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Playing, Beyond the Fields of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary and Multi-Media Approach to Reading Thanatos and Eros in Psychoanalysis, Literature, Science and Technology

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University
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Abstract

Playing, Beyond the Fields of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary and Multi-Media Approach to Reading Thanatos and Eros in Psychoanalysis, Literature, Science and Technology
By Melissa D. Sexton

Beginning with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I trace the structure of the traumatic neurosis within literary and psychoanalytic theories of trauma and suggest the evolution of consciousness results in bodily performances of play and myth. Since Freud performs the tension that exists between the life and death drives not only by playing with the play of his grandson but also in multiple references to Aristophanes' myth, I read very closely Plato's *Symposium*, where the conversations about Eros engender questions we continue to ask about how love is a drive for human relationships. I consider the neuro-psychoanalytic work of Jaak Panksepp as he charts the affective neuroscience of play, suggesting we are wired for joy. In the context of the 21st century where the great frontiers of brain-mapping and social networking technologies are rediscovering how language most significantly rewrites the human being, I address some of the early trends in how the increasingly dominant "flickering signifier" (N. Katherine Hayles) currently revamps communication systems. Web 2.0 technologies emphasizing "emergence" create new life forms as writing machines now also write us into being. New technological conditions create challenges and opportunities for pedagogical practices where students ask "What does literature do?" in ways that allow for no easy dialogue with the answers from the past. As somewhat of a case study, I consider the writing and biography of the physician-turned-novelist Walker Percy, together with Charles Sanders Peirce, for making meaning in post-modern times and I read Percy's *The Thanatos Syndrome* in dialogue with Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. My dissertation concludes with a multimedia storytelling performance—a palimpsest—of the Percy family, the breech of the levees, and my students' own engagement with service learning, six months after Hurricane Katrina. From all layers beyond both the disciplinary and "ground-zero" fields of trauma, play becomes significant for performance of any story that emerges when there is a breech of consciousness that is experienced as a result of trauma.

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career with a more dignified, professional voice, advocating for the betterment of Graduate School education. Lastly and most importantly—especially during this final week—I am extremely grateful for the guidance of my advisor, Dr. John Johnston. His careful edits and words I have taken to heart; he has come through for me, seeing this dissertation project to its completion (and I hope **that** he sees how I now have command of the semi-colon).

Although many lonely hours have produced this dissertation, I realize I have not really been alone. In the beginning, I was greatly encouraged by mentors from the Atlanta Psychoanalytic community, namely: Dr. Sam Brown, Dr. Beth Selig, Dr. Micky Nardo, and Dr. Paul Trudeau. Additionally, I was also encouraged by people within the Emory Trauma Network—Dr. Kerry Ressler, Dr. Ann Schwartz, Dr. Rebecca Bradley, and Dr. Cathy Caruth—to do work that would "build a bridge" between the clinic and the classroom. Indeed, it was a great privilege to listen to people in the clinic talk to me about their trauma histories and I have kept their stories in mind, pursuing my own academic questions. In many ways, I have written this dissertation for the people—mostly lower-income, urban, African American patients—I met in the Fulton County Outpatient Mental Health clinic of Grady Memorial Hospital. I have always hoped to do right by the one man I met in the waiting room I interviewed against the backdrop of the 9/11 catastrophic sounds and images playing across the television as he said to me: "See, now, everyone will know how I walk around feeling every day of my life," followed by, sadly, "and no one cares." With the timely election of a new President, however, there is renewed hope for change and I am furthermore convinced that people *do* care.

Likewise, with respect, I have tried to keep in mind the complex stories of the Percy family. I am tremendously grateful for the opportunities Melissa Percy Spalding provided, introducing me to her family. I am also particularly grateful to Phin Percy and his father, Billups Phinizy Percy. The generosity they offered to me in sharing their stories has been matched by the care with which I have attempted to represent them in my own scholarship.

Lastly, I have gone the distance because of my children. Every step of the way, they have been with me, from the first days of waddling along behind me like little ducklings on the way to the library to, now, sleeping peacefully as teenagers down the hall as I type these words. Because of Boone and Mollie-Emma, I know that love knows no bounds. Therefore, I dedicate this work to them for always teaching me every single day in every hour this very lesson I have hoped to pass on to them: keep going; be not afraid; in the end, what triumphs is *love*.

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Introduction

> The advent of writing is the advent of… play; today such a play is coming into its own, effacing the limit starting from which one had thought to regulate the circulation of signs, drawing along with it all the reassuring signifieds, reducing all the strongholds, all the out-of-bounds shelters that watched over the field of language.[1]
>
> -Jacques Derrida

> Pleasure can be expressed in words, bliss cannot.[2]
>
> -Roland Barthes

Why do writers write and readers read? What is compelling about textuality that holds the attention of participants who gather around a given textual body? Does presence require the directed attention of the reader? What *is* textuality?

Jacques Derrida surmises that a *play* of texts constitutes "the end of the book and the beginning of writing" (*OG,* 6). Indeed, textuality is "a new mutation in the history of writing" (*OG,* 8) in which writing both exceeds and comprehends language, no longer constructing istoria and epistémè as predetermined "detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence" (*OG,* 10). It is though the concept of writing goes beyond language because writing represents movement, comprehending language as a "signifier of the signifier" affecting the signifieds "the moment they enter the game" (*OG,* 7).

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Of Gramatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), 7 (cited in text as *OG*).

[2] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 21 (cited in text as *PT*).

With similar curiosity regarding "the game" of writing, in *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes identifies a "site of bliss" created by a writer seeking out a reader "without knowing where he is" (*PT,* 4). Barthes suggests, "It is not the reader's person that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, or an unpredictability of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game" (*PT,* 4). Barthes seeks not to reappropriate presence so much as to reappropriate the readability of writing.

But, the pleasure of reading *The Pleasure of the Text* (or any text, for that matter) is that it is writing that is offered desirous of the person who reads, although the reader is nothing (no figure) but a "vessel for expansion" (*PT,* 5). The site, Barthes stresses, is the place "where the garment gapes" (*PT,* 9); it is the "staging of an appearance-as-disappearance" (*PT,* 10). There is no active-passive performance in the site so inscribed; there is neither subject nor object. "The text supersedes grammatical attitudes: it is the undifferentiated eye… the eye by which I see God is the same eye by which He sees me" (*PT,* 16). The assumption of the text becomes about being not only a common site/sight, but also an uncommon desire: what is readably written seeks what, beyond writing, can be read. The readerly text incites pleasure that is irreducible to a writer's intention for locating the reader. The reader reads a writer's text searching for, not the writer, but the structures inherent in the textual body that entice a reader to keep reading.

What is enticing about an engagement with a text? What functionality does textual representation and reproduction reappropriate, if not presence or pleasure? Furthermore, how can reading engage a text that already presents absence, even within a trace structure signifying historical presence?

On the one hand, possibilities of interpretation shall forever be contaminated by a reader's own dislocation within a larger context of pleasure seeking appurtenance. On the other hand, writing and the metaphoricity of writing shall forever remain absent from logocentric verity. Aside from questions of original marks bespeaking meaning via traces; what can be said regarding textuality that compels writers and readers (in)to participation? Can the internal and the external be so separated as to denote a scientificity of writing (such as was postulated by Saussure) as a reader may deduce—beyond the pleasure of the text—toward contextuality? All problems of reference aside, what can be significant about the site which already instantiates deconstructive movements of both dislocation and erasure?

In an essay entitled "Force and Signification," Derrida critiques the "structuralist invasion"[3] for reinscribing presence, burying the difference between writing and reading, precisely constructing philosophical concepts symptomatic of repression. Although signification through form and structure entice, Derrida notes, "Form fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself" ("FS," 4).

Derrida's argument centers upon the reader's task to begin with a separation from oneself in the act of reading, opening up a scene of reunion between reading and writing that is inaugural of difference. Derrida's critique of structuralism incites further claims upon a literary critic's task of reading, deconstructing structuralism by recognizing within the economy of writing a writerly anguish:

> It is because writing is inaugural, in the fresh sense of the word, that it is dangerous and anguishing. It does not know where it is going, no knowledge can

[3] Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978), 9 (cited in text as "FS").

> keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and that is, primarily, its future. However, it is capricious only through cowardice. There is thus no insurance against the risk of writing. Writing is an initial and graceless recourse for the writer, even if he is not an atheist but, rather, a writer. ("FS," 11)

The anguish of the writer is constituted in the absence of the writer and reproduced via the meaning in the written text relying on the secondary absence within the presence of the reader. Herein lies the danger:

> [Does] not meaning present itself as such at the point at which the other is found, the other who maintains both the vigil and the back-and-forth motion, the work, that comes between writing and reading, making this work irreducible? Meaning is neither before nor after the act. Is not that which is called God, that which imprints every human course and recourse with its secondarity, the passageway of deferred reciprocity between reading and writing? Or the absolute witness to the dialogue in which what one sets out to write has already been read, and what one sets out to say is already a response, the third party as the transparency of meaning? Simultaneously part of creation and the Father of Logos. The circularity and traditionality of Logos. The strange labor of conversion and adventure in which grace can only be that which is missing. ("FS," 11)

The circularity of language, the intertextuality of reading writing, entices response-ability for a movement of speech [parole] and language [langue] engraved and constantly reinscribed through reading that connotes the difference between the absence of the presence (the trace) and the presence of the absence (interpretation).

On the one hand, structural components of the text become the object. On the other hand, the object becomes the work of engagement between reading and writing—without reference to form or content—but, more precisely, to the economy of force and signification, "escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions" ("FS," 19). Herein lies the between, the différance: as a "dream of emancipation" ("FS," 28) from language which inscribes and reappropriates meaning without reading the context of writing, erasing or effacing Being structured as presence within a site of pleasure.

In an essay entitled, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida argues for a deconstruction of logocentrism which "is not psychoanalysis of philosophy"[4] but a reconsideration of repression in a deconstructive gesture to understand how logocentrism posits representations that reproduce what cannot be determined. He argues that Freud performs a scene of writing in which "metonymy [is] perpetually at work on the same metaphor, obstinately substituting trace for trace and machine for machine" ("FSW," 229). For Freud, Derrida emphasizes, writing is like dreaming, constituting an emancipation of force from a signification of what is forbidden in the rupture or the gap of meaning. Just as dreams emerge as symbolic images seeking linguistic expression, writing, according to Freud—says Derrida—institutes "a multiplicity of agencies or origins" where memory functions as the "ideal virginity" for expression beyond repression ("FSW," 226). Derrida summarizes his thoughts about Freud's notion of writing:

> Traces thus produce the space of their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure. From the beginning, in the present of their first impression, they

[4] Derrida, Jacques, "Freud and the Scene of Writing" in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978), 196 (cited in text as "FSW").

> are constituted by the double force of repetition and erasure, legibility and illegibility. A two-handed machine (like Freud's Mystic Writing Pad) a multiplicity of agencies or origins—is this not the original relation to the other and the original temporality of writing, its primary complication: an originary spacing, deferring, and erasure of the simple origin, and polemics on the very threshold of what we persist in calling perception? ("FSW," 226)

Derrida criticizes Freud's notion of two-handed writing, arguing that primal repression, which is crucial for the unknowing force for writing, cannot be transformed into discourse. "It is then not sufficient to say that in dreams, words are condensed by things; and that inversely, nonverbal signifiers may be interpreted to a certain degree in terms of verbal representations" ("FSW," 219). Texts maintain a certain intranslatability as reproductions signified by representational traces never performing the originary speech-act prior to repetition. "Everything begins with reproduction" ("FSW," 211).

The scene of writing, similar to the site of bliss, plays upon memory in a transformation of Freud's topographical model of the functioning of the mind into a more dynamic model where displacements of meaning are represented as dislocations in the force of repetition alone. Derrida follows Freud's insight that there is "a breach" of consciousness and it is similar to the rupture of a text resisting reading in the very context of readability in spite of writerly anguish. With no intended reader toward which communication through writing gestures, a writer must write to mark one's voice, casting forth into grammatological futurity an event which shall with force signify to a reader that one (haunting) subject has passed this way before. Such is the history of writing signs to communicate absence of a former and a future presence, attesting to the site of

bliss where in reality, one exists only as presence delayed. Writing constitutes a written sign marking a difference from what is oral or gestural, carrying a force ("force de rupture") tied to a spacing ("espacement") separating a given sign or signifieds as external to other signs or signifieds in an "internal contextual chain" ("FSW," 9). Meaning comes through the "emergence of a mark" coming forth with force from a space ("FSW," 10). Thus, writing as signature emerges from a context, constituting an event where, very basically, "writing is read" ("FSW," 21).

Deconstruction is about reversal of terms and displacement of a system that hierarchically diminishes discursive forces. If a writer writes and a reader reads, it is the practice of exchanging something contextual irreducible to site, structure, or form. Reading for writing and writing for reading inaugurates textuality that—if not registers something primordial—reflexively recognizes pleasure.

While this dissertation is not necessarily about deconstruction, nor should the reading represented within these pages be about displacement or deferral, it is about desire for return—as a drive for the relation—inspiring love beyond one's life alone. Ultimately, within these pages I am trying to tell an ongoing story; it is a story that functions quietly as an intervention: suggesting, ultimately, *love never fails*. In the final analysis, I hope to emphasize with psychoanalytic, philosophical, literary, and scientific, rigor how it is that interdisciplinary dialogues create new vistas for scholarship and research, supporting humanities studies in the important conversations that must continue regarding love and life in this new century.[5]

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[5] Representative of many, I especially thank the following colleagues and interlocutors for their contributions and patience toward the development of these pages: Jean Paul Cauvin, Brian Croxall, Jennifer Hughes, Maria Kepler, Marc Muneal, Matthew Roberts, Jennifer Watts, and Leah Wolfson.

Only now do I realize the significant influence upon the following pages of a first philosophy in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas. In an essay entitled "Freedom and Command," Levinas writes, "Expression renders present what is communicated and the one who is communicating; they are both in the expression."[6] During the same year-long Levinasian seminar, I was engaged in conversation with people at Grady Memorial Hospital and the Fulton County Out-patient Mental Health Clinic, collecting initial trauma histories for a larger research project studying the undiagnosed Post-Traumatic Stress symptoms of an urban, mostly African American, patient population. As the face of the Other—a white face, asking black people to tell me their stories—I was entrusted with many emotional memories and unexpressed signs of suffering, as well as incredible narratives, outlining and performing various strategies of both resistance and resilience. My classroom readings supported my clinical work. I learned to ask, "Would your answers have been different if I were not white?" inviting many surprising responses.

"Freedom and Command" makes accessible the Levinasian emphasis upon the face of the other in an analysis of tyranny and resistance. Basically, Levinas utilizes the master-slave metaphor to illustrate how the antithetical resistance to command is implied in the tyrannical phenomenon of dominating forces. If one *commands* through tyranny, one develops a strategy of coercion, coming at the other from an angle of surprise, fearful of the possibility of the other's resistance. Such an agency required within the action of resistance implies a *will* that is independent and free. Yet, when freedom fails to exercise resistance, such inaction signifies that the will of the one commanded is *in accord with* the will of the one commanding. Since freedom implies resistance, when freedom *fails*

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[6] Emmanuel Levinas, "Freedom and Command" in Collected Philosophical Papers, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 21 (cited in text as "FC").

action, it is as if the one who commands *obeys* the will of the one commanded. Levinas critiques this ancient theme of Platonic philosophy by stating "true heteronomy begins when obedience ceases to be obedient consciousness and becomes an inclination" ("FC," 16).

Furthermore, first- and second-order desires differ in positions of perceived autonomy verses apparent heteronomy, regardless of whatever experience freedom potentially affords. Herein, the complexities of freedom introduce the problem of violence and tyranny, to which resistance must always respond. As Levinas says, "The supreme violence is in the supreme gentleness…. That one can create a servile soul is not only the most painful experience of modern man, but perhaps the very refutation of human freedom" ("FC," 16).

In order for resistance to act in freedom to protect freedom, Levinas suggests such conditions imposed by freedom and command warrant the necessity for creating a just State. Commands of a just State, exterior to me, are imposed upon me in order to preserve my freedom. Yet, as Levinas is quick to assert, "Institutions obey a rational order in which freedom no longer recognizes itself" ("FC," 17). Levinas thinks that the unreasonable commands of impersonal reason, too soon, become inevitably abundant within the context of the just State. Herein, the freedom and the flaw co-exist as the problem and the challenge: a coherent discourse necessitates a reason prior to reason making impersonal reason more humane.

If the endeavor is to make impersonal reason more humane in the logical assertion that there exists a reason that is prior to reason, it follows that only *language* can assist in the effort toward a human understanding which privileges experience. Levinas asks:

> Is there not a speech by which a will for what we call coherent speech is **transmitted** from freedom to freedom, from individual to individual? Does not impersonal discourse presuppose a discourse in the sense of this face-to-face situation? In other words, is there not already between one will and another a relationship of command without tyranny, which is not yet an obedience to an impersonal law but is the indispensable condition for the institution of such a law? ("FC," 18, my emphasis)

I suggest Levinas implies that language becomes *more than* a set of signs and symbols in the face-to-face encounter; language *becomes* communication (although the word he uses is translated as "expression"). The question follows: is language *becoming* an ontological imperative?

The distinction between resistance and opposition is central for interpreting experience in light of a relation where communication becomes an ethical imperative. Experience interpreted is always only instantaneously encountered in the face that resists me exteriorally—restoring my freedom in the context of relationality—opposing my isolation. Otherwise, is my being not Being? In isolation, do I not exist?

In a very real sense, these are the questions I explore throughout my dissertation. My clinical work supported my classroom readings. Those faces and voices and stories called me to respond with a more nuanced inquiry and resolve, open to empathic outcomes where love and play have the chance to provide alternative endings beyond the disciplinary fields of study which focus upon readings of death and trauma.

The face speaks prior to language acquisition; this speaking/seeing dynamic for cognitive development—structured in the event organized by time and space—is the

essence of relationality: the trace of jouissance is experienced in relation with the other and such an experience is fundamental toward establishment of a will which is always referential of one face opposing another. Thus, the radicality of such a metaphysical ontology necessitates an *otherwise than being* as the basis for an Ethic of ethics.

A human being is never a text. Texts, rather, are documents produced in part to address privileged perspectives with regard to what it means to be a human being. From the outset, confessing my bias, I privilege human experience and ways for transmitting what words alone can never express. Recalling Barthes' insight, I believe in bliss. As Levinas emphasized a return to a first philosophy of ethical consideration in an "otherwise than being,"[7] unconsciously—as will become evident through these pages—he helped to chart the course for my own interdisciplinary methodology.

Chapter 1 takes seriously the clinical work of Dr. Sigmund Freud, tracing his intent to bring relief to suffering patients, particularly from the stupefying symptoms of the traumatic neurosis. Reading Freud's pivotal text, where he introduces the life drive without explicating fully what he *means*, I argue that his own performance communicates more than what words alone can possibly say, in another's absence.

Chapter 2 is devoted to how it is that Eros befuddles, closely reading Plato's *Symposium* for clues as to why Freud repeatedly references Aristophanes' myth at crucial points within *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but also in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*. I suggest Freud's repeated references to the myth of the soulmates creates a conundrum where myth, love, and play intersect and intervene in dialectical tension toward a new hermeneutic. I argue the performance of

[7] I shall be forever indebted to the year-long seminar with Professor Jill Robins, reading through the philosophical writings of Emmanuel Levinas, particularly *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being*.

Freud's own play is an attempt to bridge the impossible gap between the life and death drives, economically, within a psychic system to make sense of what, otherwise, makes no sense.

Immediately following World War II, cybernetic theory explains much of what Freud postulated about homeostasis and economies of pleasure mitigating pain. Chapter 3 considers the possibility that we are wired for joy. Beginning with the surprising work of Jaak Panksepp, pioneer of a new interdisciplinary field of neuro-bio-psychoanalytic research—"affective neuroscience," he calls it—I review current findings and debates within cognitive science and consciousness studies to understand how Eros functions most primordially. Additionally, in third-wave cybernetics where "emergence" creates new life forms within networking systems, I begin an analysis for what it might mean, now, to be "post-human," linked as we are, particularly with writing machines also writing us into *being* beyond what we have yet to imagine.

Chapter 4 is a cautionary statement in light of all the previous chapters. Dr. Walker Percy devoted his life to the life drive, as is evident in both his fictional renderings and multiple interests in interdisciplinary fields of human interaction. Toward the end of his life, he received an award from the National Endowment for the Humanities and his lecture became an apologetic for interdisciplinary humanities studies. Stories matter and re-matter beyond what science alone can tell us. Relying upon his interests to usher forth via Charles Sanders Peirce a new hermeneutic, I read his last novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, as a way to loop back around to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, arguing that Percy-Peirce emphasized the triadic relation to name

what is significant about being human and therefore important not to forget nor to diminish.

My dissertation concludes with a multimedia storytelling performance—a palimpsest—of the Percy family, the breech of the levees, and my students' own engagement with service learning, six months after Hurricane Katrina. From all layers beyond both the disciplinary and "ground-zero" fields of trauma, play becomes significant for performance of any story that emerges when there is a breech of consciousness that is experienced as a result of traumatic events. In conclusion, relying upon these non-linear multimedia formats, I examine how literature makes a difference in the classroom learning space for engaging students toward life-time learning. Essentially, I perform how every text is documentary of something which exceeds textuality more profoundly, signifying something more profound about the human experience which has more to do with presence than absence.

Chapter 1

Freud at *Play*: A Return from Beyond in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

I started my professional activity as a neurologist trying to bring relief to my neurotic patients. Under the influence of an older friend and by my own efforts I discovered some important new facts about the unconscious in psychic life, the role of instinctual urges, and so on. Out of these findings grew a new science, psychoanalysis, a part of psychology and a new method of treatment of the neuroses. I had to pay heavily for this bit of good luck. People did not believe in my facts and thought my theories unsavory. Resistance was strong and unrelenting. In the end I succeeded in acquiring pupils and building up an International Psychoanalytic Association. But this struggle is not yet over.

Im Alter von 82 Jahren verließ ich als Folge der deutschen Invasion mein Heim in Wien und kam nach England, wo ich mein Leben in Freiheit zu enden hoffe.

-Sigmund Freud[8]

A. Introduction: A Return to *Studies on Hysteria*

Freud's biographers often quote a letter he wrote to Martha Bernays on April 28, 1885: "As for the biographers, let them worry, we have no desire to make it too easy for them. Each one of them will be right in his opinion of 'The Development of the Hero,'

[8] BBC, "Sound Recording of Sigmund Freud," July 12, 1938, London. http://www.freud-museum.at/freud/media/sfmax.mp3 (accessed June 17, 2008). Many thanks to Melvin Haack for transcribing and translating the last sentence Freud spoke in German. The English translation is: "At the age of 82 years, I left my home in Vienna as a consequence of the German invasion and came to England, where I hope to end my life in freedom."

and I am already looking forward to seeing them go astray."[9] Given the challenge issued by Freud himself, it is important to listen to Freud's voice from the beginning of any attempt to read him, and for two main reasons: first, listening to Freud invokes our own sense of urgency to pay attention, in our own work, to how it is that the "struggle" of psychoanalysis is not yet over, both for psychoanalysis as a theory or method, and also for understanding how our own psychic narratives weave in, out, and through translations and practices; and, secondly, Freud's sense of the "struggle" of psychoanalysis poses the question as to whether or not psychoanalysis is interpretive artistry or scientific methodology. No matter where any theoretician or practitioner lands within such a debate around issues of efficacy, the intention within "discovery" must be linked with the aim of "relief," if not cure, because of course psychoanalysis raises the ultimate question as to whether or not "cure" is possible.

Freud's own analysis was partially conducted in communication with his friend, Wilhelm Fliess, via letters he wrote describing dreams, outlining efforts of reality testing, uncovering wild "boundary" ideas about the gaps of the psyche, most evident in the affects of mainly women who had yet to articulate the cognitive links they could make with their own experience. Freud's own "little hysteria" is referenced only once in one of his letters to Fliess:

> August 14, 1897
>
> After a spell of good spirits here I am now having a fit of gloom. The chief patient I am busy with is myself. My little hysteria, which was much intensified by work, has yielded one stage further. The rest still sticks. That is the first reason for my mood. This analysis is harder than any other. It is also the thing that

[9] Sigmund Freud, in *Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939*, ed. Ernst L. Freud, 140.

> paralyses the power of writing down and communicating what so far I have learned. But I believe it has got to be done and is a necessary stage in my work.[10]

From the beginning, Freud's sense of urgency is rooted within the method to find and begin to articulate cognitive links. His discovery, of course, is about the important fact that the unconscious is dynamic. Never arriving anywhere gives us pause to wonder what—if anything—psychoanalysis has to offer for the betterment of humankind in this 21st century.

In "The Joke: Child's Play," Samuel Weber makes an important link with Freud's discovery that the joke, like a dream, has "the apparent ingenuity [der scheinbare Witz] of all unconscious processes [as it] is intimately *connected* [Zusammenhang] with the theory of the witty and of the comic,"[11] providing another connotation. As Weber explains, "The status of Freud's theory depends on its connection to the scheinbare Witz: either it is able to pierce that *Schein* and penetrate to the essence it conceals, that of the unconscious as a serious, substantial entity; or the scheinbare Witz will end up by making a laughingstock out of the theory."[12] As I shall attempt to outline and support throughout the introduction for this chapter, it is my stated bias that Freud was most curiously motivated to find ways to help people heal from traumatic experience, and not just to be overly playful with psychic material that is no trivial or laughing matter. Following the introduction, I will more closely read Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for ways the text serves as a return to his earlier work as "a neurologist trying to bring relief to [his] neurotic patients,"

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[10] Sigmund Freud, "Letter 67" in *The Origins of Psycho-analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 213-214.

[11] Sigmund Freud, *Origins of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1963), 297, quoted in Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 123.

[12] Samuel Weber, "The Joke: Child's Play" in *The Legend of Freud* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 124.

as it is important to hear him say near the end of his life. As will become evident, Freud too seeks relief.

Learning How to Learn

Any sophisticated reader must realize, first and foremost, Freud was a clinician. There is evidence, as I shall emphasize, that his interests were dedicated to an enlightenment he believed only pure science via clinical research could usher forth. With his beginning curiosities grounded in the health and welfare of his patients, he struggled to articulate his findings in such a way that learning necessitated continual revisions of both theory and practice. Thus, it is often difficult to trace how his method of inquiry, treatment plan, and theoretical foundations diverge from and inform his primary project: to understand *how* the human psyche is dynamic.

