

Writing – A New Beginning

... every story is ultimately about the person who remembers it – the rings and scars storytelling might reveal in the self.
Susann Cokal (The New York Times Book Review, March 2, 2008, 7)

Writing is a peculiarly private experience that can be made public. On reviewing an earlier draft of this paper my partner consistently and persistently asked me – to what end are you writing? I found myself successively frustrated, angry and confused; and as a consequence I had moments of seemingly unending feelings of hopelessness and futility. And so, I have chosen to begin this paper yet again – because those feelings seem true somehow to the process of writing and more particularly to the content and process of writing this paper; as did the conversation I needed to have with her. During that conversation, I had moments of thinking, quite erroneously, that I was frustrated and angry with her. She repeatedly kept drawing me back to Adam Phillips' paper "On Being Bored" (1993), and I kept repeatedly telling her that I hadn't got to that part of this paper yet – in other words I kept myself mired in that particular state of (internal and therefore external) relationship. Phillips describes the earliest version of it as occurring between the parent and the child – tell me what to do and tell me that what I am doing, is ok (Phillips, 1993). This is a rather unwieldy and conflictual position for a parent to be in. It revolves around the absolute necessity that the parent tolerate without acting on the demand by the child to organize the child's activity into something productive by being prescriptive; and the other pole that

involves telling the child that it is ok to thrash around, flounder and sit in the doldrums of confusion and uncertainty – because something useful will certainly come from all that “inactivity”. In other words tell me that the thrashing around that I am doing is ok and that the chaos and disorder of my thoughts and writing will show itself in the end to be leading somewhere; as opposed to the idea that my partner could tell me how to proceed. She did “tell me”, by repeatedly asking me what I wanted to say and repeatedly pointing me towards Phillips.

Why is it that I want to talk to you about writing? Why do I write? What is personal? What is theory? What have either of those to do with psychoanalytic writing? What does autobiographical writing have to do with rigorous psychoanalytic writing and clinical thinking? How do the lines between healthy narcissism, solipsism, self reflection, experience, theory, clinical development and honesty intersect? So, I have now briefly and summarily traversed the trajectory of this paper.

We are all heirs to a psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic tradition and we enter that tradition to take up our full membership and responsibility. Psychoanalysis and more specifically psychodynamic psychotherapy is at one dimension an oral tradition – we talk and we listen, not merely as a matter of practice, but as a manner of training – we are in personal therapy, group therapy, individual supervision, group supervision, dream groups, seminars and concentrations – in other words we are with others and we talk. But we are also writers – this is

communicated to us immediately as we write our autobiographies when we apply. We go on to write our application to the formation years, our application to supervision and our regular supervision updates, and we write our case histories – by which we mean the development of our self as therapists against the background of our work with this other human being who plays the supporting cast as our client. We are writing about our ability to think, theorize and remain humanly present – not just in our therapeutic clinical work – but in our writing as well. We join a tradition and an ongoing dialogue carried out through the medium of the written word. We are trained to be writers as a subsidiary task to our training as psychotherapists.

We have entered now into a tradition and forum for writing in order to talk with each other. These alumni presentations poise us between our training, our clinical experience, our capacity for unique thought, our collegiality; and our development as writers.

I am interested in the form and meaning that our, and specifically my writing takes. I am interested in writing generally – from the perspective of a lively and ardent reader, from the perspective of conversation as it occurs in my reading group, and from the perspective of why I write. I write with multiple agendas and multiple audiences. I am interested in autobiographical writing and memoir; I am interested in clinical writing, thinking and theory building; I am interested in

writing as a form of musing; and I am interested in the form that that writing itself takes.

So I see this paper as moving between those worlds of interest. There is the writing I do that is memoir, the effort I make to grasp and understand personal experience and how I remember and hold it up to see and hear and reflect upon. There is the writing I do that is part of my development as a thinker and theorist. There is the writing I do that is meant to communicate and elaborate the intersection of those two forms. This latter writing is the effort of this paper.

We learn to reveal ourselves as part of our training and we learn it in order to remain as transparent as we can to ourselves and to others – for its own sake. Then we learn to hold and use that transparency at the service of our therapeutic work and for the benefit of our clients. Sometimes, we do not so much speak as show – even when we are talking. We show the breadth of our development, our training and our thinking – through the medium mostly of our speech; though it would be foolhardy to believe we do not show ourselves in ways outside of speech as well. But, when we come to speak to each other in this forum – we do it through the medium of the written and spoken word – we deliver papers. This seems to me a lovely phrase – to deliver a paper. Delivery implies for me the arrival of nascent ideas to others who wait for the arrival. In midwifery the appropriate phrase would be that you “catch”; in Freud’s language, you catch the drift of my thinking as it appears on the page, the movements of my unconscious

with your own (Freud, 1923, 239). Writing also means to show myself in the act of the delivery, the act of writing and speaking. This is in part my focus here – what does my writing show and how does it show itself?

Let me proceed with a few organizational thoughts to orient you to this writing and this conversation I have been having with you in my imagination. To begin, when writing is personal, it is not necessarily all figured out, especially at the beginning end of things. More often it is messy and disorderly and thoughts drift from idea to idea. This writing moves by association.

When writing is towards a clinical or theoretical end, something is meant to be figured out and presented cogently. Much of the process of the movement of thoughts has been distilled down or edited out. Phillips is quite clear that under pressure from the child's demands borne out of their frustration; if the parent can not hold open uncertainty for the child, the parent will stave off feelings of their own failure to help by prematurely and intrusively trying to organize the child into a useful activity. In that gesture the child is deprived of the opportunity to wait and to move towards an activity borne out of their own idiom. To ensure that the space for the child to consider the "this and that" of their own world does not collapse, adequate time and space needs to be left in the between time; between quietly musing (or thrashing around), and moving towards thinking.

When we are writing are we caught up in trying to form a prescription or are we trying to make and hold open space? Clinical writing is often written to prove the point of a theory and to illustrate it with clinical examples. Personal writing is often messy. It is not that organization never arrives; of course it does merely by putting one word in front of the other. But, how can we stave off ordering long enough to permit order to arrive? What do we do with the disorderly in the between time?

