the physical world: the furniture of dreams.

The furniture is not the point of the work, as Civitarese has taught us. Analysis plays in the poetry of psychic life. Symbols have an *as-if* quality for the healthy ego: we know that something might mean more than one thing, and we can play with that meaning. We have awareness of fantasy space and imagination, and we understand when we are engaged in playing and acting, holding a word or object with a double meaning. Losing this fictionalizing function leads to delusion.³⁸⁵ The play of meanings are lost. Collapse may also occur in the ability to differentiate between me and not-me. The oscillation between tuning into self versus attuning to

³⁸³ Segal, “Notes on Symbol Formation,” 316.

³⁸⁴ Bion, “Differentiation of the Psychotic from the Non-Psychotic Personalities,” 269.

³⁸⁵ Thomas Fuchs, “The Human ‘As-If’-Function and Its Loss in Schizophrenia” (paper, Phenomenology Center Annual Symposium, Duquesne University, March 15, 2018), <https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=phenomenology-symposium>.

other is lost; alterity overwhelms the self. As Thomas Fuchs puts it: “With the loss of the ‘as-if’ quality, imaginations turn into perceptions and acquire a concretistic reality.”³⁸⁶

The fence between fields is what is at stake here, and its dissolution results in a number of pathological patterns. One could apply the model of overwhelm-through-otherness to J’s description of being confounded by the arrival of an otherworldly being. The subjective position of the channel is decentred by alterity: an external agent takes over the psychic apparatus. “Broadcast thoughts,” as mentioned above, are another symptom of a mind inadequately separated from the world at large—selfhood climbs over the fence and permeates the atmosphere. We also see, in this two-world model, how the mind goes about animating things that aren’t meant to be animate. A misplaced fragment of mind, untethered from the subject, means one is attributing intentionality where it ought not to be. Fuchs cites Manfred Spitzer, who “suggested that schizophrenic delusions should actually be considered as self-reports about private or inner states (similar to, say, an exclamation of pain), and not as epistemic statements on factual matters in the public world (which they only appear to be).”³⁸⁷ By this logic, we can assert that spiritualism is not a theory of reality *per se* but rather a symptom of interiority characterized by confusion about where thought stops and reality begins. Fact and fiction are moderated in this way.

For Levin, constructing an unfixed boundary between outside and inside is part of the symbolic process: insides and outsides are continually propagated. We sort others from self experience through an intelligent, imagining body that differentiates as well as incorporates. We experience ourselves contained in others, too. This semantic movement produces insides and outsides, and generates distinctions. Though the boundaries and subdivisions are indeterminate, they can become ideologically fixed. In Levin’s understanding, mental health comes to rest on these categories, though this does not exhaust the epistemological possibilities of where to locate insides and where to locate outsides.³⁸⁸ These categories are troubled when we consider the technological extensions and inhabitations of embodiment (though, as we will see in Part Two of this dissertation, psychoanalysis also problematizes material mediations and technological

³⁸⁶ Fuchs, “The Human ‘As-If’-Function,” 11.

³⁸⁷ Fuchs, “The Human ‘As-If’-Function,” 14.

³⁸⁸ Charles Levin, personal conversation with the author, April 2, 2020.

attachments, as such attachments encroach upon humanist constructions of self). We humans may be perpetually creating distinctions, or “playing with reality,” but the discipline protects a categorical distinction that must either exclude the contributions of the living world or make the otherworldly into the innerworldly.

And so, in the psychoanalytic universe, we can site the mechanism of projection as a wayward crossing of the fence between inside and outside. Through projective identification, the external world becomes a reflection of a fragment of inner life. The hallucination is a split-off fragment of the psychic apparatus that takes on a seemingly autonomous existence from self. The wrong-way traffic between inner and outer looks like this: parts of the subjective self (disowned feeling, undigested thoughts) may be projected onto or put into external objects through the process of projective identification. What was once self comes to be identified with parts of the external world. So not only has the self been misplaced but the identity of the hitherto “inanimate” object has become invaded with human subjectivity, which comes back to haunt the self in disguised, or altered, form. The object itself participates in this relational process only as a vessel for an individual’s wandering ideation. This process of demarcation guides today’s clinicians when we assess a patient for a “loss of contact with reality.”³⁸⁹

Psychoanalysis recognizes that the transit of insides and outsides is ongoing. But when pathological mental processes take hold, we understand the issue in terms of a developmental failure. Analysis facilitates “regression in the service of the ego”³⁹⁰—that is, with an aim to

³⁸⁹ Psychopathology is largely determined by the level of distress as well as impairment of function.

Psychic mediums do not necessarily suffer greatly from their work or meet the diagnostic criteria laid out by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)*. From the point of view of mental health practitioners, delusions (grandiosity, such as contact with a deity), hallucinations (sensory perceptions that apparently occur without external stimulation), loss of ego boundaries and reality-testing impairment, and identity disorders (“If I can channel another who is not-me, who am I anyway?”) come rather close to the experience of mediumship. Public or consensual reality becomes the measuring stick against which subjective belief or abnormal inference about external reality can be measured. I was struck by the name of a clinical program at Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary for adolescents and young adults diagnosed with psychotic disorders. The name of the program is: Reality Challenged.

³⁹⁰ Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, International Universities Press, 1952.

repair the moment(s) things went awry, and to address the fault lines in the building of a self through symbolic competence and containment. Though we understand that infantile “primitive” strata of the psyche never disappear, we recognize what is and is not an acceptable version of adult reality, and who and what are acceptable “objects” for object relating. In Bollas’s characterization of schizophrenia, the mind is not capable of integrative work. Instead, it is involved in inventing, expelling and projecting unconscious mental contents. Its container is spilling. It is not a case of absent symbolism; rather, but it is a symbolic process in which one hasn’t learned to classify representation and thing, psychic-mental phenomenon and external reality: “one might say [schizophrenics] live in a world that is overwhelmed by the arbitrary nature of their symbolic order.”³⁹¹

The question of what is arbitrary and what is well ordered (and to whom) leads me to Tobie Nathan’s quip that psychopathologists “think that if ‘primitive’ people use magical methods, it is because they are *symbolically* displacing the deep thoughts that the scientists themselves are able to grasp through ‘direct contact,’ that is, without their fantastical veneer.”³⁹² Those who know how to think, in this schema, know how to correctly identify a symbol. I return to this theory of primitivity, as well as Nathan’s ethnopsychiatry, later in section XXI – “Rethinking magical thinking: On other solutions to reality.”

Bollas admits to the inevitability of a “fantastical veneer” but he works to ensure that the phantasm stays where it belongs. According to him, the object world may be “evocative” in aesthetically and emotionally impactful ways (*the furniture of dreams*), but this does not open a question of not-human or otherworldly agency or intentionality. Instead, he is content to see external things as elicitations or receptacles for human mental life, and voices, messages and visions as hallucinations. An object may be invested with feeling, a stand-in for a lost human connection, a thing to hold a vulnerable aspect of self. An invisible agent is a misplacement of mind.

³⁹¹ Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts*, 130.

³⁹² Tobie Nathan and Isabelle Stengers, *Doctors and Healers* (Polity, 2012), 34.

3.2 On the colonial imposition of reality testing

In his writing on schizoid processes, Philip Bromberg applies “primitivity” to certain societies, as well as certain individual minds, that fail to differentiate mental state from reality. For Bromberg, a society without written language can’t frame social reality through consensual validation:

With regard to a society, a primitive culture is one that has not developed a written language. . . . It is taken as a sign that the individual members of the society have achieved a level of consensually defined self and object representation needed to schematize social reality beyond their own subjective needs, and that the process of communication uses language not only as a tool to get what one wants but also as a means of expressing who one is. . . . Freud suggested that primitivity reflects a state of mind which is dominated by an unquestioning belief in the power of thought; a phenomenon which he also held to be the foundation of magic. The link between magical thinking and the obsessive quality of one’s private inner world has been always a subject of great fascination to psychoanalysts. Freud proposed the idea that magic is nothing more than the imposing of the laws governing mental life upon real things, rather than allowing the world of real things to shape one’s mental life.³⁹³

According to this schema, “primitivity” involves categorical mistakes in the judgment of reality, a reality determined by some discrete line between an inner order of thought and an outer order of real things. Reality testing rests on correctly positioning objects of the outside and objects of the inside according to the “shared rules through which reality is constructed and judged.”³⁹⁴ A personality develops when one can sense things as others do, when experience can be organized, consciously or unconsciously, by shared codes.

Of course, constructions and judgments of realities are heterogenous, as anthropologists know, though Viveiros de Castro notes that this doesn’t stop anthropologists’ “desire for ontological

³⁹³ Philip M. Bromberg, “Getting Into and Out of One’s Self: On Schizoid Processes,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 20 (1984).

³⁹⁴ Bromberg, “Getting Into and Out of One’s Self,” 440.

monism.”³⁹⁵ While Viveiros de Castro’s method of controlled equivocation is meant to counter this desire, psychoanalysis preserves the epistemic assumption that we live in one world, and though there may be many colourful cultural interpretations of it, some cultures represent (word the world)³⁹⁶ more accurately than others. A multiplicity of worlds is lost through the assumed authority and singularity of the modern real.

In Bromberg’s civilization, a ghost would not be a “shaping agent.” In compliance with a modern Western frame of reality—as is repeated in the developmental parameters of psychology and reiterated in psychoanalytic diagnostics—maturity requires an accommodation of the real world and laying ghosts to rest. Or, at least, it requires them to be placed on the correct side of the fence. The person who understands this order may also referee the matter of psychological maturity and regressive states.

Eugen Bleuler’s 1908 coinage of the term *schizoid* intended to describe an inclination toward inner life and away from the external world.³⁹⁷ A descriptive etiology of schizoid personality disorder—the nonpsychotic cousin of schizophrenia—reveals a character who is oriented not toward the practical matters of life but toward a sensitivity and eccentricity of thought, overvaluation of inner life, peculiarity of manner, tendency toward social withdrawal and proclivity for magical thinking. The picture is of a person preoccupied with interiority, rather than one easily positioned in the world at large, in shared social space.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Viveiros de Castro argues that this desire for ontological monism “usually pays with an inflationary emission of epistemological dualisms—emic and etic, metaphoric and literal, conscious and unconscious, representation and reality, illusion and truth, et cetera.” By importing these dualisms as a given, we describe other worlds as though “illusory version[s] of our own.” (Viveiros de Castro, “Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation,” 16.)

³⁹⁶ Andreotti, *Hospicing Modernity*.

³⁹⁷ Eugen Bleuler, *Dementia Praecox or the Group of Schizophrenias*, trans. J. Zinkin (International University Press, 1950).

³⁹⁸ Freud’s *Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams* pictures a sort of descent through the hierarchical levels of mental life toward a “restoration of primary narcissism.” A dream becomes hallucinatory wish fulfillment, the mind itself produces its world and there is an “almost complete withdrawal from the surrounding world and the cessation of all interest in it.” Dream life, alongside slips of the tongue and somatic complaints, could be read as symptoms of an other world, an inside, infantile,

“Mediumistic psychosis,” linked to schizoaffective disorder, is another diagnostic category applied to those who engage in spiritual or occult practices and begin to experience “hallucinations,” and who might find themselves in distressing or dissociated states on account of their “beliefs.”³⁹⁹

What unites these clinical pictures—and what came to define the schizoid character in both psychotic and nonpsychotic instantiations—is a consistent discrepancy and conflict between inner worlds and outer reality, such as in R. D. Laing’s notion of the “divided self.”⁴⁰⁰ A schism is built into this “character.” They exhibit a tendency to fall into the “disorderly” world of the phantasmic unconscious and to lose footing in reality and the social symbolic world. This inner/outer dichotomy is still taught—indeed I have taught it myself, as an instructor on schizoid process at my training institute.

earlier world of psychic life not yet ordered by the demands of outer reality. Dreaming, for Freud, is close to psychosis: a disordered hallucinatory realm of inner processes. (Sigmund Freud, “Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams” (1916), in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (Macmillan, 1963), 151.)

In Klein’s work, “schizoid” refers to an “earlier” phase of infantile psychic development. She organizes the infantile mind into two positions: the *paranoid-schizoid* and the *depressive*. The paranoid-schizoid mechanisms describe a state of persecutory anxieties, a splitting of impulses into hated-devalued or loved-idealized objects. In this “earlier” phase, the infant projects a part of themselves into the object. The depressive position, a phase considered to be a psychological achievement, allows for these splits to be re-integrated: a “synthesis between loved and hated aspects of the complete object.” I will return to Kleinian theories of schizoid states in Part Two. (Melanie Klein, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27 (1946): 100.)

³⁹⁹ Jon Klimo writes: “German psychiatrist Hans Bender . . . proposed the existence of ‘mediumistic psychosis’ in many of the patients with whom he worked. He studied patients diagnosed as schizophrenics who, before their illness, had practiced some form of automatism that opened what Bender called communication with their *Other*. . . . By using automatisms, Bender said, splits of mediumistic psychosis led to disruption of normal personality that was different from schizophrenia.” (Jon Klimo, *Channeling: Investigations on Receiving Information from Paranormal Sources* (North Atlantic Books, 1998), 227.)

⁴⁰⁰ R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Tavistock, 1959).

One can read a striking historical instance of imposing an epistemic map on a “primitive culture” in Duerr’s account of the analytic ethnologist Devereux, who decides that the shaman, “infinitely less realistic than ordinary people,” is, in the final analysis, “psychically ill.” In this schema, we may consider shamanic communion with other worlds, species and spirits as myth born from magical thinking. The cosmos is rendered a projection screen for the human, a hallucination on an absence. Duerr identifies this as a procedure of “armour-plating subjectivity” in early anthropological and psychiatric pursuits, so as to protect the boundaries of reason.⁴⁰¹ Devereux’s recommended technique for analyzing occult occurrences in the analytic encounter was to interpret and disabuse the patient of their repressed infantile strivings for magic:

The occult has tremendous appeal for the unconscious, since it reflects the primary process in an almost simon-pure form, and stimulates powerful infantile wishes and reluctantly abandoned magical attitudes. . . . [M]an gives but grudgingly allegiance to reality and logic, and goes through life hoping that somehow, some day, reality will comply with his unconscious needs, and will provide him in the end with a miraculous “realistic” justification of his conditionally and tentatively abandoned magical attitudes.⁴⁰²

This language echoes out through contemporary analytic work. Consider the Barangers who write that the “analytic situation seems to obey—like the thinking of primitive peoples, according to Lévy-Bruhl—not the logical principles of identity, non-contradiction and causality but the law of ‘participation.’”⁴⁰³

There is much to unpack here, including the colonial language of participatory primitivity as distinct from logical civility, as well as the conventional (read: civilized) model of “causality” and “identity,” which Barad et al. are at pains to unravel. What Lucien Lévy-Bruhl calls the

⁴⁰¹ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 93.

⁴⁰² George Devereux, *Psychoanalysis and the Occult* (International Universities Press, 1953), 392.

⁴⁰³ Baranger and Baranger, “Analytic Field,” 800. It is worth drawing attention to the fact that this paper was published in 2008. Jung was also influenced by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl a century earlier and drew from his work to develop his understanding of *participation mystique*—a blurring of subject-object boundaries found in infants and primitive cultures. See Carl Jung, “Archaic Man,” in *The Collected Works*, vol. 10 (Princeton University Press, 1931).

“complex participations” of primitive cultures is cast as a “regressed” or “earlier” mode of thinking.⁴⁰⁴ The Freudian version of this colonial hierarchy runs as follows: the mental modes of “primitive people” correspond to the childhood mentalities of “civilized people.”⁴⁰⁵

These colonial cartographies continue to guide clinical practice and theory formation. Bollas, like so many psychoanalysts, embedded in a tradition of anthropocentrism and ontological reduction, follows the developmental trajectory of a mind that grows to achieves greater capacity for “grown-up” symbolization. Bollas describes his work with schizophrenia patients in terms of regression to “an infant’s perception of the universe.”⁴⁰⁶ In the process of treatment, certain realities come to be disqualified, or at least internalized and sufficiently represented. The material world is not animate in the way the mentally ill shaman thinks it is: it has been animated by the troubled mind. What is required, then, is a reclamation and integration of mind and mental processes from the world at large. From such a position, cultural explanations for illness and healing that draw on disparate existences, such as other-dimensional spirits, can be interpreted, digested and dispelled. Whether framing the behaviour of a singular patient, a tradition of healing or an entire cultural system, what we are left with are “prelogical” states, incapable of conceptualization.⁴⁰⁷

For Freud, dreaming is also a “return” to primary process and an omnipotent state of wishful thinking. Some analysts emphasize the psychopathological aspects of this stratum of psychic life, and others emphasize the creative potential of dreaming, art and other forms of “primary process

⁴⁰⁴ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The “Soul” of the Primitive* (Allen & Unwin, 1928).

⁴⁰⁵ See Sigmund Freud, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love” (1912), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 12, 177–90.

⁴⁰⁶ Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts*, 104.

⁴⁰⁷ Mel Faber’s *Modern Witchcraft and Psychoanalysis* is but one contemporary text outlining the developmentally “primitive” underpinnings of witchcraft, linking the practices of goddess worship to an infantile fantasy of a symbiotic state, charted along developmental lines as a fantasy embedded in a state of “separation and rapprochement” with the mother’s body. Faber writes: “The eager activity of the Witch, her enthusiastic employment of tools and invocations, must not prevent us from appreciating the ultimately regressive nature of her conduct.” Faber argues that magical technologies such as rituals and spells are a kind of performance of omnipotence stemming from infantile wish-fulfillment fantasies. (Mel Faber, *Modern Witchcraft and Psychoanalysis* (Associated University Presses, 1993), 90.)

thinking.”⁴⁰⁸ In any case, infantile thinking is to be differentiated from the strata of a mature mind and culture. It is a layer of mind certainly not to be left in its “raw” form. By digesting this “early” inheritance, the “infantile not-yet-subject” becomes a subject.⁴⁰⁹

An oft-repeated narrative about psychoanalysis positions the discovery of the unconscious as a Copernican Revolution that unseated the ego as “master in its house.”⁴¹⁰ Childishness thrives not simply out there in the wilderness but also deep within the so-called rational European mind! Unfortunately, the criteria for “primitivity” has not been challenged: we continue to sort modes of thought—indeed entire onto-epistemologies—through the filter of “young or mature.”⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Eigen is one analyst who extols the importance of *primary process* functioning. Primary process is usually associated with affect and flow, while *secondary processes* regulate or bind that flow into representations, making the development of thought possible: “Freud had one eye on mobility, another on barriers. The psyche was alive with pulsating movement. Yet the flow met inner-outer resistances, had its own inertia, stickiness, backflow (regression), and finally emptied into the river of death. Perhaps the emphasis on structuring tendencies, ego integration, and mastery kept analytic attention too riveted on dichotomies between free and bound energy, drive discharge and realistic delay, wish fulfillment and disguised rerouting, impulse and control, irrational—rational, pleasure-unpleasure. Not enough credit was given to what *primary process flow* achieves, the *work* it does” (Michael Eigen, *Psychic Deadness*, (Routledge, 2004), 20. Emphases in the original).

⁴⁰⁹ Brian Carr, “At the Thresholds of the ‘Human’: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Replication of Imperial Memory,” *Cultural Critique*, 39 (Spring 1998): 120.

⁴¹⁰ This Copernican Revolution, declared by Freud, is ongoing apparently, linked to the work of influential metapsychologists such as Lacan, Laplanche and Slavoj Žižek. See, for example Jeremy Tambling, “Freud’s Copernican Revolution,” *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, Manchester UP, 2012; Shoshana Felman, “The Originality of Jacques Lacan,” *Poetics Today*. 2:1, 1980-81; Jean Laplanche, *The Unfinished Copernican Revolution*, UIT, 2002; Robert Kilroy, “Toward a Copernican Revolution: “Zizek!” as Symptom, Zizek as Symptom, Zizek’s Symptom,” *International Journal of Zizek Studies*, 10:3, 2016.

⁴¹¹ Magical thinking is understood as a belief in (or wish for) mastery over the natural world, an overvaluation of fantasy, a mix-up regarding the order of ideas and the order of nature. Freud again presents a developmental picture, which follows the evolution of the infantile mentality to the establishment of a realistic adult mind: “If we may take the now established omnipotence of thought among primitive races as a proof of their narcissism, we may venture to compare the various evolutionary

Primitivity is inescapable, but is now equivalent to the regressive, the infantile, the unconscious, the archaic.

Disastrous socioecological consequences stem from this instantiation of colonialism, which infantilizes “complex participation” (including participation across broad lifeworlds and dimensions), and makes those modes of participation into internal issues. Other conceptual-relational systems are not accepted as statements of reality in their own right. Instead, epistemological modes such as animism now signal pathology. It is hard to deny that within the psychoanalytic developmental schema, one discerns an infant in peoples with countermodern metaphysical theories and who navigate other coordinates of reality.

What the narcissistic Freudian child requires in due course is thinking through the reality principle and established fact. “Surely infantilism is destined to be surmounted. . . . [M]en cannot remain children forever,” writes Freud, in *The Future of an Illusion*.⁴¹² An “education to reality,” the repudiation of “magic” in favour of a “dictatorship of reason,”⁴¹³ is one way to become an adult.⁴¹⁴

stages of man’s conception of the universe with the stages of the libidinous evolution of the individual. We find that the animistic phase corresponds in time as well as in content with narcissism, the religious phase corresponds to that stage of object finding which is characterized by dependence on the parents, while the scientific stage has its full counterpart in the individual’s state of maturity where, having renounced the pleasure principle and having adapted himself to reality, he seeks his object in the outer world” (Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (Moffat, Yard, 1919), 149). This developmental schema is repeated in training institutions today, for example through the linking of narcissism with infantile defences such as *omnipotence of thought*. See Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis* (Guilford, 1994), 104.

⁴¹² Freud, “The Future of an Illusion,” (1927) in *The Standard Edition* vol. 21 (1927-1931), 49.

⁴¹³ Sigmund Freud, “Why War?” (1933), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 22, (1932-1936), 213.

⁴¹⁴ Joel Whitebook writes of the Freudian ambition that “magic” might be observed “under the umbrella of the scientific *weltanschauung* which, so it is claimed, has methodologically excluded all traces of magical thinking from its make-up. . . . It studies magic scientifically, but it doesn’t truck in it.” Freud’s vision, according to Whitebook, is one where “humans are bound to renounce their archaic wishes for protection and consolation, replace their affective bonds to society with rational ones, and—even more improbably—resign themselves to a meaningless and indifferent universe.” (Joel Whitebook, “Slow

Despite the glaring colonial overtones of this theory—its claims for epistemic authority, the way it provides a solution for understanding reality (in the singular), thereby rendering other solutions scientifically or philosophically “undeveloped”—the language of “psychological maturity” is reinforced in psychoanalytic training.

So-called primitive defences are meant to describe the ways psychoanalysis understands the reality of the infant: preverbal, prelogical, pre-reality-principle, pre-object-related. A primitive defence is what an infant mind, lacking psychological maturity, might do with its overwhelming reality. These defences might include splitting (psychologically parsing good from bad, pleasurable from painful), idealization (imbuing an object with power), withdrawal (into interiority, sometimes simply shutting down in a moment of distress), denial or fantasies of omnipotent control. Through the language of primitivity, we are meant to understand that inchoate, infantile mental processes underlie our integration of the facts of external reality and the governance of consensual language.⁴¹⁵ The picture is of a mind struggling with, growing through, transforming and translating its encounter with reality (Bion’s O).⁴¹⁶

Returning to the process of symbol formation that Segal outlines, we are to understand that mental health involves knowing the difference between word and world. We are meant to

Magic: Psychoanalysis and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 50:4 (2002), 199, 197.)

⁴¹⁵ See for example, Jane van Buren and Shelley Alhanati, eds., *Primitive Mental States: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Origins of Meaning* (Karnac, 2010). The authors in this volume—many of whom I reference in this dissertation—explore infantile and prenatal states of mind as an explanatory scaffolding for struggles to make meaning and mentalize experience.

⁴¹⁶ In his “An Essay on the Symbolic Process,” Levin examines the ways that the unconscious has been pictured as a hierarchical region where the symbolic realm of language (secondary processes) are positioned above the inchoate bodily life of the infant (primary process). He challenges the notion that there is a disorganized sensory experience that must be ordered by a higher mind, in the manner of language “colonizing” the “primitive” body. For Levin, this is a repetition of a dualistic epistemology when there is, in his view, “no sharp line demarcating conceptual boundaries of symbolic process, defense, and psychic process in general.” In his understanding, there is no such thing as a “pre-symbolic” being; rather, we are an organismic-symbolic matrix that is not fixed to one developmental line. (Levin, *Essay on the Symbolic Process*, 21).

internalize a cartography that charts a boundary between symbol and thing. When the distinction between symbol and thing is mixed up, we are in danger. Indeed, this distinction is meant to uphold a level of civility. (Viveiros de Castro queries: “Where would we be without this statutory distinction between the literal and the metaphoric, which strategically blocks any direct confrontation between the discourses of anthropologist and native, thereby avoiding any major unpleasantness?”⁴¹⁷)

Spirit mediumship troubles this statutory distinction. Are its interlocutors delegates of the unconscious, or are they delegates from other dimensions? They seem to be “out there” and “inside” as well. They show up sensorially; they take hold of psychesomatic process. Ghosts drift around as palpable things, surprising us with their alterity. Or they are intangible but offer signs, leave traces, drop carrots. Their sign activity is productive. They emanate from the inside out, and they are also gathered from the outside in: a Möbius strip. The psychoanalytic convention is to clean this up. How? Through ensuring the liminal becomes something symbolic rather than an emissary from an abundantly ontological cosmos. Not-me becomes me. Spirits become affects that need to be transformed into thoughts. Extant entities come to mean something about the human. Other organizations of social life, those with “magical attitudes,” are translated as primitive through psychoanalysis’s intellectual heritage.

In *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Viveiros de Castro muses on the idea of writing a book referencing *Anti-Oedipus* called *Anti-Narcissus*. The question he poses via the Anti-Narcissus figure concerns how the “other” studied by the anthropologist might be a counterforce to anthropology’s own conceptual imagination. In Viveiros de Castro’s approach, “the conditions of the ontological self-determination of the collectives studied will absolutely prevail over the reduction of human (as well as nonhuman) thought to a dispositif of recognition: classification, predication, judgment, and representation.”⁴¹⁸

The founding colonialism of the discipline of anthropology, which Viveiros de Castro et al. are attempting to redress, lives on in psychoanalytic theory and practice like a ghost (I mean it metaphorically this time, although who’s to say who shows up in psychoanalysis’s institutions,

⁴¹⁷ Viveiros de Castro, “Perspectival Anthropology,” 14.

⁴¹⁸ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 43.

conferences and offices). Colonialism's mechanisms are involved precisely in the reduction of other collectives (human, not-human, spiritual and so forth) to recognizable Western conceptual categories.

Digestion metaphors are often used to describe how the developing psyche functions in relationship and how symbolic formation happens. Through projective identification, the mother is available to receive raw feeling and motor activity from her baby. She helps transform it, process it, make it digestible. Nascent sensory data is converted into material that can be dreamed or consciously thought. If mom is unavailable to perform this function, a danger arises of not being able to separate one's mental apparatus from the world. Digestion, metabolization, processing—these are bodily metaphors about consuming and transforming experience. I am thinking here of David Graeber, who writes about consumption as the “urge to destroy things in order to gain recognition of one's sovereignty over them.”⁴¹⁹ As Alf Hornborg writes: “eating is indeed the perfect idiom for destroying something while literally incorporating it.”⁴²⁰ Psychoanalysis's relationship with ghosts and spirits demonstrates this point.

3.3 (Other)worldly communicators

Before I turn my attention to psychoanalysis's history of exorcism by incorporation, I want to suggest how spirits might escape this two-world map that separates “primordial nature” from “the prison-house of language.”⁴²¹ Let me begin with Anzaldúa's account of writing:

⁴¹⁹ Alf Hornborg, “Submitting to Objects: Animism, Fetishism and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism,” in Harvey, ed., *Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, 256.

⁴²⁰ Hornborg, “Submitting to Objects,” 256.

⁴²¹ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 90, citing Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton UP, 1972). Speaking via Jane Roberts, Seth shares his understanding of the “prison-house of language.” “Words in a language,” we find her alter ego saying, “function not only by defining what a specific object is . . . but also by defining what it is not,” such that “our idea of identity is like a magic circle we've drawn around our minds, so that everything outside seems dark and alien, unselflike” (Jane Roberts, *The 'Unknown' Reality, Volumes One and Two: A "Seth" Book* (Amber-Allen, 1996), cited in Peter Skafish, “From Another Psyche: The Other Consciousness of a Speculative American Mystic (The Life and Work of Jane Roberts)” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 23). The magic circle that Seth evokes is also the tactical aim of the phenomenological reduction.

As you write, the rhythm of words and the flow of images evolve a structure and act as catalysts for combining information in a new way. . . . You are the watcher . . . scrutinizing and processing every sensory experience. You become aware of a supernatural being. It shares with you a language that speaks of what is other; a language shared with the spirits of trees, sea, wind, and birds; a language that you'll spend many of your writing hours trying to translate into words. Walking between realities—one strange, another familiar—you experience the shock of recognition, the pleasure it gives you. A deep sounding from the landscape resonates through your bodymind.⁴²²

Anzaldúa situates her writing in “cracks between worlds.”⁴²³ This “dwelling in liminality” encompasses “imaginal identities” and “literally present spirits.”⁴²⁴ For Anzaldúa, language issues from sources at once natural and spiritual. The landscape is sounding out. Her writing is simultaneously theory formation and a channelling event.

Anzaldúa is wise to remind us that the “I”—or the ego—is one among many imaginary identities. In this way, interfacing with the imaginary is a rather ordinary aspect of our psychic functioning. When imaginary beings are taken to be “exosomatic”—literally, present outside the human corpus—this is another story.

There are three interrelated ideas I want to raise here. First, I take note of where, in psychoanalytic work, meaningful communication is thought to be the exclusive province of human subjects. In this view, it is the human's lot to live in “interpreted experience.”⁴²⁵ Psychoanalysis works with those translations in an intersubjective field. The second idea I raise is meant to pose a challenge to the borders that construct this field as the human's exclusive domain. In Eduardo Kohn's words: “the world beyond the human is not a meaningless one made meaningful by humans.”⁴²⁶ Transmission, exchange, communication and transference happen outside the enclosure of the human: signifying systems cannot be contained (constrained) within

⁴²² Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 101.

⁴²³ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 71.

⁴²⁴ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 36–39.

⁴²⁵ Montana Katz, “Preliminary Foundational Concepts,” in Katz, ed., *Metaphor and Fields*, 12.

⁴²⁶ Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (University of California Press, 2013), 72.

an anthropocentric construction of the human social. There are other loci of significance that do not originate in a human's dreaming mind. Thirdly and relatedly, I want to suggest that words and things are not separable in the ways that psychoanalysis insists they should be in order to avoid functional disorders such as schizophrenia.⁴²⁷ To this end, I assemble the materialist projects of Haraway, Barad and Kirby, as well as the anthropology of Kohn, to challenge this logic of separability that psychoanalysis sustains.⁴²⁸

Each of these projects is invested in redressing a paradigmatic modern split between word and

⁴²⁷ According to the psychoanalytic view, there is no direct experience without some degree of mediation through unconscious or conscious interpretation or fantasy activity. Montana Katz writes: "An object is not experienced as such in itself, but only on the basis of relatively real past experience, including the involvement of prior perceptions and fantasies of the object" (Katz, "Preliminary Foundational Concepts," 14). Fantasy activity is seen as inborn, "essential and transcendent . . . rendering portions of the stream of experience meaningful" (13). Such fantasy activities are variously referred to as dreaming, "metaphoric process" and "symbolic process." Civitarese and Ferro also include the image or pictogram in their theory of mental mechanisms, which is another way to organize "crude data into experience" (Guiseppe Civitarese and Antonino Ferro, "The Meaning and Use of Metaphor in Analytic Field Theory," in Katz, ed., *Metaphor and Fields*, 132). The specificity of these representational modes opens up a larger discussion that I will not address here. The point I want to make is more general: dreaming processes such as these are hierarchized and protected inside a human mental realm, upholding what Kirby sees as a "bar that marks a radical separation between the origin/Nature/the animal and a second order of complexity/Culture/the human" (Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 90).

⁴²⁸ Panpsychism is one theory that challenges this logic of separability. Matter's nature is hypothesized to be essentially mentalistic: psyche is a fundamental feature of the structure of reality. William Seager considers Alfred North Whitehead's panpsychism, whereby "the fundamental 'units' of existence [are] in some way *experiential*. A vivid example is his remark that 'each actual entity is a throb of experience including the actual world within its scope'" (William Seager, "Whitehead and the Revival (?) of Panpsychism," author's webpage via University of Toronto Scarborough, n.d., <https://www.utscc.utoronto.ca/~seager/mywork.html>). See also Neil Theise and Menas Kafatos on a universe of self-organizing systems where sentience pervades every level of organization: Neil D. Theise and Menas C. Kafatos, "Sentience Everywhere: Complexity Theory, Panpsychism & the Role of Sentience in Self-organization of the Universe," *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*, 4:4 (April 2013).

world, representation and worldly contact zones. Haraway attends to the generative effects of tropes in shaping and organizing materiality, as well as the thought-shaping power of materiality. Kohn expounds on sign systems and modes of thought embedded outside human minds. Barad contends that entities are produced by “material-discursive” intra-actions, in contradistinction to the notion that language describes pre-given material.⁴²⁹ Kirby insists on the textuality of nature—an originary writing that composes “Earth’s grammar.”⁴³⁰ What follow is not so much a thorough exposition of their unique projects as an effort to open the anthropocentric grip that psychoanalysis has on language and to consider where it slips from the container.

These theoretical considerations resonate with the accounts of the mediums I’ve encountered in my research, who also indicate a slippage across the categories of things and words, insides and outsides. The presence-absence of the mediums’ interlocutors resists the mandates of psychoanalysis’s representational codes: they show up (sometimes invisibly) with words, images and symbols, and they are described in energetic terms—as vibratory matter. They are at once inside and outside the medium’s consciousness. They might have been singular living humans, they might also be altogether other-than-human, even extraplanetary. They are obstinately indeterminate.

I have spent some time exploring the language of relational psychoanalysis in this Part. It’s a weird one to be sure, and its invisible objects also defy empirical verifiability.⁴³¹ Traces,

⁴²⁹ Again, Barad uses *intra-action* rather than *interaction*, since the latter presumes entities have a prior ontological reality before their entangled relating.

⁴³⁰ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 39.

⁴³¹ In “Psychoanalysis and Empirical Evidence,” Francesca Ortu notes that the research culture around psychoanalysis has changed in recent years, going from an insistence on “clinical research” (conducted by the psychoanalyst in the psychoanalytic relationship) toward “empirical research” about its efficacy. Such an approach was once considered “anti-psychoanalytic” (Francesca Ortu, “Psychoanalysis and Empirical Evidence,” *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica*, 1, (2007),

<http://www.rivistadipsicologiaclinica.it/ojs/index.php/rpc/issue/view/1>). Controversially for some, the “closure” of psychoanalytic epistemology has prompted increased empirical clinical trials over the past decades, most of which study psychoanalysis’s effectiveness. This has helped reposition psychoanalysis as an “evidence-based” psychotherapy, even if its chosen objects and symbols remain somewhat enigmatic. See, for example, Peter Fonagy, ed., “A Open Door Review of Outcome Studies in

hauntings, hallucinations, objects, part-objects, dreams, Bion's "elements" are the peculiar nonphysical materials of psychoanalysis. Immeasurable yet powerful agents such as these evoke speech, engender thought and action and implicate themselves in our personal idioms, our ways of being. These "objects" are internal to the subject, carried along through human psychesomatic transmission. As Segal's formulation of symbolic development and schizophrenia has taught us, we need help representing these activating elements. To this end, the psyche is modelled as a symbolizing apparatus, with our early relationships helping set us up for thinking and dreaming. The bare, material fact we can accept is the family, our neonatal and infantile moments. From that bedrock, psychic life generates its elaborating, symbolizing machinations. This symbolic process is considered to be an inborn, involuntary anthropological activity.

Both mediumship and psychoanalysis deal with dynamic invisible dimensions and communicative processes. The trouble is, the evocative inner objects of psychoanalysis assume a shape and become a speaking subject in mediumistic fields. These subjects communicate across various channels: sensation, emotion, image and concept. They also symbolize. Indeed, they communicate about words! J tells me: "Spirits talk to me a lot about vocabulary, and meanings of words we use." I ask J if the spirits have any advice for my dissertation. "The spirits are saying you need to define your vocabulary," he says. "Most of these words don't make sense to the rest of the world." Fair. These words don't always make sense to me, either. These spirits want me to clarify.

During one meeting, J describes a scholarly figure appearing to him. He presents himself as a guide for my academic work. J's gaze is intense, directed over my shoulder toward the upper corner of the room. When he returns his gaze to me, he says with some astonishment ("ooh, I have goosebumps") that this spirit has informed him that he has "access to all the libraries." This particular source of intelligence threatens to overwhelm what is an already sizable research project. (Strangely, this appearance aligns with a psychic reading years ago: a "professorial chap" was said to have been present in the room with us—suited, high collared, "a little stiff," as the psychic put it.)

Psychoanalysis," International Psychoanalytic Association (1999):

<https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.3458.0160>.

Straight away, I am unsure if the information being sensed and translated in the room with J is properly mine, or whether property boundaries make any sense at all in this work. The professor is linked to a world of information. If the professor is an ideational being, he is himself full of ideas. If he is of another world, his is also concerned with words. A lot hinges on where this source of intelligence is situated. Is this J's mind dreaming while awake? Have I been visited by an other-dimensional academic who has access to vast number of libraries? In either case, my eagerness to sort out where the professor and his libraries belong already assumes "a division between inner and outer orders of human experience (natural and cultural, mental and material, real and imaginal, etc.)"⁴³² This is a difficult epistemic habit to break.

Field psychoanalysis reiterates this habit through its configuration of words and worlds. Mentation, symbolism, dream and fantasy compose the inner circle of human processes. Dreaming-on-the-inside is a developmental level to be achieved, not only for a prelinguistic neonate but for a culture. "The concept of the object is a tool of understanding for the analyst and a notion that would become meaningless if it were studied as an independently existing entity," writes Nora Kurts.⁴³³ On the outside of the representational system of psychoanalysis, embedded in the holding environment of human-to-human contact, these evocative objects will be meaningless. That is just not where these elements live.

What does this particular interiority do to the things of the outside? This brings us to the favoured metaphor in Bionian work: the corporeal concept of digestion. This model of psyche figures emotion and thought as particles, something like a material residue, more or less raw. Processing is captured in bodily terms: these particles are ingestible and expellable. They can be transformed within the right apparatus. The digestive process "equates to the conversion of proto-emotive chaos, into affectively meaningful representation."⁴³⁴

⁴³² Espírito Santos and Blanes, *Social Life of Spirits*, 12.

⁴³³ Nora Kurts, "Object," in *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Alain de Mijolla (Thomson Gale, 2005), 1168.

⁴³⁴ Matthew John Mellor, "Making Worlds in a Waking Dream: Where Bion Intersects Friston on the Shaping and Breaking of Psychic Reality," *Frontiers of Psychology*, 9:1674 (2018): <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6171158>.

In *When Species Meet*, Haraway describes a moment that conveys the significance of “nourishing indigestion.”⁴³⁵ She describes meeting her community, people who “refuse to assimilate to each other even as they draw nourishment from one another, to riff on attachment sites, and to explore the obligations of emergent worlds where untidy species meet. These people let me join them, and my stomach has never settled.”⁴³⁶

How would a psychoanalyst help Haraway’s stomach settle? What, in this therapeutic model, would she have to digest in order to be well? In psychoanalysis, multispecies and multiperspectival entanglements do not enter into the conversation because it is assumed that humans alone create meaning. Moreover, it is assumed that containment—translating raw alterity into digestible form—is a therapeutic action.

Civitarese writes: “the goal of the analyst’s transformations is to provide meaning—a *plus* of sense and meaning as the result of a certain way of engaging in relationship—in order to develop the patient’s capacity for learning from experience.” He goes on: “the *plus* is at bottom a *plus* of humanity.”⁴³⁷ The human is the proprietor of this special extra ingredient.

It is important to note that Civitarese’s *plus* is not simply about adding abstracted meanings or concepts to dumb feeling but also involves the shared sensing and sense-making within which (human) bodies participate. He uses the term *consensuality* to describe an intersubjective and sensory background of common-sense-making. Haraway’s multispecies attachments and commitments to all sorts of social animals would not make sense here: it is the *intersensoriality* and *intercorporeality* of the human infant and parent that lays the “ground” for the transcendent ego.⁴³⁸

Civitarese draws on Julia Kristeva to define “levels” of semiotic and semantic process: “The ‘semiotic chora’ . . . is made of rhythms, sounds, shapes, kinaesthetic impressions,

⁴³⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 285.

⁴³⁶ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 294.

⁴³⁷ Civitarese, “The Names of O: Is Bion a Mystic,” 7.

⁴³⁸ Civitarese and Ferro, “Metaphor in the Analytic Field,” 122. A similar move is made in Didier Anzieu’s *Skin Ego*, which theorizes how sensory experience of the body (the “psychic envelope”) comes to be transposed to a psychic register as an “I.” See Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (Yale University Press, 1985).

proprioceptions, sensations, gestures, etc. Semiotic and semantic are always simultaneously at work in discourse and both belong to the widest sphere of the symbolic.”⁴³⁹ Intersubjectivity (as modelled in the container-contained dynamic) is the “invariant” of psychic growth. Bion, according to Civitarese, “is motivated from the outset by a relational or collective view.”⁴⁴⁰ And this he sees as a “radically social theory of subjectivity.”⁴⁴¹

Allow me to cite a remark that stands out starkly against Civitarese’s steadfastly humanist claim for radical social theory: “What differentiates human and non-human beings is the capacity for ‘cooperative intentionality.’ We could call this the capacity for activating a function of mutual attunement aimed at common action.”⁴⁴² Differentiation is an enactment here, one which constrains the field of intention, cooperation, attunement, collaborative movement. It becomes ever clearer how Civitarese’s phenomenological reduction is also an anthropocentric reduction.

In analysis, we engage in some intentional action within a shared symbolic universe. This engagement involves the exchange of “primitive sensations” (Bion’s beta elements), which in time become integrated into verbal language. In Civitarese’s view, this symbolic universe, composed of emotional and bodily consensuality plus language and meaning, is the common ground of humanity: “What matters is whether or not the single individual submits to this knowledge and accepts it, lives in consensuality, even when she finds herself in conflict with a part of the social group.”⁴⁴³

⁴³⁹ Civitarese, “The Names of O,” 14.

⁴⁴⁰ Civitarese, “The Names of O,” 4.

⁴⁴¹ Civitarese, “The Names of O,” 4.

⁴⁴² Civitarese, “The Names of O,” 3.

⁴⁴³ Civitarese, “The Names of O,” 13. We don’t seem to be far from Guattari’s “semiological subjection and semiotic enslavement.” The schizoanalytic project was invested in how libidinal flows become overcoded by psychoanalytic systems and their favoured tropes: the triangle, the phallus, the father. In object relations and field theories, we again come up against semiotic submission, only the analyst is more likely to include the mother and the breast as organizing parental metaphors. The investments of the Guattarian unconscious are far more entangled and diverse. He reminds us: “A power formation binds more than ‘human communication.’ It implicates as well an entire complex of ‘extra-human’ semiotic machines” (Guattari, “Semiological Subjection, Semiotic Enslavement” in *The Guattari Reader*, 141).

This does indeed *matter*, in the oft-used neo-materialist sense of *matter* having materializing effects. That is, submitting to a theory of sociality and its entrenched logics has widespread consequences for what Barad calls “ecologies of difference.”⁴⁴⁴ For Civitarese, meanwhile, the problem is one of mental health: “From this perspective any form of pathology, and not only psychosis, could be seen as a crisis in the contract of consensuality.”⁴⁴⁵

I want to play with this idea of *consensuality*—shared sense-making—alongside the question of consent. To what meanings must we submit? How do these systems of knowing adjudicate who participates in this sense-making? What felt-sense of relationship signals “proto-emotive chaos”? What kinds of transformations must sensoriality undergo?

The normalized presumptions that protect the anthropos and its special intelligence, on one side of the nature-culture divide, have not been interrogated in the field theories that Civitarese espouses. As Barad points out, all sorts of uncontrollable beings in fact breach this divide. In “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” Barad introduces us to “natural” phenomena—atoms, neurons, amoebas, lightning, stingrays—that engage in social behaviours (such as intentionally organizing in collectives) and exhibit uncanny capacities for attunement (communicating telepathically across space and time).⁴⁴⁶ The point, for Barad, is not to finally include not-humans in enjoying

⁴⁴⁴ Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 30.

⁴⁴⁵ Civitarese, “The Names of O,” 13.

⁴⁴⁶ “Reading about electricity’s predilection for tall buildings, lone trees on golf courses, tractors and bodies of open water, I also learned that quite curious initiation rites precede these electrical encounters. An intriguing communication, a sort of stuttering chatter between the ground and the sky, appears to anticipate the actual stroke. A quite spectacular example is the phenomenon of St. Elmo’s Fire, a visible light show that can sometimes be seen to enliven an object in the moment, *just before the moment*, of the strike. . . . Uman explains this moment of initiation in terms of speech acts. ‘What is important to note . . . is that the usual stepped leader starts from the cloud without any “knowledge” of what buildings or geography are present below. In fact, it is thought . . . that the stepped leader is “unaware” of objects beneath it until it is some tens of yards from the eventual strike point. When “awareness” occurs, a traveling spark is initiated from the point to be struck and propagates upward to meet the downward moving stepped leader, completing the path to ground.’ We might well ask what language drives this electric conversation that seems to get ahead of itself in the final instant (or was it the first instant?) of divine apprehension” (Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 10, citing Martin Uman, *All About Lightning*

the spoils (“the plus”) of so-called human attributes such as intentionality and language and special psychic gifts but to instead question the “boundary making practices by which the ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ are differentially constituted. This must include not merely natural forces and social forces but the differential constitution of forces as ‘natural’ or ‘social.’”⁴⁴⁷

Psychoanalysis takes this differential as a given, even as it repeatedly reinscribes the boundary in its theory and practice.

Whereas Civitarese grounds mentation in the intercorporeal matrix of mother and child, Haraway draws our awareness to another “ground” that is neither figuratively nor literally “too concrete.” The *tentacular* is one trope that grounds the ideational with/in a wider field:

The tentacular are not disembodied figures; they are cnidarians, spiders, fingery beings like humans and raccoons, squid, jellyfish, neural extravaganzas, fibrous entities, flagellated beings, myofibril braids, matted and felted microbial and fungal tangles, probing creepers, swelling roots, reaching and climbing tendrilled ones. The tentacular are also nets and networks, it critters, in and out of clouds. Tentacularity is about life lived along lines—and such a wealth of lines—not at points, not in spheres. “The inhabitants of the world, creatures of all kinds, human and non-human, are wayfarers”; generations are like “a series of interlaced trails.”⁴⁴⁸

Tentacles spread through networks, they eschew the spatial delimitation of “spheres.” Tentacles don’t stop at the skull, a unit self, a mother-baby dyad, a family or a singular species. They reconfigure the territory as they make their trails.

Haraway’s work has long followed the ways by which metaphors are pathways of mattering, how bodies and meanings, subjects and objects co-shape each other.⁴⁴⁹ Rather than leveraging the

(Dover, 1986), 47. Emphasis in the original).

⁴⁴⁷ Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 32.

⁴⁴⁸ Donna Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulucene,” *e-flux journal*, 75 (2016): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>. Citing Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Routledge, 2007), 16.

⁴⁴⁹ See, for example, Donna Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology* (Yale UP, 1976).

symbolic away from the things of the world, she formulates a “material-semiotic joint.”⁴⁵⁰ Material configurations are *articulations*. Stories, theoretical apparatuses, social symbolics are *of* the world, directly involved in its material becoming. In this way, psychodynamics (fantasy processes, meaning making) are not posed against a more or less static (and mute) world. They are rather intra-implicated relationalities, neither pre-given nor fixed.

Ghosts help us think about processes in motion. They dis-order the fence separating word and world, psyche and materiality. Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos performs with ghosts in his own writing to describe the slippery dynamics of what he calls *matterphors*.⁴⁵¹

A ghost is a sliding. It uses the materiality of objects and that of language to make its immateriality known to us. It is a wound that haunts us. It nests in our bodies. It makes the world around us vibrate. From the edge of our skin to the other side of the air, all bodies are spectral nesting grounds.⁴⁵²

I count ghosts among Barad’s queer phenomena. Barad’s queer critters are “inherently destabilizing and do not have determinate identities, by definition.”⁴⁵³ Barad has investigated the weird spectral physics of quantum particles that are paradoxically alive and dead.⁴⁵⁴ Further, through their reading of Bohr, they present a strange moment in the history of quantum physics

⁴⁵⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 292.

⁴⁵¹ Haraway describes her experience of material metaphors as a kind of *swerving*. Similarly, Deleuze uses the term *sliding* to denote a physicality of semiosis: “a sort of gliding that spans the sides of the fold, transferring meaning . . . and in the process constructing new meaning” (Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans M. Lester (Continuum, 2004), 108, cited in Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos “Performing Metaphors,” *Theory and Event*, 24:1 (2021): 268). Instead of a *dividing fence* as the topography of thought and world, we have a *fold*. Deleuze releases the digestion matterphor from its psychic symbolic function: “The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside” (Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 96–97).

⁴⁵² Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, “Performing Metaphors,” 272.

⁴⁵³ Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 33.

⁴⁵⁴ See Barad’s treatment of Schrödinger’s cat in “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance.”

where materiality and discursivity were recognized as entangled. Barad narrates how Bohr thinks through the indeterminate ontological nature(s) of particles and waves:

Desperate to make sense of all this, Bohr makes one of the strangest moves in the history of physics: he turns his attention to the question of . . . *language*! (A respectable move for a scholar in the humanities, but what on earth is a physicist doing examining the nature of concept use and meaning making?!) . . . Bohr's unique contribution is this: he proposes that we understand *concepts to be specific material arrangements* of experimental apparatuses. . . . Concepts are indeterminate outside of the appropriate material conditions needed to make them intelligible. Any particular experimental arrangements, which gives determined meaning to a particular concept . . . will, by necessity, always produce its constitutive exclusion. . . . On Bohr's account then, there is an intimate relationship between discourse and materiality that goes beyond the frequently repeated refrain that writing and speaking are material practices.⁴⁵⁵

This “material-discursive apparatus” undermines the distinction between observing subject and observed object. Reality is not an “outside” that is represented: for Barad, concepts are material enactments—“iterative materializations”—unfixed and in process.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance,” 252–53. Emphases in the original.

⁴⁵⁶ Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance,” 264. Michel Serres, interestingly, has a similar vision when he explores the figure of the angel: “They slip nimbly beneath theories of sets, they are able to pass through the walls of rigor as easily as through the walls of prisons. Their body of angels goes beyond limits; their number makes a mockery of counting; their logic abhors inflexibility. Or rather, they inhabit quite distinct levels, but they move noisily up and down from one landing to another, swamping the intermediate space with the clouds of their presence. Are they capable of slipping in and out of dimensions?” Barad guides us toward an inherent indeterminacy of boundaries in the fabric of reality, a “nature: whose components are perpetually performing, refiguring and materializing ontologies.” Likewise, for Serres, the transience of the angelic realm has a similarly disturbing nature: angels “connect the unconnected, disconnect the connected, and between them tie up and untie all orders” (Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth* (Flammarion, 1995), 90, 92).

Iterative materialization is echoed in Kirby's work on a general "natural" field of textuality. Nature is not "*pre-scriptive*"—that is, Kirby challenges the logic that an inarticulate "state of nature" exists prior to the animating force of the human meaning-making scribe.⁴⁵⁷ Her deconstructive reading of this nature-culture split argues for "grammatology writ large."⁴⁵⁸ Nothing is exempt from this originary writing or scriptability.

She writes: "If we think of language as a maze of in-finite differentiation whose fundamental dimensions are still being drawn, then we cannot assume that language is an instrument invented by humankind to access a world from which we are severed."⁴⁵⁹

Instead, language becomes "*global poesis*," involving *patternments* with all sorts of participants in the making.⁴⁶⁰ Like Barad's mattering, these patternments are broadly conceived: "language, representation, modeling—this is what the world does in its ongoing manufacture."⁴⁶¹ Humans, in this system of textuality, are peculiar expressions of these intelligent, expressive ecological processes, rather than the singular ones who express. As in Barad's ethico-onto-epistemology, the ontology of things is totally entangled with these epistemological processes of *reading*, *translation*, *re-presentation* and the like. There is no "outside" of this general and generative form of literacy, this "inventive complexity."⁴⁶² Neither can these processes be captured inside a construction of the human, cultural sphere.

A far-ranging textuality emerges from Kohn's ethnography as well. In *How Forests Think*, Kohn explores modes of thought and representation he encounters in the Upper Amazon. Through an analysis of semiosis, largely indebted to Charles Sanders Peirce, Kohn traces semiotic webs beyond the human, insisting that signs are not exclusive to the human domain. There also exist other forms of thinking that are not exclusively symbolic: "signs are in, of, and about other sensuous worlds that we too can feel."⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 84.

⁴⁵⁸ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 129.

⁴⁵⁹ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 34.

⁴⁶⁰ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 35.

⁴⁶¹ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 133.

⁴⁶² Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 44.

⁴⁶³ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 345.

This is an ecology of relations wherein all organisms “interpret” signs, a kind of meaning-making procedure in itself. For Kohn, symbolism can be differentiated as a style of semiosis, one that involves certain conventions within a symbolic system. While humans might hang out in the symbolic field (Kohn’s account of his anxiety demonstrates the dissociated quality of symbolic separation),⁴⁶⁴ he maintains a relationship of continuity with a broader life system of signs, unbound to human contexts but certainly entangling humans in its informative sensuality.

Kohn describes symbolic life as a habit with unique effects. Central to this work is the existence of other habits of effective semiosis toward which we can open. In psychoanalysis, the symbolic habit is guarded and elevated, whereas Kohn draws sign systems through other-than-human organisms and ecologies. What psychoanalysis constructs as an “outside” is, in Kohn’s ethnography, a living process of semiosis. He calls this a “world mind”:

Signs don’t come from the mind. Rather, it is the other way around. What we call mind, self, is a product of semiosis. . . . Selves, human or nonhuman, simple or complex, are outcomes of semiosis as well as the starting points for new sign interpretation whose outcome will be a future self. They are waypoints in a semiotic process. These selves, “just coming into life,” are not shut off from the world; the semiosis occurring “inside” the mind is not intrinsically different from that which occurs among minds.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Kohn captures this in an interesting way in his section “The Feeling of Radical Separation.” I want to emphasize how certain modes of thought (here, symbolic thought) can produce feeling states that are not in touch with relational ontologies. It is not immaterial that this mode is precisely what psychoanalysis works to achieve. Kohn writes: “Symbolic thought run wild can create minds radically separate from the indexical grounding their bodies might otherwise provide. Our bodies, like all of life, are the products of semiosis. . . . But symbolic thought run wild can make us experience ‘ourselves’ as set apart from everything: our social contexts, the environments in which we live, and ultimately even our desires and dreams. We become displaced to such an extent that we come to question the indexical ties that would otherwise ground this special kind of symbolic thinking in ‘our’ bodies, bodies that are themselves indexically grounded in the worlds beyond them: *I think therefore I doubt that I am*” (Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 49. Emphasis in the original).

⁴⁶⁵ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 34.

Signs end up being “not just about the world. They are also in important ways in it.”⁴⁶⁶ If a ghost signals the absence of a once living being, then Kohn reminds us that biology also works with constitutive absences: “that which something is not can be a cause” in a natural world as well as in the life of the mind.⁴⁶⁷ This constitutive absence, this sign, is actually, oddly, a lively, shaping, materializing effect.

These lively signs bring to mind Bion’s “thoughts without a thinker,” which describes floating elements beyond a psychic apparatus. Segal captures this in a typically psychoanalytic way. She interprets these elements as disturbances in need of containment: “Beta elements are very concrete. They are felt as bad internal ‘things’ which can be dealt with only by expulsion. [Bion] emphasizes that the beta-function emotions are also experienced as physical objects.”⁴⁶⁸ I might suggest that these elements indicate a kind of sign system that is, at first at least, untethered to human minds, more worldly than human-symbolic. Bion uses the term *residue* to describe thoughts. The analyst must apply a “sieve” to sort through the “material.”⁴⁶⁹

While the psychoanalytic sieve has filtered what it deems irrelevant to the human, Kohn’s fieldwork rethinks communication and connection, asking: “what sort of life does semiosis take beyond the trappings of internal human minds, beyond specifically human propensities, such as the ability to use language, and beyond those specifically human concerns that those propensities engender?”⁴⁷⁰ Kohn insists that whatever may be unique about human semiosis is intertwined with other representational modalities. Interestingly, he notes how dream interpretation among

⁴⁶⁶ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 30.