Freud set out to study what was scientifically inexplicable. In so doing, he had to learn *first* how to learn. He looked to Janet, Charcot, and Breuer to be mentors and partners in such an uncharted venture. His early writings helped establish foundational "preliminary communications"[13] that would guide his emerging project toward establishing foundations of psychoanalytic theory and practice. His intent was to develop measures where pure observations, out of scientific necessity, could give insight into clear formulations of symptomatology, aetiology, and practical methodology. Of course, also out of necessity—because so much of his theory and practice was challenged and revised in his work with women—his focus would inevitably shift.

[13] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud (1893-1895), *Studies on Hysteria* in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (*SE*, hereafter), 1966.

As I have suggested, while working with Charcot, Freud was learning *how to learn* about hysteria.[14] In the "Preliminary Communications" of the *Studies on Hysteria,* Freud and Breuer emphasize the project will be about connecting the event precipitating the onset of symptoms with the appropriate affect, precisely abreacted. The challenge is to recover the experience the patient does not like discussing (*Studies on Hysteria,* 3). Often, there is a "symbolic relation between the precipitating cause and the pathological phenomenon—a relation such as healthy people form in dreams" (*Studies on Hysteria,* 5). Thus, inducing a dream-like hypnoid state in the patient becomes the original focus that will chart the course for further learning.

His empathy for stigmatized persons, both male and female, conveys an ethical stance toward a theory of subjectivity that promotes respect for suffering persons, rather than maltreatment and misunderstanding from the mishaps of misdiagnosis. He expresses an injustice that such persons are too often ostracized as *malingerers*, feigning symptoms, or culturally stigmatized as *evil*. He writes, "In earlier centuries **she** would have been certain to be judged and condemned as a witch or as possessed of the devil" (*Studies on Hysteria,* 11, my emphasis).

To his credit, Freud takes a radical stand against false piety in the religious and medical communities: women should not be branded as evil or untreatable, respectively,

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[14] See Sigmund Freud (1893-1895), "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication" in *Studies on Hysteria,* 1955, 1-17. One can discern his method of learning from the following writing: "In his study of hysteria Charcot started out from the most fully developed cases, which he regarded as the perfect types of the disease. He began by reducing the connection of the neurosis with the genital system to its correct proportions by demonstrating the unsuspected frequency of cases of male hysteria and especially of traumatic hysteria. In these typical cases he next found a number of somatic signs (such as the character of the attack, anaesthesia, disturbances of vision, hysterogenic points, etc.), which enabled him to establish the diagnoses of hysteria with certainty on the basis of positive indications. By making a scientific study of hypnotism—a region of neuropathology which had to be wrung on the one side from skepticism and on the other from fraud—he himself arrived at a kind of theory of hysterical symptomatology. These symptoms he had the courage to recognize as for the most part, real, without neglecting the caution demanded by the patients' disingenuousness" (11).

when they exhibit signs of misunderstood intelligence or creativity or when they suffer from the projected ills and wiles—sexually expressed or repressed—of a given society. Thus, the importance of establishing the scientific methodology for psychoanalysis was an effort to dissuade less critical thinking with rationality.

Prior to considering Freud's casework with the women in *Studies on Hysteria,* it is important to note a difference of gender bias that emerges in his early work with a male hysteric, August P.[15] In this first case study, Freud makes a monumental discovery, although it is a discovery that will not necessarily carry over into his work with women, as I will demonstrate, following a return to his earliest thinking about hysteria.

August P., age 29, an engraver, appears with symptoms of hemianaesthesia—the loss of sensation of the left side of his body. In his work with this patient, Freud discovered an important linking phenomenon involving the affects of fear and rage. When he was 8, notes Freud, August P. suffered a blow in the street—presumably by a large horse—leaving him with a ruptured right eardrum. The onset of presenting symptom severity, suggests Freud, was triggered by a reminiscence in the patient of the ensuing suffering from the earlier trauma, thus reinscribing the original fear and dread of (re)injury. Freud records that, prior to the onset of hysterical symptoms, August P. was thrown *into indescribable fear* when his brother ran at him with a knife, threatening to stab him in a dispute over money. This trauma, now linked with the earlier trauma, produced: "a ringing in his head as if it were going to burst; he hurried home without being able to tell how he got there, and fell to the ground unconscious in front of his door" ("Observation of a Severe Case of Hemi-Anaesthesia in a Hysterical Male," 26).

[15] Sigmund Freud, (1886) "Observation of a Severe Case of Hemi-Anaesthesia in a Hysterical Male" in *SE*, Vol. I.

Freud suggests that the fear induced by an oncoming angry brother (like a large animal in the street) produced the reminiscence of a bursting sensation in his head. Such a fright-flight response, followed by an amnesiac episode, precipitated further onset of symptoms: left-sided headaches and intra-cranial pressure, fatigue, depression, and a feeling as if his body had been *altered*. In a later episode, an accusation of theft triggered rage, depression, suicidal ideation, nightmares, and numbness throughout the left side of his body, with accompanying convulsive attacks, likened to panic attacks.[16]

Freud's presentation of the case in Vienna to a larger audience demonstrated the patient's high degree of anaesthesia to mucous membranes, muscle tissue, and disturbances of movement along the left hemisphere of his body. Freud deduced from the symptoms of August P. that, due to a sensitized patch of skin along the left elbow, he had "hope of being able to restore the patient in a short time to normal sensitivity" ("Observation of a Severe Case of Hemi-Anaesthesia in a Hysterical Male," 31). Freud suggested with this case that the hysterical neurosis is a type of frozenness in response to reminiscences of previous traumas linked by triggers of fear and rage that have become neurologically mapped onto and trapped in the body. His early work with August P. helped him clarify the *hope* of addressing fear-induced symptomatology through a method of recovering missing links of traumatic experience with appropriately abreacted affect.

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[16] See American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Edition IV, (Washington, D.C., 2000). Today, we would clearly recognize these symptoms as classic for a diagnosis of PTSD: experience of event that induced intense fear, helplessness or horror (A); a re-experience, recurrent and distressing, accompanied by nightmares, flashbacks, exposure to internal/external cues that trigger a physiological reactivity (B); efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the event with an inability to recall aspects of trauma and restricted range of affect (C); hyperarousal expressed through difficulty of falling or staying asleep, irritability/anger, hypervigilance, difficulty concentrating, exaggerated startle response (D); duration longer than one month (E); causing significant distress in social or work life (F) (467-468).

Still prior to *Studies on Hysteria,* Freud's paper, "Hysteria,"[17] outlined some of his more ethical reasoning for addressing hysterical presentations in women. He explicitly references his empathy for women patients suffering from hysteria—maltreated and misdiagnosed—in an effort to justify the import for ongoing research and development of a therapeutic method through clinical trials and treatments:

> The name 'hysteria' originates from the earliest times of medicine and is a precipitate of the prejudice, overcome only in our own days, which links neuroses with diseases of the female sexual apparatus…. The poor hysterics, who in earlier centuries had been burnt or exorcized were only subjected, in recent, enlightened times, to the curse of ridicule; their states were judged unworthy of clinical observation as being simulation and exaggerations. ("Hysteria," 41)

Such a statement clarifies a justice issue and advocates for the rights of women to fair medical treatment and respectful curiosity regarding the presentations of symptomatology heretofore scientifically unstudied.

In the same paper, Freud furthers his proposition that hysteria is a neurosis that is curable. Now, however, it is linked more generally with "conditions of excitability," rather than more specific affects of fear and rage Freud states:

> Hysteria is based wholly and entirely on physiological modifications of the nervous system and its essence should be expressed in a formula… a physio-pathological formula… which has not yet, however, been discovered; we must be content meanwhile to define the neurosis in a purely nosographical fashion by the

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[17] Sigmund Freud, (1888) "Hysteria" in *SE,* Vol. I.

> totality of symptoms occurring in it, in the same sort of way as Graves' disease is characterized by a group of symptoms…. ("Hysteria," 41)

Thus, with a sense of the importance of impartiality, Freud set out to study a certain severity of suffering expressed in people whose gestures of illness were often discounted and cause for (further) abuse. With somewhat of a sense of justice and compassion, therefore, Freud sought to establish a scientific method of inquiry—a pathway for understanding—in order to increase knowledge regarding aetiology and to provide relief from symptomatology. Such an agenda—one of establishing a method based on descriptive observation for the sake of studying trauma-specific and trauma-linked affect—is often under-emphasized in psychohistories of the development of the Freudian project. Freud began his work, learning how to learn about the trauma-specific impact upon the brain and the mapping of traumatic experience through narratives, symptoms, and signs of reminiscences.

Learning How to *Un*learn

On the one hand, Freud expressed empathy for misogynistic treatment of women; on the other hand, he split the difference due to gender in his aetiological formulations that, so biologically-based, can be read as nothing less than reductive of women's experiences of trauma. His early hypothesis emphasized that the difference between male and female hysteria was represented through differing biologically-based signs of sexual expression or repression, taking on different symptomatic forms due to: women's *predispositon*—because of the *slightest aversion* to satisfaction from vaginal orgasm—to bizarre behavior including "boundary ideas"[18] (upon which, psychoanalysis will come to

[18] See Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Fliess, #46" in *SE* Vol. I. Freud describes boundary ideas as unarticulated but full of affect: "On the one hand, it belongs to the ego and on the other hand forms an

be based, as I shall subsequently argue); and men's *predetermination* toward hysterical symptomatology due to ***the woman's predisposition***.[19]

> In concluding remarks of *Studies on Hysteria*, however, Freud confesses:
>
> I cannot imagine bringing myself to delve into the psychical mechanism of a hysteria in anyone who struck me as low-minded and repellent, and who, on closer acquaintance, would not be capable of arousing human sympathy; whereas I can keep the treatment of a diabetic or rheumatic patient apart from personal approval of this kind. The demands made on the patient are not less. The procedure is not applicable at all below a certain level of intelligence, and it is made very much more difficult by any trace of feebleness of mind. The complete consent and complete attention of the patients are needed, but above all their confidence, since the analysis invariably leads to the disclosure of the most intimate and secret psychical events. (*Studies on Hysteria,* 265)

In his process of discovery while working with women patients, there is much Freud will have to overcome, *unlearning* what he so early and so diligently set out to learn and even to conquer.[20] What lies ahead is a **method**, supporting an appreciation that all shall *not* be so easily deciphered, determined, or deconstructed.

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undistorted portion of the traumatic memory… resulting in a compromise formation as a displacement of attention along a series of ideas linked by temporal simultaneity, a *gap* in the psyche."

[19] See Sigmund Freud, "Letter to Fliess, #14" in *SE* Vol. I. For the man, hysteria generally gets referenced as "coitus interruptus," primarily owing to the woman's illness (184). See Sigmund Freud, "Further Remarks on the Neuro-psychoses of Defense" in *SE* Vol. III. He writes, "… a path is laid open to an understanding of why hysteria is far and away more frequent in members of the female sex; for even in childhood they are more liable to provoke sexual attacks" (163).

[20] See Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* in *SE* Vol. II. He uses "conquering" language: "…I have learnt in the course of the analysis to interpret the residual phenomena and to trace their aetiology; and in this way I have secured a firm basis for deciding which of the **weapons in the therapeutic armoury** against the neuroses is indicated in the case concerned" (266, my emphasis).

Freud learned something from all the women written about in *Studies on Hysteria.* Briefly:

- Anna O. dubbed the long sessions of hypnotic utterances as a "talking cure" or "chimney sweeping" (*Studies on Hysteria,* 30);
- Emmy helped him realize the importance of cathexis and the need for further understanding about mixed states of neuroses (*Studies on Hysteria*, 89);
- Lucy helped him learn of his own limited hypnotic powers (*Studies on Hysteria,* 108) and the power of transference-countertransference phenomenal interaction toward abreaction (*Studies on Hysteria,* 117);
- Katharina helped him learn about a period of latency in sexual development, reemerging as associated memories in later understandings of a woman's more mature knowledge (and experience of) sexuality (*Studies on Hysteria*, 133);
- Elisabeth helped him learn about the technique of free association that would clear away psychical material in search of the *gap* of reference between symptoms and buried traumatic memories, creating conversion via symbolization (*Studies on Hysteria*, 152).

Freud and Breuer set out to establish a therapeutic method of practical importance. They thought if they could excavate the hysterical symptoms, linking them to a specific event, they could erase the symptom from the body/person/gesture of the patient. In many ways, such a procedure actually worked. They tried to explain *how* the method worked:

> It brings to an end the operative force of the idea which was not abreacted in the first instance, by allowing its strangulated affect to find a way out through speech;

> and it subjects it to associative correction by introducing it into normal consciousness (under light hypnosis) or by removing it through the physician's suggestion, as is done in somnambulism accompanied by amnesia. (*Studies on Hysteria*, 255)

But since not everyone would/could undergo hypnosis, Freud had to unlearn what he had so carefully attempted to learn and, in the process, he had to reconfigure the diagnosis of hysteria with new divergences of neuroses in general (*Studies on Hysteria*, 256-257). Determining causes, too, were difficult to discover and so he ascertained sexual factors to be the primary relation for the distinguishing clinical presentations of neuroses: "I reflected that it was not right to stamp a neurosis as a whole as hysterical because a few hysterical signs were prominent in its complex of symptoms" (*Studies on Hysteria*, 258). In other words, pure cases of hysteria became less and less obvious. He continues, "I could well understand this practice, since after all hysteria is the oldest, best-known and most striking of the neuroses under consideration; but it was an abuse, for it put down to the account of hysteria so many traits of perversion and degeneracy" (*Studies on Hysteria*, 259). Abuse of the method, the patient, or his own hypothetical stance? I argue Freud's shift of focus was necessitated by a sensitivity to how such *abuse* could alter reality, getting in the way of something more profoundly substantial: an inter-subjective phenomenon that incorporates into respectful consideration all that *boundary ideas* can possibly inform.

Explanation of the Psychoanalytic "How"

As Freud would come to know, taking it symptom by symptom, too, was difficult to treat, administering a technique that was not working. He, nonetheless, attempted to

obtain the pathogenic recollections original to the symptoms: instructing the patient to lie down, close her eyes, concentrate, insisting she overcome ***resistance***:

> A new understanding seemed to open before my eyes when it occurred to me that this must no doubt be the same psychical force that had played a part in the generating of the hysterical symptom and had at that time prevented the pathogenic idea from becoming conscious. What kind of force could one suppose was operative here, and what motive could have put it into operation? (*Studies on Hysteria*, 268-269)

Through his own frustrations with Breuer's method and his own foibles with obstinate patients, he recognized a universal characteristic of such ideas:

> They were all of a distressing nature, calculated to arouse the affects of shame, of self-reproach and of psychical pain, and the feeling of being harmed; they were all of a kind that one would prefer not to have experienced, that one would rather forget. From all this there arose, as it were automatically, the thought of **defence.** (*Studies on Hysteria*, 269)

The realization of the need to interpret resistances and defenses became an integral part of the psychoanalytic method. Unconscious processes at work in the service of the ego censored psychical traces lost to view, yet only evident in the form of repulsion, expulsion, and repression. Freud writes, "Thus a psychical force, aversion on the part of the ego, had originally driven the pathogenic idea out of association and was now opposing its return to memory. The hysterical patient's **not knowing** was in fact a **not wanting to know—**a not wanting which might be to a greater or less extent conscious" (*Studies on Hysteria*, 269-270). In a sense, Freud's own *not knowing* intervened in the

process of the patient's *not wanting to know*, weaving a web of associations in an intersubjective encounter in a verbal and physical *psychical* exchange.

While he may have learned how to learn from Charcot, he learned how *not* to learn from working with these women. There are many poignant examples of the struggles Freud faced—having to give up his former hypothetical stances and techniques—only to find within such a gap of reference a new way of knowing: *not* knowing. Such a revelation is beautifully referenced in a footnote written about an interpretive exchange with Lucy, a woman who could not be cured of loving an obstinate, grief-stricken man. Briefly, in the exchange with Lucy, Freud says:

> "You're afraid of their (the other servants in the house) having some inkling of your hopes and making fun of you."
>
> "Yes, I think that's true."
>
> "But if you knew you loved your employer why didn't you tell me?"
>
> "I didn't know—or rather I didn't want to know. I wanted to drive it out of my head and not think of it again; and I believe latterly I have succeeded." (But, of course, as the analysis proved, this was not true.)
>
> "Why was it that you were unwilling to admit this inclination? Were you ashamed of loving a man?"
>
> "Oh no, I'm not unreasonably prudish. We're not responsible for our feelings, anyhow. It was distressing to me only because he is my employer and I am in his service and live in his house. I don't feel the same complete independence towards him that I could towards anyone else. And then I am only a poor girl and

> he is such a rich man of good family. People would laugh at me if they had any idea of it." (*Studies on Hysteria*, 117)

Together, Lucy and Freud came to realize there is no cure when it comes to something like love. Freud tried. He pressed his hand upon her forehead time and again hoping to help her make associations that would relieve her of her distressing predicament. Alas, he had to admit, "I was not very well satisfied with the results of the treatment: I had removed one symptom only for its place to be taken by another" (*Studies on Hysteria*, 119). Cure eventually came to mean *no* cure. Lucy remained in the presence of the man, in love all the same, yet choosing not to be unhappy with the reality that he could not respond or reciprocate what, in her, was not really so pathological (*Studies on Hysteria*, 121). And this, in a sense, became her cure.

So what did Freud learn here? He learned *how* to appreciate something about love and work as is referenced in the note he placed in between the lines of his dialogue with Lucy:

> I have never managed to give a better description than this of the strange state of mind in which one knows and does not know a thing at the same time. It is clearly impossible to understand it unless one has been in such a state oneself. I myself have had a very remarkable experience of this sort, which is still clearly before me. If I try to recollect what went on in my mind at the time I can get hold of very little. What happened was that I saw something which did not fit in at all with my expectation; yet I did not allow what I saw to disturb my fixed plan in the least, though the perception should have put a stop to it. I was unconscious of any contradiction in this; nor was I aware of my feelings of repulsion, which must

> nevertheless undoubtedly have been responsible for the perception producing no psychical effect. *I was afflicted by that blindness of the seeing eye which is so astonishing in the attitude of mothers to their daughters, husbands to their wives and rulers to their favourites.* (*Studies on Hysteria*, 117, footnote 1, my emphasis)

Perhaps love is *hysterical*, in its own right; all the same, because of his early studies and life's work to bring relief to suffering patients, Freud both learned and *un*learned, formulating a methodological lens into *experience* that, in the analytic end, does not always have to be traumatic. It is important to highlight Freud's own conclusion about what he came to know in such a state of unknowing:

> When I have promised my patients help or improvement by means of a cathartic treatment I have often been faced by this objection: *Why, you tell me yourself that my illness is probably connected with my circumstances and the events of my life. You cannot alter these in any way. How do you propose to help me, then?* And I have been able to make this reply: *No doubt fate would find it easier than I do to relieve you of your illness. But you will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed against that unhappiness.* (*Studies on Hysteria*, 305)

B. "Go to the fwont!"

Freud tells a story, but he also performs a story in his writings. Just as the women helped him discover that the dynamic unconscious is always at play, within his text it becomes apparent that Freud too seeks unconscious relief. Play becomes the sublimation of love in ways that mark an absence, providing an abreaction of affect from the

traumatic rupture where too much consciousness of absence becomes, otherwise, like a dream, as in a fulfillment of a wish. Such is the case, I would suggest, when, speaking like a child, Freud notes his grandson saying, "Go to the fwont!"[21]

As Freud was working through his theory in 1905, connecting jokes with the pure and simple quality of child's play, he was seeking to understand how pleasure can bring relief in the "processes of repetition, rediscovery, and recognition" that he would eventually describe in 1920 as the scene of child's play where the compulsion to repeat becomes the entry into language as a "subject articulates the absence of the other—the mother, but also of itself."[22] I will argue that Freud was working toward a theory of Eros as a drive for (a return to) the relation by way of telling and performing *story*.

While Eros does not "cure" what Thanatos threatens by any means—and this is no laughing matter—what is ultimately at stake in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the very connection between Witz and the psychogenesis of pleasure that must be summoned or harnessed for "relief" beyond resistance, if the unconscious is to survive. In a significant way, Freud references Plato's *Symposium.* Although he does not discuss the text at length, he cites a section of the dialogues—Aristophanes' speech—to stress something about Eros he cannot say, raising a question about the tension between the death drive and the life drive, as one seeks a return or a reunion.

Who Speaks?

Within the larger context of the ancient dialogues of the *Symposium,* of course we know the one who has the most to say is absent, speaking all the same, but not with her

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[21] Sigmund Freud, (1920) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *SE*, Vol. XVIII, 16 (cited in text as *BPP*).

[22] Samuel Weber, "The Joke: Child's Play," 135-136.

own voice. Socrates speaks her speech. Her speech becomes his yet separate from him too. In tandem, then, and with his voice, Socrates and Diotima speak as one. While the speech speaks one thing, the act of Socrates speaking in her behalf and in her absence, playfully speaks another. This, of course, begs the question: *When one of two is absent, how does one speak only as one?*

The question seems pertinent for what is at stake in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, since Freud references Plato's *Symposium* in a significant way, not only textually but also performatively speaking the speech of a child. Clearly, *how* one speaks when someone is missing is important, perhaps even impossible. At the same time, speaking becomes imperative, particularly if the message to be conveyed in one's absence performs something of what absence comes to *mean*. In short, *how* Freud speaks provides something new for psychoanalysis to consider: performance communicates more than what words alone can possibly say, in another's absence.

Reading for the Right Thing

Beyond the Pleasure Principle is one knotty text. In a letter to his friend, Sándor Ferenczi, Freud admits:

> I am writing the essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and, as in all instances, I am hoping for your understanding, which has not yet abandoned me in any situation. In it I am saying many things that are quite unclear, out of which the reader has to make the right thing. Sometimes one can't do otherwise. But I hope you will find something interesting in it. Unfortunately, it is not the same thing as an exchange of ideas face to face.[23]

[23] Sigmund Freud, (1919) "Letter from Sigmund Freud to Sándor Ferenczi, March 31, 1919" in *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi Volume 2, 1914-1919*, Edited by Eva Brabant,

The "many things that are quite unclear" become the knots of the text that lend more to the performance of writing, demanding the readers' participation to make of it "the right thing." Thus, "[making] the right thing" marks a kind of uncertainty about a shift that he cannot so readily name, except by way of metaphor, referencing—as he introduces—the relationship between the death drive and Eros, or the life drive.

In many ways, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the two-faced Janus of his *oeuvre*, as it looks forward while also looking back. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is a *returning* point in Freud's writing insofar as he takes up his initial inquiry into the nature of traumatic experience, examining how what cannot be expressed becomes symptomatic, or even emblematic, as in the case of dreams or play. He makes note of how the "symptomatic picture" of the traumatic war neurosis—which he prompts the reader to think will be the direct object of study—is similar to hysteria but requires a more complex understanding with regards to how "the disturbance of the mental capacities" are related to "fright, fear, and anxiety" (*BPP*, 12). Additionally, however, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is also a *turning* point as it distinguishes a new metaphorical complexity for an emergent anatomical structure in the mind that will become directly linked to the significance of this important text. The link between the drives with language, performances of play, and human relational capacities find a grounding with Freud's discoveries outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in a way that scholars and researchers today still grapple to understand. Freud outlined the edges of what continue to be ongoing conversations and he anticipated the borderlines between

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Ernst Falzeder, and Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch under the supervision of André Haynal. Translated by Peter T. Hoffer (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1993-2000), 340-341.

disciplines, suggesting something new for psychoanalysis to consider for the 21st century: a performative hermeneutic can restore *soul* to human relations where *play* becomes the medium through which Eros privileges presence over absence.

Ernst Jones notes, "It is a little odd that Freud himself never, except in conversation, used for the death instinct the term *Thanatos*, one which has become so popular since. At first he used the terms 'death instinct' and 'destructive instinct' indiscriminately, alternating between them, but in his discussion with Einstein about war he made the distinction that the former is directed against the self and the latter, derived from it, is directed outwards."[24] At the same time as the death instinct is read by many scholars[25] to be the sobering reality that is signified by Freud's temporal *beyond*, Freud's *method* of play at work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* can also be read to signify a return, not to death, but to life. As Cathy Caruth notes in her essay, "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival," regarding a new reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for the necessity of the life drive, "it is only in listening to this second and literarily creative element in Freud's own writing, that the theory of trauma, now so prevalent in numerous disciplines, can extend itself beyond the theory of repetition and

[24] See Ernst Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud (Volume III)*. Edited by Lionel Trilling and Stephen Marcus (New York: Basic Books, 1961), 295. See also, Sigmund Freud, (1933) "Why War?" in *SE*, XXII, 195-216.

[25] For an analysis of sadism in connections of repetition between the phenomenological doctrine of intentionality and object relations theory, see Judith Butler, "The Pleasures of Repetition," in R. A. Glick and S. Bone, *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), 259-275. For an analysis of Freudian drive theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that makes of the death drive the aim of Eros, see Jean Laplanche, "Why the Death Drive?" in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976).

catastrophe, beyond the insight of the death drive, into the insight enigmatically passed on in the new notion of the drive to life" ("Parting Words," 61).[26]

When Survivors Limp

The last lines—"Was man nicht erfliegen kann, muss man erhinken. Die Shrift sagt, es ist keine Sünde zu hinken"—are translated in the final footnote of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as "What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping…. The Book tells us it is no sin to limp" (*BPP*, 64). Eros offers something even more enigmatic than traumatic experience itself. When trauma ruptures, creating consciousness, survivors limp not only toward death but also toward some kind of reunion, best expressed in Freud's use of a story and a style taken from Plato's *Symposium*. Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan surmise "Freud's use of Aristophanes' speech [is] the effective conclusion of or true criterion for understanding his radical revision of his instinct or drive theory (i.e., love and life as opposed to aggression and death) in his pivotal work *Beyond the Pleasure Princicple.*"[27]

The interplay between traumatic rupture and Eros is metaphorically represented via myth, play, and biology. The text as a whole is concerned with the broad themes of 1) the economy of pleasure; 2) the rupture of consciousness; 3) play that evolves from unconscious dynamics; and 4) stories of cathexes. Freud's method employs a way of speaking for another, somehow absent, all the same present in his writing and in play. While his style is not overtly autobiographical, I suggest his methodology introduces a

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[26] Cathy Caruth, "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival" in *Acts of Narrative*, edited by Jacobs and Sussman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003).