Some years ago I was reading Jonathan Lear's *Therapeutic Action*. Lear made this observation about the literature available to analysts in the psychoanalytic journals between 1930 and 1960: "... looking back it seems that at the same time as these articles were being published, there emerged a generation of psychoanalysts who, overall, were too rigid, too stiff, too cut off from their patients". (Lear, 2003, 10)

We are all positioned at a reflective point in time between what we read and digest and what we write for others who read and listen to us.¹

In light of the fact that we are all inveterate readers – what does this mean for us when we read; and equally importantly, when we write? Lear went on to ask: "... was there something about the writing itself that facilitated the development of overly remote analysts? It seemed implausible to assume that the writing had nothing to do with it.while analysts consciously learned the content of

¹ Please consider this in reference to my discussion of Ogden, 2006, on page eight below.

what was being said, they unconsciously learned the *form*. What they learned was true; how they learned it was rigidifying”. (Lear, 2003, 10, emphasis added)

I read these passages by Lear over two years ago, and I was unaware then that his questions would linger with me and would set in motion a desire that is rooted in writing. Robert Hass describes desire thus: “Desire that hollows us out ... That kills us and kills us and raises us up... .” (Hass, 2007, 20) I am interested in a writing that pursues and is itself a desire. As for being hollowed out and killed and killed – I think that also has a place in taking up our place within a psychodynamic tradition as a matter of approach and praxis. I will return to this as I go along.

Lear asks of us: “How does a *form of communication* latch onto one’s psyche”? (Lear, 2003, 13-14, emphasis added) In other words, how does the writing treat the reader? Lear’s overall project was to consider freshly what James Strachey (1934), W.R.D. Fairbairn (1958), and Hans Loewald (1960) were considering when writing about the nature and aims of therapeutic action²; but I am thinking about what Lear is offering us by way of questions about how we write, the actual form that our writing takes; the distance or personableness we include, the use of clinical theory and jargon we might impose upon the flow of our thoughts, or the adherence to certain forms or formulas of expression. The consequence of this writing approach encourages a certain stance and “... insofar as the formulation of the theory gets in the way of analytic process, by encouraging a stance that is

² We could also consider D.W. Winnicott (1962) and Stephen Mitchell (1997).

too “knowing” or too intrusive or too withdrawn, then even if the content of the theory is true, the form of the communication is open to criticism”. (Lear, 2003, 15)

I am interested in developing my enthusiasm for writing, my desire to affect others through it, and the development of my capacity for clinical thinking and theory building. In short I am interested in the form. In the spirit of a lively conversation on all these fronts I am approaching you through writing this.

The act of reflecting and writing is itself an important process - not just the outcome. Patricia Hampl would say that: “Memoir is the intersection of narration and reflection ... Memoirists must show *and* tell”. (Hampl, 1999, 33, emphasis original) As therapists we join a tradition of writing, thinking about and expressing what we are doing and our writing itself reflects something about *how* we are going about doing it - the honesty, openness and integrity with which we approach the effort to write. It is a private conversation made public.

In *The Manticore* Robertson Davies quotes a poem by Ibsen (Davies, 1973, 73).

It often comes back to me for consideration:

To live is to battle with the trolls
In the heart of vault and brain.
To write: that is to sit
In judgement over one's self.

I do not think judgement is meant in the typical way - but in the sense of gathering together something of what one can say now - with the understanding that with time what one knows must change. Each change accepts and permits the death and integration of something previous.

In rereading these last few pages I have remembered several times a passage from *Reading Loewald: Oedipus Reconsidered*. (Ogden, 2006, 655 – 666) In a section called “The Metamorphic Internalization of the Oedipal Parents”, Ogden develops the word *metamorphosis* used by Loewald by enlarging its written compass. Ogden, in a play of imagery, uses a passage from a book on biology that describes “the great wave of death and destruction that sweeps over the internal organs of the caterpillar”, while certain “imaginal discs” nourish themselves on the breakdown tissues and “shape the organism [a butterfly] according to a new plan”. (Ogden, 2006, 666) Whether we as readers are interweaving the thinking of past writers or lending ourselves as writers to be digested and used by others, or as Hass suggests - hollowed out and killed and killed; we must take up our own place and then willingly give it up with the same generous bow to the new.

In this way writing is a projection towards knowing; a gesture in the direction of thinking and formulating something not yet said and a contribution to something as yet unfinished. Writing is both a provisional and an unequivocal form of

attention. That form of attention leaves traces, visible artefacts of the movements of our thinking.

By way of continuing to turn your thoughts towards writing I would like to bring Lear's passages into a conversation with two chapters I was also reading by André Green. I am referring particularly to Green's introduction to his book *Private Madness* (Green, 1997, 16) and to his book *A Paradigm for Clinical Thinking* (Green, 2002). Green takes the time in his introduction to this latter book to talk about why he writes. What follows is a brief overview of my understanding of those thoughts salient to my purpose here.

First, it is necessary to take one's own thoughts and ideas as an object of interest and sustained attention. It has taken me a long time to find a way not to let those stray thoughts and ideas slip past my own attention and interest. And, it seemed to me, that I had to find some way of attending and being interested without denuding the ideas of liveliness just as they were entering into life.

Something of the writing should carry the vitality and dimensionality of the thinking; and the test of this is an important second consideration and one connected to the vitality and aliveness of writing – the reader in reading should feel stimulated to consider the “this and that” of their own thoughts as they occur to them while reading. Green expressed his belief that writing a case history of one's client population does not legitimize analytic writing. I agree, and believe

that writing can be animated as a personal and thoughtful experience without slipping into solipsism and without eradicating the aliveness of the reader.

Thirdly, and this is a recurring challenge for me, is that the writing, the transcription into words, is a process of interlocution with myself. I do not see writing as a sublimation of drives and desires as Green suggests. I experience it as a conversation with myself first, for it seems that only a conversation has any hope of keeping the writing lively. This is not to say that the approach to writing is a solitary activity. While the writing itself occurs in solitude I have often gained access to something I need to think and write about; through my conversations with others, through reading, and through attending lectures. Eventually, at some point, I must sit down with myself and have a talk. It means that I have to suspend the too orderly thinking of my day to day life and try to allow the same freely associated attention that I develop when I pay attention to my clients, my dreams and when I am taking a photograph. It is not an easy line to walk between the arrival of associations and the arrival of the words and form that will carry them. Too much order and the associations are lost, too much association and the pen never reaches the paper. I am reminded of an analogy that William James used. In trying to evoke the difference between substantive thoughts, thoughts that we pause to articulate; and transitive thoughts, the thought still in motion; he described a bird in flight perching here and there on a branch. He went on to say that it is very difficult to see the transitive parts for what they are – precisely because they are in motion from one idea to the next and “stopping

them to look at them before the conclusion is reached is really [an] annihilating [of] them". If we succeed in arresting these transitive thoughts "they cease forthwith to be [themselves]". (James, 1968, 36 - 37) So I would ask again, how do we suspend ordering long enough for the order to arrive and how do we hold the thought in flight without at the same time stopping it dead in its movement? When my intention is to be read – how do I allow for the aliveness of the reader, the external other?