⁴⁶⁷ “[C]onstitutive absence is central to evolutionary processes. That, for example, a lineage of organisms comes to increasingly fit a particular environment is the result of the ‘absence’ of all the other lineages that were selected out. And all manner of sign processes, not just those associated directly with biological life, come to mean by virtue of an absence” (Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 37).

⁴⁶⁸ Hanna Segal, “Beta-elements,” in de Mijolla, ed., *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 171.

⁴⁶⁹ Wilfred Bion, “Wilfred Bion, Tavistock Clinic Seminars - 4/8 1978,” YouTube video, 1:03:18, posted by Dr. Nuno C. Sousa, Psychoanalyst, February 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuE_JepuqDw.

⁴⁷⁰ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 41.

the Runa does not stop at human poesis: dreams involve inhabiting another creature's point of view, an exchange of selves. This dreaming fosters a "seeing beyond oneself,"⁴⁷¹ rather than facilitating the "recovery of an 'internal setting'," which is what Ferro and Civitarese hope to achieve through dreamwork.⁴⁷² Indeed, for the Runa, "the inability to see beyond oneself or one's kind" indicates "soul blindness."⁴⁷³ Kohn embeds Civitarese's *consensuality* in the living communicative world of a forest—a dynamic ecology of communicating, transpersonal, transspecies selves.

3.4 Vibratory beings

Having gestured toward the communicative natures of more-than-humans, I want to spend a moment exploring how the psychics in my midst describe their own practices.

In my preliminary research with Jane, I sent a series of questions for her spirits to answer. My interlocutor(s) in this case did not dwell in a physical body, though, they explained, they once did. They answered via Jane:

And who be I? For I have not a body any longer. I am an energy, made up of energy just as you are. It moves at a rate a bit higher than you. I no longer can dwell within a body. Everything in your world is made of energies, all moving at different rates. Some can be seen and heard; some cannot. I am an energy that you can tap into. We are a source of intellect, a source of knowing. You might think of it as the God-source, but I am not alone in the Mother Energy; I am part of it. You might think of it as layers or dimensions within the one. The oneness is part of everyone, and you can tap into this at any time, if you choose.⁴⁷⁴

An "I"—a point of view— intersects with Jane's body in the process of channelling. The co-occurrence of one dimension in another brings to mind Barad's "multiple entanglements, differences cutting through and re-splicing one another."⁴⁷⁵ Diffraction patterns are waves that

⁴⁷¹ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 116.

⁴⁷² Ferro and Civitarese, "The Meaning and Use of Metaphor," 140.

⁴⁷³ Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 117.

⁴⁷⁴ Jane and spirits, audio recording emailed to the author, March 5, 2014.

⁴⁷⁵ Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations," 245.

“overlap and extend into each other,”⁴⁷⁶ changing the “original” patterns. These are “patterns of difference that make a difference,” as Barad writes.⁴⁷⁷ In contact with Jane, these energies suggests a weird “agential separability”⁴⁷⁸ of entangled terrains that are momentarily stabilized: life and death, vibration and matter, singularity and oneness, self and other: channelling is an iteration of cutting together-apart.⁴⁷⁹

The psychics and mediums I encounter usually describe their practice in terms of a sensitivity to energies. In my reading, this attunement to the vibrational eludes the psychoanalytic endeavour to contain and humanize. To draw from Marcus Boon, in a vibrational ontology, vibrations are actors with particular kinds of agency. In *The Politics of Vibration*, he writes on novelist Clarice Lispector’s sense of a vibrational substratum: “Lispector receives or transduces vibration through her body . . . a transduced vibration emerges as words.”⁴⁸⁰ Transducing vibration into words is psychic work. In Bion’s understanding, the beyondness of life (O) makes demands on us for psychic work. In this instance, *psychic work* means something more agential: one can speak with

⁴⁷⁶ Evelien Geerts and Iris van der Tuin, “Diffraction and Reading Diffractively,” *New Materialism Almanac*, July 27, 2016, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/d/diffraction.html>.

⁴⁷⁷ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 72.

⁴⁷⁸ “Agential separability—the agentially enacted material conditions of exteriority-within-phenomena—is what agential cuts enact in their cutting together-apart,” writes Barad. (“Diffracting Diffraction,” 177). Elsewhere, they explain: “There is no pure external position, only agential separability, differences within, *différance*” (“Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 47).

⁴⁷⁹ Jane Roberts’s experience resonates with Jane’s capacity to tune to other wave patterns of “differences that make a difference”: “It’s like having two mental or psychological focuses instead of one. I can be . . . busy with my own thoughts, for example, when new lines come to me from other sources. They’re intrusive in that I recognize them as not mine.” Reiterating that these other lines of thought emerge from the potential field and can be “tuned into,” she explains that, “when this happens,” “the information comes alive through us” and “mixes with the contents of our minds . . . so that a new reality is formed”—a “synthesis” or “combination” that “clicks together,” “combines the separate sets of traits,” and in that way forms “a composite of my own consciousness” and “the consciousness of someone else” (Jane Roberts, *The Afterdeath Journal of an American Philosopher (The World View of William James)* (Prentice Hall, 1978), cited in Peter Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 444).

⁴⁸⁰ Marcus Boon, *The Politics of Vibration*, 3.

an “I” from beyond who inhabits a different form. As in Runa dreaming, myriad “I” perspectives can be exchanged, embodied.

The language of vibratory materiality,⁴⁸¹ or what Blackman has called an “immaterial corporeality,”⁴⁸² draws attention to fields of transfer across boundaries. New materialist scholars also see a far-reaching connectivity in vibrational energy:

When coursing through different kinds of materiality, vibrations elicit resonances and varying responses within them, spanning from physical to sensorial and materially-bound mental processes. At the same time, vibrations are themselves shaped by the living and actively responding—agential—materialities that they encounter and through which they move. Relatedly, vibrations focus our attention to the interconnectedness and co-occurring of human and more-than-human materialities, bodies and entities.⁴⁸³

Psychic mediumship deals with the shaping effects of energetic and affective patterns that take on forms that are not properly “in the head”. Rather, energy transfer passes through the mediumistic field to be transduced and translated. This transference is not a projection of inner theatre—it involves cosmological forces.

⁴⁸¹ I think here of Jane Bennett’s work on material-energetic assemblages: “Many of us now believe that the *locus* of action is probably better figured as an assemblage of human and nonhuman bodies, each of which emits quanta of thing-power. If you think of materiality as vibratory (Deleuze), or prone to swerves and flukes (Lucretius), or expressing a conative drive to ally itself with other bodies in order to enhance its power (Spinoza), then it becomes harder to believe that humans are anything other than participants composed of many actants with variable degrees of agency” (Jane Bennett, “Powers of the Hoard: Further Notes on Material Agency,” in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Oliphaunt, 2012), 270).

⁴⁸² Noting that projects such as Bennett’s have focused on the material assemblage, Blackman’s work considers the noncorporeal, affective distributions of consciousness that also constitute (not singularly human) assemblages. See Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies*.

⁴⁸³ Heii Fast, Taru Leppänen and Milla Tianen, “Vibration,” *New Materialism Almanac*, March 30, 2018, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/v/vibration.html>.

When I ask D if she'd like to have a conversation with me on the topic of mediumship, she tells me she doesn't identify as one. She is closer to "a kind of transreader reading liminality."⁴⁸⁴

Among those who consult with her, D is referred to as an "intuitive." She describes her practice as a therapy of energy. She feels the atmosphere as though moving through a wave or a cloud. It is a felt-sense, a sensation in the hands, in the heart, at the edge of the body, the skin. She describes navigating clouds of emotion in her work. Her practice is about cultivating an openness to interacting with these subtle energies. D reflects on what she sees to be a cultural tendency to push away the invisible, or the "sensitive world," inclining instead toward the calculable, measurable and mechanical. She identifies this as a spiritual wound. "Ways of sensing reality are disappearing." For D, doing intuitive readings is a retrieval of a way of being in the world and it is also an ethical sensibility:

Our responsibility, in each period of time that we inhabit, is to try to put words on that [outside dimension]. It's a way to help our society to breathe. Without that, we will suffocate. I don't mean we need to talk about guides and entities, just open the space, whatever it is.

I do ask D about the language of spirits, guides and angels frequently used in psychic readings. These terms she sees as tools—ways to encapsulate information or the sensation of a type of energy. For D, the terms *ghosts* and *guides* are symbols that over time have come to be attached to energy forms. These personifications are always changing, but they provide a reference for vibratory experience, a dynamic encounter with a "pattern" outside the parentheses of a tangible reality. In this way, these less-tangible entity-energies are also ideas—alive and animate—available for felt encounter.

D often cites Deleuze, whose seminars she has attended and whose thinking influences her own. She understands entity-energies as *intercessors*. Intercessors are "go-betweens," intervening in worlds, producing "creative interference (in the sense of interference between sound or light waves)."⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ D, personal communication with the author, March 13, 2018.

⁴⁸⁵ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics* (Ashgate, 2007), 13.

Civitarese and Ferro are also interested in the energetics of the psychoanalytic session: “There is no point in the field . . . that is not touched by the ‘electromagnetic waves’ of the intersecting projective identifications of patient and analyst.”⁴⁸⁶

In analysis, these waves are exchanged between living people who are already distinguished as such. They are segregated from all other interference patterns. The vibratory material of the situation must be transformed by human narrative, creating a little distance between the felt thing and the “felicitous metaphor,” which “have a containing effect (the frightening and unknowable ‘O’ is ‘cooked’).”⁴⁸⁷ Civitarese and Ferro describe the analytic process in this way:

The essential aim is to weave together the emotional threads making for growth of the patient’s capacity to dream/think/symbolize. To this end, the conversation often proceeds on a twofold level, in which the manifest text *metaphorizes* the latent text of the unconscious/field dimension of the relationship—the invisible “electromagnetic waves” that establish it, exactly as in the case of play in the therapy of children.⁴⁸⁸

Together the patient and analyst construct “metaphors or myths that attribute a specific meaning to their joint experience.”⁴⁸⁹ Doing so is to aid in the recovery of an “internal setting.”⁴⁹⁰ This internalization process severely curtails what artist Elisa Ferrari has called a “vibratory model of collective care.”⁴⁹¹

Bollas’s view that the schizophrenic has mixed up metaphor and matter is meant to resolve a problem regarding the status and location of liminal entities such as the “I” that answered my question through Jane. As Kirby puts it, there are “rather frugal conventions of measurement and comprehension through which we confer existence.”⁴⁹² Drawing energetics into the conversation

⁴⁸⁶ Civitarese and Ferro, “Metaphor in Analytic Field Theory,” 126.

⁴⁸⁷ Civitarese and Ferro, “Metaphor in Analytic Field Theory,” 139.

⁴⁸⁸ Civitarese and Ferro, “Metaphor in Analytic Field Theory,” 139.

⁴⁸⁹ Civitarese and Ferro, “Metaphor in Analytic Field Theory,” 126.

⁴⁹⁰ Civitarese and Ferro, “Metaphor in Analytic Field Theory,” 140.

⁴⁹¹ Elisa Ferrari, “In Increments of 13,” presented as part of the exhibition *The Pandemic Is a Portal*, Audain Gallery – SFU Galleries, Vancouver, June 22–July 31, 2020, <https://www.sfu.ca/galleries/audain-gallery/past1/ThePandemicIsaPortal/Ferrari.html>.

⁴⁹² Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 1.

makes it difficult to tidy up the relational field in this way. Reading with Barad's entangled electrons, we are susceptible to a far more "dis/orienting experience of the dis/jointedness of time and space, entanglements of here and there, now and then, a ghostly sense of dis/continuity."⁴⁹³

D's therapy of energy requires a great deal of careful grounding, since energies are so fluid and promiscuous. (She practices qi gong and meditation.) The forms she works with slip through bodies, psyches. They slip in and out of the bounds of a unit self, causing a disturbance as they go. In J's case, sometimes a spirit will offer a series of words, an idea or an image. Sometimes the spirit will just show up as a frequency that leaves his body quaking. There is the information that the entity provides, and then there is the "wavelength" that carries that information. Psychic work is not cut away from lived material diffractions. Vibratory matters such as these are not under the dominion of what Bollas calls our "private poesis."⁴⁹⁴

As I write finish this chapter, my landlady, who lives upstairs, is texting to let me know that the ghosts are messing with the lights in her apartment. They dim and brighten. She has asked them to stop, because they're scaring her cat. Apparently they listen. These inhabitants invite me to travel from a human-symbolic world along a thread that opens up to more unsettling agential signs with material influence on the electrical grid and Rosie the cat. "Reality is an active verb," writes Haraway.⁴⁹⁵ Mediumship expands Haraway's "bestiary of agencies [and] kinds of relatings" into extraterrestrial and vibratory realms.⁴⁹⁶ "Who would take that risk?" asks Michael Taussig, "Letting that tumultuous crew tumble into our time."⁴⁹⁷

4 BULWARKS

⁴⁹³ Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations," 244.

⁴⁹⁴ Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts*, 122.

⁴⁹⁵ Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 6.

⁴⁹⁶ Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 6.

⁴⁹⁷ Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State* (Routledge, 1997), 9.

4.1 From “primitive psychotherapies” to psychoanalysis proper

According to Civitarese, psychoanalysis is concerned with “a terrain extraterritorial to the domain of reality we all take for granted.”⁴⁹⁸ Who the “we” is here and what, precisely, we take for granted as real is an unsettled matter, as my presence at spiritualist gatherings and channelling circles have demonstrated to me.

What do we dream up for personal reasons, and which “outsides” press upon us to think and feel? The way that psychoanalysis settles these questions has a history, of course, which I will consider here. To establish a territory for this science of mind, bulwarks were built and phenomena managed. Before spirit entities were cut from reality and corralled within the psychic apparatus, they inhabited an open terrain, sometimes exerting great influence on the living. The borders of the living and dead, insides and outsides, fictive and real, had to have been negotiated in order for Civitarese to take anything for granted.

Civitarese’s model of reality includes some entities who are afforded status, voice and agency. It reduces others to a conception of human fantasy, a symbolic creation. Some are simply “the furniture of dreams.” Field psychoanalysis attends to the *fiction* term of the fact/fiction binary, so that it becomes a site of interest and the medium of treatment. We hold the *irrational* or *space of illusion* or *as-if* dimension safely within the analytic situation, with the aim of establishing an internal setting. We do this by feeling with, working through, mentalizing and symbolizing. In a word: containing.

A safe space is invaluable to therapeutic process. This enclosure has not been safe for all bodies, however, including those who do not conform to a gender binary system⁴⁹⁹ or the normative structure of desire⁵⁰⁰ and those who are racialized.⁵⁰¹ This is also true for beings who have long coexisted in other social and cosmological configurations. Savransky writes: “‘Gods,’ ‘spirits,’

⁴⁹⁸ Joseph Grotstein, “Bion’s Transformation in O and the Concept of the Transcendent Position,” 1997, <http://www.sicap.it/merciai/bion/papers/grots.htm>

⁴⁹⁹ Paul Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak: Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts* (Semiotext(e), 2021).

⁵⁰⁰ Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, eds., *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (U Chicago Press, 2001).

⁵⁰¹ Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay and David Mark, eds., *Inhabiting Implication in Racial Oppression and in Relational Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2023).

‘witches,’ ‘sorcerers,’ ‘ghosts,’ ‘magic’ and other solitary entities inhabiting worlds other than the modern West have also been affected by the way the latter has represented them.”⁵⁰²

Typically, the method of treating esoteric practice was in concert with Western conceptualizations (“violent absorption”) of other cosmologies (theories of reality) in colonial encounters.⁵⁰³

Yet, despite its enclosures and exorcisms, psychoanalysis remains in uneasy relationship with the elements it disowns. Contemporary clinical writing still has to negotiate with esoteric and paranormal matters that arise in analysis, materials that destabilize its conceptual fences. Before turning to some examples of contemporary therapeutic boundary work, I will look at where other agencies—not simply living humans—participated at the outset of this science of mind.

Psychoanalysis is directly entangled with ghosts, co-emerging as it did with nineteenth-century psychical research, the purview of which included spiritual mediumship. The dynamic unconscious, the invisible nuclei of manifest symptoms, emerged from a culture of overlapping and competing conjectures, explanatory models and practices regarding ineffable matters. Following chains of association through the development of psychoanalysis draws one into a morass of theories and practices, among which the distinctions between mental activity, natural phenomena and supernatural beings were widely debated and never entirely resolved.⁵⁰⁴ This

⁵⁰² Savransky, “Worlds in the Making,” 352.

⁵⁰³ In his introduction to *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Skafish describes this situation this way: “the modern’s violent absorption of other peoples, by presuming that such ideas can always be reduced back to their own” (Skafish, introduction to *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 10).

⁵⁰⁴ Adam Crabtree surveys the long-standing, conflicting paradigms entwining mesmerism, hypnosis and the psychologies that emerged in the modern era of psychological healing. Hypnosis, as introduced by James Braid, attempted to explain the effects of animal magnetism through an exclusively psychological framework. Mesmer, in the meantime, was committed to a “physicalist approach,” explaining animal magnetism and the action of magnetic fluid as a natural rather than occult phenomenon: “Only the spiritualists—a minority among magnetizers—believed magnetic action to transcend the natural” (Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer To Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (Yale UP, 1993), 171). Others (those affiliated with Swedenborg, for example) were dedicated to the hypothesis that healing action was spiritual in nature and that those in mesmeric trance have direct contact with spiritual

theory of mind is entwined with practices of hypnosis and mesmerism, and we can follow these threads further still into magnetic spiritism, spiritual mediumship, clairvoyance and telepathy, as well as the “mystical revival” associated with occult practices in the West.⁵⁰⁵ The esoteric was

realms. Still others were interested in the paranormal phenomena—such as telepathy, clairvoyance and distance healing—reported to arise in magnetized states.

This history, in Crabtree’s telling, is one of highly contested efforts to position the theory and technique of mesmerism: to establish it within the realm of natural science, to explain it according to psychological principles (suggestion, sympathy) or to account for it as supernatural phenomena.

Similarly, Andreas Sommers reveals how the line between science and magic, scientific naturalism and the supernatural, was never so distinct. He describes the complex “epistemological incommensurabilities” and differing metaphysical and scientific presuppositions at the foundation of the field of psychology. An instance of the politics of such incommensurabilities is found in the debunking of unscientific “spook hunters” by members of the English Society for Psychical Research. The effort to expel mediumship’s claims from “psychology’s professional and epistemological territories” is documented via Sommers’s study of physical medium Eusapia Palladino. Sommers revisits the “unloved sibling” of modern psychology, interrogating the historical separation of “orthodox and respectful” work from research in parapsychology. (Andreas Sommer, “Psychical Research and the Origins of American Psychology,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 25:2 (2012); see also Sommer, “Materialism vs. Supernaturalism? ‘Scientific Naturalism’ in Context,” *Forbidden Histories*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.forbiddenhistories.com/2018/07/scientific-naturalism/>.)

The parsing of the domains of the empirical, biological, psychological and mystical is an incomplete project in psychoanalysis. Indeed, this discipline maintains an odd, liminal and at times marginalized relationship to the fields of psychology, medicine and mainstream scientific authority.

⁵⁰⁵ Klimo surveys the eclectic early twentieth-century views on the human psyche and spirit that were not integrated into mainstream psychology. Richard Bucke’s *cosmic consciousness*, Ralph Waldo Trine’s *spiritual and mental universes* and Thomson Jay Hudson’s *subjective mind coextensive with higher planes* are examples of these discarded theories. Klimo highlights a conflict between models of the psyche as open (to other intelligences, etc.) and those where the psyche is enclosed. An instance of the former is Frederic Myers’s hypothesis of a *subliminal self*, where a part of the mind can access a wider universe of energy. Similarly, Charles Darwin’s contemporary Alfred Russel Wallace wrote: “There must be an unseen world of spirit, which causes changes to take place in the world of matter, and evolution on this planet must be directed and aided from outside by superior and invisible intelligences, to which man, as a spiritual being, was susceptible. Moreover these intelligences very probably exist in a gradated series

never far from Freud's scientific ambitions, though he wrestled with the proximity. Magic, Freud wrote, is "the precursor of our technology."⁵⁰⁶

That Freud's theory of psyche is indebted to an unorthodox chapter in the history of the science of mind is well documented.⁵⁰⁷ The English Society of Psychical Research (SPR) was established in 1882 to systematically investigate paranormal phenomena emerging in conjunction with the spread of spiritualism in North America and Europe. So far as these practices cited realities anomalous to scientific presuppositions, the SPR suggested they deserved serious attention. Many of the society's members played a pivotal role in developing the field of psychology (William James, to name one), and, in 1911, Freud became a lifelong honorary member. He contributed to their proceedings, and Freud's work was largely introduced to the English-speaking world through the SPR.

Despite this professional affiliation, under Freud—and more so under Freudianism—the worlds of the medium suffered the same fate as the anthropologist's "primitive cultures." Spirit intrusion, possession, loss of soul and sorcery came to be examples of the disease theories of "primitive psychotherapies," according to Henri Ellenberger.⁵⁰⁸ Possession and exorcism are now seen as precursors to the discovery of the unconscious—the conventional narrative being that Enlightenment sciences largely dispelled belief in spirits in the West.⁵⁰⁹ Luckhurst describes

above us" (Alfred Russel Wallace, *The World of Life* (Chapman & Hall, 1910), cited in Klimo, *Channeling*, 240–41). Also see Klimo, "Psychological Explanations," in *Channeling*.

⁵⁰⁶ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works* (1939) in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 23, (1937–39), 113.

⁵⁰⁷ See Devereux, *Psychoanalysis and the Occult*; Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (Basic Books, 1970); Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*.

⁵⁰⁸ Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, Basic Books, 1970.

⁵⁰⁹ In his investigation of the occult in Britain, Alex Owen suggests that the modern "self" and its attendant theories of consciousness did not emerge from an entirely disenchanted epoch. Indeed, such theories mark an "unresolved tension between the spiritual and the secular that surely marks the modern period" (Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (U Chicago Press, 2004), 257).

a “rush to scientize many aspects of social and cultural life,”⁵¹⁰ as the Western world consolidated scientific naturalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all while supernatural phenomena was having a moment, be it in a séance, on a stage or in a laboratory.

Freud “established” psychoanalysis on this fluid terrain, with objects of knowledge moving in and out of orthodoxy. These are the messy, speculative origins of the psychoanalytic unconscious—an “entanglement of conjectures,” as Luckhurst puts it,⁵¹¹ many of which were never neatly integrated into the field, but neither fully rejected. Derrida writes of psychoanalysis’s inability to either “swallow or vomit” the phenomenon of telepathy.⁵¹² Spirits may also be lodged in the throat of contemporary psychoanalyses.

These founding moments of psychoanalysis contain a certain indeterminacy, where other possible becomings, epistemological lines of flight, ontological entities and energies may have found a place to roam in this theory of mind. Hidden and paradoxical presences have always participated in the psychic field: psychoanalysis proceeds from intuitions regarding hidden forces. While the empirical modern sciences would come to outright reject the supernatural, psychoanalysis operationalized these presences through a theory of the unconscious.

Savransky, following Mol, describes a “politics of reality”⁵¹³ whereby a tradition assumes the “exclusivity to represent—now in the most political sense of the term—not just natural and experimental entities but also other, human and non-human entities as well.”⁵¹⁴ By way of example, Ellenberger’s history of the unconscious notes an overlap between therapeutic modes and their associated realities:

⁵¹⁰ Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870–1901* (Oxford UP, 2002), 4.

⁵¹¹ Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, 262.

⁵¹² Jacques Derrida, “Telepathy,” *Oxford Literary Review*, 10:1 (1988): 43.

⁵¹³ As Mol writes, ontological politics arise from the understanding that realities are performed through various practices: “*Ontological Politics* is a composite term. It talks of *ontology*—which in standard philosophical parlance defines what belongs to the real, the conditions of possibility we live in. If the term ‘ontology’ is combined with that of ‘politics’ then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given. That reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices” (Mol, “Ontological Politics,” 74–75).

⁵¹⁴ Savransky, “Worlds in the Making,” 353.

Occasionally, possessed patients were brought to mental hospitals or to the Salpêtrière in Paris until the end of the nineteenth century. One of them happened to be treated by [the psychologist] Janet during the years 1890 and 1891. . . . Janet cured this patient, without, of course, resorting to exorcism but by unraveling the “fixed subconscious idea” that was the root of the disturbance and by bringing it to the patient’s awareness.⁵¹⁵

With an “of course . . .” we are interpellated into a community of scholars who, like Janet, know better: we have grown out of belief in possession. Spirits become wishes and repressed impulses seeking a symbolic means of expression. They are no longer “on the loose.” The buried psychic material and energy of traumatic experience might emerge as an altered personality, a behavioural anomaly, a voice or another trait that reveals itself in spite of the conscious persona. The doctor, the analyst, the adult, would come to stand as interpreter of these expressions of the unconscious.

In her explanation of “magical thinking,” Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor outlines Freud’s proposal that children have an epistemophilic drive, “a simple speculative curiosity,” which, Freud surmised, “pushed humans to create their first cosmic systems.”⁵¹⁶ This analysis omits that psychoanalysis was also epistemologically (and politically) driven into a “cosmic system” that envisioned the universe as mechanistically causal rather than animate. The system’s institutionalization involved phenomenological reductions, ontological erasures, severances between cultures and more-than-human ecologies, exclusions and exorcisms, so as to establish a reality that “we” can take for granted. Those occupying intermediate or transitional categories—the living dead, absent presences, immaterial bodies—are especially vulnerable to these cuts.

4.2 The inner theatre of hysteria

The psychoanalytic origin story I was taught ignored the ghosts. It was a story about hysteria: Freud’s introduction to Jean-Martin Charcot’s hysteric patients at the Pitié-Salpêtrière University Hospital. I learned about Freud’s encounter with the first analytic patient, Bertha Pappenheim, known in the literature by her pseudonym Anna O., and his admiration for Josef Breuer, Anna

⁵¹⁵ Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 22.

⁵¹⁶ Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor, “Magical Thinking”, in de Mijolla, ed., *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 1000.

O.'s physician and hypnotist. This narrative takes us from hypnosis and its various models of the human mind toward "the talking cure," ("from trance to transference"⁵¹⁷). Anna O. became the prototype of the hysteric. Despite the fact that Anna O. was not, in fact, cured by Breuer's approach, Freud deemed him to be the "secret master of hysteria."⁵¹⁸ Anna O., in this account, was the catalyst for a novel formulation of mental influence on psychosomatic life. Her suffering was neither neurological nor supernatural: she was suffering from remembrances.

Physical symptoms of hysteria (including, in Anna O.'s case, a severe cough, vision and speech disturbances and extremity paralysis) came to be understood as symptoms of something decidedly less than physical: emotionally charged, repressed memory. Bodily distress provided clues about unconscious ideas, the emotional tension of hidden mental life—a realm of causation neither measurable nor material. As the story goes, Anna O., constrained by gender and the customs of a conservative family, "responded to her limited prospects for mental stimulation by frequent daydreaming, creating a 'private theater' for her personal entertainment."⁵¹⁹ Eventually, during the crisis of her father's illness, she began to fall into a dissociative trance. She hallucinated, her body became paralyzed, she lost speech. Snakes crawled from the walls, trying to kill her father. The fingers at the end of her paralyzed arm transformed into snakes "with death's heads" for nails.⁵²⁰ Eventually, her consciousness split into different forms: one melancholic, the other hallucinatory and destructive. At times she conversed in German, at other times exclusively English, but she had no recollection of this linguistic alter. Her sense of time became loose.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ Dan Gilhooley and Frank Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing, and Postmaterialist Model of Mind: I Woke up Dead* (Routledge, 2020), 179.

⁵¹⁸ Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 180.

⁵¹⁹ Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 180.

⁵²⁰ Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. James Strachey (Basic Books, 1957), 38.

⁵²¹ Consider Barad's description of quantum particles: "Particles are given to fits, to paroxysms, to spasmodic bouts of e-motion or activity. . . . What queer quantum attribution, what strange agency, do we have here? What is this talk of fits, passions, and paroxysms of inanimate entities? Passion-at-a-distance no less?" Further, for these particles, like for Anna O., "there is no overarching sense of temporality, or continuity" (Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations," 245).

Breuer's hypothesis expounded on the notion of an inner theatre. Freud also considered the theatrics of Anna O.: her transference love for Breuer was framed as a "fire at the theatre."⁵²² Civitarese takes up theatre metaphors in his own writing on the analytic field to convey the unreality, or *as-if* quality, of the phenomenologically reduced therapeutic situation.⁵²³ He explains:

Freud is not referring, as we might expect, to events in the external world or to facts of material reality, which might be so urgent and dramatic as to necessarily annul the *as if* functioning of the setting's device, but rather to the flaring up of transference love, something that he now places *inside* the framework of the cure, after initially considering it an impediment.⁵²⁴

I will return to the urgent external fires in material reality in Part Two, when I turn my attention toward trees. For now, we understand that Anna O.'s symptoms originated in emotionally charged memory, which created an inner drama within which her doctors, through the transference neurosis, became scripted. This move toward internalization is key. The "cure," administered via trance, hypnosis and talking, was not approached on the organic level; it proceeded in a different region. Traumatic hysteria became a matter of impermissible ideas that haunted the edges of conscious thought. Reliving and recounting memory became a therapeutic agent. The body of the hysteric was now understood to be involved in processes of symbolizing. The imagination of the hysteric, banished from the field of consciousness through repression, was newly conceptualized as producing bodily and emotional effects.

Breuer, the "secret master of hysteria," began his treatment in an unusual way. Dan Gilhooley writes:

From a historical perspective, what's surprising about Breuer's reaction to Bertha's dizzying set of symptoms is that he didn't apply any of the conventional treatments for

⁵²² Sigmund Freud, "Observations on Transference-Love (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis III)" (1915), *The Standard Edition*, vol. 12, 162.

⁵²³ Guiseppe Civitarese, "Fire at the Theatre: (Un)reality of/in the Transference and Interpretation," in *The Intimate Room* (Routledge, 2008).

⁵²⁴ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 2.

hysteria which a general practitioner would have naturally considered in 1880: Anti-hysteria drugs, electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, metallotherapy with magnets, exercise/massage, or a diet regime. . . . These were the recommended treatments and he ignored them all. Instead, capitalizing on her autohypnotic abilities, he chose to work within her trance state, and in the final phase of treatment to employ hypnotherapy.⁵²⁵

Arising from a tradition of magnetism, hypnotism was at best unconventional, and not uncommonly associated with charlatanism during the time of Breuer's practice. Nevertheless, the intuition that symptoms were emerging from somewhere less quantifiable—an animating “absence” rather than a measurable presence—had an immense influence on Freud. A moment in the past could disorder the coherence of a present “self.” The hidden workings of memory, thought, desire could make a person ill. Bizarre emanations and behaviours could be met as emissaries of the inner theatre. The etiology of Anna O.'s drama became intrapsychic.

Freud's theory of mental life, indebted as it was to hypnotherapeutic practice in a direct way, eventually rejected it as superfluous.⁵²⁶ His own technique was free association: talking while awake. Rather than encouraging the strange phenomena and emotional nuisances arising in trance states, analytic reflection on free-associated material was meant to bring this “world,” revealed in dreams, transference and parapraxes, under some form of control. Given the power of affect in the relational field, the methodology of Freud's talking cure mandated that the analyst-doctor be positioned as neutral observer.

What the analyst provides is *insight*. Freud writes:

⁵²⁵ Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 185.

⁵²⁶ Crabtree discusses Freud's dismissal of “double-consciousness theory,” which arose from hypnotic practice and is linked to Janet's work. Regarding dissociative states, Janet hypothesized that an individual can have multiple centres of subconsciousness that operate simultaneously, which are accessible in trance or hypnosis: “There are many minds in one body,” as Crabtree puts it (*From Mesmer to Freud*, 359). Freud did away with this multiplicity, instead theorizing a unified consciousness that involves both conscious and unconscious functioning. All “other voices” are housed within the unconscious and framed in terms of *splits* and *conflict*. Crabtree argues that psychoanalysis has not adequately accounted from the multiplicity of psychic states and the automatisms that arise in hypnoid states.

It is perfectly true that psychoanalysis, like other psychotherapeutic methods, employs the instrument of suggestion (or transference). But the difference is this: that in analysis it is not allowed to play the decisive part in determining the therapeutic results. It is used instead to induce the patient to perform a piece of psychical work—the overcoming of his transference resistances—which involves a permanent alteration in his mental economy. The transference is made conscious to the patient by the analyst, and it is resolved by convincing him that in his transference-attitude he is re-experiencing emotional relations which had their origin in his earliest object-attachments during the repressed period of his childhood. In this way the transference is changed from the strongest weapon of the resistance into the best instrument of the analytic treatment. Nevertheless its handling remains the most difficult as well as the most important part of the technique of analysis.⁵²⁷

Isabelle Stengers and Léon Chertok describe psychoanalysis's rejection of the notion that hypnosis had curative agency.⁵²⁸ The “rapport” established between hypnotist and patient, the influence (suggestion) of the hypnotist, was considered to be a contaminant to the process. To eliminate this contaminant, “rapport” came under the auspices of the theory of transference: a “passion play” that must be interpreted, analyzed and “cleared away” over the course of analysis.⁵²⁹ Unruly relational “emanations” could now be observed in the clinical encounter. Hypnosis was encircled by the transferential apparatus, and Anna O.'s “theatrics” were corralled within an internal setting. In this way, it became possible to render irrational “feeling” intelligible to a scientific gaze (or ear).

⁵²⁷ Sigmund Freud, “An Autobiographical Study” (1925), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 20, (1925-1926), 42-43.

⁵²⁸ Isabelle Stengers and Leon Chertok, *A Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason: Hypnosis as a Scientific Problem from Lavoisier to Lacan* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 23.

⁵²⁹ Sigmund Freud, ““General Theory of the Neuroses’ Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis Part 3” (1917), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 16, (1916-1917), 453.

To be sure, this theory and use of transference has undergone a major overhaul in the psychoanalytic milieu.⁵³⁰ We now work within an interpersonal situation involving two-way traffic of “emanations.”⁵³¹ Transference does not simply indicate identification with authority figures replayed in the analysis. Donnel Stern describes this as a “rigidity left over from an earlier time.”⁵³² The relational lineage of analysis understands that psychic life is unpreventable and not even the analyst can escape it.

4.3 Psychoanalysis as passion play

This analytic approach has been described as “aesthetic,” turning from a deductive hunt for historical clues about the origins of neurosis toward “interactive and immersive” play.⁵³³ Psychogenesis is now understood to unfold through this aesthetic orientation to others, and the unconscious has an organization that reflects this: “Whether we will it or not, our inner characters are constantly seeking a stage on which to play out our tragedies and comedies.”⁵³⁴ Grotstein captures this unavoidable unconscious situation as a “passion play”:

⁵³⁰ As noted above (in section 6 – “Working in the transference”), contemporary psychoanalyses maintain that “clearing away” the transference is a misguided, not to mention impossible, therapeutic goal. As Whitebook writes, the “description of the analyst as the ‘purveyor of insight’ does not amount to full disclosure. For we are also conjurers of magic. In good faith we must admit that before we can purvey insight of any depth a certain amount of magic—perhaps ‘slow’ magic, or ‘faded’ magic . . . but magic nonetheless must be summoned up in the form of the transference” (Whitebook, “Slow Magic,” 1203). What Whitebook points out, like Stengers and Chertok, is that Freud’s endeavour could not purify the passionate attachments and relational “enchantments” that hypnosis was said to provoke. These attachments are at once the “object” of the psychoanalytic project and the motor that drives the process.

⁵³¹ Steven Kuchuck outlines the sea change in psychoanalyses that have turned from Freudian intrapsychic structures toward the intersubjective clinical field that understands the analyst and analysand as co-contributors to the dynamics of the consulting room. See Steven Kuchuck, *The Relational Revolution in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* (Karnac, 2021).

⁵³² Donnel Stern, “Bionian Field Theory and Contemporary Interpersonal/Relational Psychoanalysis,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 23:6 (2013).

⁵³³ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 74.

⁵³⁴ Joyce McDougall, *Theatres of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage* (Brunner/Mazel, 1985), cited in Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 193.

The psychoanalytic session, to say nothing of life itself, constitutes an ongoing theatrical play or novel in which we unconsciously beckon and recruit others via our unconscious “casting director” to enter in the sphere of our personal lives so as to play out roles that our unconscious playwright continuously creates in order to *dramatize* incompletely (insufficiently or inadequately) processed moments of emotional significance that still cry for attention in our internal world.⁵³⁵

Drama becomes “the fundamental function of the psychoanalytic encounter,” as Grotstein sees it.⁵³⁶ How do we read this drama? As the echo of childhood conflicts: “Drama, an art form which issues from one’s internal aesthetic organization, is a latter-day descendent of the ‘lost c(h)ord’ of infancy and of its pre-lexical, ‘sign-ing’ . . . technique for communication.”⁵³⁷ What is played out in the transference is the not-yet-symbolized experience of a child. He goes on to say:

The psychoanalytic session is not only a play, not unlike play in child analysis. It is a play of *passion*—in the religious and anthropological (shamanistic) sense—involving transference countertransference as a form of “*exorcism*,” which penultimately signifies the transfer of demons from the analysand to the analyst and ultimately the obligatory need for the analyst to suffer (the “*passion*”) as the “*sacrificial scapegoat*.”⁵³⁸

Here we see the child, the shaman and the demon are all held within the “internal setting” of the psychoanalytic session. The necessary exorcism will happen through containment, but not before the analyst and analysand “feel the presence of the same emotional demons.”⁵³⁹

In clinical work, “unrepresented states” suffuse the space to be suffered together. In this way, the analyst can readily embrace the theatre and their immersion in the play, participating within the improvisational *as-if* quality of psychic life: “to construct its fictional truths, seen as the fruit of a dramatization that takes place within the frame of the setting, an analysis requires its actor-

⁵³⁵ Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 190.

⁵³⁶ Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 190.

⁵³⁷ Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 191.

⁵³⁸ Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 191. Emphasis in the original.

⁵³⁹ Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 192.

authors, or reader-writers, to lose themselves in the story and then to re-emerge from it.”⁵⁴⁰ Of course, the analyst, with their theoretical frameworks and awareness of the fiction, may also offer a healthy dose of demystification. Field theory “thus aim[s] at satisfying a poetics and an aesthetics of emotional involvement (how to let oneself be captured by the text and why) as well as a poetics and an aesthetics of disenchantment (how to make one intuit that the text is a fiction . . .).”⁵⁴¹

The disciplinary enclosure of analysis has stretched a little over time to encompass the play of relational psychesomas. The hysteric’s inner theatre now includes another actor in the play, who is also the dramaturge. While the analyst will “obey the laws of participation,”⁵⁴² they also will be able to read the text of the drama. Here, the analyst is still positioned as the one who can step out of the enactment, and offer meaning. They also act as arbiter of fact and fiction. They work *within* the fiction by involving themselves in narrative reconfigurations, which directly reorganize the psychic field. They help the patient to dream differently.

Determining who or what can participate in this play, and in what manner they may show up, was integral to the production of the psychoanalytic conceptual apparatus. Anna O. became manageable (but uncured!) through the analytic container. She was held within the loop of her own family drama. She was, moreover, enclosed within a modern Western tradition wherein the human drama is the focus of inquiry against a silent backdrop of concrete reality.

Anna O.’s cough, her trances, the snakes coming from the walls and growing from her fingers, her capacity to fluidly switch between languages, the emotional forces moving through her: these now became phenomena of a personal psyche that necessitated containment. Managing the unruliness of her symptoms involved pinning them to a personal past that ultimately could be played out in the transference as dramatic representations of unprocessed memories. They became “disturbing thoughts” requiring two minds to think them: Bion’s “thoughts in search of a thinker.”

⁵⁴⁰ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 91.

⁵⁴¹ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 74.

⁵⁴² Baranger and Baranger, “The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field,” 800.

4.4 Séance management

In this section, I look at how the psychological sciences were utilized to control, classify and organize the alterities swirling around as these disciplines started to take shape. The sensory data of the spiritualist scene would need to be handled methodically. Practices of spirit communication would necessitate conceptual clarity, not to mention physical restraints.

I begin by revisiting the diagnostic category of *magical thinking*, and trace how this concept, governed by the modern injunction to separate infantile feeling from rational thought, showed up in paranormal laboratories.

Classically, magical thinking refers to a belief that one can influence the external world through thought alone. In the literature, it is the province of babies and primitive peoples. It is associated with “primary narcissism” or “infantile omnipotence.” Here, as the theory goes, in a state of symbiosis with the mother, prior to differentiation and object relating, the infant imagines itself to be the locus of influence on a broader world, which is, in fact, well beyond its control. For example, this baby might hallucinate gratification when the external world is lacking.

Reality testing, as I have laid out above, becomes a mark of psychological maturation. Among other things, it involves adequately recognizing the autonomy of others: *Mom is a subject in her own right, beyond my narcissistic preoccupation with my own needs. She doesn't just appear because I will it.* Relinquishing imaginary control over objects and the broader universe is to move from magical thinking into reality and maturity. This acknowledgement of alterity is a crucial moment in a human's ethical development.

Meanwhile, in the laboratories of paranormal research, it would not be advisable for the researcher to relinquish control over the medium and her others. Her and her spirits' autonomy would not be well tolerated. They would provoke practices of authoritarian control, some of them abusively cruel, some patronizingly parental. Eventually, it would come to be her infantile thinking that required treatment.

Freud organized spirits in such a way so as to pin them to the unique madness of the individual (or culture), thereby cancelling their alterity altogether. The holding environment of the analytic situation offered an enclosure for distressing phenomena such as that experienced by Anna O. and her doctors. This enclosure is a kind of management strategy. Within this container dynamic,

psychic material can be modified; it is the medium of psychoanalytic change. It is also a way to domesticate phenomena that otherwise would threaten to overwhelm the psychoanalytic process.

This management strategy has antecedents in early paranormal research. In *Science of the Séance*, Beth A. Robertson explores the fluid and contested borders between esoteric convictions and empirical endeavours in the spiritualist research of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁴³ Traversing this fluidity and finding a life raft in the face of the spiritualist's borderline "objects" (are they spiritual, natural or pathological?) would require some authoritative tools. Such tools also served to justify this research as scientific. The ontological instability of the ghosts themselves, and the potentially "destabilizing force" of the mentally ill medium, were obliged to meet the bounds of scientific language and decorum. Séances were brought into laboratories and clinics. The proceedings were measured and documented by an array of apparatuses, including elaborate techniques of restraining the medium's body as they channeled, thorough physical examinations before and after séance, and methods of inscription such as photography.

Psychical researchers also drew on sciences of mind to determine the reliability of mediums and their witnesses. One way to do so was to subject the medium to psychological assessment. Surely

⁵⁴³ One example of this border negotiation between nascent sciences and spirits involved marrying physics frameworks to mediumistic phenomena. Developments in physics frequently undergirded the study of spiritualism and the occult. In *Vibratory Modernism*, Anthony Enns and Shelley Trower trace the "vibratory" developments of sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whereby the universe came to be imagined as a "vast network of continuous vibrations." Such a universe, composed of various forms of energies (some understood to be extrasensory) became the focus of scientific study as well as an aesthetic preoccupation. This electromagnetic landscape of borderless bodies, and communications and transmissions of energy across distance, lay explanatory groundwork for psychical research, such as that conducted by the SPR. For example, the hypothesis of psychically *tuning in* to unseen vibrations; the *emanations* of energy arising from the human vessel (or *nervous matter*, or *cerebral radiation* or *brain waves*); and the notion of a *continuation of conscious energy beyond the body* were ideas adopted by modern psychical researchers to explain mediums' communication with the discarnate. Drawing from energetic discourses accounted for a "bridge between planes" while lending scientific legitimacy to paranormal investigations. (Enns and Trower, eds., *Vibratory Modernism*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.)

the medium's interlocutors could not speak on their own behalf! A diagnostic frame was imposed on the unruly bodies and personalities participating in spiritualist practice. In this way, it was surmised, one could sort out psychological fiction from physical fact.

Puglionesi describes how psychical research in America had to "standardize its sources within a certain range of reliability."⁵⁴⁴ For some, "the serious study of psychical phenomena itself represented a break with reality."⁵⁴⁵ Testing for mental soundness, scrutinizing the emotional life of mediums and others who reported ghost encounters, became a legitimizing tool. Further, arming oneself with the scientific apparatus ensured psychical researchers themselves were not vulnerable to a stigmatizing diagnosis.⁵⁴⁶

Drawing from Haraway's notion of the *modest witness*, Robertson notes how the laboratory and its methods of inscription did their best to erase the subjectivity of the researcher while drawing a more manageable circle around the object of observation. A particular ideal of rational knowledge upheld the transparency (or erasure) of certain embodied subjects (the *scientific self*) while rendering other bodies credible or illegitimate, intelligible or nonexistent. In contrast to the authoritative researchers armed with experimental apparatuses and classificatory systems, mediums, in the unsophisticated position of using their embodied selves as communication technology, threatened to be seductively deceptive or unstable, sliding into uncivilized

⁵⁴⁴ Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms*, 207.

⁵⁴⁵ Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms*, 203.

⁵⁴⁶ See Puglionesi on this point. The "spectre of madness" and stigma haunted this research: "[American Society for Psychical Research] correspondents were always talking through madness, taking around it, locating their experiences in relation to the social and clinical borders of sanity" (Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms*, 208).

regressions and taking others with them.⁵⁴⁷ This diagnostic framing of spirit mediumship was gendered, racialized⁵⁴⁸ and classed.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ Sommer writes of James's psychical research and its place (or lack thereof) in the establishment of American psychology. As Sommer points out, the notion of *atavism*—that is to say, the degenerative move toward “earlier” or ancestral states of being—was one response to the spread of occult belief, a pathological “epidemic of delusions.” This is another example of how developmental psychological theories frame “earlier” states as necessary but problematic steps on the progressive journey of “adult” or “civilized” development, where relapse is something to guard against. As he writes: “Atavisms formed a prominent part within an arsenal of medical entities born out of the fear of degeneration—the flipside of nineteenth-century obsessions with mental and racial evolution, which long pre-dated the advent of Darwin’s and Russel’s works. Nourished by deep worries that evolution and thus progress could be reversed, atavistic throwbacks served as standard explanations for madness, political un-rest and indeed all sorts of ills, including deviations from social, political, and sexual norms, thus also laying the foundations for eugenics and associated race theories of the twentieth century” (Andreas Sommer, “James and Psychical Research in Context,” in *The Oxford Handbook of William James*, ed. Alexander Klein (Oxford Online, September 2020), 8, 9; <https://www.forbiddenhistories.com/2020/09/wj-oxford-handbook-chapter/>).

⁵⁴⁸ Robertson examines where mediums themselves have racialized the séance space, most commonly through stereotyped performances of Indigenous or orientalized spirits. In what might be an early instantiation of identity fraud, Robertson suggests that these practices allowed white séance sitters to idealize “the primitive, modernity’s other” (Beth Robertson, *Science of the Séance* (UBC Press, 2016), 67). This trend of mediumship was concurrent with the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Indian Act and other campaigns in Canada for cultural annihilation, making a performance of the racialized body’s “dematerialization” (and reaffirmation of white fantasy) all the more problematic.

These séances were troubling to psychical researchers for different reasons. Not only did some of these spirits directly contest and mock the white authority in the room, their sensate “appearances” “proved far too disruptive to séance conditions.” These spirits were known to show up via exoticized sensory markers—sounds, smells and tastes—and the spirits themselves were cast as subversive and in need of regulation. Robertson writes that “psychical researchers reoriented the séance sensorium to reflect their scientific, masculine ambitions by presenting their faculties of perception as superior to those of mediums and other séance participants” (Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 69, 83).

Ashon Crawley’s writing on Black Pentecostalism and the anti-Black underpinnings of theological and philosophical thought come to mind in this regard: “An entire range of sensual

Mediumship was transgressive to a construction and performance of white European masculinity, necessary for a researcher's claim to objectivity. The medium, in contrast to the "scientific man" and his "tenacious use of the mind"⁵⁵⁰ was coded variously as a shamefully hysteric or as a passive vessel. In other words, the practice was feminized. "Trance mediumship," for example, was cast as a state of passivity: "Conceived of as submissive, docile, and especially receptive to the spirits, female clairvoyants allegedly epitomized the compliant, sensitive specimen of psychical research."⁵⁵¹ And yet, despite her compliant and sensitive character, the medium's body would have to be restrained with rope, wires, plaster, tape, padlocks and frequent examinations and undressings, ostensibly to eliminate any potential of fraud. The mechanical controls and systematic inspections to which the medium's mind and body were subjected belie a sense of threat.

Not only might she be deceptive, the channelling session proved to be disorderly, affectively intense and sensorily confusing. Robertson recounts the unbridled corporeality of research séances:

Richly scented odours also wafted through several séances of this period, typically likened to floral aromas or musky colognes... Touch also played a dominant role... the

experiences—sound, smell, touch—were selected for such a racializing thought project. Thought had to be, in effect, made to be pure. Such thought was to be categorically distinct while *creating* the means through which the categorically pure zones of thought could emerge" (Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath* (Fordham UP, 2017), 12).

⁵⁴⁹ As Robertson notes, "the labour struggles of the interwar period did not leave the séance room unscathed." Middle-class researchers were invested in the quality of "ignorance" in their mediums: "This requirement meant that the medium had to be either very young or of the lower or working classes—a woman who, as an effect of having minimal access to education, remained characterized as a 'naïve' participant with an 'unsophisticated mental outlook.'" Robertson describes the medium Margery Crandon, who, born to a farming family in Picton, Ontario, ended up in the upper echelons of society through marriage. She expressed her class identity by channeling her dead brother, Walter: "During a Boston séance in 1926, Walter told the sitters: 'You're all snobs.'" (Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 61, 63, 64).

⁵⁵⁰ Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 48.

⁵⁵¹ Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 50.

spirits eagerly caressing, prodding, poking, and tussling with the sitters. . . . They were even “banged in the stomach” at other moments.⁵⁵²

One can’t help but wonder about the psychical researchers’ own projection of helplessness and desire for control in the face of these hysterical channels and their “aberrant souls,” as Robertson puts it.⁵⁵³ Like a caricature of a hetero marriage, the obsessive need for order, purity and control met the hysterical display of unhinged affect, emotion and “imagination.”

The management of the medium’s body can be read alongside the hysteric’s “fire at the theatre.” Both required a referee, a tenacious mind, to master her uncritical, sympathetic character. The laboratory and its methods of inscription, techniques of restraint and frames of classification were attempts to manage an unstable and destabilizing object of observation. Through psychological investigation, the study of spiritualism became increasingly smaller in scope. The lens focused in such a way that dis-orderly phenomena could be individualized as “symptoms.” The scientific gaze could avoid the sensory wildness of the séance altogether by turning its attention to the individual body-mind of the medium herself. Theories of dissociation and the splitting of consciousness into extraneous identities were disseminated at this time and provided an origin story for “spirit possession.” The fragmented consciousness of the medium became more significant than the entities she contacted. Using the burgeoning language of abnormal psychology allowed for hypotheses about “mental fabrication.” What was once an otherworldly spirit became an “emanation” of a mind.⁵⁵⁴ This mind was fundamentally immature, wracked

⁵⁵² Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 76.

⁵⁵³ Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 127.

⁵⁵⁴ For Jessica Riskin, the investigation of Mesmer in the 1770s marks an epistemic shift whereby “felt-sense” was rendered an illegitimate basis for knowing. Mesmer argued that mesmerism was empirical, despite the fact that it functioned beyond the regular human sensorium, which could be witnessed through its effects (feeling being the measure of truth). The commission determined that mesmerized people were unaffected by a magnetic, fluid agency: rather, they were locked in the misleading productions of their imagination. Riskin argues that the Mesmer investigation is a key moment where the deceptive human imagination and the workings of interiority were marked as forces in the (mis)determinations of reality. See Jessica Riskin, “The Mesmerism Investigation and the Crisis of Sensationist Science,” in *The Sixth Sense Reader*, ed. David Howe (Berg, 2009).

with instabilities, regressive and unconsciously motivated. Again, we return to the mental life of the child:

The cultural link between femininity and madness directly affected how mediums were perceived, irrespective of the clairvoyant's gender. Psychical researchers portrayed female and male psychics as unstable minds on the brink of mental, physical and even sexual pathology. Not inconsequentially, a significant aspect of paranormal investigations involved the assessment and monitoring of the medium's mental situation. Eric J. Dingwall held a fairly positive attitude toward these mediums he regarded as genuine, yet he still insisted they were essentially abnormal, with a "childlike nature" and a tendency for "waywardness."⁵⁵⁵

Through the intertwining of paranormal research and the flourishing field of psychology, spirits were losing their individual identity and beginning to become a symptom of unconscious life. The parental authority of the researcher had done its work to infantilize mediumistic practice.

In *The Social Life of Spirits*, Espírito Santo and Blanes note numerous difficulties in making invisible entities an object of research in what they call an "anthropology of intangibles." An approach they aim to avoid is one that "relies on the unquestionability of the senses . . . or on the notion of representations." Instead, they see "an opportunity to think about 'evidentiary regimes' and how entities and their effects come and go 'within specific regimes of rationality.'"⁵⁵⁶

In the regime of psychoanalytic reason, internalizing ghosts prevents them from slipping outside the human social sphere and taking on weird and excessive ontological shapes: this is psychoanalysis's experimental control. Unlike with an autonomous entity, it is possible to recollect early wishes, strivings and defences writ large across the cosmos and place them back into the individual mind. By capturing the medium through the language of mental health, a division between real and unreal, health and insanity, life and death is reinscribed.⁵⁵⁷ Through

⁵⁵⁵ Robertston, *Science of the Séance*, 136.

⁵⁵⁶ Blanes and Espírito Santo, *The Social Life of Spirits*, 3–4.

⁵⁵⁷ Notably, not all mental health circles hold the line between life and death so rigidly, as seen in the controversial field of near-death studies, inaugurated by Raymond Moody and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Akin to the inside/outside sorting of psychoanalytic practice, psychology's and psychiatry's explanatory

the control methods of paranormal research in its conjunction with the psychological sciences, mediumship came to be aligned with illness. “The connection between Spiritualism and mental pathology proved enduring,” writes Puglionesi.⁵⁵⁸

4.5 A bulwark for slippery mystical mud

To this day, the categorical entanglements between paranormal studies and the project of psychoanalysis seem to be at once intriguing and embarrassing to practitioners, who continue to perform complex boundary negotiations around just what counts as “psychoanalytic phenomena” as distinguished from “occult phenomena,” and what might lead a person down some “slippery mystical path,” as Civitarese puts it.⁵⁵⁹

Freud certainly wrestled with the slippage. As compelled as he may have been by psychical research, he was also, in Carl Jung’s account, threatened by what Freud called “the black tide of mud of occultism,” against which one must erect “an unshakeable bulwark.”⁵⁶⁰ This is a peculiar warning, read alongside his encouragement to Jung and Sándor Ferenczi to venture beyond the bulwark: “Freud encouraged his closest disciples to undertake ‘dangerous expeditions’ in the

models for near-death experiences tend to be categorized as “in-brain theories” and “out-of-brain theories.” The former draws on neurology, the brain chemistry of the dying or drugged and psychological categories such as depersonalization and dissociation. The latter argues that basic assumptions about mind and brain need to be challenged, and that “transcendental” categories must be incorporated into the study of consciousness. See *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, generally; Janice Miner Holden, Bruce Greyson and Debbie James, eds., *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation* (Praeger, 2009); and Bruce Greyson, “Near Death Experiences and Spirituality,” *Zygon*, 41:2 (2006).

⁵⁵⁸ Puglionesi, *Common Phantoms*, 209.

⁵⁵⁹ Guiseppe Civitarese, “Bion’s O and His Pseudo-Mystical Path,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 29:4 (2019): 388.

⁵⁶⁰ Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Vintage, 1961), 155. Notably, Jung’s family members, including his mother, were practicing spiritualists. Jung’s cousin, a medium, was the topic of his 1902 dissertation. The conflict between Freud and Jung orbited, in part, around Jung’s interest in mystical and occult matters. Ferenczi, another of Freud’s closest mentees, also spent a considerable amount of his pre-psychoanalytic career involved in spiritualism. See Julia Gyimesi, “Why Spiritism?,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 97 (2016).

occult countries, from which he claimed to be unable to restrain them, but he also warned that he could not himself accompany them.”⁵⁶¹ As Luckhurst points out, Freud’s ambivalence about the mud was never resolved, but the institutionalization of psychoanalysis required he make some decisions.⁵⁶² If Freud didn’t resolve the matter for himself, Freudianism certainly tried to.⁵⁶³

Interestingly, similar language was used in the development of American psychology. Andreas Sommer describes how critics of James’s occult interests were invested in “stemming the James tide.”⁵⁶⁴ The fluidity of these images, gesturing at a murky (perhaps abject) force crashing into a sea wall, is striking.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶¹ Freud, letter to Ferenczi, May 1911, cited in Renaud Evrard, Claudie Massicotte and Thomas Rabeyron, “Freud as Psychical Researcher: The Impossible Freudian Legacy,” *IMÁGÓ Budapest*, 6:4 (2017): 11.