[27] Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium* (University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2004), 69, n. 31.

profound structure for thinking critically in multi-disciplinary ways about how intersubjective relationality is essential for the human species.

Freud observed his grandson Ernst at play to stress a fundamental fact: repetition is not without purpose. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in the following sections, Freud's playful performance can become foundational for reading methodologies, particularly when trauma ruptures *un*consciousness and survivors, toward life, limp.

C. The Economy of Pleasure

In the very beginning of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud stresses a homeostatic tendency at work within the human psyche, aligned with the psychoanalytic assumption that "the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle" (*BPP*, 7).[28] As Freud argues, the internal reactions of the mental apparatus to external dangers or to new breaches of consciousness around what was formerly repressed, produce perceptual unpleasure.

Donald Nathanson's essay, "Project for the Study of Emotion," provides an overview of the scientific milieu of Freudian theory. He insists Freud was a product of his day, "steeped in the science of hydraulics" and so he "understood the drives both as some sort of fluid transmitted through invisible pipes and a force akin to electricity [where the] 'energy' that traveled along these conduits was called psychic energy, and those thoughts and memories touched by the drives were said to be 'invested' with this energy."[29] It is no wonder Freud relies upon homeostatic principles to frame the problem he will address

[28] See Ethel Person's forward in *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Edited by R.A. Glick and S. Bone (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) for a concise and accessible history of Freud's shifting thought regarding affects, where she discusses "the psyche's inclination to homeostasis by way of this cyclical buildup and discharge" (x).

[29] Donald Nathanson, "Project for the Study of Emotion," in *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Edited by R.A. Glick and S. Bone (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), 82.

within the text having to do with how the mental apparatus seeks to bind unpleasure to unconsciousness so that the pleasure principle can become modified by the reality principle.

In 1911, Freud wrote the paper "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning"[30] prior to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. This paper was the prerequisite outline for the unconscious mental processes working, accordingly, in responses with the pleasure principle and the reality principle. His point was to map out how such interactions form consciousness. Sensory information from external stimuli—through repetition of the pleasure and reality principles—instigates a functional notation system where memory-traces and thinking processes partially operate. Judgments of what is true or false convert into action or tolerated non-action. Cathectic processes rise to a new level where "verbal residues" mark "ideational presentations" in the "economic expenditures of energy":

> A general tendency of our mental apparatus, which can be traced back to the economic principle of saving expenditure [of energy], seems to find expression in the tenacity with which we hold on to the sources of pleasure at our disposal, and in the difficulty with which we renounce them. With the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This activity is **phantasying**, which begins already in children's play, and later continued as **day-dreaming**, abandons dependence on real objects. ("Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," 222)

[30] Sigmund Freud, (1911) "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" in *SE*, Vol. XII.

Already, in 1911, Freud was linking the pleasure principle with child's play and day-dreaming, studying the unconscious processes that make one available for *not* experiencing reality, such as he discusses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as linked with trauma.

The significance of the *beyond* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has to do with how time and space mark mastery—not of traumatic event or affect—but of a structure where the repetition compulsion enables the mental apparatus to move toward a life drive, by enacting a return to a past time before trauma ruptured conscious experience. Traumata that is re-appropriated through a hyper-cathectic structure of departure-return, reconstitutes a narrative for the self to assimilate into consciousness. Likewise, within an economy of pleasure, a tension occurs between what is conscious and what is unconscious and the difference between the two results in hysterical symptom formations or traumatic neuroses, if not re-appropriated through a binding cathexis. In concluding remarks of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes:

> Our consciousness communicates to us feeling from within not only of pleasure and unpleasure but also of a peculiar tension which in its turn can be either pleasurable or unpleasurable. Should the difference between these feelings enable us to distinguish between bound and unbound processes of energy? Or is the feeling of tension to be related to the absolute magnitude, or perhaps to the level of the cathexis, while the pleasure and unpleasure series indicates a change in the magnitude of the cathexis **within a given unit of time?** (*BPP*, 63)

Thus, in the meta-economy of pleasure that is experienced as "peculiar tension," he proposes "consciousness arises instead of a memory trace" (*BPP*, 25). Inversely, the

unconscious—revealed by memory traces set forth due to "unclaimed experience" [31]—is most active, dominating all events. Therefore, a question naturally follows: What happens when too much consciousness fails to protect against what cannot be forgotten?

D. The Rupture of Consciousness

It is almost impossible to read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* without practicing the tension that comes from having to read and reread Freud's text in a back and forth manner, comparing what he introduces in a later section, revising interpretations of what it seems he says earlier. Just as he suggested to Sándor Ferenczi, the reader will have to make of it the right thing.

While in chapters I and II Freud discusses the problem of the traumatic neurosis creating a "dark and dismal" (*BPP*, 14) dilemma for a person expending excessive amounts of energy, trying to forget an experience of trauma, in chapters IV and V Freud introduces how the general state of flooded consciousness fails to protect against the unconscious or preconscious repressed memories of previous traumas. He stresses that it is inevitably impossible to forget what was never fully experienced in the first instance. With no shield of anxiety in place to anticipate the onrush of stimuli, trauma introduces too much information to process all at once. Under normal circumstances, anxiety generally functions to protect.

Freud admits that chapter IV—where he uses a biological metaphor to explain how consciousness is but a small part of mental functioning—will become the most likely of his thought processes to be dismissed. All the same, he incites the reader's

[31] See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996). Subsequently, I will briefly discuss Caruth's reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for the important departure-return structure she identified, which has currently dominated trauma theory in multidisciplinary contexts.

curiosity by admitting much anxiety, signaling something significant about what it is he is attempting to express. As one quickly discovers, however, chapter IV becomes a significant lens through which chapter II should be read: in light of the biological metaphor, Freud reads into the homeostatic tendencies in Little Ernst's play a preparation through the repetition the child is performing to acquire sufficient anxiety to protect against the trauma of loss. Increasing anxiety through play, in this sense, creates enough unpleasure through repetition to protect against a breach of consciousness where there is too much information to be processed by the human organism in a brief moment of time. Too much consciousness wounds and disables.

He begins chapter IV by claiming that psychoanalysis has as a "point of departure"[32] the idea that consciousness is but a small part of mental functioning and that the unconscious processes reveal memory-traces which are most enduring if *not* experienced consciously. In addition, what we perceive is what constructs consciousness (Pcpt.-Cs) and can be marked in time and space, on the "borderline between outside and inside" (*BPP*, 24) toward the external world, which is, of course, enveloped by other psychical systems such as the immediate social circumstance or civilization as a whole.

He describes the event of trauma as a rupture of consciousness:

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[32] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *SE*, Vol. XVIII. He writes, "Psycho-analytic speculation takes as its point of departure the impression, derived from examining unconscious processes, that consciousness may be, not the most universal attribute of mental processes, but only a particular function of them. Speaking in metapsychological terms, it asserts that consciousness is a function of a particular system which it describes as Cs. What consciousness yields consists essentially of perceptions of excitations coming from the external world and of feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which can only arise from within the mental apparatus; it is therefore possible to assign to the system Pcpt.-Cs. a position in space. It must lie on the borderline between outside and inside; it must be turned towards the external world and must envelop the other psychical systems. It will be seen that there is nothing daringly new in these assumptions; we have merely adopted the views on localization held by cerebral anatomy, which locates the 'seat' of consciousness in the cerebral cortex—the outermost, enveloping layer of the central organ. Cerebral anatomy has no need to consider why, speaking anatomically, consciousness should be lodged on the surface of the brain instead of being safely housed somewhere in its inmost interior. Perhaps we shall be more successful in accounting for this situation in the case of our system Pcpt.-Cs" (24).

> Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. At the same time, the pleasure principle is for the moment put out of action. There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead—the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of. (*BPP*, 29-30)

In the pleasure-unpleasure economy, the human being is likened to a "living vesicle" (*BPP*, 27-28) with a "protective shield" where "*protection against* stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of* stimuli" (*BPP*, 27).

Trauma occurs when excitations are powerful enough to break through the shield. Whereas the pleasure principle functions with a capacity to shield, during a traumatic rupture there can be no cathexis that binds free-floating energy in time or space. The pleasure principle cannot be primary in functioning and so the shield is weakened, failing to protect against large amounts of stimuli breaking through with no possibility to become psychically bound. Thus, the organism is flooded with too much information. Here Freud speaks of the "continuous stream of excitations" (*BPP*, 30) invading the mind with no recourse of reaction.

Freud asks, "How shall we expect the mind to react to this invasion?" (*BPP*, 30) and explains "What *we* (psychoanalysts) seek to understand are the effects produced on the organ of the mind by the breach in the shield against stimuli and by the problems that follow in its train" (*BPP*, 31). At the breach, "cathectic energy is summoned from all

sides," diminishing and impoverishing all other psychical functions, setting up an "anticathexis on a grand scale" (*BPP*, 30). But, since the "purpose of the **reception** of stimuli is to discover the direction and nature of the external stimuli"—so as to sample in small quantities "specimens of the external world" (*BPP*, 27)—what becomes too much for consciousness must be worked out in a more primitive capacity of dreaming.

The primitive capacity of dreaming provides evidence that the compulsion to repeat the trauma reveals that there was *a time before* when dreams were a function of the pleasure principle, acting out the fulfillment of wishes. In the *time before*, like the unicellular organism, we were *learning*, in order to reach a more evolved state where we could come to know our wishes (*BPP*, 34). With trauma, however, such an evolutionary agenda appears to be in retrograde.

E. The Evolving Play of Psychoanalysis

If, for psychoanalysis, our "point of departure" is that consciousness is but a small part of mental functioning, in order to offset the economic tension between unpleasure and pleasure, one must hypercathect: one must attempt a "return" through *play*. As D.W. Winnicott says, "Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. 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."[33] While not so much has been written about Freud at play, there is evidence in this astonishing text that he too was playful.

[33] See D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1982), 38.

As already discussed, Freud sets forth in chapter I of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* how the economic tension exists between unpleasure and pleasure. Subsequently, in chapter II, Freud *plays* with the play of his grandson, observing how the child attempts to master the displeasure that arises from the absence of the father. It is easy to miss Freud saying, "Go to the fwont!" in all the homeostatic vocabulary. Freud himself is at play, repeating what the child, in play, has also repeated, having heard from adults an explanation for why his father is absent. While much has been made, as I shall later discuss, of the same child's earlier play with the words "fort… da" for "gone" and "here," not so much has been written about Freud's observation of aggressive play, in the child's "Go to the fwont!" traumatic expression.

Freud, however, marks the significance of this act of traumatic play in a footnote of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, by linking the child's play to a dream. In the note, Freud references the context of absence, noting the child's despair and, thus, the need *both* for the dream as well as for the game:

> If I am not greatly mistaken, the first dream that I was able to pick up from my grandson, at the age of one year and eight months, revealed a state of affairs in which the dream-work had succeeded in transforming the **material** of the dream-thoughts into a wish-fulfillment, whereas the **affect** belonging to them persisted unchanged during the state of sleep. On the night before the day on which his father was due to leave for the front, the child cried out, sobbing violently: "Daddy! Daddy!—baby!" This can only have meant that Daddy and baby were

> remaining together; whereas the tears recognized the approaching farewell. (*The Interpretation of Dreams,* 461)[34]

The child's "Go to the fwont!" Freud recalls in chapter II is also linked with the past event of separation, which was not the fulfillment of a wish, but an unconscious resolve to remain linked with the real object of the father. The link between the two, represented in Freud's text as a hyphen, unconsciously remains unbroken, although in reality the relation is severed. As Freud notes, indeed the child was in a "passive situation," thereby enacting through a game of repetition, "unpleasurable though it was," an "active part" (*BPP*, 16). The memory trace of this prior departure is reenacted several months later, but it is Freud's read and recall of the child's psychic representations that we really receive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and, thusly, *Freud's own play* we see, concealing a wish.

Between passivity and activity exists the mystery: how can language master, through play, what is too painful to produce for conscious awareness? Furthermore, what memory traces exist in preconscious form that function to mark—in creative acts of narrative or play—what could actually be too much for conscious awareness, thereby threatening a breach that becomes traumatically injurious to the brain? What is Freud trying to tell us when he performs, in writing, a shift from fitful sleep into daytime games enacting defiance? *How* does he count upon the reader to make of all this *the right thing?* When he suggests, as he does on the previous page, that this is "the child's great cultural achievement" (*BPP*, 15), what is he beginning to formulate about the traumatic structure that is, inevitably, a part of the human experience?

The one who is absent is *not* absent from the performance of dreaming, crying out, or missing. One of two always speaks and play is performative of some kind of

[34] Sigmund Freud, (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams* in *SE*, Vol. IV.

return that is always evolving, if not mastering. Against the backdrop of the child's dream—during which he cried out "Daddy! Daddy-baby!"—the child formulates a game that is the game Freud uses to demonstrate the economic factor of producing pleasure in an active part as the child learns to tolerate the absence of his mother as well. Doubling upon the game, Freud also participates in an active part when, soon after the writing of his remembrance of the child's play, he loses *his* child, the original child's mother, his daughter Sophie.

Freud marks the text with a revision of a footnote, indicating he himself seeks relief, returning to this scene of play. Footnote 1 to the text reads, "When this child was five and three-quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really 'gone' ('o-o-o'), the little boy showed no signs of grief" (*BPP*, 16). Following my argument, it is significant to note Freud's insertion of 'o-o-o' as if it, now, were his own expression. It is no coincidence that playing with the child's play functions within the text to perform more than what Freud can write. All the same, he is creating a marker within the text for a breach of consciousness where repetitions of words around non-words like, "o-o-o," express a cathexis which functions as a *return* to a time before, if not a *reunion*. Too much consciousness of absence makes for a breach of consciousness where no hypercathexis can protect.

Therefore, as Freud shifts into speaking about the "normal" activities of children at play, he is making a turn from the "dark and dismal subject of the traumatic neurosis" (*BPP*, 14) but—as chapter IV helps articulate—perhaps, he also really is not. Indeed, Freud's "great cultural achievement" here and in chapter IV helps to clarify what it is that

is “achieved” in a way that helps to introduce how it is Eros will always attempt to mitigate the death instinct (Thanatos), as Freud will introduce in chapter VI.

Playing *Fort/Da*

As we read in the opening lines of chapter I, Freud focuses on the economic factor as motive with regards to producing a yield of pleasure. He describes the scene of “a little boy of one and a half” who “invented by himself” a “first game” that intrigued Freud as being a “puzzling activity” (*BPP*, 14). Freud notes that this “good boy… never cried when his mother left him for a few hours” although he was “greatly attached” to his mother, as she breastfed him and cared for him “without any outside help” (*BPP*, 14).

Freud’s turn in the text, describing “normal” play, is intriguing: “This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking many small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business” (*BPP*, 14). Apparently, Freud was highly attuned to the boy, noticing the “few comprehensible words” the boy could utter and learning how to interpret the “number of sounds which expressed a meaning intelligible to those around him” (*BPP*, 14). A “loud, long-drawn-out ‘o-o-o-o’” linked with “an expression of interest and satisfaction” came to represent to “his mother and the writer of the present account” the word *fort*, meaning, “gone” (*BPP*, 14-15).

Like the link of “Daddy! Daddy!—baby!” the link between “mother and the writer” expresses a *fort* that Freud’s text also represents, inversely, as the writing of the words produce a palimpsest, where the reality principle must modify the pleasure of reproducing a shared interpretation, since Freud’s daughter, Sophie—the mother of the

child—was, at the time of Freud's revisiting this writing, deceased. Remembering the scene produces a peculiar tension at play between the unpleasure of loss and the pleasure of recall, modified by the reality of thinking and writing about play. For the child, and also for Freud, too much consciousness of absence produces an absence of self too unless a phantasy or narrative can help to bind the unpleasure to the unconscious, so that the self, indeed—as an active agent—can return from what is too much both to forget as well as too much to experience in any given time and space of consciousness.

The "joyful '*da*' ['there']" produced greater pleasure, of course, as the child discovered the toy, the mother, or himself and this, Freud says, is the "great cultural achievement" as it becomes a renunciation of instinctual satisfaction. Freud describes the return: "Then one day the child had a toy attached by a string and, instead of pulling it behind himself; he continued the *fort* game, tossing it off while holding onto the string; completing the game by hailing its reappearance, saying '*da'* [there]. There was no doubt, the greater pleasure was attached to the second act" (*BPP*, 15).

Upon such an achievement, Freud suggests, civilization is built. Instinctual pleasure, through the play of repetition, compensates the *discontents* that go along with the ruptures of relationality that can become all too traumatic. For, the "true purpose of the game" is to enact the necessary unpleasure of departure that becomes preliminary to the joyful return. Just as the child could not have possibly "felt his mother's departure as something agreeable or even indifferent"— playing *fort* more frequently than *da*—Freud notes in chapter IV "the difference between systems that are unprepared and systems that are well prepared through being hypercathected may be a decisive factor in determining

the outcome" (*BPP*, 32). Where the "strength of a trauma exceeds a certain limit," however, "this factor will no doubt cease to carry weight" (*BPP*, 32).

The aim of playing *fort*, in this case, is to hypercathect. Like the traumatic dream returning a patient suffering from a traumatic neurosis back into the situation in which the trauma occurred with regularity, the child's game endeavors "to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission" (*BPP*, 32) was felt to be the cause of the trauma. In the child's case, it is the trauma of disappearance—without the chance to make as lasting the dyadic link between parent-child—that returns the child beyond the peculiar tension of unpleasure in the real context of too much absence. Rereading chapter II where Freud plays with the play of his grandson through the lens of chapter IV which emphasizes that "*protection against* stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of* stimuli" (*BPP*, 30) makes it possible to see how the *fort-da* structure is both game *and* trauma reenacted. In such an economy of play, the child (or Freud) masters through the compulsion to repeat a return to the pleasure principle which functions to bind unpleasure to unconsciousness. Playing (and playing with playing) works to avoid the dissatisfaction that occurs when it seems as if the aim of one's instinctual satisfaction shall never be fulfilled.

Fortifying Against *Not* Returning

The difference, of course, is that the dreamer is in a passive situation, whereas the player, in playing, becomes a more active subject. If dreams are supposed to be functioning in order to fulfill a wish, play functions likewise, returning one to the possibility that the mind will be ready, not for loss (or absence, *fort*) experienced as

unpleasure, but for gain that is, indeed, most pleasurably experienced as return (or presence, *da*).

If there is a theory of play at work within Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I would suggest it has to do with how repetition of saying or writing something like "Go to the fwont!" is also a conscious command with unconscious motives. In order to fortify the protective shield against the reality that the father is *not* returning—i.e., that he *is* absent—the aggressive command is a hypercathexis which is both evolutionary play as well as playing that creates evolved outcomes. Perhaps this is what *Freud* is suggesting when, in chapter IV, he writes "In the case of children's play we seemed to see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing the mastery they are in search of" (*BPP*, 35). As Freud observes,

> [C]hildren will never tire of asking an adult to repeat a game that he has shown them or played with them, till he is too exhausted to go on. And if a child has been told a nice story, he will insist on hearing it over and over again rather than a new one; and he will remorselessly stipulate that the repetition shall be an identical one and will correct any alterations of which the narrator may be guilty—though they may actually have been made in the hope of gaining fresh approval. (*BPP*, 35)

Freud's descriptive writing plays with the insistence he observed in the child's play to experience redundancy.

The "Go to the fwont!" context is also linked with the fort-da game, as an evolved form. For now, it is the object of the *toy*—not the father, not the self, not even the link

between the two—that becomes cathected with the affect of anger. As Freud interprets, the more passive and internalized affect while playing *fort* could have meant—with more subdued defiance—something like "All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself." As Freud plays with this interpretation, he supports it with the more evolved game, noting, "A year later, the same boy whom I had observed at his first game used to take a toy, if he was angry with it, and throw it on the floor, exclaiming: 'Go to the fwont!'" (*BPP*, 16). It is a way of returning the father to himself, or returning the link of *Daddy-baby*, acknowledging an absence that is too powerful to forget, yet also not powerful enough to produce a real return.

Could it be that what is needed from the interplay of affect and cognition is an appreciation for *how* language or physical expressions—particularly evolved from play—have, as an end result, the capacity to fortify the instincts in a hypercathected story for functioning? In other words, "Go to the fwont!" is Freud's way, too, of calling forth how "a yield of pleasure… [can] be undertaken by some system of aesthetics with an economic approach to its subject-matter" (*BPP*, 17).

F. Stories of Cathexes

Perhaps one of the most impressive readings of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* appears in the work of Cathy Caruth, whose literary analysis of Freud's writing identified an important "departure-return" structure that has spawned critical interdisciplinary dialogues regarding "Trauma Theory." Her initial reading in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* identified the child's game as symbolizing a pattern of departure and return which resonates "not only because the child's play does or does not provide evidence of repetition compulsion" but because, as a structural pattern, it "brings

into prominent view a larger conception of historical experience, a conception Freud was grappling with and trying to bring into focus in the writing of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 66).

Caruth identifies in the writings she reads the impact of the event as an enigmatic representation where "what returns to haunt the victim… is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 6). So, the game becomes emblematic of departure with the return being one to the future in which one has to face the historical and urgent question as it emerges from the core of the trauma narrative: "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 7).

The double telling is an oscillation between the "crisis of death" and "the crisis of life" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 7). Listening to the voice of another or reading the words of a writer demands an attention to the task of witnessing where we as listeners and readers awaken to discover "the silence of [trauma's] mute repetition of suffering" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 9). Furthermore, since she reads Freud as saying that trauma is not experienced directly, "the problem of survival, in trauma, thus emerges specifically as the question: What does it mean for *consciousness* to survive?" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 61).

What occurs is a "break in the mind's experience of time" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 61) when trauma presents what is *like* a bodily threat: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (*Unclaimed Experience*, 7). She suggests, at the heart of Freud's death drive, is the awakening that occurs to the incomprehensibility of survival. The origin of the death

drive is at the heart of having passed beyond death, unknowingly, and without mastery. If there is a correct reading of Caruth's reading of Freud's reading—another palimpsest—it would involve a disturbing recognition that the incomprehensibility at the heart of the awakening produces too much consciousness for functionality.

When One-of-Two Speaks

In "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival," an important shift occurs in Caruth's thinking. She makes of Freud's observation of the child's game that "the repetitive game, as a story, thus seems to represent the inner symbolic world of the child: as a story of departure and return, the game seems not only symbolically to fulfill a wish by telling the story of the mother's departure as the story of her return, but also to substitute, for the pain of loss, the *very pleasure of creation itself*" ("Parting Words," 48, my emphasis).[35]

Her re-reading of Freud here discovers something new, just as Freud does too in ways more difficult to read as he performs what he cannot speak, himself. Having recognized within the Freudian text a story structure, Caruth introduces a contemporary story of trauma and survival, where departure-return can be read, shedding insight into *the very pleasure of creation itself.* For here the significance of the life drive produces a homeostasis and therefore, a turn, in the act of creative substitution.

Caruth asks a new and important question: "What is the language of the life drive?" ("Parting Words," 54). In "Parting Words," she makes a shift within her reading to accommodate the change brought to a mother who encounters a child, after the trauma of losing his best friend (her son). Caruth tells the story of Gregory, returning to his best

[35] Cathy Caruth, "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival" in *Acts of Narrative*, Edited by C. Jacobs and H. Sussman (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003), 47-61.

friend's room to speak to the deceased, Khalil, who was stabbed as an innocent victim of gang violence. Gregory attempts to speak to Khalil as if he were still alive. The mother of the dead boy intervened, noticing an important part of what it means to *limp* toward life, after having experienced the tragic death of her own child. To Gregory, Bernadette began to listen.

Caruth reads the narrative that comes out of the intersubjective relationship between the dead child's mother and his best friend. Caruth notices that Gregory was linking himself with his dead friend in a complex process, both needing a way to memorialize Khalil and also to separate from him, beyond a wounded heart. Caruth's reading of the narrative identifies two comments Gregory makes, where it would seem Gregory's life was now linked with Khalil's death. As Gregory comments that his friend "had a good heart," he also understands his own experience of Khalil's death: "[It is like] somebody is actually pulling your heart out… repeatedly stabbing it." Caruth observes, "The dead Khalil's life and Greg's survival of it are tied around a heart that they share and that has now been removed" ("Parting Words," 53-54).

Interestingly, it is at this juncture in her own text that Caruth begins to shift her referral of Gregory to "Greg," thus signifying a push she sees him trying to make within language toward a "beyond" where the life drive moves one into a recognition of death. Greg speaks "parting words" ("Parting Words," 55) as one of two attempting to speak. The past and the future collide in one present moment. *How will consciousness survive?*

The turn comes at a juncture where *difference* is acknowledged: difference between life and death, here and gone, then and now: life here now. No manner of textualization or interpretation substitutes for the creative act where play says what one

cannot say and, perhaps, that is the point within evolved creative acts of substitution: consciousness is preserved by remembering to forget.

Caruth rereads Freud's "oscillation in his understanding of the child's game" saying:

> As Freud's interpretation passes from the *fort* to the narrative of *fort and da,* and back again to the *fort,* Freud shows himself as struggling in the face of a child whose language, in its shifting meaning for Freud, first brings him nearer and then distances him in Freud's understanding…. Paradoxically, then, it will be in his repetition of the child's distance, in his distancing of the child at the moment of his failed comprehension of the game, that Freud's own text will connect with, and transmit, the story the child cannot quite tell. ("Parting Words," 59)

In place of the *fort,* there is a "stammering word" ("Parting Words," 55) creating a new direction for life, "*beyond the story*" into a "human history" ("Parting Words," 60) where survival becomes the aim for any kind of future. As Caruth notes in her final comments: "[It is]… through the creative transformation of this stammer into a new language of psychoanalysis—not only the language of departure,… but the very future language of psychoanalysis itself,… for example, around the individual's capacity for play—that the possibilities of Freud's not yet articulated insight are handed over to us" ("Parting Words," 61).

What is *not yet articulated* is the future where survival exceeds survival, returning one always to the myth of the two. And this is the story *Freud* retells in *his* conclusion.

G. Conclusion: Eros Holds All Living Things Together

As Freud ultimately concludes, "the pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts" (*BPP*, 63); but, this would seem to be a far cry from an earlier statement in which he acknowledges that "[Eros] holds all living things together" (*BPP*, 50). I surmise that such a conclusion is both about psychoanalytically-oriented science as much as it is about the human being seeking some sort of restoration or transformation—*beyond* what might actually be possible—particularly if there has been some sort of rupture via traumatic experience. Indeed, Freud seems to suggest, every human being primordially experiences trauma; it is just that there are those people so traumatized by *event* as to be reminded of the reality that there is no departure from an all too real rupture and, henceforth, it is possible there shall be no return that can ultimately be reparative.