Finally, Green expressed the belief that writing, putting thinking into words, is an elaboration rather than an evacuation of thought. Bion suggested that we develop thinking to contain thoughts. (Bion, 1962, 111; Bion, 1994) I believe writing is a way of thinking and also a form of speaking that can contain thoughts. By thoughts I do not only refer to cognitive activity, rather, I mean the elaboration of one's experience and perspective and the stance one takes towards one's own thoughts. In speaking about himself as a young writer Don DeLillo described the potential for writing as learning "to think about things, to ride [our] own sentences into new perceptions". (DeLillo, 1993) This kind of writing does not have, "already knowing" the conclusion in mind, before the beginning. Writing should not act to destroy the links between experience and thinking, and theory should not be the instrument of that attack.³ Writing should not be allowed to drift too far into an abstraction – where no one is present, no one is speaking and no one can listen.

³ Reading "Attacks on Linking", Bion, 1959 was helpful in reflecting on this misuse of theory and writing.

When we write whom are we speaking to initially? I mean this as a literal question, and I am not referring to our intended or imagined audience. In the privacy of our written moments – who is listening? We ask our clients to listen to themselves. This is not a metaphor. They really must hear their own words as they speak them. So, when we write – is it an interior monologue or do we call up an “other” self to hear? Would that make it then a conversation? I believe it is, and that this other self both informs the words and listens to the word-sounds. I think if we ask these questions it potentially alters how we might write and read to each other.

If we consider the words we use to write or to talk about language, as compared to say the sensations we are in the realm of when we speak out loud to each other, the experience of language shifts dramatically.

What are some of the qualities of spoken words that set speakers apart: rhythm, meter, timbre, tone, cadence, resonance, melody? These words give some indication of the movement of language when it is spoken. Literary terminology is rich with terms that seek to capture the contours of words used in poetry and to infuse them with a sense and feel for their meaning. – alliteration, onomatopoeia, hyperbaton and assonance – to consider just a few. The poet, when employing these techniques, is attempting to do something quite particular with language. Di Benedetto hints at this in the following passage: “If poets seem to be intent on playing when they use alliterations and rhymes, turning

upside down the usual order of words and forcing them into special measures of syllabification, in reality they are discovering hidden meanings in the world. ...

The phenomenology of dreams and the practice of poetry share a certain capacity to displace the author from his own discourse.” (Di Benedetto, 2005, 10) Can we not as therapists become equally deft with our use of language, be equally willing to be displaced from our own familiar discourse and thinking, when language is the predominant medium of our craft?

As therapists do we possess a vocabulary that is as rich in such nuances. Alice Jones notes this in “Poetry and Psychoanalysis”. “When language lacks this energy, our attention wanes. Perhaps it is when this crucial component of heard language gets lost that analytic writing begins to sound dead. And at times we write for each other in generalities, not the exquisite particulars of our patients’ words and our own quirky thoughts. When we lose the intensity and exactness, language falls flat, the ear goes to sleep, and we no longer know where we are or what in the session is most real”. (Jones, 1997, 699)⁴

⁴ I would direct you also to a passage in which Stephen Mitchell is elaborating one of Hans Loewald’s conceptions of language and its capacity to hold the connection between primary and secondary process: “There is a deep link between the same words in their primary-process and secondary process forms. The key question for Loewald is: How alive is that link? Does language in its adaptive, everyday (secondary-process) form resonate with its earlier sensory, affective, undifferentiated (primary-process) origin, or has a severing split the two realms from each other?” (Mitchell, 2000, 9) Mitchell develops a very useful and helpful consideration of Loewald’s challenge to the distinction between pre-verbal and verbal, and primary and secondary process; and the ways that language operates in these two developmental eras and levels of mental organization. (Mitchell, 200, 7-8)

Why is it when we write theoretically that the vitality of speech can become lost? We seem to talk about things – psychodynamic theory, clients, or psychoanalytic tools of understanding – transference, counter-transference, projection – to name a few. But we do not seem to write from the inside of things that are in a constant state of flux. When I think of reading Thomas Ogden or Christopher Bollas, what I find most compelling are the sections where they write about their own reveries in a session; actually revealing what they are and reflecting on them in their writing. And, when they write about sessions with their patients I feel satisfied and engaged. It is not that they eschew theory, but the manner in which they enliven it. I realise while I am reading that I feel as if I have been drawn into a really good story with living characters. When I read these articles I invariably think – that is the way I would like to be able to write; freshly, honestly and with candour and a keen attention to small but personal detail.

In reflection now I wonder if Ogden, Bollas and others, as living and vital writers, serve what could be called a selfobject function. They provide for me what I have not yet established in myself. A means of holding myself open yet contained within my own developing writing.

I think several things are sometimes missing in some psychoanalytic writing. First, theory is written as if a formulation and conclusion are the objective of the writing. Writing from inside a psychoanalytic experience of a session would sound more like musing out loud to oneself about what one thinks might be going

on, taking notice of and thinking about one's own thoughts, associations and reveries – rather than clarifying one's conclusions.

Secondly, written language seems to lose touch with sound. If writing removes language from its experiential matrix/bedrock – then how can we really capture the experience we are trying to write about? We often take our communications to each other to be written, as if writing severs language from the immediacy of the experience of sound. That severing is further exacerbated because we are relaying something that has occurred outside of the writing, often within the privacy of a session. For an enterprise so focused on communication we sometimes seem to lack a means to appreciate the very vehicles by which communication is made possible – voice and ear. How often do you read your own writing out loud to yourself? How often do you listen to the sound of your own thoughts?

Is it only the ear that registers the sensation of words – isn't the mouth also registering the sensation of words as they are in the act of becoming spoken sounds? The mouth itself is rich with sensory memories. I know that my writing reads very differently if I don't speak it out loud to myself periodically. When I say that I have been talking with you for some time I am not referring to an intrapsychic process; myself with internalized others – I have quite literally been saying my thoughts out loud as they arrive on the page to ensure that my writing

attempts to pursue a conversation – and I have been waiting for you to arrive to actually hear my thoughts and respond.

Finally, we treat sound and imagery as if they emanate from separate spheres because they are received by different organs of perception. We speak of images being called up before the mind's eye, yet when we speak an image we are engaging the sensations of the body – we physically speak and hear and see.⁵

How we hear and speak, read and write, are all of one piece. Alice Jones makes a significant point when she notes “Both writing and analysis revolve around what we are willing to let ourselves know out loud. Both parts are essential, the knowing and the saying, in order for each to have its transformative effect”. (Jones, 1997, 689)

One of the difficulties with writing is how to approach a process that mostly employs secondary process thinking – while trying to reach primary-process vitality and liveliness by association, non-linear logic and humour. By humour I

⁵ For an excellent portrayal of the intersection of speech, sound and listening as a bodily experience I recommend reading “Jumping From The Couch: An Essay on Phantasy and Emotional Structure”. (Lear, 2002, 591) Jonathan Lear offers a description of projective identification and an instance of psychotic literalness. His client repeats an utterance from his girlfriend: “Go To Hell”! In the course of this discussion Lear does this interesting piece of writing which seems not so much the literal as the physical. “The utterance ‘Go To Hell!’ is a physical act: the air has moved from deep inside the speaker’s body; it is expelled with a collapsing chest, a moving mouth and tongue and, perhaps, with glaring eyes. The air between them is set in motion and the soundwaves penetrate my patient’s ears and a message is taken into his body. ... a piece of meaning that is itself physically instantiated has been taken into him”.

mean that flexibility of mind that allows things to move into association with each other knowing that they are carrying an energy that is seeking expression.