⁵⁶² Several researchers have reconstructed Freud’s ambivalence about the occult. Luckhurst, for example, identifies Freud’s manoeuvres to distinguish a theory of a “highly specific unconscious” in this way: “Freud’s concern may not be that an association of psychoanalysis with the occult may drag it towards pseudo-science or the demolition of scientific precepts. It may be that psychological explanations of the occult, particularly psychical research, may have been closer to the dominant psychology so intent on marginalizing Freud” (*Invention of Telepathy*, 274). Gilhooley suggests that, since Freud was already depreciated for his theories of the sexual unconscious, an alignment with the occult (despite his own interest in, not to mention lived experiences of, telepathy) would have posed yet another professional risk (Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*). According to Evrard, Massicotte and Rabeyron, Freud’s view on “thought transference” became less, rather than more, rigid over time (“Freud as Psychical Researcher”).

⁵⁶³ Luckhurst identifies Ernest Jones as someone who desired to legitimate the discipline of psychoanalysis and to steer Freud away from his occult interests. Jones also suppressed Ferenczi’s writing on the topic (Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, 275).

⁵⁶⁴ James McKeen Cattell and Edward B. Titchener correspondence, quoted in Sommer, “James and Psychical Research in Context,” 10.

⁵⁶⁵ In “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” Barad describes the “fearful and faintly moralistic” language used to describe what they call *ultraqueer critters*, or *blob phenomena*, such as an oozing “team of Amoebas Billions Strong.” These phenomena suggest that the imaginaries surrounding them reveal a “merger of political anxieties and scientific curiosity.” Such readings, Barad argues, reveal concerns over shifting boundaries such as those of nature/culture and non-human/human agency, not to mention the aggregation

Psychoanalysis still struggles to work out its problematic overlaps with spirituality, mysticism and the paranormal—territories that D has described as “outside the parentheses of the epoch.” Readings of Bion are but one example of how these enigmatic territories are negotiated. The demand for a spiritual bulwark persists: while highly influential to a generation of analysts, his later work is considered rather elusive, mystical or enigmatic for some tastes, even evidencing senility.⁵⁶⁶ Others celebrate the more numinous aspects of his metapsychology. Eigen sees the interpenetration of psychoanalytic and mystical modes in Bion’s work, noting how Bion speaks to unknown intensities that have us straddling madness and something more enlivening and mysterious. Similarly, Grotstein believes that Bion’s epistemological forays are mystical journeys, beyond conventional terrain.⁵⁶⁷

Annie Reiner makes a link between Bion and the spiritual leanings of Jung, who, incidentally, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the psychology of the “so-called occult,” providing an analysis of the somnambulist mediumship of his cousin who he referred to as S.W.⁵⁶⁸ Both Bion and Jung

of morality and revulsion in the rhetoric of science reporting. My interest here is in Freud’s language—his “bulwark” against “black mud” (so close to what Barad sees as moral panic around “blob phenomena”—critters that don’t stay put or respect the usual boundary logic). Barad’s move is to interrogate some long-standing boundaries and “bulwarks” meant to protect various anxieties and moral commitments, human exceptionalism being but one of these. To this end, they consider the agency of “queer” phenomena in reality making. They write: “*Queer* is itself a lively mutating organism, a desiring radical openness, an edgy protean differentiating multiplicity, an agential dis/continuity, an enfolded reiteratively materializing promiscuously inventive spatiotemporality. What if queerness were understood to reside not in the breach of nature/culture, per se, but in the very nature of spacetime mattering?” My reading of Freud’s boundary negotiations aims to draw out the inherent breaches of human mental life that psychoanalysis initiated while it simultaneously struggled to protect the integrity of a field. (Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” 25, 26, 27.)

⁵⁶⁶ See Guiseppe Civitarese, ed., *Bion and Contemporary Psychoanalysis*.

⁵⁶⁷ See Michael Eigen, *The Psychoanalytic Mystic* (Free Association Books, 1998), and James Grotstein, “Bion: The Man, the Psychoanalyst, the Mystic: A Perspective on his Life and Work,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 17:4 (1981).

⁵⁶⁸ Carl Jung, “On the Psychology and Pathology of So-called Occult Phenomena,” in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 1 (Princeton UP, 1970).

draw attention to dimensions beyond the edge of an individualized psychic apparatus (archetypal realms, a collective unconscious, O).

Reiner also wants to account for psychic or paranormal phenomena exhibited by patients in her clinical work. States such as psychic intuition are problematized through the rubric of trauma, breakdown of maternal containment and defence against emotional growth: “Like most gifts, or talents, psychic intuitions are of complex origin and meaning, and at times seem to grow like a pearl, from an irritant, in this case an irritant of psychological origin.”⁵⁶⁹ Reiner instructs us that children who undergo early trauma such as severe maternal absence are prone to mental fragmentation, becoming “‘orphans of the Real’ who exist in varying degrees of self-imposed exile from their inner and outer realities.”⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁹ Annie Reiner, “Psychic Phenomena and Early Emotional States,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 24 (2004): 315.

⁵⁷⁰ Annie Reiner, “Ferenczi’s ‘Astra’ and Bion’s ‘O’” (paper, 7th Annual Wilfred Bion Conference, Psychoanalytic Centre of California, March 7, 2017), <https://p-c-c.org/new-video-annie-reiner-at-the-2017-bion-conference-at-pcc/>. The term *orphans of the Real*, from Grotstein, indicates those who are unable to create meaning via unconscious processes. When the “container function” breaks down, one faces the possibility of being lost in “meaninglessness.” Coming back into the capacity to symbolize is the therapeutic aim. Symbolism provides, as Grotstein puts it, “a protective blanket” with which to encounter the real. See Joseph Grotstein, “Orphans of the ‘Real’: Some Modern and Postmodern Perspectives on the Neurobiological and Psychosocial Dimensions of Psychosis and Other Primitive Mental Disorder,” *Bull Menninger Clinic*, 59:3 (Summer 1995).

Reiner revisits Ferenczi’s esoteric notion of *the astra*, which denotes a spiritual realm that Ferenczi thought his traumatized patients would “visit.” According to Reiner, Ferenczi called his patients who had unusually intuitive and mediumistic qualities “wise babies.” What he meant was that these children, who had lost contact with a human mother due to trauma, had dissociated and instead made contact with an ineffable realm in a “flight from reality.” This compensation for human attachment accounted for moments of clairvoyance and mystical oneness, a sort of cosmic container for the child’s lack of maternal provisions. Reiner suggests that we read Ferenczi’s *astra* through the language of trauma, primitive or undeveloped ego states, the defences of dissociation and fantasy and escape from “self.” As Reiner puts it, patients seeking maternal attachment may find themselves unbound and “bleeding out into an unbounded mental universe” (Reiner, “Psychic Phenomena and Early Emotional States,” 322).

Such orphans, though perhaps unusually “wise,” in Ferenczi’s words, do not grow up. They are lost, searching an infinite mental universe for the mother. According to Reiner, the resulting intuitions and telepathic knowing, so far as they smack of the magical, are only a substitute for genuine thinking.

Civitarese rereads the mystical interpretations of psychoanalysis in order to decipher them in more palatable philosophical terms. He spends some time developing an argument that, in fact, one of Bion’s more elusive notions—his concept of O⁵⁷¹—is not *mystical* but rather a rigorous conceptualization of truth in Western philosophical terms, a concept that rests, finally, on linguistic (not to mention human) foundations. Civitarese asks:

Couldn’t this . . . be taken as a reference to the spiritual substance of language and its being fundamental, in the sense of foundational, for humanity as opposed to animality? And isn’t language something that by definition transcends the individual?⁵⁷²

O becomes an intersubjective, linguistic background, a shared language between mother and child, or analyst and analysand, or container and contained. This pre-reflective but certainly human unconscious language is the “groundless ground” through which human psychic subjects come to be. “It should be clear,” he writes, with anthropocentric conviction, “that Bion’s, mystical path is simply his passionate search to investigate the essence of humanity.”⁵⁷³

Psychic experiences are not unique in the psychoanalytic literature.⁵⁷⁴ Indeed, thought transference is deeply embedded in the discipline:

⁵⁷¹ Interpretations of the theory of O, in Civitarese’s view, are “dangerously close to nonsense . . . it has the rare privilege of giving rise to exhilarating interpretations” (Civitarese, “Bion’s O and His Pseudo-Mystical Path,” 388).

⁵⁷² Civitarese, “Bion’s O and His Pseudo-Mystical Path,” 394.

⁵⁷³ Civitarese, “Bion’s O and His Pseudo-Mystical Path,” 400.

⁵⁷⁴ *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* has dedicated several articles to parapsychological phenomena in clinical work. See, for example, Janine De Payer, “Uncanny Communication and the Porous Mind,” 26:2 (2016); Shannon Farber, “Becoming a Telepathic Tuning Fork: Anomalous Experience and the Relational Mind,” 27:6 (2017); Claudie Massicotte, “Psychic Transmissions: Freud, Spiritualism, and the Occult,” 24:1 (2014).

[F]or the past ninety years psychoanalysts have written about a clinical phenomenon in which the patient's thoughts and feelings emerge spontaneously in the analyst's mind. Jung, Deutsch, Ferenczi and Balint use the word telepathy to describe this phenomenon, and many others employ metaphors like induction, projection, and contagion to explain how one person's thoughts and feelings pass through space to enter the mind of another. Even contemporary Freudian analysts, among the last to accept the therapeutic value of countertransference, acknowledge "the inner experiences of the analyst spring from, resonate with, and elucidate the inner world of the patient."⁵⁷⁵

Ofra Eshel as well as Dan Gilhooley and Frank Toich directly address the "controversial, disturbing 'foreign body' of telepathy" in the field.⁵⁷⁶ In *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing, and a Postmaterialist Model of Mind: I Woke up Dead*, Gilhooley and Toich describe occurrences of shared dreams, pre-sentience and synchronicity, not to mention instances of manifold consciousnesses and parallel worlds arising in clinical work (suggesting a model of multiple selves versus a unit self or internal setting); the deconstruction of the death/life binary (Schrödinger's cat provides a figure for exploring this indeterminacy); and nonlinear temporalities. In Gilhooley's thinking, quantum physics provides an explanation for mental phenomena that do not cohere to a materialist framework or obey the regular laws of causality.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 152–53.

⁵⁷⁶ Ofra Eshel, "Where Are You, My Beloved? On Absence, Loss, and the Enigma of Telepathic Dreams," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 88:4 (August 2007): 1603. Eshel follows a series of letters between Ferenczi and Freud that reveal not only that Ferenczi conducted thought-transference experiments with Freud and his daughter Anna but also that Freud was, purportedly, ultimately convinced that minds could communicate unconscious to unconscious. However, he placed this discovery outside the domain of his science. See Eshel, "Where Are You My Beloved?"

⁵⁷⁷ Not dissimilarly, Myers, cofounder of the SPR, theorized that the medium's mind involves a "hidden self" vastly more creative than a waking, conscious mind. As Sommers writes: "Myers conceptualized in terms of 'uprushes' into conscious awareness from a cosmic nexus perpetually connecting all beings" (Sommers, "James and Psychical Research in Context," 5–6).

Gilhooley makes a connection between the mechanism of projective identification and spirit possession.⁵⁷⁸ To be unconsciously “possessed” by the unconscious of the other, to hold their feelings and perhaps dream their dreams, is, for Gilhooley, akin to the “folk doctor’s” universe, whereby one organism is invaded by the spirit of another. We internalize portions of others’ minds, we identify with them, we are possessed by affects and ideas. This is a highly contagious unconscious field.

Eshel, Gilhooley and others open to a consideration of what Barad calls the “queer phenomenology” of telepathy. That is to say, these nonlocal communications are transgressive to conventional temporal-spatial boundaries. They suggest strange aggregates and entanglements of consciousness and invent relationships that muddle the divisions between discrete minds. Certainly, psychoanalysis is no stranger to drawing from physics, for metaphors for what is experienced clinically (“black holes” of depression)⁵⁷⁹ or for explanatory frames for psychic phenomena.

Generally, however, even in opening unconscious communication beyond the usual ego boundaries of the self, the “entities” we converse with and the rapport we form with them have limits. Psychoanalysis retains a distinctly human “groundless ground” for the unconscious and its transformations, certainly exclusive of nonhuman ontologies. We can consider the strange

⁵⁷⁸ See Gilhooley “Thought Transference in Psychoanalysis,” in *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 144–58.

⁵⁷⁹ Psychoanalysis frequently uses astrophysical entities such as black holes as metaphors. Meanwhile, “ultraqueer critters” perform what Barad calls a “materializing promiscuity”—a radical openness in the unfolding of nature, from neurons, to amoebas, to lightning, “all the way down” to the atom. I am reminded of Guattari’s script *Un amour d’UIQ*, which tells the story of a group of marginalized squatters (schizophrenic, stateless), making contact with alien intelligence through a subatomic particle. This infra-quark begins to display intelligence as well as human psychological traits (jealousy, desire) and an ability to transform human bodies into jellyfish form. I see Guattari’s attempt at a Hollywood science-fiction movie as envisioning the microbial/quantum/invisible as an agential machine—not a metaphor—participating powerfully in human affairs. Ofra Eshel, “‘Black Holes,’ Deadness and Existing Analytically,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 79 (1998); Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity”; Guattari, *Un amour d’UIQ*, trans. Silvia Maglioni and Graeme Thomson, in *A Love of UIQ* (U Minnesota Press), 2016.

transpersonal traffic of thoughts, so long as these thoughts are tethered to human assemblages of psychogenesis, human language and human culture.

Given that the infant and its mothering source are seen as foundational to the psyche and to the building of an identity, we can follow a chain of association connecting mystical experiences or telepathic communication to *in utero* states, or to infantile-maternal symbiosis, and from there we can conclude what might have “gone wrong.” Read through the analytic frame, “occult” experiences are explained etiologically as manifestations of unconscious communication most often resulting from early trauma.

Gilhooley observes that “rapport” is often interpreted as “a remnant of intrauterine life.”⁵⁸⁰ A symbiotic connection and resonance between bodies naturally links to an originary realm involving infant and mother. Eshel reads telepathic dreams in the clinic as “a search engine to seek and find the analyst, in order to halt the process of abandonment and prevent a return and collapse into the depths of despair of the early traumatization.”⁵⁸¹

Eshel opens her inquiry to a porosity between beings, and then goes on to describe a fixation on “an archaic, symbiotic mode of communication, prior to the formation of boundaries of self and other.”⁵⁸² Rather than consider more broadly cosmological entanglements, she explains, à la Winnicott, how the mother creates a sense of continuity and structure. Some form of maternal caregiving protects the child from the vastness of mental life (O). When this maternal function is ruptured or absent, the telepathic dream emerges to compensate for this distance. It forges attachment. Such connection, embodied and encoded in the telepathic dream, defies the usual self-other boundaries and allows for unusual and immaterial modes of communication in the field. It is from here that aberrant psychic experience may spring.

With parapsychological experience grounded in a model of human maternal care, there is not much room to understand connection outside that rapport and its traumatic rupture. To consider communicative connection beyond human-to-human exchange is to tread into an animistic worldview, which mixes up the distinctly human psychic realm with the material realm: “Freud

⁵⁸⁰ Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 168.

⁵⁸¹ Eshel, “Where Are You, My Beloved?,” 1620.

⁵⁸² Eshel, “Where Are You My Beloved?,” 1619.

had found in the experience of the uncanny, animistic thinking and the experiences of traumatic neurosis hints of . . . traumatic loss of inner objects.”⁵⁸³ This stubborn tendency to bracket human intersubjectivity as a default setting—that which properly nurtures a healthy psyche into being—renders most other entities either paltry or problematic things, to be backgrounded, or digested into a dream.

4.6 Exorcisms

“There is a lot in psychoanalysis that falls under the heading of haunting,” writes Stephen Frosh. “Perhaps it makes sense to think of its whole project in that way—as a project of exorcism.”⁵⁸⁴ In his writing on the “passion play” of psychoanalysis, Grotstein concludes that the work is akin to a “shamanistic exorcistic rite.”⁵⁸⁵ He uses Bionian language to describe how this ritual works: O (ultimate reality) is transformed within the operations of the container-contained dynamic (applying alpha function to beta elements). Elements circulate between minds in the psychic field. These shadowy presences instigate mental activity and fuel our behaviour. Feelings manoeuvre through the atmosphere, creating turbulence. Thoughts are projected and internalized. Psychic elements communicate. They can reassure, disturb and make trouble. *Phantoms*, *hauntings* and *revenants* are some of the metaphors used to describe these dynamics.

Contemporary psychoanalysis has found a place for spirits, to be sure. They are relegated to the subjective psychic field in a particular way, stripped of dimensionality or identity. The spiritualist’s entities have undergone a process of disillusionment—or, perhaps, a meagre preservation of illusion through captivity, otherwise known as the praxis of containment. When working analytically, the entire session is framed such that analyst and analysand participate in a sort of “illusional dimension,” as Civitarese puts it.⁵⁸⁶ Ghosts submit to the requirements of this dimension. What they *are*, now, is human unconscious activity.

Psychoanalysis mobilizes ghostly metaphors to conceptualize communication that operates outside visual or verbal exchange. The “ghost” readily suggests a complicated entanglement

⁵⁸³ Katz, *Metaphor and Field*, 72.

⁵⁸⁴ Stephen Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* (Palgrave, 2013), 38.

⁵⁸⁵ Grotstein, “Psychoanalysis as a Passion Play,” 192.

⁵⁸⁶ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 15.

between psyches, the ways we may be haunted by temporalities and by one another. We reckon with the emotional remnants and revenants of our pasts. Davies reflects on the ghostly within the object relational unconscious: “even in our most solitary moments we are relating to that ‘ephemeral spectre’ of internal others. . . . [I]n object relations parlance other internalized objects.”⁵⁸⁷

Ghosts convey something about the dynamics of unconscious life: they are traces of the unconscious realm who speak in and through the discourse of the subject. Not quite belonging to the subject, but not quite its own agent either, the psychoanalytic phantom is usually understood as something repressed or unacknowledged in the psychic life of an individual. Perhaps this haunting is transpersonal or intergenerational: an animating force that makes us, inherently, not quite ourselves. Ghosts signify how an event (a trauma, a generational inheritance, a lost object) can show up and animate the mental and relational life of a person. This animate element takes the form of a “show and hide ambivalence,” as Frosh puts it.⁵⁸⁸ Ghosts seek reparation and expression. Ultimately, we need to be dispossessed of them to get on with the business of living.

I have noted that Bion’s language is reminiscent of the mediumistic field: psychic entities of some kind circulate, signals are sent and received, we are in flows and reversals of flow, suspended between psyches. Framing mental life in this way bestows psychic phenomena with an eerie agency. As the Barangers put it, this field is “physically absent but experientially present.”⁵⁸⁹ Such “psychic productions” are, according to Civitarese and Ferro, combinations of emotions and ideas emanating from the unconscious. They “enable us to see reality from a number of different angles, investing it with a ‘poetic’ ambiguity.”⁵⁹⁰ These “emanations” (also called “evacuations”) can haunt us from the edge of our conscious awareness.

Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török are known especially for their use of phantoms, and the language of “the crypt,” to account for a particular way that intergenerational trauma—perhaps a secret held by a parent—registers psychically and how it makes itself known in the transference.

⁵⁸⁷ Jody Davies, Response, IAARP colloquium series 35, “Death of a Parent: Openings at an Ending, Psychoanalytic Perspectives” by Mary Joan Gerson, November 12–24, 2019.

⁵⁸⁸ Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions*, 39

⁵⁸⁹ Baranger and Baranger, “The Analytic Situation as a Dynamic Field,” 798.

⁵⁹⁰ Ferro and Civitarese, “Analysts in Search of an Author,” 651.

The *phantom* suggests how the analysand is haunted by an occluded, undisclosed trauma, and, in turn, the analyst is haunted by something guarded or encrypted within the analysand's unconscious. For Abraham and Török, the phantom signifies a buried or "entombed" psychic object, an unavowed, denied, closed-off space in the psychic life of the analysand. Their work describes a particular topography of psyche that organizes itself around an unspeakable, or unsymbolized, wound. The phantom operates metapsychologically and has some form of agency—the way we would say an internalized object relationship does. It creates a "crypt effect." The analyst might sense something occluded within the other: a "specific malaise," perhaps a feeling of lack in the transference. In the course of analysis, the phantom reveals itself for what it apparently is: a memory (perhaps not one's own) seeking signification. This is a phantom that can be relinquished through analytic interpretation.⁵⁹¹

Hans Loewald suggests that "the unconscious is a crowd of ghosts" who are forced to live in the shadows and make themselves known through symptom and pathology. He writes:

Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost-life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow-life. Transference is pathological in so far as the unconscious is a crowd of ghosts, and this is the beginning of the transference neurosis in analysis: ghosts of the unconscious, imprisoned by defences but haunting the patient in the dark of his defences and symptoms, are allowed to taste blood, are let loose.⁵⁹²

Ghosts are stirred up by the analysis, let loose. But only so far! They make themselves known through the transference, they are contained in symbolic process, and, if all goes well, they can become ciphered through analysis. With the unconscious thus properly reorganized, they are now ancestors,⁵⁹³ in their proper temporal space. As we have seen, leaving ghosts as ghosts is an

⁵⁹¹ Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (U Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁵⁹² Hans Loewald, "On the Therapeutic Action of Psycho-Analysis," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 41 (1960).

⁵⁹³ This transmutation of *ghosts* to *ancestors* omits nonmetaphorical practices of ancestor communication, not to mention assumes a linear temporality where the past can be placed behind us. As Akomolafe notes,

example of desymbolized thinking. Rather inhospitably, the psychoanalytic milieu conjures ghosts in order to make contact, and then either transmutes them, internalizes them, or lays them to rest.

Despite the fact that mediums report these entities as fully equipped with their own sophisticated languages and distinct ideas, analytic interpretation turns them into psychic objects, traces of the past, enigmatic messages and metaphors for psychic function, chained to a personal self, to the psychic apparatus, to a personal past. In this way, these entities are at once mobilized and suspended through analytic work, located in terms that foreclose their ontology. Psychoanalysis arbitrates what is psychic and what is supernatural, and holds that the supernatural is, in fact, psychological. The spirit is a rather meagre thing, an echo of a relationship that is now a function of cognition.

Let's return, for a moment, to the hag, and how Duerr identified the moving fence during the European witch hunts: "The Devil had conquered the 'inside' of the soul, and in view of this, his new abode, the body, had to be killed and burned in order to deprive him of his base."⁵⁹⁴ The psychoanalytic world developed an alternate ritual apparatus for dispelling such demons: containment became the technical method of exorcism. The ghosts now live inside the human "soul" rather than in the wilderness, and can, in due course, be put to rest.

ancestry in this schema "is a distant object—and matters of belonging and Indigeneity are locked in a static past, accessible to only a few." Instead, Akomolafe writes that "ancestrality is a matter of dense and marked landscapes and stumbling places attracting our bodies." Many of these practices include ecologies of not-humans, rather than simply human relatives, as intergenerational ancestors, in an ongoing meeting of bodies across temporalities. (Akomolafe, "Time Enfoldments," personal website, October 10, 2017, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/time-enfoldments>.)

⁵⁹⁴ Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 49.

5 ON OTHER SOLUTIONS TO REALITY

5.1 Rethinking magical thinking

Ogden, in his description of Bion's work with groups, notes that "magical solutions" are forms of nonthinking. The magical thinker refuses to grow up and learn from experience. "Genuine thinking," by contrast, does not evade experience or feelings and does not flee into fantasy (or what Bion would call the *basic assumption* of groups). The magical thinker interprets the world according to what they want to be true.

Ogden writes that "the processes of learning and maturing require that one tolerate feelings of not knowing, of confusion, and of powerlessness." Thinking "confronts reality in its full, unforgiving alterity."⁵⁹⁵ Maturity, in this schema, requires one to recognize that magical ideas, or psychotic patterns, cannot solve the emotional problems that arise in the real world.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁵ Ogden, *Bion's Four Principles*, 15.

⁵⁹⁶ Despite Ogden's psychopathologization of magic, Gilhooley argues that a significant connection actually exists between physics' theories of *entanglement*, Ogden's theory of *the third* and James Frazer's classical definition of *contagious magic*: "Contagious magic is based on the recognition that the sympathetic relationship between two people is so great that, even though separated, what is done to one alters the other" (Gilhooley and Toich, *Psychoanalysis, Intersubjective Writing*, 81). Ogden's *third subjectivity* is the unconscious interactive space created between the analytic dyad—another way of talking about the field. This, the "central clinical phenomenon of psychoanalysis," is, in Gilhooley's reading, an instance of quantum entanglement, a nonlocal connection between discrete individuals. For Frazer, and for physicists such as Erwin Schrödinger, this symbiotic space prior to psychological boundary extends to materials as well. What happens to one quantum particle affects another, despite a physical separation across time and space: there is no materialist mechanistic causality in this realm. Gilhooley likens the phenomenon to the homeopathic principle, where "like produces like" and an "effect resembles its cause." What may have been conjoined will "remain forever afterwards, even when quite disserved from each other, in such a sympathetic relation that whatever is done to one must similarly affect the other" (James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (Macmillan, 1922), 43). This consideration of analytic phenomena and "magic" shifts from the language of "infantile immaturity" toward a theory of the real that is decidedly queerer, à la Barad. Generally, we separate out our day-to-day experience from the weird realm of quantum particles. Yet for those who do trauma work, there is something recognizable in the statement that "the atom's *identity, its ontology, is never fixed, but*

Despite being associated with magic and schizophrenic process, by no means are all mediums thought to require psychiatric intervention. Not all of the voices perceived are distressing—communication with the “unseen” need not disturb day-to-day functioning. (Surely we all incessantly navigate the unseen by engaging, for example, with thoughts.) The perplexing confusion as to what is real and what is unreal (inside or outside, subjective or objective, symbol or thing) attributed to those with schizophrenia does not necessarily plague those whose relational field includes entities, the dead, ancestors, spirits, energy beings and others. Those beings have enough realness to be relatable.

Stengers writes of the “tolerant attitude” one can assume when others “appear not to possess the code.”⁵⁹⁷ Therapists can be taught to develop cultural competency and be gracious with cultural beliefs, while quietly knowing better what a person *actually* means (symbolically) when they do ritual practice, speak with their ancestors, or perceive a ghost hovering in the room. We can allow for an idiosyncratic fantasy life so far as no one is harmed.⁵⁹⁸ This therapeutic stance can be polite, but it does not require that we approach mediums as cosmopolitical theorists in their own right.

In the remainder of this section, I draw on Nathan’s ethnopsychiatry and the challenge it poses to container methodologies of psychoanalysis. I consider techniques and theories of healing that, in my own training, would have fallen under the “magical thinking” diagnostic. I work against the notion that these techniques fail at “genuine thinking.” Instead, they confront psychoanalysis with the limits of its own thought.

In *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, Ashon Crawley opens a line of questioning resonant with my own:

is always open to future and past reworkings” (Barad, “Nature’s Queer Phenomenology,” 43. Emphasis in the original).

⁵⁹⁷ Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains,” 41.

⁵⁹⁸ “Neurotics,” Freud tells us, “are only affected by what is thought with intensity and pictured with emotion, whereas agreement with external reality is a matter of no importance” (Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 86).

What does it mean to place oneself into a conceptual zone and category of distinction and to think from such a “place”? How does thought emerge from that which has been deemed, a priori, a categorically distinct mode of thought? And just what desires for purity undergird such a drive toward thinking from the categorically distinct zone?⁵⁹⁹

To get here, to this categorically distinct place, requires a mode of thinking “purely different from—through excluding—*other* thought.” The result of this is that “thought’s flourishing, its leaps and bounds, must be strangled.”⁶⁰⁰ I’m reminded of Stengers’s contention that, in the psychoanalytic milieu, “purification is a production.”⁶⁰¹

Stengers describes a modern territory that is not only “ruled by the critical opposition between objectivity and subjectivity”⁶⁰² but also defines itself through creating a divide between cultures: “Here we are in modern territory, with the territorial ‘great divide’ refrain—they believe, we know.”⁶⁰³ As I have argued, this “modern territory,” characterized as “serious adult thinking,” aligns with the developmental thrust of psychoanalysis, where we are meant to “work through” our infantile selves in the transference. This model of psychic function reverberates in the moral imperative Stengers sees on her side of the epistemic divide: “Thou shalt not regress.”⁶⁰⁴

In psychoanalysis, we are invited to regress. Indeed, as Levin writes:

⁵⁹⁹ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 11.

⁶⁰⁰ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 11.

⁶⁰¹ Isabelle Stengers, “Deceptions of Power: Psychoanalysis and Hypnosis,” trans. Roxanne Lapidus, *SubStance*, 19:2–3 (1990): 90. Stengers considers Freud’s technical use of transference and the disqualification of hypnotic suggestion an “impurity”: “To know, to refuse to know, to fight a threatening knowledge, all of these indicate the stakes put up by those participate in the adventure of modern rationality, and the stakes of the psychic life with which the psychoanalyst deals” (Stengers, “Deceptions of Power,” 89).

⁶⁰² Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains,” 39.

⁶⁰³ Stengers, “Experimenting with Refrains,” 41. The conceit that there are those who *think* and those who *believe* is, as Nathan indicates, a cornerstone of Western psychiatric and psychological practice: “In general, white people think that there are two types of societies—one where people think more than believe and another where they believe more than they think—their own falling naturally into the first category” (Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 31).

⁶⁰⁴ Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

[P]sychological health can be measured in a rough and ready way against tolerance for regression. . . . [B]orderline/schizophrenia do not result from regression as such but from an enhanced fear of it—a rigidification of ordinary patterns of perception, and a consequent fragmentation and disorientation of the experiential field.⁶⁰⁵

In this view, rigidity is the trouble. A defensive perceptual apparatus is unable to tolerate new experience. Freud’s bulwark—beyond which he encouraged his disciples to adventure, and yet which he also needed to build for fear of illegitimacy—is a kind of organizational rigidity in itself. This rigidity was built into the discipline. Now, we are encouraged to regress, in a container, in service of the anthropocentric ego (itself an invisible guiding and reorganizing entity).

The field of ethnopsychiatry insists psychological disorders be read through the lenses of specific cultural contexts and their own determinants—radically heterogenous systems of thought beyond analytic or Western scientific models. Conceptualizations of madness, interpretations of “symptoms,” and technical methods of healing vary widely. Alexander Moreira-Almeida and Joan D. Koss-Chioino discuss efficacious treatment of what Western psychiatry would call schizophrenia by spiritual healers in Puerto Rico and Brazil. They outline the methodology of the Puerto Rican spiritist, leaving aside the question of the “real reason” for healing:

[T]he persistent negative influences of disincarnated spirits (called “obsession”) or trauma experienced in previous lives are considered etiological to mental disorders, in association with psycho-social and biological factors. The presence of an obsession is detected during mediumistic meetings when the obsessing spirit communicates through mediums or when a spiritual guide manifests through a medium and explains the cause of the patient’s problem. Given their “bio-psycho-socio-spiritual” model of mental disorders, Spiritist séances for dis-obsession are recommended, as well as “passes” (laying on of hands), prayers, and injunctions to live according to ethical principles. In treating a client considered obsessed, the focus is on dissuading the obsessing spirit of its purpose of doing harm to the distressed client by means of dialogue between the

⁶⁰⁵ Levin, *Notes on the Symbolic Process*, 58.

medium(s) and the distress-causing spirit. The obsessing spirit is brought to the table and possesses a medium for this purpose.⁶⁰⁶

The understanding here is not only that affective and cognitive processes are culturally patterned but also that one might acknowledge the concrete effects of certain concepts, such as spirits, rather than interpreting them as “representation.” This is the approach Nathan proposes:

How should we consider the concepts which organize cultural therapeutic systems? As “representations,” “beliefs” or genuine theories? If we think of them as “representations,” we deny them, in effect, any claim to describing objects of the world: they speak of things, we, of representations; they, of the action of the fetishes, we, of the belief in the action of the fetishes; they, of the demands of the dead, we, of mourning feelings; they, of the constraints imposed by the gods, we, of “paternal complexes.” If we could find a way to respect their claim of describing the world, then we should consider cultural therapeutic systems as genuine theories.⁶⁰⁷

Further still, Nathan argues, *there is no position from which to determine if one is living in illusion or reality*. He is truly describing transitional space, but one not founded on the primacy of the maternal object. Nathan describes the ethico-epistemological problem of working with “mental life” across cultures, in particular when the working approach amounts to invasion and imposition:

Those who from the start deny actors in a system the capacity to totally account for the system they manage, are doomed to interpret these actors’ theories, their results, the entire system. As a result we have a psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst, an ethnographer feeling at home everywhere he (or she) goes.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ Alexander Moreira-Almeida and Joan D. Koss-Chioino, “Recognition and Treatment of Psychotic Symptoms: Spiritists Compared to Mental Health Professionals in Puerto Rico and Brazil,” *Psychiatry*, 72:3 (2009): 272.

⁶⁰⁷ Tobie Nathan, “Georges Devereux and Clinical Ethnopsychiatry,” trans. Catherine Grandsard, *Ethnopsychiatrie.net*, n.d., www.ethnopsychiatrie.net/GDengl.htm.

⁶⁰⁸ Nathan, “Georges Devereux and Clinical Ethnopsychiatry,”

Rather than requiring a patient to relinquish the spirit, this model insists the clinician relinquish their entitlement to impose an onto-epistemological map where, in fact, one already exists. Other systems of thought not only invite modalities of healing but also indicate other options for relationships and experiences of selfhood. They, moreover, constitute other realities, composed of differently arranged networks or collectives.

Of course, the theoretical orientations and techniques of psychoanalysis are also particular arrangements of subjectification, relationality and reality.⁶⁰⁹ The analytic cartography determines where the analytic pair will travel together. The degree to which an analyst is open to traversing surprising territories (perhaps tolerating utter conceptual disorientation) has an enormous bearing on what transformations are fostered in the field. Analysands “grow” (or at least *morph*) in and through the particular limits and opportunities of the analytic system of thought. Whatever the training might be, though, Nathan argues that the work is entrenched in an enduring assumption:

Psychotherapy that is called “scientific” (obviously, I’m not talking about its truth value, only its method, whether Freudian, anti-Freudian or neo-Freudian, fanatical Kleinian or crypto-Lacanian, whatever . . .)—this type of psychotherapy, I was saying, always contains a single premise that is clear and explicit: humans are alone!⁶¹⁰

Even in the relational model of psychoanalysis, the enclosed dyad is isolated from the universe. We humans are alone in the container, and we reproduce this aloneness through methodologies of containment. Searching for an unconscious motivation, a memorialized object relation, a symbol, is a conceptual template and it is also an ontological operation. These are “hypotheses and choices with regard to the relations that beings maintain with one another.”⁶¹¹ So, for example, a framework that separates categories such as *human mind and culture* from *matter and nature* considers animism to be a misapprehension, or mistaken vision, based on a relational interaction whereby human mental life is projected onto the backdrop of “nature.” Animism, in

⁶⁰⁹ Descola writes of the “stabilization of frameworks of thought and action of our practical engagement with the world: what one might call ‘worlding’—the instituted expressions of relations between multiple entities whose ontological status and capacity of action vary according to the positions they occupy in relationship to others” (Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, 78).

⁶¹⁰ Nathan and Stengers, *Doctors and Healers*, 20–29.

⁶¹¹ Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, 32.

this system of human solitude, is a form of magical thinking that overvalues thought—thought mistakenly writ large across the universe. Countless relata are hushed in the name of this version of common sense.

What gets to be taken seriously, what agents have effects, what counts as real and what does meaningful relationship look like in a metaphysical matrix ordered otherwise? With the clinical example of a “woman who faints,” Nathan lays out a contrast in systems of thought and their therapies. The woman in question “felt she was going blind, fainted for no reason, wandered like a lost soul.” Nathan goes on to describe the patient’s history: Born in Mali, of Bambara ethnicity. A hidden pregnancy. She gave birth alone. The child was placed on a windowsill and fell, resulting in the child being institutionalized, blind, deaf and mute. Accusations of infanticide. Nathan writes:

In such a situation, I insist, the therapist takes on a huge responsibility. If you decide to look for a disorder *inside*. . . you are bound to condemn her to keep up her solitary wandering in a world with a single universe. But if you start in a divine way, looking for invisible beings—and they must be Bambara invisible beings—at the origin of her disorder, this will necessarily pull [her] out of her solitude.⁶¹²

One could follow a number of interpretive trails here, and each has different consequences. The woman somatizes and faints on account of her hysterical inner theatre. The ghost that haunts is guilt for the institutionalized child. Or the trauma of this birthing experience. Or a familial pattern yet to be revealed.

Nathan, alternatively, describes interpretations garnered through a divining session, which involve information about the patient’s family as well as an ancestral cosmos into which her body-mind is webbed. Nathan is clear in his argument that invisible intention is a technical principle in this conceptual system, one that gives “the patient new affiliation.”⁶¹³ A network of invisible spirits as well as tools and objects are entangled in a curative matrix. In one epistemic field, this woman is struggling with her “unconscious strategies” and must be directed toward a “more mature strategy for existence.” In another, she assists in “complicat[ing] the world.” She

⁶¹² Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 22.

⁶¹³ Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 49.

has become the “unknowing informant of the invisible world, one that is worth knowing about.”⁶¹⁴

Civitarese holds that “analytic investigation no longer falls on the subject (on the search for psychic *contents*), but [on] *how* the dyad reaches an intersubjective agreement on the nature of reality.”⁶¹⁵ While a boundary has shifted to include the transpersonal (mental life is never quite one’s own), that boundary works in service of human subjects co-creating knowledge and meaning, as well as reproducing human subjects, alone, in a one-world system. Two human subjects are the grounds of becoming a human subject.

With mental space modelled on an originary duo of mother and child, the medium becomes vulnerable to *fragmentation* in this picture, as though something originally whole and coherent has been shattered. Is this an unfortunate fragmentation of self, or does so-called rupture tune us to complex ecologies beyond a unit self that the maternal holding environment is meant to nurture? What bulwarks have to be built, and phenomenological reductions performed, to provide therapy in the maternal mode? And who was there, participating in communicative, affective relationships, prior to the imposition of psychoanalysis’s modern modes of intelligibility? Which relational realities are we meant to grow out of?

Savransky writes of “crafting a problematic togetherness of entities and relations, but also of solitudes, of dreams and hopes. A form of togetherness that can never be stabilized, but which constitutes a risk, and a possibility, for a practical and always partial construction of common worlds.”⁶¹⁶ Tethering spirits to the human mind is certainly not the only construction of togetherness. The therapist’s difficulty is to allow other constructions of common worlds to bear on their practice. Turner describes her experience seeing a spirit form during her participation in an Ndembu ritual:

Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. It was a large gray blob about six inches across, opaque and something between solid and smoke. I was amazed, delighted. . . .

⁶¹⁴ Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 6.

⁶¹⁵ Civitarese, “Bion’s O and His Pseudo Mystical Path,” 398. Emphasis in the original.

⁶¹⁶ Savransky, “Worlds in the Making,” 365.

Everyone was hooting, and were all jumping with triumph. The gray thing was actually out there, visible.⁶¹⁷

She goes on to reflect on the process of giving anthropological account to her experience of this plasmic thing. Edith Turner notes there is a difference between understanding “from without” versus experiencing “from within.” I quote her at length here, as she lays out the rather commonplace experience of accessing “alternate realities,” which recognized, internalized theoretical models can’t accommodate. Confronted with an object extraordinary to one’s disciplinary field and its worldview, Turner reminds us of the possibility of listening:

Campbell wrote an extremely sympathetic book on tolerance for the oddities of Wayapi Indian thought. Yet he confessed that he did not regard shamanic manifestations among the Wayapi “as entities in the form of animals or people”; he felt he ought to see them “as conceptual devices . . . metaphors through which the living world is expressed,” a theory he derives from “miniscule points of grammar.” Is this faithful reportage of the people’s experience? The people would deny it. The “metaphor” model is everywhere to be found in anthropology, but it is rarely found in the real world where events of the psyche are regarded as commonplace, where different cultures have for long been exploring the intangible in terms for their everyday experience, where to date some hospitals in America nurses are trained to understand the near-death experience, where stories of spirits and lights and midnight paralysis and hag riding continually emerge when there is a listener who will not mock them.⁶¹⁸

By and large, the psychoanalytic milieu’s listening performs a reductive translation. The mechanism of digestion transforms otherworldly dispatches into a narcissistic reflection, an echo from an infantile history.

⁶¹⁷ Edith Turner, “A Visible Spirit Form in Zambia,” in *Readings in Indigenous Religions*, ed. Graham Harvey (Continuum, 2002), 167.

⁶¹⁸ Turner, “A Visible Spirit Form in Zambia,” 171, quoting Alan Tormaid Campbell, *To Square with Genesis: Causal Statements and Shamanic Ideas in Wayapi* (U Iowa Press, 1989), 90, 21.

Healers who “never manage[d] to give up on their spirits, demons, fetishes and sorcerers” find themselves under the conceptual umbrella of “magic” (belief, fiction).⁶¹⁹ Whereas modes of thinking-healing that fall outside modernized Western practices attribute intention to invisibilities, psychoanalysis “welds the symptom to the person.”⁶²⁰ In the former systems, the “disorder” can be treated with tools and techniques of divination that address the invisible realm. In the latter, with invisibilities already coded as archaic fantasy, the psychoanalytic pair gets to work deciphering the symbolic meaning of the enacted belief.

In the container, an experience can be metabolized—made thinkable or mentalized and, therefore, workable. “In order to explain how it works,” writes Civitarese, “Bion turns to the mother-infant relationship and extracts from it the best model we have to conceptualize subjectivation and consequently, therapeutic action.”⁶²¹ Without denying the immense influence of human attachment on psychic development, is this in fact the best model for relational becomings and therapeutic action that we have? When this model of becoming is positioned as more fundamentally real than any other, we can only read the spirits as symptoms of a rupture in the human-centric matrix. The exclusions performed here are enormous, when familial connection is the only meaningful arrangement of connection and co-emergence that relational practice can allow.

As Skafish points out, the modern characterization of a person being “one self, one body” is altogether upended by Jane Roberts’s channelling.⁶²² In her psychic work, identity is “composed of myriad fragments.” One must be open to “multitudinous alteration and change” through new

⁶¹⁹ Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 29. “Giving up on,” like one gives up on their transitional object (blanket, doll) in order to enter the grown-up world.

⁶²⁰ Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 38.

⁶²¹ Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 390.

⁶²² While channelled through Jane Roberts, William James suggests that “consciousness could have several competing, coexisting foci and that some conversions might function not by entirely unifying a self divided but by making a transcephalic kind of organization of those fragments. Such conversions would thus convert not only the contents of consciousness but also its form” (quoted in Skafish, “From the Library of the Superreal,” 451).

combinations of consciousnesses.⁶²³ If, as a therapist, I am in the business of constructing “solutions to reality,” then what is a productive solution? What thinking has been problematized? What if, as the mediums I have worked with suggest, their own field of experience may present other vertices to think-feel through?

Curiously, after having done away with what he sees to be magical solutions to reality, Ogden admits: “Reality viewed from a single vantage point represents a failure to think.”⁶²⁴

5.2 Forces that transform containers

Practicing psychoanalytic therapy has fostered my sensitivity to enigmatic presences. In my clinical work, I try to furnish a relational space to dream, feel and think through personal predicaments. I am invested in working through the patterns of relational webs. I work in an affective, aesthetic dimension, sensitive to relational exchange, tuned to the translations of experience. Whatever therapeutic transformations occur, they are said to happen in this ineffable “place,” a transitional space, a meshwork of unconscious processes, an affective atmosphere of felt and fleeting phenomena that are not properly mine, but neither fully another’s, held in a shared field. The play of the psyche, I have been taught, is a kind of “theatre.” The psychic stage is populated by representations of our experiences. I involve myself in this play: it’s *as-if* we were haunted . . .

I am troubled, though. I am thinking here of the title of an interview with choreographer Faye Driscoll: “Bodies in Catastrophic Interdependence.”⁶²⁵ Her work *Weathering* is meant to evoke interlocking, cascading climate crises. The bodies in this dance entwine in destabilizing tactile relations. They affectively enmesh. Get caught up.

In my work, I am meant to parse my body-mind and the body-mind of my patient from a matrixial, material, vibratory web that we can’t actually escape. The phenomenological reduction

⁶²³ Skafish, “From Another Psyche,” 24–25.

⁶²⁴ Ogden, “Bion’s Four Principles,” 17.

⁶²⁵ Angel Callander, “Bodies in Catastrophic Interdependence: A Conversation on Fay Driscoll’s *Weathering*,” *Public Journal* (March 1, 2024): <https://publicjournal.ca/editorials/bodies-in-catastrophic-interdependence/>.

is a therapeutic (technical) arrangement that fabricates an inside purified of the influence of the outside: an absolutely inadequate therapeutic response to the moment.

This analytic field is irreducible to the physiological, but so many “invisibles” are reduced to its processes. The container is principally relational, but its access to relationship is severely restrained. Moreover, this method—self-assured in the maturity of its metaphysics—can decide whether or not a subject is adjusted to reality (in empathic, parental or psychopathologizing tones).⁶²⁶

As part of my fieldwork, I attended Sunday service at the Open Door Sanctuary in Victoria, British Columbia. At this church, the ministers are unconcerned with religious affiliation: the spiritualist path simply testifies that life continues beyond the physical realm, and that, with some guidance, we are able to commune with the dead. The founding ministers are also tutors at Arthur Findlay College, a training institution for mediums in spiritualism and psychic sciences located in Essex, England.

The walls of the Open Door Sanctuary are lined with portraits of early spiritualists. I notice a photograph of Jung. The Sunday service includes songs and a sermon, and there are opportunities for receiving healing energy—a laying on of hands. The service culminates in a demonstration of channelling, when a medium takes to the stage to give voice to the dead. The medium, it seems to my analytically trained mind, is engaging in a process of free association. At spiritualist church, we understand that what arises in the stream of consciousness is not entirely one’s own consciousness. Messages relayed from the “other side” might be an expression of love and support, or something strangely specific and banal: “Someone is showing me a pantry full of flavoured Lipton Tea boxes.” “They are showing me a music box.” The medium hums Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Für Elise,” and a woman in the congregation understands the dispatch. Tears are often shed when a connection is made, when someone claims the ghost. Tissues are passed.

⁶²⁶ This position is facetiously outlined by Latour: “the Whites presented themselves to the others as people who were ‘finally’ in possession (this is the word for it!) of a rational psychology, a native subjectivity, an authentic, nonfabricated self, which was going to be able to extend the benefits of subjectivity to the whole planet—with the unconscious as a bonus and medications as an option” (Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (Harvard UP, 2013), 204).

Emotions sweep through the room along with the channelled information, undoing whatever comfort I might take in critical distance.⁶²⁷ In each of the psychic spaces I've participated in, most immediately striking to me has been, as the psychotherapists say, "the feeling in the room," and precisely how *uncontained* it can feel. There are phenomena that will "not be quarantined and [are] always threatening to leak out and contaminate 'life as we know it.'"⁶²⁸ The channelling demonstration is truly a queer ontological performance.

Does this uncontainedness mean the congregation is unable to think? So overwhelmed by passion (grief, longing—who knows what else) that they have left their philosophical faculties at the door? Who among us could distinguish between a genuine thought, a mature thought, a magical solution, a misrepresentation of reality? What modalities or epistemic constraints would be appropriate to employ within this room of burgeoning commitments and connections?

In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, Latour writes a vivid description of what we might take to be a psychic predicament:

Whether we are dreaming or awake, from simple anger to the monstrous crimes we sense we are capable of committing, from "black looks" to stormy passions, there is no one among us who is not in constant touch with these transformational beings. In our relations with them, it is as if we were some fragile envelope constantly bombarded by an incessant rain of beings that bear psyches, each of which is capable of influencing us, moving us, messing us up, upsetting us, carrying us away, devouring us, or, on the contrary, making us do something we didn't know we were capable of doing, something that inhabits and possesses us from then on. Like Cassavetes's heroine, we all live "under the influence," positive or negative, according to the turn taken by these "psycho-tropes." We still have to find out what they are, what they want, what language they speak, and how to "seat" them.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ I think of Crawley's description of Black Pentecostalism as a disruptive force "produced against the grain of liberal logics of subjectivity." He describes an "extra-subjective mode of being together" that occasions a critique of the known and coherent, the normatively violent (Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*. 4).

⁶²⁸ Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," 45.

⁶²⁹ Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 196.

Latour does not assume these psycho-tropes—what he calls “beings of metamorphosis”—are simply language, or object relations, or some formulation of the unconscious.⁶³⁰ Rather, a network of psychogenic actors are at play in Latour’s work. He relinks the psychic predicament to a proliferating cosmology through the question of possession: “But by whom are you possessed? Who carries you away? Who traverses you? Who has begun to dwell in you?”⁶³¹ These networks “shore up psyches.”⁶³² There is a “swarming of entities necessary to the self’s constant fabrication, its continual mutations.”⁶³³

Relational psychoanalysis readily admits that not all psychic materials come from within: intergenerational haunting is but one relational exchange that shows up in the human dream. According to my training, the shared unconscious circulates with constellations, objects, energies and invisibilities that once roamed free in other worlds whose collectives (I was taught) haven’t learned to think. Inside a psychoanalytic container, the ceaseless (mis)translation of experience can be re-enacted, relived, modified. Thus enclosed as fantasy, object relationships can be treated. Genuine thought replaces magic. Adulthood governs infancy. Already existing collectives become privatized. “Unreality,” as psychoanalytic field theories understand it, is traversed in the transference, conjured by the magic circle of the phenomenological reduction. What Latour insists is that modernity’s “interior self” is fabricated, upheld and traversed by so many irreducible, invisibilized assemblages.

My encounters with mediumship and non-modern healing modalities have reorganized transitional territory so that the field I work in is far more playful (spirited)—and also far more

⁶³⁰ Latour’s argument for *irreductionism*, as described by Bryant et al., holds that “all entities are equally real (though not equally strong) insofar as they act on other entities. While nonhuman actors such as germs, weather patterns, atoms, and mountains obviously relate to the world around them, the same is true of Harry Potter, the Virgin Mary, democracies, and hallucinations. The incorporeal and corporeal realms are equally capable of having effects on the world” (Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, eds., “Toward a Speculative Philosophy,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (re:press, 2009), 5).

⁶³¹ Latour, *Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 193.

⁶³² Latour, *Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 190.

⁶³³ Latour, *Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 193.

dis-orderly—than my training would allow. Brian Holmes describes a “moment of trembling between affect and expression” that initiated Guattari’s *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*.⁶³⁴ Before the signs and signals of another kind of collective life become incorporated into the psyche of the human subject, before psychic subjectivity becomes a closed, anthropocentric system, other sorts of meetings play out along novel frontiers.

Viveiros de Castro, following Deleuze, writes of a knowing that “isn’t a representing [of] the unknown but a way of interacting with it. A way of creating rather than contemplating, reflecting.”⁶³⁵ I admit that, writing as a therapist, and in the context of academia, I have felt a compulsion to legitimize these practices and their objects in and through “acceptable” philosophical and psychological systems—as though they have simply needed an approved mode of thought to authorize their right to exist. As though mediums require a sanctioning into legitimacy. As though the entities themselves are inert and without perspective, and as though those perspectives are unable to unsettle the thought-containers I work within. As though *I* might possess the respectable mode of representation! I think about Turner’s reflection on the difference between being inside an unusual experience and applying an outside conceptual apparatus.

If I’m being honest, this compulsion to legitimize feels born of anxiety. The anxiety of becoming unmoored from a shared community of sense-making. There, too, is the anxiety of disobeying my conceptual disciplining. Unhappy consequences for epistemic noncompliance have been wrought before. Banishment and burning are but two of them.

Fortunately, I have guides here—some of them among the living, and some of those even legitimate scholars. As Stengers notes, the devaluation of a “regressed” side of an epistemic binary, and the injunction to “not go there,” lingers. “There *is* some work to be done on this side,” she writes. “We can begin by addressing the moral imperative that mobilizes us, as it produces an obscure fear of being accused of regression as soon as we give any sign of betraying

⁶³⁴ Brian Holmes, “Guattari’s Schizoanalytic Cartographies, or, the Pathic Core at the Heart of Cybernetics,” personal website, February 27, 2009, <https://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/guattaris-schizoanalytic-cartographies/>.

⁶³⁵ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 104.

hard truth by indulging soft, illusory beliefs.”⁶³⁶ Haraway describes what it is to “not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference.”⁶³⁷ Some of my guides, of course, are further afield. Skafish quotes Roberts:

“each identity of the psyche unites with the others while maintaining its identity”—“can combine and unite with others, yet retain its uniqueness and experience,” “mix and merge while retaining an inviolate nature” (it “does not need fences”)—and is thus at once itself and others.⁶³⁸

It does not need fences. Neither fences nor bulwarks are needed here, because Roberts does not disappear, fragment or regress through her eccentric relational practice with others “at the margin.” Her vertices of thinking are pluralized; her personality expands via her alters. Like the hag, she indicates the cuts, then gestures at other experimental relational arrangements. She asserts an ontological plurality, a field of immaterial bodies, abundant forms of intimate-extimate consciousnesses and concomitant expressions of self, alternate sensoriums and translations, multiplicitous dimensions, a redistribution of agencies and transformative more-than-human relations. In this co-created field, you and not-you and me and not-me can combine and express in myriad, pluralized and paradoxical ways.

In psychoanalysis, such madness has its private place. The hallucinatory organ of a psyche is, after all, more manageable than a decadently panpsychic multiverse of forces with whom we are in catastrophic interdependence.

5.3 Heresy

In another conversation with J, the spirits show up with more advice for my dissertation. This time, they see I am struggling with organizing sections and creating a directional flow for my

⁶³⁶ Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”

⁶³⁷ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *The Haraway Reader* (Routledge, 2004), 69. See also Iris van der Tuin, “Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist Onto-Epistemology: On Encountering Chantal Chawaf and Posthuman Interpellation,” *Parallax*, 20:3 (2014).

⁶³⁸ Skafish, “From Another Psyche,” 12.

writing. (They are correct.) They show J that I could make a map of my ideas using small square pieces of coloured paper and drawing lines between them. A visual way to make connections. Helpful, and not unlike my supervisor's advice. From here, we address the interdisciplinarity of my research. I share my confusion at how to draw these lines of thinking together, unsure whether this will be a productive or destructive conversation. J and his others are struck by the idea of working at the margins of disciplines, straddling conventional fences. In response, he/they want to share an idea about the difference between religion and spiritual practice. The former requires accepting a system of thought, a given definition. The latter—practicing outside institutionalized doctrine—is called heresy. J laughs as he channels: “They’re saying the name of your project could be *Heresy!*”

PART II: DENDROPHILIA

*Nature reads and writes, calculates and copulates with itself in the most perverse, creative, and also destructive ways*⁶³⁹

6 OUTSIDES

6.1 The environment mother and going on being

Serres describes the way that angels in the ancient traditions “don’t always take human form.” They may be “any of the elementary fluxes and movements that make up our Earth.” He envisions these beings as circulating message bearers: “When a tree moves in a gust of wind, physical attributes of heat and cold, as well as living elements, are added to mechanical movement; what far-reaching messages is it receiving and transmitting in this exchange of fluxes?”⁶⁴⁰ Traditionally, Serres tells us, angels inhabit the universe of things. They are pantheistic.

In Part One, I explored how the spiritual medium exists in an exchange of fluxes, in a field of far-reaching invisibilities. Efficacious agents, energetic and talkative, move in and out of their sensorium. Determining the proper “symbolic elaboration” here, that is to say, how precisely to sort the personal mind from “messages from without,” comes into question in the mediumistic field. Psychoanalytic interpretation ensures that circulating message bearers such as these are *actually* misrepresentations of a psychic process involving human objects. Containment goes to work on the experience of a ghost in a digestive process of incorporation and assimilation, until it can be mobilized effectively within a limited system—obliterating its integrity and demoting its unique agency in the process. Harnessing ghosts in service of symbolizing the unconscious, tethered to the human community and family drama, is one way psychoanalysis has simultaneously assimilated spiritual beings into the subject’s phantasy and banished them from the universe beyond. In this particular institution of the reality principle, spirits could not survive on their own terms.

⁶³⁹ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 95.

⁶⁴⁰ Serres, *Angels, A Modern Myth*, 25.

Some beings are ushered into the psyche. And some are kept outside. It is not the case that psychoanalysis denies the “universe of things” on the other side of its fence. These we can leave as facts. The “outside” is simply not integral to “working in the dream,” unless the excluded non-human closes in on the human psychesoma, in which case we are in the province of pathology. While psychoanalysis keeps ineffable spirits inside through digestive assimilation, it places most of the world outside, performing some pathologizing border operations to ensure it remains there. Part Two of this dissertation turns to these exclusions.