But Freud builds upon the sexual/life instinct, employing a metaphorical analysis via biology and then also myth, correlating multi-cellular versus uni-cellular existence with individual people thriving amidst community. Life instincts, libido, take others as objects, neutralizing death instincts. "In this way," he says, "the libido of our sexual instincts… coincide with the Eros of the poets and philosophers which hold all living things together" (*BPP*, 50).

Freud moves toward the determination that ego instincts have libidinal components and so his hypothesis that the origin of instincts can be traced back to "a need to restore an earlier state of things" (*BPP*, 57) becomes reminiscent of the earlier *beyond* referenced by and repeated in the traumatic dream and the circuitous route by which we return from that which we can never depart. So, he calls upon a myth to say

something metaphorically, because what follows provides meaning about absence in a way that science cannot articulate:

> **The original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two…**. Everything about these primaeval men was double: they had four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually Zeus decided to cut these men in two, **like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling.** After the division had been made, **the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one.** (*BPP*, 57-58)

His use of Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* performs his point: figurative language shall forever be employed toward any kind of discussion seeking scientific impartiality (*BPP*, 72-73) regarding matters of "ultimate things, the great problems of life and science" (*BPP*, 71-72).

Between life and death, all manner of phenomena hangs in the balance where language *stammers* to say what cannot fully be understood, except that for every speaker, one's absence is always present. Any kind of reading/ listening/ or teaching methodology that takes to heart the insight of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* must hold within the economic tension the pleasure-unpleasure of what something like *playing* can only creatively seek to accomplish.

Chapter 2

The *Symposium's* Conundrum: "What is (the truth about) love?"

Myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him.[36]

-Claude Lévi-Strauss

Does not Eros strive to convert the reality principle also, just as it transformed the pleasure principle?[37]

-Paul Ricœur

The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.[38]

-Hans-Georg Gadamer

A. Introduction: Eros Befuddles

Sigmund Freud references Aristophanes' myth from Plato's *Symposium* to explicate a problem: the life drive is an instinct toward relations that are both *here* and *gone*. Eros is figured into Freudian psychoanalysis at crucial points within *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but also in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud's repetition of referencing the myth of the soulmates creates a conundrum where myth, love, and play intersect and intervene in dialectical tension toward a new hermeneutic. What is, then, this new hermeneutic? Freud does not—and, perhaps, cannot—say.

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[36] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).

[37] Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, translated by Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970), 337.

[38] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2000, orig. pub. 1960), 103.

Jonathon Lear notes an absence in Freud's writing about Eros in general in a way that makes one wonder if there is something profound in Freudian theory about absence, specifically. Lear reads Plato's emphasis on absence throughout the speeches of the *Symposium*, but he more specifically focuses upon Freud's connections with Plato's text, wondering what Freud was up to most basically, relying upon Plato to say what it seems cannot, by psychoanalysis, be spoken. In *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul*, Lear writes:

> Although [Freud] places Eros at the center of psychoanalytic theory, he says remarkably little about it. Of course, he speculates grandly: he introduces Eros as one of two cosmic principles which, together, make the world go round. In the realm of the human psyche, Eros and the death drive are the basic drives which, in complex particular forms, account for all neurotic conflict. Eros itself is ultimately responsible for human development. But grand speculation masks an inner emptiness. We lack an understanding of what Eros is. Eros has, as it were, been introduced into psychoanalysis without an introduction.[39]

Freud is in good company if he cannot say more about Eros. In *not* saying, he positions himself in an ongoing symposium where, at the most basic level, only one question emerges: *What is (the truth about) love?*

B. An Ongoing Symposium

Perhaps Plato's *Symposium*[40] is the greatest text on the subject of love—playfully resounding various themes and perspectives—as Eros is discussed in the round, in an

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[39] Jonathan Lear, *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 124.

[40] Plato, *The Symposium*, translated by Christopher Gill (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

effort to give Eros due praise as "he is such an ancient and important god" (177b). The speeches do not answer a question other than the rhetorical question Eryximachus repeats, quoting how Phaedrus observes and complains: "Isn't it terrible, Eryximachus, ... that the poets have composed hymns and paeans to other gods, but none of them has ever composed a eulogy of Love?" (177a-b) The original symposium, therefore, ensues in an effort to meet a challenge rather than in an effort to answer a question. Nevertheless, as the speeches each seek to address ongoing assumptions about more primitive original questions, Eros—even if exempt from supplying answers—inspires ongoing dialogue. Such a phenomenon is not to be taken too lightly.

Appropriately, for readers in this 21st century still grappling with what can become significant about a Freudian legacy, Christopher Gill asks if the *Symposium* is about love or desire.[41] Whether being about one more than the other, clearly the *Symposium* addresses something of the nature of both love and desire in ways that complicate the Freudian references to Aristophanes' myth, deepening the ongoing dialogues within academic discourses relying upon psychoanalysis as to whether or not relational dynamics restore love to more ethical stances in both theory and practice. In posing his question, Gill poignantly identifies that an even more fundamental question—such as the one I am suggesting: *What is (the truth about) Love?*—seeks a dialectic, if not a privileged place of a new hermeneutic that becomes thematic across the disciplines.

The *Symposium* is, as Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glozov-Corrigan recognize, a performative-inquiry where "Plato's dialectic is not only argument; it is also *play*"

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[41] See Christopher Gill, "Introduction" in Plato, *The Symposium*, x.

(*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 2, my emphasis).[42] The speeches are framed within the telling of a story, retold from yet another telling of the story from the memory of one who had been present, years before, at the original event. Three generations removed, the text exists, claiming homage to an oral tradition put to print by another retelling as well as a translation of the ancient, original writing about the more ancient original event. To say that the text is a *dialogue* is to forget the profound implications, framed through retellings: indeed, across time and space, the symposium of the *Symposium* effectually continues, jump-started from the original symposium's playful form.

Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan make the point that the frame inspires more questions than the even *more* original *missing* question—prior to Eryximachus rhetorical question—could possibly provoke:

> The *Symposium* casts us literally into the middle of things, for it starts with an answer to a question that is yet to be posed: 'I think I am not unpracticed [*ameletêtos*] in what you ask about,' [says Apollodorus]. So we seek the question and its context prompted by the answer. But the question turns out to be no simple affair, for its unfolding ultimately brings into play, and calls into question, some of the major issues of Platonic philosophy: the relation between 'fact' and 'fiction'; the problem of what is 'true' in narrative, rhetoric, and philosophy; the nature of the good and the beautiful; the puzzle of the relation between soul, body, and love; the question of form and identity; and ultimately, the problem of the nature and scope of art. But we start at least in between an answer and its required

[42] Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2004).

> question, even if in a sense we never get to the end of the question we are seeking." (*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 7)

Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan recognize the radical impact the *Symposium* introduces for literature as, for the first time, a new genre emerges which is "*conscious* of its function as an image, as of its special representative powers, and of its *difference* from all other literary and rhetorical genres" (*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 196). Philosophical thought becomes "living speech and character in an open-ended, inconclusive way" overcoming "distance of heroic events into the intimate proximity of everyday conversation" so that readers across time and space are continually included (*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 196).

Very basically, Freud relies upon Aristophanes' myth to say something about the life drive that he himself, over time, can only perform by repeated references. Progressively reading the three textual moments in context, therefore, (re)produces the central problem human relations pose for psychoanalytic theorizing, just as Jay Greenburg and Stephen Mitchell have noted with their pertinent question: "Why does the clinical centrality of relations with others pose a problem for psychoanalytic theorizing?"[43]

Reading Hans Loewald for Freud's missing introduction to Eros, Lear finds a body of psychoanalytic work which concentrates on the erotic, as Leowald understood Freud's genuine innovation in his later theorizing to be about introducing Eros as the life drive at work in therapeutic relations. "There would be no reason to conceptualize the death drive as a drive if it were posited merely to account for a certain entropic

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[43] Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983), 3.

tendency," deduces Lear, based upon Leowald (*Open Minded*, 143). Lear continues, "In the absence of Eros, we have tragedy…. In the presence of Eros, we have the permanent possibility of comic restoration…. The death drive was 'nothing new.' But perhaps we now need something new which will serve as a genuine complement to Eros" (*Open Minded*, 146-147).

Perhaps Freud suggested—by observing and commenting upon the symptomatic behaviors of his grandson—that the complement to love is *play*. As I will subsequently argue, via repetitive and progressive references to Aristophanes' myth, Freud understood the dialectic of tragedy and comedy at work within the story of the soulmates seeking a return to love so that something of the self can be restored. However, as Aristophanes' myth is reinterpreted by Socrates-Diotima, it is astonishing to consider that his reliance upon the myth—as ludicrous as even Aristophanes figured it to be—*was Freud's play* at bridging the impossible gap between the life and death drives with something as instinctual as child's play, dreams of love, or myths of origins: all of which function, economically, within a psychic system to make sense of what, otherwise, makes no sense.

If Lear is correct in identifying that there is something significant about absence in Freudian theory, perhaps the hermeneutic created for love's return is based upon the desire expressed whenever one-of-two attempts to speak, as I argue is always the case whenever speech becomes event. *Absence* creates consciousness in a way that becomes traumatic when indeed the person has been absent from his or her own experience as an issue of temporality, in a way such that trauma theorists contend; yet absence becomes presence whenever a recognition occurs in such acts as play or identification with myth

toward meaning so that love becomes more than desire, producing performances which convert reality, restoring something of the self in a new hermeneutical move.

First, speaking as one in the absence of another performs more than what speech connotes. And now secondly, stories of origins or myths of meaning perform moments of inexplicable absence where, perhaps, order or meaning would otherwise fail to exist. Suffice it to say that towards the second assertion Freud relies upon the myth—which is a tale about the ancient origins of love and desire—to say what he cannot say. Using the myth, Freud builds new theoretical fodder for psychoanalysis to consider at the same time as he rewrites what he has already written. With *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as one of Freud's early collaborators commented, "This is putting dynamite to the house; but, Freud knows what he does"[44] acknowledging the turning point in Freudian theory to make of Eros and Thanatos a dialectic beyond anything scientific inquiry can fully acknowledge, divorced from studies of literature and art (and even play) as representative of human experience. Indeed, the difference his reliance upon the myth makes strikes at the very heart of controversies which began after his death and continue on into this day.[45]

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[44] See Melanie Klein's comments during the "Second Extraordinary Business Meeting" of March 11th, 1942 as she seconds Dr. Winnicott's resolution which seeks to reaffirm that "The aim of the Association is the cultivation and furtherance of the psychoanalytical branch of science founded by Freud, both as pure psychology and in its applications to medicine and the mental sciences: further, the mutual support of the members in all endeavours to acquire and disseminate psychoanalytical knowledge." Klein states, "More than once Freud found himself confronted with the problem that a new piece of work did not altogether tally with, or that it even contradicted, his earlier findings; and it seemed as if one of his greatest discoveries might burst the frame which encompassed the work hitherto developed. The sequence of books which was inaugurated by his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* revolutionized psychoanalysis and seemed to shake its foundations. At the time of its publication, one of Freud's early collaborators, Dr Eitingon, said to me: 'This is putting dynamite to the house; but,' he added, 'Freud knows what he does.'" Pearl King and Riccardo Steiner, *The Freud-Klein Controversies, 1941-1945* (London: Tavistock, 1991), 89-90.

[45] See King and Steiner's work for transcripts, papers, letters and analysis of the controversies between the Anna Freud circles and the Melanie Klein circles with regards to whether or not Klein's work—somewhat based upon her understanding of Freud's significant turn with *Beyond the Pleasure*

Aristophanes' myth, Plato's *Symposium* about love, and child's play figure into the traumatic neurosis in ways over which theory and practice continue to be baffled. Therefore, across the disciplines of the Humanities regarding love… still, there is much to be spoken. Philosophy offers a conundrum of great value, leading the way with ancient literary texts such as Plato's *Symposium*, complicating what we think we know, presenting encouragement for ongoing explorations in the studies of myth, love, and play.

What is at stake here within such dialectical and dialogical tension is the interpretative methodology for the very question Gill posed regarding the difference between interpersonal love and human desire/ motivation. So the question I pose—*What is (the truth about) love?—is* the question for the ongoing symposium Freud helps us continue, superimposed upon the original symposium, handed down to us through Plato's *Symposium*. It is the question, I propose, that is at the heart of the very active, ongoing discussion which sparks controversy and debate among analytic interpreters of Freud's primary texts, continuing on today as interpreters from disciplines of the sciences and humanities conduct (continuing) symposia, often without realizing how deeply indebted to Freud's theory and method they just might be.

C. When One-of-Two Speaks: Eros as Hermeneutic

"[You're] making me watch out for jokes in your speech," (189b) says Eryximachus to Aristophanes in the interchange after and before their respective speeches. Indeed, Eryximachus stepped in to speak prior just as Aristophanes was overtaken by hiccups and missed his turn. Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan read the interactions between the speeches, suggesting that disorder is introduced into the

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Principle—was either a development of Freudian theory or divergent from Freudian theory. Pearl King and Riccardo Steiner, *The Freud-Klein Controversies, 1941-1945.*

proceedings as Aristophanes hiccups and Eryximachus (ironically and comically meaning "the hiccup fighter") takes Aristophanes' place in the order. Eryximachus emphasizes the precision of science while Aristophanes demonstrates creativity aroused by disruption (*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 62-63). Aristophanes regains bodily control with the "sneeze-treatment" as the **not**-so-well-ordered body—jokes Aristophanes in reference to Eryximachus' speech—seems to want "the kind of noises and tickles that make up a sneeze" (189a). Directed by a typically playful Muse, Aristophanes suspects he is bound to say something as noisy and ticklish as his body performed; he is bound to say something more, he fears, that could even be received as "ludicrous" (189b), with an important emphasis on the *ludic*, hinting what follows is a performance that is full of play.

He continues the symposium with his disruptive approach, saying, "I think people have wholly failed to recognize the power of Love; … He [Eros] loves human beings more than any other god; he is their helper and the doctor of those sicknesses whose cure constitutes the greatest happiness for the human race" (189c). Aristophanes continues, saying the "ludicrous" thing about the nature of the human being. First, genders were originally triadic, not dualistic:

> For one thing, there were three human genders, not just the present two, male and female. There was also a third one, a combination of these two; now its name survives, although the gender has vanished. Then "androgynous" was a distinct gender as well as a name, combining male and female; now nothing is left but the name, which is used as an insult. (189d-e)

Secondly, the shape of each was circular, not split:

> For another thing, the shape of each human being was a rounded whole, with back and sides forming a circle. (189e)

Thirdly, the origin of each gender was cosmic, not genetic:

> The reason why there were these three genders, and why they were as described, is that the parent of the male gender was originally the sun, that of the female gender the earth, that of the combined gender the moon, because the moon is a combination of sun and earth. They were round, and so was the way they moved, because they took after their parents. (190b)

Lastly and more implicitly, human nature evolved by myth and its meaning and not by tragedy alone. However, according to the myth, many died in tragic pursuit of love's reunion:

> Since their original nature had been cut in two, each one longed for its own other half and stayed with it. They threw their arms round each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to form a single living thing. So they died from hunger and from general inactivity, because they didn't want to do anything apart from each other…. [They] kept on dying in this way. (191a-b)

Finally, the plastic surgeon-like gods got it right, "[by moving] the genitals round to the front [so that they were] in this way made [to] reproduce in each other, by means of the male acting inside the female" (191c).

Aristophanes' speech involves a storytelling practice where myth explains as it also shapes certain conclusions that can only follow. Aristophanes explains the nature of the problem desire poses and love inspires:

> That's how, long ago, the *innate desire* of human beings for each other started. It draws the two halves of our original nature back together and tries to make one out of two and to heal the wound in human nature. Each of us is a matching half of a human being, because we've been cut in half like flatfish, making two out of one, and each of us is looking for his own matching half. (191d, my emphasis)

According to Aristophanes, and also to Freud, human beings need one another in order to restore the wholeness we constantly feel to be missing. While such a statement is not so radical to make, it is nevertheless poignant and not to be underemphasized particularly by 21st century readers of Freud, especially since Aristophanes' myth is more central to his thought than subsequent interpreters of Freud have acknowledged.

But, back to the story; as the evening progressed it came time for Socrates to give his speech. Instead of a eulogy to Love, however, Socrates begins with "I am prepared to tell the truth… the truth about Love," (199a-b) because eulogies only "give the appearance of praising Love" (198e) without actually doing so. It is important for my argument to note that his speech is not his own. Based either in fact or fiction, Socrates begins to convey all he had earlier learned from Diotima, a woman from Mantinea, who was wise about the ways and mysteries of Love (201d). Speaking *on behalf* of Diotima, it comes to seem as if the two *join* in a linguistic performance, saying as much or more than can be said as their speech elides the other within the dialectic, performing something of the significance that absence comes to mean.

When Socrates speaks—"'The idea has been put forward,' she said, 'that lovers are people who are looking for their own other halves,'" —he is performing the myth of the union as much as he is staging the meaning of what cannot be spoken by speaking all

the same, *in her absence*. And, s/he continues, "'But my view is that love is directed neither at their half nor their whole unless, my friend, that turns out to be good'" (205d-e).

Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan argue that the *Symposium* can be read together with the *Republic* (Plato, 6-7) in a way that contextualizes how the "good" is "present" as the afterimage of the good through pun (meaning, Diotima's speech, in her absence) and in the shadows of what we expect to see. "We *expect* the 'good,' but the really significant feature of the *Symposium* is finally its 'absence'" (*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 157-158). Socrates—having been addressed himself by Diotima—addresses Aristophanes, playing upon the pun of the two halves in union at the same time as s/he speaks of what—in the "good"—is between Love and something else that the "good" comes to describe or, at least, to represent. Socrates speaks, but he speaks as one-of-two:

> "'Haven't you realized that there's something between wisdom and ignorance?'"
>
> "'What is it?'"
>
> "'It's having right opinions without being able to give reasons for having them. Don't you realize that this isn't knowing, because you don't have knowledge unless you can give reasons; but it isn't ignorance either, because ignorance has no contact with the truth? Right opinion, of course, has this kind of status, falling between understanding and ignorance.'" (202a)

Based upon the performance of the kind of tragic-comic trajectory something like Aristophanes' myth comes to mean, Gill observes, "One of the key questions raised by the *Symposium* is whether Socrates' speech is about interpersonal love or about human desire and motivation in general" (xi). It is an observation I think Freud also makes about

the nature of Love (Eros) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* particularly as he relies upon Aristophanes' myth—not only here but also in two other places—articulating a central problem for psychoanalysis. It is as if Socrates' speech—in all its ambiguity as Gill observes—becomes Freud's speech, particularly when in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he introduces Thanatos in integral relation with Eros to say something he cannot say except by way of myth with a metaphorical meaning that addresses an *innate desire* Freud, too, cannot so thoroughly explain.

According to James Strachey's footnote, Freud's first published appearance of the term "death instinct" is in the passage below, where it is connected with the life instinct which we submit to the Sublime Necessity when—having given up the importance of the compulsion to repeat—we die of internal causes. Freud writes,

> But what is the important event in the development of living substance which is being repeated in sexual reproduction, or in its fore-runner, the conjugation of two protista? We cannot say; and we should consequently feel relieved if the whole structure of our argument turned out to be mistaken. The opposition between the ego or death instincts and the sexual or life instincts would then cease to hold and the compulsion to repeat would no longer possess the importance we have ascribed to it. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 44)

A few paragraphs later, Freud writes, "Dealing not with the living substance but with the forces operating in it, [we] have been led to distinguish two kinds of instincts: those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 46). Freud's references to Aristophanes' myth set up a problem which Gill partially

elucidates about Socrates' speech: the ambiguity between interpersonal love and human desire/ motivation marks the split between the object from the aim and so the *relation* is either a return to a former state of non-existence (in death) or a reunion likened to a former life-supporting connection (in love).

Arguably, Seth Benardete discusses Diotima's "ladder of ascent" as linked most directly with Aristophanes' myth, suggesting that Socrates-Diotima reinterpret(s) Aristophanes in two crucial ways. First, as Benardete suggests, Aristophanes also argues that desire for one's self in/ with one's "other half" is impossible and Diotima furthers the argument by saying that desire continues to produce such an illusion of finding the self in relation with the other by positing that that union is always a dilution of the self in the other. Benardete comments, "This other represents the beautiful, in which the eternity of the beautiful and the eternity of the self are mutually annihilated in the birth of an illusory self" (195).[46] The ladder of ascent overcomes love's dilution since, on the lowest level, mortal offspring result from desire's union, followed by the next level where speech as event embodies both the lover and the beloved, so that, at the highest level of ascent, poetry is privileged because "speech is freed from the individual beloved and is generated in the beauty of the moral," (195) producing heroes of poetry and the eternal glory of the poet. According to Benardete, Socrates-Diotima stress—on the basis of Aristophanes' myth of the half seeking to be whole—that "the poet's fame is the closest to the immortal that the individual can come" (195). The drive toward the good and the beautiful—just as Freud noted as the "great cultural achievement" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 15)—has to do with the forward movement of instinctual renunciation. Renunciation is for the

[46] Seth Benardete and Allen Bloom, *Plato's "Symposium"* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 2001).

sake of Eros, which is *not* a god as Socrates-Diotima argues, but an aim toward a *beyond* where consciousness that is both evolved and hermeneutically inspired pursues objects which are representative of more than what only seeks to produce pleasure.

However, as Paul Ricœur suggests, Eros strives to convert the reality principle also. Regarding a reading of Diotima-Socrates' ladder of ascent, I prefer the interpretation of Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan because it is in line with a new hermeneutic I argue Freudian theory and practice can offer by emphasizing how it is Eros can be about "perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as quoted above, 46). Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan write:

> The "sudden" revelation of the beautiful may be the most essential precondition of an authentically human life, as both Socrates and Diotima evidently believed, but it also looks, to the casual observer, like airy-fairy fiction or the ultimate stage of self-delusion…. We know [the Socratic individual] is always in need, even at the "top" of the ladder when he is least limited by subjectivity or partiality. And we know he always needs to be re-created. If he feels completely free of any desire, then he is not a true lover or philosopher or poet…. Each "step," then, is intersubjective yet vertical and self-expanding. (*Plato's Dialectic at Play,* 160)

Each step expands, involving love of another toward a version of reality that is beyond what one can discern in and of themselves toward the beautiful which exists in a community where dialogue is ongoing, freeing human beings into the moral and political obligation to participate in the good (*Plato's Dialectic at Play*, 160). This continues to be for the 21st century the hope of the Freudian legacy. As I have argued, it is dependent

upon interpreting the significance of Freud's multiple referencing of Aristophanes' myth within the context of the *Symposium's* conundrum.

D. Reading Freud for Eros: *'Ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt'*[47]

One can only read the problem—linked via the myth that is centrally located in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—in connection with the other two references in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and surprisingly in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* in a footnoted passage, which has heretofore gone unrecognized (as far as I can determine) by other psychoanalytic readers. Since it seems to be the case that specific references to a myth mark certain knots within a text for closer readings prior to the summative work of interpretation, then repeated uses of the same myth must be read both diachronically (changes of meaning over time) and synchronically (simultaneous meanings within a given time) as applicable for theory-making.

Prior to closer readings of the contexts for Freud's references to Aristophanes' myth and appropriate interpretations which follow, it is important to consider *how* myth functions in theory-making particularly as Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests, "Myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him."[48] Additionally, Roy Schafer contends—as psychoanalysis is not a natural science but an interpretive discipline—analytic interpretative work based in epistemological foundations "deal with questions concerning not only what we know but how we know what we know."[49] As Schafer discusses in *A*

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[47] From Mephistopheles in *Faust,* 1:4, "Presses ever forward unsubdued," is used by Freud to speak to the life drive which, instinctually, strives to return to an earlier state of things, beyond repression. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *SE,* Vol. XVIII, 42.

[48] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning,* 3.

[49] Roy Schafer, "On Becoming a Psychoanalyst of One Persuasion or Another" in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 15(1979), 347.

New Language for Psychoanalysis, the analytic interpreter must discern the epistemological and methodological challenges between "action language" and "metapsychology" in order to understand the rules for an action language in practice. He suggests analytic interpreters must embrace both *how* a metapsychology becomes instructive as much as *what* action language accomplishes when it is performed.[50]

In 1978, Schafer spoke to a graduating class of analytic candidates from the Wm. Alanson White Institute, reminding them that beliefs are always heterogeneous, undergoing evolution:

> When it is forgotten that any one school of thought is a loosely integrated and changing body of fictions, the fictions become myths. As myths they are ultimate, unchangeable assertions about reality pure and simple. Like primitive religious beliefs, they claim direct access to one and only one clearly ascertainable world. Then they are beyond comparative analysis; other conceptions of the order of things are discredited. (Schafer, "On Becoming an Analyst," 347)

It becomes an important dilemma for the reader of primary textual theoretical material to understand the relation between theory and myth. Also, when reading secondary theoretical materials, analytic practitioners—as Schafer suggests—must compare interpretative gestures all the while clarifying which myths *they* employ—perhaps even unconsciously—as they ascertain meaning from any given theoretical text. Afterall, it is part and parcel of the Freudian project to do the work of excavation of the individual and cultural unconscious at work in any act of interpretation. According to Schafer, a discerning reader must read theory for myth in a meta-analysis in order to know the

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[50] Roy Schafer, *A New Language for Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976).

difference between what is known and how one proclaims to know what is known. It is as if counter-transferential material always accompanies any interpretive effort, even if the interpretive aim is directed toward a written text. Such work, I argue, is similar to Diotima's aforementioned ladder of ascent.

With the above caveat, the import of multiple references to Aristophanes' myth clearly becomes more important for any discerning reader of Freud to consider regarding whatever it is Freud is introducing into psychoanalytic theory whenever he discusses *Eros*. Is Freud setting "dynamite to the house" of psychoanalysis, suggesting that Eros, as life-drive, is only mythical or metaphorical? Or is he performing more than he can say, speaking from beyond, even unto readers here in this 21st century?