When Alice Jones writes: “There are differences between creative work and free association. Free association’s product is insight, not action. In writing there is an attempt to translate an impulse into existence in the world, to realize an impulse in form, to find the metaphor, voice it, write it, and let it go”. (Jones, 1997, 690)

I am most intrigued by the notion of form. Sculptors give physical form to their internal images. They craft their medium with attention to what is added and taken away, to the sensation of the material and to the energy that the sculpture is meant to contain. Can we as writers do the same? If we want to write theoretically how do we give form and shape and contour to our musings, our own thoughts, in a way that maintains a connection to the matrix out of which they emerged? And, how do our written words work on the reader so as to draw them into the world that gave shape to our own thoughts?

I have oscillated back and forth between literary reference and sculptural form in order to try and evoke a sense of what I am talking about. How can I write in a manner that sounds like my thoughts when they are fresh and convey them in a manner that approaches a conversation with the reader? How can I use words

that gain static form on the page while still infusing them with the energy and movement of thinking on the fly?

“As analysts, we attune ourselves to the overlap of meaning and music in words, but we mostly speak to each other about content ... When language carries an emotional impact, the rhythm is inherent to its meaning. Our ears tell us when the two are out of sych, and this is one way we recognize that something is going unsaid”. (Jones, 1997, 694)

Or more precisely: “If form matches content, then words will have a visceral impact”. (Jones, 1997, 695)

Our language can act like a sensory surface or skin for experience. The qualities of skin are rich with elasticity, tension, turgidity, softness and containment.

Writing, reading, listening, speaking – these acts press on that skin from the interior and the exterior.

Form comes to us through the experience of our client’s rhythms of speaking, choice of words, silences, outbursts, refusals to pause, through their breathing, held breath, pitch and tone and volume. How many times have you formed an impression of someone just by speaking to them on the phone? Language is such a rich medium and we are informed by more than we can even say.

We show more than we can say. (Lear, 1998, 13) How to bring that truth to an examination of writing when so much writing seems to be about saying, or at least wording? What do we show when we write? I pose this as a serious and essential question. I would add – how do we write in a lively way? How do we approach writing without falling into the pit of being too didactic, too dry, and too knowing – or its corollary – needing to know – too much? In his paper “Figures and Their Function: On the Oedipal Structure of Psychoanalysis”, Christopher Bollas describes the conundrum that is psychotherapy. (Bollas, 1996) Both parties in a psychotherapeutic couple come to the task with the intent of concentrated attention and the possibility of interpretive understanding; and both parties must abandon that form of attention and intention. They must “not allow their wish for knowledge to interfere with a method that defers heightened consciousness in favor of a dreamier frame of mind in order to encourage the free movement of images, ideas, pregnant words, slips of the tongue, emotional states, and developing relational positions”. (Bollas, 1996, 1) It seems to me that writing; that first draft of “something”; can make good use of this practiced state of mind that we cultivate as therapists. This state of mind allows us to move between listening, reverie and reflection, and the formulation of thoughts that lie at the intersection of primary and secondary process thinking. When we speak in those moments to our clients, we do not close the door to unconscious influence in order to speak. That door is always slightly ajar. Procedurally, the act of writing, like learning to think in our earliest life, and learning to speak as therapists, moves us from one state to another and back again. I do not actually

believe that writing is strictly a secondary process activity any more than certain forms of sustained reverie are.

A humbler presentation of what we know requires a useful defense against too much egoness; a very particular kind of dissociation. I am on uncertain ground here. Can dissociation undergo a form of maturation without giving up its fundamental skills and usefulness? Can dissociation be anything other than a defense? What do I mean?

To begin with, I mean that capacity to step away from the immediacy of my own thoughts or experiences – the purple prose of them – and towards a moment-by-moment agreement with myself to allow the experience to become animated enough and in such a way that it can pass along the nerve endings of my arm and into my pen⁶, and then into you? In other words, can writing become a form of re-possessing my experience at an experience-nearer distance but with something like a provisional perspective: “this is what I can say right now and this is why I’m curious about it at the moment”? This is a provisional stance but it is not equivocal.

Dissociation allows for the possibility of what is not known and can not be seen; to be present and acted out in one’s lived life. Writing is an action and from up

⁶ For those of us who use a computer screen to see our thoughts as they appear, I am inclined to feel that the option to scroll down and up, the act of cutting and pasting that makes words disappear and reappear elsewhere, and the red and green line that appears to prompt us to return to those slips of the tongue and fingers; does a remarkably good job of emulating some of the activities of primary process thinking.

close and after the fact I can better see what I could not know at the outset. But, I am also a humanly limited creature. Some of what will be seen is seen by others, who read and listen with their own associative capacities. I am reminded of something I was told about Carol Shields. In an interview she said she loved to read other people's writing because it allowed her access to an imagination other than her own. I think I want to be read because I will then be held by an imagination that is also not my own. And what can I learn from that other imagination that I can not offer myself?

A final aspect of dissociation that seems useful is its capacity to loosen ties. In order to move along the flow of ideas another kind of agreement with myself has to occur – an agreement similar to the kind that I make when I sit in my chair and try to allow the flow of a client's words to carry me into the drift of my own associations. (Freud, 1923, 239) Some boundary between conscious and unconscious must become and remain more porous, less tightly held; less a will to clarity and more a tolerance of the vague and uncertain and ephemeral; and animated by a form of attention that does not have orderliness or too narrow a focus on its agenda.

I am speaking here about personal experiences and about writing that is loosely autobiographical – but autobiographical for the purposes of furthering clinical thinking. What have personal writing and clinical thinking to do with each other? I see that there is a bridge here that I must build, and there are at least two

questions that I must attend to in order to create that bridge. First, if writing is meant to help bring experience nearer, then it would seem at cross purposes to itself to use it for clinical and theoretical development if clinical theory is a method of distillation and reason. Surely that is what writing about our clients provides?

Secondly, my next most pressing questions would be – why write autobiographically and why would anyone else want to read or hear about this private experience – why make it public? This is where you come in as a reader, because it is in you that I want to evoke some things; and one of those things is your own subjectivity and imagination as you read what is otherwise personal/clinical writing. This writing requires a living and responsive reader.