I suggest how a “phenomenology of encountering ecological beings”⁶⁴¹ is curtailed by the sanctity and artificiality of this enclosure. Trees are my point of departure. More specifically, I begin with tree love, or dendrophilia. Apart from positioning trees as the furniture of dreams (or concretely as furniture), how might we practice within a relational field that includes their communicative corporeality? I will go on to give an account of how psychoanalysis handles other love objects who are not human and to consider how entangled ecologies, symbiotic relationships and more-than-human attachment sites are portrayed. It would seem that psychosis, perversion and various conceptual deviations lurk at the fence separating “me” from the rest of the world.⁶⁴²

Psychoanalysis imagines the “outside” as an “environment” from which the subject must differentiate. We can draw a link between this arrangement of the environment and the way that Winnicott’s *holding environment* operates. This environment, also referred to as the *environment mother*, is conceived of as the ideal facilitating situation through which the psychoanalytic subject develops an indwelling sense of selfhood. This individual’s inner world comes to be

⁶⁴¹ Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*, (Verso, 2017), 110.

⁶⁴² The entry for “encounter” in *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* proposes that “[t]he relation between the psyche and the world is born at the time of the primordial event of the encounter—the mouth and the breast.” Generally speaking, any encounter with the outside will be shaped by an earlier encounter that operates “inside”: “Such an event has, in fact, already been shaped by the psyche according to mnemonic traces anterior to the encounter.” An encounter is linked to a more “fundamental meaning,” namely, psychic representations of humans in relation or stored experiences intermingling with present experiences. These favoured psychoanalytic objects govern our meetings with outer objects. (Sophie De Mijolla-Mellor, “Encounter.” *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 505.)

organized via their first external object (mom). They begin dreaming up reality first and foremost through a relational matrix with the caregiver, and then, if the maternal environment is “good enough,” transitional objects can take the mother’s place, helping the child separate and enter a broader cultural world. This transition from “environmental symbiosis” to the world of human culture is a construction that I confront here.

Generally, the proper developmental sequence runs as follows. We make our way through the narcissism of infantile life (the primary processes), in symbiotic connection with the primary caregiver. We have to endure demanding inner realities as well as the world of fluctuating external realities. Hopefully, the environment mother will help us manage this. In addition to learning to make communicative bridges via shared, consensual language with other humans, we are expected to set up a proper relationship to the broader object world, a position that, in psychoanalysis, hovers between Viveiros De Castro’s description of the Western modern injunction to purify the subject from the object, and Winnicott’s understanding of transitional space and its subjective-objects, where we never fully cleanse the world of our affect-laden ideas about it.

Many disappear from the scene of relationship through this epistemological framework. We do not play in contact-zones, or feel into entanglements, or consider material mediations of becoming. Instead, psychoanalysis insists that the outside, “real” world is best envisioned as a background against which analytic procedures and human dramas unfold. For the most part, this arrangement goes unexamined.⁶⁴³ What Viveiros De Castro calls the “ancient matrix of western

⁶⁴³ Juan Tubert-Oklander describes how a *Weltanschauung*—a conception of the world—underlies different cultures of psychoanalysis. He writes: “Freud only considered one of the two possible meanings of the *Weltanschauung*: that of an intellectual system that proposes a formal reconstruction of how things are, and how we should think about them. But there is still another meaning of the term, and a very important one; this refers to a rather indefinite and loose set of assumptions, beliefs, intuitions, values, habits, ideals, aspirations, shared by a community and largely unconscious to the individuals who have internalised them during socialisation” (Juan Tubert-Oklander, *The One and the Many: Selected Papers on Relational Psychoanalysis and Group Analysis*, Self-Published, 2013, 65). The *Weltanschauung* of relational psychoanalytic work is my focus here. By this I mean the unexamined relational predilections

metaphysics” and its predicates, (citing subject and object, humanity and animality, nature and culture, physical and moral,⁶⁴⁴) are well entrenched in this practice. This environment, how it is constructed in relation to the psychoanalytic subject and what this relation means for ecological thinking are the problems I pursue in what follows.

Winnicott’s oft-quoted phrase “going on being” refers to the sense of psychic continuity we gain through the nonintrusiveness of the environment mother and, later, through a therapeutic holding environment: “The holding environment therefore has as its main function the reduction to a minimum of impingements to which the infant must react with resultant annihilation of personal being.”⁶⁴⁵ While the annihilation of personal being is certainly a concern in therapeutic practice, the ways by which this model of two-minds-meeting precludes other transformative encounters is my concern. *Who* goes on being through this arrangement of relationship?

One troubling implication of this relational paradigm is that its working model of the subject is entirely mediated by human contact and human cultures. The subject is severely restricted in their sense of self, in how they perceive connection, in how they practice cohabitation.

Meanwhile, the rest of planetary existence is backgrounded in service of this human’s healthy development. The psychoanalytic body-mind and our ways of organizing selfhood are built on the assumption that our interactions (or intra-actions⁶⁴⁶), ought to be cordoned off from the world. *Ought* is the operative word here: the boundary, so far as it has materializing effects on what comes to matter, is always a morally burdened choice.

To be sure, the neonatal situation requires a caregiver. We’re utterly dependent on others for our survival when we’re born, as well as for our sense of personal continuity. Psychoanalysis trains its sights on the dynamics of parent and child as the crucial facilitating environment for coming to be and going on being: mother figures bear a great deal of responsibility here. Surely, though,

and preconceptions about the social and psychic world, which import the basic conventions and boundary projects of Western modern thought.

⁶⁴⁴ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 55.

⁶⁴⁵ Donald Winnicott, “The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 41, (1960), 591.

⁶⁴⁶ Haraway describes intra-action in this way: “Species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters” (Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 4).

this environment is not the only mediation of psychosomatic life that enables going on being. And, just as surely, in the intensity of environmental crises, we cannot expect a “minimum of impingement.”

Consider Klein’s treatment of apocalyptic thinking. In her view, a child’s “anxieties and phantasies about inner destruction and ego disintegration . . . are projected on to the external world and underlie the delusions of its destruction.” The end of the world, then, is a projection of an internal catastrophe, “for [the child’s] subjective world has come to an end since he has withdrawn his love from it.”⁶⁴⁷ One upshot of this formulation is that delusions of destruction come from inside an infantile mind. The Kleinian psychesoma has the capacity for Eros and Thanatos, which it directs at the world. Apocalyptic thinking is a projection of destructive impulses writ large, a case of misguided omnipotence. Withdrawing love from one’s world, psychically, is to shut down one’s sense of subjectivity. The world one withdraws from is rather small, from an object relations perspective. In Klein’s nursery, the morphing realities of the ecological “outside” have been obstructed from view, because the relationship that matters, the one that sets the human successfully on course, is that of parent and child. By and large, broader worlds of beings have been conceived as little more than backdrop for the metabolizing processes of two human minds being emotional together.

With destruction framed as an apocalyptic delusion rooted in the matrix of mother and baby, Klein offers little room to address progressing catastrophes on the outside. Winnicott, in turn, developed his metapsychology from Klein’s picture of infantile intrapsychic life. Infantile ruthlessness (hunger, aggression) must be tolerated by the early environment (again, usually the mother). The environment mother helps the infant move through an illusion of omnipotent gratification, as well as frustration and the breakdown of illusion, and on to object relationship. When mother survives the needs of the baby, that is, she participates well enough in the infant-parent interaction, she sets the stage for a livable inner world for the child. This sequence of infantile disillusionment (the environment mother is not forever satiating, and has her own agency), splitting (bad, frustrating breast versus good, satisfying breast) and then the move toward repair and healthy attachment with the wholeness of the maternal object (what Klein calls the *depressive position*) has been used as a way of understanding the human’s emotional position

⁶⁴⁷ Melanie Klein, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms,” 104.

with the “environment” more generally.⁶⁴⁸ This thinking is sometimes mobilized to try to address “climate anxiety,” unpacking the anxieties and defensive positions humans commonly take in the face of climate change.⁶⁴⁹

I want to complicate this application of Kleinian theory to ecological thought. Psychoanalytic environments are decidedly small, and the theory’s foundational humanist divisions prevent us from doing much beyond safely processing fear and guilt, achieving a “depressive position” by feeling regret for our destructiveness toward the “great beyond.” Its vision of “livable worlds” is also rather diminutive. My project is to step outside the analytic dyad in order make contact with the excessive materials that partake in collective relational fields. With healthy mental life seen as having access to a consistently nonintrusive holding environment, one wonders how the disturbance of climate change might alter the models of psychic life that psychoanalysis holds dear.

Containers and holding environments are unfairly distributed; a sense of continuity is not equally inherited. Ways of being held are irreparably ruptured by forces outside the home, such as the ecological-cultural destruction brought on by imperialism. In my therapeutic practice during the Covid-19 pandemic and during ongoing climate events, one mode of address, appropriate for those who have lived a relatively privileged and protected existence, has been naming dread, tolerating anxiety, grieving a loss of fantasized safety and “normalcy,” and working within an upended sense of day-to-day reality. Insofar as the dispensation of going on being is entirely and unjustly imbalanced, insofar as counting on “holding environments” is evidently unsound, our relational practices demand a metaphysics that doesn’t pledge fealty to the human family.

It’s not as if psychoanalysis denies the destruction unfolding outside a baby’s mind, and certainly fantasy life, too, can be amazingly destructive. What I call into question is how human subjectivity is protected within the enclosure of reparative intersubjective relationship. My point

⁶⁴⁸ See for example Catherine M. Roach, “The Unconscious, Aggression, and Mother Nature: A Feminist Psychoanalytic Approach to Ecological Theology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 13:1, Spring 1997.

⁶⁴⁹ See Joseph Dodds, “The Psychology of Climate Anxiety,” *BJPsych Bulletin*, 45, 2021.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8499625/>.

is not simply that an originally sound container is breaking down in our current age of climate calamity but that the container model has always cut out too much active entanglement.

Psychoanalysis can't adequately address the interweave of bodies, beings and processes in which we are enmeshed without recourse to pathologizing language. This means that, in theory and in practice, it runs the risk of rehashing dominating versions of reality and reductive relational modes, while prohibiting other intelligent embodiments and ways of knowing. My inquiry is about livable *shared worlds* that involve enlarged communities, and restructured modes of relationship, collectivity and attachment that are outliers to the narratives of relationality and selfhood that psychoanalysis holds dear. There are certainly other arrangements of the real that exceed the restrictions of psychoanalytic work. How psychoanalysis attends to those arrangements, or fails to do so, is my concern.

The underlying assumption that mental and emotional life plays out in an isolated sociocultural domain is, I argue, impossible to sustain. Any attribution of "healthy development" concerned with the vicissitudes of human kinship alone is meaningless. When psychoanalysis attempts to handle catastrophe by dreaming up reparative relationships between and within humans, it occludes a great deal of the mess we are in—the messes we are responsible for, as well as the potential fertility of those messes. This ethico-onto-epistemological mapping continues to be imposed on inner and outer worlds, confining our being-in-relation to a very narrow, monocultural conception of transformation and becoming.

In what follows, I attempt to argue this point by examining some key clinical concepts that function as boundary markers, or fences, between a construction of "humans" and the rest of the world. Infantile regression, states of symbiosis, schizoid characterology, perversion and fetishism are interrelated terms that tell a precautionary tale about how humans might fail at their own proper becoming. I consider how these categories work to situate the psychoanalytic subject in specific relational configurations, as well as warn us about other modes of encounter. In this sense, they are like teaching stories, or morality tales, about how we might get ourselves into trouble.

Along our journey to psychic maturity, we must learn to identify ourselves as a categorically individuated species who bonds within certain boundaries. As well, we have to sort out what is proper to the inside, what belongs outside, what counts as subject, what is an object. We learn

how divided categories are meant to guide our relating. These clinical concepts are salient for understanding how psychoanalysis has imagined (or failed to imagine) material worlds and how it monitors our participation with the “outside.”

Chapter Six, *Outsides*, discusses how psychoanalysis positions externality, a position that is increasingly difficult to hold during polycrises. Chapter Seven, *Perversity and Other Relational Mistakes*, lays out some clinical categories that govern human attachment. I indicate where bonds with more than humans are interpreted as fantasy versions of a more foundational human relationship. Chapter Eight, *How To Approach the Outsiders*, is a discussion of how psychoanalysis’s philosophical commitments prevent it from engaging beyond its enclosure. I introduce several vertices of thought—materialist, object-oriented, anthropological—in an effort to disrupt the narcissism of this theory of subjectivity. Chapter Nine, *Re-entangling*, looks at the embedded, material mediations of psychesomatic life in contrast to psychoanalysis’s transcendent, dreaming subject. Finally, in Chapter Ten, *Agential Dreaming*, I offer another history of psychic life via Freud’s early encounters with fish. Returning full circle to my prologue, a consideration of nervous systems thread *mind* back into the mycelial patterning of terrestrial life.

Bion writes that “thinking necessarily involves viewing reality from multiple vantage points. . . . Viewing reality from multiple vantage points allows each vertex (each way of viewing reality) to enter into a mutually mutative conversation with other ways of seeing/knowing/experiencing.”⁶⁵⁰ Mediums have taught me that mutative conversations aren’t generated by human minds alone. A consideration of material beings (via trees, dolls, lampreys, microorganisms and soil) lures the psychoanalytic subject out of a construction of “self,”⁶⁵¹ and its adoption of hegemonic Western

⁶⁵⁰ Ogden, “Bion’s Four Principles,” 17.

⁶⁵¹ Braidotti explains: “Psychoanalysis taught us that imaginary re-locations are complex, and as time-consuming as shedding an old skin. Moreover, changes of this qualitative kind happen more easily at the molecular or subjective level, and their translation into a public discourse and shared social experiences is a complex and risk-ridden affair” (“Interview with Rosi Braidotti,” in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, Open Humanities Press, 2012, 35). What I am proposing is a consideration of the material dimensions of these re-locations and to gesture at some reformulations of how the material and imaginary are mapped.

representations of reality, into a world of beings that are, as Braidotti puts it, in processes of “co-production with us,” in a “dynamic web of interconnections or hybrid contaminations . . . a radical non-purity.”⁶⁵² The idea of dangerous cross-contamination between subjects and objects, and the idealization of a particular kind of human containment, will be called into question.

Serres and his angelic-earthly fluxes—the elemental, spiritual, psychic and material—animate the fields in which I wander here. Like J, who sees trees as TVs for spirits, Serres’s tree is also a medium for the angelic realm. The angelic realm can shape-shift as well, taking terrestrial form. These elements are fluctuating, mobilizing and communicative. They live among things. They are promiscuous entities who, in contact with other entities, bring about novel messages, patterns, forms. This identity-bending, corpus-transforming, fence-crossing picture of matter and spirit defies the requirements of the psychoanalytic milieu, which depends on demarcating psychic insides from worldly outsides.

Asserting a dominating representation of “reality” and relationality has undermined other accounts of beings-and-becomings-in-the-world, accounts that might better help us along in our current predicaments. Instead of opening the field of relational realities in the making, what we will see in psychoanalysis is a symbolic sandbagging of domestic container spaces and anxiety about dehumanization.

6.2 Muddying the field

On the topic of sandbags (and anxiety), parts of this chapter were written at a time when the province colonially known as British Columbia declared a state of emergency. After unprecedented heat, the province’s Interior region burned for weeks. Forest habitats, desert habitats and mountain ecosystems, as well as people habitats, such as the town of Lytton, a three-hour drive from Vancouver, burned down, while ocean habitats heated up to the point that marine beings cooked in their shells. This was followed by an extraordinary (though, we are told, soon to become more ordinary) amount of November rainfall for the province, brought on by an “atmospheric river” (a cyclonic low-pressure system), which led to flooding, the destruction of homes and farmlands, the loss of livestock and the breaking and blocking of major highways by

⁶⁵² Rosi Braidotti, “Posthuman, All Too Human: Towards a New Process Ontology” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23, (2006), 199.

water and mudslides. While a forest can intercept groundwater, clear-cut logging and widespread fires have made the land vulnerable to surface runoff and erosion. On a trail through a rainforest in Tofino, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, a sign teaches the Tla-o-qui-aht Nation's name for trees: *sučas*—landholders. No, a landholder is not he who owns privatized land, but a being whose roots literally hold earth together.

Exposed earth, unheld, gives way in the rain. Not just earth, but vehicles are swept away, carried on the torrents of mud. Humans are trapped in cars en route. A sinkhole opens up in the middle of the road north of Nanaimo, also on Vancouver Island. A lake previously drained to create farmland in Abbotsford, on the mainland, creates conditions inviting massive flooding. Chickens and cows are drowned. Supply chains halted. Mud flows across water-repellant soil, now devoid of otherwise water-absorbing trees. Mud flows through houses, altering the terrain of “home” and our affective fantasies thereof. Material processes rupture the safety of domestic and civilized space, literally. There are entities that flow through homes, rupturing, in a concrete way, literal concrete.

Three months prior to this deluge, the ground was ruptured in another way, as the remains of victims of Indian residential schools were uncovered in Kamloops, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory, in the province's Interior. Efforts to uncover the unmarked burial sites on residential school grounds have been ongoing since the 1970s, two decades before the last residential school closed. In one instance, near Dunbow, in Southern Alberta, it was flooding of the Highwood River that unearthed the caskets and remains of seventy children, many of whom have yet to be identified. The 215 unmarked graves discovered near Kamloops spurred ongoing investigations into the many undocumented burial sites across Canada. The traumatizing, retraumatizing, tangible traces of the European colonial project continue to be unearthed.

Today, in this state of climate emergency, the highways that connect lands and carry goods are also broken. Local gas stations are empty. Freud's mission to build “an unshakeable bulwark” against “the black tide of mud of occultism” breaks down in another register.⁶⁵³ The ground upon which we build infrastructure and construct extractive economies is unstable. The ground, moreover, is the site of violent denial and repression.

⁶⁵³ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 155.

I have also written in the Canadian Prairies during another state of emergency: wildfire season, formerly known as summer. At sunrise, the sky is disquietingly fluorescent. By midday, the sun is a vague and barely discernible smudge of light in the brownish haze. We walk the dog over parched grass. Many comment on how it looks like a different planet with an altogether different atmosphere. The smoke that creates this sci-fi ambience is a floating assemblage of particulate matter. Some of it has gathered here from Lytton. An admixture of volatile organic compounds and gasses drift over the Rocky Mountains. The compounds left over from a burned forest are hydrophobic; these will contribute to British Columbia's November's disaster, the atmospheric river deluge.

I work as a therapist through these uneasy times. Events such as floods and fires, the unearthing of colonial histories and the ongoing re-creation of this colonial violence locally and across the planet begin to creep into my practice. Sustaining the illusion of a *holding environment* or an *environment mother* and her endless provisions is untenable in this situation. The beleaguered outer worlds (the *not-me*) are no longer outside our collective sentience.

An alternative to the fantasy of reparative human containment is sorely needed, but one that avoids another common fantasy that careens toward the inevitability of catastrophe. This would be equally unhelpful. "Yes, there are apocalypses already ongoing all around us," writes Natasha Myers:

The decimation of the Boreal forest to extract bitumen on stolen Indigenous land in Canada is one such apocalypse. But giving into apocalyptic thinking is itself a kind of exit strategy, an easy out. Ruin porn, including those all-too-compelling images of plants rupturing through abandoned buildings in Detroit and Chernobyl, thrives on this narrative of "a world without us." The earth will be better off without people, so we are told. Beware of such apocalyptic thinking. Anthropocenic thought catches you up in thrall of apocalypse and sets us all to work furtively dreaming the end of times.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁴ Natasha Myers, "How to Grow Livable Worlds: Ten (not-so-easy) steps for life in the Planthropocene," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, January 7 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/natasha-myers-how-to-grow-liveable-worlds:-ten-not-so-easy-step/11906548>.

Apocalyptic thinking can be a submission to a disastrous fate, a kind of nervous system shutdown in the face of overwhelming trauma. It can also show up in transcendence fantasies, undermining the fact that most of us (a few billionaires excluded) are stuck on this planet in a demanding and unstable situation. Environmental racism assures that the planet's inhabitants will face unequal timelines and degrees of stuckness: knowledge of destruction is unavoidable when your land, air and water sources are repositories for the hazardous waste of colonial industry, or the source of its capital gains.

Therapy has taught me that in a state of overwhelm we lose the capacity to bear a discomforting experience. We are more likely to react against it. We resort to whatever repetitive defences we have practiced. This plays out intellectually, emotionally, physically and always relationally. Psychoanalytic writing on climate anxiety diagnoses defensive patterns in humans grappling with climate anxiety,⁶⁵⁵ but I also detect them in the psychoanalytic handwringing over dehumanization that we see in the clinical literature. With rare exception,⁶⁵⁶ psychoanalysis shores up its humanist defences in the face of a mutative world.

6.3 A note on psychoanalytic approaches to environmental crises

In “Thinking Catastrophic Thoughts: A Traumatized Sensibility on a Hotter Planet,” Susan Kassouf admits there is a “prevailing anenvironmental orientation” in psychoanalysis. Drawing from Bion, she argues that we must learn to think catastrophically, to develop the capacity to mentalize ecological realities. Kassouf also expresses concern with Klein's formulation, where destruction is envisioned only in terms of infantile phantasy. Most clinicians understand “catastrophizing” to be a cognitive distortion, even cognitive behaviourists, who distance themselves from psychoanalysis.

⁶⁵⁵ See for example Sally Weintrobe, ed., *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Karnac, 2013.

⁶⁵⁶ See Patricia Clough's work on the biotechnical and machinic mediation of unconscious life, and the “originary technicity” of the subject. Patricia Clough, *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000. See also Katie Gentile “Destroying the ‘Human’ for the Survival of the World: A Proposal for a Temporally Dense Psychoanalytic Subject.”

To better address catastrophic times, Kassouf suggests we foster a “traumatized sensibility.” In practice, interpersonal trauma could provide guidance, a “path to awareness.” She writes:

*A traumatized sensibility has learned from experience that annihilation is thinkable. It can bear the tragic, the feeling of irreparable brokenness, or in environmental terms, that we have entered a time of post-sustainability. There is a living memory, or awareness, or ability to imagine the inevitability of repeated collapse, social and otherwise, violence and war. And yet, an ability to think and translate thinking into action in a state of precarity is maintained. The world is not assumed to be safe. . . . Just as annihilation is thinkable, despair is bearable. A traumatized sensibility does not resist but can tolerate despair, and continue being, thinking and acting in the world.*⁶⁵⁷

The eco-psychoanalytic subject must be able to bear difficult feelings. Though ostensibly invested in acknowledging reality beyond the infant-mother bond, Kassouf’s traumatized sensibility is still directed at human extinction: “At present, the real external world confronts us—not with frustration or no-breast—but with a sixth extinction, a catastrophe—not no mother, but possibly no human species.”⁶⁵⁸ Why the tragedy Kassouf names must be species specific is one question that comes to mind. Another question I pursue here is how the underlying metaphysical assumptions embedded in psychoanalysis might make it difficult to think otherwise.

I share Kassouf’s concerns regarding a person’s capacity to hold traumatic experience (my clinical work revolves around this very problem). I also trouble myself with how two minds in a therapeutic setting might touch on more-than-human environmental breakdowns. (This has been a prevailing difficulty during pandemic therapy, not to mention doing therapeutic work during genocidal and ecocidal disasters: How do I approach a network of interlocking biological-economic-social-ideological-technological-existential crises through an interpretive framework entrenched in historical interpersonal trauma? My answer, quite simply: I don’t).

⁶⁵⁷ Susan Kassouf, “Thinking Catastrophic Thoughts: A Traumatized Sensibility on a Hotter Planet,” *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 82, 2002,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8853093/>. Emphasis in the original .

⁶⁵⁸ Kassouf, “Thinking Catastrophic Thoughts.”

I do align myself with Kassouf's call to acknowledge the vulnerable materiality of bodies embedded and enmeshed with other bodies, and to admit that the very notion of a "holding environment" is ruptured. But, here, I want to do something unconventional with relational work. Psychoanalysis not only about fostering psychic vessels that can think-feel our shared and personal conditions; it is also *involved* in the creation and destruction of these conditions through its theories of relationship and practices of care. The work that needs doing is not simply to adjust ourselves (insides) to reality (externals), like a disastrous version of reality testing, but rather to consider how the whole edifice of inside/outside and subject/object might be differently imagined and inhabited.

Kassouf urges us to cultivate "a more livable state of permeability to reality."⁶⁵⁹ To this end, I want to consider eccentric repatternings, heterogeneous realities and queer relationalities that psychoanalysis may not be able to incorporate without some degree of conceptual self-obliteration. Bionian work emphasizes that we need to learn from experience. The field of experience is diminished when most relata are cast as the scenic backdrop of unfolding human stories, rendered mute.

My sensibility is not only traumatic, not only about coping with dread and despair, not only about mourning histories—it is playfully irreverent. Perverse, even. I argue that psychoanalysis could stand to loosen up and let go of its limiting reality principle. I reject the charge that doing so would amount to a manic flight from difficulty, through the realms of magical thinking (though some circles may find me guilty as charged). The importing and reinforcing of modern metaphysical boundaries has rendered psychoanalysis dangerously ineffectual for thinking through material conditions, or for offering any alternative to how we might cohabit with more-than-human beings. I am looking for other options, for thinking-feeling and interlacing with other creatures of culture.⁶⁶⁰ Playing outside the holding environment I was taught to protect, and acknowledging that the fantasy of being securely held is untenable, is an attempt to step outside the impasses of this practice.

⁶⁵⁹ Kassouf, "Thinking Catastrophic Thoughts."

⁶⁶⁰ I borrow the term *creatures of culture* from Graham Harvey: "In this line of thought, all of us living beings are culture-creatures, we're intelligent, we act with purpose, we communicate and take notice, we participate in a world of multiple purposes" (Harvey, *Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, 139).

“There is no contract involved in the primary relationships between human organisms,” writes Levin, continuing:

The notion that the necessary organization which makes mind and world possible consists of something that sets human existence apart from a sort of predifferentiated nature is part and parcel of the Platonic-Cartesian heritage that informs the whole enterprise of modernist epistemology.⁶⁶¹

Barad might put it this way: there is nothing given in advance of our entanglement. We are in a situation of continual reworking and repatterning, undoing what is, what has been and what might be. This might sound familiar to the psychoanalyst. However, what I describe here is not simply a psychic reworking and reconfiguration of the human unconscious—it involves a material reworking with/in the multiplicities that the construction of the subject excludes. Psychoanalysis has managed to cut out the preponderance of planetary entities from its framework, as though an awareness of more-than-humans is irrelevant to the work of relational transformation. This extraordinarily small morphological field dematerializes the world while problematizing interconnection with it. Psychoanalytic discourses of perversion tell us so.

The construction of perversion demonstrates the ongoing boundary work that psychoanalysis must perform to maintain its figure of the subject as ontologically distinct from not-humans. It indicates the edge of psychoanalysis’s capacity, or willingness, to theorize more-than-human contact. This edge—or *hedge*—is a divisive cut whose breach is a violation: the wilderness threatens the hard-won domain of human subjectivity. As I hope to demonstrate, despite the cutting-apart that psychoanalysis enacts, it can’t extricate itself from a world replete with beings who are intent on cutting-together in myriad ways. Mushrooms, as my prologue proposes, are co-writers of this dissertation. In the following chapters, marriages are performed between humans and walls, a synthetic doll almost turns an analyst on, and the body of a fish inaugurates a paradigm-shifting theory of mind.

I begin the following chapter, *Perversity and Other Relational Mistakes*, with dendrophilia. Tree love challenges psychoanalysis’s conventional boundaries—cutting across (rather than between) human dwellings and forest communities. Perhaps we’ll train our attention on the dendrophilic

⁶⁶¹ Levin, *Essay on the Symbolic Process*, 150.

person's eccentric inner life and put our minds to interpreting her relational orientation, as psychoanalysts have done for centuries. It might also be possible to extend our curiosity toward her objects of love.

7 PERVERSITY AND OTHER RELATIONAL MISTAKES

7.1 Dendrophilia

Dendrophilia: love of trees. In her course at the New School of the Anthropocene, “Learning to be Better Lovers: Forest Thinking in a Forest City,” artist Katie Holten proposes that “we can’t love something until we name it.”⁶⁶² She offers an invitation: “What other ways can we give voice to the non-human?”⁶⁶³ Holten, for her part, created “tree alphabets” for Ireland and New York City, which pair a local tree to each letter of the alphabet, envisioning these works as a way to “reforest our imaginations.”⁶⁶⁴ Holten wants to imagine ways to hold these beings in mind. As in Haraway’s work on companion species, here love is held as a kind of ethical regard across difference, an invitation to be curious about what is not-me: “Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning.”⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶² Naming, of course, is not only a way to know and love, and it can also be a gesture of hegemonic political power. Holten’s approach to naming is to hold the specificity of trees in mind as a loving act. The colonial expansion of botanical science and empire-driven “bioprospecting” presents another angle on the power to name, classify and taxonomize. Identification of plants allowed for profit through the expanded exploitation of land. See, for example, Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan eds., *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*, U Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

⁶⁶³ Katie Holten, “Learning to be Better Lovers: Forest Thinking in a Forest City,” *New School of the Anthropocene*, www.nsota.net/learning-to-be-better-lovers-forest-thinking-in-a-forest-city.

⁶⁶⁴ Amy Brady, “An(other) Interview with Artist Katie Holten,” *Artists and Climate Change*, July 5, 2021. <https://artistsandclimatechange.com/2021/07/05/another-interview-with-artist-katie-holten/>.

⁶⁶⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 70. Joanna Zylinska takes issue with Haraway’s approach to interspecies kinship, suggesting that the affective investments of animal studies might do well with “a moment of hesitation” before imposing a moral framework on our involvement with others. She writes, “the human is presented with an ethical task of having to make decisions, always in an uncertain terrain, about life, in all its different incarnations and enactments.” As well, she argues that the prescription of an “attitude” with regard to animals and other not-human beings (love, respect, curiosity) imports a particularly human notion of relational goodness into its ethics. As she writes, a “non-normative, technics-aware bioethics thus needs to seriously consider the polyvalent relations of co-evolution and co-emergence. However, it must also carry a visible trace of reflection on the very process of its creation:

Of course, this is only one way we might experience or classify “love.” We know, etymologically, that the brotherly love and affection of *philia* can take on the qualities of obsession.

Paraphilia: a powerful, persistent interest in atypical objects (“other than sexual interest in genital stimulation or preparatory fondling with phenotypically normal, physically mature, consenting human partners”⁶⁶⁶).

According to the *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, “[t]he concept of perversion is a recent one, though the word has been in use since the beginning of the third century, when it meant ‘to invert’ or ‘to make some-thing go wrong.’”⁶⁶⁷

from the human vantage point of language, philosophy, and culture” (Joanna Zylińska, “Bioethics Otherwise, or, How to Live with Machines, Humans, and Other Animals,” in *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change. Vol 1*, Open Humanities Press, 2009, 220). Keeping this ethical pause in mind, I nevertheless want to try to complicate the categorical status of human-only culture that Zylińska retains.

⁶⁶⁶ Claudia Reardon, “Paraphilic Disorders,” *MedScape*, <https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/291419-overview>.

⁶⁶⁷ Luiz Eduardo Prado De Oliveira, “Perversion (Metapsychological Approach),” *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 1257. Drawing from Michel Foucault, Tim Dean traces how this theological term was imported into psychological fields. For sexual deviation to become a nosological entity, it was necessary to use the concept of *instinct*, as it would allow pathology to be resituated “inside” a person when disorderly sexual behaviour could not be linked to an organic, anatomical cause. Perverse manifestations were not simply emanations of an organ (genitals, brains) but linked to the function of an analogous sexual *instinct*. As such, “sexual pathology became explicable via reference to something inside a person that could not be seen, something that no autopsy or physical examination would reveal. It was by means of this psychologizing of sex that what previously had been considered in terms of immoral or unlawful acts came to be regarded in terms of personhood; hence ‘the pervert’ as a clinical and characterological type” (Tim Dean, “The Frozen Countenance of Perversion,” *Parallax*, 14:2, 2008, 98).

Dean points out that Foucault uses *sexuality* and *perversion* almost synonymously, and argues that modern society is directly perverse in its multiplication of sexualities. He cites Foucault: “These polymorphous conducts were actually extracted from people’s bodies and from their pleasures; or rather, they were solidified in them; they were drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by

A dendrophilic love, by definition, veers toward the perverse.⁶⁶⁸ Classified as a paraphilia, erotic interest in trees is a deviation from a recommended path.⁶⁶⁹ The *DSM* now notes that a paraphilia

multifarious power devices” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol 1, trans Robert Hurley, Random House, 1978, 48). Techniques such as *confession*, and later *clinical listening*, are understood to produce perversions, creating a multiplicity of newly visible and confessable sexualities. Formulating sexual perversion is a modern adaptation of the technique of Catholic confession through the rubric of Western medicalization, whereby “clinical listening” has created a “political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex” in the spirit of “of analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification, of quantitative or causal studies” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol 1, 23-24).

⁶⁶⁸ Joseph Bristow writes: “Given the overwhelming quantities of evidence that [Richard von] Krafft-Ebing . . . produces on the topic of sexual perversion, *Psychopathia Sexualis* makes the distinct impression that the highest form of heterosexual love is menaced on all sides by an epidemic of perverse sexual behaviors” (Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality*, Routledge, 1997, 29). The early sexologists understood a natural function of instinct to be procreation. Though the taboos around homosexuality and transgender identities were challenged by the discipline of sexology in the nineteenth century, with many sexologists affiliated with gay rights movements, the notion of an “inverted” or “antipathetic instinct” became entrenched. As Bristow writes, “Rather than advance the idea that Western society developed customs and practices that emerged from specific historical conditions, these writers often believed that their culture provided a wholly intelligible map for interpreting human nature. To this end, they deployed devices that were thought to provide transparent access to the indisputably natural state of sexuality” (Bristow, *Sexuality*, 18). For example, explaining sex via the popular social Darwinist framework of “survival of the fittest” made reproductive aims a particularly important touchstone in early sexological thought. And because sexologists “leant heavily on medical science, it had a marked tendency to codify certain sexual behaviours as categories of disease” (Bristow, *Sexuality*, 6). Perversion become an intelligible medical category in a climate of burgeoning taxonomies of sexual types and forms. See also: Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to the Antipathetic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-forensic Study*, Forgotten Books, 2012, originally published 1894.

⁶⁶⁹ The charge that certain sexual behaviours might constitute “acts against nature” is undercut by a theory of the psychic subject that warps the notion of natural instinct through adding the complexifying factors of drive and fantasy life. For the polymorphously perverse Freudian child, coming into mature sexuality is highly demanding. Libido is sent on an obstacle course through the unconscious. Identifications and complexes assail the Freudian child on their way to adulthood: the anxiety around sexual difference, the

is a disorder only if it causes distress to self and other—which opens up a number of difficult questions.⁶⁷⁰ A paraphilia involves sexual feelings toward an atypical object but, more precisely, an “inanimate object.” Straight away, not only do we have a diagnostic category that arbitrates right relationship with trees, it also does work on how trees are meant to be understood.

Certainly, they are entities of the not-human kind and, apparently, without animacy.

Understanding, Morton suggests, is only one way to access others. Using the language of *access mode*, they remind us of the myriad ways beings may access other beings.⁶⁷¹ Objects also have “access modes,” ways of signalling and registering others, “which means dropping the idea that (human) thought is the top access mode and holding that brushing against, licking or irradiating are also access modes as valid (or as invalid) as thinking.”⁶⁷² Mushrooms might access a tree through the exploratory nature of their hyphal tips. A tree may access a mycelia network by sending it electrical signals, or water, or a mineral. A tree’s leafy canopy may restrain itself from physically accessing the leaves of another tree’s canopy in the phenomenon of crown shyness. Some hypothesize that crown shyness is a result of *too much* sensitive access between trees.

interpretation of the primal scene, the difficult negotiations between id and ego, the complicated identifications with mom and dad, and the physiological intensity that erupts in phantasy. Since Freud, genital, reproductive aims alone no longer usher the child into adult sexuality. The erotic drive and where it attaches itself is more arbitrary than sexologists might have admitted. Despite Freud’s scrambling of instinctual aim, and his dismissal of the prevailing view on heterosexual intercourse, the construction and classification of perverts persisted and persists. The very notion of the *perverse* as a psychic characteristic retains the principle that human passions come to be organized (be it by sociocultural inculcation, force of drive, or a combination thereof) and directed along a particular route. Identifying and differentiating between sexual paths, where precisely they are meant to go and where they are off course, is an ongoing, iterative performance in psychoanalysis.

⁶⁷⁰ Notably, the *DSM* changed “paraphilias” to “paraphilic disorders,” with only the latter signifying a mental disorder. This was purportedly an attempt to normalize “non-genitally-oriented” sexual practice. The term *neosexuality* is also commonly used in place of *perversion*, which is an attempt to depathologize and recode sexualities, given a broad range of sexual responses to others.

⁶⁷¹ Morton, *Humankind*, 86.

⁶⁷² Morton, *Humankind*, 37.

Dendrophilia is an intricate knot of a word, with many threads to follow. It opens an ethical question about how we know and how we love, what forms of knowledge and love we might aim at others, and how we access one another. It is a site where bodies and fantasies are stirred by object relatedness. Dendrophilia also teaches us about perversion. In the psychoanalytic mode, Muriel Dimen writes of

the reproductive heterosexuality of maturity in which sexual health is defined as the release of semen into the vagina. But we know that sex was and remains far more multifaceted than that, and we are embarrassed by our own multiplicity, which, in cultural and psychoanalytic theory, turns out to consist of deviations.⁶⁷³

Dimen argues that sexuality can't be reduced to specific relational forms: "there is more than heaven and earth than is dreamt of in normativity."⁶⁷⁴ Freudian instincts circulate independently and excessively—polymorphously, without a necessary object, without an essential aim. Tim Dean writes, "If the instinct has no natural or preordained function, then there is nothing to pervert."⁶⁷⁵

But so far as perversion can indicate a tendency toward aggression, objectification and coercive use of others, we are given to understand that libidinal paths can be aggressively "eccentric," to the point of violence. Robert Stoller, for example, defines perversion as "the erotic form of hatred."⁶⁷⁶ Perversion, from this point of view, might involve imposing a proclivity on another without consent.

Perhaps we could see this mode of perversity as playing out with old-growth trees, where these dehumanized "objects" are felled and chopped and shipped to other continents as fuel to burn. As a paraphilia, however, dendrophilia also signals how we know (understand, sort, parse, distinguish, categorize) "objects," as distinguished from human subjects. This psychopathological category itself is a form of violence, an epistemic imposition that not only

⁶⁷³ Muriel Dimen, "Sexuality and Suffering, Or the Eew! Factor," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 6:1, (2005), 11.

⁶⁷⁴ Stephen Hartman, "Muriel Dimen: Field Theorist," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 18:2, (2017), 134.

⁶⁷⁵ Dean, "The Frozen Countenance of Perversion," 97.

⁶⁷⁶ Robert Stoller, *Perversion: The erotic form of hatred*, Pantheon, 1975.

places a value judgment on the dendrophile in question but also dismisses the agential power of trees and the vastly entangled others in their habitats. The tree's contribution to this relationship is simply not worthy of serious consideration. After all, it is we humans who fantasize, at times anthropomorphically.

Deviating from the psychoanalytic path, we may discover that not-humans, as well as objects circumscribed by the Western modern as “fetish objects,” are corporeal selves from—and with—another point of view. Morton would insist that objects emit a sensuality, exceeding how we understand them or “use” them. More-than-humans might be grasped in their excessive sensuality and sentience. Dogs dream⁶⁷⁷ and communicate.⁶⁷⁸ Trees transmit messages along networks of entangled root and mycelium links;⁶⁷⁹ like psychic mediums, they have a felt sense of the vibratory.⁶⁸⁰ Jellyfish use a kind of nonlocal telepathy.⁶⁸¹ Concrete entities—things—gather in networks that construct our worlds.⁶⁸² Beings such as these perform a liveliness that intervenes in our own performances and arrangements of reality.

Barad and Kirby help to inform—or deform—my reading of the psychoanalytic pervert and their misguided modes of relating. Barad reminds us that what we identify as “nature” is replete with “queer critters” committing so-called acts against nature.⁶⁸³ The notion of a “natural,” species-specific libido does not hold in symbiotic relational fields: we will see this in Section 36,

⁶⁷⁷ Eduardo Kohn, “How Dogs Dream: Amazonian natures and the politics of transpersonal engagement,” *American Ethnologist*, 34:1, 2007.

⁶⁷⁸ See, for example, the They Can Talk animal cognition experiments through the Comparative Cognition Lab at the University of California, San Diego. One research project involves domesticated animals who learn to communicate with “talking buttons,” a board of buttons with symbols that the animal can press with a paw to play pre-recorded words. See <https://cclab.ucsd.edu/>

⁶⁷⁹ Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, Allen Lane, 2021.

⁶⁸⁰ “The plants also discriminated between the vibrations caused by chewing and those caused by wind or insect song. Plants thus respond to herbivore-generated vibrations in a selective and ecologically meaningful way” (Heidi Appel, “Plants respond to leaf vibrations caused by insect herbivore chewing” *Oecologia*, 175, 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4102826/>).

⁶⁸¹ Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity.”

⁶⁸² Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Economy of Things*, Duke UP, 2010.

⁶⁸³ Barad, *Nature’s Queer Performativity*.

Symbiosis, with Lynn Margulis's creatures, who are far-reaching in their styles of mating.⁶⁸⁴ As if these creaturely sexual proclivities weren't weird enough, "queer critters" also operate outside the conventional frameworks of causality and space-time. For example, Kirby and Barad work with the stingray, a "queer co-worker" with "uncanny communicative abilities." These beings are oceanic channels, who are

able to participate when a message which has yet to arrive, will have been addressed to them, for they unlock themselves in readiness. It is as if the identity and behavior of any *one* observable receptor cell is somehow stretched, or disseminated, in a space/time enfolding; as if they are located here, and also there at the same time.⁶⁸⁵

The ontology of these beings is unsettled and unsettling: "Their very 'species being,' as it were, makes explicit the queering of 'identity' and 'relationality.' . . . To speak of 'queer critters' is to cut across the cuts that define these terms."⁶⁸⁶

What do these uncanny communicative habits have to do with perversion? As a clinical category, "perversion" protects a number of divisions. Much hinges on ascertaining who-what gets to be subject (human) and who-what is object (not-human). Much is at stake in the developmental journey from symbiotic relationality toward human identity. Much also hinges on the differentiation between nature and culture, and who-what belongs where. Enacting and upholding these divisions seems to tie us up in conceptual knots. Barad writes:

What kinds of acts against nature inspire moral outrage? Queer pleasures for sure, even some forms of heterosexual sex, and an assortment of other human practices. Clearly, the nature/culture divide is at issue and at stake, but the logic that tries to hold it in place is quite perverse. On one hand, it is clear that humans are understood to be the actors, the enactors of these "acts against nature." The sense of exteriority is absolute: the crime is against Nature herself, against all that is natural. Nature is the victim, the victimized, the wronged. At the same time, humans who commit "acts against nature" are said to be

⁶⁸⁴ Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What is Sex*, Simon and Schuster, 1988.

⁶⁸⁵ Vicky Kirby, "Quantum Anthropologies", in Laurence Simmons ed., *Derrida Downunder*, (Dunmore Press, 2001), 59.

⁶⁸⁶ Barad, *Nature's Queer Performativity*, 33.

acting like animals. In other words, the “perpetrator” is seen as damaging Nature from the outside, yet at the same time is reviled for becoming part of Nature.⁶⁸⁷

These logics are complicated by the creatures that Kirby and Barad mobilize in their work. Who-what comes to be is an ongoing production, “the materializing effects of boundary-making practices.”⁶⁸⁸ Importantly, it is not only already-separated-out humans who project their cultural myths and constructs upon “nature.” Queer critters are also engaged in this meshwork, in the “writing” practices of a symbiotic real.⁶⁸⁹

In her materialization of deconstruction, Kirby upholds a “text” that is at once grammatological and biological, cultural and natural. Akin to Barad’s quantum entanglements, this text is a “unified field” of “operational differentiations.”⁶⁹⁰

The underlying assumption that we usually work with, as Kirby describes it, involves an “inarticulate outside”: a background that naturally lacks the intelligence of us humans. She explains: “This representation might be judged unfair, for it is not so hard to acknowledge that Nature, safely contained within inverted commas of course, may well babble.”⁶⁹¹ So, sure, nature might communicate, but we are cut off from understanding, prohibited from even trying (this would be tantamount to animism). Nature is the “pre-symbolic” (read: primitive, infantile) babbling out of which we have evolved.

The patterning of human nature, when we begin to look closely, is a far more complex interweave of not-me materials, forces and significations than we are used to allowing.

What Kirby calls the “queer entanglements of being human”⁶⁹² indicates where the sphere of human psychodynamics gives way to all sorts of biological, material processes, which are in turn woven into imaginations, fantasies. As I explore below, though psychoanalysis has

⁶⁸⁷ Barad, *Nature’s Queer Performativity*, 30.

⁶⁸⁸ Barad, *Nature’s Queer Performativity*, 31.

⁶⁸⁹ I borrow this term from Morton and elaborate on psychoanalysis’s relationship with symbiosis in what follows. (Morton, *Humankind*, 18).

⁶⁹⁰ Morton, *Humankind*, 67.

⁶⁹¹ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 48.

⁶⁹² Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 93.

depathologized certain queer sexualities, the normative route still requires we protect the primacy of human nature, our identifications, our “bonds of love”⁶⁹³ in separation from essentially everything else. Kirby’s chiasmic thinking undercuts the notion of a relational psychesoma that naturally moves in a particular direction. It also notes where those marginalized from psychic life are relational participants in the very morphology of whatever the human might be.

A forest is one environment, a transitional environment, with/in which we might experiment with enlarged commitments to more elaborate and diverse communities. It is, as Haraway teaches, material and it is semiotic—not simply in the sense that we humans construct stories about it (though we certainly do). A forest is a communicative, relational system that eschews the internal setting of psychoanalysis and its claim to human-only access modes. In contrast to the mesh of dynamic interrelations in the woods, the object relationships that analytic therapeutics adjudicate come to seem depressingly, dangerously reductive.

7.2 Crooked paths: On misdirection and misunderstanding

I spend a lot of time in the woods on the edge of the ocean here in Coast Salish territory. My own relational instincts follow a dendrophilic bent. At times, I simply prefer the company of a forest. East Sooke is one community that has seduced me into its web of relations. Arbutus and stonecrop on the cliffs. Nootka rose and nettle along the trails. Douglas fir was named after a Scottish botanist, but of course all these beings have been known and named differently. In Halkomelem, these trees are known as sleyuhp (Downriver name) and c’sey’ (Island name).⁶⁹⁴ Close to the coastline, these trees are draped in usnea. Usnea, incidentally, is a stable symbiosis of fungi and green algae. The tree does not provide nutrients for this symbiont—it just offers a place to hang and photosynthesize.

On these walks, I am a co-creator and co-destroyer of worlds. Leaning over a leopard slug to take a picture on my phone, their eyes stalks withdraw from me. I am a gigantic technological intrusion. I am also dwarfed by the mesh of a rainforest. I am a pollinator, a spore carrier, a meal,

⁶⁹³ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, Knopf, 2013.

⁶⁹⁴ “Douglas Fir” *UVIC Map Shop*, <https://mapping.uvic.ca/section/douglas-fir>.

a threat, an oblivious breaker of spiderwebs. Sitting on rocks, looking for whales and sea lions, I am an accelerator of mineral erosion. Gratefully, this place pulls my awareness out of a preoccupied, overthinking “inside.” Being here is an inside-out and outside-in experience. It is not necessary to draw lines here. This is a shared sensory encounter. My psychic and somatic tentacles feel into this environment, drawing in nourishment (sea anemones are a good image for this access mode, and the “brooding anemone” a particularly poetic one). I am also sensed as I go. Ravens click when I pass. When there are cougar sightings, I’m encouraged to carry a stick. I’ve been advised that they will see me long before I see them.

Irigaray captures her own dendrophilic bent this way:

The combination of the sensible qualities of the flower gathers me, thanks to an attention they awaken at various levels, and, imperceptibly, I am brought from concentration to contemplation. If I take time to live such a state, it can be converted into a sort of ecstasy, which results from a culmination of energy.⁶⁹⁵

In exile from her philosophical and psychoanalytic milieu, Irigaray heads to the woods, to cultivate an alternate manner of sensing and being outside her tradition. The path she follows there is “through vegetal being.” The flower, guru-like, initiates a transformative process for Irigaray.

Conventionally, *perversion* means we have made an error in our sense of direction. It is at once a misperception of the order of things and a misdirection of our drive. We misread the map, our aim is amiss and we’ve arrived at the wrong object. The religious etymology of perversion suggests the notion of turning away, taking the wrong path, distorting the Truth. This shows up again in Oedipal analyses when perversion becomes “an attack on truth and on the law.”⁶⁹⁶

When perversion is indicated in the relational clinic, it is most often understood through the rubric of dehumanization. It describes a form of object relatedness where one partner disavows

⁶⁹⁵ Irigaray, *Through Vegetal Being*, 47.

⁶⁹⁶ Rafael Lopez-Corvo, “Internal and external geography of The Oedipus Complex,” *International Psychoanalytic Association* 2014., https://www.ipa.world/IPA/IPA_Docs.

the vulnerability or the agency of the other.⁶⁹⁷ Thus, perversion as a clinical category tells us something about who gets to be envisioned as human, who is therefore privy to love and safe connection and who should be safeguarded from reductive, inhumane objectification.

Perverse symptomology is no longer linked exclusively to sexual behaviour; a perverse relational mode may be conspicuously erotic, but not necessarily so. Instead, the analyst might identify an underlying quality of relationship whereby others are rendered manageable through objectification. Perversion encompasses forms and fantasies of bonding that attempt to override recognition of the other's subjectivity in some way; perverse operations anxiously shore up the self by objectifying the other. It is a retreat from "true" relationality. There is often hatred in this bond, and always negotiations with power. Ruth Stein's language is markedly material when she describes the toxic expression of perversion:

[F]ollowing Melanie Klein and object-relational thinking, we know that if and when destructiveness, hate, and shame cannot be encompassed within the erotic and be expressed libidinally, they may spill over and dangerously pollute our life's surround with lethal, disgusting, smelly, thick black oil.⁶⁹⁸

The ethical form of bonding from which one may stray is, we are to understand, proper to the human:

Perversion is a dodging and outwitting of the human need for intimacy, love, for being recognized and excited; it is the scorning of the moral imperative of coming face to face with another human being's depth and unfathomable nature, which becomes palpable when one is in touch with one's longing for the "inside" of the other, sexually or

⁶⁹⁷ Addressing the question of how we come to access another person as a human is one of psychoanalysis's ethical commitments. Jessica Benjamin's "Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness" tracks the maturational process by which we can come into an experience of mutual recognition with another person. Benjamin examines the relational impasse of "doer and done to," a sort of sadomasochistic dance where "there appear to be only two choices: either submission or resistance to the other's demand" (Benjamin, "Beyond Doer and Done To", 9).

⁶⁹⁸ Ruth Stein, "Skimming the Milk, Cajoling the Soul—Embodiment and Obscenity in Sexuality: Commentary on Muriel Dimen's Paper," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*. 6: 2005), 20.

otherwise. Perversion is the active replacement of intimacy by a sexualized, enticing “false love.”⁶⁹⁹

So, if the contemporary pervert has “made something go wrong,” it is their failure to correctly recognize humanity and desire it accordingly. The pervert relates to people as though they are not human, or the pervert forms paraphilic relations to not-humans rather than safeguarding their affection for humans. They objectify and dehumanize the wrong category, and they have turned away from human(e) connection. The violation here is a category mistake.

Stein goes on to cite a lack of true curiosity about the other: the “absence of a sense of enigma and wonderment.”⁷⁰⁰ As a defensive stance, perversion enacts a fantasy of mastery. It is an effort to dodge the terror of dependency, a denial of interrelationship.⁷⁰¹

Once again, through diagnostic classification, we are at a disputed border between psychic life and the realities beyond it. The border crosser who develops some kind of intimacy with the “outside” is on a crooked path. They are also, strikingly, terrified of dependency and interrelationship—with humans. Meanwhile, those who have “penetrated into the forests to clear them and to degrade them progressively into ‘resources,’ the armoured conquerors [who] also went beyond the horizon, because there was something they wanted, because strange lands

⁶⁹⁹ Ruth Stein, “Why Perversion: ‘False Love’ and the perverse pact,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 86, (2005), 782.

⁷⁰⁰ Stein, “Why Perversion,” 782.

⁷⁰¹ Levin argues that rigidity within psychotherapeutic models are themselves a form of perversion, when “technique” is employed for “defensive purposes.” The rationality and neutrality of correctly applying technique in relational situations can land cruelly. Containment methodologies can be used in this way. Levin suggests how “‘containment’ in psychoanalysis is more like the euphemistic jargon of the U.S. military command during the Vietnam War—the enemy must be ‘contained.’ Whatever we may claim rhetorically, this connotation of containing in order to kill or neutralize, or eventually ‘integrate’ the patient with the powers that be, is the operationally predominant sense of ‘containment’ in psychoanalysis. We get very nervous when the patient is thought to be ‘acting out.’” (Charles Levin, “Bad Faith and Complex Kindness: Psychoanalytic Technique as a Confusion of Tongues,” *Sándor Ferenczi Conference*, McGill University, 2015. Shared in personal communication.)

promised them loot,”⁷⁰² also participate in an intimate encounter, albeit one of violence and degradation. This perversely exploitative stance then becomes the facilitating backdrop against which our emotional lives are lived out, a rationalized dehumanization of mere matter. But at least we have managed to individuate!

Psychoanalysis is itself implicitly guided by a perverse fantasy of species narcissism and separation; a *severing*, as Morton puts it.⁷⁰³ This fantasy arbitrates who-what is relatable and what forms of relationality are appropriate, who-what to humanize and who-what to dehumanize. (Landing the title of “human” is an honour in this schema, and very few will receive its dispensations). This version of human exceptionalism is a well-buttressed (mis)understanding that allows us people to forget there are other presences/absences involved in our very (de)composition, and also that there are many who are not as directly involved with us but exist nevertheless. Further, this version of human exceptionalism separates its own “straight” processes from an infinitely polymorphing field of contact. Barad describes polymorphous perversity as fundamental to materiality:

Every level of touch . . . is itself touched by all possible others. Hence, self-touching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self. Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is. Polymorphous perversity raised to an infinite power: talk about a queer intimacy!”⁷⁰⁴

“Violence and erotics are inside each other”⁷⁰⁵ in this haptic reading of quantum field theory. Perversity unfolds in an entangled field of co-creative/destructive affiliations that include infinite bodies and things.

⁷⁰² Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 92.

⁷⁰³ Morton, *Humankind*, 42.

⁷⁰⁴ Karen Barad, “When two hands touch, how close are they? On touching the inhuman that therefore I am,” in *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality*, eds. Kerstin Stakemeier & Suzanne Witzgall, (Diaphanes, 2017, www.diaphanes.de/titel/on-touching-the-inhumanthat-therefore-i-am-v1-1-3075) 5-6

⁷⁰⁵ Karen Barad, “On Touching: The Alterity Within,” *Hold Me Now: Feel and Touch in an Unreal World* Conference, <https://www.are.na/block/4170739>.

Psychoanalysis has an uncomfortable relationship to such closeness. With ambivalence haunting our relationships, thanks to Klein's elaboration of hateful states, not to mention Freud's death drive, we do not rest easily within our entanglements. Our propensity to form libidinal links and to destroy them with equal passion makes tricky work out of intimacy. Thus, arriving at intersubjectivity requires that we learn a bit of restraint. The psychoanalytic rubric of perversion functions as an interdiction between bodies.

And yet the human exceptionalism that runs through this practice not only has provided philosophical justification for all kinds of perverse modes of extractive colonialism but also has made it difficult—even pathological—to consider the ways we interface and identify with, internalize, incorporate and otherwise develop intimacy with beings beyond its inner kingdom of human love. To the extent that psychoanalysis puts its mind to other-than-humans, or “externals,” it is certainly possible to relate to them incorrectly. There is, doctrinally, a singularity to “outside reality” (as in “reality testing”), rather than an admission of a variety of reals created and destroyed by a variety of beings in intimate relation. As Barad puts it, human exceptionalism “undermines attempts to think and grow ecologies of difference that have a chance of flourishing.”⁷⁰⁶

The perverse violence described in the psychoanalytic literature gives me pause when I encounter the more affirmative visions of not-human couplings put forward by Deleuzian thinkers such as Braidotti. Braidotti's call is to deterritorialize structurations of desire and subjectivity, through the affective, nomadic body. The vital materiality of the body is capable of transcending the identities and identifications that fix the subject: there are no metaphysically permanent identities here, and our “inner scaffolding” is not fixed. Braidotti explains: “Desire is never a given. Rather, like a long shadow projected from the past, it is a forward-moving horizon that lies ahead and towards which one moves. Between the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet,’ desire traces the possible patterns of becoming.”⁷⁰⁷

Perhaps precisely because the “body is a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others,”⁷⁰⁸ contemporary psychoanalyses retain the category of the perverse as a

⁷⁰⁶ Barad, “Nature's Queer Performativity,” 30.

⁷⁰⁷ Braidotti, “Interview with Rosi Braidotti,” 32.