Aristophanes' Myth and Freud's Theory of Sexuality

First, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*,[51] Freud importantly describes the sexual instinct, in biological terms, as a "hunger" (135) and proceeds to define differences of terms between the sexual *object* as "the **person from whom** sexual attraction proceeds" and the sexual *aim* as "the **act towards which** the instinct tends" (135-136, my emphasis). Already, the definitive terms redirect what too easily becomes a misreading where the *object* is thought to be the referent for the *aim* rather than the subject for the study of how the aim takes direction via an *object-choice.*

In this context, Freud recalls the "beautifully reflected… poetic fable" (136) in Plato's *Symposium* where Aristophanes speaks about the original being that becomes halved, forever more seeking again to be whole. These two, he says—"man and woman"—"are always striving to unite again in love" (136). Figuratively speaking, of

[51] Sigmund Freud, 1905, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in *SE*, edited by James Strachey, vol. VII (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), 135.

course, Freud is suggesting here something significant about human relations: too much consciousness of absence produces repetitive behavior which enacts what it means to seek reunion or to return to a state of being where no consciousness of absence produced a rupture from which no return is necessary. As he demonstrated with his grandson, the experience of absence gets reworked in storytelling play where Oedipal conflicts and interests take on different shapes and forms. While he speaks extensively of inversions and perversions, the emphasis achieved by invoking Aristophanes' myth reflects a desire that may contribute to the continuum of pain along the sado-masochistic resistances in line with "disgust, shame, and morality" (footnote 2 added in 1915, 162), since "the play of influences which govern the evolution of infantile sexuality [will show] its outcome in perversion, neurosis or normal sexual life" (*Three Essays*, 172). This means, I think, that the original use of the term *object* directs the *aim* toward the **union**-in-order-to-be-whole with the object choice. All else is either, according to Freudian definition, perversion or neurosis as the aim from the object toward the object-choice is prohibited or inhibited.

Eventually, Freud acknowledges that the first object realized to be external is the breast and it is to this hunger-quenching libidinally-cathected object-choice to which we all seek to return, symbolically, as such an experience of nourishing satisfaction becomes foundational for all other expressions of sexual aims. As he states: "There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a **refinding** of it" (*Three Essays*, 222, my emphasis, marking the theme of union/reunion post severance from a source that satisfies hunger).[52]

[52] See also Melanie Klein, "The Origins of Transference" in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, edited by Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press, 1952) where she writes about the early stages of development

In a footnote added in 1915, Freud distinguishes between the *anaclitic* or *attachment* aim to object choice or the more pathological narcissistic object-choice where the subject's own ego seeks to find itself again through/in other people (*Three Essays*, 222). The significant point here has to do with the primary relation of the infant-mother dyad as foundational for distinguishing between internal and external experiences of love. Thus, his reference to Aristophanes' myth is used to demonstrate the primordial nature of foundational constructs for all relationality, *beyond fusion* where there is no memory of the stages of separation. As Freud additionally highlights, the importance of mother-love for the continued progression of the infant is central for the individual's continued growth in wanting to know love which will promote further knowledge in adult life for *how* to love toward fulfillment of the original—now returned from the repressed—aim.

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of the human infant experiencing "persecutory anxiety." Klein links persecutory anxiety with Freud's death instinct *inwardly* turned, producing fear of annihilation. Simultaneously, fear of retaliation arises, directing destructive impulses *outwardly*, toward the object. External experiences of pain reinforce internal sources of persecutory anxiety, increasing the need for comfort and care to mitigate increasing fears of hostile forces. "The infant directs his feelings of gratification and love towards the 'good' breast, and his destructive impulses and feelings of persecution towards what he feels to be frustrating, i.e. the 'bad' breast" (202). Hence, love and hate as well as the good and the bad become distinguishable, one from the other, associated with the different aspects of the breast and experiences of pleasure and pain. Her major contention diverges from Freud: "Object relations are operative from the beginning of post-natal life" (204). She hypothesizes that "autoerotism and narcissism include the love for and relation with the internalized good object which in phantasy forms part of the loved body and self" (204). She emphasizes "states" rather than "stages" where Freud suggests the relation to the breast precedes autoeroticism and narcissism. As she notes, Freud uses "object" to refer to "instinctual aim" while she uses the term to refer to a *relation*, linking emotions, anxieties, phantasies, and defenses. What is at stake here, I would suggest, is the difference between "a metaphysical commitment" (Roy Shafer) to an essentially unspoken myth where the post-natal human being is thought to begin life as either separated or attached. Hence, the problem posed for theorizing by the "problem of the relation with the other," as previously mentioned, has to do now with reading the theoretical nuances where the *severance* of the umbilical chord creates radical changes for the neonate's immediate structuring of experience, for no longer does a fused existence protect from pangs of hunger at the same time as the skin is exposed to something other than the warm and tight enclosure of a previous existence within the womb. Essentially, reading Freud and Klein comparatively—via an ancient and latent myth for repressed relational memory—it seems clear to me that Freud emphasizes *severance* while Klein emphasizes *union*. Naturally, therefore, conceptualizations of what constitutes experience and what delineates experience from memory will play out, theoretically, in reconstructions of theoretical drives and/or relational aims. For both Freud and Klein, regarding either instinctual aim or relation: libidinal attachment is still essentially libidinal attachment; thus, directed by an oriented drive for life in relationship.

Aristophanes' Myth as a Return to Pleasure

Secondly, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud more fully recalls the myth, explicating both the story and now also the context for *how* it functions to express something of the counterbalance between the instincts of life (*Eros*) and death (*Thanatos*). As he states, immediately preceding his recall of the myth: "Science has so little to tell us about the origin of sexuality that we can liken the problem to a darkness into which not so much as a ray of a hypothesis has penetrated" (*BPP*, 57). He continues, stating how a myth, rather than a scientific explanation, helps us imagine that trauma (his original inquiry) is linked with desire expressed via sexual intimacy where there is "a need to restore an earlier state of things" (*BPP*, 57). Thus, Freud returns to addressing the rupture wrought by traumatic experience—perhaps explaining his hiatus into the many years of studying sexuality—via instincts he attributes to Eros and to Thanatos. Plato's theory, he says, deals with not only the *origin* of the sexual instinct, but also with "the most important of its variations in *relation* to its object" (*BPP*, 57). And so, he retells the myth—this time as a way of introducing *thanatos*—in connection with the pleasure principle and the reality principle, as instructive toward the journey to pursue and obtain the reminiscent original partner in order to satisfy sexual instincts as *more* than aim or object-choice*, beyond* (or returning to) what *thanatos* threatens:

> The original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two…. Everything about these primaeval men was double: they had four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually Zeus decided to cut these men in two, "like a sorb-apple

> which is halved for pickling". After the division had been made, "the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one." (*BPP*, 57-58)

With the retelling of the story, there seems to be more contextual emphasis on relational components in a way that resituates, in the overall intent of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "the third step in the theory of the instincts" (*BPP*, 59). This has to do with how "regression"—as evidenced by a "compulsion to repeat"—must rely upon "figurative language" (*BPP*, 60) so as to discuss the transformation of the sexual instincts into *Eros* (*BPP*, 60, footnote 1). Freud is skeptical of drawing more intuitive conclusions from mythic formulations and he takes three pages to say so, with profuse apologies. Thus, the pleasure principle is in service to the reality principle, just as *Eros* remedies (or "prolongs the journey") with regards to that which *Thanatos* seeks to sever.

Aristophanes' Myth as a Way to Understand the Bisexuality of Civilization

Lastly and interestingly, I find a third reference to the same myth that is cloaked by language of a kind of bisexuality where "halves" are discussed in terms of maleness/femaleness in a way that speaks to—not so much in exclusive terms regarding the sexual aim—the coupling of equal partners, apparently not to be confused with gender roles reflecting projections of societal worth or devaluation. In footnote 7 of chapter IV in *Civilization and Its Discontents*,[53] Freud writes:

> Man is an animal organism with (like others) an unmistakably bisexual disposition. **The individual corresponds to a fusion of two symmetrical halves, of which, according to some investigators, one is purely male and the other female. It is equally possible that each half was originally hermaphrodite.** Sex

[53] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* in *SE*, vol. XXI, 105. (Cited in text as *CD*).

> is a biological fact which, although it is of extraordinary importance in mental life, is hard to grasp psychologically. We are accustomed to say that every human being displays both male and female instinctual impulses, needs and attributes; but through anatomy, it is true, can point out the characteristics of maleness and femaleness, psychology cannot. (*CD,* 105, my emphasis)

As it is no longer obscure in the evolution of civilization, the struggle between *Eros* and *Thanatos* is like "a battle of the giants that our *nurse-maids* try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven" (*CD,* 122). Note an allusion to the return to the breast, where obviously Freud knows more than the quenching of hunger happens, as lullabies about Heaven perform and develop a mythic imagination in the association with nourishment. Freud's sobering exposition of the transformation of the instincts into drives by which, he says, we seek to mitigate pleasure-unpleasure, is both influential *of* and influenced *by* **relations of love** and also, perhaps, dreams of heaven. For good or ill, *relations* create moments of happiness in an otherwise unhappy dilemma where the struggle for life is not only for the individual anymore, but indeed for the human species as well as for a return to the *beyond.* The human species is most basically—according to the recurrent use of the myth I have attempted to explicate in the Freudian opus—*missing* an *at-one-ment* with "another half" toward whom we are constantly seeking to return in some kind of order to *reunite* more than ourselves, in Love.

As I have argued, the significance for retelling the story of Freud's insight in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as well as the rediscovery of his repeated reliance upon the myth of the two seeking reunion, is interpreted for us in the end of Plato's *Symposium* because it is Diotima who speaks with Socrates as he invokes her authority, performing

so much more, beyond absence. And, this is the conundrum: even in her absence, she is not gone; the two, through story, are still one, referencing the present as partners in playful conversation. After all, who, indeed, is speaking when, in referring to Aristophanes' myth, one-of-two interprets:

> "If love desires the good; 'Love's function is giving birth in beauty both in body and in mind'.... All human beings are pregnant in body and in mind, and when we reach a degree of adulthood we naturally desire to give birth. We cannot give birth in what is ugly, only in what is beautiful. Yes, sexual intercourse between men and women is a kind of birth. There is something divine in this process; this is how mortal creatures achieve immortality, in pregnancy and giving birth. This cannot occur in a condition of disharmony…. [The] object of Love is not beauty.... [but] reproduction and birth in beauty.'" (206b-e)

To return to Greenburg and Mitchell's question, "Why does the clinical centrality of relations with others pose a problem for psychoanalytic theorizing?" means to confront the ancient split between body and mind that creates ambivalence—not only between gender-specific roles regarding pregnancy, birth, and breast-feeding—but also about how we privilege knowing what we know and what postulations our theories render for reclaiming dignity within positions of relationality. Ultimately, through Socrates speaking her speech in her absence, Diotima—returning from the repressed—becomes the playful voice of the teaching theorist/ analyst. Her words speak from the between space where theory and praxis often dare to tread: "Right opinion, of course, has this kind of status, falling between understanding and ignorance" (202a).

E. A Mythic Performance

Clearly Freud relies upon Aristophanes' myth from Plato's *Symposium* to say what he cannot say. Furthermore, the *Symposium's* conundrum presents a new hermeneutic with regards to the intersection of myth, love, and play in such a way as to complicate how Eros, as life drive, intervenes to order phenomena of human relations. Whether relations are *here* or *gone*, speech signifies something about how any one-of-two of us can know what we know about absence or presence. Desire as a drive or instinct rewrites the brain after a traumatic neurosis or event (as modern neuroscience is now beginning to understand). Since bridging the gap between the hard sciences and the interpretative arts was part and parcel to Freud's original quest to study trauma—the real golden thread throughout his work—it is of evolutionary import for the human race for empathy to build pathways of social networks where storytelling practices create some kind of order toward reunion of the one to the others. Even if only through myth or play, love must win.

How does Aristophanes' myth function and can we discern something new for understanding Freud's later theorizing if we closely read for the significance that such references seek to explicate, particularly regarding Eros? No matter the school of thought, the Freudian legacy for the 21st century posits new ways for Eros to figure toward a hermeneutic that is now required for the survival of the human species. As Freud writes in the conclusion of *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

> The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It

> may be that in this respect precisely the present time deserves a special interest. Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers,' eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result? (*CD,* 145)

Like Eryximachus quoting Phaedrus, we might now ask what new eulogies to the workings of Eros are being written. And, when we ask, we might also wonder which eulogies we are proposing in *how* we ask, attempting to bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities. With this particular myth, was Freud—like Plato—*also playing*? If so, *how* so? Furthermore, how might we too play? As Hans-Georg Gadamer says, "The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition" (*Truth and Method*, 103). Perhaps, such is the lesson Freud learned from watching his grandson at play: when we fail to repeat the game, internally, we are already dead; we, too, are gone.

Chapter 3

The Aim of Love and Play: The Emergence of "Soul" as the New Hermeneutic for the Postconscious Posthuman

> Clearly, the role of positive emotions—of our ability to have reasonable desires, to play zestfully, to nurture lovingly, and their widely ramifying consequences in the body—will continue to be a most interesting chapter of future health research. To make progress, we will need to better objectify the matter of greatest individual concern—the dynamics of affective experience—at more than a superficial level.[54]

A. Introduction: Overcoming the Threat of Becoming Post-Human

In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles tells three stories after extensively researching archives for the history of cybernetics: 1) how information lost its body; 2) the emergence of the cyborg as cultural artifact post World War II; and 3) how the human became posthuman in cultural constructions of what it means to be human. She explains that the posthuman mentality privileges four points of view: 1) the body as biological substrate is an accident; 2) consciousness is an epiphenomenon; 3) the body is the original prosthesis we learn to manipulate; and 4) the human being is configured to be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines.[55] She asks, "What do we make of this shift from the human to the posthuman, which both evokes terror and excites pleasure?" (Hayles, 4)

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[54] Jaak Panksepp, "The Quest for Long-Term Health and Happiness: To Play or Not to Play, That Is the Question" in *Psychological Inquiry* 9.1(1998), 64.

[55] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999), 2-3.

The Josiah Macy Foundation Conferences on Cybernetics from 1943-1954 forged a new paradigm, sparking conversation regarding information theory (Claude Shannon), neural networks (Warren McCulloch), computational theory based upon binary code (John von Neuman), and the visionary, larger implications of cybernetics for culture and meaning (Norbert Wiener). "Fed by wartime hysteria," notes Hayles, "the cybernetic perspective had a certain inexorable logic, [working] to undermine the very liberal subjectivity… through a strong emphasis on *homeostasis*" (Hayles, 7-8).

Yet, although the initial feedback loop was linked originally with homeostasis, the emerging phenomenon of reflexivity—where another system is made, from the point of view of a changed perspective—became the subversive and threatening idea, primarily through discussions of the observer (Hayles, 8-9). Breaking forth in the discussions with an observer's perspective, a Freudian analyst, Lawrence Kubie, suggested "every utterance is doubly encoded, acting both as a statement about the outside world and as a mirror reflecting the speaker's psyche" (Hayles, 9-10). Hayles notes the second wave of cybernetics—fueled by thinkers such as Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Heinz von Foerster—incorporated reflexivity.

The third wave of cybernetics, however, is now all about emergence since "flickering signification…[is] the fascinating and troubling coupling of language and machine" (Hayles, 35). Hayles prophetically states:

> The more consciousness is seen to be the product of multiple coding levels, the greater is the number of sites where interventions can produce catastrophic effects…. [We] can no longer *assume* that consciousness guarantees the existence

> of the self. In this sense, the posthuman subject is also a postconscious subject. (279-280).

In this paradigm, the presence/absence dialectic of first-wave cybernetic thinking and operations is somewhat displaced by a third-wave pattern/randomness dialectic where "meaning is not front-loaded into the system, and the origin does not act to ground signification" (Hayles, 285).

The time is ripe for discovering a new hermeneutic: one that, as Hayles suggests, will be crafted to be "conducive to the long-range survival of humans and of the other life-forms, biological and artificial, with whom we share the planet and ourselves" (291). It is imperative to consider what we can still mean by "brain," by "mind," by "consciousness," and—given Hayles' insights—what, if anything, is still left for meaning to be attributed to "soul." Many of the current debates for consciousness studies grapple with ancient questions surrounding meanings of conceptual terms; however, now, with exponential growth in networks—both within the brain-mapping quests for studying affect as well as in the emergence of social groupings—a new hermeneutic must consider what it can mean to be a thinking human being, very much linked with the evolution of second and third wave cybernectic legacies.

In this chapter, I will bring together thinkers with visions of how what is emerging is more than an entwinement with machines and information-processing computations, and who point to a new pathway before us, returning us to being, beyond what is posthuman, looping us back around in a meta-economy where the emerging emphasis has more to do with return, rather than mostly with only departure. Beginning with the antecedents for joy in the mammalian brain, moving to the body-minded self,

and then through the links of consciousness at play, I suggest people are learning how to be empathic and loving, beyond the fields of traumatic events which, otherwise, lead us only to death and destruction, rather than life and love. Psychoanalysis can help inform how we tackle this new dilemma: the dilemma of how to be human, emphasizing intersubjective avenues for storytelling, story reading, and story listening events.

B. It's All About Learning: We're Wired for Joy

What is emerging has to do with new ways of knowing how we feel, creating possibilities for more humane interactions where intersubjectivity is the longer term goal, in real life via virtual life. The 20th century profoundly introduced thanatos in new ways which we daily confront with the threat of too much consciousness potentially wounding and disabling any return to authentic ways of being in relationship. Scientists, philosophers, and humanities scholars face challenges of interpretation that will lead to new ways of reinscribing what is pleasurable about life, beyond decomposition and death alone.

Beginning with new and controversial scientific research that posits the evolutionary emergence of the human soul, I argue human beings—affectively connected with animals—must relearn what it means to be familiar with something as simple as joy. As a result, human beings have hope in returning to more primordial emotional selves where story, myth, and imagination continue to give instruction toward how life—even beyond one's own death—has meaning. It is an unrealized hermeneutic Freud himself, in the final analysis, hoped the human race would embrace.

“Let’s go tickle some rats!”

Laughter and joy have evolutionary roots in the mammalian brain. That’s what Jaak Panksepp—pioneer of a new interdisciplinary field of study called “affective neuroscience”—has worked to recover. Building upon the research of Paul MacLean,[56] who coined the phrase “epistemics” as the study of subjective experience, Panksepp and colleagues recognized and charted a distinct vocal pattern in rats that resembles primitive human laughter.

Panksepp and his research team hypothesized social bonding depends upon recognizable neural systems “honed exquisitely and at times idiosyncratically by individual learning experiences,” where signaling systems express “social urges that characterize human life.”[57] While measuring rat vocalizations during social contexts such as sex, aggression, and play, they noted that the highest measured vocalizations, which they describe as “50-kHz type chirps,” were recorded in abundance during what they cleverly termed “rough-and-tumble” play, or “RAT” play for short.[58] “Indeed, these vocalizations were especially frequent when animals were anticipating the opportunity to

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[56] Paul D. MacLean, *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990).

[57] Jaak Panksepp and Jeff Burgdorf, “Laughing Rats and the Evolutionary Antecedents of Human Joy?” in *Physiology and Behavior* 79 (2003) 534.

[58] For a description of RAT play, see Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998):

> It is difficult to capture the dynamic image of real-life play in words. But the overall impression given by practically all mammals is a flurry of dynamic, carefree rambunctiousness. In rats, one sees rapid spurts of activity, toward and away from a play partner. Sometimes one animal ‘bowls’ the other animal over, which leads to a flurry of playful chasing. In turns, the animals pursue each other, with rapid pivoting and role reversals. Animals often pounce on each other’s backs as if they are soliciting vigorous interaction; these ‘dorsal contacts’ can be easily quantified and have been commonly used as an explicit measure of play solicitations. Sometimes the dorsal contacts do not yield reciprocation, instead ending up as prolonged bouts of dorsal grooming. At other times, the recipient of play solicitations responds by either running away or twisting laterally; an apparent bout of wrestling ensues, in which one animal winds up on its back with the other animal on top. This ‘pinning’ posture can also be easily quantified and is the clearest measure of the consummatory aspects of play. (284)

play, and we came to recognize that such vocal measures could be used to measure positive affective expectancies" (Panksepp and Burgdorf, 535). Had they discovered that rats laugh? They wondered.

One day during the spring of 1997, Jaak Panksepp walked into the lab and looked to his junior colleagues saying, "Let's go tickle some rats!" (Panksepp and Burgdorf, 535) What they discovered was surprising: the vocalizations more than doubled over the levels they had seen during RAT play. "To all appearances, the animals enjoyed this tickling which simulated their own playful activities" (Panksepp and Burgdorf, 535). Their subsequent research plans took a turn toward examining more closely what they thought they had discovered that day in the lab:

> As a matter of principle (of the evolutionary variety), we decided to remain open to the possibility there was some type of ancestral relationship between this response, and the primitive laughter that most members of the human species exhibit in rudimentary form by the time they are three months old. This intriguing behavioral response intensifies marvelously during the next few years and is exquisitely expressed when children begin to vigorously play with each other, being especially evident when they eagerly chase each other in games such as tag. (Panksepp and Burgdorf, 535)

Because of the nature of their research, they initially had a hard time being taken seriously as it was difficult to convince scientific journals their findings should be published. They decided to share their story with the general public, turning to animal documentaries, such as a BBC production called *Beyond a Joke* and a Discovery Channel

show, *Why Dogs Smile and Chimpanzees Cry*. Following the airings of these shows,[59] they received an enormous amount of fan mail. One woman sent in a letter beautifully describing a replication of their experiment:

> After seeing the Discovery special, I decided to do a little experimenting of my own with my son's pet rat, Pinky, a young male. Within one week, Pinky was completely conditioned to playing with me and every once in a while even emits a high-pitched squeak that I can hear. It's been about 4 weeks that I have been tickling him everyday and now, the second I walk into the room, he starts gnawing on the bars of his cage and bouncing around like a kangaroo until I tickle him. He won't even eat when I feed him unless I give him a good tickle first. I had no idea that a rat could play with a person like that! He tackles my hand, nibbles, licks, rolls over onto his back to expose his tummy to be tickled [that's his favorite], and does bunny kicks when I wrestle with him. It's the funniest thing I've ever seen, even though my family thought I had lost my mind until I showed them. (Panksepp and Burgdorf, 535-536)

The woman's letter indicates her play is significant towards her own learning too, insofar as the successful replication of the experiment sparked an interest in her to return to school for graduate studies.

As indicated by the writing sample Panksepp included in his article, human involvement in play, mirth, delight, joy, and the repetition of affective activity thereof, has a draw that continues to entice participants, beyond the act of the original participant-observer event.

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[59] Several clips exist on YouTube. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myuceywaOUs (accessed on July 13, 2008).

Is it any wonder Freud included in *his* writing the observation of his grandson playing the "Fort-Da" game? If the unpleasurable *fort* is repeated more often than the *da*, then not only is it important to consider how *fort* repeats the disruption of the semiotic *gone*, but it is also important to consider *how* it matters that the less often occurrence of the more pleasurable *da* creates the *return* that then signifies what is happening in the brain. Jaak Pansepp is quoted on the neuropsychoanalytic website as saying: "Freud should be placed in the same category as Darwin, who lived before the discovery of genes.... Freud gave us a vision of a mental apparatus. We need to talk about it, develop it, test it [as] it is not a matter of proving Freud right or wrong, but of finishing the job."[60]

Neural Networks of Play

Because joy arises from the neural networks of play, "the impulse for RAT play is created not from past experiences but from the spontaneous neural urges within the brain."[61] Based on MacLean's rudimentary model of the "triune brain"—where the deepest and most ancient layer is the reptilian brain, with the more evolved layer being the mammalian or limbic brain, and then the most evolved layer being the neomammalian or neocortical brain—spontaneous and active PLAY impulses originate from specific circuits of the mammalian brain where basic emotions are generated and mediated. "Of course, a great deal of learning probably occurs during the course of roughhousing play, but this is ultimately the result of spontaneously active PLAY impulses within specific circuits of the brain, some of them in ancient parts of the thalamus, which coax young

[60] See http://www.npsa.cz/npsaquotes.html (accessed on July 13, 2008).

[61] Jaak Panksepp, "The Periconscious Substrates of Consciousness: Affective States and the Evolutionary Origins of the Self" in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5-6 (1998) 281.

organisms to interact in ludic ways on the field of competition" (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 281).

Panksepp proposes a neurobiologically-based taxonomy for emotional systems as designators for mapping distinct neuronal patterns, coherently operating in conjunction with external and internal cues from environmental and social factors. Motivational systems evolved from adaptations to primal situations such as: "(1) the search for food, water, and warmth; (2) the search of sex and companionship; (3) the need to care for offspring; (4) the urge to be reunited with companions after separation; (5) the urge to avoid pain and destruction; (6) the urge to express oneself vigorously with decisive actions if one's self-interests are compromised; (7) the urge to exhibit vigorous social interaction" (*Affective Neuroscience*, 50), and there could be several others. He names affective designators in UPPER-CASE letters, alerting the reader that the system he references is one that has been genetically encoded in the brain as an emotional operating system. The major emotional operating systems are: SEEKING, FEAR, PANIC, and RAGE. The more sophisticated systems such as LUST, CARE, and PLAY are "built around neural complexities that are only provisionally understood" (*Affective Neuroscience*, 54).

Even as Lear notes, as cited in chapter 2, "we now need something new which will serve as a genuine complement to Eros,"[62] Panksepp and colleagues remarkably argue that those neural systems that complement Eros might just have to do with PLAY circuits in the brain. "PLAY circuitry allows other emotional operating systems, especially social ones, to be exercised in the relative safety of one's home environment"

[62] Jonathan Lear, *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 146-147.

(Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 283). Play helps animals learn about environmental and social realities, leading to emotional states (where "e-motion" playfully recognizes "evolutionary-motion" as the complex organism—evolving over time—exhibits motor behavior in conjunction with affect) so that "an animal may gradually reach a point where true anger, fear, separation distress, or sexuality is aroused" (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 283).

While the playful mood may subside, adaptations from learning about true emotional states within predicaments of environmental and social realities then become useful for predicting future outcomes where play produces more complex variables for how a SELF[63] acts. "In human children this may often consist of running to mother in tears, with complaints about the injustices they have encountered to see what type of social support and understanding (i.e., kin investment) they might be able to muster" (Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 283).

E-motion: The Foundation of Learning

Panksepp's work supports Freud's foundational economy to which Damasio also adheres: "homeostasis is a key to the biology of consciousness."[64] As Damasio notes in *The Feeling of What Happens*, "No aspect of the human mind is easy to investigate, and for those who wish to understand the biological underpinnings of the mind, consciousness is generally regarded as the towering problem, in spite of the fact that the definition of the problem may vary considerably from investigator to investigator" (4).