The intersection of my experience and thinking is where I am trying to start from. Why should the attention I employ to integrate the meanings of a dream or to take a spontaneous photograph be any different from the attention and methods that I use to write and more precisely to think? Reasoned secondary process thinking dries up and dies if it is not rooted in a movement that includes the influence of primary process tensions. What I know cogently and intelligently about dissociation also shows itself in the form and movement of my thinking and its manifestation in the words that flow across this screen. The intersection and dispersement of ideas, the interrupted passages and the unexpected links between theorists also display the activity of my unconscious as much as the action of my ordering and orderly mind. “Desire drives the search, whereas

intellectual discipline or external demands on the writing shape the specificity of the particular content". (Bassin, 2002, 304) Can I get both of these processes to speak and intersect in the action of writing and in the artifact of *how* what is written reads? Desire and discipline make interesting bedfellows.

Donna Bassin described that state of attention that she believed was necessary to allow the interplay of past and present intentions. For me that attention is like an arrow finding its trajectory; navigating the gravitational pull of memory and desire in order to permit something new to take shape through writing:

This alert, curious, and yet unfocussed state of mind, like evenly suspended attention, blinds itself to memory and desire in order to maximize the free associations we need to get into fresh and vital thought necessary for engaged writing. While our past pushes us to look for resonance in the present, good writing delivers us from the compulsion to repeat endlessly. (Bassin, 2002, 300)

It interests and excites me to think of writing as the location and means of moving past from repetition into delivery and freedom. In order to further my answer about the relationship between different forms of writing, I would say that I would like to be able to use the attention and form that memoir writing takes in order to disrupt the orderliness of theoretical writing. In other words, I would like to disrupt the idiomatic form of my regular conscious thinking. It was helpful for me to read Patricia Hampl's chapter "Memory and Imagination". Her candor is deeply engaging as she reveals:

"[it] still comes as a shock to realize that I don't write about what I know, but in order to find out what I know. Is it possible to convey the enormous degree of blankness, confusion, hunch, and uncertainty lurking in the act of writing? When

I am the reader, not the writer, I too fall into the lovely illusion that the words before me which read so inevitably, must also have been written exactly as they appear, rhythm and cadence, language and syntax, the powerful waves of the sentences laying themselves on the smooth beach of the page one after another effortlessly.

But here I sit before a yellow legal pad, and the long page of the preceding two paragraphs is a jumble of crossed-out lines, false starts, confused order. A mess. The mess of my mind trying to find out what it wants to say. This is a writer's frantic, grabby mind, not the poised mind of a reader waiting to be edified or entertained". (Hampl, 1999, 27)

This is a humbling position to take up.

My mind immediately placed Patricia Hampl into a conversation with Donna

Bassin. In her article "I'm in the Milk and the Milk is in Me", Bassin wrote:

"... writing is the only way for me to gain clarity on my usual formless and disorganized thinking. *I have to write until I find those sentences which recognize my thoughts*". (Bassin, 2002, 301, emphasis added)

Bassin directs the reader to an aspect of writing that for us, as psychotherapists who write, is compelling:

"... I was never encouraged to examine the meaning and compelling press of my need to write, the seemingly disparate themes of my writings, or my inner life as I write". (Bassin, 2002, 297-298)

I think this is the first time I have read anyone considering the underlying inner life of writing, and more importantly the inner life carried live by the action of writing itself. Writing for what it shows rather than what it says. Writing as a thing in itself – regardless of what the eventual content will be. The content is the manifest product of an effort but as Bassin later goes on to say, it is the artefact

of another experience. The experience is one of moving from one register of awareness into another and back again in an endless cycle of inter-animation. For me, writing is a way of slipping my usual orderly and logical thinking and the pared down way that I otherwise allow myself entrance into ordinary speech.

When we write clinically we show what we cannot say by the manner in which we write and in the way that we hold our clients as the objects of our thinking. How much more do I show in the manner in which I hold myself as the “subjective object” of my own thinking when I am not hidden behind a case history?

Autobiography is a fascinating and popular genre and in part I think it is because we are interested in how a person holds their self up for thinking, what they offer by way of their own interest in themselves and how they find ways to express that interest. Of further appeal are the ways in which we as readers are drawn into (or kept out of) the story by the writer. How are we as readers treated? How do we conceive of readers when we are writing?

I have been thinking about my desire to write and of the passing but more frequent moments when I can. I have written for many years as part of my experience as a student in university and at The Centre for Training in Psychotherapy (CTP). At CTP I began to learn to take myself as an object of my own interest and to speak about myself as a subject of interest and to begin to write from those shifting and intertwined positions. When I was diagnosed with cancer and when I had to find a way to digest that experience, keep it from

slipping away from me; when I had to find a way to re-examine some of those moments from my past that were roaring away in the depths of my psyche, that kept rising unexpectedly and unpleasantly into view - attuned and vibrating with this potentially new edition of past fears; I had to write. It was at that time that I think I can say I became really conscious that I was writing and that the agenda for the topics and content and form were my own.⁷

I would like to return to and elaborate my earlier idea of dissociation from a personal direction. Writing I think operates for me like a defence, at least in its initial stages. Like a defence it both defends me and returns me to the scene of the crime, the site of my sense of an early trauma; and it offers me a fresh chance at negotiating something differently. Writing returns me to that location and to an action. The location, simply put, is relational. It was against the background of older relationships that I could only desire and hope to write and yet not. It is against the backdrop of new relationships that I now write and that backdrop has changed enormously over the years and more acutely since I was diagnosed.

Writing also returns me to splitting in order to un-split. What splitting am I referring to? Splitting employed as a separation of thought from feeling, of self from other and self from self. It is also a return to desire: a desire to affect

⁷ While I can say that I have held this awareness of my writing rather lightly for some time, I know that its articulation and weight came more clearly to me during a conversation with my reading group when I attempted to say it out loud to others. In response to their interested listening I started the project of this paper and committed myself to this presentation.

others, to engage others, to evoke interest and a response. Writing is at its most basic a return to the earliest world of logos when experience first finds its way into language in the company of an “other”.

When I quoted Hass earlier it was to introduce the idea that desire, or rather the desire bodied forth by writing and by the effort to understand something of one’s world, is an effort at what Lear calls an erotic engagement. (Lear, 1999, 9, 11)

As an expression of and as a means of giving form to that desire, writing is a unique act. It traverses the territory between dissociation from the cares and concerns of secondary process thinking and enlists the movements of the unconscious. It employs the ego at the interface of interior and exterior, self and “other”, inner and outer reality; and it allows the ego to synthesize those worlds in words. Every day words need to be hollowed out of their habitual meaning, their regular way of carrying and conveying information about the self; and given a different shape and form through the action of transferring experience live from one register of self to another.