⁷⁰⁸ Braidotti, “Interview with Rosi Braidotti,” 34.

kind of safety measure—an ethical prophylactic. Object relations analysis is at times charged with desexualizing the unconscious;⁷⁰⁹ however, the notion that our psychesomas are threaded through with powerful forces such as eros and aggression is still a bedrock of the theory.⁷¹⁰ Therefore, one must be prudent in psychoanalysis—we are far less inclined to celebrate the unleashing of transformative flows and energies so far as they are, from day one, not innocent. Since Klein insists that babies are instinctually loving and hating, we understand that these forces are challenging for a developing psyche to manage, let alone for others who must survive our states of mind.⁷¹¹

The Kleinian baby is a helpless neonatal mess, in a state of psychotic anxiety around the pulsations of impulses, out-of-control caregivers, breasts that satisfy and frustrate, persecutory fantasies. It is a dangerous time, infancy.⁷¹² And we don't quite grow out of it fully. Destructive impulses and dangerous defences also animate the vital, nomadic body. The container provides a safe place for unbearable bodily impressions and their affiliated fantasies, so we may do less harm to other bodies. With this in mind, “perversion” is retained as a clinical category in psychoanalysis. Containment techniques are not only a theory of psychic

⁷⁰⁹ See Andrea Celenza, *Clinical Applications and Perverse Scenarios*, Routledge, 2014.

⁷¹⁰ Laplanche's metapsychology is a good example of the recentring of the sexualized unconscious. In his metapsychology, it is the alien implantation of adult sexual messages that initiate unconscious life for the neonate. See Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*.

⁷¹¹ Klein, *Love, Hate and Reparation*.

⁷¹² Consider Klein's description of infantile inner worlds and phantasied attacks on the mother: “One is the predominantly oral impulse to suck dry, bite up, scoop out and rob the mother's body of its good contents. . . . The other line of attack derives from the anal and urethral impulses and implies expelling dangerous substances (excrements) out of the self and into the mother. Together with these harmful excrements, expelled in hatred, split off parts of the ego are also projected on to the mother or, as I would rather call it, into the mother. These excrements and bad parts of the self are meant not only to injure the object but also to control it and take possession of it. In so far as the mother comes to contain the bad parts of the self, she is not felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be the bad self” (Klein “Notes on some schizoid mechanisms,” 101). Here, outsides are taken in, eliciting various kinds of affects, and insides are expelled outward, with emotional force. This moment of what object relations psychoanalysts see as symbiosis gives rise to all sorts of hostile and guilt-laden fantasies.

development but also an ethic through which we practice navigating thoughts and feelings without enacting them and destroying ourselves and others in the process.

This carefulness is understandable. What remains unconsidered is the performance of humanizing as an ethical necessity. Dendrophilic wanderings have little to no bearing on the relational psychesoma. The best psychoanalysis can do is conceive cross-species love as a misstep—a deprivileging of human attachment and a perversion of the bonds of love that matter to psychoanalysis. These bonds, it turns out, are positioned as a defensively guarded “subject” in an “environmental surround” made of inappropriate love objects. To put it more directly: psychoanalytic constructions of selfhood, in their dehumanizing lack of mutuality with more-than-human collectives, are an expression of the very perversion they describe.

7.3 Schizoid splits

I want to recount a moment in my psychotherapy training that further highlights the ethico-onto-epistemological quandaries I encounter in psychoanalytic work. This particular quandary had much to do with fences marking out fields, and my responsibility to them.

After graduating from my training institute, I was asked to teach a seminar on “schizoid character structure” to first-year trainees. As in psychiatry, learning the typology of “personality organizations” and character diagnosis is a basis of this clinical training.⁷¹³ Various formulations of mental conditions and personalities have been charted through the entwined history of psychoanalysis, psychology and psychiatry, meant to “capture,” in a sense, dynamic modes and

⁷¹³ While the *DSM* is a compendium of categories and subcategories meant to define the “disorders” of individuals who exhibit distress or disability,” psychoanalysis has its own clinical guides emphasizing the psychosocial dimension of human suffering. *The Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual* was conceived as a complement to and elaboration of the *DSM*. Its formulations of disorder take into account unconscious, underlying and perpetuating causes of distress. Personality traits arise, for example, from developmental issues, habitual defences and early modes of object relationship. The impetus here is that the psychodynamic manual can provide “depth” to the categories of disorders, providing descriptions of the patient’s inner world, their social and emotional patterns and processes, “underneath” observable symptoms and traits.

patterns of being in the world. They are interpretive frameworks through which to view psychopathology.⁷¹⁴

Ostensibly, the purpose of diagnostic categorization is to organize treatment plans and enable the therapist to adapt their approach to the unique dynamics of individual patients. These classifications provide a map for navigating across the sea of unconscious functioning. What I was taught is that we humans have habitual patterns of behaviour and thought that can be identified and categorized as more or less functional. What I lay out here is how the clinical concepts I learned and taught in turn not only act as maps by which to read and organize human behavior but also reinforce particular metaphysical boundaries that buttress human interiority from the exteriority of material life.

In my seminar on schizoid patterns, I presented a history of the term. In 1908, the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler introduced the term *schizophrenia* to the medical community at a lecture in Berlin.⁷¹⁵ The term came to replace Emil Kraepelin's *dementia praecox*, meaning a

⁷¹⁴ Though psychiatry was once dominated by psychoanalytic models of mind, these domains are now in conflict around the framing of disorder. In the US, the psychoanalytic system provided a nosological framework until the 1970s, when psychiatry oriented itself toward an “atheroetical” and empirical medical model of “illness presentation.” The medical diagnostic model tends toward a biological framework of classification, seeking the neurobiological and genetic underpinnings of human behavior. See Anne Harrington's *Mind Fixers: Psychiatry's Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness*, Norton & Company, 2019. According to Alina Suris et al., this shift toward medicalization arose, in part, from the rise of pharmacology and the ways that medicine sought to address mental illness through biochemical intervention (Alina Suris, Ryan Holliday and Carol North, “The Evolution of Classification of Psychiatric Disorders,” in *Behavioural Sciences* 6(1): 5, March 2016). Harrington offers another history for this shift toward a medical model, suggesting that the removal of “homosexuality” from the *DSM* in 1973—a decision made by vote by the American Psychiatric Association—raised questions about the scientific validity of a medical classification system that can be decided by vote. This led to the elimination of Freudian theory from psychiatric diagnostics and a refocus on the brain as the seat of mental illness. Suffice to say, in all of these histories, the classification systems differentiating psychiatric and psychoanalytic diagnoses are ever evolving, contentious and unsettled.

⁷¹⁵ Theodor Kyziridis, “Notes on the history of schizophrenia,” *German Journal of Psychiatry*, 8, 2005. The legacy of this category is unambiguously violent. Bleuler, who saw the schizophrenias as organic in

“premature dementia” or “precocious madness.” Etymologically, *dementia* denotes “out of one’s mind.” Imported into the schizoid typology is the concept of a unified mind that one can either inhabit or leave, as well as one that can be split or splintered: the Greek verb *schizein* means “splitting,”⁷¹⁶ and the Greek *phren*, originally meaning “diaphragm,” later became “soul, spirit, mind.”⁷¹⁷

Freud’s notion that the ego finds itself in conflicting allegiance to internal wishes and external reality underlies the construction of schizoid typology. The ego’s allegiance to reality, rather than to the id, is, for Freud, what differentiates the psychotic from the neurotic.⁷¹⁸ Adjusting to the demands of reality versus fantasy is required for the psychoanalytic subject to grow up. We

origin, practiced eugenics and sterilized many of his patients, who were framed as a threat to the healthy ideals of his race. Bleuler writes: “The more severely burdened should not propagate themselves. . . . If we do nothing but make mental and physical cripples capable of propagating themselves, and the healthy stocks have to limit the number of their children because so much has to be done for the maintenance of others, if natural selection is generally suppressed, then unless we will get new measures our race must rapidly deteriorate” (Eugen Bleuler, *The Textbook of Psychiatry*, Macmillan, 1924, 214). Another example of the ideological harnessing of this category is given by Robert van Voren, who examines the political agendas of the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century: “The Moscow School of Psychiatry expanded on the concept of ‘sluggish schizophrenia’ to classify individuals who had symptoms of ‘reform delusions’” (Robert van Voren, “Political abuse of psychiatry - An historical overview,” *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 36:1, 2010, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2800147/>).

⁷¹⁶ Bleuler developed the notion of *psychic ambivalence*—being of two minds about something. Klein’s metapsychology focuses in on this ambivalence and the related mechanism of *splitting*. Her theory centres around Eros and Thanatos: feelings of love and hate for an object, and our difficulty tolerating these conflicted states. The schizoid position, in Kleinian analysis, denotes a developmental moment where ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are split apart. A frustrating object can’t be a satisfying object at one and the same time in the schizoid position. It is in the depressive position, associated with a more developmentally mature state, where we come to tolerate mixed feelings which are inherent to psychic life. (Melanie Klein, *Love, Hate and Reparation*).

⁷¹⁷ Paulo Fusar-Poli and Paul Politi, “Eugen Bleuler and the Birth of Schizophrenia (1908),” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 165:11, 2008, 1407.

⁷¹⁸ Freud, “Neurosis and Psychosis,” (1924) *The Standard Edition* Vol 19, (Hogarth, 1923-1925).

know from Bion that we may find ourselves ill-equipped to deal with our experiences of reality. Without the right containment, we are at risk of pathology.⁷¹⁹

The schizoid type is said to lie on a spectrum between high functioning (McWilliams mentions Ludwig Wittgenstein by way of example) and psychotic levels of functioning, such as is observed in schizoaffective disorder. The schizoid personality is often portrayed in terms of contradictions between internal life and externally observable behaviours. In other words, the schizoid is not what they may seem. McWilliams's clinical descriptions provide a picture of contradictory states that might be observed in relationship with such an individual: A detached affect, yet a deep longing for connection. An appearance of self-sufficiency overriding a deep emotional need. Appearing absent-minded while acutely vigilant. Nonreactive yet exquisitely sensitive. Affectively blunted while internally overpowered by intense emotion. She goes on: "They may seem utterly indifferent to sex while nourishing a sexually preoccupied, polymorphously elaborated fantasy life. . . . They may strike others as unusually gentle souls, but an intimate may learn that they nourish elaborate fantasies of world destruction."⁷²⁰

The schizoid mind is solipsistic instead of interpersonal. The schizoid shrinks away from the object world into interiority, in an effort to protect the self emotionally. Environments (the psychoanalytic kind) are eschewed in favour of staying "shut in." Harry Guntrip describes a state of "animation in between two worlds, internal and external, and having no real relationship with either of them. It has decreed an emotional and impulsive standstill, on the basis of keeping out of effective range and being unmoved."⁷²¹

As Franco Berardi notes, a schizoid effect might be to "build fictitious universes that do not correspond to the immediate perceptual experience."⁷²² This propensity can be more or less

⁷¹⁹ See Bion, "Differentiation of the Psychotic from the NonPsychotic Personalities."

⁷²⁰ Nancy McWilliams, "Some Thoughts about Schizoid Dynamics," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 93:1,(2006), 7.

⁷²¹ Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self*, (Routledge, 1968),18.

⁷²² Franco Berardi, *The Third Unconscious: The Psychosphere in the Viral Age*, (Verso, 2021). 4. For Deleuze and Guattari, splitting is far more fragmentary than a simple binary split such as love/hate or inner/outer. Breaks in reality are multiplicitous, opening rhizomatic escape routes out of the

functional, with psychiatric illness as a decompensation. Berardi explains how “the schizophrenic person recomposes the fragments of reality that belong in their mind, by creating their own principles of organization.”⁷²³

As we veer too deeply into mental reality, our consensual organization of reality may unravel. On the other hand, we must be wary here: it is also possible for the schizoid to relate to the world incorrectly by imposing their unconventional inner codes on outer things. For Bromberg, this instance of primitivity must be “superseded by the ability to see things as other people see them through the capacity for conceptual, objectively modifiable organization of experience.”⁷²⁴ This is particularly challenging for this typology, since they withdraw from an interpersonal, social matrix, which would help to organize their codes. Bromberg tells us that this suspension between fantasy and consensual reality makes it hard for the schizoid to “feel real.”

Psychoanalysts too are suspended in the schizoid dilemma, dissuaded from situating themselves too far “inside” (too much archaic, disorganized fantasy), discouraged from engaging with concrete things or the wrong sort of “outside” environment (too much artificiality or taboo objectality). As we will see, the “just right” situation will involve humans.

Contemporary diagnostic texts such as McWilliams’s *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis* present a compassionate tone in their classification of personality types. The schizoid might present as a touch eccentric, in a difficult position between their need for (human) object relationship and their retreat from it. The nonintrusive warmth of the therapist is key in allowing this “type” to repair their splits and to help reorganize their inner worlds. In the seminars I ran, we would do the work of pathologization in a loving tone. We are trying, as Bromberg counsels, to get the schizoid “out of himself and [to] stay out.”⁷²⁵ Where, precisely, are we drawing them and urging them to stay? A humanized intersubjective field devoid of “artificial” objects and false object choice.

Oedipalization of the subject. The senses of self and universe unleashed by the schizophrenic mind are polyphonic.

⁷²³ Berardi, *The Third Unconscious*, 7.

⁷²⁴ Bromberg, “Getting into and out of one’s self,” 440.

⁷²⁵ Bromberg, “Getting into and out of one’s self,” 447.

Teaching this logic of insides and outsides exposed, for me, a chasm between clinical training and post-humanities scholarship. I found myself straddling commitments. These epistemic commitments are also “options” for experiencing relationship. They open and close possibilities for inhabiting worlds. They are divergent ethical trajectories.

Fostering emotional growth and developing insight within an ameliorative human relationship is the ethical trajectory of psychotherapeutic practice. The critical agenda of what can loosely be called the “nonhuman turn” dismantles the rigid boundary constructed between human subjects and their material worlds. In this schizoid seminar, I offered a piece of clinical writing by Danielle Knafo entitled “Guys and Dolls,” which brings the Janus-faced commitments of these fields into stark relief.

7.4 Guys and dolls, Subjects and objects

Knafo’s “Guys and Dolls” tells the story of an analysis with a man named Jack who cohabited with a life-size sex doll named Maya. For the purposes of the schizoid seminar, we foregrounded the split between the fantasy world of the analysand and the real world of human-to-human sociality and sexuality. We played with this clinical material as an instance of schizoid functioning, as well as an example of perverse object relationship. Our interpretation of Jack orbited around an assumption that there is a correct fantasy for the human psyche, which aims itself at a human object.⁷²⁶ Actually, as Knafo suggests, Jack’s fantasy *is* in fact about humans, but he is caught in a tangle of conflicted libidinal ties that might otherwise bond him to normative intimacy. Guntrip suggests that the schizoid “cuts themselves off from human

⁷²⁶ Knafo references Freud’s observation that we do not necessarily outgrow anthropomorphism. We understand that the human is an imaginative witness—we see this with Winnicott’s transitional objects as well. The premise here is that humans are engaged in a pervasive, unconscious procedure of projection, which includes attributing human qualities to inanimate objects as well as other living beings who lack our quality of consciousness. We recognize a human tendency to objectify as well. Such a manoeuvre exists on a spectrum, Knafo tells us, playing out in genocide, exploitation and enslavement, in violent forms of perversion, and in a physician’s ability to perform surgery without emotional involvement (Danielle Knafo, “Guys and Dolls: Relational Life in the Technological Era,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 25:4, (2015), 484). Subjects become objects, and objects become subjects, via the slippery dynamics of the human psyche.

relations in the outer world” and is “driven back on emotionally charged fantasied object-relations in their inner mental world.”⁷²⁷ Lost in the inner world, the schizoid is not *person-seeking*.⁷²⁸ According to Guntrip, as humans “[w]e seek persons, not pleasures”⁷²⁹ An object-seeking libido must be careful in its aim.

Knafo explains that Jack sought help due to his increasing isolation from human company, due to shame and guilt around his lifestyle. He had been living inside his *relational fantasy* (in contradistinction to a real relationship). The analytic goal here was to assist Jack in emerging from omnipotent psychic retreat, where he enacted a faux relationship with Maya, and back into the (at times painful) reality of human attachment. Moving from the not-human object toward establishing a relationship with a “real woman,” as messy as it may be, was the successful end of this analysis. Knafo, the human-identified analyst, facilitated this transition, from interiority to an out-of-oneself connection, by being a primary relational object for Jack over the course of treatment.

Exploring the unique objectality, ontology or agency of Maya was not our class’s task. Knafo, however, recounts Maya’s uncanny presence when they “met” in one session. In this moment, the analyst found herself drawn into the relational field of a sexualizing gaze, framing Maya in her “almost-but-not-quite” reality, noting her beauty and seductive draw, a shared social delusion around femininity to be sure. The framing is at once objectifying and subjectifying: “Adam’s rib transformed.” Knafo practically writes a passage out of a romance novel:

Jack scheduled the session at night and borrowed a friend’s van. He rolled Maya into my office on a hand truck (she weighs 100 lb!) covered with a blanket. When he removed her from the dolly and sat her on the couch next to him, I gazed at her, frankly astonished. She looked almost, but not exactly, like a beautiful young woman. There she sat with a passive frozen expression, a full-grown sister of Barbie, a glistening Galatea, Adam’s rib

⁷²⁷ Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self*, 20.

⁷²⁸ Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 133: “Perhaps here we can grasp the difference between a real schizo trip and the petty bourgeois style of familialist regression. A schizo is not very much interested in ‘human warmth.’ His concern lies elsewhere, on the side of the most deterritorialized flux; the flow of the ‘miraculating’ cosmic signs, and also the flow of monetary signs” (Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 133).

⁷²⁹ Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self*, 21.

transformed, the archetype of womanly beauty with her thick, wild mane of auburn hair; huge almond-shaped green eyes and a plump-lipped, sensual mouth. Her hourglass body matched the cultural ideal of feminine beauty. Her hands and feet were fine and delicately crafted with hotpink nail polish on elegantly shaped nails. Intensely curious, I wanted to see her naked, but of course that was out of the question.⁷³⁰

In this passage, Knafo is drawn down an eccentric path, seduced by an intensity between herself and the object. Maya's presence, her *thing-power*, makes itself known,⁷³¹ and she intervenes in Knafo's fantasy. Maya, the object, emanates a kind sensuality.⁷³² Then we see the voice of analytic reason sternly redirect Knafo ("of course that was out of the question"). She manages to find her footing:

I was uncomfortable, too, because the scene felt so uncanny, the two of us talking about Jack letting go of someone who was not a someone—this doll who looked like a woman, this beautiful container for fantasy and lifeboat cast upon the lonely sea of existence. Yet as the session continued, I relaxed. He was not letting something go, I told myself; rather he was retrieving something—a hope, a dream, a question for love—withdrawing it from the doll and bringing it back to himself. Now he could be enough, at least enough to try again with a live woman.⁷³³

Maya, here, is properly dehumanized. She is an unsuitable partner, Knafo decides. She is instead a container, something we can put human fantasy into. Not unlike the analyst herself.

⁷³⁰ Knafo, "Guys and Dolls," 497.

⁷³¹ "Thing Power," writes Jane Bennett, is "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter," *Political Theory* 32:3, (2004), 351). Bennett takes inspiration from "[Henry David] Thoreau's notion of the Wild, that is, his idea that there is an existence peculiar to a thing that is irreducible to the thing's imbrication with human subjectivity. It is due to this otherness or wildness, says Thoreau, that things have the power to addle and rearrange thoughts and perceptions." (Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter," 348.)

⁷³² See Morton's *Realist Magic* for an argument about the aesthetic, sensual quality of inter-objective space.

⁷³³ Knafo, "Guys and Dolls," 497.

It is easy to envision the manufactured doll as a container for humans: fantasy is built into Maya's very design.⁷³⁴ Jack's fear of emotional closeness with a living woman is supported, in many ways, by an industry that buttresses the dehumanization and domination of feminine bodies. That technology is entwined with structures of power and that pornographic stereotypes prevail in sex dolls is undeniable.⁷³⁵

⁷³⁴ To give one example of the ideology of doll manufacturing, Jennifer Robertson describes the ways by which sex dolls and robots are invested with conventional ethnic-national homogenous identities and related gender tropes. These humanoids shore up a fantasy of normative gender roles, reinforcing sex-gender binaries, as well as becoming a "topographical map of and for a national ethnic identity" (for instance, some robots and dolls specifically represent an "average Japanese female visage" and desired body shape). These humanoids embody fantasies of sex and gender via a mostly male identified design team: "The process of gendering robots makes especially clear that gender belongs both to the order of the material body and the social and discursive or semiotic systems within which bodies are embedded" (Jennifer Robertson, "Gendering Humanoid Robots: Robo-Sexism in Japan," *Body & Society*, 16:2, 2010, 4). According to Robertson's research, a gendered division of labour is reinforced across humanoid and human bodies alike in increasingly roboticized social space in Japan.

⁷³⁵ Tanja Kubes describes how the next generation of "real dolls" are blended with artificial intelligence, robotics, internal heaters and virtual reality interfaces. These robots are designed to interact with their user in increasingly "lively" ways. Kubes emphasizes how feminist new materialism and object-oriented ontology invite us to see not only how traditional categorizations are not only transgressed but also how "biological and technological actors" are connected, "thus linking the carbon and silicon spheres." Acknowledging the hegemonic gender scripts in this industry (the hyperfeminization of dolls prevails), Kubes makes the argument that sex robotics can potentially open up an opportunity for feminist new materialism to open toward productive, non-dualistic, transspecies partnerships. Kubes's theoretical vision follows Barad, Latour et al., interrogating the categorical distinction of humans and robots (while noting the agential cuts that create such distinctions) and emphasizing the emergent and active capacities of (never already decided) subjects and objects. In the encounter between mind and matter, subject and object, are hybrid beings that "constitute an ontological order of their own." From here, queering interventions on robots and dolls might open to "creative and interpretive construction processes." (Tanja Kubes, "New Materialist Perspectives on Sex Robots: A Feminist Dystopia/Utopia?" *Feminist New Materialisms: Activating Ethico-Politics Through Genealogies in Social Sciences*, eds Beatrice Revelles Benavents, Monika Rogowska-STangret, Waltraud Ernst. (MDPI, 2020) 98.)

A critical analysis of the power dimensions of Jack and Maya's relationship is essential here. Certainly, conventionally gendered scripts are inscribed on human and nonhuman bodies alike, and dominating patterns of attachment are rehearsed between partners. The sex doll industry is predominantly male-engineered, catering to a male gaze through tropes of passive femininity. Jack's phobic relationship with women is one meaningful thread in this entanglement of psychesomas and technological objects, one which Knafo picks up in their work together.

That being said—and here is where the boundary work of psychoanalysis collides with the deconstruction of those boundaries in materialist work—the relational field that Knafo takes for granted in her work with Jack and others rests on the categorical distinction between human subjectivity and technological objectality. Knafo feels into the transitional space between subjects and objects when she writes, “Of course love and sex are the result of imagination as much as they are reality. How different, then, are any of us from Jack and Maya?”⁷³⁶ She goes on, though, to reconstitute the psychic enclosure: “How easy to project one's wishes and fantasies onto an object when nothing pushes back. The result, however, has the potential to collapse the internal and external worlds.”⁷³⁷

As I discovered with my seminar group, an institutionalized disavowal of what Haraway conceives of as infolding organic and technological flesh⁷³⁸ pervades these relational practices. If an assemblage was emerging between Jack, Maya and Knafo, a “webbed bio-social-technical apparatus,”⁷³⁹ if these actors were drawn into a knot of silicone, flesh and fantasy—a technocultural love story, an intimate conjunction of bodies—this wasn't the lens we used in therapy class.⁷⁴⁰ While Haraway argues that “partners do not precede the meeting; species of all

⁷³⁶ Knafo, *Guys and Dolls*, 495.

⁷³⁷ Knafo, *Guys and Dolls*, 496.

⁷³⁸ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 8.

⁷³⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 134.

⁷⁴⁰ Kubes challenges the argument that sex with not-humans is not possible. This argument runs as follows: “If sex is a co-experience, involving a mutual, parallel, and simultaneous experience between humans who are radically different from humanmade artefacts, then it follows that penile, digit, or oral penetration of an object does not constitute sex. This is the case whether the penetrated ‘object’ is in fact an objectified human being or an anthropomorphized object” (94). In this picture, sexuality can only

kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters,”⁷⁴¹ the analytic task, according to my seminar group, was as follows: traverse the trauma that has Jack seeking the wrong kind of companion (“as far back as he could remember, he was made to feel diminished and emasculated by women”)⁷⁴² and reorient the libidinal flow. A doll is an attractive solution to the intersection of Jack’s sexual needs and his fear of living women, and this we must reroute toward safely humanizing true women.⁷⁴³

This idealized (for Knafo, at least) vision of bonding is challenging to uphold given the myriad psychesomatic techniques, far larger than the human domain, intervening in the production of sexualities. Preciado has indicated where the sexual subject is thoroughly mediated by biochemical “outsides” and technological prostheses, in what he calls a *pharmacopornographic regime*.⁷⁴⁴ Human attachment, enigmatic signifiers and maternal holding environments are only a fraction of who-what animates eros.

I also want to complicate Knafo’s therapeutic aim by opening up the question of the vast—*polymorphous*—options that exist for engaging objects, conceptually, affectively, corporeally. Objectum sexuality (OS)—sexual orientation toward objects—is one image of the relational

transpire in a field of intersubjectivity. Without “subjectivity behind the eyes,” there is no mind to relate to (94).

As Kubes points out, this is an idealized notion of sex. Even among humans, mutuality can be a rarity. Whether or not this is our preferred conceptualization of sexuality is not Kubes’s point: she wants to address how this conception of sexuality negates the ways that “objectophilia” operates in our lives without any expectation of reciprocation or mutuality. Drawing from Bennett, Kubes notes how “thing power” shapes our interactions with the object world in addition to our own attachment scripts (Kubes, “New Materialist Perspectives on Sex Robots,” 224). From a new-materialist point of view, partners coexist ontologically—they may contribute differently to the relationship, but both are emergent entities, contributing to patterns in and through their meeting.

⁷⁴¹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 4.

⁷⁴² Knafo, “Guys and Dolls,” 493.

⁷⁴³ “No more lying in bed next to an inaccessible woman while longing for sex. No alimony. He would be in charge at last! He would no longer need a woman. He would have his own woman, a woman who would cater to his needs and one who would love and fully accept him” (Knafo, “Guys and Dolls,” 494).

⁷⁴⁴ Paul Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics*, The Feminist Press, 2013.

beyond the confines of human bonding, a queering of the appropriate domains of the sexual. In her article “Objects of Desire: Toward an Ethics of Sameness,” Amber Jamilla Musser explains, “objectum sexuality emerged in 1979, but has only recently begun to gain traction as a new sexological category.”⁷⁴⁵ Musser observes how love is simultaneously normalized and queered in OS narratives. OS love stories recount stages and phases of courtship: sexual attraction, “very much in love,” married even. Erika, for example, is married to the Eiffel Tower. Their “face,” their “personality,” their “shape” and a sense of “spiritual kinship” are cited as reasons for attraction. The way they feel on the skin. How they smell.

Those who identify as OS sense into a different organization of the relational field, eschewing what counts as “true” psychoanalytic object relationship. While OS narratives uphold the love object’s uniqueness, the language of an object showing up in dynamic ways, even possessing a “soul,” suggests a kind of anthropomorphism that would alarm most psychoanalysts. Musser writes about “Erika [who] believes that an object’s soul reveals itself ‘when you are truly, truly interested in an object and you’re willing to bare your soul, then you see theirs.’”⁷⁴⁶ Furthermore, OS isn’t necessarily genitally oriented. Resonating with the communicative links between spirits and mediums, eros is described as a transfer of energy, a shared vibration, heat. Differing bodies and energies are in a relation of exchange here. Sex might also be mediated by video, such as in Amy’s long distance relationship with the carnival ride 1001 Nachts at Knoebels Amusement Park in Pennsylvania.

⁷⁴⁵ Amber Jamilla Musser, “Objects of Desire: Toward an Ethics of Sameness,” *Theory & Event*. 16:2, 2013, <https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1005&context=wgss>).

⁷⁴⁶ Musser, “Objects of Desire.” An object oriented ontologist might consider this arrangement in another way: any object is partially withdrawn; its soul is not fully knowable. However, each object (us humans included), also sends out its “notes,” engaging in an aesthetic dimension with all sorts of other notes sent by all sorts of other objects. See Graham Harman on a discussion of things sending out their “notes.” (Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court, 2002).

7.5 Fetishism: The wrong object

It is not uncommon for the clinical literature to cast OS folks as fetishists. They eroticize categorically nonsexual objects, putting a quality “into” the object that isn’t there in reality through the mechanism of projective identification. The fetish object⁷⁴⁷, we are to understand, is an otherwise inanimate thing endowed with projection. It is the raw material upon which the human exteriorizes meaning.⁷⁴⁸

Relating to objects erotically, emotionally or both is a perverse choice in the psychoanalytic imagination, since psychoanalysis adopted the ethnological concept of *fetishism* and sexualized its meaning.⁷⁴⁹ Importantly, the perverse function of the fetish signifies a denial (or, more

⁷⁴⁷ I was struck by the “man-made” etymology of *fetish* here: Portuguese *feitiço*, for “talisman” or “charm.” Latin *facere*, “to make or manufacture,” and *facticius*, translated as “artificial.” *Man-made*. Alan Bass writes, “even before its use by the explorers, the word already had the connotations of magic, manufacture, and facticity” (Allan Bass, *Fetishism, Psychoanalysis and Philosophy: The Irridescent Thing*, Routledge, 2018, 5). Projection, like transference, can be read as a psychic mechanism of human-generated fabrication.

⁷⁴⁸ Assuming a perspective in contrast to this reduction of “things,” Tobie Nathan lays out the qualities of “active objects,” or spell objects, in non-Western healing practices. Such an object is a “living thing” and “active independent of their maker . . . and receiver” (Nathan, *Doctors and Healers*, 75). Whereas medication is an active object that works on the “inside” of the biochemical subject, spell objects work in a complex material-cultural therapeutic system where symptom and healing action are not located in one individual.

⁷⁴⁹ French ethnologist Charles de Brosses harnessed the concept of *fetishism* in 1760 to account for what colonizers observed in the religious veneration of cult objects amid “primitive” non-Europeans. (See Alan Bass, “On the History of Fetishism, De Brosses and Comte,” *The Undecidable Unconscious: A Journal of Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis*, 2, 2015). Alphonso Lingis notes how early European merchants considered the objects valued by West Africans as “assigned value far in excess of what any rational calculation of utility and exchange value would justify” (Alphonso Lingis, *Body Transformations: Evolutions and Atavisms in Culture*, Routledge, (2005) 112). That is to say, operating outside the domain of commerce and commodity, the “fetishes” of West Africans were deemed “irrational.” Alfred Binet imported the term into psychological fields, where it became linked to degeneracy. He noted that sexual

accurately, a disavowal)⁷⁵⁰ of human bodies and their psychosexual significance or a rejection of a broader field of human relationality and intersubjectivity, in favour of things. Using the example of a shoe fetish, Stein writes, “the woman’s body, her breath, her live, willful presence—her soul—is eliminated in favor of the shoe that has substituted her, that has symbolically ‘killed’ (or castrated) her and become itself the oxymoronic object of desire, a well-controlled mystery.” She continues: “It is no longer a metonymy for the woman’s femininity, it has become *the thing itself*, a fetish, erasing and replacing the need for the flesh-and-blood woman, triumphantly seeing the signifier over the signified.”⁷⁵¹ Fetish objects are all-too-concrete vessels masking human psychic constructions.

Alfonso Iacono describes how “the concept of *fetishism* has often, and quite problematically, been intertwined with the implicit notion of substitution.”⁷⁵² Psychoanalysis seems to consider what has been improperly substituted to be of inferior ontological value. As Iacono explains, “it is impossible to provide a substitute—unless improperly—for what is single and *unique* (a god, an object).”⁷⁵³ Such is the logic of idolatry, the worship of a false god. A commentator on Knafo’s “Guys and Dolls” opens her essay with Plato: “Everything that deceives may be said to enchant.”⁷⁵⁴ The fetishist is in the cave, interacting with seductive shadows rather than true forms. The “truth” of the fetish object is conceived in various ways in psychoanalysis: castration

arousal by objects “corresponds in every respect” to the religious adoration of “savages.” (Alfred Binet, “Le fetichisme dans l’amour” 1888, cited in Bass, “On the History of Fetishism”, 19).

⁷⁵⁰ The formulation of fetishistic disavowal usually runs as follows: *I know mother is without a penis, but I deny this reality via use of a fetish object.*

⁷⁵¹ Stein, “Why Perversion,” 780.

⁷⁵² Alfonso Maurizio Iacono, *The History and Theory of Fetishism*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 5.

⁷⁵³ Iacono, *The History and Theory of Fetishism*, 7.

⁷⁵⁴ Plato’s *Republic* cited by Christine Keiffer, “Guys, Dolls, and the Uses of Enchantment,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 25:4, (2015) 508.

anxiety⁷⁵⁵ and the attendant negotiation with lack;⁷⁵⁶ trouble with the “phallic mother”;⁷⁵⁷ the denial of difference,⁷⁵⁸ and so forth. In the relational school, the world of concrete objects is a

⁷⁵⁵ Classically, the fetish object is read as a substitution for the phallus and all that it signifies. Freud elaborates on castration anxiety, a drama orbiting around the penis, or the mother’s lack thereof, which underlies the fetishist’s object choice. Freud: “Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital” (Freud, “Fetishism” (1927), *Miscellaneous Papers 1888-1938*, Vol 5, *Collected Papers*, Hogarth, 1924-1950), 200). Probably! From here, the fetish object becomes the defensive buffer from castration. Following along with the overvaluation of the phallus and its supplementary “lack,” Paul-Laurent Assoun notes that castration is to be read in a wider sense, that is, as “everything that is ‘lacking in man’ either as individual or as social being.” For Assoun, the fetish functions as whatever is used to “stop up the hole.” (Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Fétichisme*, cited in Bass, *Fetishism, Psychoanalysis, and Philosophy: The Iridescent Thing*, 6).

⁷⁵⁶ Abraham and Torok associate fetishism with a “gaping wound” in the topography of the psyche: “It seems to us that these inventions of the mind also rest on some ‘gaping wound,’ opened long ago within the ego and disguised by a phantasmic and secret construction” (225). The fetish is the wound’s disguise. It is “a veritable *symbol-cover*” (225). The fetish signifies a falsity, a mask or a concealment of a truth: “the true symbol, the authentic and full creation of the subject, remains concealed by the fetish.”⁷⁵⁶ For Abraham and Torok, this is the tragic split of the fetishist: denying the gaping wound, which is encrypted, split off, disavowed and covered over with a fetishistic attachment. As an object choice, the fetish is meant to provide unconscious protection from traumatic states, perceptions, anxieties and relational conflicts. It is a pathological solution, an effort to fill a traumatic psychic “hole.” (Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. ““The Lost Object—Me”: Notes on Identification with the Crypt,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 4, 1984).

⁷⁵⁷ In this case, we are not simply grappling with what the mother is missing. The mother, too, possesses power. Perhaps the fetish object “provide[s] access to the maternal breast and full possession of the idealized mother” (André Lussier, “Fetishism,” *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 583). Here, fetishism dramatizes the experience of helplessness in the face of the mother’s power and an effort to secure mastery over it. This line of interpretation appears in Knafo’s analysis of Jack, whose fear of women, born of maternal abuse, oriented him toward a love object he could control. Stoller describes the rage and hostility men may feel at having to separate themselves from identification with the mother, while not “escaping out of her orbit.” Revenge ensues: “The study of perversion is the study of hostility more than libido” (Robert Stoller, “Hostility and Mystery in Perversion,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 55:3, (1974), 426).

disappointing and deceptive proxy for the centrality of human bonding and the affects generated there. When linked to a story about infantile experience, we understand objects to be deployed in a symbolic-defensive fashion. Teresa de Lauretis writes, “the fetish is not simply an object (in the common sense of the word, a thing), but an object set in a *mise-en-scène*, in the scenario of a narrative from which it acquires its psychic value as object of the drive.”⁷⁵⁹

Some literature draws perversion closer to a psychotic level of function. Harold Searles describes the schizophrenic experience in terms of a lack of differentiation from, or oneness with, the non-human environment. Such a state is considered inherent to infantile experience: “he does not distinguish himself from his surroundings, whether human or nonhuman; he does not distinguish between inner and outer sensations; in the brief periods of wakefulness he and the world around him are one.”⁷⁶⁰ With the “higher functioning” schizoid character, some theorize that an impinging environment has driven the individual into the interior, away from contact with the human-mediated world. Eros, in this case, may become fixated on the artificial or the inanimate: that which can be more easily controlled. This behaviour indicates retreat from “genuine” interpersonal relationship. Paradoxically, such a character is defensively walled up in interiority, as evidenced by the schizoid’s preference for relating to an artificial exteriority.

Commodity fetishism is also cited in readings of OS: attributing some spiritual quality to an object while ignoring its underlying design, manufacture and labour relations. However, according to Musser, some OS folks are as interested in their lovers’ histories as one might be with any human one is intimate with. They resist fetishism as a diagnosis. Musser writes:

See also Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Female Sexuality: New Psychoanalytic Views*, eds. Chasseguet-Smirgel and Frederick Wyatt, University of Michigan Press, 1970.

⁷⁵⁸ Drawing on Derrida, Bass positions fetishism as a disavowal of *différance*, a fixing of reality in the concrete. “Fetishistic compromise formations” arise as a response to differentiation when difference is experienced as a catastrophe. Bass argues that “concreteness in general is a defensive response to any form of difference, and the replacement of the reality of difference with a structure of opposed fantasies” (30). This fantasy might also include Freud’s own “phallic monism, which says that everyone is either phallic or castrated” (Bass, “History of Fetishism,” 30).

⁷⁵⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud’s Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.

⁷⁶⁰ (*The Nonhuman Environment*, 30).

Fetishism is difficult to apply to objectum sexuals for several reasons. First, it leaves us unable to account for the particularity of their object choices. Though Erika argues that she is drawn to walls as a category, she is not in love with all of them. Second, this specificity renders collection undesirable. Although many objectum sexuals are in relationships with several objects simultaneously, the logic of collection does not seem to apply. This is partially because of the particularity of each object and relationship and partially because these tend to be large objects, which would make collection practically difficult. Finally, Freud's insistence on embedding fetishism within a narrative of trauma is rejected by the objectum sexual community largely because of their reluctance to be classified as suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, which is one of the frequent diagnoses given to objectum sexuals⁷⁶¹.

While the psychoanalytic fetishist is often cast in terms of their enactments of mastery and control, the reflections of OS folks on loving public monuments reveal a different fantasy elaboration of their objects: "One lacks the ability to fully control the object; D. elaborates on this lack of agency on her part, 'I can't control anything, and me and my darling; we have so little to share. I have to accept people polluting and damaging him all the time and I cannot even defend him.'"⁷⁶²

The fetishist's connection to the phallus and the proclivity to eroticize substitutes is also a concept rejected by OS people. A. L. writes, "their inner Freudian makes the claim that I must love a building because it's a large phallus! What? This implies I cannot have physical gratification without the presence of a penis and therefore I cannot love without human company. Absurd! [sic]."⁷⁶³

Incidentally, dendrophilia is also sometimes explained in terms of veneration of phallic symbols (that is, idealized human parts provide a more "reasonable" explanation for arousal).

⁷⁶¹ Musser, "Objects of Desire."

⁷⁶² Musser, "Objects of Desire."

⁷⁶³ Musser, "Objects of Desire."

Sunayana Baruah's text "The Phenomenology of Fetishism in 'Objectum Sexuall'" is one example of the psychoanalyst "knowing better" when it comes to matters of love.⁷⁶⁴

Unsurprisingly, the analyst's epistemic position is the civilized adult who practices scrutiny in the field of misdirected feelings and confused conceptualizations. (With regard to fetishism, Heinz Werner writes, "Among primitive peoples, and also children, there is found a kind of thinking which, with great justification, may be termed 'concrete' thinking. Its distinctive characteristic lies in the fact that the conceptual activity operates in indivisible unity with motor-perceptual and imaginative processes."⁷⁶⁵ Charles de Brosses puts it more bluntly: "Fetishism is

⁷⁶⁴ Sherry Turkle's work is another example of the conventional psychoanalytic framing of technology. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (pp. 280–283) argues that technophilia is emotionally and psychologically dangerous for human beings. Attachment with a person gives sustenance: "a sense of being attached to the human narrative." That a technological device, robot, machine, object can't *feel* is the primary problem here. A robot companion can't love us back. Further, as the title suggests, a dependency on technology means we come to expect less of human relationality. With our devices, we exist in "post-familial families"—a different arrangement of connection and connectivity. Psychoanalysis is an antidote for Turkle: "with its emphasis on the comedy and tragedy in the arc of human life, [psychoanalysis] can help keep us focused on the specificity of human conversation." Oedipus will help us here: "Oedipus is . . . a story about the difference between getting what you want and getting what you think you want." Turkle's approach is to psychoanalyze technology as "symptom and dream": "Like all psychological symptoms, it obscures a problem by 'solving' it without addressing it. The robot will provide companionship and mask our fears of too-risky intimacies. As dream, robots reveal our wish for relationships we can control." My issue with Turkle is not that she examines technological development and coevolution and cognitive patterning with technology, nor that she wants to make decisions about technological mediation. What I rather want to note is that Turkle's psychoanalytic approach rests on a categorical protection of the "human" and the inviolate intimacy between human persons. While Turkle misses "the human voice," I suggest that she not only idealizes human connection (which itself can be dehumanizing and traumatizing) but also sets us up in a limited ethos and habitus.

⁷⁶⁵ Heinz Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development*, (International UP, 1940), 162. Early colonial thinkers of the fetish attributed fear and helplessness to the "primitive mind," as an explanation for fetishization. A person seeks solace and control via instrumentalizing an object. (Iacono notes how radically different peoples, across different histories, with heterogeneous customs, were indiscriminately

practiced by peoples who spend their lives in perpetual childhood.”⁷⁶⁶) For Baruah, OS “demands analytic scrutiny of the emotional worlds of the individuals.”⁷⁶⁷

Baruah’s analysis focuses on an individual’s difficulty coming to terms with a lost (human) object and their attempt to compensate for loss. The object of love, otherwise understood to be neutral on its own, functions to assuage the anxieties of the OS lover. We again have a formulation where an otherwise impersonal object becomes a transference object, a receptacle for human fantasy gone astray. A transitional object fails when the child doesn’t transition in the right direction. In other words, the object is meant to be a go-between, as the child learns to relate correctly to an external world, where the external world signifies, it seems according to Baruah’s text, human social relationships. Surely libidinal energy is not so wide reaching all on its own, without some original fascination with the phallus, the breast or other symbol-anchor that psychoanalysis has ready at hand!

The characterization of the fetishist revolves around a display of *concreteness*: “that is, the clinical issue of patients for whom symbolization is a specific problem, for whom things are as they are, that is, for whom it is always a question of ‘real presence.’”⁷⁶⁸ This concreteness might

generalized under the umbrella of “fetishism”). One recurring theme in the literature is the notion that this broad swath of peoples used the fetish object as a deification of “*nature’s irregular phenomena*, whose causes those peoples were unable to understand” (Iacono, *The History and Theory of Fetishism*, 14, emphasis in the original.) He continues: “It could not have been otherwise: irregular natural phenomena pertain to scientific analysis, to an explanation of the real causes of what is produced by nature. By deifying natural events which provoke fear and awe, primitive religion does nothing more than attribute erroneous causes to phenomena which do not present themselves as regular and, hence, are beyond the control a ‘savage’ can exercise on the basis of his limited knowledge and limited experience” (Iacono, *The History and Theory of Fetishism*, 24). Another theme is the instrumentalization of a “charm,” whose purpose is to protect the bearer against harm. As with the pervert’s fetish, this thing is a defensive strategy against anxiety.

⁷⁶⁶ Charles De Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches*, (Fayard, 1988), 13.

⁷⁶⁷ Sunayana Baruah, “The Phenomenology of Fetishism in ‘Objectum Sexuels,’” *Presencing EPIS: A Scientific Journal of Applied Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis*, 2015, episjournal.com/journal-2015/fetishism-in-objectum-sexuals.

⁷⁶⁸ Bass, “The History of Fetishism,” 24.

show up as an insistence that one's version of "objectivity" is correct and an inability to play with differences of interpretation (for example, where an analysand defensively shuts down varieties of symbolic play through their insistence on external "truth").⁷⁶⁹ Fetishism certainly involves a choice of an "untranscendent" material object. ("For De Brosses," writes Alan Bass, "fetishism was the primal religion, because it does not move beyond the terrestrial: the thing is the god. This first religion is unorganized and lacks reference to universality."⁷⁷⁰) Never mind the complex morphology, agency and intra-activity of earthly things, psychoanalysis casts a terrestrial object as a paltry thing in comparison with the transcendental psychic subject.

Psychoanalysis's understanding of the fetish object—be it inert, animate, animal, vegetal, mineral, machinic—is itself a kind of projective identification lobbed over the fence to the not-human realm (and to be clear: the specificity of the object rarely seems to matter in the psychoanalytic literature).⁷⁷¹

With the assumption that *things* are meaningless in themselves apart from being a substitute for humans, the things' own contributions to the field disappear from view. It is a distraction from the human dream. Whatever may "lie behind" the fetish, whatever the obsessional object choice may signify, we are left without much information about the relata. Rather, a fetish is a

⁷⁶⁹ Bion's notion of "attacks on linking" lends itself to this analysis. A Bionian reading might highlight how perversity arises through a lack of human containment. This person has recourse to externality in order to avoid contact with challenging states of mind in the absence of the containing function. The child has not internalized the soothing object (breast) that might help them "modify the baleful force of emotion," and "consequently the links surviving are perverse, cruel, and sterile" (315). Bion continues: "Emotion is hated; it is felt to be too powerful to be contained by the immature psyche. . . . [I]t gives reality to objects which are not self and therefore inimical to primary narcissism" (Bion, "Attacks on Linking," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 40, (1959), 313). Analytic literature has mobilized attacks on linking to reiterate the "falsity" and artificiality of the fetish. The relationship with the object is an example of "anti-knowledge" replacing the true object (mother) with a false object (fetish/substitute).

⁷⁷⁰ Bass, *Fetishism, Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, 7.

⁷⁷¹ In *Dog Love*, Marjorie Garber challenges the framing of animal companionship through the logic of substitution. She writes: "The point is perhaps not to argue about whether dog love is a substitute for human love, but rather to detach the notion of 'substitute' from its presumed inferiority to a 'real thing'" (Marjorie Garber, *Dog Love*, (Simon and Schuster, 1996), 135).

replacement, perhaps for the mother's scary body or for the truth of genuine human intimacy. It is a "false love." To be a pervert of this kind is to mix things up. A thing is a substitute for something else, a killing off of the human soul. In this expression of perversion, a human is defiantly not-human, and a not-human is the object of passionate attachment.

Psychoanalysis is in a bind with regard to relating with things. On the one hand, fetishists are thought to be fixated on the not-human objective object, flattening human symbolism into concreteness, closed off to the play of meaning: things just *are* what they *are*. In this reading, a fixed fetishized idea, or fixed sexual need for a thing, is a kind of fossilization of unconscious play. The fetishist has succumbed to the siren song of the external while eschewing the dream of the internal. Meanwhile, we ought to be wary of ascribing human meaning to the so-called inanimate, projecting our affect onto things, turning a not-human into a vessel for our anxieties and desires, anthropomorphizing and enlisting alterity in our narcissistic human stories.⁷⁷² One way or the other, we are relating to things incorrectly, messing with a boundary between the human inner world and the world(s) of externality. Fetishism lets us know that Winnicott's transitional space can go wrong with regard to not-human things: too much intermingling indicates psychopathological states.⁷⁷³

⁷⁷² See Myers on the scientific anathema to the "trap" of anthropomorphism: Natasha Myers, "Conversations on Plant Sensing: Notes from the Field," *NatureCulture*, 2015, www.natcult.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/PDF-natureculture-03-03-conversations-on-plant-sensing.pdf.

⁷⁷³ Victor Tausk's classic essay "On the Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia" is one example of the way the schizophrenic experience is understood in terms of a paranoid projection of the machinic. For Tausk, the paranoid schizophrenic invents elaborate machines to account for the disintegration of their inner world. These devices are seen to be unconscious projections of fragmented bodily experience. (Victor Tausk, "On the origin of the influencing machine in schizophrenia," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 2:5, 1933). Eigen describes the influencing machine as "a vivid summary of basic mental and physical self-structures involved in a deteriorated materialism. In this paranoid fantasy, the psychotic patient feels that her or his mind is being taken over and her or his behavior influenced by a distant machine. Tausk understood this delusion as a projective expression of a mechanized body self. For Tausk the machine is a symbolic petrification of the sexually alive body, an attempt to freeze or deanimate the threat of feeling, of life itself. . . . The penetrability of the subject by an alien mind is also at stake . . . *thought itself is taken as an invasive, alien power emanating from a foreign, controlling mind*" (Michael

Rather than apply a map of human interiority to comprehend these more-than-human object relationships, I want to ask how these material things might morph our feeling bodies, our self-concept, and rearrange the coordinates of our favoured cartographies. Kirby writes:

If we are to open the question of identity and sexuality more thoroughly, we will need to risk the identity of humanness itself and the logic that operates to indemnify this identity against an outside that is alien to it, and against modes of intercourse that are considered improper, impossible and—unnatural.⁷⁷⁴

Morton reminds us of the “always-already quality of nonhuman impingement.”⁷⁷⁵ Whereas for Knafo this impingement poses a threat to the psychoanalytic subject, for Morton et al., it is a basic ontological reality we would do well to note.

OS might warrant a psychoanalytic reading, in order to identify the developmental misstep and guide the patient back to the human family. Doing so, however, denies the ways desire and attachment work and play, across types and kinds of bodies. It also ignores the deep interconnection with and bearing of not-human bodies on our own.

Musser’s move is to “read [OS] as a turn *toward* objects rather than a turn away from humans.” She asks: “What does it mean to embrace the otherness of an object? Specifically, what does it

Eigen, *The Electrified Tighrope*, (Karnac, 2004), 201). For the psychoanalyst, these mind-controlling machines come from “inside.” They are projected inventions of a troubled self. Deleuze and Guattari dispute the formulation that Tausk’s machines are a projection of the individual psychosoma. Instead, processes of pre-subjective machinic interaction are productive of particular psyches. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*).

⁷⁷⁴ Vicki Kirby, “(Con)founding ‘the Human’ Incestuous Beginnings”, in eds Noreen Giffney and Myra Hird, *Queering the Non/Human*, (Ashgate, 2008) 40. Revisiting Freud’s theory of acquisition of a “self” through the realization of bodily boundaries, Kirby challenges the usual schema of “biology first,” after which “culture” is installed and modifies nature. Instead, she writes, “I want to suggest that what sits behind this question’s prohibition is the possibility that the physical body—biology—conceives itself differently through myriad images, ideas and notions, such that an idea *is* a biological cause/effect. In other words, ‘initial conditions’ are inherently unstable and mutable, and consciousness can’t be separated out from this biological complexity” (Kirby, “(Con)Founding the ‘Human’: Incestuous Beginnings,” 43).

⁷⁷⁵ Morton, *Humankind*, 300.

mean for humans to imagine themselves as objects? What mode of un-becoming a subject does objectum sexuality offer?"⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷⁶ Musser, "Objects of Desire."

8 HOW TO APPROACH THE OUTSIDERS

8.1 Objectality, materiality

We also might ask ourselves about the objects of love. How could we conceive of their contributions to the relational field? How are we meant to experience the things that we live with? Those working under the umbrella of the “nonhuman turn” have taken on these questions, opening the phenomenological reduction to a universe replete with object relationship.

Morton offers a Buddhism-inflected picture of a universe of entities contributing to and coexisting in a shared dream space:

The bardo of this life is like coexisting with seven billion people, all having slightly different nightmares. We affect one another across these nightmares. The view is not solipsism or idealism. These nightmares are happening in a shared space and they happen because we exist. And what happens in them is real. It affects you. Now [object-oriented ontology] argues that what nonhumans do is not all that different from what humans do. And “nonhuman” can mean frog, pencil or electron cloud. So the bardo now includes the dreams of trillions of entities.⁷⁷⁷

This dreaming is a process of translating experience. For Morton, it is an aesthetic and material process, not simply a symbolic one. One object translates another object into its own terms, and in doing so it makes some kind of mark. “Objects dream,” Morton insists. “Think of a footprint. It’s sand’s dream of a foot.”⁷⁷⁸ And, as he reminds us, there is no end to mistranslations. We don’t “get it right” once and for all, though we are given to understand that (mis)translations have real effects:

The asteroid never encounters Earth as just a blank screen, onto which it projects its own fantasy, its form—its warping by other objects. The asteroid does not perform a negation of every positive content, a Hegelian “abstraction from all determinateness.” The ego of an object is simply the record of the traumas that happened to it—this goes for the objects

⁷⁷⁷Morton, *Realist Magic*. 179.

⁷⁷⁸Morton, *Realist Magic*, 180.

called human, for whom the ego is a virtual, sensual object. Thus there are no blank screens in reality whatsoever.⁷⁷⁹

This treatment of objectality has two effects. First, it upends the notion of an actively projecting subject improperly relating to a passive, mute or neutral object: objects begin to creep in, taking up space in a co-created real. Morton is not far from Winnicott's transitional phenomena, only they include the uniqueness of an object's influence into *bardo* space; the bardo is usually read as an intermediate space between this life and the next. It can also represent any state of intermediacy or transition—a Winnicottian moment writ large. The way Morton's objects send out their unique "notes" disrupts the binary language of *animate/inanimate*: instead, objects are ontologically *undead*.⁷⁸⁰

The second effect of this ontology is that the subject—the one that psychoanalysis is at pains to protect—is taken to be merely one style of object among myriad others. All objects are capable of making lasting impressions on other objects, and certain objects force this realization—global warming being one of them. Morton describes this displacement of the transcendental subject as a kind of humiliation, "which means being brought low, being brought down to earth."⁷⁸¹

With OS, as in any love story, the object makes a mark on the lover's sense of being, and vice versa. Lovers (mis)translate each other, resonate with each other. The love object radiates something of itself; the lover is drawn to it. The material significance of these intimacies are illegible to the analytic ear. The love object is translated to be sure, through psychoanalytic discourse, where it disappears into the background—now a signifier of a human's more primary relations. The desire to merge with objectality is swept into a tale of human love lost, since we are "naturally" libidinally fixed to the human, though we may be psychically defended from it. Since we move through symbiosis with the "environment mother," we must ultimately be "disillusioned from this relationship" to avoid pathological states.⁷⁸² Going forward, all other connections will be an unconscious displacement of this early environment. A polymorphous

⁷⁷⁹ Morton, *Realist Magic*, 198.

⁷⁸⁰ Morton, *Humankind*, 118.

⁷⁸¹ Tim Morton, *Hyperbobjects: Philosophy and Ecology at the End of the World*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 17.

⁷⁸² Bollas, *Shadow of the Object*, 17.

sexuality that fails to “get on track” and follow a particular teleology puts us squarely back in the world of the regressed and infantile.

Now, as I led this seminar on schizoid processes, I was also engaging in feminist materialist theory fully committed to undoing the metaphysics of the separated human and “queering what is meant by nature.”⁷⁸³ Despite the philosophical disagreements between new materialists and object-oriented ontologists,⁷⁸⁴ the effort to undercut anthropocentrism is shared. Rebekah Sheldon writes of feminist materialisms: “This perspective is emphatically relational. It begins from the assumption that ideas and things do not occupy separate ontological orders but instead are co-constituents in the production of the real.”⁷⁸⁵ The conjoined ontology-epistemology of Barad’s project asserts an “immanent enfolding of matter and meaning,” where these terms become inseparable and transitional. I was, before therapy school, accustomed to using entwined phrases such as *naturecultures* and *fleshy semiotics*, which I learned from Haraway et al. I also

⁷⁸³ Donna Haraway, “A Game of Cat’s Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies,” *Configurations*, 2:1, (1994), 60.

⁷⁸⁴ Are objects entangled or inherently separate? Should we begin with processes or things in themselves? Should we emphasize the relata or the relationship between? Graham Harman gives one example of differing agendas between thinkers who are often cited together: OOO [object-oriented ontology] is a philosophy of full-blown individual objects, while Jane Bennett’s version of New Materialism downplays such entities in favor of what she calls a ‘single matter-energy.’ Defending the basic ontological structure of an object, or arguing for the entanglement of phenomena is not my business here. Instead, I am interested in tracing the ways that both open a conversation about realities that psychoanalysis has placed outside of its container. Reframing humans as objects, on equal ontological ground with all else (the OOO approach), or, prioritizing an entangled nature of categories such as humans and non-humans (as with new materialisms), are meant to be correctives to human exceptionalism. With Barad, I see that the differentiation that psychoanalysis makes between the human processing container and every other worldly entity enacts a cut in the fabric of co-existence. And I think that Harman *et al* pose an important question that guides their philosophical project. That is: *What portions of reality are missing here?* (Graham Harman, “The Battle of Objects and Subjects: Concerning Sbriglia and Zizek’s Subject Lessons Anthology,” *Open Philosophy*, 3:1, (2020), 31).