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[63] SELF is short for simple ego-type life form. See Jaak Panksepp, "The Periconscious Substrates of Consciousness: Affective States and the Evolutionary Origins of the Self."

[64] Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), 40.

While the homology of neural underpinnings may be global across species,[65] Antonio Damasio, in *Descartes' Error*, insightfully complicates the matter for what it means to be a human being, evolved from other species, by suggesting that "the soul breathes through the body, and suffering, whether it starts in the skin or in a mental image, happens in the flesh" (xxi).[66] He argues three main points:

> **1)** Emotion is the loop of reason. He proposes that reason is probably not as "pure" as many might wish, evolving in an intricate relationship with biological regulating mechanisms, where emotions express reasoning strategies (xvi).
>
> **2)** Feeling is not necessarily "an elusive mental quality attached to an object" but a direct perception of the body, so that feelings are cognitive (xx).
>
> **3)** The body is represented in the brain, serving as the reference point for the neural processes we call "the mind." Therefore, "the mind exists in and for an integrated organism" (xx).

The last statement is anchored by the following three *interactions*:

> **a)** There is a mutual interaction via biochemical and neural circuits between the brain and the body of humans which makes for "an indissociable organism," involving endocrine, immune, and autonomic components.
>
> **b)** The mind-body organism as a whole, in turn, interacts with the environment.

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[65] For a discussion of neural pathways affected by breeches of social networks, see Jaak Panksepp, "Feeling the Pain of Social Loss" in *Science* 302 (2003). He writes: "Feelings of love and loneliness, and the thoughts they provoke, are constructed in part from neural pathways in the brain that regulate core emotional responses, such as playfulness, sexuality, and friendship, as well as separation distress in our fellow creatures" (6).

[66] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1995).

> **c)** The organism that interacts within the context of environment, as a whole, is a functional and structural ensemble we call mind and not brain alone, whereas "mental phenomena can be fully understood only in the context of an organism's interacting in an environment" (xxi).

Thus, Damasio believes "the body proper provides more than mere support and modulation: it provides a basic topic for brain representation" and his highly nuanced foundational belief confronts Descartes' dualism from the start, so that, simply, "feelings let us *mind the body,* attentively" (159).

The "body-minded brain" (223) is alert to the environment, so that, in an example about walking home late in an urban area where it becomes apparent someone is following you:

> Your brain detects the threat; conjures up a few response options; selects one; acts on it; thus reduces or eliminates risk…. The neural and chemical aspects of the brain's response cause a profound change in the way tissues and whole organ systems operate. The energy availability and the metabolic rate of the entire organism are altered, as is the readiness of the immune system; the overall biochemical profile of the organism fluctuates rapidly; the skeletal muscles that allow the movement of head, trunk, and limbs contract; and signals about all these changes are relayed back to the brain, some via neural routes, some via chemical routes in the bloodstream, so that the evolving state of the body proper, which has modified continuously second after second, will affect the central nervous system, neurally and chemically, at varied sites. (223-224)

Feeling is the result of the extent of mental and bodily changes, particularly under circumstances where business as usual becomes suspended or, suddenly, shifts.

Building upon William James' model of body reaction to the environment as foundational for emotion, Damasio outlines a theory of primary and secondary emotions, introducing the Somatic Marker hypothesis[67] where "emotion is the combination of a *mental evaluative process,* simple or complex, with *dispositional responses to that process*, mostly *toward the body proper*, resulting in an emotional body state, but also *toward the brain itself*," so that additional changes of the brain occur (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 139). What he suggests is that not only does the mind arise from activity in neural circuits, neural circuits "were shaped in evolution by functional requisites of the organism, and that a normal mind will happen only if those circuits contain basic representations of the organism, and if they continue monitoring the states of the organism in action" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 226). In brief, he is saying the body contributes life support and modulatory effects to the brain at the same time as content for the workings of the normal mind.

The Emergence of the Soul for the Body-Minded Self

Thus, for the self to emerge from a biological state, both brain and body-proper systems must be in full swing. The self, as a "repeatedly reconstructed biological state" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 227), is *not* a little homunculus, as Descartes posited for the body-mind split; the self is endowed with subjectivity via experience where continuous reactivation of "representations of key events in an individual's autobiography," occur, so that "dispositional representations" which define "what we do, whom and what we like,

[67] Antonio R. Damasio, D. Tranel and H. Damasio, "Somatic Markers and the Guidance of Behaviour: Theory and Preliminary Testing" in *Frontal Lobe Function and Dysfunction*. Edited by H.S. Levin, H.M. Eisenberg and A.L. Benton (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

what types of objects we use, which places and actions we most usually frequent and perform" are at play, constantly constructing the self "from the ground up" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 238-240).

With such constant change that mostly goes unnoticed until an event occurs that disrupts the remaking, it is as if "the present continuously becomes past, and by the time we take stock of it we are in another present, consumed with planning the future, which we do on the stepping-stones of the past. The present is never here. We are hopelessly late for consciousness" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 240). Nevertheless, "The truly embodied mind I envision," he concludes, just as he began, "does not relinquish its most refined levels of operation, those constituting its soul and spirit" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 252).

With all their "dignity and human scale," consciousness, *evolved*, produces a unique organism, complex and fragile, with a difficult job: "to move the spirit from its nowhere pedestal to a somewhere place, while preserving its dignity and importance; to recognize its humble origin and vulnerability, yet still call upon its guidance. A difficult and indispensable job indeed, but one without which we will be far better off leaving Descartes' Error uncorrected" (252).

The Human Soul and Consciousness

In connection with much of Damsio's thinking, Panksepp reiterates the same important job for consciousness, calling forth how it is with all vertebrates we share a common source for affect. If there is such a "seat for the soul" from which consciousness has evolved that is locatable in the brain, Panksepp hypothesizes it would be the PAG, short for the periaqueductal central gray area of the brain stem. In comparing similarities

of the brains of guinea pigs during separation distress and the brain regions activated during human sadness, the common activation of the PAG "suggests that human feelings may arise from the instinctual emotional action systems of ancient regions in the mammalian brain" (Panksepp, "Feeling the Pain of Social Loss," 239).

Not only is the PAG the most highly interconnected area of the brain, the PAG "is an initial source of the anguish and suffering that suffuses self-awareness during stressful circumstances when the SELF is significantly out of homeostatic balance" (Panksepp, "The Periconscious Substrates," 577). The PAG is the passageway, connecting the brain with the body, where neuronal firings of pain and all other emotional experiences, including sexuality, including the arousal of fearfulness, when organisms via neural circuitries express both distress and pleasure or the displeasure of separation or the first manifestations of joy from social contact. So convinced was Panksepp about the PAG for being the seat of the soul from which consciousness arises, first experienced as primary processes for emotion, he predicted that the neural tissue of the PAG would be the slowest to die in a tissue culture (Panksepp, "The Periconscious Substrates").

Indeed, he was right.[68] Thus, for Panksepp:

> Consciousness is not critically related to being smart; it is not just clever information-processing. Consciousness is the experience of body and world,

[68] I attended a meeting of the Neuro-Psychoanalytic study group in October of 2006 held at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. At the meeting, Jaak Panksepp discussed the PAG as being the most ancient neural tissue of the brain for primary affects and he showed slides to support his hypothesis that the neural tissue of the PAG would be the last to die. See also Jaak Panksepp, "Affective Consciousness and the Instinctual Motor System: The Neural Sources of Sadness and Joy" in *The Caldron of Consciousness, Motiviation, Affect and Self-Organization: Advances in Consciousness Research*. Edited by R. and N. Ellis, vol. 16 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publications, 2000); Jaak Panksepp, "Affective Consciousness: Core Emotional Feelings in Animals and Humans" in *Consciousness and Cognition* 14.1 (2005); Jaak Panksepp, "Emotional Feelings Originate Below the Neocortex: Toward a Neurobiology of the Soul" in *Behavioral Brain Science* 30.1 (2007); and Jaak Panksepp, "The Neuro-Evolutionary Cusp Between Emotions and Cognitions: Implications for Understanding Consciousness and the Emergence of a Unified Mind Science" in *Consciousness and Cognition* 1 (2000).

> without necessarily understanding what one is experiencing. Primary phenomenal states have two distinct but highly interactive branches: (1) the ability to perceive and orient in the world, and (2) the ability to feel the biological values of existence…. I focus on the latter—the primary affects, from bodily hungers to emotional delights. If we get the foundational issues right, then the secondary and tertiary layers of consciousness—the ability to have thoughts about the world and thoughts about thoughts—should become easier hard problems. (Panksepp, "Toward a Neurobiology of the Soul," 101)

C. Consciousness and the Hard Problem of Qualia

Damasio describes what, for consciousness studies, is most pressing between two intimately related problems: understanding how the brain of the organism engenders images of an object, addressing the problem of qualia (sensory qualities or cues); and, secondly, how "the brain engenders a sense of self in the act of knowing" as the brain processes qualia in developing a mental image of objects (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 9). He writes:

> I could see that overcoming the obstacle of self, which meant, from my standpoint, understanding its neural underpinnings, might help us understand the very different biological impact of three distinct although closely related phenomena: *an emotion, the feeling of that emotion,* and *knowing that we have a feeling of that emotion.* (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 8)

Furthermore, he states his working definition of consciousness for understanding affective phenomena:

> Consciousness is the rite of passage which allows an organism armed with the ability to regulate its metabolism, with innate reflexes, and with the form of learning known as conditioning, to become a minded organism, the kind of organism in which responses are shaped by a mental *concern* over the organism's own life. (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 25)

Consciousness and the Self

In Damasio's theory, two kinds of consciousness correspond to two kinds of self. First, core consciousness is the core self, which is "a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts" (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 17). Secondly, there is the more traditional way we think of the self linked with identity, corresponding to a nontransient composite of facts and ways of being that come to characterize a person.

Damsio calls this more traditionally understood entity the "autobiographical self" because there is a systematized set of memories linked with situations where "core consciousness was involved in the knowing of the most invariant characteristics of an organism's life" (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 17). His focus for two kinds of consciousness, however, not only links perceptions of qualia with how the brain within the organism interacts with the social and physical environment but also within and building upon temporal qualities so that, as he says, "The scope of the core consciousness is the here and now" (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 16).

The hard problem of qualia then, becomes central within the current debates of cognitive science. As Mark Solms succinctly notes, the disjunction within the question "How does the mind emerge from the brain?" exposes the more radical question, "How

does consciousness emerge from the brain?" and, herein, belies the multidisciplinary conundrum.[69] It is to be observed, however, that *emergence*—a third-wave cybernetic emphasis—is now importantly and curiously central to the conversations regarding consciousness, at a time when being post-conscious marks the uncertain paradigm shift to come.

This very conundrum cognitive philosopher, Daniel Dennett, seeks to address. In his formidable *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett builds upon the earlier assertion—"there simply are no qualia at all"[70] —as a tactical move from which to launch an argument against dualism by saying that any theory of consciousness must realize how the brain *is* the mind. He says,

> Descartes was a mechanist *par excellence* when it came to every other phenomenon in nature, but when it came to the human mind, he flinched. In addition to mechanical interpretation, he claimed, the brain also provides material to a central arena—what I've been calling the Cartesian Theater—where, in human beings, the soul can be a Witness and arrive at its own judgments. Witnesses need raw materials on which to base their judgments. These raw materials, whether they are called 'sense data' or 'sensations' or 'raw feels' or 'phenomenal properties of experience,' are props without which a Witness makes

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[69] Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience* (New York: Other Press, 2002), 46. Mark Solms is a key figure in the neuro-psychoanalytic movement and the new translator of Freud. See Jason B. Jones, "An Interview with Mark Solms," *Bookslut* (May 2007) for an interview during which Solms discusses new perspectives for dialogue between research agendas and clinical psychoanalysis as well as translation and publication of Freud's volumes expected to hit the shelves in 2009. http://www.bookslut.com/features/2007_05_011064.php (accessed July 13, 2008).

[70] Daniel C. Dennett, "Quining Qualia," in *Consciousness in Contemporary Science*. Edited by A. Marcel and E. Bisiach (New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

> no sense. These props, held in place by various illusions, surround the idea of a central Witness with a nearly impenetrable barrier of intuitions. (*Consciousness Explained*, 322)[71]

It is important to break through the barrier. But, while "consciousness is gappy and sparse, and doesn't contain half of what people think is there" (*Consciousness Explained*, 366) and "the idea that the Self—or the Soul—is really just an abstraction" (*Consciousness Explained*, 368), I argue it is *actually* qualia that provide the links that become the good effectors. Furthermore, feedback loops create new and emerging ways in which human beings and machines are already interacting toward the creation of a new hermeneutic where love, play, and story provide opportunities for presence and return.

Good Effectors and Feedback Loops Rely Upon *Links*

Norbert Wiener explained in his 1948 introduction to cybernetic theory, *decisions* (like a coin toss) beget other decisions or measures along a continuum of the binary scale of infinite numbers, in a flow interrupted or redirected from what is learned via feedback loops. The transmission and return of information, or *feedback*, depends upon the human subject's possession of "good effectors" so that "the performance of these effectors be properly monitored back to the central nervous system, and that the reading of these monitors be properly combined with the other information coming in from the sense organs to produce a properly proportioned output to the effectors."[72] Furthermore, mechanical systems, like humans, need to possess *good effectors* in order for *oscillation* to be kept at minimum for more stable, linear operations. However, oscillations increase

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[71] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1991), 322.

[72] Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1961, orig. pub. 1948), 96.

non-linear feedback inputs, producing growth, which, at various junctures create competition, increased oscillation, and diverse feedback loops where effectors perpetuate (and use) information. Importantly, for an information feedback system to maintain vitality, homeostatic processes must provide a certain, predictable amount of continuity.

Memes, too, make the difference for creating "the idea of the Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity" (Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, 410). Memes are ideas, as Richard Dawkins[73] argues (and Dennett builds upon) that have become the new replicators and will be the impetus for the current evolutionary process as the brains of *homo sapiens* provide shelter and become mediums for their transmission. Replicators thus create a point of view where interests of self-replication bring into the environment whatever is good for promoting constancy and knowledge about what is bad that is to be avoided. Dennett says, "The first reasons preexisted their own recognition" (*Consciousness Explained*, 174). Self-preservation begets boundaries. Multiple functions often serve single uses.

The *self* that is a "web of discourses" is a by-product of the individual belonging to the human species, just as a shell is to a snail or a dam is to a beaver (*Consciousness Explained*, 416). Therefore, Dennett says:

> A self, according to my theory, is not any old mathematical point, but an abstraction defined by the myriads of attributions and interpretations (including self-attributions and self-interpretations) that have composed the biography of the living body whose Center of Narrative Gravity it is. As such, it plays a singularly important role in the ongoing cognitive economy of that living body, because, of

[73] See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

> all the things in the environment an active body must make mental models of, none is more crucial than the model the agent has of itself. (426-427)

But, it is the *living* body that is agential, as described and validated or in dispute with, other agents in feedback loops of information, qualifying existence. Dennett is saying (and does so explicitly a few pages earlier) that we are all storytellers, by our evolutionary nature: "Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source" (418).

In short, what we *mean* by "mind" is distinct from what we *know* about "brain." While any theory of consciousness must address the mind-body problem, "Perhaps consciousness really can't be explained," teases Dennett, "but how will we know till someone tries?" (40) He tries, emphasizing the "point of view" where there is a conscious mind—an observer in a particular *point* of space and time—avoiding materialism, but also avoiding some other kind of link that has to do with *qualia*.

Dennett says:

> Dualism, the idea that a brain cannot be a thinking thing so a thinking thing cannot be a brain, is tempting for a variety of reasons, but we must resist temptation; 'adopting' dualism is really just accepting defeat without admitting it…. Somehow the brain must be the mind, but unless we can come to see in some detail how this is possible, our materialism will not explain consciousness, but only promise to explain it, some sweet day. (*Consciousness Explained*, 41-42)

He then asks what happens when we try to locate the point of view *within* the individual… in the brain. There is no point to which all information funnels.

Here is the point of intervention both Damasio and Panksepp make with Dennett: consciousness studies must now take into account the fact of the PAG as the passageway through which all sensory input and all motor responses flow *and* from which all affect emerges, suggesting—from an evolutionary perspective that connects all living beings with a brain—there *is* a seat from which "consciousness" emerges. This distinction, of course, is significant insofar as there is a "soul" within beings that cannot be replicated in machines, however much the "feedback loop" is importantly operational and there is much to be gleaned from computational theory of the mind, as a way of understanding some aspects—non-affective—for evolutionary thought processes which, too, give rise to consciousness.[74]

Multiple Storied Consciousness

While Descartes was the first to think about the inside observer as the seat of consciousness, hypothesizing that the pineal gland was the point of contact between the material brain and the immaterial mind, perhaps Dennett is the first to suggest that nothing really ever comes together. Although, as Dennett argues, Cartesian materialism disregards dualism, it still holds to the idea of what Dennett calls the "Cartesian Theater." But, there is no central determiner of experiences to be ordered. Therefore, Dennett proposes the Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness:

> Feature detections or discriminations *only have to be made once*…. These distributed content-discriminations yield, over the course of time, something *rather like* a narrative stream or sequence, which can be thought of as subject to

[74] For a better understanding of the issues surrounding cybernetics and feedback loops, via Lacan's reading of Freud's operational process so implied within his use of homeostasis, and the discussion as to whether or not machines will emerge into new life forms like (or better than) humans, see John Johnston, "The in-Mixing of Machines: Cybernetics and Psychoanalysis," *The Allure of Machinic Life: Cybernetics, Artificial Life and the New AI* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

> continual editing by many processes distributed around in the brain, and continuing indefinitely into the future. This stream of contents is only rather like a narrative because of its multiplicity; at any point in time there are multiple 'drafts' of narrative fragments at various stages of editing in various places in the brain. (113)

Yet, it is the *living* body-minded organism that is agential, as described and validated or in dispute with other agents in feedback loops of information, qualifying existence. Just as it is story that spins us, stories become the source as they over-ride other centralized stories. How we know what we know comes to mean something like we know how we know; and sometimes, post trauma, perhaps we know too much. In any case, qualia *figure* in language.

D. Beyond the Post-Human Self: Wired for Empathy

What we are really talking about here has to do with creating a new hermeneutic that complicates the matter of consciousness and qualia and how the mind emerges from the brain. We are living in a new age of information proliferation, such as Albert-László Barabási has identified when he says, "We have taken apart the universe and have no idea how to put it back together."[75] He rightly notes that networks drive a new paradigm shift, so that an understanding of their workings is now a prerequisite for any disciplinary inquiry seeking to engage theoretical or practical models of communication and learning. From neural networks of body-minded brain chemistries to market-driven economic predilections to social networks of storytelling strategies everything is now connected beyond dispute to everything else. When Tim Berners-Lee wrote the software program,

[75] Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life* (New York: Plume, 2003), 6.

"Enquire Within Upon Everything," —designed to function like the human brain without memory lapse—all computers suddenly had the new capacity to be linked together, thereby creating the World Wide Web.[76] A new hermeneutic is required for understanding new capacities that also now exist for human interactions, as well as for a different human capacity for learning.

Although Mark Bauerlein is right to sound the alarm with his valid criticisms[77] of the digital age where prospects for learning are diminished by "social nitwitting,"[78] it is highly unlikely any 21st century educator or scientist or world citizen can take too lightly the 23 year-old CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg. Zuckerberg begins his opening address to 800 developers in San Francisco on May 24, 2007 with the following words:

> Today, together, we're gonna start a movement. Welcome to F8. At Facebook, we're pushing to make the world a more open place and we do this by building things that help people use their real connections to share information more effectively. We've already built a handful of applications to do this--like photos, groups, events--but imagine all the things we're gonna be able to build together. We're here to unvail the next evolution of Facebook platform and we're

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[76] Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).

[77] See Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

[78] See Mark Bauerlein's website for scathing commentary against the internet's mind-numbing effect upon this generation of "learners." http://www.dumbestgeneration.com/home.html (accessed July 13, 2008).

> announcing a completely new way of using these connections. This is a big day for Facebook and we hope it's a big day for you too.[79]

With 24 million active users, adding 100,000 users per day, Facebook doubles every six months. The fastest growing users' age group is 25 and up. More than 60% of users are outside of college. More than 50% of users return more than once to the site every day. Facebook is the 6th most trafficked site in the U.S., passing Ebay and coming up closely behind Google. All this would seem to confirm Zuckerberg's point that people share information online the same way they do in the real world.

Facebook is a strikingly successful example of the new phenomenon of social networking, presumably because it helps people keep up with all their connections, simultaneously and more efficiently. It does this through a social graph that is "changing the way the world works... [since] people are more connected than at any other time in the past and the social graph is at the center of that." (Zuckerberg, 5/24/2007). The group and the group's applications are spreading exponentially throughout the entire social graph. Any developer worldwide can now build applications on top of the social graph inside of the Facebook framework. Applications can integrate into Facebook social networking graphs, helping people build businesses. Making the world "a more open place, one application at a time," Mark Zuckerberg has launched nothing shy of a hacker-mentality, information is free, revolution.[80]

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[79] For Mark Zuckerberg's full address on 5/24/2007, see http://developers.facebook.com/videos.php (accessed July 13, 2008).

[80] For an interesting article as an example for how Facebook is making the world more open, see Tom Watson, "Facebook Generation: Will Social Networks Change the Nature of Philanthropy?" 6/13/2007. http://www.onphilanthropy.com/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7133 (accessed July 13, 2008).

While play is the predominate mode of the social networking and application foray of Facebook, I argue—on the basis of a sophisticated understanding of how the life and death drives are at odds—it is an appropriate and ever-more sophisticated means of negotiating human communication systems for the learners in this post 9/11 age. But brain scientists and humanities scholars can also contribute to the mix about how playing is essential for remapping the body-minded self by showing that if learning is in any way linked with the process of homeostasis, then learning is primordially affective in quality. Therefore, especially where the humanities are concerned, learning involves whatever memes and replicators are available to transmit in order to promote joy, empathy, and altruism.

Extensive research with animals supports how "mirror neurons" work in the brain to give us insight into human empathy and theories of learning, not to mention awareness of self that is foundational for conscious processes.[81] In this digital age, I suggest there is much to learn and many new ways of teaching that science and humanities pedagogues can embrace, however playfully, with this generation's savvy for processing and sharing information.

Even as Dennett states, in the end, his primary goal has been "to demolish the presumption" that the brain is the seat of consciousness because, really, it's all about

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[81] See James R. Blair and Karina S. Perschardt, *Empathy: A Unitary Circuit or a Set of Dissociable Neuro-Cognitive Systems?*, vol. 25 (Cambridge Journals Online, 2003); Michael Lamport Commons and Chester Arnold Wolfsont, *A Complete Theory of Empathy Must Consider Stage Changes*, vol. 25 (Cambridge Journals Online, 2003); Frans B. M. de Waal, "Putting the Altruism Back into Altruism: The Evolution of Empathy," *Annual Review of Psychology* 59.1 (2008); Paul J. Eslinger, Jorge Moll and Ricardo de Oliveira-Souza, *Emotional and Cognitive Processing in Empathy and Moral Behavior*, vol. 25 (Cambridge Journals Online, 2003); Vittorio Gallese, Pier Francesco Ferrari, Umilt, agrave and Maria Alessandra, *The Mirror Matching System: A Shared Manifold for Intersubjectivity*, vol. 25 (Cambridge Journals Online, 2003); Paula Jacobsen, "Neuron See, Neuron Do," *Scientific American* (Scientific American Inc., 2007); Giacomo Rizzolatti, "The Mirror Neuron System and Its Function in Humans," *Anatomy & Embryology* 210.5/6 (2006); Giacomo Rizzolatti, Leonardo Fogassi and Vittorio Gallese, "Mirrors in the Mind," *Scientific American* 295.5 (2006).

imagination anyway, which has to do with so much more than what the brain can comprehend at a single point in time, from a singular point of view. Teaching for example *is* playing, essentially involving imagination. Dennett concludes,

> I have argued that you *can* **imagine** how all that complicated slew of activity in the brain amounts to conscious experience. My argument is straight-forward: I have shown you how to do it. It turns out that the way to imagine this is to think of the brain as a computer of sorts. The concepts of computer science provide the crutches of **imagination** we need if we are to stumble across the *terra incognita* between our phenomenology as we know it by 'introspection' and our brains as science reveals them to us. By thinking of our brains as information-processing systems, we can gradually dispel the fog and pick our way across the great divide, discovering how it might be that our brains produce all the phenomena. There are many treacherous pitfalls to avoid—such inviting dead ends as the Central Meaner, "filling in," and "qualia," for instance—and no doubt there are still some residual confusions and outright errors in the sketch I have provided, but at least we can now see what a path would be like. (433)

Critically, however, it is important to keep in mind whatever is at play with what Freud called the unconscious. Within his Multiple Drafts Model of consciousness, Dennett suggests stories write us into being. Are *homo sapiens* information-processing machines being informed and prepared by the stories that tell us? Is learning a function or product of a homeostatic process? Whereas mechanical systems, *like humans*, need to possess good effectors, now humans, *like* computing machines, must use *memory* as it is

necessary to possess "the ability to preserve the results of past operations for use in the future" (Wiener, *Cybernetics, Science, and Society*, 121).

Both human and animal nervous systems conduct computations, relaying information via *neurons*—like a decision between the binary positions of firing or repose—perpetuating important feedback chains. The point of [potential] contact between neurons—the synapse—is like a gap where information has yet to create a change or keep a change from occurring. But homeostasis is not necessarily static in view of an overall relational information networking system, particularly when considering that reflexivity is at play and emergence, via networks, has enhanced reality. Furthermore, qualia figures in moments of awareness where what is at stake is not necessarily concern for oneself but concern for others. In symbolic moments of communication where something like love overrides self-survival, beyond reason, beyond even what Dawkins describes as the "selfish gene," beyond memory, acts of empathy and altruism emerge for the greater good.

Emotions, such as whatever is involved in love or play, unconsciously map out for human beings new vistas where more sustainable futures than even science or technology alone—without the human capacity for acting out of a "soul"—can possibly address without the aid of the human arts. Interdisciplinary Humanities, together now with Digital Humanities, offers opportunities for expanding and broadening intersubjective interactions and communications, promoting empathy and altruism. Literature, I would argue, *is* the significant site of play beyond what science alone can provide. Furthermore, reading and writing are foundational for the play of consciousness at work in each and every act of empathy and altruism across the gaps wrought by the

constructions of disciplinary practices. The body-minded, soulful *self*—in whatever way that can be figured via language—crosses all disciplinary borders, and now technological borders as well.