What do I know right now about my writing?

Part of my therapy involved bringing in pieces that I had written. It was a start because I could at least argue myself into the position that someone was listening to me with an ear to hear what I had to say. It was of course so much more. Writing was a way into an experience and an invitation, a way of revealing

my self with some way out of the depths that I was casting around in. That I needed to do it like that was not a vote of non-confidence in my therapist nor was it a resistance on my part. Speaking freely began to include something more than saying. It required both a way of showing my self and the manner in which I thought I could arrive. My therapist, for her part, held her ground and caught the rope I was casting. She spoke to me somewhere between an exploration of myself that is the hallmark of therapy and as an interested other who would engage with my thoughts, ideas and as yet unspoken yearnings. I make this point particularly because the writing embodied those yearnings at a level shaped by the words I chose to write and the form that that writing took. This was like entering into a labyrinth with a rope tied around my waist, a rope that I cast out to this other through this other form of revelation and this other use of language. This wording and writing was the forging of my own return and connection – a different way for me to prevent undoing and my own lostness. Therapy was a person to leave from and return to in a manner of my own creating.

This is something that came to me with such force and from several directions. The very first piece I wrote after my diagnosis was an effort to grasp my experience of surgery. I was lying on the operating table and all around me was the chaos of preparation. I have the fleeting sense now of oscillating between a feeling of being one of the props for a scene about to unfold and of being the central character of the drama. My surgeon came in and asked me to help her

mark the spot of the tumour. The anaesthetist, Jeremy, was attempting to insert a needle into one of the small veins of my hand, and about four other people were busy around the periphery of the table. Lying inside a warm yellow blanket curiously at odds with being strapped to the table, I could feel myself withdrawing, moving inward along a familiar and darkened path. I was preparing well ahead of the anaesthesia to leave the room. Jeremy leaned his face down next to my ear and very softly called me back out into the world – and so I came. What he said to me made me cry when I remembered it later, it made me cry when I first wrote about it, and it does so at moments still. He said: “in a few moments you will fall asleep, we will look after you and you will be ok”. I turned to him and told him that I believed him and then I fell out of the room and into a very different darkness; different from that of dreams and nightmares where I have descended into bottomless depths.

The night before my surgery I asked my partner where she would be while I was in surgery. It isn't as if I didn't know the answer, it's that I needed to be reminded of something I was not then able to even be aware of. She said: “I will be in the waiting room and I will be there when you wake up”.

This is what I can now know by way of my efforts to catch that experience in the struggle to give it form through writing. Jeremy gave me a place and a person to fall from, he would watch over me as I lay in some other world. Dana gave me a person to return to and she would hold my place for me in this world. And on the

certainty of these two people I would move differently and more freely between those worlds. This is what my therapy also offered when I would struggle to read my writing; a person and a place. My writing also holds a person and a place open for me. My writing was and is my way of preventing the collapse of language yet again; a way to hold both the content and the form of an early trauma; a way to show an old solution and a way into new relationships.

My purpose here is not to slip into self analysis, but to open a consideration of the place of my own experience and how it influences how and why I write and read. It is also a gesture like and unlike my therapy. I am amongst colleagues here and I weighed heavily and repeatedly the idea of revealing anything about my autobiographical writing. But, we are here to help each other think, and write and speak. I have been enormously encouraged in previous alumni presentations by listening to others build and cross bridges within themselves and between themselves and others.

Sometime after formulating my thoughts on dissociation as a useful skill I discovered Philip Bromberg's book *Standing in the Spaces* (Bromberg, 1998). As I worked my way through his introduction I felt reassured on many fronts. His opening begins with a vignette from his childhood and his writing seems a fluid movement between his personal influences, his use of language and the development of his thinking as an integration of his personal and clinical experience. Dissociation, as Bromberg describes it, is a potential we all possess

and use in varying ordinary degrees. During trauma this potential operates at its extreme as a working solution for survival.

Dissociation is the collapse of that mental space that Adam Phillips is advocating as necessary for creative life (Phillips, 1993). Bromberg describes dissociation as that “pathological form of what in every human being allows continuity and change to occur simultaneously and thus makes normal personality growth possible – a mental space that allows selfhood and otherness to interpenetrate, and provides the context for continuity of human relatedness *while* self-change is taking place” (Bromberg, 1998, 9, emphasis original) There is an enormous tension we hold as human beings between this need for continuity, the necessity for creative change and the requirement for a setting capable of holding both.

That we require a space or place for that tension to exist inside of, and that we need another human being to help hold and occupy that space; is a dimension of psychotherapeutic practice. As therapists we must pursue the different shapes through which that space takes form – whether it is through authentic movement, speech, dance, drama, photography, dreaming, reading or writing – the location is unique to the participants. These forms then are a testament to the breadth of lived experiences that we also require as therapists as a way of holding ourselves open.

We all need to learn to think and at its best the development of thinking is done through being embedded in relationships. Isolated thinking, too logical and orderly thinking, and thinking held as an exclusively interior act – shows something. It shows a defense against need, a fear of intrusion and a fear of the loss of integration. If thinking develops to contain and elaborate our thoughts and these thoughts hold the essence of our development as a human being then a defense designed around thinking seems to me a defense against the loss of self.

Bromberg describes it thus: “The child’s experience of “me-ness” ... is most sturdy when his states of mind are experienced and reflected upon by the mind of an other, particularly during moments of intense affective arousal. ... If the other’s behavior, even if it is not fully welcoming, shows that his state of mind is emotionally and cognitively responsive to what is most affectively immediate in the child’s mind rather than tangential to it ... the engagement constitutes an act of recognition that allows the child to accomplish the developmental achievement of taking his own state of mind as an object of reflection.” (Bromberg, 1998, 10)

This capacity to hold the self up as an object of interest worthy of attention and reflection lies at the heart of our capacity as therapists. We attend to our responses during our work by allowing two very important experiences to occur. In our willingness to allow our unconscious registrations to penetrate our awareness we hold open a space in ourselves that signals our interest in it when

we speak from that often unpredictable awareness. Secondly, we turn the instrument of our attention towards our client and signal not only our interest, but the “how” of that interest. In their own turn our clients internalize both that interest and the means of following that interest into an exploration of their own inner life.

Bromberg elaborates his beliefs by citing an excerpt from Fonagy and Target:

“Our acceptance of a dialectical perspective on self-development shifts the traditional psychoanalytic emphasis from internalization of the containing object to the internalization of the thinking self from within the containing object ...”