⁷⁸⁵ Rebekah Sheldon, “Form/Matter/Chora: Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism” in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed Richard Grusin, (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 196

was engaged with Jane Bennett's materialism, where natural and artifactual things have the ability to assemble and self-organize, affecting our bodily becomings. I could conceptualize a universe of hybridity, cyborgs, monsters, multispecies kinship and Barad's "queer critters," including lightning and stingrays and atoms, who demonstrate the indeterminate nature of "phenomena-in-their-becoming."⁷⁸⁶

These multispecies, multi-thing, multidimensional universes are not a perversion of an original state of being; they instead suggest that iterative entanglements presuppose the categories upon which psychoanalysis builds its theory and practice. As Kirby argues in her materialization of Derridean deconstruction, there is no outside of the text of an indeterminate field of nature in the making.⁷⁸⁷ Or as Morton puts it, there is no "away" in planetary awareness.⁷⁸⁸ The sharp line between the subject of psychoanalysis and not-human beings—which maps onto a division between interiority and exteriority, which is the instruction of the phenomenological reduction—collapses when we consider, even for a moment, the reality of more-than-human beings. They are, experientially, right here.

Were we to bring these perspectives to bear on Jack's therapy regarding his doll Maya, we would have to admit that our self-identity is provisional at best and that external worlds are always already breaching the so-called contact barrier of human psychic life. Relational psychoanalysis also suggests that we do not precede our relations: intersubjective unfolding and co-emergence processes are key to the work. Selves come to be patterned, and psyches are co-created in shared fields. In Barad's work, *all categories* are figured and reconfigured in an "iterative unfolding" performed through material practice—including acts of love, hate or both. These practices are engaged in "sedimenting out the world in certain kinds of ways and not others."⁷⁸⁹ The notion of

⁷⁸⁶ Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," 46. Barad: "[T]he quantum paradoxes exhibited by lightning, stingrays, and humans are persistently denied any empirical purchase, as though the thought of allowing nature such a radical degree of ontological complexity is too much to bear, and that such bewildering matters must, in the end, be a result of culture's perverse framing of something significantly more tame" (Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," 36).

⁷⁸⁷ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*.

⁷⁸⁸ Morton, *Humankind*, 65.

⁷⁸⁹ Barad, "Interview with Karen Barad" 68.

a subject projecting onto a passive object is a habitual sedimentation of a far more dynamic material field. We might get curious about what this practice of doll relationship between Maya and Jack could generate, the meanings and material mutations that may arise from this encounter.⁷⁹⁰ We would wonder, finally, whether the circuits of affect that flow within families, and the stories told therein, are the only myths and systems of affiliation that matter. We might pause with our embodied response to this erotic bond with materiality (fear, disgust, excitement—body signals of boundary negotiations). We would note the ethical-epistemic choice we are making when we divide one category from another. I am not advocating for the “goodness” of relating to a doll or arguing that transgressive sex necessarily has political value; indeed, I pause hesitantly at various categorical thresholds as well. However, I do allow that worldly things (and otherworldly beings) are entangled in transformative and dynamic material-psychic relational fields. This relational field is irreducibly uncertain.

In the end, Jack and Maya’s love story provided a way for this seminar group to play with the etiology of the schizoid character structure and to explore how inside fantasy worlds and outside objects should be connected. We did not equivocate at the border. We did not ask how objectality might be otherwise configured in relation to our subjectivity. We did not propose an alternate perspective from a novel point of view (perhaps even not-human) or allow Jack’s attachments to subvert our own understandings of relationality, precisely because our work was

⁷⁹⁰ Via schizoanalysis we might ask how Jack creates a unique situation by crossing a relational threshold here, articulating something original through a combination of bodies, opening up novel territory. We might ask what kind of subjectivity he is enunciating through this inventive act of familial decoding, mobilizing his desire toward something outside the family, a solution to connection beyond “mommy.” The schizoid splits we were trying to repair via reintegration into human connection might instead be a source of vitalizing potential and inventive practice, a field of “trans-subjective” interaction: “I is another, a multiplicity of others, embodied at the intersection of partial components of enunciation, overflowing individuated identity and the organized body in all directions” (Guattari, *Chaosophy*, 83). We might also fairly question whether rearticulating desire and intimacy by consuming feminized machine beings offers any escape route from dominating cultural patterns. Maya herself is a coded machinic-semiotic being. In any case, the schizoanalytic approach to thinking through Jack’s relationship was out of bounds. Emotional dilemmas and defensive character organization are thought to develop through interfacing with environments confined to the home.

to learn to interpret Jack within the framework of the psychoanalytic apparatus. This seminar revealed to me the way that normative modes of relationship are adjudicated in psychoanalysis and how the “perverse” use of not-human objects is pathologized, albeit with an attitude of care. We brought our humanist sensibilities to the clinic.

Analysts commonly use the word *eccentric* to describe the schizoid personality. The class was in agreement that intimacy with a lifelike doll is “weird,” and such weirdness unquestionably calls for a therapeutic approach. As Kirby notes, however, “[t]he perverse antics, errancies, and unpredictabilities of intratextuality (systematicity) aren’t problems that fall away and disappear once diagnosed.”⁷⁹¹ In other words, whether or not we determine Jack is a schizoid patient, or perverse, the material networks that compose Maya continue to exert power on all kinds of minds and bodies. Barad will insist that reality is the invention of transmaterialities—and this field of connection is impure and indeterminate.⁷⁹² The nature of nature entails this originary queerness.

To navigate the field of Maya and Jack therapeutically, Knafo imports these conceptual divisions: human and not-humans are categorically distinct. The realm of the technological and the realm of the human are originally separate, with an increasing entanglement creating new and perverse configurations of subject-object relations. A thought about the inherent technicity of what we understand to be human nature is not treated here.⁷⁹³ The sensuous perception, or even conceptual consideration, of the *beingness* of other life forms is suspect. Human-to-human

⁷⁹¹ Kirby, “In conversation with Vicki Kirby”, 342.

⁷⁹² Karen Barad, “Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter?realities and Queer Political Imaginings,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay studies*, 21:2-3, 2015.

⁷⁹³ Levin notes how we dissociate from “being ‘material’ (and highly programmable) assemblies that are fitted out with all kinds of automatic mechanisms.” He offers reading as an example of this technicity: “Learning to read is to program a segment of the brain to automatically recognize and combine tiny little marks on a page that are arranged in a rolling sequence. Not to deny the semantic wonderment of the reading (or any other) experience—but this is essentially an assembly line process that has little to do with consciousness or the dynamic unconscious. It’s technology. We flatter ourselves when we call it ‘intelligence,’ as if that were something transcendently separate from the world in which we are embedded and its mysterious ways.” (IARPP colloquium post, June 20 2017. IARPP Colloquium Series, No. 30, “Unconscious Processes in Relation to the Environmental Crisis,” June 19 - July 2, 2017.)

relationality is privileged as foundational to selfhood.⁷⁹⁴ The dynamics involved in this limited idea of relationship determine how we measure mental health. At this point, we do a curious thing to the rest of existence: the mess of not-human entanglement is judged as “regressive primitivity.” Symbiosis, as we shall see later on, becomes a dangerous problem.

8.2 Correlationism

In this section, I continue to clarify where relational psychoanalysis and ecological thinking are at serious odds. One way to unpack this incompatibility is to consider what object-oriented ontologists have named a *correlationism* underlying Western traditions of thought. Object-oriented ontologists, speculative realists and new materialist thinkers, despite their differences, share an interest in developing critical and conceptual strategies for addressing worlds beyond human minds and decentring the human subject as a particularly special category of existence. Graham Harman describes object-oriented ontology’s aim as to “retrieve the question of the object from the conception of the transcendental subject.”⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁴ In “Notes on Psychoanalysis and Technology, the Psyche and the Social,” Clough considers the psyche as a border, noting how psychic mechanisms function as a protective shield. For Clough, the threshold between the technological and human is already breached. Using digital media as one example of the technical unconscious, Clough notes how it operates to engage us affectively, premised on haptic and gestural interaction. Not unlike the way psychoanalysis considers how the holding environment sets us up with an unconscious via its sensory provisions, where our sense of self is mediated by relational interaction, we are also “computationally open” to the agency of digital and other not-human media. Clough writes: “Thinking is being opened to other-than-human agencies, deprivileging the human subject while placing humans in a larger environment of affective forces” (75). For her, the body is already open to further mediation: “what [Mark] Hansen refers to as worldly sensibility or ‘worldskin,’ which touches the infant even as the infant touches itself, setting the human in the larger flux of matter, in which the technical is always already imbricated” (70). We are “always already networked” (81). In this terrain, it is difficult to track the psychoanalytic developmental convention of symbiosis with the mother toward individuation. Clough echoes Haraway when she writes that we are sensitive and wholly accessible to a holding environment that is composed of “worldly entities or objects that are not lost but rather are always becoming” (Clough, Patricia T. “Notes on Psychoanalysis and Technology, the Psyche and the Social,” 81).

⁷⁹⁵ Harman, “Battle of Objects and Subjects,” 315.

Psychoanalysis protects a specific iteration of the transcendental subject, one who takes up with reality through “deep structures of mind.”⁷⁹⁶ Freud writes:

Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychic is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be.⁷⁹⁷

It is almost doctrinal to say that the discovery of the Freudian unconscious delivered a narcissistic wound to the Cartesian construct of an individual, rationally principled, conscious subject. Humanity, as Freud writes, is given “a most bitter blow from present-day psychological research which is endeavoring to prove to the ego of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house.”⁷⁹⁸ It does seem as though this rupture to selfhood is ameliorated in contemporary psychoanalytic work, which reinscribes an ideal form of subjectivity through the relational psyche. This formulation of psychic life operates exclusively through a model of human attachment.⁷⁹⁹

Human self-love, otherwise known as narcissism, is hard to shake. Psychoanalysis has recentred human beings (albeit decentred by the unconscious) within a slightly larger enclosure, this time through holding environments, containment models and field theories of shared psychic functioning. With the “couple” at the centre of the orbit, their epistemic practices exert an especially strong gravitational pull on the rest of the world: most beings will be drawn inward, internalized, metaphorized and digested by the analytic dyad, and most things will turn out to be human representations of human-centric events.

⁷⁹⁶ Grotstein’s treatment of Bion makes an explicit link with Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Thus, the fundamental nature of the psychoanalytic concept of psychic reality is basically ‘*transcendental*’ is so far as it depends on *a priori* assumptions” (Grotstein, *A Beam of Intense Darkness*, 132).

⁷⁹⁷ Freud, “The Unconscious,” (1915), *Standard Edition*, Vol 16, (Hogarth, 1957).

⁷⁹⁸ Freud, “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis” (1917) *Standard Edition*, Vol 17, (Hogarth, 1917-1919), 44.

⁷⁹⁹ As Levin writes, “‘intersubjectivity’ arrives triumphantly on the developmental scene to save the day” (Levin, “In Praise of Rupture: The *Trieblutions* of Relational Psychoanalysis”).

In this way, psychoanalysis seems to be wholly opposed to materialist and object-oriented fields, the former concerned with the vicissitudes of subjectivity, understood as an expression of (un)consciousness evolving out of mere matter (if not terrifying materiality),⁸⁰⁰ and the latter resolutely committed to the material “outside” through considering ontologies of things, objects and processes independent of the human mind. Even in this formulation, I have laid out the issue in what Harman would call an “onto-taxonomic” way, such that it appears as if “there are two and only two basic kinds of things in the cosmos: (1) humans, and (2) everything else.”⁸⁰¹

Through the rubric of correlationism, I want to clarify the following points. Firstly, that psychoanalysis maintains this onto-taxonomy of “human and everything else” in its cartography. It overvalues human knowing and relating such that other life forms and beings seem to go missing. Indeed, psychoanalysis makes a technical convention out of correlationism through the phenomenological reduction. The second point I pursue is that, given what this human-exceptionalist epistemology excludes, myriad forms of relationship become taboo.

The cut between psychic space and material world, and the privileging of the former dimension, appears in Civitarese’s writing on the analytic field. In regard to working with the “facts” of a patient’s life, he writes:

Attention to reality/history then risks being frozen by hyperrealist immobility, that is denying—in the very act of trusting in the pseudo-justifications of a material reality as a reassuring simulacrum and therefore counterfeit—“reality” as the true sense of life. The analyst can oppose this ideology of reality through constant interrogation of himself with the patient; a permanent, by definition open and irreconciled, investigation of a reality pervaded by the shadow of the dream and the unconscious: of what else if not psychic reality?

⁸⁰⁰ A striking comment in an online colloquium of relational psychoanalysts captured the dreadful return to a (feminized) earth that we apparently leave in life: “The death drive is conservative, consistent, adamant about going backwards, to the very beginning, to mother, mother-earth, the very beginnings and definitely the end of life. The blind loyalty and striving for her airless touch” (Shlomit Gadot, “Airless Worlds: The Traumatic Sequelae of Identification with Parental Negation,” *IARPP Colloquium*, November 11-22, 2020).

⁸⁰¹ Harman, “Battle of Objects and Subjects,” 317.

“External reality” (or an *ideology* of reality—here we see Civitarese in debunking mode) draws one away from the envelope of the analysis, the internal setting of the patient and analysand, and the dream between: “The Siren’s song of the external world in fact almost always serves the analyst’s antalgic collusion and defensive splittings.”⁸⁰²

What is livelier and truer than the immobilizing simulacrum of an outside is, it turns out, psychic reality. Not only is materiality dispensed with for the sake of working with oneiric dimensions, but relating with excluded materials also becomes a problem (archaic states such as symbiosis, psychotic concreteness and the paraphilias tell us so).

Correlationism, a term coined by Quentin Meillassoux,⁸⁰³ signifies, simply put, a philosophy whereby a thing cannot be accessed apart from its correlation to a thinker. Iris van der Tuin refers to this as Kant’s “mind-dependence”: we can imagine it, but we can’t know it.⁸⁰⁴ What this has meant is that the onus of post-Kantian philosophical and critical investigation has leaned toward the subject’s modes of knowing (epistemology becomes primary), and whatever things may lie beyond the thinker have become more or less impossible to approach apart from human representational modes. Bryant writes:

Philosophy now shifts from being a debate about the nature of things-in-themselves or substance, to a debate about the *mechanisms* by which *phenomena* are produced or structured. Is it mind that structures phenomena? Language? Power? Intentionality? Embodied experience? Such are but a handful of the options that have been entertained by contemporary theory.⁸⁰⁵

One consequence of this shift in debate is that not-me beings, or Kantian things-in-themselves, or what Bryant calls “subjectless objects,” are deemed inaccessible beyond human-cultural epistemological processes. Psychoanalysis teems with *subjective-objects*; we ascribe personal

⁸⁰² Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 15.

⁸⁰³ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, Continuum, 2008.

⁸⁰⁴ Van der Tuin, “Diffraction as a Methodology For Feminist Onto-Epistemology,” 232,

⁸⁰⁵ Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 38.

meaning to essentially everything.⁸⁰⁶ Object-oriented ontology problematizes the ways by which externally existing realities become little more than a projection screen for mental-emotional life, or constructed in and through a given ideology.⁸⁰⁷

One allegation that Cohen levels is that the primary correlationist tenet, whereby one can only know the correlate of a thing rather than the thing in itself, has entrenched a contemporary Western episteme in a kind of narcissistic feedback loop: human claims to reality—our subjective or societally constructed modes of knowing—become a kind of discursive cage prohibiting any means to address reality. In Cohen’s words, the “enhancement of subjectivities” as a theoretical agenda has occluded biospheric crisis. We are stuck in a human gaze when objects are understandable only as they exist for us. “Self-bound logics” such as these,⁸⁰⁸ in

⁸⁰⁶ Bollas’s *The Evocative Object World* along with Searles’s *The Nonhuman Environment* are two noteworthy psychoanalytic considerations of not-humans. The object world as Bollas describes it affects our dream life, shapes our personal idioms, sparks free-associative processes and stirs us emotionally. In *The Nonhuman Environment*, Searles attempts to account for the ways not-human dimensions participate in the creation of the human psyche. As the object-oriented ontologist might argue, both fail to consider the subjectless object, insofar as the onus of attention here is how objects are formative *for humans*.

⁸⁰⁷ Latour, in conversation with Harman, sets this up as a gesture that has come to dominate critical theory: a “false object,” unmasked as a fetish, is actually “nothing but mere empty white screens on which is projected the power of society, domination, whatever” (Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?”, 238). From there, the explanation runs as follows: the fetishist is acted upon by unconscious forces—which, as Latour puts it, will be “whichever pet facts the social scientists fancy to work with” (238). This logic of the fetish continues to play out in psychoanalysis. Relevant to my purposes, Latour points out an epistemological stalemate that makes the critic an “explainer” of illusion, based on the preferred (and indisputable) “facts” of their own particular disciplinary lens. We get no closer to a meaningful encounter with reality, objects and things when the onus of inquiry is on the illusory epistemological framework, for example, pointing out the naivety of a mode of knowing through another, presumably legitimate, framework of “knowing better.” Instead of relentlessly parsing fact from illusion, Latour encourages an approach that looks instead to the tangle of participants that bring a thing into existence and maintain it.

⁸⁰⁸ Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 18.

Cohen's thinking, indicate a residual humanism "incapable of *experiencing* the mutations and changes that mark our climate."⁸⁰⁹

The correlationist circle means that humans keep reinscribing themselves whenever they begin to touch in on "everything else." In psychoanalysis, we can see how not-human objects are considered in and through human emotional use (as Winnicott explains, "what I am referring to . . . is not so much the object used as the use of the object");⁸¹⁰ simultaneously, the capacities and qualities of entities and life forms ultimately step back to make way for the primacy of human encounter. The object, as the *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* defines it, is a succinct iteration of correlationism: "As concerns the link between the external object and the internal object: Whatever its indisputable reality (objective, objectal), the external object remains unknowable and it is only ever possible to work with its representatives."⁸¹¹

Again, we see how it becomes difficult to allow for any realism independent of our access modes. Something exists beyond thought, to be sure (Kant's things-in-themselves), but we can only know them through the circuits of human minds—how they manifest for us. "As a consequence," Bryant writes, "it becomes clear that, for the correlationist, objects take on the status of *fictions*."⁸¹² Hence, the critics of correlationism have named this lineage of philosophy *anti-realism*. A rigorous anti-realism is precisely the methodology that analysts such as Civitarese recommend. Indeed, how things arise in the "illusional dimension"—so-called psychic facts—will be the only matter of concern.⁸¹³ It is at this point that psychoanalysis and object philosophies polarize.

The object-oriented solution to correlationism is to posit a philosophical realism in which objects are irreducible to human perception of them. The ontological plane becomes flattened such that subjects are not afforded a special existential status; they become one sort of object among many sorts. Bryant explains how "objects of all sorts and at all scales are on equal ontological footing,

⁸⁰⁹ Cohen, *Telemorphosis*, 23.

⁸¹⁰ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, xii.

⁸¹¹ Kurts, "Object," *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 1171.

⁸¹² Bryant, *Democracy of Objects*, 38.

⁸¹³ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 15.

such that subjects, groups, fictions, technologies, institutions, etc., are every bit as real as quarks, planets, trees, and tardigrades.”⁸¹⁴

Psychoanalysis, in the meantime, reinscribes its subject through its container model of mind. It marks out its intersubjective territory, laying claim to interiority-subjectivity-fantasy as its human kingdom. Human exceptionalism, this time slightly rearranged, whereby humans decentre other humans, is defended. This defensiveness becomes evident especially when the fence between intersubjectivity and objectality is threatened.⁸¹⁵ Interiority and the “great outdoors,” subjects and objects, fantasy and reality, might be blurry categories in the “dream,” but the blur is the result of human psychic processes (usually primitive ones). These blurs are then taken as distortions in how we organize things.⁸¹⁶

8.3 Between emotional epistemology and realist ontology

Object-oriented ontologies circumvent psychoanalysis’s system of dualisms by maintaining that human modes of access are only one among the infinite ways that objects encounter other objects. Morton writes: “On this view, what is called *intersubjectivity*—a shared space in which human meaning resonates—is a small region of a much larger interobjective configuration space.”⁸¹⁷ We do anthropomorphize; that’s one way the anthropos can access other beings. We could also recognize that all sorts of things participate in their own versions of morphism. This planet is a record of intimate, morphological object encounter.

For Barad, these morphological encounters are not simply physical, as though this domain were definitively separated from what we mark out as psychological. Materiality yearns, desires and

⁸¹⁴ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 31.

⁸¹⁵ Duerr writes: “Nothing is allowed to be outside any more, since the mere conceptualization of the outside is the true source of anxiety” (Duerr, *Dreamtime*, 45).

⁸¹⁶ Latour describes this mode of critique: “you have to learn to become suspicious of everything people say, because of course we know that they live the thralls of a complete *illusion* of their real motives” (Latour, *Has Critique Run out of Steam?*, 229). To be fair, contemporary relational psychoanalysis might bring a more compassionate attitude toward the illusory than we might see in critiques of ideology. The psychoanalyst posits human fantasy as irreducible and commits to working there, empathically, facts aside, as if to say, “We all make mistakes.”

⁸¹⁷ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 81.

remembers. They write: “Memory is not the recording held by events in the mind but marked historicalities ingrained in the world’s becoming.”⁸¹⁸ In “Transmaterialities,” the activity of atoms between lightning and ground is described as a “charged yearning in a desiring field.”⁸¹⁹ Sky and ground experiment with the charge of excitement, imagining new ways to connect. The ways they do so are indeterminate. Lest we assume that Barad the human is poetically anthropomorphizing weather, they insist that these queer quantum enactments are of the agential “nature” of materiality, which includes all of us in its play. Barad writes:

Matter is not the given, the unchangeable, the bare facts of nature. It is not inanimate, lifeless, eternal. . . . Matter is caught up in its own and others’ desiring fields. It cannot help but touch itself in an infinite exploration of its (im/possible) be(com)ing(s). And in touching it/self, it partners promiscuously and perversely with otherness in a radical ongoing deconstruction and (re)configuring of itself.⁸²⁰

These unbecoming becomings are not invited into psychoanalytic relational practice. Intersubjectivity—wherein the subject is already differentiated from a material field—is its entire concern and focus. While Barad sees “imaginaries with material existences in the thick now of the present—imaginaries that are attuned to the condensations of past and future condensed into each moment,”⁸²¹ psychoanalysis reserves these imaginary condensations, desires and longings, for the human mind. With therapy cast as a dreaming process between two psyches unfolding against the fixed firmament of the outside world, subjectivity is a closed loop of becoming, guarded by prohibitions around imagining, conceptualizing and otherwise touching in on not-me beings.

Donna Orange calls psychoanalysis “an emotional epistemology” made possible by “the empathic participation in the emotional life of the other.”⁸²² In a rare moment in psychoanalytic literature, Orange extends “emotional understanding” to a tree: “We perceive, classify, subdue

⁸¹⁸ Barad, “Transmaterialities,” 406.

⁸¹⁹ Barad, “Transmaterialities,” 387.

⁸²⁰ Barad, “Transmaterialities,” 411.

⁸²¹ Barad, “Transmaterialities,” 388.

⁸²² Donna Orange, *Emotional Understanding: Studies in Psychoanalytic Epistemology*, (The Guilford Press, 1995), 17.

things, such as trees. Nevertheless, if the tree becomes a Thou, it becomes a subject to me, an other.”⁸²³ Drawing from Martin Buber, the tree achieves Thou status via the endowment of the human’s emotional epistemology. (I will leave aside who-what the tree may be for the orb-weaver spider, or the morel.) For Orange, “‘making sense’ is a way of connecting to the uncharted and mysterious parts of ourselves and one another.”⁸²⁴ Orange’s psychoanalytic sensibility is comfortable with maintaining an ethical I-Thou distance, between a me and a not-me. The morphism enacted here is safely immaterial. At the very least, we can behold a particular tree and appreciate its mystery.

In *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, Morton recalls the story of Cecil the lion, who was hunted by an American dentist in 2015. They consider the public outcry that ensued, and how we can readily consider emotional identification with the lion to be a “pre-theoretical” and “childish” stance. For Morton, “Empathy isn’t as expensive as we think. . . . The point is that *no effort at all* is required; that whenever effort is brought in, solidarity fades.” They go on to relate this moment to telepathy—passion at a distance: “the boundaries between me and another are far less rigid than Western thought has supposed.”⁸²⁵

Here, empathy is a mode of felt-imagination that suspends the categorical difference between me and not-me. To imagine empathically is to identify with others, to mix up our embodied feelings for another’s. Mixing up feelings is a kind of contamination. I can imagine your suffering because my own psychesoma knows what this is and I care about it. To what extent can I mix up myself with another before I meet the edges of perversion or psychosis? How far does co-imbrication reach?⁸²⁶

⁸²³ Orange, *Emotional Understanding*, 21.

⁸²⁴ Orange, *Emotional Understanding*, 6.

⁸²⁵ Morton, *Humankind*, 83-84.

⁸²⁶ Current research on animal cognition, emotion and interspecies communication disputes the human-centric conception of emotional transmission and empathic interaction. See, for example, Elodie Briefer, “Vocal expression of emotions in mammals: mechanisms of production and evidence,” *Journal of Zoology*. 288:1. 2012., & Elodie Briefer, Federico Tettamanti and Alan G McElligott, “Emotions in goats: mapping physiological, behavioural and vocal profiles,” *Animal Behaviour*, 99, 2015.

What does the grown-up version of empathy look like? From the psychoanalytic point of view, adult empathy does require some effort. Empathy—what Heinz Kohut calls “vicarious introspection”⁸²⁷—involves emotional identification with another person. Empathy means we can imagine another’s interiority. Benjamin writes of “a relation in which each person experiences the other as a ‘like subject’, another mind who can be ‘felt with’ yet has a distinct, separate, center of feeling and perception.”⁸²⁸ Developing a phenomenological experience of other minds is a difficult but important achievement for a human psyche. In some psychoanalytic constructions of perversion, this achievement of empathy is what goes amiss.

When it comes to identifying-with and feeling-with beings outside the purview of human intersubjectivity, psychoanalysis gets embarrassed. With internalized anthropocentric metaphysics running in the background of its practice, a prohibitive superego intervenes in processes of feeling-with, feeling-for, feeling-as another. Our ideo-affective threads get snapped at a certain point and woven back into an unconscious patterned by familial relations.

This emotional episteme collides uncomfortably with realist ontology in climate catastrophe. Recall Freud’s metaphor of a “fire at the theatre,” which marks a moment where a messy emotional reality became integrated into psychoanalysis as its very technique: transference. Civitarese reads Freud in the following way:

The fire at the theatre is an incident, a real element that irrupts and causes the play to be stopped; it is a complete change of scene, a particularly surprising image. Indeed, in this passage Freud is not referring, as we might expect, to events in the external world or to facts of material reality, which might be so urgent and dramatic as to necessarily annul the *as if* functioning of the setting’s device, but rather to the flaring up of transference love, something that he now places *inside* the framework of the cure, after initially considering it an impediment.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁷ Heinz Kohut, “Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 7:3, 1959.

⁸²⁸ Benjamin, . “Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness,” 6.

⁸²⁹ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 2

The field analyst leans in to the *as-if* quality of intrapsychic life, which is understood to be the best means to deal with emotional impediments. The “internal setting” is now meant to contain the elements of psychic life, including the outbreak of fire (passion) that so distressed Breuer when working with Anna O. The fire (in other words, an enactment, a moment of transference) can now be processed and worked through.

I mobilize this particular passage to elaborate the intentional anti-realism of the psychoanalytic field, and also to be obstinately concrete (or “stubbornly realist,” as Latour writes, “but a realism dealing with what I will call *matters of concern*, not *matters of fact*”).⁸³⁰ I want to ask how the technical and epistemological devices of this psychoanalysis are meant to encounter the concerning matters of the “outside” when tending to reality is seen as an antalgic collusion, or where interfacing too closely with not-human “exteriority” is considered to be perverse, schizoid and regressive. Drawing ideo-affective threads through terrestrial materiality transgresses the psychic patterning we are meant to weave. What are we permitted to imagine? Who is allowed to affect us? *What portions of reality are missing here?*

Working through the summer of 2021, the fire in the theatre became a fire in the Zoom room. The backdrop to my sessions was a bleak brown sky blurring out the sun. This time, smoke was being blown from British Columbia’s Interior region and the state of Oregon to Vancouver Island. Bright beige is one way to describe the colour of the sky. Even with the office windows closed, smoke lingered on clothing and hair. Meetings were cancelled when parts of British Columbia lost cell service due to the combination of wildfire and the intensity of the heat dome that moved through the province. How does this emotional epistemology encounter a realist ontology that impinges on the analytic container?

I feel quite clear about the fact that I failed to help anyone integrate this disaster into an internal *as-if* setting. Patients in the same climate as I spoke uneasily about not wanting to leave their house. Due to the high levels of toxic particulate in the air, we decided this was wise.

Perhaps the most intolerable moment in the day was hearing crows calling to one another outside my office. I imagined their reality, and what they might be communicating through the smoke

⁸³⁰ Latour, “Has Critique Run out of Steam?”, 131.

while I held space for humans in a climate-controlled office. I found myself pierced rather than held by “the surroundings.”

Civitarese writes: “If the dream is the foundation and by extension the paradigm of the analytical work, keeping to material reality would be like waking up from the dream; abandoning exploration of unconscious levels of communication to become rooted in consciousness.”⁸³¹

With regard to the fires that surround my therapeutic work, I wonder, should we at least wander toward the closed windows and take a look? A burning landscape has literally disrupted the envelope of our work. Malabou writes on destructive metamorphoses that manifest as a “loss of symbolic reference points.”⁸³² The environment mother is one of these reference points: the holding environment, the container. Material events reveal the limits of these enclosures by “piercing subjective continuity.”⁸³³

Between the predicaments of psychic life and climate catastrophe, between psychoanalytic subjects dreaming together and the objects and events “outside,” I question (with Cohen) how this iteration of the oneiric paradigm, which protects psychic reality from the outside through the human container, allows us to *experience* our conditions. A bi-personal relational model is a meagre thing when dreaming is divorced, as a matter of technique, from the signifying processes of material, terrestrial beings and when no shared ground is presumed to exist in the web of communicative relationship between humans and . . . everything else.

In any case, in the psychoanalytic iteration of correlationism that I have outlined here, psychic development takes place in this highly circumscribed environment. This is the separate “parallel universe” of mental life, created through the work of gathering turbulent storms and “excesses of sensoriality” and making them thinkable.⁸³⁴

Civitarese notes how a dream is a dramatization of “the manifold levels of reality and of the possible worlds we simultaneously live in.”⁸³⁵ Which possible worlds are engendered, and which

⁸³¹ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 13

⁸³² Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 18.

⁸³³ Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 29.

⁸³⁴ Ferro and Basille, *The Analytic Field: A Clinical Concept*, 6.

⁸³⁵ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 168.

are endangered by the structure of this dream? The “intimate theatre” is built upon an inner/outer boundary that ultimately avoids most contributions to the play by making a backdrop of “everything else.”

9 RE-ENTANGLING

9.1 The separation imperative

It's not simply that terrestrial materiality is *overlooked* due to being fixed in our anthropocentric imagination. Psychoanalysis has coded symbiosis as an abject necessity whose exit is hard won for the mature individual. The relational matrix humans are meant to depart from is already exceedingly small (the environment mother). The developmental sequence of psychological events that take us to maturity, alongside the censorious framing of symbiotic relationality, leaves us in no position to fathom the ecological intimacies we inhabit and which we fundamentally *are*.

I have already described how psychoanalysis wrestles with regression. Having associated theories of infantile mental states and pre-symbolic functioning with the colonial notion of primitivity, the dangers of sliding “backward” toward archaism haunt the practice. Regression requires a human container, or a maternal holding environment, or the symbolic law to ensure its proper organization. The “proper organization” in this milieu is a human self capable of intersubjectivity with other humans. The rest provides a setting for that person to emerge.

In order to arrive here, the doxa is that we must separate. Our origin story is most often told as beginning in an undifferentiated dyad.⁸³⁶ Where me and not-me are indistinguishable.

This dyadic place is variously described as oceanic, narcissistic, symbiotic, archaic and what Bleger has called an “agglutinated nucleus.”⁸³⁷ Civitarese explains:

⁸³⁶ Levin's work challenges this orthodoxy about basic infantile undifferentiation in psychological fields, upon which linguistic acquisition must develop. This split usually plays out in the positing of a “state of nature”, or an inchoate infantile body, upon which the law of language must be imposed. Levin's argument is that there is “no presymbolic being” and no “objectless state” (Levin, *An Essay on the Symbolic Process*, 14). The symbolic process, in Levin's work, is an “organismic-symbolic matrix” (Levin, *An Essay on the Symbolic Process*, 15), meaning that psychodynamics are intermodal, at once somatic, symbolic, cognitive, affective, an organ that develop along many lines with the environment.

⁸³⁷ This residue of infantile undifferentiation is equated with what Bion calls “the psychotic part of the personality” (Bion, “Differentiation of the psychotic from the non-psychotic personalities”). This part of the psyche is what forms symbiotic relationships, which are characterized by ongoing projective identification. In this way, entanglement presents a danger for the development of the psychic subject.

[T]he starting point of human development is a state of primitive fusion on the structural level, which always includes the subject and the environment, albeit not as clearly differentiated entities. On the phenomenal or behavioural level, this state can also be described as symbiotic. Such a relationship results from a form of experiencing reality that Bleger calls the “glischro-caric position” (*gliscros-karuon*: the expression, borrowed from Eugene Minkowski, literally mean “viscous nucleus”).⁸³⁸

This relational viscosity, it is surmised, is “characterized by the presence of specific anxieties (or a catastrophic/confusional nature) and specific defenses (splitting/projection/immobilization).” Morton sees the quality of viscosity as proper to hyperobjects—those entities such as global warming, radiation, and intense sound that hold us inside of them. The experience of viscosity is one where one’s “entire physical being is caught in its meshwork.”⁸³⁹ We are “helplessly stuck” and intimately implanted within these inescapable objects.⁸⁴⁰ This, for Morton, is contemporary ecological experience.

In psychoanalysis, symbiosis is pictured as a boundaryless, fusional, pre-symbolic, archaic, pre-egoic, undifferentiated and sensory situation, which becomes a “permanent experiential level of the subject.”⁸⁴¹ In this sense, symbiosis is a rudimentary, generative matrix upon which the psyche develops. This development has much to do with separation. Given the infant’s total dependence on another body, the mother is not perceived to be a person, initially. She is an “environment,” an extension of the baby and a transformational process through her paradigm of caregiving. Eventually, through baby’s increased capacity for frustration and relinquishing fantasied omnipotence, differentiation happens. Me and not-me becomes clarified; boundaries are established. Over time, the infant separates out a sense of its own affective and cognitive life from the environment that holds it. The mother is no longer a “function,” or raw material for

(Indeed, the Oedipal father is often cast as he who “cuts” through the dyadic matrix of mother and child, introducing the child into the broader social world (language, the symbolic, etc). See José Bleger, *Symbiosis and Ambiguity: A Psychoanalytic Study*, Routledge, 2013.

⁸³⁸ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 23.

⁸³⁹ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 28.

⁸⁴⁰ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 29.

⁸⁴¹ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 29.

consumption, or a container for the infant's ruthlessness, or gratifier of hunger. She is no longer a breast that the infant fantasies into existence. The background, or "total environment," will eventually expose a person with their own priorities and locus of identity.

The psyche begins to take shape through processes of care and cathexis: the paradigms of care we receive early on, and the ways we internalize those interactions, are formative. Similar to Freud's protective shield against stimuli, information filters begin to develop that allow our infant bodies to handle an intense flow of sensation. We also need to develop "representability," which we do, as I have described, through containment⁸⁴². The container digests sensory data. Alpha process transforms beta elements. Primary processes must be layered with secondary processes. Sensation requires symbolization; nature requires culture. And the mother, it turns out, is also the site of some profoundly pathological processes.

Fusion and confusion with others, enmeshment, emotional identification with, attachment to, curiosity about the wrong objects—many dangers exist en route to individuation. Pathology lurks in the symbiotic field. Bollas situates the schizophrenic mind in this symbiotic and pre-symbolic position: "I believe that many schizophrenics return to this early sensorial world, to *somatoform experience and representation*. Before wording or conceptual thinking, somatoforms express the self's nascent experience through the body's lexicon."⁸⁴³ Psychosis is indicated in this sensorial and affective enmeshment—this mind is not properly organized.⁸⁴⁴ The schizophrenic mind may not understand separation; the sensory world of concrete things may be too close to the skin. Maturation is a perilous hero's journey.⁸⁴⁵

⁸⁴² See Section IX, "The containing function of mind."

⁸⁴³ Bollas, *When the Sun Bursts*, 152. Emphasis in the original .

⁸⁴⁴ Margaret Mahler, "On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation." *Vol. I: Infantile Psychosis*, International Universities Press, 1968.

⁸⁴⁵ It is instructive to read this narrative of the developing subject (which follows the arc of banishment from the Garden) alongside other creation myths. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Wall Kimmerer compares the Judeo-Christian Garden of Eden to the *Haudenosaunee* creation story of Skywoman and Turtle Island. "Skywoman Falling" describes a productive meeting between unlike dimensions, sky and earth. This story of a woman's fall is one of flourishing, an unexpected encounter from which arose beneficial interaction, hospitality and exchange between many types of beings. In the Judeo-Christian cosmology,

Unfettered attachment to the mother is also dangerous to one's burgeoning sexuality. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel writes: "Within the aetiology of perversions it has often been noted that the mother frequently assumes a seductive and collusive attitude towards the child."⁸⁴⁶ Estela Weldon underscores the ways that the maternal-infantile dyad threatens the sexual dynamics of the developing psyche: "a beneficial relation between mother and child can tragically become a monstrous, addictive link, in which the mother satisfies her own need to transform her infant into a thing."⁸⁴⁷

Kristeva's theory of abjection captures a primal moment of subjectification via struggle with and simultaneous attachment to the terror of the maternal body.⁸⁴⁸ As Muriel Dimen describes it, "abjection is desire before self and object have psychically cohered and, by so cohering, constituted each other. . . . [I]t registers in liminal substances that evoke fascinated disgust—feces, to take the prime example, but urine, semen, vaginal fluids, menstrual blood, snot, pimples, pus, skin excrescences." These "border materials, neither fully alive nor fully dead," both corporeal and psychic, exist liminally, inspiring disgust.⁸⁴⁹ Abjection, for Kristeva, is an archaic experience, resistant to the symbolic order and to the identity of the subject. In this instability and uncertainty around borders, in the affective ambivalence between pleasure and pain, shame and satisfaction, transgressive practices arise.⁸⁵⁰ Dimen writes: "Sexual excitement

we have the fall of another woman: Eve. Traumatic severance and human domination is the decree in this story, a metaphysical matrix that has been imported into the psychoanalytic theory of human subjectivity. (Robin Wall-Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Milkweed, 2013).

⁸⁴⁶ Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel. "Perversion, Idealization and Sublimation," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 55, (1974) 349.

⁸⁴⁷ Estela Weldon, *Playing With Dynamite*, (Routledge, 2011), xviii.

⁸⁴⁸ Kristeva discusses *motherversion* instead of *père-version*, arguing that we are all perverts, moving as we do through relationship with the mother's body. See Julia Kristeva, "Comment on Ilse and Robért Barandé's report presented to the Congress of French Speaking Psychoanalysis, 1982: 'Antinomies in the concept of perversion and paradoxes in its application to psychoanalytic theory and practice'," *IPA Podcast, Talks on Psychoanalysis*, November 11, 2020, <https://talksonpsychoanalysis.podbean.com/e/julia-kristeva/>.

⁸⁴⁹ Dimen, "The 'Eew!' Factor," 6.

⁸⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, (Columbia UP), 1982.

transports you into bodily and sensory realms of abjection foreclosed long ago in the necessities of maturation.”⁸⁵¹

Trouble with boundaries and self-other differentiation has become an etiological explanation for psychosis as well as perversion—expressions of the fantasy life of the infant who is, apparently, struggling within a threatening field of symbionts. Feeling close to one’s mother is bad enough, let alone the unpredictable terrestrial organisms in and around us. The result of all this closeness might be specific, obsessive, ritualistic, often repetitive and carefully constructed scenarios to achieve sexual satisfaction while managing infantile anxieties. Abjection is like a muddy transitional space, where the suspension of “me” and “not-me” registers as anxiety.

As we develop a mind that can more or less digest experience, we turn elements (a feeling, an experience, an interaction, an event) into psychic objects. Meanwhile, we internally maintain the environment mother as a spatial fantasy construct and as an organizing principle of relations between the self and the world. A Heideggerian “standing reserve” seems to be the primordial neonatal-maternal situation in this theory. More-than-human entities are blurred out in order for our ego identity to come into focus. Or, as in psychoanalytic correlationism, they can accrue meaning and symbolic value depending on their proximity to a familial experience. For Morton, the arrangement of “humankind” as the centre of a circle, outside which is “environment,” has served as a “severing . . . a walling off of human space from the symbiotic real.”⁸⁵² For psychoanalysis, this severance is a psychic necessity. Much of the world must be positioned as “away” in order for us humans to carry on.

Jonathan Lear writes that psychoanalysis “is a symphony of regression and reorganization.”⁸⁵³ He also argues that differentiation is psychoanalysis’s main commitment. The preferred reorganization involves healthy (not too rigid, not too flexible) ego boundaries, within which we as individuals can contain our archaic material. As in Lacan’s metapsychology, alienation from the symbiotic realm via the symbolic realm is a necessary step toward socialized subjectivity. Civitarese uses Bion’s language to convey the gradual achievement of boundaries:

⁸⁵¹ Dimen, “The ‘Eew!’ Factor”, 11.

⁸⁵² Morton, *Humankind*, 62.

⁸⁵³ Jonathan Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature*, Yale UP, 1990, 174.

We can say that, as the subject grows, it differentiates itself and makes itself positively “finite” (it lives as the agent of its own thoughts and actions, with a physical and psychic skin which marks its boundaries) as being capable of accepting ever more of this “infinite” (another of the names of O) of language (humanity) which passes through and alienates it.⁸⁵⁴

Healthy subjectivity involves developing a separate skin, as well as accepting the alienation of human language.

This separation imperative is also an ethical cut: leaving a state of co-imbricated psychesomas, recognizing ego and skin boundaries, experiencing the other as an other with their own interiority, is the aspiration. We have to come to an understanding of other humans in their strange alterity, or as different-but-similar beings with inner worlds or sentience, and with whom we can identify. A subject is somebody with whom we can have true relation.⁸⁵⁵

There are so many objects and beings who are excluded from this story of heroic individuation and barred from the field of true relation. Not-human things might be a decorative feature of a holding environment (the furniture of dreams). They may even be emotionally engaging. We may love and hate those objects with equal passion as the mother (for a time), but it is humans

⁸⁵⁴ Civitarese, “The Names of O: Was Bion a Mystic,” 13–14.

⁸⁵⁵ With agency correctly attributed to the mother, we move toward achieving the capacity for intersubjectivity and mutuality, which is a key therapeutic aim according to Benjamin’s “Beyond Doer and Done To.” For Benjamin, achieving a relationship of intersubjectivity requires reciprocal recognition of others’ minds through co-creative and mutually influencing interactions with one another. To be able to hold in tension one’s own needs and desires alongside another’s “without obliterating the difference between *I* and *thou*” requires the psychic integration of a “third space” that can hold the dyad together, separately. Benjamin is concerned with how human beings can develop this “symbolic third” that can accommodate “my reality” and “your reality” without recourse to polarization or domination and submission. The general arc of this theory of intersubjectivity is that we begin in some version of primitive fusion and we end as individuals who, hopefully, recognize other individuals and ideally with some degree of empathy. Our earliest human-mediated environments serve as a background that supports a maturational process of becoming-separate. (Benjamin, “Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness.”)

who become agential subjects. Things might hover in the transitional space between subject/object until, eventually, they are decahcted and discarded as childhood morphs into adulthood. We may remain attached to those objects (it would be disingenuous to say that we don't develop strong bonds to phones, vehicles, favourite sweaters, records, crystals and so forth), but they will be expected to lose their animacy, which we understand as an anthropomorphic attribution originating in the human's mind.

Remarkably, Civitarese sees the concrete setting of analysis (the frame, including the arrangements of time, place, fee, the features of the office) as having a "non-process" character. In this system, the formal and material setting is a consistent, invariant horizon against which psychodynamic process happens. As Civitarese notes, the traumatic shaking up of our horizons is inevitable:

As we know from clinical practice and from life, breaches of or discontinuities in the setting give rise to a painful sense of loss of familiarity, a form of vertigo that may descend into actual anxiety. Something alien bursts on to the scene. All of a sudden, a secure place becomes unrecognizable and inhospitable. The entire fragility of the foundations of a subjectivity that cannot but discover itself to be rooted in the encounter with the other is seen to reappear. This is the "impact of experience," when the subject is struck by something that cannot immediately be accommodated within a pre-established horizon, but which gives rise to a profound disturbance.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁶ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 29. John Churcher explains this fixed environment from Bleger's point of view. The analytic "setting" (or frame) provides the scaffolding for containment. This surrounding environment is rendered a "non-process"—fixed as a constant background. Churcher explains: "Within the psychoanalytic situation José Bleger distinguishes the analytic process from something that he calls a 'non-process.' The analytic process occurs within, or against the background of, this non-process. The analytic process can be regarded as a set of variables which change over time, and the non-process as a set of constants, whose values do not change, or which in any case are held as constant as possible." (John Churcher, "The Psychoanalytic Setting: the body-schema, telecommunications, and telepresence: Some implications of José Bleger's *encaudre*," Presented at the 5th British German Colloquium, 11-13 October 2013, Møller Centre, Cambridge, UK) 2.

To handle such an alien disturbance, the analytic setting is “an important primary guarantor of the necessary rhythm of security” toward “more mature and extensive forms of symbolization.”⁸⁵⁷ In therapy, the “outside” environment ideally takes on the character of a fixed horizon, non-process or a decorative beyond—a reification of a distant surround in order to secure the psychic function. It is a facilitating backdrop.

In this respect, this arrangement of the psychoanalytic environment is akin to how Morton understands the category of “nature.” Morton’s argument is to take nature out of ecological thinking, insofar as nature tends to be envisioned as a kind of aesthetic screen against which the human is separated. The psychoanalytic developmental schema normalizes (idealizes, even) a relational aesthetic whereby worldly beings can fade out, and indeed must fade out, for psychic life to proceed without too much disturbance. As Morton puts it: “Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being.”⁸⁵⁸

It is traumatic, then, when objects and events that ought to be the sustaining surround begin to show up: a fire in the theatre. Intrusive entities break through the *oikos* psychoanalysis has fashioned out of the maternal holding environment. This subject is predicated on fragile grounds, to be sure.

Not-me objects become increasingly meddlesome during climate catastrophe. They “violate the normal aesthetic propriety, which we know about from philosophers such as Kant.”⁸⁵⁹ Morton insists that there is no comfortable and proper distance at which we can place “an environment.” We don’t grow up out of “an environment.” There is no “away,” no place where we are untouched. The symbiotic mesh registers as “profoundly regressing: a toxic intrauterine

⁸⁵⁷ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 28.

⁸⁵⁸ Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, (Harvard UP, 2007), 4. There is another sense in which Morton’s theorization of “nature” finds resonance in psychoanalysis: “In the Enlightenment, nature became a way of establishing racial and sexual identity, and science became the privileged way of demonstrating it. The normal was set up as different from the pathological along the coordinates of *the natural and the unnatural*” (Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 16. Emphasis in original). Barad’s approach to this prevailing tendency to simultaneously naturalize and moralize can be found in “Nature’s Queer Performativity.”

⁸⁵⁹ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 133.

experience.”⁸⁶⁰

In *Slime Dynamics*, Ben Woodard notes:

Despite the fact that humans gradually ascended from these cultured ponds of ooze, *slime*, as both a general name for a life-generative and semi-solid substance in the physical sense and the disgust of life, the ostensible grossness of organic being in a metaphysical sense, slime remains something to be left behind and forgotten.⁸⁶¹

Morton identifies a kind of theism, or reaction to theism, in the separation imperative. They write: “Within this fear of absorption into the whole (along with its ecstatic shadow) we discern the traditional patriarchal horror of the simple fact that we came from others: what Bracha Ettinger calls ‘being towards birth.’”⁸⁶² We are working through a mythic origin story about a void/garden/maternal matrix/symbiotic nucleus from which we must ultimately separate, and not without some shame, fear and taboo desires for regression.

Psychoanalysis issues a warning: leave slimy undifferentiated symbiosis behind, or risk psychosis, narcissism, perversion, primitivity and so forth. A morphing climate delivers a corrective: you can’t. It seems like disavowal to continue to conceptualize containers as though the external beyond reassuringly has a non-process character. The psychoanalytic person is thusly compartmentalized, distinguished from the world or the environment. This cognitive distancing makes it difficult, disturbing and transgressive to recognize intimacies in shared ontological fields—intimacies that compromise containers and sensitize us to zones of contact with not-me beings that some have had the luxury of putting “over there.”⁸⁶³

⁸⁶⁰ Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 132.

⁸⁶¹ Ben Woodard, *Slime Dynamics: Generation, Mutation, and the Creep of Life*, (Zero Books, 2012), 1.

⁸⁶² Morton, *Humankind*, 71.

⁸⁶³ The trouble with this containment model becomes clearer when taking into consideration the inequity of containment across the planet. To name just a few examples in a dizzying network of poorly contained materials: Canada’s garbage from recycling programs is shipped to countries such as Indonesia. Crude oil runs through Indigenous lands. “Space trash” is what we call the millions of pieces of debris orbiting earth. Along with debris clouds in space, we have plastic islands in the ocean. This doesn’t even take into account the impossibility of metabolizing (in the physical and symbolic sense) the time scale of nuclear materials that require containment. In this sense, it is an extravagance to envision the environment at a

In the following sections, I consider the risky possibilities of re-entangling our thinking-feeling. I revisit the relational situation psychoanalysis has cast as symbiotic, primitive and regressive—not simply as a state of powerful horror (as in Kristeva) or, alternatively, as an idealistic and spiritually-bypassing oceanic “oneness” (as in some forms of Gaia eco-philosophy). This split polarizes toward the terrible or beautiful and doesn’t offer many nuanced options for thinking and feeling a living, intra-active entanglement that includes many, and out of which we do not grow up.

9.2 Symbiosis

Among other indictments (such as calling the theorizing human a “myopically and malevolently self-enclosed machine”),⁸⁶⁴ Colebrook observes the “human species’ inability to think its detachment, disconnectedness, malevolence and stupidity in relation to a planet that it continues to imagine as environment, *oikos*, cosmos or *Gaia*.”⁸⁶⁵ She describes the absurd presumption of separating out the human as the ethical animal:

[T]he human is not so much an event within life as a rupturing in the very figure of life: not one being among others so much as a violent symbiosis (or “sym-thanatosis”). . . . Should we continue to think in terms of ethics, if *ethos* or our conception of dwelling is precisely that which is brought under threat by our very belief in ourselves as ethical animals? Is not the notion that the earth is *our place* precisely what has blinded us to the

distance “out there” while we secure ourselves “in here.” We can no longer drink rainwater anywhere on earth without it being contaminated by what have been called “forever chemicals.” Conceptualizing a “non-process” of exteriority diverts awareness from toxic ecological objects and their intrusion into most spaces. Morton cites Rob Nixon’s indictment of the “slow violence of ecological oppression. . . . Poor people . . . perceive the ecological emergency not as degrading an aesthetic picture such as *world* but as an accumulation of violence that nibbles at them directly” (Morton, *Hyper Objects* 125). People are nibbled at directly to be sure, as are the not-human entities, who include oceans, coral reefs, rivers, soil, lake basins, forests, mountains, zero-G atmospheres and all the entangled beings therein who do containing and processing labour, in the supposed “background.”

⁸⁶⁴ Claire Colebrook, “Not Symbiosis, Not Now: Why Anthropogenic Change is Not Really Human,” *The Oxford Literary Review*, 34:2, (2012), 193.

⁸⁶⁵ Colebrook, “Not Symbiosis, Not Now,” 199.

ravages of our mode of life?⁸⁶⁶

Colebrook's critical agenda is to *think* destruction, as embodied in the suicidal human animal. She speaks of the destructive symbiosis that humans carry out in a peculiar split: imagining self as distanced from destructiveness while also being "of the cosmos." For Colebrook, this destructiveness and "order-destroying tendency"⁸⁶⁷ is writ large:

One might say that bounded organisms emerge only because multiple mutations and genetic variations destroy paths not taken; but it is also the case that the earth's evolutionary creativity that enabled the genesis of man—an animal whose own being has acted in such a way to threaten Gaia's own life—is "essentially" split from itself. The very creative tendencies that enable ongoing complexity and order also tend towards entropy and fragmentation.⁸⁶⁸

I approach from a slightly different angle, arguing that relational metapsychologies not only think but *advise* disconnection and differentiation within a species self-enclosure. The alternative is psychosis, perversion, and other dreadful states of "primitivity."

There is no doubt that minds and bodies can run on narcissistic logics and violent enactments. I also want to suggest that there exist other epistemic traditions, practices and possibilities of experiencing, dreaming and composing with/in terrestrial systems that modern philosophical traditions foreclose.⁸⁶⁹ A violent symbiotic mode—"sym-thanatosis"—is not exceptionally human. Nor is symbiosis exclusively violent, though it certainly can be. Imaginaries and logics, not to mention bodies, can be radically altered through symbiosis with terrestrial beings.

⁸⁶⁶ Colebrook, "Not Symbiosis, Not Now," 187-188.

⁸⁶⁷ Colebrook, "Not Symbiosis, Not Now," 203.

⁸⁶⁸ Colebrook, "Not Symbiosis, Not Now," 202.

⁸⁶⁹ I could draw from Tyson Yunkaporta on this point: "In this way of knowing, there is no difference between you, a stone, a tree, or a traffic light. All contain knowledge, story, pattern." He goes on: "We yarn about the sentience of stones and the ancient Greek mistake of identifying 'dead matter' as opposed to living matter, limiting for centuries to come the potential of Western thought when attempting to define things like consciousness and self-organizing systems such as galaxies" (Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, (Harper Collins, 2020) 25).

But more to my point: these are inescapable and mutative entanglements that psychoanalysis is not in the habit of tending to, apart from pathologizing “states of nature” and encouraging a subject’s transcendence. I suggest that psychoanalysis needs to do some reality testing and develop the capacity to bear the indeterminacy of symbiotic process without recourse to a fantasy of species exceptionalism. “The world is contaminated—*literally*—and for this reason it might be better to remain among the pollutants that have marked and marred us,” Colebrook writes.⁸⁷⁰ The psychoanalytic solution to contamination is to construct a safe container. Symbiosis teaches us where this is impossible.

Symbiosis is not a simple state of undifferentiation. Instead, it describes generative and destructive encounters playing out across differing bodies. Some of the symbiotic arrangements I describe resonate with relational processes as laid out in psychoanalysis. The container-contained dynamic, for example, is not limited to the human dyad. Acknowledging symbiotic process repositions “human” in—and as—a teeming field of active symbionts whose material expressions are also complexly social, communicative and sentient. Whatever it is we might categorize as “human” is caught in a psychosomatic patterning co-written with eclectic collaborators. My goal in revisiting symbiosis is not to idealize ecological entanglement but to insist that psychoanalysis has psychic labour to do on living within and embodying heterogeneity, beyond balking at morphologies of bodies and fretting about the queering of categorical codes.

Sheldrake tells of German botanist Albert Frank’s use of the term *symbiosis*, in 1877, “to describe the living together of fungal and algal partners in the form of lichen.”⁸⁷¹ Heinrich Anton de Bary, the founder of modern mycology, used the term, in 1879, to mean the “living together” of like or unlike organisms.⁸⁷²

Lichen’s modes of living together are inherently perverse. Its sexuality is not singular, nor is it dyadic. It is choral. Lichen reproduces systemically, with a number of interacting components or

⁸⁷⁰ Colebrook, “Not Symbiosis, Not Now,” 189.

⁸⁷¹ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 73.

⁸⁷² Robin M Overstreet, and Jeffrey M. Lotz, “Host–Symbiont Relationships: Understanding the Change from Guest to Pest,” *The Rasputin Effect: When Commensals and Symbionts Become Parasitic* vol. 3 27–64. 6 January 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7123458/>.

what are sometimes called “contaminants.” Yeast and other fungal partners as well as bacteria interact to make lichen. As Sheldrake explains, “Lichens are stabilized networks of relationships; they never stop lichenizing; they are verbs as well as nouns.”⁸⁷³

Margulis’s theory of endosymbiosis, developed in the 1960s, mobilizes the verb form of *symbiosis* as a primary evolutionary force. Her narrative of evolution is a direct critique of individualistic neo-Darwinist competition narratives. Instead, her theory draws attention to the cooperation of bacterial microbiomes, indicating where planetary life is driven by the meetings and mergers of very different sorts of beings. Perversion is not only standard behaviour from this point of view, but species-crossing intimacy is seen as foundational to life on earth.⁸⁷⁴

In Margulis’s work, symbiogenesis is the oldest and most enduring form of co-creation. It unfolds between unrelated components, such as when, for example, a fungus encounters a cyanobacterium and takes it into its own body. This is an origin story of planetary life, where intra-species entanglement is the first mover. Beings from different “kingdoms” aggregate, moving toward greater complexity. Mammalian sex, between partners of a single species, is a relatively new way to do it.