Qualia and Epistemics

Structurally, our brains are set up to re-process *qualia* just as much as our sensorial bodies are linked via mind to be re-booted *by* qualia. In *Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life*, Steven Johnson demonstrates how the new language of neuroscience is reframing interdisciplinary conversations about how we understand mental life. Quoting Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in conclusion, he identifies Freud's Copernican idea: that our drives are at odds, creating for consciousness a battleground for the subject. Johnson explains, "Our emotions and our memory are locked in a deep embrace: memories experienced under the influence of strong emotion are more easily recalled."[82] Therefore, some traumatic events are better forgotten, as reliving the memory reinscribes and strengthens the negative, traumatic catharsis of emotion. In order to avert damaging associations, new associations must be written in the brain. New memories create new neural firings, extinguishing older events that previously flooded consciousness. As Johnson puts it, "all of our remembered pasts are transformed by the present" (202).

Johnson describes how the "triune brain," proposed by Paul MacLean as previously cited, is the new model to correlate with Freudian id-ego-superego (or, roughly synonymous, the unconscious-conscious-preconscious) structure. At the deepest level, the reptilian brain (the brain stem) controls the body's metabolic functions. The

[82] Steven Johnson, *Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 201.

mammalian brain (the limbic system) —which includes the amygdala, the hippocampus, the hypothalamus, and now, as we know, the PAG—is the seat of emotion and memory. The neocortex (the two hemispheres that spread across the surface of the brain) services our capacity for language, abstract thought and learning, and the decisions from which behavioral changes occur although such changes are probably driven more by the limbic system than we have previously been able to prove, until most recently, as previously discussed.

Johnson writes about "learning" that clear, crisp blue skies above the city of Manhattan are dangerous and about having to *unlearn*, over-riding the chemical reactions that run amok, due to negative feedback loops (although he does not use cybernetic language) of neuro-chemical reactions: "If the threat that your brain is trying to protect you from is hijacked airplanes flying into skyscrapers by visual flight rules, then cloudy days *are* probably less dangerous than clear ones." As he goes on to say, "There was nothing *irrational* about being more anxious on sunny days" (60). So, due to emotional associations in moments of *learning*, chemistry is obviously important:

> If we're going to rewrite the language of selfhood along the lines suggested by modern brain science, these agents—and their effects—have to be part of our vocabulary. Learning to recognize their presence [meaning, those of 'the molecules of emotion'] should be a touchstone of the examined life. Serotonin's rejection-insensitivity and social confidence; dopamine's exploratory push, its seeking without pleasure; cortisol's frayed edge; the endorphins' oceanic bliss; oxytocin's drive to make emotional bonds; adrenaline's sudden lift. These are the humors of the modern world—the drugs in your inner medicine cabinet, the

> chemicals your brain relies on to push you toward certain objectives and away from others. (207)

Mark Solms would be the first to agree that *learning* changes the brain, boldly noting that "there is a predictable relationship between specific events and specific aspects of *who we are*" (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, 4). On the basis of the "*dedicated* function of communication between nerve cells" (10) —as Johnson also surmises—Solms and Turnbull note an important distinguishing feature underlying the biochemistry of neural networks that is somewhat predetermined by genetics but, overall, becomes "dramatically modified by *environmental influences* during life" (11). Therefore, what is foundational about the projects of neuro-psychoanalysis or affective neuroscience or interdisciplinary humanities, has to do with how "the brain comes into the world with innumerable *potential* patterns of detailed organization, as reflected in the infinite combinations through which its cells *could* connect up with each other [understanding that] the precise way that they *do* connect, in each and every one of us, is largely determined by the idiosyncratic environment in which each brain finds itself" (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, 10).

Bridging the gap between neurobiological underpinning with psychoanalytic understanding of consciousness requires a literary site for learning where important empathic links engage human beings one with another. The mind's interpretation of subjective experience is an essential ingredient for learning, but also for building community. Why? Experience shapes us and reshapes our networks. As Solms states,

> Modern neuroscience is becoming increasingly aware of the role played in brain development by experience, learning, and the quality of the facilitating

> environment—and not only during childhood. In short, the fine organization of the brain is literally *sculpted* by the environment in which it finds itself—far more so than any other organ in the body, and over much longer periods of time. (11)

The brain, therefore, is *not* like a computer, as it is not an isolated organ, connected, in various ways, with other organs as well as with an external world. Yet, unlike other organs, "the brain has a special, mysterious property that distinguishes it from all other organs. It is the seat of the mind, somehow producing our feeling of *being* ourselves in the world *right now*" (Solms and Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World*, 45).

Being ourselves in the world right now has to mean being ourselves in the world, through empathic and altruistic acts, other-minded, lest we all perish. How shall the aims of love and play inform our continued existence?

E. Neurochemistries of Love and Play

In July of 2006,[83] I attended the Seventh International Neuro-psychoanalytic Congress[84] on "Love and Lust in Attachment" in Pasadena, California, and had the opportunity to witness the lively work of a group of psychoanalysts and neuroscientists outlining some of the many objectives of this new and exciting project: to build bridges between modern technological advancements for mapping the brain in conjunction with Freudian theories and interpretive methodologies for understanding mind. Mark Solms addressed the Congress in a manner typical of his highly engaging style, outlining the difference between sexual and non-sexual affectionate relationships and the importance

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[83] I am grateful for the funding I received in the form of a travel grant from Emory University's Psychoanalytic Studies Program.

[84] Previous Congresses addressed topics of: 1) Emotion; 2) Memory; 3) Sexuality and Gender; 4) The Unconscious; 5) The Right Hemisphere; 6) Dreams and Psychosis. The 8th Congress, in Vienna, addressed Depression. The 9th Congress, to be held in Montréal in 2008, will address Consciousness: The Mind in Conflict.

of affectionate bonds based upon "our first relation with our mothers" as a paradigm for how psychoanalysis has attempted to address what is most fundamental to the human experience: social, affectionate relations.[85]

In presentations and discussions which followed, it was argued that Freud's turning point in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* had to do with how "attitudes of love and hate cannot be made use of for the relations of instincts to their object, but are reserved for the relations of the total ego,"[86] insofar as Freud is, in this text, attempting to reason about life and love. He continues, "Maternal behavior evolved from sexual circuitry, upon the same chemistries (opioids, oxytocin, prolactin) operating upon the same general brain regions producing similar affective changes; bonding emerged from the sexual-maternal circuitry with the same general neuroanatomies and the same general chemistries."[87] A third system, having to do with vasopressin, which is more male-specific, mediates the feeling to "keep at it, keep going, we want to get there, let me have it" feelings underlying the behaviors of play.[88]

Responding, Panksepp agreed:

> You basically have it right. However, we should not try to close the book before the data is in. All systems work interactively although the opioids seem to be the most powerful of the pleasure molecules in the brain. There is some indication

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[85] Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

[86] Point made by Jorge Canestri, Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

[87] Point made by Jaak Panksepp, Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

[88] Point made by Steven Suomi, Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

> that pleasure cannot occur without opioids. The neuro-psychoanalytic approach respects the mind. One of the tragedies of the neuroscientific revolution is that we've ignored the mind. Neuro-psychoanalysis has to bring the mind back into the brain in a sophisticated way. We know oxytocin increases feelings of trust…. The work is about to begin, hopefully, combining love and lust in the feminine and the maternal with the third system of play where it seems to be vasopressin that mediates. When you begin to introduce the maternal origins of sexuality into some of these systems of neurochemistry, you begin to introduce a sexed brain. From psychoanalytic points of view, we talk about psychic bisexuality; so, then, where is the division and how do those chemistries get divided? While females are more forgiving in the play situation, is there an instinct for dominance? …. How you get the positive act back on the higher perspective means you have to take on a spiritual view of life. [Furthermore], touch is essential…. Neuroscience reinforces that infancy doesn't just end in infancy… there are real needs for human warmth and connection."[89]

In summation, the Congress affirmed the following point:

> Genes are not destiny. The type of maternal care you receive does not determine destiny. There's an enormous amount of plasticity in the brain, and the environment shapes us over time, as human development takes 20 years, and attachment takes 8-9 months. We are not that hard-wired; our brains get wired in response to our own personal environments. The task of our work is to figure out

[89] Point made by Jaak Panksepp, Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

how neurons, synapses, neurotransmitters, hormones and genes really translate into our relationships at the same time as we seek to know whether or not love is just a drive."[90]

Indeed, as the above notes, however loosely transcribed show, the ongoing symposium continues.

Helen Fisher, an anthropologist at Rutgers studying the neuro-anatomical and neuro-chemical mechanisms of love, was one of the keynote speakers. "Romantic love can be stronger than the will to live," she attested. Quoting Plato, she continued, "'The god of love lives in the state of need.' When there is a homeostatic imbalance, love enters. Although love changes over time; love changes the brain. It moves from drive centers into emotion centers."[91]

While Darwin was annoyed with all the ornamentation of attraction which was superfluous and metabolically expensive, upsetting his theory that all traits evolved for a purpose—mate choice, favoritism, individual preference—all play into courtship attraction. From reading Darwin, Fisher's research question emerged: "What happens in the brain of the viewer?" She hypothesized that there is not only a sex drive; there is also an attraction drive. As Fisher noted, even Jane Goodall observed that "partner preference, independent of hormonal control, is clearly of significance."

In her note to the reader at the beginning of *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, Fisher writes, "I have tried to answer this seemingly

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[90] Point made by Steven Suomi, Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

[91] Helen Fisher, "The Drive to Love: A Neural Mechanism for Mate Choice," Seventh International Congress Neuropsychoanalysis, "Love and Lust in Attachment: Neuropsychoanalytic Perspectives on Object Relations," (Pasadena, California: July 2006).

unanswerable question…. I am convinced that this passion is a foundation stone of human social life, that just about every human being who has ever lived has felt the ecstasy and the despair of romantic love."[92] Using brain scanning technology (fMRI), she recorded the brain activity of men and women who had "just recently fallen madly in love" (xiv) and the results were "startling," convincing her that, "like a craving for food and water and the maternal instinct, it is a physiological *need*, a profound urge, an instinct to court and win a particular mating partner" (xv).

Through brain scans, Fisher was able to confirm her working hypothesis—that dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin played a role in fueling romantic passion—and she found overwhelming evidence that the ventral tegmental area (VTA) of the brain was most activated when lovers called their beloved to mind, so that "as this sprinkler system sends dopamine to many brain parts, it produces focused attention, as well as fierce energy, concentrated motivation to attain a reward, and feelings of elation, even mania—the core feelings of romantic love" (71). "Eros," she thinks—and it is astounding for a scientist to base literary opinions now upon chemistry and specific brain regions "is a combination of lust and romantic love" (95).

F. Conclusion: Questions for the Interdisciplinary Fields of Trauma Studies

If there is a guiding question that will carry over into the following pages, it is no longer "What is [the truth about] love?" as much now as it has become, "What of love remains?" Particularly when trauma ruptures, creating a psychic wound or breech, likened to a levee that can no longer hold back too much stimuli for consciousness to handle, what psychic shield protects against flooding waters? As a teacher and a

[92] Helen Fisher, *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love* (New York: H. Holt, 2004), xiii.

therapist, I know that stories and narratives have the power both to harm as much as to protect. I know, too, that myth and play interact with neuro-chemistries of love to create opportunities for mirroring something different other than only creating further negative affects of hatred or rage which potentially only leads to violence. If studies of consciousness guide us toward not only furthering critical reflection but also now toward ethics of useful, empathic responses toward others, Humanities and Social Science scholars in particular have a new challenge for the 21st Century: How can love be transformed in playful ways, facilitating learning which is neuro-chemically fueled by empathy?

In the following chapter and conclusion, I will look to Dr. Walker Percy to be a guide and mentor. These were his concerns, based both upon scholarship and life experience. I hope his voice will find new avenues for addressing what he cautions could quickly become missing in too much reliance upon technology and science, without the realization that the human being is, first and foremost, an intersubjective, relational being.

Chapter 4

Walker Percy's Message of Eros in an Age of Thanatos

> The novelist writes about the coming end in order to warn about the present ills and so avert the end…. The wounded man has a better view of the battle than those still shooting.[93]

> What does a man do when he finds himself living after an age has ended and he can no longer understand himself because the theories of man of the former age no longer work and the theories of the new age are not yet known, for not even the name of the new age is known, and so everything is upside down, people feeling bad when they should feel good, good when they should feel bad?[94]

A. Introduction: An Apologetic for Humanities Studies

During a time of shifting paradigms, how does *story* matter? Walker Percy, a physician turned novelist, positioned himself as a storyteller in what he often referred to as a *deranged* world: a world full of people too acquainted with a Thanatos syndrome, constantly searching for love which just might be too much in the ruins, all the same expressed via signs that life has meaning if we will only open our minds beyond what science alone can tell us. Convinced that human beings had been too much snookered by

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[93] Walker Percy, "Notes for a Novel about the End of the World," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954), 101.

[94] Walker Percy, "The Delta Factor," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954), 7 (cited in text as "DF").

Descartes in the past 300 years,[95] Dr. Percy the pathologist was one to look deeply into what he discerned was like the San Andreas Fault, separating the human sciences from the human arts. As he light-heartedly joked in his May 3, 1989 Jefferson Lecture before the National Endowment for the Humanities:

> It is as if we lived in a California house straddling the San Andreas Fault, a crack very narrow but deep, which has, however, become as familiar as an old shoe. After all, you can get used to anything. We can hop back and forth, feed ourselves and the dyadic dog on one side, or sit on the other, read Joseph Campbell or write a triadic paper, and never give it a second thought. Once in a while we might look down into the chasm, become alarmed, and take up a New Age religion like Gaia.[96]

Such a split between mind and matter has left us with a peculiar gap. Negotiating Descartes' dualism for over the past 300 years has been "like hopping back and forth through Alice's looking glass" ("FR," 275).

As Percy notes, both Darwin and Freud attempted to address the dualism, but from only one side looking over to the other so that we are left in the in-between where, with Percy, we are constantly asking, "Can anyone imagine how a psychology of the psyche, like Freud's or Jung's, however advanced, can ever make contact with a Skinnerian psychology of neurons, however modified and elaborated it is, for example, by some such refinement as Gestalt and 'cognitive' psychology" ("FR," 276)? Here is

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[95] For an excellent interdisciplinary, historical reading of Cartesian mind-body dualism, see Dalia Judovitz, *The Culture of the Body: Genealogies of Modernity* (Ann Arbor: UP of Michigan, 2001).

[96] Walker Percy, "The Fateful Rift: The San Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind," in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, ed. Patrick H. Samway (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 283 (cited in text as "FR").

where the wounded man, as storyteller, speaks from the battlefield, knowing that "we go from biology (dyadic science) to grammar (triadic science) without anybody seeming to notice anything strange" ("FR," 282).

Percy thought Charles Sanders Peirce provided the groundwork for a coherent science of man. Percy claims he takes from Peirce only what can be perceived to be about an attack on nominalism.[97] Within Percy scholarship, therefore, Ketner has coined the phrase the "Peirce-Percy Conjecture," emphasizing Percy's point that genuine triadic relations exist, beyond collections of relations containing only dyads.[98] We can know the world and one another in the world because we can talk about it and be understood. Material things are real; but, so too are events. As he pointed out during his Jefferson Lecture, there are two kinds of events: 1) the dyadic which, in Peircean terms, has to do with "mutual action between two things" ("FR," 279); and 2) the triadic, where the event is just as real but not subsumed by cause and effect, such as the event of language ("FR," 280). Furthermore, the words and ideas we use to talk about world and events are also real; therefore, because we *talk* and are *understood*, any theory of what it means to be human must take into account such an irreducible triad of behavior, where subject, object, and interpretant function to assert all that we come to know. In a word, "[The]

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[97] In a letter dated February 27, 1989, Percy responds to Ketner's interest in dedicating a Peirce edited volume of lectures to him, stating, "It may be misleading to dedicate to me CSP's Reasoning and the Logic of Things…. I'm not sure CSP would approve. Let me explain. As you well know, I am not a student of Peirce. I am a thief of Peirce. I take from him what I want and let the rest go, most of it. I am only interested in CSP insofar as I understand his attack on nominalism and his rehabilitation of Scholastic realism. I am only interested in his 'logic' insofar as it can be read as an ontology, or, as CSP said, insofar as he 'takes the Kantian step of transferring the conceptions of logic to metaphysics.'" Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy, *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Patrick H. Samway (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 130.

[98] For notes on further themes within Walker Percy about how Percy thought the writer was diagnostician, see Kenneth Ketner's "Novel Science: Or, How Contemporary Social Science is Not Well and Why Literature and Semeiotics Provide a Cure," in Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy, *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Patrick H. Samway (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995).

humanities… are not the minstrels of the age whose only role is to promise R&R to tired technicians and consumers after work. Rather are the humanities the elder brother of the sciences, who sees how the new scientist got his tail in a crack when he takes on the human subject as object and who even shows him the shape of a new science" ("FR," 288).

Percy argues that while it might seem like ordinary common sense, Descartes split talking behavior in two, creating a rift between mind and matter. Language, however, is in the intersection. "Language is both words and meanings. It is impossible to imagine language without both" ("FR," 279). Language cannot be reduced into a series of dyads because the word and the thing are put together by an interpretant. Percy says this is species-specific and offensive to many scientists,[99] positing a "unique" quality to *Homo sapiens*. "In sum, the scientists of man have little or nothing to say about jumping from the science of neurology, as Freud did, to a science of the psyche, whether Freudian and Jungian or what; or jumping from the natural science of biology to the formal science of grammar and structure" ("FR," 282-283).

Percy wants to know, "what happens when the serious scientist is obliged to look straight down at the disjunction?" ("FR," 284) What is one to make of language—anatomically, physiologically, and evolutionarily—as a natural phenomenon? Is the

[99] While sorting through the archives in the UNC library at Chapel Hill, I came across a letter to Robert Daniel that succinctly articulates the rift in the modern mind Percy identifies between the kinds of evidence that come to us from religion and science: "Long ago I realized something about modern science and medicine and all sciences of man. These latter embody a secret dogma—two secret dogmas—all the more surprising from those who, one would suppose, decry dogma in any form. These dogmas are: 1) Thou shalt not believe, whatever the evidence (from chimps, apes, dolphins, whatever) that man is in any respect qualitatively different from other creatures. 2) Thou shalt not believe, whatever the evidence, that there is anything wrong with man by his very nature (thou shalt believe in the aboriginal innocence of man, e.g. Rousseau, *Mead's Coming of Age in Samoa*, the Tasaday tribe, the Mayan civilization--even though these findings have been shown to be either hoaxes or wishful thinking.)" His statement here helps provide foundational provisions for science's critique of religious dogma, as well as a statement he will build upon toward an apologetic for Judeo-Christian faith.

brain, as a processing system, mostly about dyadic events, like a computer, scripted to run its own course along an infinite binary code? Or is there something different about being human we can come to appreciate when considering the fact that—as far as we know, anyway— "chickens have no myths."[100]

Percy often discusses the difference between the sign-user and the symbol-user. Sign-users follow the dyadic behavioral learning patterns within an environment (Umwelt) where rewards and punishments reinforce whatever it is that is learned. The symbol-user, however, lives in a world (Welt) that is both spatial and temporal, where meaning is formulated through the triadic uses of symbols. As a physician-turned-writer, Percy's last message to readers in *The Thanatos Syndrome*[101] is an attempt to use the novel as a symbolic interpersonal process with readers in a world that is dangerously close to forgetting that human beings have actually evolved to be able to love one another by way of sharing stories. In this chapter, I argue Percy's unfinished Peircean project can be anticipated in his last novel through the lens of his last lectures and letters; however, it is not an overtly Christian apologetic in the way some scholars have suggested.

B. Peering Into the Dysjunction

As Patrick Samway notes in his introductory comments to *A Thief of Peirce*, Walker Percy fully intended to write a book on Charles Sanders Peirce's semeiotic theory

[100] Walker Percy, "The Symbolic Structure of Interpersonal Process," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954), 202.

[101] Walker Percy, *The Thanatos Syndrome* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987) (cited in text as *TTS*).

of language. Samway, one of Percy's biographers,[102] quotes a letter from Percy to his best friend Shelby Foote, dated February 3, 1971:

> ...this guy (Peirce) laid it out a hundred years ago, exactly what language is all about and what the behaviorists and professors have got all wrong ever since—laid it out, albeit in a very obscure idiosyncratic style. I propose to take his insight, put it in modern behavioral terms plus a few items of my own, and unhorse an entire generation of behaviorists and grammarians.[103]

Having discovered Peirce as early as 1947 (*A Thief of Pierce*, x), Percy realized he had found an important interlocutor together with Kierkegaard for writing from the perspective of one wounded in battle where what becomes important in an age of Thanatos is how to discover language in a new way that helps us live.

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[102] See Patrick H. Samway, *Walker Percy: A Life*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). See also Jay Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992). In addition to these two historical biographies, see Robert Coles, *Walker Percy: An American Search*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1978) for biographical material of Percy's intellectual influences and Kieran Quinlan, *Walker Percy: The Last Catholic Novelist*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996) for biographical material related to the significance of Percy's conversion to Catholicism. Of course, in critical scholarship, there are several other brief biographies, linking Percy's writing with life events. I prefer, as one such example, Martin Luschei, *The Sovereign Wayfarer: Walker Percy's Diagnosis of the Malaise*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1972) for the economic way in which Percy's biographical material is discussed. Luschei most precisely articulates a concern I share, discussing Percy's writing as "a reversal of alienation" (233) whenever too much consciousness becomes the focus for what is experienced traumatically in isolation, layered upon more original experiences of trauma. Luschei writes, "In the novels we have often seen the character who is trapped in the cul-de-sac of his private consciousness. Most of us can recognize in ourselves a degree of the same condition; at times we may feel like the poor lonesome ghosts of *Love in the Ruins*, locked in our own machinery. It is a matter of hope then that art can be a form of liberation" (233-234). He recalls Percy's words in "The Man on the Train" where the "aesthetic victory of comradeliness" is a "triumphant reversal of alienation" because what gets represented is "a recognition of a plight in common." While the man on the train "exists in true alienation which is unspeakable," the commuter on a train reading a book about the man on the train "rejoices in the speakability of his alienation and in the new triple alliance of himself, the alienated character, and the author, 'His mood is affirmation and glad; Yes! That is how it is'" (234)! Quoted material from Walker Percy, "The Man on the Train: Three Existential Modes," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954), 478.

[103] Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy, *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Patrick H. Samway, x.

To this extent, Percy was fascinated by Helen Keller and her birth into language from an event that introduced to her, not only an environment (Umwelt), but a world (Welt). In his essay "The Delta Factor," he writes about *his own* "breakthrough" where he considered, for a moment, *Helen's* breakthrough:

> One ordinary summer day I was sitting at my desk in Louisiana and thinking about a day in the life of Helen Keller in Tuscumbia, Alabama, in 1887. I had been trying to figure out what happens when a child hears a word, a sound uttered by someone else, and understands that it is the name of something he sees. Toward this end I had filled a page with diagrams showing little arrows leaving the speaker's mouth, entering the ear of the hearer, coursing along neurons and synapses; other arrows showing light waves coming from the tree or ball the child was looking at; the two trains of arrows meeting one way or another in the brain. ("DF," 30)

Percy was peering into the dysjunction, likened to the San Andreas Fault, as an evolutionary scientist and layperson of anthropological linguistics. He posits himself as an interdisciplinary scholar, stating: "I make no apologies for being an amateur in such matters, since the one thing that has been clear to me from the beginning is that language is too important to be left to linguisticians. Indeed everything is too important to be left to the specialist of that thing, and the layman is already too deprived by the surrendering of such sovereignty" ("DF," 10). He continues, explaining how he had been convinced for awhile that "three paragraphs of Helen Keller's *The Story of My*

Life[104] veiled a mystery, a profound secret and that, if one could fathom it, one could also understand a great deal of what it meant to be "*Homo loquens, Homo symbolificus*, man the speaking animal, man the symbol-monger" ("DF," 30). Whenever it was that "the brain flowered with words," Percy thought "man became man" as Delta had occurred ("DF," 42). Studying the three paragraphs of Keller's text, Percy felt like he was looking at a mystery, for Helen had gone from wanting a piece of cake, no different from an ape, and spelling that word in Annie Sullivan's hand which prompted Sullivan to get for her a piece of cake, to making a different kind of breakthrough. Percy writes:

> If there was a bifurcation in our knowledge of ourselves and our peculiar and most characteristically human activity, with a terra incognita in between concealing the mystery, surely I was straddling it and looking straight down at it. Here in the well-house in Tuscumbia in a small space and a short time, something extremely important and mysterious had happened. Eight-year-old Helen made her breakthrough from the good responding animal which behaviorists study so successfully to the strange name-giving and sentence-uttering creature who begins by naming shoes and ships and sealing wax, and later tells jokes, curses, reads the paper, writes *La sua volontade e nostra pace*, or becomes a Hegel and composes an entire system of philosophy. ("DF," 35)

The turning point within the text provided for Percy an important question he would urgently pursue until his dying day: *What happened?*

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[104] Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life, with Her Letters, 1887-1901* (New York: Doubleday Page and Company, 1903).

Years later, Percy wrote to Foote again in a letter dated January 28, 1980, "You would not believe the main source of my distress these days. I would be perfectly happy to be let alone for the rest of my life because I now know what I want to think about and write about: semiotics, which is very important though you may not think so—and which nobody knows anything about, or very little."[105]

C. Walker Percy at Play, Writing Thirdness

The Thanatos Syndrome, however, published in 1987 would be the last book Percy would write. Given his passion for semiotics and particularly for Peirce, it is only natural to assume much of what he was thinking about writing would be played out within the text of his last work of fiction. *The Thanatos Syndrome*, therefore, is Percy's "message in a bottle" to us, drawing a picture for us of what he was thinking would be so important to spend the rest of his life writing about. In one of his last addresses, during which he received the prestigious Laetare Medal at Notre Dame, Walker Percy discussed the peculiar position he found himself in as one who straddles both the Arts and the Sciences:

> In my last novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, I tried to show how, while truth should prevail, it is a disaster when only one kind of truth prevails at the expense of another. If only one kind of truth prevails—the abstract and technical truth of science—then nothing stands in the way of a demeaning of and destruction of

[105] Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy, *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Patrick H. Samway, xviii. For important comprehensive links with Percy's early unpublished work, "Symbol and Existence: A Study of Meaning," archived in the University of North Carolina's Southern Historical Collection, see also Elizabeth Dale Johnson, "A Voice from the Bridge: A Study of Walker Percy's Early Nonfiction on Language, 1954-1961," (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1996).