(Bromberg, 1998, 10; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, Target, 2004, 288)

If as a number of theorists over time have argued, (Heimann, 1956; Lear, 1999 and Racker, 1957); we can have transference operating intrapsychically between the topographies of Freud's id, ego and superego – not to mention the transferences that pass between therapist and client; then I would suggest that in a schizoid state the thinking dimension of the containing other would potentially have to operate intrapsychically in the absence of a reliable and consistent external other. This internal dimension of self/other has the potential to keep from total collapse the capacity to think and listen to one's own thoughts; in something other than the empty echo chamber of an isolated mind. Yet, as a static arrangement this holds little potential or possibility for change or growth. It is a closed system, and its greatest cost is to both the flexibility of the imagination

and of creativity as a movement between the various thresholds within the self and between the self and others; that is a necessary component of lively thinking. As Bromberg points out, the capacity for growth rests on the tension generated between the interpenetration of self and external other. Something must interrupt the internal dialogue and shift it into an exchange. A mental space must open up, or in my case a blank screen. Moving this interior dialogue into an audible range through writing seems to me a helpful first step. And from writing and thinking to writing and speaking is a leap towards others.

From this I would then ask – how do I conceive of this as of interest generally, how do I think about your presence? This is not meant to be a soliloquy with disregard for the importance that I am speaking to you, both within the context of my writing and in the speaking; and at its heart this is meant to be an exploration of writing from a psychodynamic perspective. We are heirs to a legacy of written words and we enter into that tradition by way of our capacity to think, to use; and to show, express and reveal. Our interest is served by remaining alive to our own thoughts, committed to their expression and development with others and our preparedness to let them die a good death when new thoughts arise for thinking. This is what I believe Hass meant when he spoke of killing and killing and raising us up.

So, I am concerned here with how to write and how to approach my writing with a lively interest – and without murder on my mind. Murder and death are not born

out of the same intention. This follows a line somewhere between entertaining new thoughts without execution as an immediate goal and killing off an ancestral me when the right time has arrived. How have I been negotiating this leap towards others?

Cancer released a bare necessity in me somewhere between a long standing will to clarity, a will to form thoughts; and a dawning realization and recognition of the fluidity of nuance, or otherwise put – a tolerable sort of vagueness. To say something clearly can be like nailing a bug to the wall, and like the bug on the wall there is imminent death to the written idea. To tolerate the unsayable and the barely articulate requires a form of nuance that reveals as much as possible without cluttering the page. For that, the elegance of poetry and free association and dreaming – whether awake or asleep – is essential. For all of this conversation with others is necessary.

In my desire to approach writing with a clinical end in mind I have had to develop my own deliberate steps. I had to personalize those reasons for writing that Green spoke about with regard to his own writing. First, I have to attend to what stirs me to write. It may be a conversation with a friend and colleague, it may be a memory, or it may be my curiosity and desire to pursue an understanding of something. This writing must be unencumbered by any after-intention and it is best served by conversation. This conversation initially takes the form of writing and reading out loud to my self. In this way I think I can sustain a connection

between the words and the memory as it arrives for elaboration. When the sound is false I know that something is not yet clear or finished or satisfyingly expressed. Eventually there comes a point when I stop. I may not be done, but it is time to stop. At this point I must go away and leave the writing alone. I wait. Sometimes I do not wait well. When writing from impatience I have many new starts, as the various versions of this paper give testament to. I have come to trust that if there is more to be written, it needs to be going on in the background of the rest of my day-to-day life for a while.

When I come back to the piece I start by reading it out loud. Sometimes as I read I wonder – did I write that? I have in those moments an experiential clarity of the all encompassing possibilities and limits of my dissociation, or writing from a trance state. These are re-entry points for me and as I read, the rest of what I need to write comes forward. This is not magic but it is something I had to learn.

Mostly I learned it with others, in seminars and discussion groups; but most particularly I have been learning it in my reading group. I would read the material we were going to discuss before hand and sometimes I would have questions and thoughts. Occasionally, I would feel quite badly because I did not feel that I was giving the material it's due and that what I had to offer was thin and undeveloped. Then I would find that in the course of the group conversation, the rest of my thoughts and formulations would present themselves for thinking. These were sometimes take offs from other people's ideas and generous

enthusiasms and my own ideas would respond in kind. This thinking feels interactive and I would be able to enter the conversation with more thoughts and ideas than I had seemed to arrive with. Conversation is generative. But, sometimes I would find myself stopped by what seemed like a spontaneously arriving new idea and I would make note of it because I knew that it was something I needed to think about “alone” first. In those moments I believe that it was the companionship of others, their aliveness to the conversation and my own stimulation that provided the ground for public discourse as well as later private thought. When it seemed private I could go away and think against the backdrop of their presence. This as I write seems an inestimable gift.

At some level I have been testing these thoughts and writings against the backdrop of your collective presence; a much larger place and presence in which to think. In part I have had to imagine a large and receptive space for my thinking self to enter into. In a subtle nuance, I believe Fonagy would also point out that the other mind that presents itself to the nascent thinker; would have to be a safe place to visit. (Fonagy, *Transgenerational Consistencies of Attachment: A New Theory*, 1999, 4 and 5; *Pathological Attachments and Therapeutic Action*, 1999, 7) If as Fonagy and Target further suggest, we develop through “internalization of the thinking self from within the containing object ...” (Bromberg, 1998, 10; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, Target, 2004, 288), then my development as a thinker is occurring live, now, within a network of other interested thinkers.

Eventually, the writing will seem complete. I then have to risk asking others to read it. Usually I start by reading it out loud to my partner. It is an impossible task to ask her to respond to the writing as an objective listener when she is often also holding the weight of memory and its impact on her. In truth, it is often her subjectivity that assists me with my own. To be equally fair, it is her tolerance of my thrashing and confusion; her “hollowed out” reception of my thoughts, unencumbered by her own pressures or desires, that helps to keep me lightly in the place of waiting for what will come out of the chaos of my own thinking. This too is relational in a necessarily foundational way.

I have then asked friends and fellow readers to read my writing. I am not yet completely clear as to what I am asking for when I ask them to read. At present that is actually ok, it is their subjectivity and their attention to meaning and process and pattern that I think I need. I am looking for their thoughtful consideration of my ideas and their sense of whether I have conveyed them in an honest and lively way; and whether I have left them room to think their own “this and that” while they are reading. I would like to leave them free to think their own thoughtful thoughts. This last I believe is very important. I would like my writing to convey something about me that has not been distilled down into dry un-evocative words. I would like my writing to take them into their own associations and meanings. I would like to know that I have evoked a response. Our reader writer relationship is still developing as we encounter each other through these

exchanges. Yet through this all I know that I am working at the site of some old experience and with the instrument most appropriate to that task. Language words and sounds; this trilogy of expression is deeply evocative for me of a lively undoing.

Now of late, I have come to realize that this is not where the process ends for me. Aspects of my writing come back to me as I read different authors and as I take their theory in it intersects with my own lived experience. Experience is always from a point of view; it is embodied. Our attention is the light we cast across the horizon of our experiences and “attention is mostly interest in the direction of action”⁸ Interests and our attention, direct our forms of writing.