Moving forward billions of years from the first moment of symbiogenesis, Margulis confronts the absurdity of human-centrism, claiming instead that “microbes run the show.” They regulate climates, recycle waste products, communicate with one another, and birth complex, livable ecosystems.⁸⁷⁵ In what counts as a human body, we find one human gene per every two hundred

⁸⁷³ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 88.

⁸⁷⁴ Apropos dendrophilia and the “perverse,” Margulis has also worked on the evolutionary permutations of sex: “Biparental sex itself did *not* immediately confer any great advantage upon those organisms in which it arose” (Lynn Margulis, *Origins of Sex: Three Billion Years of Genetic Recombination*, (Yale UP, 1986) 3). There is, for example, also autopoiesis—growth that occurs in exchange with the immediate environment, as with bacterial spores. Most organisms undertake reproduction (the increase of individuals) asexually, by cell division (including our ancestral protoctists, as well as fungi). Margulis mentions slime moulds as an aggregate of hundreds of cells fusing through chemical attractants to form a “slug” (Margulis, *Origins of Sex*, 10).

⁸⁷⁵ John Feldman, “Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis rocked the Boat and Started a Scientific Revolution,” Hummingbird Films, 2019.

microbial genes. While her work does not centre on the human (we are a recent footnote in billions of years of symbiogenetic processes), Margulis nevertheless provides a reconfigured picture of the human soma as entirely composed of ongoing symbiotic encounters. Sheldrake, like Margulis, maintains that knowledge of microbial life “changes our experience of our own bodies and the places we inhabit.”⁸⁷⁶

Sheldrake furthermore notes how Darwinian theory sees species as diverging from one another, like branches of a tree, forking and separating. Lichens, on the other hand, “were doing something entirely unexpected: *converging*.”⁸⁷⁷ Separation is not the linear conclusion to the story of maturation: depending on environmental conditions, aggregates of cells will respond in different ways.⁸⁷⁸ Even the tiniest of organisms are responsive. They sense their environments and behave according to their experience. In certain environments, a distribution of intelligent behaviour occurs across a system—cooperative action across bodies.

Symbiosis can also function like a kind of co-dependency. It may be mutually beneficial and co-creative, as well as parasitic or pathogenic. Endosymbiosis occurs when one symbiont dwells within the body of another (which brings to mind a host/hostage structure, rather like Derrida’s ethics of hospitality).⁸⁷⁹ In some arrangements of “obligate” intimacy, one being can’t survive without the other. Something close to a container-contained relationship is at play here, where digestion unfolds between relata (*It takes two to think one’s most disturbing thoughts . . .*) Some hosts offer nutrients to the endosymbiont, who in turn digests and transforms matter for the host. For example, fungal symbionts who fix nitrogen and form amino acids are required by various trees and plants to survive. Lichens and rocks also have an interesting relationship: lichens

⁸⁷⁶ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 18.

⁸⁷⁷ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 72.

⁸⁷⁸ Sentience is implied here. Cells are cognitive insofar as they are sensitive to environmental input and process sensory information. Sheldrake writes: “The Latin root of the word *intelligence* means ‘to choose between.’ Many types of brainless organisms—plants, fungi, and slime molds included—respond to their environments in flexible ways, solve problems, and make decisions between alternative courses of action. Complex information processing is evidently not restricted to the inner workings of brains” (Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 66).

⁸⁷⁹ Anne Dufourmantelle, and Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, Stanford UP, 2000.

dissolve and digest geological beings. This decomposition of mineral surfaces creates young soil for a new ecosystem. “A portion of the minerals in your body is likely to have passed through a lichen at some point,” writes Sheldrake.⁸⁸⁰

Hosts might provide a hiding place. The symbiont has defensive uses: they attack invaders. A crab’s shell offers a safe space for an anemone. The anemone, in turn, stings the crab’s predators.

Necrotrophic relationships unfold such that one organism will overtake and kill another: a perverse relationship of control whereby the host is taken hostage. For example, a wasp penetrates a ladybug with its stinger and uses the host’s body to incubate its eggs. The ladybug manages to birth the wasp’s progeny, who weave a cocoon around her legs. Thus she becomes a protector of wasp larvae. Eventually, the babies consume the ladybug.⁸⁸¹

One being is ruptured and driven by the interests of the other. Here we have traumatic implantation in the Laplanchian mode: a being colonized by the enigmatic messages of a powerful other. The symbiotic real resonates with but also complicates Laplanche’s implantation model of the human unconscious: exchange happens in myriad ways, vertically as well as horizontally across forms of life. Co-emergence, co-mutation, contamination, companionship: countless intimacies unfold at various scales.

Some symbiotic events lead to morphological flourishing. Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the red cedar forests of Coast Salish territories. Mother Cedar, as she is called here, is considered to be a maternal holding environment, as well as an ancient and sentient being. Cedar has traditionally and literally held myriad entities, including people “from cradleboard to coffin,” providing transport, clothing fibres, homes, heat, nets, harpoons, tools of medicine and ceremony, beds and dishes.⁸⁸² Many of these cedars, now clear-cut, were older than first contact with European imperialism. They lived in complex old-growth cultures. In contrast to the cognitive-emotional maps brought from Europe, Wall Kimmerer argues that systems of

⁸⁸⁰ *Entangled Life*, 75.

⁸⁸¹ Ladybugs and wasps, containment and contamination, were thought in dialogue with artist Leyla Majeri for her *Garden Archive* exhibition catalogue: “There is a wasp who penetrates the ladybug,” Circa art actuel, Montreal 2019.

⁸⁸² Wall-Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 278-279.

symbiotic reciprocity first sustained these trees. In her writing, we understand the “knower” is not the hegemonic human but rather a network of beings who lend themselves intelligently to the functional community of a forest. On the ground level of algae, microbes, fungi, slimes and so forth, being a nonindividual—a “cosmopolitan body,” to use Sheldrake’s term⁸⁸³—has supported life in environments that would be inhospitable to a singular being. “The question of what is and isn’t an island is fundamental to the study of ecology and evolution,” Sheldrake writes.

The question of who is and isn’t an island is also a psychoanalytic problem. We need to separate from “intense symbiotic needs.”⁸⁸⁴ The infant is an endosymbiont, entirely dependent on its host for survival. This is recognized to be a state we pass through and must eventually escape through corporeal and psychic separation. This relational being will not be introduced to the open ecological field; rather, it will play out its drama between human actors in human culture—one split-off branch of the evolutionary species tree. In the psychoanalytic field, these branches will not touch.

As Levin describes it, moving toward “my” identity, or ego separateness, is a story about “‘form won through the void’ of primary undifferentiation.”⁸⁸⁵ The “void” of no-self is, from another point of view, a swarming dimension of incontrovertible intimacy. Upholding a sense of human self-determination, alongside creatures who thrive on being impudent about boundaries, feels all the more untenable during a viral pandemic.

Shifting attention to the so-called void from which we humans are meant to differentiate puts us in touch, directly and concretely, with an agential abundance of organic and inorganic actors. Kirby reminds us that differentiations are proper to nature itself.⁸⁸⁶ Differentiations and variations also speak of the microbial. Berardi notes:

Human history is over, and the new agents of history are the “critters,” in Haraway’s parlance. The word *critter* refers to small creatures who do strange things, like provoking mutations. [William] Burroughs speaks of viruses as agents of biological, cultural,

⁸⁸³ Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, 82.

⁸⁸⁴ Civitarese, *The Intimate Room*, 24.

⁸⁸⁵ Levin, IAARP colloquium post, June 20 2017.

⁸⁸⁶ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 110.

linguistic mutation. Critters do not exist as individuals. They spread collectively, as a process of proliferation.⁸⁸⁷

Critters, microbes, fungi, viruses, memes and microplastics⁸⁸⁸ tell us that we are, in fact, open territories, moved and shaped by these beings' caresses. They are transformational objects of biological internalization and psychic mutation. We will not extricate ourselves from this intimacy. (This is not only a human event: as I write, the white-tailed deer population across North America is experiencing a surge of Covid-19 infections.)⁸⁸⁹ This transmigrating organism thrives on intimacy, capriciously suffusing and affecting bodies, collectives, imaginaries.

Kirby notes how the decentred psychoanalytic subject's "most personal and private desires originate elsewhere."⁸⁹⁰ *Elsewhere* is also deep "inside" the psychoanalytic enclosure, since the microbial world participates in patterns of sexuality and sociality. Berardi's point in *The Third Unconscious* is that an event such as a viral pandemic alters the very coordinates of unconscious life. He notes how "the virus transforms the reactions of a body to the body of the other, thus reframing the sexual unconscious."⁸⁹¹ Linking the erotic to encounters between bodies, Berardi opens the question of how lived bodily arrangements generate unconscious rearrangements: new imaginaries are elaborated in this "sensuous chaotic becoming."⁸⁹² Thinking with/in symbiosis is the dreaming-with-others that psychoanalysis places on the "outside" of the dream. There is a transgressive intimacy to microbe relations, which dissolve the status of "us" and "them."

⁸⁸⁷ Berardi, *The Third Unconscious*, 14.

⁸⁸⁸ See Damian Carrington, "Microplastics found in human blood for the first time," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2022.

⁸⁸⁹ Covid-19 has been detected across the world in cats (big and small), dogs, tigers, hamsters, ferrets, minks and gorillas. Zoonotic disease—passage between species—is yet another example of the material transgression of species boundaries. "Closure" is not feasible here. (See *OIE: World Organization for Animal Health*, updated Feb 7 2022, <https://www.oie.int/en/what-we-offer/emergency-and-resilience/covid-19/#ui-id-3>).

⁸⁹⁰ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 89.

⁸⁹¹ Berardi, *The Third Unconscious*, 10.

⁸⁹² Berardi, *The Third Unconscious*, 15.

Margulis's work presents a vision of the ways we—like every other existent on this planet—are assemblages of not-me.

Psychoanalysis, in practice, will not account for how these beings shape our minds and love affairs, because its vision of intimacy is exclusive. In the clinic, we trace how states of “primary oneness” (rather than states of *primary multiplicity*!) are followed by traumatic severance (from the womb or the maternal dyad), toward integration and “higher unity,” in a defensively constructed enclosure. Lingering between the self and materiality is abjection, a primordial, traumatizing horror. Are there less terrifying ways to feel into our inter-implication with other bodies? Could we venture, like Kohn, to bear in mind a “shared constellation of attributes and dispositions—a sort of shared transspecies habitus”?⁸⁹³

Symbiosis is demanding. It entails total inextricability from living and dying systems. We don't, finally, establish a demarcated self anywhere here. It is absolute vulnerability and dependency in a net of perversely creative and devastating scenarios. Morton writes that “relying-on is the uneasy fuel of the symbiotic real.”⁸⁹⁴ Clinical psychoanalysis classifies “narcissistic self-sufficiency”—a denial of need for or dependence upon others—as a defence mechanism. When significant others have been disappointing, unreliable or terrifying, a fantasy of self-sufficiency helps quell the terrible vulnerability and precarity of being wholly dependent on an extensive web of relata.

Surely narcissistic self-sufficiency is at work in the psychoanalytic construction of human maturation. The legacy of Western metaphysics is implanted in its practice, like a wasp's egg in a ladybug. And as in traumatic repetition, parasitic implantation is re-enacted upon other bodies so that the fantasy of self-enclosure can be maintained. This implantation, of course, is not simply ideational. Morton argues that this metaphysics is founded on such an inside/outside demarcation—a severing they describe as a violence. Morton writes:

⁸⁹³ Kohn, “How Dogs Dream,” 7.

⁸⁹⁴ Morton, *Humankind*, 2.

If there is no “outside” to actually existing ecological space, since the symbiotic real has no certain center or edge (Where do you, where can you draw the line when you think interdependence?), how on earth does this exclusive club function?⁸⁹⁵

Like most defensive strategies, the fantasy of self-enclosure functions mechanically until it can no longer be maintained.

9.3 Soiling the psyche: Shifting “grounds”

Layers of soil form a literal holding environment for terrestrial life. There are limits to soil’s holding capacity, despite hopes soil could mitigate climate change by being a repository for carbon. Carbon sequestration aims to absorb gasses in forest wood, as well as soil, peat, bogs and swamps. Carbon also acts like the return of the repressed: it won’t stay buried indefinitely. A tree eats carbon in order to grow. When a forest burns, carbon combusts and is released into the atmosphere.

This holding environment is not a non-process backdrop. Soil gives porous passage to all sorts of entities, including the ones that are now called “greenhouse gases.” Soil is a plurality: “At a bare minimum, it consists of minerals, decaying organic matter, air, water, and enormously complex ecosystems of microorganisms. One teaspoon of healthy soil contains more bacteria, fungi and other microbes than there are humans on Earth.”⁸⁹⁶ Saprotrophs are the fungi able to rot, transform and potentiate dead matter. They lay the groundwork for livable forest ecologies—a sort of networked digestion process to be sure, one that allows for cycles of transspecies becoming and decomposing, living and dying.

I begin this section on the ground in order to tackle some conspicuous disappearances in the construction of the analytic subject. Psychoanalysis touches the ground through its archaeological metaphors: buried repressions, hidden crypts, layers of sedimented meaning and so on. Soiling is also exquisitely Freudian in its dirtiness: etymologically, soil is that which sullies and defiles, drawing us close to perversity once again. In many ways, analysis is a process

⁸⁹⁵ Morton, *Humankind*, 63.

⁸⁹⁶ Gabriel Popkin, “A Soil-Science Revolution Upends Plans to Fight Climate Change,” *Quanta Magazine*. July 27, 2021, www.quantamagazine.org/a-soil-science-revolution-upends-plans-to-fight-climate-change-20210727.

of *unearthing*.

We have heard Freud's call for a bulwark against the slippery mud of occultism.⁸⁹⁷ I have also outlined how we are meant to repudiate muddy, "undifferentiated" states of symbiosis. Psychic life is simultaneously built upon and delinked from earth-bound grounds such as these. To be a human is to live, out of necessity, in a virtual reality: "[the subject] comes into being by differentiating itself from the real and can never completely free itself from it. The real is like water to a fish or air to a bird."⁸⁹⁸ The real, like "nature," is inescapable, but we must organize our separateness. As such, it is pictured as an atmosphere, an ambiance, a surround. Earthly beings such as communicative filaments (threads of mycorrhizal fungi, for example) and flowing mud (such as relentless, concrete-busting rainstorms on the west coast of Turtle Island), or lively dirt digesters (such as worms) are irrelevant to the differentiated virtuality of this psychosomatic life.⁸⁹⁹ Bionian field theory cuts out heterogeneous terrestrial bodies and intermediaries from the psychoanalytic dream of what it is to be human.⁹⁰⁰ Material reality becomes a confinement for a

⁸⁹⁷ See Section IXX: "A bulwark for slippery mystical mud".

⁸⁹⁸ Guiseppe Civitarese, "The Grid and the Truth Drive," *The Italian Psychoanalytic Annual*, (2013) 98,

⁸⁹⁹ Meanwhile, my materialist interlocutors demonstrate processes of dreaming-with dirt, rather than extracting selfhood from it. Barad writes about diffraction in this way: "We might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over—ingesting and excreting it, tunneling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it" (Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction, 168). Haraway follows the elemental beings ("sympoetic multispecies string figures") who live underground in webs of threads or nets. Note here how thinking burrows into biodiverse ground. (Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitocene, Cthulucene."). The rhizome is also an underground figure, a tangle of roots that, for Deleuze and Guattari, fosters connection across heterogeneous points: "The rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectible, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 21).

⁹⁰⁰ A distinction with animality is made: A subject is "elevated" from animality by use of symbol, poetry, dreaming—the "purely human" capacity to give meaning to emotional experience. (Guiseppe Civitarese, *Psychoanalytic Field Theory: A Contemporary Introduction*, (Routledge, 2022) 106). As according to Martin Heidegger animals are "poor in world." (Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of*

play of associations—bare “fact,” as opposed to fantasy—the latter being the proper material of psychoanalytic work.

This is not to say that material bodies don’t matter: physiological experience still catalyzes mental phenomena according to contemporary psychoanalysis, as it did in Freud’s view. A Freudian will note how bodily zones are sites of excitation that give rise to representation. In contemporary psychoanalysis, working through the relationship between mind and body is a therapeutic goal. Bollas talks about a child’s ability to move into the body’s being, or into physical expression, and the ways that relational trauma can hinder our ability to incarnate. In states of dissociation, the feeling body is not fully inhabited or felt.⁹⁰¹ Ferro and Civitarese see the unconscious as a function of the personality that is “constantly working to find, or rediscover, a basic psyche-somatic integration.” They write about “successful dreams, fragments of poetry, psychic productions that restore body to mind and mind to body.”⁹⁰² Being sensate with another (again, the child-mother dyad is the model) is the common foundation of sense.⁹⁰³ Bodies

Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude, Indiana University Press, 1995, 184). Soil, I would imagine, despite its multi-entity complexity, would be even world-poorer.

²⁴³Bollas, *The Mystery of Things*, 126-133. Interestingly, Winnicott notes that mental functioning divorced from the liveliness of the body can be a defence: prioritizing the mental aspect can be a flight into the illusion that mind is separate from the fleshy environment. In this sense, mental life replaces mother-soma when her environmental provisions are impinging on our early state of being. Drawing mind back into relation with soma is the psychoanalytic task, then, creating a safe-enough environment for integration of somatic experience. Whatever mind is—however we may “specialize out psyche” or demarcate an irreducible mental experience—it develops, according to Winnicott, from a matrix of bodily-psychic experience. “I suppose the word psyche here means the *imaginative elaborations of somatic parts, feelings, and functions*, that is, of physical aliveness,” he writes (Winnicott, “Mind and its relation to the Psyche-Soma,” 244. Emphasis in the original). The psychic field rests on what Ogden calls a “sensory floor,” where the individual moves from immersion in sensory activity to an ability to represent (Thomas Ogden, *The Primitive Edge of Experience*, Jason Aronson, 1989). This is not dissimilar to Anzieu’s view that the ego is formed by the experience at the interface of skin and sensory contact (Anzieu, *The Skin-Ego*).

⁹⁰² Ferro and Civitarese, “Analysts in Search of an Author,” 651.

⁹⁰³ Civitarese, “The Names of O: Is Bion a Mystic?” 4

communicate with other bodies, Civitarese tells us, well before language acquisition.⁹⁰⁴ *Which bodies* are involved in sense-making is the question.

In this section, I examine where material mediators are erased in order for the psychoanalytic mind to be constructed. I do this work alongside Latour, who has spent some time exploring soil science and its inter-implication of words and worlds, language and nature, via a field trip to the Amazonian forest of Boa Vista.⁹⁰⁵ Latour helps us think about modes of being that don't quite fit into the constricting dualisms of the modern Western episteme—the heterogenous agents involved in the co-construction of realities. In doing so, he notes a philosophical erasure (although “burying” might be more apt here) of these multiple forms of being that exist in the so-called gap between inside and outside, mind and object, human understanding and things, fact and fetish.

Latour reflects on a tendency in the social sciences to think with only two poles: we are dealing either with bare facts or with a social construction. This binarism results in a conclusion that, if a fact is constructed, it must mean that it is weak—a fetish.⁹⁰⁶ Field psychoanalysis accepts this formulation and puts the “bare facts” aside to explore psychodynamics as one creative mode of

⁹⁰⁴ Guiseppe Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, 2016. Departing from Civitarese's anthropocentrism, we can read here a consilience with forest ecology. Simard's work traces interspecies communication and sensory exchange between soil fungi and tree roots in forests. We might even read object relational, familial themes in her concept of the “Mother Tree,” an elder who nurtures her offspring through an underground network of “communication, sentience and protection” (Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree*, 5). Indeed, Simard states that these chemicals, passed between tree and mushroom (and other plant species), are “identical” to human neurotransmitters. In addition to food, these entities are said to pass along information about conditions in the forest: pathogens, weather, and so on. Simard (et al.) coined the term *wood-wide web* in the article “Net Transfer of Carbon between Ectomycorrhizal Tree Species in the Field” (*Nature*, 388, 1997)..One paradigmatic shift Simard's project exhorts is to recognize sociality, sentience and symbiosis as integral to a forest's existence, whereas forestry once understood (dreamed) trees as being competitors for nutrients and light.

⁹⁰⁵ Bruno Latour, “Circulating Reference: Sampling the Soil in the Amazon Forest,” in *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Harvard UP, 1999.

⁹⁰⁶ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, (Oxford UP, 2005) 92.

reality fabrication. Unlike the positivist, the psychoanalyst has no worry about becoming lost in “mere” construction, since dreaming reality is understood to be exactly what we do with our psychesomas. (Correlationism appears again here—we tend to loop around the interior, tinkering with our transferences, content to let the distraction of material objectality evaporate.)

Fact or fantasy is also mapped onto “object” or “subject,” and these terms become polarized as well. Latour proposes an additive and inventive solution to this either/or scenario: “to encourage philosophy to add other modes of existence, by specifying other terms of reference and proposing other patterns, other ‘envelopes’ for many other types of beings.”⁹⁰⁷ The practical solution for Latour is to consider any “actor” as real, or as having ontological weight, so far as they influence or animate action.

In addition to learning to attune to the multiple systems, histories, practices, tools and agents involved in producing realities, I have learned a new term from Latour: *pedology*—the science of soils. He writes:

Holes and pits are to pedology what a specimen collection is to botany: the basic craft and the focus of obsessive attention. Since the structure of soil is always hidden beneath our feet, pedologists can display its profile only by digging holes. A profile is the assemblage of the successive layers of soil, designated by the beautiful word “horizon.” Rainwater, plants, roots, worms, moles, and billions of bacteria transform the parent material of the bedrock (studied by geologists) into many different “horizons,” which the pedologists learn to distinguish, classify, and envelop in a history that they call “pedogenesis.”⁹⁰⁸

Latour tracks the things of pedology, from the people involved to literal holes on the border of the savanna and the forest, from the instruments of measurement and collection to the numbering of samples, and on to the interpretive strategies for reading said samples. Within this network of knowledge makers, Latour describes a grid-like instrument with columns and rows in a wooden

⁹⁰⁷ Bruno Latour, “Reflections on Etienne Souriai’s *Les differents modes d’existence*” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, Graham Harman, (re:press, 2011), 321.

⁹⁰⁸ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 40.

box that can be carried like a suitcase: the *pedocomparator*. He explains:

[T]he pedocomparator will help us grasp the *practical* difference between abstract and concrete, sign and furniture. With its wooden frame, its padding, and its cardboard, the pedocomparator belongs to the world of “things.” But in the regularity of its cubes, their disposition in columns and rows, their discrete character, and the possibility of freely substituting one column for another, the pedocomparator belongs to “signs.” Or rather, it is through the cunning invention of this hybrid that the world of things may become a sign.⁹⁰⁹

I am spending a moment with Latour’s interest in this hybridic object, at once a sign generator and a concrete thing—a tool for extracting, classifying and coding—because it occurs to me that Bion also uses a grid in his work.⁹¹⁰ Grotstein describes Bion’s grid, also made of “gratings” or “thought bins” with which “to store categories of thoughts and emotions.”⁹¹¹ While Latour’s grid tells of how soil shifts from forest or desert floor to sign, Bion’s grid sorts mental activity—conferring order onto the chaos of unconscious material.

For the Real, or Bion’s *O* to become accessible to a psyche, it must be digested and made personal. It undergoes unconscious transmutations via the process of containment. The grid is an instrument designed to help the analyst organize (extract, classify, code) the transmutations of material arising in a session. Further—and here is a consequential move—the grid is a model of how subjectivity is organized. As Civitarese describes it, the grid “sums up within itself the

⁹⁰⁹ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 47-48.

⁹¹⁰ See Wilfred Bion, *Elements of Psychoanalysis*, William Heinemann, 1963 & Wilfred Bion, “The Grid,” in *Taming Wild Thoughts*, Karnac, 1997.

Natasha Myers and Ayelen Liberona’s ongoing Becoming Sensor in Sentient Worlds project is of note here, insofar as they advocate for an “ungrid-able ecology.” Working with the remaining black-oak savanna of Toronto’s High Park, this project aims to sense into land in ways that interrupt “colonial common sense” and rationalizing discourses, as they play out in conservation ecology’s monitoring strategies. Some of these sensory practices include exploring gestures and movements, understanding tactile textures and connecting with scent and soundscape. (Natasha Myers and Ayelen Liberona, “becoming sensor,” <https://becomingsensor.com/>).

⁹¹¹ Grotstein, *Beam of Intense Darkness*, 247, 243.

phylogenesis and ontogenesis of the subject.”⁹¹² It shows “what happens when . . . subjectivity springs out of the fine atomic dust of infrasensible or ultrasensible reality. It conveys an impression of the processes of transformation that give rise to the subject.”⁹¹³

Bionians work in a tradition that “ungrounds” the psychic subject—and by *ungrounding* I mean that this subject must spring out of the dust! This is an uprooting of human self-identification from a terrestrial ground, a world teeming with life forms, in various stages of terraforming and deforming, threads interweaving through soil, water, air, bodies, digesting and connecting as they wiggle through—Haraway’s tentacular dimension.⁹¹⁴

Similarly, psychoanalysis also “grounds” itself far from the neural-networked brain in Malabou’s work on plasticity. With neurological trauma, for example, we have an organ, thought to be the seat of self-identity, in physical and sometimes destructive contact with worldly circumstances.⁹¹⁵ A bioelectrical thing of the flesh that, through destructive symbiosis (disease, a chemical or viral invasion), can entirely upend one’s notion of self. Using language not unlike that found at the intersection of neurobiology and mindfulness therapy,⁹¹⁶ Malabou describes her subject as *plastic*:

Plastic, if you look in the dictionary, means the quality of a matter, which is at the same time fluid but also resisting. Once formed, it cannot go back to its previous state. For example, when the sculptor is working on the marble, the marble, once sculpted, cannot be brought back to its original state. So, plasticity is a very interesting concept because it means, at once, both openness to all kinds of influences, and resistance.⁹¹⁷

⁹¹² Civitarese, “The Grid and the Truth Drive,” 92-93.

⁹¹³ Civitarese, “The Grid and the Truth Drive,” 97.

⁹¹⁴ “Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters.” (Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking.”)

⁹¹⁵ Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*.

⁹¹⁶ See for example Norman Doidge, *The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*, Penguin, 2007.

⁹¹⁷ Malabou, Catherine and Noelle Vahanian, “A Conversation with Catherine Malabou,” 6.

Unlike the language of therapeutics, Malabou's definition reminds us that material encounters with material "influences"—including inorganic matter—are not necessarily generative. They can also be irreparably disorganizing.

Stenger's writing on *Gaia*,⁹¹⁸ like Malabou's destructive plasticity, draws out complex forces that are intrusive and unpredictably influential. Casting planetary phenomena as mute does not begin to capture the way that they press upon bodies, thoughts, affects and feelings.⁹¹⁹ The figure of Gaia is a planetary agent, "a ticklish assemblage of forces,"⁹²⁰ socially, politically and personally disruptive. Psychic reconfiguration transpires with this ever-changing planetary force, if only because materials have the "power to challenge [one's] well-defined categories."⁹²¹

In the psychoanalytic theory I am addressing here, a strange sort of eliminativism is at work.⁹²² We follow a path from sense to significance, feeling to human-mediated meaning. Developing a

⁹¹⁸ Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Open Humanities Press / meson press, 2015.

⁹¹⁹ Stengers, "Diderot's egg: Divorcing materialism from eliminativism."

⁹²⁰ Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*, 47.

⁹²¹ Stengers, "Diderot's Egg," 10. Stengers notes: "Eduardo Viveiros de Castro vigorously emphasizes that many other peoples and societies have undergone such a world destroying intrusion. Learning what it may mean to give intrusive Gaia the power to have us thinking and feeling may also mean learning to think and feel in their presence, but, I would add, without playing the ventriloquists" (Isabelle Stengers, "Gaia: The Urgency to Think (and Feel)," *Thousand names of Gaia Conference*, Rio De Janeiro, Sept 2014, <https://osmilnomesdegaia.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/isabelle-stengers.pdf>). *Trauma* may be one of the (increasingly less impactful) names of the "thousand named gaia." One intrusive force, namely a European colonial "destroying process," results in the material and cultural devastation and exploitation of interconnected lives.

⁹²² Stengers describes *eliminative materialism* as "actively eliminating everything about 'us' that cannot be aligned with [one's] conception of what matter is all about." She explains: "My point is that as soon as materialism is identified with eliminativism—with elimination as an achievement in itself, accompanied by the proud opposition between those who believe and those who know—the connection with struggle is lost. It becomes a matter of mere rivalry for a very disputed title: who is the thinking brain of humanity?" (Stengers, "Diderot's Egg" 7). In field analysis, I see almost the contrary to what Stengers attributes to eliminative materialism: a repetition of a boundary between psychic and material, fiction and fact, subject

container-mind requires we dream reality, travelling a route to higher modes of symbolization.⁹²³ The Bionian grid is a tool for “scoring” the dynamics of a session, observing how a human digests a quantum of outside reality on the inside.

Bion’s *thought bins* are a container-grid meant to indicate a separation, a “quantum leap,” from biology to psyche, corporeality to ideality. The grid tracks the alteration of experience, its evolution into states of mind. The analytic practitioner can sort the ways (im)materials move between unconscious and conscious processes.⁹²⁴ Psychic transformation has us moving from the concrete to the abstract, from corporeal sensation to ephemeral thought, “[b]y virtue of the work of removal of sensory and concrete elements,” as Civitarese explains it.⁹²⁵

So between grids, we are dealing with different materials. The concreteness of dirt and dreams. It is the relationship between dimensions, and the movement between one and the next, that interests me. Latour is curious about soil making its leap into a text, via a network of tools which include the pedocomparator and many other transformative agents besides. Latour will

and object, and a decision to work within the former term of each binarized pair while eliminating the rest from its purview.

⁹²³ The distinction Deleuze and Guattari want to make between a *map* and a *tracing* arises here. Mapping, in their view, is about “experimentation in contact with the Real.” It constructs in and through its connections. Tracing, by contrast, is a rewriting or representation of contact. It relies of the notion of deep structure. In this regard, they take on Klein’s analysis, noting where her “cartography” is reduced to a tracing that is already-decided. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12-13).

⁹²⁴ Though psychic content moves through the grid bidirectionally, movement is couched developmentally, in terms of transforming psychic content toward increasing epistemological sophistication and ontogenetic maturation.

⁹²⁵ (Civitarese, “the Grid and the Truth Drive, 93). Interestingly, the grid was developed to make a conceptual bridge or common language between the Kleinian and Freudian models of psychic functioning—for “different schools to engage in a debate without allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by passion” (Civitarese, “the Grid and the Truth Drive, 92). So, this mathematical tool for theorizing psychic life, and expressing the increasingly complex ontogenesis of the subject, not only provides a tool for observing how “raw” material becomes mental, so we may categorize and sort out mental content, but also helps a room full of analysts speak dispassionately about mental objects, without, one might surmise, “devolving” into territorial animals.

focus the reader's attention on this hybrid, this moment of substitution, the very instant when the future sign is abstracted from the soil. We should never take our eyes off the material weight of this action. The earthly dimension of Platonism is revealed in this image. We are not jumping from soil to the Idea of soil, but from continuous and multiple clumps of earth to a discrete color in a geometric cube coded in x- and y- coordinates.⁹²⁶

"A text truly speaks of the world," Latour writes, as he tracks the operations and successive transformations involved in wording a world, or speaking soil.⁹²⁷ Bion's grid acts like a pedocomparator for immaterial elements: from traces of mute soil (more precisely in this case, the excitations arising from reality and intercorporeal human experience) toward abstraction and legible sign. What tools, beings and systems get us there? The ontologies of transformative agents that Latour insistently recognizes are nowhere to be found. As far as Civitaresi is concerned, humans meeting other humans is the technology that makes the human operate. Neither "nature" nor "technology," neither the pedocomparator nor that which the pedocomparator holds, is intrinsic in any way to mental life as outlined here. We leap from organism to psychic intersubjectivity with nary a not-human mediator to be seen.

Where in the world is the Bionian grid? Bion is interested in a different kind of residue—the signs themselves, mental and emotional traces of contact with worldly bodies.

The grid is a tool for tracking increasing immaterialization. In the language of field theorists, the container of human interiority promises transformation toward (potential) "sophistication," which means, it turns out, disidentification or disconnection from the symbiotic real. What we can read in the Bionian field is an investment in the Idea of soil (though, let's be honest, even the Idea of soil will hold little interest for the psychoanalyst).

Let me return to a moment in Latour's text where he describes his pedologist pointing to a sketch of a graph. This graph is one transformation or iteration in a series of transformations during this soil-sampling expedition. Latour writes:

[T]he extension of the index finger always signals an access to reality even when it targets a mere piece of paper, an access which in this case nonetheless encompasses the

⁹²⁶ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 49.

⁹²⁷ Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 61.

totality of the site, which, paradoxically, has entirely disappeared even as we are sweating at the center of it.⁹²⁸

At the centre of a site (an ecotone—the transitional area between two biological communities, desert and forest, where beings from two differentiated habitats are still entangled), bodies sweat while getting to know the site’s ground through grids, gestures and representations. I am reminded of doing clinical work amid climate crisis. What gestures do we make, when we interpret emotional data, that sweep away the beings in and around us? I am sweating due to an unprecedented heat wave. The windows are closed because of the smoke.

In theory and practice, psychoanalysis works in the “groundless ground” of ideation against a vanishing milieu composed of myriad material beings. Sensory life is a necessary but all-too-concrete base element of a “higher” abstracted virtuality. It is in “representational abstraction” that psychoanalysis spends most of its time.⁹²⁹ Psychoanalysis has discovered the human at the point where we undergo a conversion through and then beyond material life. The language of “sophistication” is used when we achieve access to abstract thoughts, but we also talk about salvation. Civitarese expresses this idea clearly with regard to addressing bodies in analytic practice: the analyst is required to be attuned to sensation, with the goal of symbolizing, or providing representation, to what is felt in the somatic field: “this representation itself [affords] virtual salvation.”⁹³⁰ Symbolizing, or Bionian *alpha function*, becomes a lifeboat in a sea of

⁹²⁸ Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 65.

⁹²⁹ Latour muses on the process of scientifically documenting (transubstantiating) the soil of the forest: “And what would be the point of transporting the whole forest here? One would get lost in it” (Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 36). Perhaps so as to avoid getting lost—or losing oneself—psychoanalysis also performs its own “communicative conversions” that “pack the world into words” (Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 81).

⁹³⁰ (Guiseppe Civitarese, “Embodied Field, Somatic Reverie and Patients with Blocks to Symbolization” *International Psychoanalytic Association Conference*, Prague, August 7-11 2023. https://spsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Civitaresse_Embodied-Field-Somatic-Reverie-Blocks-to-Symbolization.pdf). The religiosity in this vision of subjectivity deserves some elaboration. The Bionian ultimate reality (O), that which subtends psychic life, is couched in various terms in the literature: O is an enigmatic “beyond,” God, god-head, the One, vagina, thing-in-itself, unknown infinite void or Platonic form (Civitaresse, “The Names of O: Is Bion a Mystic.”). Grotstein emphasizes the “ineffable, inscrutable, unknowable, infinite”

primordial sensation. Finding salvation in the psychoanalytic mind has a long history. When Ferenczi found himself straying too far into “depth biology,” he wrote to Freud:

I got lost in biological problems and can’t find my way back to psychology! Fortunately, I know I am on the wrong track, and I hope—after leaving the mostly biological train—to land finally in the secure harbor of psychoanalysis.⁹³¹

What does grounding psyche securely outside of biology “save us” from? Kirby suggests that admitting “we are subject to forces that far exceed our ability to control them, and that our individual identity and agency is a fractured ecology of seemingly alien chemistries and ‘creatures,’ such that ‘nature speaks us,’ leaves us feeling uneasy.”⁹³² And so, the persistence of humanist boundary work around psyches, the gap between human mental life and interwoven

quality of Reality that seeks realization. To cite just two examples among many of Grotstein’s reading of Bion as a mystic: “Bion may be likened to the patriarch Abraham, who eschewed idol worshipping in favour of an invisible, ineffable, inscrutable deity—who is One—who/which is utterly beyond the reach of our senses . . . whom/which we are compelled, with faith, to experience through the blindness of our emotions” (Grotstein, *A Beam of Intense Darkness*, 56). And: “I became aware of Bion’s occasionally stentorian rhetoric and could not help thinking of Moses descending from Mount Sinai with the ten tablets . . . and encountering the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. . . . For Moses, as for Bion, faith lay in a belief in the existence or presence (‘holy ghost’) of an ultra-sensual object” (Grotstein, *Beam of Intense Darkness* 315). In this passage, Grotstein notes that the tablets are an instance of O (a disruptive revelatory experience), while the golden calf represents knowledge (approximated and human mediated). Here again, the materiality of the stone tablets is very clearly not the point.

Civitarese took issue with this mystification of Bion, instead seeing shared language between subjects as the ground of psychic life. Civitarese grounds the subject in a transcendental human language and suggests that “what differentiates humans and non-human beings is the capacity for ‘cooperative intentionality’” (Civitarese, “The Names of O: is Bion a Mystic” 3). Tell that to the mushroom collectives!

⁹³¹ Ernst Falzeder and Eva Brabant eds., *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi, Vol 2, 1914-1919*, (Harvard UP, 1996) 46.

⁹³² Kirby, “In Conversation with Vicki Kirby,” 334.

ecologies, is our *salvation*. It would seem that we are to dematerialize the world for the sake of mental health.⁹³³ (Whose salvation? Whose mental health?)

Are we to be saved from a morphing material world through an ever more sophisticated capacity to dream our humanity via the mediation of other humans? In the meantime, we perform a broad erasure of terrestrial mediation. As though soil has no culture of its own. As though we ourselves aren't animated by dirt. As Stengers puts it, "the separation is too clean, and makes too many victims."⁹³⁴

⁹³³ Bion writes: "Man owes his health and his capacity for continued health, to his ability to shield himself during his growth as an individual by repeating in his personal life the history of the race's capacity for self-deception against truth that his mind is not fitted to receive without disaster" (Wilfred Bion, *Cogitations*, (Karnac, 1992), 192). Allow me to add that one's "self-deceptive shield" is another's lived disaster.

⁹³⁴ Stengers, "Diderot's Egg," 10.

10 AGENTIAL DREAMING

10.1 The lamprey

Latour has helped me bear in mind where worlds vanish in the psychoanalytic construction of the dream. In this final chapter, I turn to another unorthodox reading of the history of psychoanalysis that includes collaboration with terrestrial and oceanic beings. As with the spirits of Chapter One, I am asking what might materialize if the discipline did not perform its particular erasures and boundary-work its way into a human container. What if the non-process character of the “environmental surround” came alive to be sensed and dreamed? What possibilities for relational practice arise from reconfiguring the psychic field? I conclude Part Two with a consideration of nervous systems and somatic modalities that reach beyond the individual organism. Doing so allows me to imagine arrangements of psychic embodiment that depart from the strictures of the modern, humanist dream. I hope this imagining might begin to redress an ecologically dissociated conception of the psyche.

In *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*, Elizabeth Wilson offers a rereading of the Freudian project, beginning not with hysteria but with the corpus of a not-human being: the lamprey. With Wilson, I revisit this fish’s role in the development of a theory of mind. For it was a fish’s nervous system that activated Freud’s: a moment of generative ichthyophilia.

Freudian metapsychology is more deeply embedded in biology than psychoanalytic histories usually acknowledge. This work included research into embryology, cerebral paralysis, evolutionary theory, and the phylogenetic association between the nervous systems of lower vertebrates (namely fish) and humans. The neurobiological (not to mention not-human) context of Freud’s research is often overlooked—or at least it was at my training institute.⁹³⁵

⁹³⁵ Often, the argument is that these early theories are biologically reductionistic. Lacanian schools favoured linguistic and sociocultural frameworks, while object relations schools, via Klein, tended to eschew the theory of drives and instead centred their inquiry around the phantasmic. It’s as though materiality itself was not as sophisticated, perplexing and dynamic as the privileged realm of human culture and mind. Meanwhile, according to Gerhard Scharbert, the same disciplinary divorce can be seen in the neuroanatomical disciplines, where Freud’s place is discounted. (Gerhard Scharbert, “Freud and Evolution,” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 31:2, 2009, 300).

The etymology of the German word *Trieb* is an instructive place to begin. Originally, it translated into English as both “instinct” and “drive”:

The German verb *Treiben* generally means “to set into motion”; its earliest meaning was “to drive cattle.” The verb was also used to refer to getting plants to grow, to stamp metal, to drill a mineshaft, to practice languages, to do business, to spend money, to act up—German uses *Treiben* for each of these. Likewise to propel someone into flight, to push someone to the limit, or to feel pressured to do this or that. The noun *Trieb* shows the same range of force and diversity. Sprout, shoot, or offshoot, for plants; impulse, tendency, penchant, inclination, and instinct for animals and humans—these are all described by the word *Trieb*, which also becomes pejorative when someone gives in to his or her appetites. *Triebleben* means “instinctual life,” and *Triebhaft* means “instinctive.” In physics, *Trieb* means “motor force,” and it appears in a number of compounds such as *Triebfeder*, “mainspring,” *Triebkraft*, “driving force.” *Triebstoff*, literally “driving stuff,” means “fuel.”⁹³⁶

Trieb signifies both an acting on materials in the world as well as a vital force running through vegetal, animal and machinic bodies. It was adopted by psychoanalysis to explain psychodynamics, especially as they relate to infantile sexuality. It is perhaps Laplanche’s metapsychological formulation that sets up a distinction between the sexual unconscious and animality most explicitly: we are to understand that *Instinkt* belongs to animals, while *Trieb* is uniquely human, corresponding to the “urgent unintelligibility that precipitates the formation of the unconscious in the first place.”⁹³⁷ The enigmatic messages implanted in the child via culture and the paradigm of the mother’s care initiate Laplanche’s sexual unconscious.⁹³⁸ In psychoanalytic work, whether we are translating the internalized messages from the other or, to shift to Bion’s language, grappling with the unknowable O of reality, our experience will need to be digested.

Of course, internalization and digestion are not only psychological metaphors. The guts, as Wilson points out, are also a site where exteriority and interiority intermingle, literally: “For an

⁹³⁶ Michelle Porte, “Drive/Instinct” in *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 444.

⁹³⁷ Adam Blum, “How to Surf Oceanic Feeling,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 32:6, (2022), 557.

⁹³⁸ Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*.

internal organ, the gut has a remarkably intimate connection to the outside.”⁹³⁹ Inheritance, or mechanisms of transmission between birth parent to infant, happen biologically as well.⁹⁴⁰ We are hosts to others’ biology. This is, of course, what we are to understand through genetics—we are iterations and patternings of ancestral texts. Microbes are passed vaginally during birth and through breast milk, creating bodily defence systems by organizing a physiology of self and non-self and contributing to the development of behavioural traits. Tobias Rees et al. write of how emotional, cognitive and behavioural characteristics arise through the compositions of microbial cultures.⁹⁴¹

In psychoanalysis, however, we know that a special part of us transcends the goo of materiality and the evolutionary mandates of animality, like a butterfly leaving the chrysalis. *Instinkt* departs from drive. Culture imposes itself on nature. At this point, a line is drawn between this goo and ourselves, as we become the being who enters the enigma of social-symbolic life. The subject exists in a dream as distinguished from a mechanistic materialism and its unspeakable (and unspeaking) qualities—such is the salvation model of the psyche.

The canonized story of psychoanalysis usually involves pivotal meetings with hysterics. In Part One of this dissertation, I laid out the story of Anna O., who inaugurated the psychoanalytic technique of transference.⁹⁴² Charcot’s hypnosis experiments on hysterical patients at the Sâlpêtrière were also instrumental for Freud. Charcot’s proposal—that hysterical symptoms were not caused by organic lesions but were mental in origin—is said to have ushered Freud from a

⁹³⁹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*, (Duke Up, 2004), 44.

⁹⁴⁰ Wilson notes how in conventional biology (citing Daniel Dennett), the idea of the “inheritance of acquired characteristic” is considered to be a Lamarckian error. Psychoanalysis, meanwhile, readily understands the idea of inheriting traits, such as with intergenerational trauma, which can show up as acquired habits of affect, behaviour and phantasy. In response to Dennett et al., Wilson writes: “This too easy decision (a kind of ontological apartheid) implies that the stuff of biology and the stuff of psychology operate in disjunctive realms” (Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 68). Mobilizing Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, she argues for the infectious and communicative nature of biology and its reciprocity with psychology.

⁹⁴¹ See Tobias Rees, Thomas Bosch, Angela Douglas, “How the microbiome challenges our concept of self,” *Plos Biology*, 16:2, Feb 9, 2018.

⁹⁴² See Chapter 16, “The inner theatre of hysteria”.

neurological to a psychological framework. This encounter is considered to be Freud's epistemological break.⁹⁴³

Traditionally, hysteria referred to the transformation of a psychic conflict into a physical symptom: a nervous cough, a paralyzed limb. The conversion of "remembrances" into bodily symptoms gave mental life some autonomy and agency. Emphasizing the psychical, rather than the physiological, in the conceptualization of hysteria was a methodological choice for Freud—a cut, in other words, with consequences:

I must, however, emphasize that the present work is characterized not only by being completely based upon psycho-analytic research, but also by being deliberately independent of the findings of biology. . . . Indeed, my aim has rather been to discover how far psychological investigation can throw light upon the biology of the sexual life of man. . . . [T]here was no need for me to be diverted from my course if the psycho-analytic method led in a number of important respects to opinions and findings which differed largely from those based on biological considerations.⁹⁴⁴

Ideational, phantasmic, symbolic and cultural dimensions are distinguished from body. They require a different technical approach. In hysteria, we see these ideational agents acting on a nervous anatomy with more force, at times, than biology. This formulation, in which the psychoanalytic is deliberately distinguished from the biologic, underlies the phenomenological reduction, the bracketing out of "concrete reality" and the privileging of fantasy and personal fictions.

Relational and field psychoanalyses still lean heavily on a classical distinction attributed to Freud: an ideational logic gives rise to the hysterical soma, whereby a body can be symbolically guided, written upon, such that a body part can become psychically cathected. Without these mechanisms, it is not a psychic event. Though physical bodies participate in hysterical symptomology, the motor of fantasy is where metapsychology turns its attention. These bodily

⁹⁴³ Yunis Anil Yulmaz, "Freud's Encounter with Charcot and his Epistemological Break," *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 3:6, August 2021.

⁹⁴⁴ Freud, "Three essays on the theory of sexuality," (1950), *Standard Edition*, Vol 7, (Hogarth, 1901-1905), 131.

symptoms are then understood to be the result of a psychogenic process.

Wilson, noting how feminist theory has also tended to separate the psychic and biological realms in an effort to avoid biologism and associated gender essentialism, revisits the inter-implication of the psychic and biologic, the ideational and organic. Her work underscores the complex dynamism of biological bodies, suggesting how corporeality is complicit in psychological events. In Wilson's work, hysterics are displaced as the "seminal" figures of the history of psyche. Instead, she proposes that Freud discovered psychic life in the bodies of fish.

Prior to his work with Charcot, Freud was in the Department of Physiology at the University of Vienna, studying the nerve cells of fish and crustaceans and publishing work on animal neurobiology. Freud reflects on his early interests as a neuroanatomist and physiologist as being "a challenge to his personal integrity," but, at the same time, he says, "I think that I was happier about this particular insight than I have been about others since."⁹⁴⁵ This admission, found in an exchange between Karl Abraham and Freud, refers to an 1879 paper titled the "Spinal Ganglia and Spinal Cord of the Petromyzon." Gerhard Scharbert draws a link between Freud's research on the evolution of the nervous system in fish and the model of psychic development that persists in his theory of the human. He spent his years in Vienna in a laboratory with lampreys and crayfish, comparing the lamprey's spinal cord and brain with those of humans and studying the cell structures and nerve fibres of crayfish. Some consider this work on nerve tissues in marine animals to have contributed significantly to the discovery of the neuron.⁹⁴⁶

Although psychoanalytic doctrine considers this "neurological Freud" to be pre-analytic, it is possible to see where the marine bodies that occupied Freud's interest animated his metapsychology.⁹⁴⁷ This encounter with the primitive nervous system of a fish generated

⁹⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, *Briefe*, S. Fischer, 1965. (Cited in Scharbert, "Freud and Evolution," 297).

⁹⁴⁶ Gordon Shepard, "The Nerve Cell Studies of Freud," *Foundations of the Neuron Doctrine*, Oxford UP, 2015.

⁹⁴⁷ Lazaros Triarhou mentions a 1995 New York Academy of Sciences meeting that examined Freudian psychoanalysis through a neuroscientific framework. He goes on to note how hysteria, or conversion disorder, "seem[s] to be validated by recent data from fMRI studies: selective alterations in primary sensorimotor cortical (S1) activity have been implicated in subjects with unexplained sensory loss"

questions about the nervous elements of more complex bodies and “higher minds,” which eventually opened toward a consideration of what would later be called psychic occurrences, such as hysterical conversion. Scharbert writes, “central concepts from the field of physiology, such as association, representation, transmission, symbol, and replacement, which first occurred in his studies on aphasia, are later incorporated into the theory of dynamics of the psychic apparatus.”⁹⁴⁸ Further: “Freud’s interest in *urzeitliche Erlebnisse* (primeval experiences . . .)—in other words, our earliest childhood memories—was first founded upon his clinical groundwork in the field of paediatric neurology.”⁹⁴⁹ In Scharbert’s reading, the biological field exerted its influence throughout Freud’s career.

Freud’s work with the eel-like creature of the lamprey resonates with Ferenczi’s *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*, in which Ferenczi lays out his vision for bioanalysis.⁹⁵⁰ This work proposes (“audaciously,” says the *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*)⁹⁵¹ to think eroticism and drive beyond maternal-themed regressions, back to our emergence from the ocean.

In *Thalassa*, Ferenczi argues that organic life (animals, organs, tissues) can be read bioanalytically—through an analytic science of life.⁹⁵² According to Tom Goodwin,

(Lazaros Triarhou, “Freud’s beginnings in neurobiology,” *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 6, (2009), 7). 1-13.

⁹⁴⁸ Scharbert, “Freud and Evolution,” 302.

⁹⁴⁹ Scharbert, “Freud and Evolution,” 303. Scharbert describes Freud’s various interwoven interests, including the “differentiated organisms and organs from protists,” evolutionary theory, embryology and research into cerebral paralysis. In *The Question of Lay Analysis*, Freud writes: “Considering the intimate relationship between the things that we distinguish as bodily and as mental, one may foresee that the day will come, when paths of knowledge and hopefully of influence will open up that will lead from the Biology of organs from Chemistry to the field of neuroses” (Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis* 1926, (Norton, 1978), 54).

⁹⁵⁰ Sándor Ferenczi, “Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 3:1, 1938.

⁹⁵¹ Porte, “Drive/Instinct,” *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 447.

⁹⁵² Ferenczi “recounts his ‘guilt’ over the use of a method that violates the disciplinary boundaries between the natural and mental sciences” (Shé Hawke and Anna Gibbs, “The Currency of Water: Ferenczi’s Thalassal Trend, the Evolution of Tears, and the Role of Affect in the Psychosomatic Relation,” in *Thalassa, The Hungarian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 19:1, 2008, 40). Thus we see how

what makes the thalassal argument so extraordinary and contentious is that this first trauma of postnatal separation is not the original event that motivates the individual. It is itself a repetition of earlier catastrophes in the history of the species that are inscribed in what Ferenczi terms a “biological unconscious.”⁹⁵³

The Ferenczian body remembers on the cellular level. Indeed, memory can be traced through other shapes and forms of intramaterial embodiment. Further, for Ferenczi, fluids have a relational, signifying and intelligent nature. For example, ejaculation is read as a striving to return to the sea—a regressive libidinal tendency toward a “piscine period.” It is Freud’s *oceanic feeling* biologized.⁹⁵⁴

While Ferenczi imagines psychesomatic life as extensive with a deep, aquatic evolutionary history, the later Freud had a difficult time theorizing beyond childhood. “Biologically,” Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fliess, “dream life seems to me to derive entirely from the residues of the prehistoric period of life (between the ages of one and three).”⁹⁵⁵ In *Civilization and Its*

straddling the boundary between psyche and biology is under the critical gaze of a Freudian superego.

⁹⁵³ Tom Goodwin, “Translating the Origins of Psychoanalysis,” *Angelaki*, 25:6, (2020), 127.

⁹⁵⁴ Psychoanalysis of the oceanic arose from Rolland and Freud’s personal communication. Rolland derived this term from reading Baruch Spinoza, who posited God or nature as an infinite substance. For Freud, who claimed not to have access to such a feeling, the oceanic would become an archaism originating in infantile symbiosis. Jackie Wang revisits the oceanic in her writing, asking: “What would it mean to socialize (or communize) oceanic feeling?” Mobilizing Fred Moten’s work on Blackness and the Middle Passage, Wang proposes a reading of the oceanic as a “point of departure for new socialities and political models that do not rely on discrete selves” (Wang, “Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect”). Moten’s “paraontological” modes of being are outside the notions of self-ownership or the containers of discrete subjectivity. The political possibilities of the paraontological pose a serious challenge to Freud’s and Kristeva’s analyses of the oceanic as a regressive and infantile state. Wang describes how Kristeva reads the oceanic in terms of lethality, a subject abandoned to a presymbolic void. This ocean is seen to be a destructive nothingness into which a person may withdraw into a state of undifferentiation outside of signification. Without the symbolic Law, maternal fluidity can be catastrophic. I want to point out how communicative biologies, nervous systems and ancestral organisms—all of which constellate in various networks—are far from a “nothingness.”

⁹⁵⁵ “Letter from Freud to Fliess, March 10, 1898,” in Jeffrey Masson ed, *The Complete*

Discontents, Freud attributes the oceanic to the infantile state of narcissistic symbiosis.⁹⁵⁶ For Ferenczi, meanwhile, the oceanic is not a compensatory fantasy for a lost infantile state but rather a structuring, phylogenetic influence from a not-yet-human symbiogenetic moment. Despite Freud's early interest in the nervous system of fish, when he entertains the notion of psychological prehistory in *Totem and Taboo*, his origin story begins with the primal horde and the sexual and social dramas of "primitive man."⁹⁵⁷ Ferenczi insists on taking us to an altogether different habitat: "For the human being . . . is in fact really descended from the fishes, and the famous *Amphioxus lanceolatus* has the honour of being the ancestor of all the vertebrates and therefore also of the human species."⁹⁵⁸ This material substratum is not merely about maternal symbiosis but also wrapped up in the mutations and co-metamorphoses of aquatic bodies.⁹⁵⁹

In Ferenczi's reworking of evolutionary theory, biologic memory operates through bodies. Intergenerational trauma is materialized, ancestry is not human and organic materials carry

Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904, (Harvard UP, 1985) 301.

⁹⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Norton, 2005. Also see Kristeva's writing on the omnipotent fantasies of limitless connection. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Columbia UP, 1989.

⁹⁵⁷ Here, Freud speculates on the origins of Oedipal drama, which is essentially a story about men dealing with desire, violence and guilt via the authority of the father. (Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*).

⁹⁵⁸ Ferenczi, "Thalassa," 45.