Jeanette Winterson expresses this elegantly in “The Powerbook”:

“Perhaps this is how it is – life flowing smoothly over memory and history, the past returning or not depending on the tide. History is a collection of found objects washed up through time. Goods, ideas, personalities, surface towards us, then sink away. Some we hook out, others we ignore, as the pattern changes so does the meaning. We can not rely on the facts. Time, returns everything, changes everything”. (Winterson, 2000, 286)

So I am returning now to my own writing with the theoretical ear of clinical listening and thinking. This seems to me a fruitful ground for furthering my own capacity to think and elaborate my clinical ideas in a manner that is experience-near and relational. To return to Winterson: “What keeps the tension is the tension itself – the pull between what I am and what I can become. The tug of

⁸ Adam Crabtree provided this distinction of William James’ thoughts. I may have gotten it horribly wrong from a philosophical point of view or from William James’ perspective – but I find it useful for my purposes here. C.T.P. Lecture Series: September 10, 2007

war between the world I inherit and the world I invent". (Winterson, 2000, 248)

This engagement is what Lear has called an erotic engagement with the world (Lear, 1999, 11); by allowing the world to seduce me into a conversation with it, with others, with each of you.

It is a larger step to go from writing and talking about writing to finding a way to introduce myself differently onto the page. If we are part of a tradition we are also part of an orientation to how a therapist behaves. We do not enter therapeutic conversations personally; we do not reveal ourselves, our personal lives, histories or struggles – do we? Of course this is not true; we show more than we say; and if this is true, part of what I am showing is that it is difficult and uncomfortable for me to bring my personal experience to the fore. I guard against attention, and more importantly I guard against my own awareness that I might want to evoke an interest. It took quite a while for me to develop what might loosely be called a healthy narcissism.

Some years ago my reading group was discussing Emmanuel Ghent. It was around the same time that I was reading Lear and Green. I would like to begin anew and finish this section with a quote from Ghent:

"... we need the compelling intensity that accompanies surrender to our inner experience. Through immersing ourselves in the intensity of what we fear and desire, immersing ourselves by engaging the *language and imagery that those fears and desires knew* in the moments when they were alive with nascent intensity, we may ultimately discover ... within ourselves our own authentic voice". (Ghent, 1992, 139, emphasis added)

It would seem obvious that the language of those fears was embedded in the development of thought and thinking and expressed through the spoken word, the need for a receptive audience and an exchange between the two; through the use of another to assist in giving shape to thought and to provide thoughts with a place to go and thus to initialize thinking as a creative act. The capacity to think and to capture thought begins initially in the effort to occupy a common space. Thinking gains its shape through the recognition of an attentive other, their containment of the nascent thinker's thoughts and their reflective action on those thoughts. This is I believe what Bion meant when he stated that thinking exists to contain thoughts, thoughts foster the art of thinking. The thinking dimension of the containing other begins the process of giving shape, direction and a relational quality to the thinking process. Thoughts drive the thinking engine. It is not that thinking generates thoughts.

But, what is the fear? The fear itself is desire. Desire is the engine that drives thinking, writing and the imaginary; it is the desire for erotic engagement that Lear described.

Ghent continues to develop his belief that "the patient has a stake in experiencing forbidden needs as infantile, in part because the intense longings that have long been suppressed began to take formative shape in infancy or early childhood, so that the symbols used in adulthood to express these longings are affectively connected to these early periods" (Ghent, 1992, 139).

What do I understand from these passages? I know that fears and desires are engaged in the act of writing as I know that longings experienced only in their infantile shape – prohibits language for me. What stakes have I in keeping those longings infantile and undeveloped? To keep them infantile maintains that less fruitful form of dissociation. Knowing is painful, writing is revealing, and writing to know is a transformative act. Language, alongside its content, is a gestural act. Its form expresses as much as its wording and it is meant to try and carry both desire and engagement well.

I think writing can learn something from the “oedipal arrangement” (Bollas, 1996) that is a psychotherapeutic practice. I found Bollas’ paper helpful in settling the tension I kept running into as I tried to integrate the idea of mixing the form that memoir writing takes with the different task of more theoretical writing. Bollas writes: “As the patient makes her dream, breaks it up through free speech, and searches amongst the remains for fragments of meaning she keeps alive – or discovers for the first time – the interactive yet intermittent exchange of three mentalities ... The self that is alone yet in the presence of the other (the dreamer), the self that is unknowingly involved in uttering the contents to a reverential other (the infant and the mother together), the self that comes to account for and accept responsibility for knowing the internal world through

penetrating insights (the child and the father) are the essential *family* of authors”.
(Bollas, 1996, 2, emphasis original)⁹

Writing to dream occurs against the background presence of what Grotstein called the “Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious”. For Grotstein this term’s ambiguity reflects a “subject who is a reflection of itself and is known (and knows itself) only indirectly”. (Grotstein, 2000, viii) Writing dreams this subject into language if language is held lightly and the dream landscape of form is allowed to carry something of the Ineffable subject’s subjectivity. There is for Grotstein a generative tension between this ineffable subject and the phenomenal subject who is also the dream recipient. I write to hear myself and I enlarge my receptive task by also allowing myself to invoke the presence of readers, writers, listeners and fellow conversationalists. Trying to think about the interaction of all these, alters the experience of each of them profoundly.

We are all interested as psychotherapists in assisting the movement of “something” across thresholds of awareness. This is what Bassin hints at when she writes: “I have to write until I find those sentences which recognize my thoughts” (Bassin, 2002, 301) We find, through the action of writing, not only the words; but through the form of writing itself we locate that stance that allows the recognition of our own thoughts to occur freshly. Part of that stance is to wait to

⁹ I will leave aside a discussion of the fact that I do not believe that this *family* is predicated on the actual assignment of place along gender lines. Anyone with whom one can relax against in quiet reverie is in the role of the primary care giver, regardless of their gender, and anyone who offers penetrative interpretations, aside from their gender, is in the role of the one who approaches from outside that first dyadic relationship. Gender here can be seen to be irrelevant.

know. In a provocative manner this breaks up that form of psychoanalytic thinking that is predicated on already knowing. We write then in the manner that we strive to practice as therapists – we wait curiously to know. Creativity derives its energy from this tension between the impetus to know through some form of expression and the suspension of too quick an understanding. Much like James' bird, we try to capture the thought in flight without arresting its forward and sometimes erratic and unpredictable motion. To break up too orderly thinking aimed at clarity; a tolerable sort of vagueness is necessary when making room for one's own unconscious and the unconscious play of others, and when using writing as the arena for that interplay, and delivering writing at the interface of self and other in conversation.

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