⁹⁵⁹ Shé Hawke makes a link between *Thalassa* and Elaine Morgan's *The Descent of Woman*, in which Morgan presents a feminist theory of evolution through an iteration of "aquatic ape theory." Her argument counters the predominant theory of human life as emerging from the trees of the savanna and instead suggests that humans, as with other mammals, were semiaquatic. Her argument cites physiological characteristics of humans, such as saltwater tears, hairless bodies, webbed digits, subcutaneous insulating fat and the fluid medium of the womb, among others. Hawke is particularly interested in Morgan's evolutionary work done on tears and their suggested marine origin: "through the optic of phylogenetic psychoanalysis, tears open up the space between psyche and soma that was so important to Ferenczi and other analysts of his era." (Shé Hawke, "Evolutionary Water: Wombs, Sea, Tears and their Utraquistic Relation," *Altitude: An e-journal of emerging humanities work*, Vol 9, 2011, www.thealtitudejournal.co).

psychic traces—the writing of catastrophic, ecological events translated as life. In this theory, the ideational and organic are in a relationship of mutual morphological influence.⁹⁶⁰

Psychoanalytic writing features a tension that sees early Freud as “somatocentric” (“the ego is first and foremost a body ego”)⁹⁶¹ while also favouring psychological etiology for somatic disturbances. “Complicated and ever-present” is how Michèle Porte describes Freud’s relationship with the biological.⁹⁶² Certainly, Freud recognized his debt to evolutionary theory. He grappled with materiality, animality, nervous systems and phylogeny as he constructed his theories of unconscious life. Instinct and drive served as a way to think of the threshold between biology and psychology. Somatic, libidinal charge is transmuted into the psyche, and the psychic enervates the hysterical body; or, as Porte puts it, “psychic morphogenesis could be grafted onto the underlying biology of onto- and phylogenesis.”⁹⁶³ A “biological bedrock,” Freud notes, presents a limit to what psychoanalytic work can do.⁹⁶⁴

Contemporary relational iterations of psychoanalysis understand that psyche indeed interfaces with somatic “bedrock” and that body-level sensory experience is the raw material that needs psychological processing: mentalization, containment, alpha function, digestion. The processing machine moves from primitive elaborations of bodily experience toward higher abstraction: what begins as action among the organs of the corpus, or the contact between baby and maternal

⁹⁶⁰ Oliver Sacks also explores the influence of animality on psychic life. He highlights the “reptilian” precursors of human nervous system development. Interestingly, reptilian possibilities of psychosomatic function exist alongside the presence of mammalian traits—they are not mapped as a previous stage in a linear, determinate phylogeny. Wilson writes: “Sacks’s work is powerful not simply because of its ability to resist degenerative understanding of neurological disorder, but also because it demonstrates how different modes of embodiment (reptilian, mammalian, neurological, emotional, behavioral, cultural) intermesh, cohabit, and occasionally dissociate” (Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 82). The notion that these various patterns of embodiment are available to us is a cornerstone of contemporary somatic therapies. A “limbic highjack,” for example, is a common way of describing a traumatic trigger. What this means is that systems of creaturely functioning, including reptilian modalities, can be easily accessed.

⁹⁶¹ Salman Akhtar, “Body Ego” in *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, (Karnac, 2009), 39

⁹⁶² Michele Porte, “Biological Bedrock” in *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 182

⁹⁶³ Porte, “Biological Bedrock,” 182.

⁹⁶⁴ Porte, “Biological Bedrock,” 182.

environment, are transposed into symbolic expression. It is a sort of refinement factory, or a dematerializing grid, which produces poetry.

Astrida Neimanis's "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water" is another attempt to remediate this hierarchical relationship between mind and materiality. Neimanis presents a practice of feminist embodiment that observes, identifies and finds affinity with water, as material media. We might mythologize water in our stories, but water is rather composing us: "Sixty to ninety percent of your bodily matter is composed of water. Water, in this sense, is an entity, individualized as that relatively stable thing you call your body."⁹⁶⁵ Neimanis echoes Ferenczi when she writes: "Water connects the human scale to other scales of life, both unfathomable and imperceptible. We are all bodies of water, in the constitutional, the genealogical, and the geographical sense."⁹⁶⁶ The aqueous invites us to think through fluid webs of connection and exchange, as well as the porous and sensitive membranes that hold us, tentatively and porously, together. An oceanic relational field is a material fecundity. Similarly, in "Being and Slime: An Alluvial Introduction," Karin Sellberg and Kamilea Aghtan argue for a politics embedded in the basic reality of bodily flows, which "makes any sense of a 'core', or indeed a comprehensible corpus, practically impossible."⁹⁶⁷

Compare this flowing, gestational vision with the psychoanalytic outlook on fluidity as captured

⁹⁶⁵ Astrida Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water," in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 97.

⁹⁶⁶ Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water," 99.

⁹⁶⁷ Karin Sellberg and Kamillea Aghtan, "Being and Slime: An Alluvial Introduction" in *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies 9: Bodily Fluids*, (2014), 166. This fluid model of subjectivity is also championed by Braidotti, who, working through Deleuze's figuration of nomadic subjectivity, envisions people in terms of flows in process, bodies becoming affective forces, forming assemblages. This subject does not stop at the human skin, and nor does it stop at the maternal milieu as holding environment for psyche formation. This "human organism is neither wholly human, as a person, nor just an organism. It is an abstract machine, radically immanent, which captures, transforms and produces inter-connections. The power of such an organism is certainly neither contained nor confined to consciousness" (Rosi Braidotti, "Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity," *Rhizomes*, 11/12, Fall 2005/Spring 2006, <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/braidotti.html>).

by David Rosenfeld:

[In] the model of the primitive-psychotic body image, there is no notion of skin, but instead the notion of fluid as the nucleus of the primitive-psychotic body image. Thus, there is only a vague psychological notion of a wall that contains vital fluids, or blood, and fantasies of bleeding, or “emptying out” of those vital fluids.⁹⁶⁸

This fluid, flowing, leaky, intermingling situation is the wrong body image. Without a containing wall, we could bleed out, become a body without organs, oozing our way into perverse connection. We could lose ourselves in the oceanic, regress into primitivity. We’re threatened with a “destructuring and disorganizing of the soma, psyche and sociality.”⁹⁶⁹

10.2 Nervous systems

It is precisely a destructuring of the human-centred psyche, sociality and cosmos that I am playing with in this dissertation. Destructuring makes some in the psychoanalytic milieu nervous. Civitarese writes that “word representation provides a walkway that stops us from falling into the abyss of infinity and the infinite difference of things in nature.”⁹⁷⁰ This special linguocultural creature hovers safely above the threatening world of things. Yet some destructuring will be necessary for doing ecologically attuned relational work. Civitarese’s abyss is the symbiosis in which we live. His vision of human salvation from the infinite things in nature is clearly not working out.

Like Ferenczi, Freud made connections between oceanic and terrestrial bodies. Freud did so by examining the nervous system of the lamprey. Nervous systems are biological, electrical and relationally and ecologically emergent substrates—communicative networks of nervous tissues and synaptic spaces, composed of hundreds of types of neurons, linking body-minds, insides and outsides, across extensive terrains, life forms and temporalities. A nervous system is a literal entanglement. It is a sensory medium that is shaped and patterned through relations. It positions us as a knot in a web of influential relations. It loosens our identifications with privileged

⁹⁶⁸ David Rosenfeld, “Body Image,” *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 197-198

⁹⁶⁹ Micheal O’Rourke, “The Big Secret About Queer Theory,” *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies* #9: *Bodily Fluids*, 2014), 11.

⁹⁷⁰ Civitarese, “The Names of O, is Bion a Mystic?,” 147.

anatomies within that web. Travelling outside the enclosure of human dreaming does not reduce the sophisticated mind to dumb or mechanistic material; rather, we participate in “natures” that are animate and animating, agential and activating.

Psychoanalytic outliers such as Ferenczi and Wilhelm Reich, as well as those practising contemporary somatic therapeutics, offer an alternative to human container models of psychesomatic life. They also nudge us toward sensing a relational field that psychoanalytic boundaries can’t bear. I put the nervous system into play here, not to reduce mental life to the brain (as in eliminative neurosciences), but rather to draw out and redistribute psychic life along a chiasmic weave of sensitive filaments, tracing dreamwork through bodies, objects, entities, milieus and timelines.

By imagining embodiment as patterned and patterning aggregates of interlinked rhizomes, microbiomes⁹⁷¹ and electromes,⁹⁷² the predicament of psychic life begins to take interesting new shapes. These communicative corporealities are not predetermined, hermetically sealed or essentially human. Chains of association, dreaming processes and webs of organic and inorganic systems are interlaced.⁹⁷³ Akomolafe invites us to consider how thinking-feeling happens

⁹⁷¹ Rees et al. challenge the conventional biological markers of individual selfhood (namely, immune system, brain and genome), arguing that microorganism interaction unbinds the human from any conception of enclosed individuality. See Rees, Bosch, Douglas, “How the microbiome challenges our concept of self.”

⁹⁷² Sally Adey, *We are Electric: The New Science of our Body’s Electrome*, Hachette, 2023.

⁹⁷³ I am guided here by Kirby’s argument about the ontological materiality of signs: “how neurons learn new material through an inherent plasticity and interactionism (in other words, any ‘one’ neuron is already ‘webbed’). . . . Even the layperson is increasingly aware that biological information in general, from genetic structures to the translation capacities of our immune system, shares some workable comparison with natural languages” (Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 72-73). As Kirby suggests, these “biological grammars that seem to be the communicative stuff of life” tend to be foreclosed by philosophers (here she cites Butler), who warn of an inevitable gulf between human representation or social construction and the “stuff out there.” Such approaches repeat a culture/nature split, where we discursive humans are enclosed in culture, barred from access to the “inhuman ‘outside’” (Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 74).

through these “affective assemblages,” described as “large territorial beasts with human bodies as organelles”:

To feel is to glow; it is to be activated at the crossroads where politics, expectations, stories, bodies, furniture, media, food, spirits, computational frameworks of neoliberalism, history and microbial worlds intrasect. Decentering humans from the story of feeling relieves us from the burden of emotional authenticity, and might open up post-qualitative research adventures to the edges of sentimentality. More importantly, it can tell us a lot about the territories we are entangled with, and how habitual modes of feeling can often get in the way of our flourishing.⁹⁷⁴

Similarly, Jackie Wang writes of an oceanic territory of “collective constellations.”⁹⁷⁵ My experience of animacy is enmeshed in these constellations, which include the entangled filaments holding my physiology together. This writing body is animated, and what activates it can’t be localized in a control centre in the skull; neither is it limited to my family history or the reparative relational work I have done with an analyst. My relations with people, as meaningfully felt as they may be, are not solely responsible for the energy and thought I invest in this project. In contact with other entities (cedar trees, psilocybin, coffee beans, screens, ferries, daylight), the self-states I recognize as some iteration of “me-ness” are animated in considerably (sometimes wildly) different ways.⁹⁷⁶ Oceanic collectives produced a rudimentary version of the nervous system I mark out as mine. Forest collectives sustain it.

⁹⁷⁴ Bayo Akomolafe, “We do not feel emotions,” Oct 7, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/we-do-not-feel-emotions>.

⁹⁷⁵ Wang writes: “In recent years a group of anonymous friendship theorists drawing on the work of Deleuze, Guattari, Tiquun and Spinoza have used ‘constellations’ as a way to visualize their social mode: ‘We form constellations. Our bodies are never isolated, are always enmeshed in shifting patterns of relations. Scattered across space, our selves form patterns, trace connections ethical but unseen. They give us consistency and form outside of our solitude. When we make our connections material, our constellations take shape, become tactile, make worlds’” (Friendship as a Form of Life” Issue 2, 2016, cited in Wang, “Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect.”).

⁹⁷⁶ Not dissimilar to somatic therapies, the “sensuous” is something that David Abram espouses as a pathway to relational participation. Thinking in terms of a mutual reverberation between perceiving, sensitive bodies, Abram is also making a cosmological claim for a “perceptual cosmos” (David Abram,

“We begin with structural entanglement rather than clean and isolated identities,” Kirby tells us.⁹⁷⁷ The psychoanalytic neonate begins in entanglement too. Adam Blum writes of how, from the beginning, we are “conducting the charge that is already stimulated by the other in one’s body.”⁹⁷⁸ We also understand that the embodied charge that we are meant to channel runs along closed circuits in analysis. Although psychoanalysis is at pains to differentiate the psychic subject from the biological reality, a meshwork of activating bodies has us in its grip.

Abysmal “things in nature” are not an origin against which a subject must be distinguished and defined: the distinctness of the human as the psyche-hoarding entity erodes when we begin tracing the filaments of this system. A (de)formative relational field would include many sentient bodies who get tangled up in enactments, who communicate and exhibit oneiric behaviours. When the *Octopus cyanea* dreams, her body changes colour, texture and pattern.⁹⁷⁹ Plant bodies also sense their environments. We are linked into their networks of sensitive transfer as well.

“Animism, Perception, and the Earthly Craft of the Magician,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed Bron Taylor, Continuum, 2005). Through a reading of Merleau-Ponty, Abram embeds bodies in fields of sentience and intelligence: “This has become a very basic insight to me: that our bodily senses, left to their own devices, are inherently animistic; that sensory perception is participatory; that the senses are gregarious organs that actively participate in the surrounding terrain; and that when we speak of the world around us as a set of objects or objective mechanical processes, we actually frustrate our senses and force our awareness to withdraw from our skin and from our eyes and our ears, and we climb up into our heads and live in a set of verbal abstractions—because the human animal cannot help but experience the world as animate and alive through and through” (David Abram, “The Ecology of Perception: Interview with David Abram,” *Emergence Magazine*, July 20, 2020, <http://emergencemagazine.org/interview/the-ecology-of-perception>,).

Given his emphasis on the “interplay and tension between our animal body and the animate earth,” Abram’s philosophical project is often adopted by nature-based therapies and eco-psychology literature. Land-based therapeutic practices, for example, facilitate psychesomatic experience in connection to place. Here, land becomes a co-therapist, a participant in processes of change. See for example Andy Fischer, *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*, SUNY, 2002.

⁹⁷⁷ Kirby, “In Conversation with Vicki Kirby,” 334.

⁹⁷⁸ Blum, “How to Surf the Oceanic Feeling,” 557.

⁹⁷⁹ David Pena-Guzman, *When Animals Dream: The Hidden World of Animal Consciousness*, Princeton UP, 2022.

Plants can distinguish between nourishment and predators; their bodies react accordingly. They know weather patterns and times of day. The plant genes that can distinguish between light and dark are shared in human DNA. Plant seedlings and animal bodies remember. They pass their embodied memories through generations. As with our mammalian bodies, in a plant body the stimulation of a cell results in an electrical signal: information is transferred within and between bodies. I have used sea anemones as an image in my therapeutic work, to draw attention to embodied expansion and contraction. When unbothered, anemones take up space by waving their tentacles in the water, which help them to feel and feed. When their sensory cells are disturbed, the tentacles retract, drawing in protectively. I can relate.

These defence mechanisms and behavioural patterns—the material of psychoanalysis—plays out across planetary assemblages. Wilson mobilizes Ferenczi’s “depth biology” in her reading of hysteria:

The increased capacity in hysteria for the fabrication of lumps in the throat . . . suggests that an aptitude for condensation, displacement, connotation, repetition, or identification cannot be contained to the ideational realm (dreams, parapraxes, and so forth); these capacities are also part of the nature of the body’s organs, vessels, and nerve fibers. The action of the musculature of the intestines is not that of passive substrate awaiting the animating influence of the unconscious but, rather, that of an interested broker of psychosomatic events.⁹⁸⁰

Wilson argues that the agency of biology itself has been overlooked in psychoanalysis as well as in the theories it has influenced, and she challenges “the presumption that anatomy is so solidly and immutably composed that it could underpin strict determinism.” She finds a psychoanalytic guide in Ferenczi: “With Ferenczi I want to show that anatomy is volatile enough to generate multifaceted and paradoxical destinies.” Hysteria, in her view, is not forced on a compliant body from without; rather, “it is already part of the natural repertoire of biological matter. A more sustained focus on the biology of hysteria would allow us to see that the proclivity to conversion (diversion, perversion) is native to biochemical, physiological, and nervous systems.”⁹⁸¹

⁹⁸⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism*, (Duke Up, 2015), 53.

⁹⁸¹ Wilson, *Gut Feminism*, 13.

Somatic modalities aiming to address trauma through the nervous system have proliferated in the therapeutic milieu.⁹⁸² This therapeutic sea change has not been ignored by contemporary psychoanalyses; attempts to integrate the techniques of somatic work into the principles of psychoanalysis are not uncommon.⁹⁸³ This is, perhaps, not entirely surprising, since contemporary somatic work shares a lineage with Freud. His colleague Reich was a key progenitor of somatic-based clinical practices.⁹⁸⁴ In a unique iteration of Ferenczi's bioanalysis,

⁹⁸² Stephen W. Porges's polyvagal theory is one popularized approach to working with trauma corporeally. Drawing from theories of the neurobiological development of animal nervous systems, the polyvagal model assesses states of physiological and psychological threat within a body. Porges works with a "stimulus-organism-response," where vagal nerve networks react to encounters autonomically. This nervous system is conceptualized as a bidirectional "brain-body model that interprets the brain regulation of peripheral physiology (e.g., neural regulation of both cardiovascular and endocrine function) as providing a neural platform for emergent adaptive social and defensive behaviors" (Stephen Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-regulation*, (WW Norton, 2011), 3). Porges coined the term *neuroception* to mark a difference between perception, (which requires a prefrontal cortex) and the detection of stimulus before cognitive awareness. The idea is that we (along with all sentient beings) are scanning and sensing through our autonomic nervous systems, adapting to what is sensed, adjusting, reacting, responding physiologically. These responses become patterned into nervous bodies, showing up as moods, behaviours and narratives. There are threads to trace here within Lamarckian natural philosophy and his concept of *irritability*. In Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's evolutionary theory, organisms mutate through their sensitivity to inner and outer stimuli. This is an adaptive history of organic life, which identifies a vital reactivity in nature. Self-protective mechanisms as well as creative adaptations are activated and organized through the "irritability" of embodied beings. See Guido Giglioni, "Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and the Pace of Irritability in the History of Life and Death," in *Vitalism and the Scientific Image in Post-Enlightenment Life Science 1800-2010*, eds Sebastian Normandin and Charles T Wolfe, Springer, 2013).

⁹⁸³ See, for example, the discussion in David Levit's "Somatic Experiencing: Enhancing Psychoanalytic Holding for Trauma and Catastrophic Dissociation—Contending with the Flood and the Fog," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 32:3, 2022.

⁹⁸⁴ The literature often traces this lineage from Reich to Fritz Perls and Laura Perls, who went on to found Gestalt therapy, as well as Reich's student Alexander Lowen and his bioenergetic analysis. Elsa Gindler and her student Charlotte Selver are also influential figures in contemporary models of somatic trauma

Reich tied bodies to metapsychology through his own theories of biopsychic energy. And again like Ferenczi, he was another controversial, pathologized and ultimately demoted protégé of Freud.⁹⁸⁵

Reich developed a vitality theory that operates in cosmic, political, atmospheric and psychobiologic domains. His theory of biogenesis tracks the circulation and repression of sexuality in and around the physical organism. His concept of the *psychophysical* articulates psyche and soma so that neurosis can be read in the living system of the body. For Reich, psychophysical energy circulates through the entire musculature of the body as well as in the cosmos at large. His theory of *orgone* is libido writ large—a pervasive cosmic energy operating beyond the enclosure of human infantile sexuality, beyond the container models of mind. This theory is cosmological and it is also deeply political: vital force is obstructed by fascism.⁹⁸⁶

Biogenesis is not fixed on the phantasy of early object relations but rather elaborates an ontology of driving forces that animate body-minds. Sebastian Normandin notes an inherent animism in Reichian thought: “Reich’s orgone is an attempt to ‘vitalize’ or ‘animate’ a universe conventionally seen as made up of largely inert, dead matter.”⁹⁸⁷

The biophysicality of emotional life, and the idea of a vital life force, continues to run through contemporary somatic therapies. Though the basic notion of *stuck energy* remains consistent in

work. Gindler’s influence on Reich is often cited—both his daughter and his second wife worked directly with her. See: Judith Weaver, “The Influence of Elsa Gindler: Ancestor of Sensory Awareness,” *The United States Association of Body Psychotherapy Journal*, 3:1, 2004.

⁹⁸⁵ A short passage in *The Legacy of Sándor Ferenczi: From Ghost to Ancestor* remarks on Ferenczi’s interest in neurobiology and how the mechanisms he put forward can be linked with contemporary neurosciences. See “Links to Science” in Harris and Kuchuk, *The Legacy of Sándor Ferenczi*.

⁹⁸⁶ Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Orgone Institute Press, 1946.

⁹⁸⁷ Sebastian Normandin, “Wilhelm Reich: Vitalism and its Discontents,” in *and the Scientific Image in Post-Enlightenment Life Science, 1800-2010*, 184. Reich’s is a political project as well as a cosmological vision: bioenergetic circulation necessitates freedom from repressive regimes and their neurotic structuration. Ameliorating organotic breakdown became the key to personal and social health in Reichian therapeutics. The infamous orgone accumulator was one means to this end. This version of cosmic-orgasmic vitalism, and more particularly the tools Reich developed to capture and channel this *élan vital*, was controversial enough for the US Food and Drug Administration to have him arrested.

this work, most contemporary somatic approaches de-emphasize “orgiastic potency,” focusing instead on the body’s remembrance of traumatic events. The evolutionary development of the nervous system and how an animal body adapts to threat, novelty, affect and overwhelm are at the heart of this praxis. It is often called a “bottom-up approach” meaning that a rootedness in the bodily field of experience is facilitated before working with narrative.⁹⁸⁸ The instruction is to notice your biology: to bring awareness to sensation, skin and muscles, gesture and posture. Kinaesthetic, proprioceptive, autonomic, sensory and visceral phenomena, usually considered to be unmentalized in psychoanalysis, are at the centre of this work. The favoured materials of psychoanalysis (symbols, chains of association, the play of meaning, dreams and emotions) are conceptualized as threads of entanglement tied to a corporeal field. A practitioner might ask: What is the sensation? Where in the body is this felt? What nervous system state (fight, flight, freeze) has initiated this fantasy?

As Levine teaches, much information is to be gleaned from the viscera.⁹⁸⁹ This I read alongside Wilson’s suggestion that “rather than turning away from anatomy, we could turn toward it more attentively to see what improbable capacities it holds.”⁹⁹⁰ She explores this point in relation to bodily reflexes: a nervous system is inventive and thoughtful in its reactivity. It is irreducible to

⁹⁸⁸ One marked distinction between the somatic and the psychoanalytic approach is the use of physical touch, versus the strict limits around the “talking cure.” Reich’s “character-analytic vegetotherapy” makes direct contact with bodies to release neurotic patterning in muscular tension (what he called *body armour*). Somatic experiencing work, as developed by Levine et al., also pursues “table work” to support nervous systems as they move through states of dysregulation. These methodological differences point to prioritizing addressing the physical or material versus the immaterial traces of unconscious interiority via transference. The “prophylactic ethic” of psychoanalysis also stems from negotiating safe boundaries in a practice that emphasizes the sexual unconscious (this is what makes psychoanalysis a so-called dangerous method). The psychoanalytic aim, therefore, is to help a person contain through symbolization, rather than to physically support the movement of embodied energy. See Wilhelm Reich “Psychic Contact and Vegetative Current. (A Contribution to the Theory of Affects and Character-Analytic Technique)” in *Character Analysis*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972.

⁹⁸⁹ See Peter Levine with Ann Frederick, *Waking The Tiger: Healing Trauma*, North Atlantic Books, 1997.

⁹⁹⁰ Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 45.

automaticity. Reflexes are linked to emotional expression, which unfolds in relational fields. Blushing, bristling, jaw clenching, fainting: these are meaning-full biological events that are initiated unconsciously and relationally.

Bodies receive and send information, monitoring environments inside and outside the skin: the breath, heart rate, contractions and expansions, the gestures of another body in our milieu. The organism is always sensorially engaged in unintentional forms of processing. Triggers are physiological events: a traumatic trigger hijacks our neurophysiology well before we can reflect cognitively. Ferenczi also writes about a primordial psyche that can be activated in psychological distress: “In such moments, when the psychic system fails, the organism begins to think.”⁹⁹¹ Here, we are far from Grotstein’s reverent description of the landscape of psychoanalysis: “A hovering, ethereal, placeless landscape that dreamily interpenetrates our reality with its all-too-subtle yet all-too-powerful Ultimate Reality that is beyond our senses.”⁹⁹²

In this work, *organic substance* can think—bodies themselves are dynamic in expressing wishes and motives. Autonomic functioning acts as a sensitive mediator, intervening in and influencing bodily and mental life. Again, this is not the salvation of human poesis that Civitarese underscores, or the hovering beyond that Grotstein intuits; rather, it is psychesomatic events unfolding through the viscera. Not only are our nerves exquisitely sensitive (so much so that the presence of another can trigger a cascade of biochemical responses, that is, biological events as signs of emotion), but the very organization of the nervous body is stimulated through interaction.⁹⁹³

⁹⁹¹ Sándor Ferenczi, *The Clinical Diary of Sándor Ferenczi*, ed. Judith Dupont, (Harvard UP, 1988), 5-6).

⁹⁹² Grotstein, *A Beam of Intense Darkness*, 117.

⁹⁹³ Psychobiological attachment theory works with the premise that centres of our brain and nervous system are soft wired and profoundly influenced by the environment as we grow. For example, the myelination of neurons, which allows for processing emotional experience, develops in infancy and continues growing throughout life. The limbic system is responsible for emotional processing and learning and develops in concert with caregivers and their regulatory capacity (or disruptive intensity, or neglect, or any number of affective relational experiences). Much of this work focuses on the dyad of caregiver and child, as well as the neonatal development of nervous systems through childhood. The popularization of attachment theory in therapeutic circles emphasizes how “attachment styles,” developed

Civitarese also insists there is an “indissoluble interweaving of biology and sociology.”⁹⁹⁴ He notes the impossibility of identifying the exact moment at which we cross the threshold from bodily life to culture, at which point meanings are given to bodily experience. He further insists that bodies are never only material but also translating systems of material experience, written through with the values of a social group. (This we could link to nervous system patterning. For example, which bodies are entitled to react to threat with aggression? Which bodies develop to suppress or sublimate aggression in order to feel safe?) Civitarese’s *consensuality* speaks to somatic experience in the analytic dyad that can become digested into shared meaning. Here, he draws on Derrida to explain how the logic of the supplement ensures there is such a thing as psychic life: the meaning of experience is always structured through slippage and deferral; it is always in process, always changing through traces of the other added to the text.

That others are involved in the writing of the sensorium is a relational vision to be sure. Civitarese writes, “in humans the mind is relational from the outset and by association it always takes on the values of the social group.”⁹⁹⁵ Who belongs to this social group? With Derrida ready at hand, Civitarese holds that the “unconscious is organized through a weave of differences.”⁹⁹⁶ This inherent but still oddly immaterial relationality is also captured by Juan Tubert-Oklander when he writes that the “individual personality is determined, contained, and traversed by myriad threads or pathways of the relational web—communications, relationships, traditions, values, language, assumptions—which become a part of it, at the deepest layer of the unconscious.”⁹⁹⁷

In her writing on metaphoric process, Montana Katz envisions the individual as a *sinew*. She writes: “All that is identified with a person—his or her life experiences, memories, thoughts, bodily experiences, etc.—are part of the sinew of metaphoric processes associated with that

in early childhood, repeat themselves in our adult relationships. For my purposes, I want to underline the open patterning and networking of bodies in contact with other bodies—an illustration of co-becoming through object worlds. See, for example, Dan Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who we are*, The Guilford Press, 1999.

⁹⁹⁴ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 51.

⁹⁹⁵ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 129.

⁹⁹⁶ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 87.

⁹⁹⁷ Tubert-Oklander, *The One and the Many*, 23.

person.”⁹⁹⁸ For Katz, sinews are manifold and multitemporal, a complex tangle of affect and thought. The psychoanalytic subject, in her view, is composed of many of these threads. A metaphoric process is an “unconscious trail which includes and encodes emotional, procedural, dynamic, and other unconscious ingredients of experience.”⁹⁹⁹ Psychoanalysis works at digesting these ingredients, mentalizing the unlocalizable, more-than-physical threads through which we pattern ourselves.

In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa likewise describes selves through a strand, or web-like, structure:

Our bodies are geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering and overlapping “countries.” . . . As our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (tejemos), and are woven into, our identities.¹⁰⁰⁰

Sinews, like Haraway’s tentacular beings, are networked strings of meaningful matter. Katz, working in the psychoanalytic paradigm, sees the sinews as operating in intrapsychic and interpersonal human space: “Metaphoric processes are essential to human life; that is, without the continuous, ongoing stream of metaphoric processes, there would be no human world. . . . [T]hey are the ways in which humans communicate, verbally and nonverbally, intrapsychically and intervivos.”¹⁰⁰¹ In Civitarese’s words, psychoanalysts’ clinical work is aimed at “an enhancement of meaning . . . a greater humanity.”¹⁰⁰²

Andalzá (un)weaves selfhood across energetic, subatomic, material, physical, natural and supernatural territories. Her webbing does not separate out poesis from the various beings and

⁹⁹⁸ Katz, *Metaphor and Fields*, 20.

⁹⁹⁹ Katz, *Metaphor and Fields*, 15

¹⁰⁰⁰ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 69.

¹⁰⁰¹ Katz, *Metaphor and Field*, 15.

¹⁰⁰² Guiseppe Civitarese, “The Concepts of O: Is Bion a Mystic?” Paper presented at San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis, November 17 2017, cited in Beth Steinberg, “Civitarese on O: Bion’s Pragmatic and “Aesthetic Intersubjective” Theory of Truth, the Growth of the Mind, and Therapeutic Action,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 29:4, 2019), 422.

becomings of the world. An orb-weaver's web, I have learned, is an acoustic prosthetic: they hear others through their technological webbing.¹⁰⁰³ (The bug is also a TV, as J has told me).

Civitarese goes on to state that because of the human's lack of transparency to self, given their situatedness in a differential weave, Bion's project "completes the deconstruction of the ego or the subject."¹⁰⁰⁴ Does it, though? Here, language, sociality, culture and humanity are conflated, while the model's human exceptionalism is left untouched. Corporeality becomes an emergent site of subjectivity, psyche springs from the symbiotic abyss. Drive is mobilized as a hinge connecting psyche and body—what Civitarese describes as the "choir leader of the basic needs of the body."¹⁰⁰⁵ Drive looks to reduce tension. Symbols anchor drive. Some of these symbols will not enter the conscious mind and instead will float around in what Civitarese startlingly calls "the Indian reservation of thing representations incompatible with the ego."¹⁰⁰⁶ Between choir conductors and "Indian reservations," we have here a deeply colonial metaphorization of the psychic apparatus. These regrettable analogies also mirror a process of border work that unfolds in analytic theory itself. What is incompatible with this theory of the human, embedded as it is in the assumptions of Western human-centrism? We already know that Freudianism took distance from the regressive, "primitive" oceanic.

Let's consider the deconstruction of this subject from another angle. The thought that bodies function like co-written texts, and that biology could be expressive in this way, brings us close to Kirby's assertion "that the physical body—biology—conceives itself differently through myriad images, ideas, and notions, such that an idea *is* biological cause/effect. . . . [C]onsciousness cannot be separated out from this biological complexity."¹⁰⁰⁷ Indeed, the human psyche is only one field at play in a broader material text. Kirby's rereading of deconstruction allows for another differential logic, whereby sociality, thought and language are too narrowly conceived.

¹⁰⁰³ See Jian Zhou, Junpeng Lai, Gil Menda, Ronald N. Miles, "Outsourced hearing in an orb-weaving spider that uses its web as an auditory sensor," *PNAS*, March 29, 2022.

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2122789119>.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 88.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 132.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 127.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 100.

The “intelligent inventiveness”¹⁰⁰⁸ ascribed to human sociality is, in Kirby’s view, patterned through corporeality “at large.”

Kirby’s thinking is radically inclusive of the biological and organismic, and it is also an attempt to override the obstinate dualist tendency to slip into *either text or* materialism. The biological, fluid and organismic does not disappear into non-presence when reformulated into the terms of the symbolic—the formulation itself is naturally biological. We are all collectively being formulated and articulated through what Kirby calls “Nature’s manifest literacy.”¹⁰⁰⁹

Ferenczi struggled through the problem of mind-body imbrication differently than Freud. His postulation of a “biological unconscious” means that the material dimension is also imbued with latent psychic actions and impulses, that, on occasion, erupt into action. It is a “substratum alter intelligence.”¹⁰¹⁰ In *Thalassa*, Ferenczi turns his clinical attention to inter- and intra-corporeality—the communication between and within bodies. The “sympathy” of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system dates to Galen, who described a rapport between organ systems that might not be anatomically connected. This “vestigial terminology . . . registers the long established character of nervous substrate: a reflexive affinity for other bodies and organs.”¹⁰¹¹ Notably, Ferenczi is today lauded in relational psychoanalysis for his influential contributions to relational theory. In particular, the use of countertransference—the unconscious of the analyst in the analytic process—is now foundational to the relational school and in the *shared dream* of field analysis. What we don’t hear about so readily is inter-materiality. Wilson returns to Freud to draw out the inherently bodily dimension of transference:

In the case of Frau Emmy, [one of Freud’s case studies on hysteria] her transferential relations to Freud aren’t simply in her head (or in her brain), they are in her gut. These relations are more strongly serotenergic, vagal, and mucosal than they are cognitive. Her gut responds directly to psychological duress . . . not simply because there is a relay of information from higher cortical centers, but more immediately because of the

¹⁰⁰⁸ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 70.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 84.

¹⁰¹⁰ Shé Hawke and Anna Gibbs. “Ferenczi’s Thalassal Trend: The Evolution of Tears and the Role of Affect in Psychosomatic Relation,” 48.

¹⁰¹¹ Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 73-4.

consanguinity of enterology and mood. An effective intervention into Frau Emmy's condition requires that this natural affinity of gut and psyche be respected. Freud comes to understand that he cannot remove her symptoms didactically or cognitively; he instead intervenes locally and psychologically on the skin, in relation to the muscles and glands and nerves and fear ("I then removed her gastric pains by stroking her a few times across the epigastrium").¹⁰¹²

This is an account of dynamic materiality that can be shared, felt and activated corporeally. Communication and responsiveness occurs between bodies, sites, organs, functions. This relational enactment is at once ideational and enterological. It is a psychic event brought on by physiological sympathy.

For Wilson, the tissues of our bodies can "become alive to a number of different ontogenetic and phylogenetic possibilities."¹⁰¹³ With Kirby, we could naturalize the dynamics of psychic communication and insist that "Nature reads, writes, and effectively articulates *itself*." The repercussion of this comprehensive textuality is that "'the human' has no privileged position as scribe if Nature is, and always was, a self-recording."¹⁰¹⁴

One consequence of reintroducing nervous systems into the cartography of psychic life is that the hierarchical mapping of human thought as the summit becomes untenable.

Though relational psychoanalysis aims to integrate psyche and soma, it treats the human at the point when they are drawn into the symbolic, into dreams and fantasy processes. The sensations and pulsations of the bodily organism push their way toward thought and abstraction, and analyst and analysand meet within this field. Emotion becomes an intermediary between body and mind, demanding symbolization. Civitarese muses on Bion's alphabetization of psychic functioning:

It is as if with the theory of alpha function [Bion was] taking Freud's metaphor of the poetry of the mind literally. Maybe inverting the alphabetical order of the letters in the transition from beta to alpha reflects his intention to indicate, in the upward movement

¹⁰¹² Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 42-3.

¹⁰¹³ Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 61.

¹⁰¹⁴ Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 84.

toward the “top” of the alphabet, something that was gradually transformed in a similar way from the periphery back to the summit of the nervous system.¹⁰¹⁵

The human is cerebrally centred here. As per Western convention, the mind is imagined as a control tower, “at the top.” This hierarchical arrangement of the nervous system as centralized in the brain, as well as the psychoanalytic corollary, which sees psychic functioning as an elevator toward higher mental summits, has been challenged by Wilson. Her argument that the “neurological is not synonymous with the cerebral”¹⁰¹⁶ is consistent with contemporary somatic approaches to psychotherapy, such as polyvagal theory, which holds that the vagal system in humans is not unified in one central place. Here, “two systems are neuroanatomically distinct, have different ontogenetic and phylogenetic origins, and employ different adaptive strategies.”¹⁰¹⁷

Wilson resists hierarchical cartographies through an examination of the guts. “Psyche is part of the circuitry that encompasses body-brain and beyond,” in “a system of mutual constitution from which no particular element emerges as the originary, predetermining term.”¹⁰¹⁸ To make this point, Wilson looks at the activity of the enteric nervous system (ENS), which enervates the digestive tract. The ENS resembles the central nervous system (CNS) insofar as it contains neurotransmitters identical to those found in the CNS. Like the brain, the ENS does the work of processing information. It functions in interconnection with the CNS, but, to some degree, it is also able to do its work autonomously. As Wilson puts it:

The enteric nervous system can, when it chooses, process data its sensory receptors pick up all by themselves. . . . The enteric nervous system is thus not a slave of the brain but a contrarian, independent spirit in the nervous organization of the body.¹⁰¹⁹

¹⁰¹⁵ Civitarese, *Truth and the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis*, 139.

¹⁰¹⁶ Wilson, *Gut Feminism*, 5.

¹⁰¹⁷ Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-regulation*, 49

¹⁰¹⁸ Wilson, *Gut Feminism*, 19.

¹⁰¹⁹ Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 36.

Again, Ferenczi's intra-corporeality comes into view here. The biological functions of the guts express psychological events: nervous signals in the stomach form what Wilson sees as "mini-brains" or "sites of psychological intensity."¹⁰²⁰ We see this functionality in how trauma and emotional stress manifest gastrointestinally, in how mood is regulated here, and in how SSRIs have effects on serotonin (most of which is produced and stored in the gut). We see this in the transference between Frau Emmy and her doctor. The innate affectivity, communicability and sensitivity of the ENS network means the "psychological landscape could be more broadly surveyed."¹⁰²¹ Nervous system functioning knots us into "lowly" organs, as well as their inhabitants, who are also in conversation here. Neurotransmitters and microbes assemble to influence behaviour, or misbehaviour.

Through the minutiae of nervous systems, we are in the domain of interrelated bodies who are making sense of their worlds and encounters. Immersion in these broad material communicative systems creates a slippage between human, animal, vegetal, fungal, mineral, microbiological and technological modes of functioning. The point here is not simply that "outside worlds" animate us via our irritable nervous systems—although that is one important thread I am following. But I am also leaning into a Latourian conviction that "agency is a distributed, implicated eco-logy with no central organizing origin."¹⁰²²

From this point of view, psychic functioning might begin to look like something closer to panpsychism: that is, mentality, sentience and communicability are properties of material life in

¹⁰²⁰ Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 41.

¹⁰²¹ Wilson, *Psychosomatic*, 41.

¹⁰²² As interpreted by Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, 84.

general.¹⁰²³ Information processing¹⁰²⁴—what psychoanalysts have called dreaming—is not inherently human.¹⁰²⁵

¹⁰²³ Steven Shaviri approaches psychic functioning in terms of self-valuing entities: “It is not just a matter of how *we* value lobsters, or neutrinos, or lumps of granite, but also of the ways in which these entities *value themselves*—and differentially value whatever other entities they may happen to encounter” (Steven Shaviri, “Consequences of Panpsychism,” *The Nonhuman Turn*, eds Richard Grusin, (U Minnesota Press, 2015), 22–23). In other words, what Freud saw as the narcissism of human self-love (which can readily take the form of defensive self-protection) is shared terrestrially. Attachment and bonding are also more-than-human experiences, distributed across chemical, cellular and biomolecular scales.

¹⁰²⁴ Theise and Kafatos consider how “internal processing of information that results in a response to a sensed environment” operates across scales—quantum, molecular, subatomic and atomic, as well as more complex communities of living systems. They clarify: “Thus, technically speaking, there is no “external” to be sensed and no ‘internal’ processing to create a response to the external; rather, the component activities that define sentience are inherent and pervasive, to be currently described, in part, by the concepts of quantum entanglement and non-locality” (Theise and Kafatos, “Sentience Everywhere,” 385). Rather than see sentience as emerging from the development of greater complexity (usually resulting in a human mind), Theise and Kafatos proposes a pervasive field of sentient processing, where nervous system behaviour is observable in the smallest of entities.

¹⁰²⁵ Notably, Triarhou writes that “one of the first attempts at reconciling Freudian unconscious mental process with neurophysiology was the speculative hypothesis put forth by [Jonathan] Winson, based on the evolution of dreaming state in mammals” (Triarhou, “Freud’s beginnings in neurobiology,” 7).

Winson’s research looks at the theta waves and REM sleep of animals. His work acknowledges the psychological core of dreaming and frames it as an evolutionary means to integrate personal crisis. For Winson, dreaming is a form of memory processing, and it is an adaptive survival mechanism. He offers his take on the Freudian unconscious: “For reasons he could not possibly have known, Freud set forth a profound truth in his work. There is an unconscious, and dreams are indeed the ‘royal road’ to understanding it. The characteristics of the unconscious and associated processes of brain functioning, however, are very different from what Freud thought. Rather than being a cauldron of untamed passions and destructive wishes, I propose that the unconscious is a cohesive, continuously active mental structure that takes note of life’s experiences and reacts according to its own scheme of interpretation” (Jonathon Winson, “The Meaning of Dreams,” *Scientific American: The Hidden Mind*, Scientific American Inc, April 1 2002, 60).

Circumscribing ideation in “higher minds” is challenged by turning attention to the viscera. The open and distributed character of nervous systems signal between bodies, stretching across attachments as well as through time. The psychogeneses that somatic therapeutics explore plant us in reptilian, mammalian, aquatic and vegetal modes of function. I can add psilocybin to this weave of psychesomatic modalities, and more besides. These entangled intimacies are both catastrophic and generative. Psychoanalysis has neglected most of these relationships through its reductively humanized subjectivity. Now, impossibly, we must learn to contain and process ecological catastrophe within this fenced-off place that never was. Meanwhile, nature—which is also culture—reveals its intelligence through its shape-shifting sensitivity to symbiotic relationship.

WHITHER THE CLINIC?—DREAMING OUTSIDE

In August of 2023, I participated in a writing workshop on Klahoos traditional territory, known colonially as Cortes Island. This workshop, hosted by poet Erin Robinsong and mycologist Merlin Sheldrake, was entitled “Return Address.” Its purpose was to experiment with addressing beings on the land in the second person—to practice writing in I-Thou relationship, rather than speaking *about* a not-human being, in the mode of a subject pronouncing upon an object.

We gathered close to the beach on Smelt Bay. Merlin spoke about symbiosis, Lynn Margulis, and relational processes driving evolutionary biology, drawing a picture of a fundamental interlacing of living-dying beings. Erin introduced us to poetic practices of speaking to more than humans, as well as David Abram’s work on sentience and embodied perception. We were instructed to wander the land to find a being who captures our attention. There were prompts: notice who you love, ask them a question, remain attentive to your addressee, wonder how they want to be spoken to.

These are communication skills you might expect to learn in a couple counseling session. The invitation here was about attuning to others beyond human attachment. To allow a singular being to emerge from the “background environment.” To be seduced into a relational field with another, and to respond to this lure.

My addressees on that day were a doe and a fawn I spotted foraging on somebody’s lawn. This is a common enough sight in B.C., a nuisance for some who try to maintain a garden. They still capture my attention. Sitting with a pen and notebook, with a literal fence running between myself and these deer, I ran into the very tension that sparked this project.

When I proposed this dissertation, I situated my work between a theory of psychodynamics—what Bionian field theory calls *working in the dream*—and ecologies of material life. I was trained in a discipline concerned with human intersubjectivity, while I was researching new materialisms and ecological humanities oriented toward more than human beings and processes. Each field presented me with a predicament: the irreducible predicament of psychic life, and the intensifying predicament of ecocatastrophe.

I began with the hunch that it would be unwise to eschew the ineffable psyche—our “chronic irritant”—in our ecological, ethical work. I had hoped that a theory of the Bionian unconscious might contribute to ecological thinking in some way. I had a fantasy of rescuing Bion *et al* from the ire of academics who were certain that psychoanalysis was rightfully destroyed by Deleuzians. The methodology of *working in the dream* intrigued me, but I was puzzled by the phenomenological reductions deemed necessary to composing this dream. I wanted to cross the fence enclosing the psyche toward the dizzyingly abundant and materially formidable phenomena of planetary living and dying.

I called upon the figure of the hag to help me do so: the hag who sits on the hedge cutting nature and culture together-apart. I likened the hag’s modes to a Baradian view of onto-epistemo-ethical entanglement. The hag indicates that differentiations and connections are in-process and unfixed. In collaboration with vegetal beings, the hag flies across divisions and defies boundaries, visiting unofficial realities and becoming not-human. Their psychic coordinates and the worlds they traverse are not discretely separated. The hag’s ontologies proliferate through their encounters and the alliances they make. Their embodied modes are multiple. In their worlds, the spectral and material co-mingle in uncanny ways. The hag encourages me not to “homogenise the heterogeneous” but to recognize “new powers to act and to imagine. To fabulate.”¹⁰²⁶

One response to trauma is to repeat a protective pattern to the point of fixation. The hag offers an alternative. They will refuse to fix identity in any one place. They do not dissociate, they re-associate. They do not fragment into pieces like the “orphans of the real”¹⁰²⁷, they collectivize. Re-assemble.

In contrast to the demands of psychoanalytic modernism, my research involved convening with the intelligence of material and immaterial beings, terrestrial and cosmic agents that constitute worlds. What falls under the domains of nature and culture can be, and indeed are, established in radically different ways outside of modern Eurocentric traditions such as psychoanalysis.

¹⁰²⁶ Isabelle Stengers and Philippe Pignarre, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, 108-109.

¹⁰²⁷ Grotstein, “Orphans of the ‘Real’: Some modern and postmodern perspectives on the neurobiological and psychosocial dimensions of psychosis and other primitive mental disorder.”

I mobilized mediumship since, in my reading, it exceeds psychoanalytic constructions of human interiority. Mediumship presents a robustly different model of interrelationship and mind. It is transitional space unleashed across dimensions. This “play” is wildly inclusive of liminal, contested phenomena who exist in the cosmos at large. I tracked where psychoanalysis built a bulwark and attempted to incorporate this practice into its own conceptual enclosures.

I mobilized dendrophilia in order to consider relationship with not-humans, and to examine which relationships constitute pathology according to psychoanalytic doctrine. By re-directing our awareness toward a humanist dream of development, psychoanalysis is ill-equipped to consider our collective becomings and un-becomings.

As I wrote, and read, and wandered through diverse ecosystems, as I explored alternate cartographies of immaterial and material worlds, attending channeling circles and imbibing mushroom tea, as I conducted therapies while living on the uncomfortable edge of real disasters, I started to morph.

This did not end up being a recuperative project.

How do I conceive of the relational psychoanalytic clinic at the conclusion of this dissertation? How do I conduct a therapeutic practice with people now? This too is in transition. Certainly, my tether to psychoanalytic worlds has been frayed. I have, however, discovered and created tethers to other worlds.

Psychoanalysis is involved in the project of conceptualizing the human mind and tinkering with the intricacies of human mental and emotional life. The therapeutic aim of this tinkering is to help a person bear their suffering, and relate to the conditions of their lives. This is care work, and it can be invaluable for many who struggle, myself included. I still feel that discarding psychesomatic mediation is an impossibility; the elaborations of dreaming minds and sensitive bodies subtend and alter daily lives in material ways. My own therapy practice endeavors to tend to this confabulating sensitivity. My thinking on psychic structure, however, in particular my training in *containment*, was reconfigured through encounters with a shifting terrain “outside” of the container.

While I was trying to retain the psyche as a medium for ecological thinking, I had to acknowledge that my working theories of psychic life are complicit in perpetuating a colonial

fantasy of human-exceptionalism, separation and hierarchy. Its clinical concepts espouse an edict of transcendence—indeed, this is the subject’s “salvation.” Psychoanalysis, as a discipline and interpretive community, runs on a series of epistemological and ontological omissions, foreclosures, repudiations. The conceit that human relations generate the subject and saturate our experience overshadow the far-reaching dynamics of co-existence. This Searles could see in 1960 when he wrote that the theory of psychological development operated as if “human life were lived out in a vacuum.”¹⁰²⁸

Such defensively enclosed self-identifications (violent denials) keep psychodynamics hovering over and above the planet, while simultaneously problematizing a basic relational condition of indeterminate intra-activity that captures us all in its dynamic web.

Upholding human relation as a model for healthy attachment discounts the symbiotic real of planetary life. Through pathologizing primitivist tropes, psychoanalysis shuts down arrangements of the real that include spirits, who signal the lively, agential sanctity of the land, and generations of ancestors, whose contributions are webbed into present conditions. Despite the fact that the animacy of not-human beings *is* the very community organizing planetary existence, despite “the outside’s” immense power to activate thought, feeling and action, psychoanalysis upholds an authoritative version of subjectivity in a protective disciplinary milieu that itself practices anthropocentric patterning to the point of fixation.

So, instead of carving out a distinct space for the psychoanalytic psyche, my thinking on relational psyches and container methodologies was irrevocably complicated. Like Winnicott, I hope therapy will “bring the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play.”¹⁰²⁹ By rupturing the container, I sensed into the serious play of an expanded transitional space, whose boundaries are continuously reworked. This is not simply the space of mental life, but of living dreams that organize worlds differently.

If we can only imagine our relational selves through the circuits of human mediation, and through a fantasy of human differentiation, we are, in a word, deluded. This reductive paradigm renders the “not-me” a blank thing, devoid of spirit without we humans breathing life into its

¹⁰²⁸ Harold Searles, *The Nonhuman Environment*, 3.

¹⁰²⁹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 51.

ontology. Psychoanalysts do not have a method of engaging meaningfully with envoys arriving from heterogeneous, interconnected systems of life, bearing stories, messages, caught their own processes of co-becoming. Instead, therapists are bunkered together in an office, or a nursery, or a training institution, against a backdrop of dehumanized, inert and categorically alterior things, available for use, but not for significant relationship. These entities we know, but know not to know. (Which is, incidentally, one way we play out perverse disavowal, as outlined by psychoanalysis).

While there are certainly practices for being with others outside of this narrow relational field—mediumship being but one of them—I learned where psychoanalysis deems such practices as an epistemological mistake, a dream to be retranslated into its narratives of human development. This carries on a tradition of colonial epistemocide, undermining collectivities, bulldozing through myriad practices of engaging worldly and otherworldly beings, cutting through other patterns of holding worlds together, extracting entities that might be sacred in one entangled system in order to profit those in another differently-arranged system. This, of course, unfolds materially, as well as ideationally, in the ways we incorporate, translate, digest another’s reality into our authoritative frameworks. The psychoanalytic dream can’t imagine conscious collectives outside of human culture. The biophysical outcomes of this limited dreaming are real.

Civitarese’s vision of the “concreteness of the material world”¹⁰³⁰ is not a stable foundation against which we can mark out ourselves and our translation processes. Nor, I argue, is it a useful instruction for therapeutic work. Embeddedness in morphological, pulsating, excreting, circulating, pulsating, expanding, contracting, growing, dying, multiplying, dividing, ebbing, flowing, activating and immobilizing processes is ceaseless. Relentless, even. Determining where our somas, our psyches, our nervous systems, are *not* in intimate, visceral relation with ecologies, where our self-identities are not mediated and woven through with the *not-me* poses an irresolvable challenge. Container structures are collapsing, internally and externally. Living in ecological crises, extreme weather events, ecocide and genocide, the irreparable alteration of human and not-human environments, should drive this point home and it is unfortunate that it doesn’t, often until one’s own community is destroyed.

¹⁰³⁰ Guiseppe Civitarese, “Immersion versus interactivity and analytic field,” (*International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 89, 2008), 279.

Vanessa Andreotti, with Chief Ninawa Huni Kui of the Amazon, state that colonialism creates neurobiological impairment. This impairment, part of our unconscious colonial inheritance, prevents the recognition that we are nested within systems.¹⁰³¹ In my understanding, this diagnosis—a counter-diagnosis to the mandates of psychoanalytic health—indicates where a psychic predicament is also an ecological predicament. The two were never decisively cut apart.

Whether psychoanalysis will admit that the “outside world” has always already breached its container remains to be seen. What seems true to me, at this point, is that the phenomena “reduced” by psychoanalysis is crucial for livable interrelationality. Learning how to bear these conditions in body and mind, to feel and imagine along the mycelia, to sense into the sinews, to activate beyond the protective humanist patterns which are evidentially not working: Perhaps this is where a “clinic” will be of use. Can a field praxis recognize how worlds hang in the balance in our transitional spaces? How could we nurture the capacity to play with/in phenomenological abundance? I have touched on some relational theories and therapies attentive to unusual criss-crossings: the biological-technological-cosmic experiments of Wilhelm Reich, the oceanic bodies of Sándor Ferenczi, Maria Sabina’s mushroom dialogues—her “sacred clowns”, Jane Roberts’ other-dimensional aspects, J’s spirits and D’s energy forms landing on the edge of sense, group therapies involving animate objects and spirit collectives in Nathan’s ethnopsychiatry. Each of these practices implicate agential ecologies who collaborate in transformative work. These are not clinical practices in the sense of diagnosing, enclosing and treating an individual. They evoke alternate patterns and dynamics of relationality and reality wherein human centrality is dislodged.

Back on Cortes Island, at the fence separating me from a fawn and a doe, I am feeling some friction between the instructions of this workshop and my own mental loops. I get stuck in what Omar Baig has described as the “malaise of correlationism.”¹⁰³² How do these deer want to be

¹⁰³¹ Vanessa Machado de Oliveira Andreotti and Lucia Pietroiusti, “Hospicing Modernity: A Conversation,” *e-flux* 139, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/139/561748/hospicing-modernity-a-conversation/>.

¹⁰³² Omar Baig, “A Guide to Timothy Morton’s Humankind,” *Epoché*, 15, July 2018, <https://epochemagazine.org/15/a-guide-to-timothy-mortons-humankind>.

addressed? *How should I know?* As I circle through my cognitive links and references, I sense how frustrating the narcissism of correlationism is.

A news article I had half-read a few weeks prior floated to mind. The 2023 wildfire season in B.C. had been the worst on record. When Casper Creek, near Whistler, was on fire, a resident is quoted to have seen deer running from the burning forest. The image was enough to stop me from reading further. My nervous system and the deer's nervous system were entrained for a moment: I was frozen, vigilant, I wanted to run. What arose from there is grief, a wave from the pit of my stomach, to my throat, to my eyes. I can't be sure who feels a sensation like grief when they flee their habitat. It is enough for me to know that creatures such as these exhibit attachment behaviours, are woven into the dynamic, communicative fabric of a place, and run for their lives. Must I overthink it? Is my projection of grief misplaced? Should I know better?

I considered writing to my addressees about this news article, and I came up against my own psychic container. Do I want to spill my sorrow to these creatures, grazing on a lawn? I pause between my thoughts and their world. I sit in my feeling body and fantasied identification with another.

I want to protect these two as they are having an easy meal, unbothered by predators, in the afternoon. I imagine with them: the terror of living in a time where the inhabitants of the planet are being devoured and disappeared by the violence of capitalist imperialism and interlinked systems of extreme climate events. Surely, they, like myself, are caught in the force of realities that are at once *unnecessary* and devastatingly powerful.

I also want to communicate across the fence: That I understand what it means to be a "deer in headlights." That I am also frozen at times. That I also might want to play dead. That I seek refuge in forests. That my body shakes sometimes, when the feelings are particularly dreadful; I am animal in these ways as well. That I am maladapted to the pace of change brought on by climate catastrophes, that disaster exceeds my ability to process cognitively or understand conceptually, that instead, I cycle through states of vigilance or numbness. That I can no longer assign the reason for these fluctuating states, this sense of deep insecurity and uncertainty to my family of origin. Phallic lack is the least of my worries. The ones I hold dear, the beings who make this life livable, are endangered and irreplaceable. I think of the cosmology outlined by Viveiros de Castro: every being is human, they just wear a different body, which lends them a

different perspective. Perhaps, in this way, though I can't be certain, it is appropriate to speak of a field of shared concern— or care— rather than a personal inner world. The affective charge of care experienced here stretches and enmeshes this body into a tangle of embodied beings and momentous encounters: lightning in a summer drought, a fire tornado created by heat, smoke, wind, the flight instinct of a deer's nervous system, knowledge of real danger. This is something we share in common. In this commonality, Morton sees an opportunity for solidarity.

The meaning of care, as Elisa Ferrari taught me, developed etymologically through lamentation and fondness.¹⁰³³ De la Bellacasa insists that care is about attending to what is neglected¹⁰³⁴.

Though I have spent much of this dissertation unraveling the patterned assumptions of psychoanalysis, I do hold onto a thread of relational practice, hoping to weave it into another kind of text. Another methodology of care might not be so limited in its meaning-making, and so rigid in its enclosure. This practice would sense its fields and its affective connections differently. It would entail not-simply-human psychesomas dreaming together. Certainly mushrooms have taught me to bear another perspective in body and mind and to surrender to the condition of being woven-in. Relational 'selves' might be reconceptualized and re-experienced, awkwardly and tentatively perhaps, especially for those who have learned certain codes of kinship and the impropriety of stepping over a fence. And it is careful work, given our accumulated habits of narcissistic self-protection. We are capable of acting out disastrously in the face of insecurity and change.

What I ended up writing down in my notebook on Cortes Island is that the news stories of fires I carry in mind are too terrible to share with these creatures. I also dared to exchange their body for mine, tuning between nervous systems, imagining the different worlds that open and close for them.

On that day, they ate in the sun. I admired their spots, the ways they lifted their ears when my steps crunched the dried arbutus leaves on the other side of the fence. I noticed how they kept

¹⁰³³ Elisa Ferrari and Katherine Kline, "Vibratory Models of Care," *PUBLIC*, 69, 2024.

¹⁰³⁴ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, "Matters of care in technoscience: Assembling neglected things", (*Social Studies of Science*, 4:1, 2011). De la Bellacasa takes Latour's "matters of concern" and introduces "matters of care" as a way to approach assemblages of "neglected things."

watch, and kept close. And then I returned to the circle of poets, sharing their dreams of crow,
sand, lodgepole pine, salmonberry.

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