> human life for what appear to be reasonable short-term goals. It's no accident, I think, that German science, great as it was, ended in the destruction of the holocaust. The novelist likes to irritate people by pointing this out. It's his pleasure and vocation to reveal in his own allusive and indirect way, man's need of and openings to other than scientific propositions.[106]

In his 40-page primer on his unique understanding of semiotics, tucked away within the pages of *Lost in the Cosmos*,[107] he plainly states what has been bothering him and driving him to write fiction as metaphorical/ allegorical playgrounds for theories of science, religion, philosophy, linguistics, and psychoanalysis and it is echoed in the lines above. Throughout his interdisciplinary writings, there is a common thread of urgency: Descartes had it all wrong. Percy was certain he wanted to prove through Peirce: "What Descartes did not know: no such isolated individual as he described can be conscious" (*Lost in the Cosmos*, 105). He explains,

> Semiotically, the self is literally unspeakable to itself.… The self of the sign-user can never be grasped, because, once the self locates itself at the dead center of its

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[106] The remaining part of the speech is as follows: "The novelist, I think, has a special calling to truth these days. The world into which you are graduating is a deranged world. It is his task to show the derangement. My characters are a little strange. In my last novel, there was a priest, not your ordinary priest, he climbed a fire tower and refused to come down. Yet from his tower, he saw a great deal more than brush fires. In another novel, there are two unusual lovers. One is a man who has achieved every material goal in life, yet he is subject to strange fits, takes to falling down in sand traps. The other is a young woman who escapes from a mental hospital. Her obsession is that ordinary language is worn out. So, she invents a new language. The point is that it is through their sufferings—symptoms if you will—that they begin to see what has gone wrong and where the truth lies. So the novelist is one of the lowliest handmaidens to the celebration to the truth of the good news. But if he, or any of us, succeeds in this task then I say, Laetare indeed, 'Let us rejoice.'" R. McCain et. al., "Walker Percy's Remarks Upon Receiving the Laetare Medal at Notre Dame in 1989," as posted on "Korrektiv: The Adventures of a [Small Group of] Bad Catholic[s] at a Time Near the End of the World," March 14, 2007, http://www.korrektiv.org/2007/03/walker-percy-at-notre-dame-1989.html#comments (accessed on June 1, 2008).

[107] Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983).

> world, there is no signified to which a signifier can be joined to make a sign. The self has no sign of itself. No signifier applies. All signifiers apply equally…. The signified of the self is semiotically loose and caroms around the Cosmos like an unguided missile. (*Lost in the Cosmos*, 106-107)

Such is the predicament for human beings, separate from other species along the evolutionary path: language is the sign for consciousness; but, irreducibly, the event of consciousness happens within the world that is constructed of symbols within the environment where one speaks to another. Triadicity or "thirdness" occurs, not when A throws C and hits B in the eye; but when A *gives* C to B.[108] Walker Percy seems to be emphasizing that the triad involves *meaning* where the interpretant tells some kind of intersubjective story.

The last section of Percy's 1989 Jefferson Lecture helps make the same point: "the triadic creature is nothing if not social" ("FR," 289). Such an assertion is, for Percy, a hint toward understanding where he was headed with his Peircean project. Insofar as he suggests science can say nothing about "what it is to be born a human individual, to live, and to die," it is the novel—or the story—that "ought to be taken seriously indeed since these are the cognitive, scientific, if you will, statements that we have about what it is to be human" ("FR," 288).

Thus, in light of such a view of the novelist and of the novel, one must attempt to read, especially, his last novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*. John Desmond also came to the same insight that Percy's fiction must be read through his Jefferson Lecture. His reading,

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[108] Walker Percy, "A Triadic Theory of Meaning," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954), 161.

however, differs in so far as he is committed to articulating a Christian apologetic for the 20th century in ways Percy himself never got around to writing, and, arguably, did not seem to care to write. While Desmond reads Percy through the specific lens of Eucharistic moments as they relate to Gnosticism,[109] I find Mary Deems Howland's work to be slightly different yet more aligned with the unfinished Percy project as she thinks through the specific influence of Gabriel Marcel's theories of intersubjectivity upon Percy's playfulness within his writing. As she notes,

> For Marcel the intersubjective world into which every child is born precedes the Cartesian division of subject-object, just as incarnation precedes cognition of one's having or being a body. Walker Percy agrees with Marcel's placement of intersubjectivity as ontologically prior to all other conditions: the most radical backtracking into consciousness cannot carry us beyond what Marcel calls the intersubjective milieu, by which he means the prime and irreducible character of intersubjectivity.[110]

Relating Percy to Marcel, Howland reframes what was at stake for Percy as he was like a "wounded man [with] a better view of the battle than those still shooting," writing "about the coming end in order to warn about the present ills and so avert the end."[111] "Indeed," he says, "it may well turn out that consciousness itself is not a 'thing,' an entity, but an

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[109] To follow such threads of speculation for how Percy might have written an apologetic, see in particular John Desmond, "Walker Percy's Eucharistic Vision," *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 52:3, (2000): 219-231. See also, John Desmond, *Walker Percy's Search for Community* (Athens: UP of Georgia, 2004). Desmond reads hope into Percy's fiction, drawing upon the Jefferson Lecture again for a new anthropology where the arts and sciences reconcile toward a Eucharistic vision for community, based upon the historic Judeo-Christian event of the Incarnation.

[110] Mary Deems Howland, *The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1990), 13-14.

[111] Walker Percy, "Notes for a Novel about the End of the World," 101.

act, the triadic act by which we recognize reality through its symbolic vehicle" ("FR," 287). Consciousness is literary; also, consciousness is social.

Such a symbolic vehicle for emphasizing Peircean thirdness is *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Furthermore, in writing it, Percy's thinking about thirdness was not outside of an intersubjective dialogue. During the time he was writing *The Thanatos Syndrome*, he was in an active conversation with many, but especially with Ken Ketner, regarding Peircean theory. In a letter to Ketner dated December 17, 1992 after Percy's death, Mrs. Percy confides her husband's pleasure upon finally meeting Ketner in Washington the day after the Jefferson Lecture: "I remember seeing Walker greeting you in a little park across from the hotel in Washington and how pleased Walker was," she wrote to Ketner. "He had on several occasions told me, 'Bunt, this man knows what I'm getting at.'"[112] Her memory of Percy's enthusiastic comment for meeting Ketner provides further proof of Percy's profound urgency to think through what he wanted to write about—and did end up writing about, playfully enough—in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, but in a way that most readers miss without considering what he was up to in this text, working through how he would use the thought of Peirce.

Upon reading through the letters between the two intellectual friends, perhaps one of the more significant moments occurred when Percy posed to Ketner the essential questions he had been pondering, hoping Ketner could help him understand how Peirce might respond: "How does the sign-user go about living in his phaneron?" and then, "How would you investigate it?" (*A Thief of Peirce*, 3). In the same volume, Ketner included an essay, "Peirce's 'Most Lucid and Interesting Paper': An Introduction to

[112] Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy, *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Patrick H. Samway, 167.

Cenopythagoreanism,"[113] because he finds Percy to be similar to Peirce but using writing and storytelling to investigate the very questions Percy posed to Ketner. First, to clarify, as Samway notes in the introduction, Ketner's reference to Percy as a "Cenopythagorean" means he sees Percy as "a new American Pythagoreas who… attempts to make a breakthrough in uniting philosophy, literature, and semiotic" (*A Thief of Peirce*, x). Secondly, Samway notes Percy's summary (in a letter dated August 8, 1984) learning from Ketner that the phaneron is "totality of all that is before or on your mind" and "the notion of phaneroscopy [is] a method of examination of same, and the idea of valency of elements in the phaneron [is] key to a classification system." Percy notes, "I arrived at the phaneron through a different route, my idea of the 'world' of the symbol-user (triadic) as opposed to the 'environment' of the organism (dyadic)" (*A Thief of Peirce*, 3). A sign-user seeks a signified in one whom the sign-user is able to locate a self, intersubjectively; in such relations, the signifier joins the sign of the self which can only be signified by the triadic event where the interpretant honors the self as sign, one for the other.

The "novel science" of the signifying process, as Ketner put to Percy in a letter dated September 17, 1987, has to do with how the novelist draws a picture for the reader, setting up a fictional relational world against which backdrop the reader can see the picture of the parallel world of the reader's personal life.[114] Triadic science relies upon

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[113] Kenneth Laine Ketner, "Peirce's 'Most Lucid and Interesting Paper': An Introduction to Cenopythagoreanism," in Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy, *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy*, ed. Patrick H. Samway (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995), 195-219.

[114] For an excellent example which serves as a testimonial to Percy's idea that the novel functions as diagnostic tool, see Carl Elliott's funny and warmly written introductory essay in Carl Elliott and John D. Lantos, *The Last Physician: Walker Percy and the Moral Life of Medicine* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999). Most of the essays in this collection were written from the perspective that there is something unique about a physician writing. Most of the essayists are, themselves, medically trained.

the non-deterministic, yet intersubjective, relation-building world, signified by symbols and myths, yet weighing heavily upon *how* selves are then experienced as known, having "drawn a picture" within which and against which to function, seeking always signification via another sign-user, or through stories of how sign-users speak one to another.

Many scholars read Percy with some suspicion, recognizing he has something important to say about what it means to be a human being. Bertonneau writes about Percy as being similar to Saul Bellow in this way, where both risk being "morally, linguistically, and culturally atavistic."[115] Bertoneau describes them as "swimmers against the stream" when, as he concurs with Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*,[116] the self does not amount to much ("Eulogists of the Soul," 100). Regardless, Bellow and Percy are "spokesmen for the gravity of being a self, defenders of an idea of human dignity that descends to the present from a theological past" ("Eulogists of the Soul," 100). Both Percy and Bellow eulogize the soul because they see in the self, believing it is full of soul, "the metonymy of much that has been lost in the revolutionary tumult of the twentieth century" ("Eulogists of the Soul,"100). Describing the Peirce-Percy triadic phenomena, where "there is literally no world, for human beings, without language; nor is there a self placed consciously in a world" ("Eulogists of the Soul," 97-98), Bertonneau reads *The Thanatos Syndrome* for the characteristics of dyadic behavior, showing the self is lost. As he notices in Percy's text, Tom More, observer of "Angelism-Bestialism,"

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[115] Thomas F. Beronneau, "Saul Bellow and Walker Percy: Eulogists of the Soul," in *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 14 (1995): 91.

[116] Jean François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport Sur Le Savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

diagnoses the malady for the modern soul, where "death of meaningful language and the recursion to animal behavior" is but "a hollow death in life" ("Eulogists of the Soul," 99) disconnection between people.

There are many ways to read *The Thanatos Syndrome* in particular and Percy in general. Since so many critics work to bridge the gap between Percy's fiction and biographical material,[117] I have felt relieved not to do so. John Desmond's essay, "From Suicide to Ex-Suicide: Note on the Southern Writer as Hero in the Age of Despair," provides a good enough foundation for freedom to read Percy as, perhaps, Percy wanted to be read. Desmond writes about the theme of suicide in Percy's novels as being different from Faulkner, mostly because of the influence of Kierkegaard. For Percy, writes Desmond, death in life despair is a condition of spiritual suicide, where there is the "refusal to will to be a self, to be that union of the finite and the infinite which can find identity only 'transparently under God'" ("From Suicide to Ex-Suicide," 47).[118] Though despair permeates Percy's every novel, it is exemplified when the self refuses to be a self: "So pervasive is despair in his work that one can speak of a condition of cultural suicide or general thanatos, yet his protagonists also struggle against it, struggle, that is, to become ex-suicides" ("From Suicide to Ex-Suicide," 47-48). While it would make sense to attempt to understand why Percy writes fiction from the point of view of a wounded man or being lost on an island, linking as much with the traumas of consciousness he himself has suffered, I find most intriguing Percy's own intrigue as it

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[117]For critical work on biographical critics, see Edward J. Dupuy, *Autobiography in Walker Percy: Repetition, Recovery and Redemption*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996).

[118] Quoting thought of Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; and, The Sickness Unto Death.* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1954).

informs the *how* which is the true message that emerges, overcoming trauma with a drive for life.

I argue, therefore, that one can read *The Thanatos Syndrome* through the very questions Percy posed to Ketner: "How does the sign-user go about living in his phaneron?" and then, "How would you investigate it?" (*A Thief of Peirce*, 3) In the novel, Dr. Tom More, a Freudian psychiatrist, is a sign-user living in his phaneron, investigating it in order to understand what has changed about his environment since he has been away. (*The Thanatos Syndrome* was written to be a sequel to *Love in the Ruins*.[119]) As narrator and protagonist, Dr. Tom More is struggling to reestablish his work with "normal neurotics," yet something seems to have gone very wrong in his absence from his talking-therapy practice. This time around, Dr. More discovers that a strange symptom-complex has emerged within his patient population: 1) sexual inhibitions are lower than normal, with people behaving sexually like animals; 2) speech patterns are short and staccato with flat affect; and 3) memory for geographical location and numerical computations are phenomenally and disproportionately above normal range. By the end of *The Thanatos Syndrome*, we discover with Dr. More that some learned and well-meaning people have been intentionally poisoning the water supply. They are conducting research with a chemical "vitamin" that reduces social aggression but, in the meantime, changes the brain and also the peoples' moral conscience. Thus, *The Thanatos Syndrome* is Percy's critique of the common dogmas embedded within *both* science and religion, deconstructing one set of imperial constructions with the other.

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[119] Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time near the End of the World*. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971) (cited in text as *LITR*).

Even within the novel, however, Dr. Tom More is unable to investigate his phaneron outside of significant intersubjective relations. While, as the book begins, it is Dr. More who speaks, saying, "For some time now I have noticed that something strange is occurring in our region," in the end it is only within dialogue where selves signify one for the other, making an important claim about the Peirce-Percy interpretant: "genius consists not in making great discoveries but in seeing the connection between small discoveries" (*TTS*, 3). Whatever it is that happens in the brain-body during connections with other people will be what makes for consciousness, as well as for language as event. As Ketner says, "WP's novels are almost a 'working model' of a science of Thirdness. But people don't usually know that such is what is happening to them when they read one of them" (*A Thief of Peirce*, 23).

Even within the novel, Dr. More surmises "old-fashioned shrinks are out of style" as "brain engineers, neuropharmacologists, chemists of the synapses" replace the ones who listen to troubled souls, who believe there is a psyche "born to trouble as the sparks fly up," able to interpret one's own self while listening to another (*TTS*, 13). But, "if one can prescribe a chemical and overnight turn a haunted soul into a bustling little body, why take on such a quixotic quest as pursuing the secret of one's own self" (*TTS*, 13)? In the words of Dr. Tom More, the old-fashioned Freudian analyst, Percy raises the question at the heart of the novel, justifying the value of language—in talking and listening, the quest for the self shapes and reshapes, not only the brain, but human

relations—over and against whatever reductions science brings into, however unwittingly, as an understanding of what it means to be a human being.[120]

As the novel progresses, Dr. More discovers that language itself is dying and he wants to know why. Something is missing. There are signs of suppression of cortical function, affecting areas of the brain—"I'm thinking particularly of the posterior speech center, Wernicke's area, Brodmann 39 and 40… the locus of self-consciousness" (*TTS*, 22)—in the speech patterns of patients. Upon conferring with the Qualitarians, he discovers their objective—to reduce all manner of societal "ills"—bringing into question the very value of whatever it might mean to be Homo sapiens, or *Homo sapiens sapiens*, as the case may be. As one of the Qualitarians says, "The only trouble with Homo sapiens is that parts of our brains are too fucking big" (*TTS*, 195). So, there is a pun at play here, suggesting "we know what we know" and maybe that no longer works in the evolutionary scheme of things. The "Blue Boy" project, says Bob the Qualitarian, is based on the hypothesis that "at least a segment of the human neocortex and of consciousness itself is not only an aberration of evolution but is also the scourge and curse of life on this earth, the source of wars, insanities, perversions—in short, those very pathologies which are peculiar to Homo sapiens" (*TTS*, 195); or just Homo sap sap, Percy puns for short, particularly after heavy doses of sodium in the water supply which inhibits dopamine production in the prefrontal cortex, increasing endorphin production for natural highs, all the while suppressing the cortical response to bombardment from the limbic system. "Tom, we can see it! In a PET scanner" (*TTS*, 193)! Percy has Bob

[120] Lewis Lawson has written extensively upon the figure of Dr. Tom More as Freudian psychiatrist. See Lawson, "Tom More: Cartesian Physician," *Delta: Revue du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Ecrivains du Sud aux Etats-Unis* 13 (1981): 67-82; "Tom More and Sigmund Freud," *New Orleans Review* 16.4 (1989): 27-31; "Neurobiology and Psychoanalysis in the Work of Walker Percy," *Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Americaines* 24 (1991): 1-8.

the Qualitarian surmising that seeing is believing; yet, he is not peering into the disjunction in the way Percy seeks to advocate. Something within the scientific method is still missing, Percy playfully suggests.

In keeping with the Peirce-Percy conjecture, the self in context is always a self in dialogue with another where language is the behavior—or the sign we can see—for a relation only an interpretant can figure. What is significant for a reader becomes, then, not so much about the individual character, but about the dialogues because what the characters talk about has to do with what it means to *mean* something; or what it means **not** to mean when language fails to do what language was meant to do: i.e., *express meaning.*

Michael Kobre makes important interpretative claims for theories of consciousness as he performs Bakhtinian readings of Percy's dialogic art. He cites Percy's protest against the use of fiction to get across theological or philosophical content, although finding within Percy's narrative form a willingness to allow Kierkegaardian stages of life to confront certain religious and philosophical issues.[121] Building upon the work of Lawson[122] as a seminal essay for any Bakhtinian reading of Percy's fiction and of Ciuba[123] for an appreciation of the quality of dialogue from the heart, mind, and soul, Kobre argues a Bakhtinian idea of multiple voices pervades the

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[121] Michael Kobre, "The Consolations of Fiction: Walker Percy's Dialogic Art," *New Orleans Review* 16.4 (1989): 45-53.

[122] Lewis A. Lawson, "Walker Percy's Indirect Communications," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities* 11 (1969): 867-900.

[123] Gary M. Ciuba, *Walker Percy: Books of Revelations* (Athens: UP of Georgia, 1991).

consciousness of Percy's characters.[124] As Kobre notes, Bakhtin considered Dostoevesky's *Notes From the Underground*[125] to be profoundly dialogic and this too was one of Percy's favored texts (which he first read in convalescence over and over again), never failing to credit Dostoevsky as one of his primary influences for writing and thinking. However, Kobre criticizes *The Thanatos Syndrome* for being too polemical, with the mid-dialogue between Father Smith and Dr. More as being too dominant, creating a flawed text in novelistic terms. At the same time, he recognizes the historical parallel—made public seven years after the novel's publication—that the United States government had conducted secret experiments during the Cold War, exposing countless Americans (primarily minorities and the working class poor) to radiation; so Percy's text functions best, he says, as "an artfully disguised jeremiad" (*Walker Percy's Voices*, 216) in Percy's depiction of Project Blue Boy.

While Kobre criticizes Percy for inserting the dialogues between Father Smith and Dr. More into a narrative form, making *The Thanatos Syndrome* too polemical for even Percy's taste, I argue these dialogues to be the central site for thinking through what Percy might have been up to in his self-proclaimed urgent Peircean-based project that he did not accomplish. One of the central organizing themes for the novel has to do with what Father Smith has come to consider while holed up in a water tower with an azimuth, an instrument used to measure the angle of a third point between two observation markers. This is, of course, an obvious symbol Percy employs to emphasize the triadic at play. Indeed, Father Smith was keeping alert for smoke signals using the

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[124] Michael Kobre, *Walker Percy's Voices* (Athens: UP of Georgia, 2000).

[125] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, Trans. Hugh A. Aplin (London: Hesperus, 2006).

azimuth while Dr. More, on the ground below, was also trying to understand what presently was going on that was just not right. Between the two points of view from the ground below and from the water tower above, the two men would come to discern that something very deranged was occurring.

Lewis A. Lawson plays off of the shift between the use of Dr. More's lapsometer in *Love in the Ruins*—which was an instrument that could measure the human soul within the neocortex—to the use of the azimuth in *The Thanatos Syndrome* which, according to Lawson, symbolically charted outbreaks of fire on earth between the poles of matter and spirit so that the talk between two subjects (not analyst and patient), charted the way between flesh and consciousness ("Tom More and Sigmund Freud," 31). Martha Montello[126] introduces Marcel's notion of difference between a "problem" and a "mystery" in a way that produces a clinical shift for Dr. More's work between the figure of the Freudian psychiatrist in *Love in the Ruins* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Her intervention via Marcel is significant, clarifying that a "problem" is "something which I meet which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce," whereas a "mystery" is "something in which I myself am involved" ("The Diagnostic 'I,'" 117).[127] Montello notes,

> While the whodunit tale of the novel's surface unfolds on a secret plot to engineer human behavior by tainting the community's water supply, a deeper probe into the recesses of the human spirit reveals the threatening syndrome at

[126] See Martha Montello, "The Diagnostic 'I': Presenting the Case in the Thanatos Syndrome," *New Orleans Review* 16.4 (1989): 32-36. See also Martha Montello, Carl Elliott and John Lantos, "From Eye to Ear in Percy's Fiction: Changing the Paradigm for Clinical Medicine," *The Last Physician: Walker Percy and the Moral Life of Medicine* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 46-58.

[127] Quoting the ideas of Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (Westminster London: Dacre Press, 1949).

> the novel's dark center. The doctor discovers that if he is to help himself and his patients he must not only deal with a problem but become involved with a mystery as well. ("The Diagnostic 'I,'" 31-32)

She concludes that Tom More must take his own medicine: the talking cure. In *Love in the Ruins*, Tom More says, "A note to physicians: if you listen carefully to what patients say, they will tell you not only what is wrong with them but also what is wrong with you" (*LITR*, 39). The shift in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, however, occurs when More himself is diagnosed, particularly by Father Smith, as suffering from "an abstraction" so that he is isolated in consciousness. Montello argues that the Thanatos Syndrome is a schizophrenia of spirit where all become ill as the spirit of abstraction proliferates. She too notes the azimuth is used metaphorically, but to demonstrate something of the structure for the basic shape of intersubjectivity as being about "triangulation."[128]

D. Psychoanalytic Theology for the Event of Consciousness

The central dialogues of the novel that take place between the rehabilitating psychoanalyst in Dr. Tom More and the hysterical theologian in Father Rinaldo Smith mark two points of intersubjective consciousness within the novel that practice what is needed for the new age while looking back upon the old: a psychoanalytic theology which, in dialogue, confronts with honesty a degree of human pathos, establishing a new ethic of empathy, grown wiser from a triadic understanding of the religio-scientific dyadic mistakes of the past. Tuttleton[129] comes closest to identifying the tension I am

[128] Although intriguing and insightful, I find her essay falls short in the one respect that she does not so clearly explain her abstract use of "triangulation," based upon what seems an uncertain reading of, albeit difficult, philosophical and linguistic texts.

[129] James W. Tuttleton, "The Physician-Writer and the Cure of the Soul," *New Orleans Review* 16.4 (1989): 17-21.

reading between psychoanalytic science and theological anthropology, in an attempt to bridge the Cartesian gap, embodying something so elusive as soul. Tuttleton writes that for Percy the soul is not something that can be healed, since it is a mystery beyond the reach of psychiatry. Writing from what Tuttle calls "Christian existentialism" Percy links dread, anxiety, and fear with Kierkegaard, making more conscious an appreciation of symptoms as a means to understanding the nature of suffering, so that one's own existence does not become alienated from what a technological society would deprive one of accessing.

It is Father Smith, described as an old Ricardo Montalban-looking failed Catholic priest, who makes the diagnosis for the new age: "We've got it wrong about horror. It doesn't come naturally but takes some effort" (*TTS*, 254). Many critics read *The Thanatos Syndrome* from the statement of "tenderness leads to the gas chambers,"[130] criticizing Percy for plagiarizing Flannery O'Connor. If there is a singular summative sentence, however, I propose the idea expressed above that "horror takes effort" as most central, expressing as it does the dilemma between the polemic of Thanatos and Eros when it comes to the development of consciousness and how consciousness can survive, post trauma. Such a thought, in spite of what noted critics have suggested, is not about misdirected goodness and naïve faith in science so much as it is about doing the work of balancing consciousness with what can remain unconscious, as necessary to shield one against traumatic rupture, leading to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If there is

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[130] See Sue Mitchell Crowley, "The Thanatos Syndrome: Walker Percy's Tribute to Flannery O'Connor," *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher*, Ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991) 225-37; Patricia Lewis Poteat, et al. "Pilgrim's Progress: Or, a Few Night Thoughts on Tenderness and the Will to Power," *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991) 210-24; and Francois Pitavy, et al., "Walker Percy's Brave New World: The Thanatos Syndrome," *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991) 177-88.

an argument to be made toward understanding the import of dialogic relations where subjects interact so as to determine what is real, then this one statement justifies a good enough reading for clinical and academic scholars and researchers to investigate, as it is the phenomena described by this one utterance which serves to mark the extraordinary coping mechanisms PTSD symptoms over-shoot for keeping one conscious so as to protect against what the unconscious cannot allow.[131] The diagnosing priest has come to understand as much, after describing to the psychoanalyst a memory, occurring as a flashback, after his initial conversation with Dr. More who was called upon to make a diagnosis of Father Smith since it seemed to other good Catholics that Father Smith had apparently lost his mind.

After all, it was the case that Father Smith abandoned the local parish ministry and took up residence in a fire tower, high above a pine forest on the outskirts of Feliciana, Louisiana. While Dr. Tom More was tracking clues below, trying to identify behavioral patterns in his patient population, another local priest called upon Dr. More to visit Father Smith in the fire tower. Father Placide tells Dr. More, "I don't know whether Father Smith is a nut or a genius, or whether he has some special religious calling. It's out of my league, but I can tell you this, Doc, I need help" (*TTS*, 110).

Meanwhile, the ladies of the Church, like a Greek chorus, trade conjectures: "I heard that he wouldn't come down when he had a heart attack and wouldn't let anybody

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[131] For issues of temporality pertinent to the phenomena of the flashback as described by Father Smith, see Cathy Caruth, "Traumatic Awakenings: Freud, Lacan, and the Ethics of Memory" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 91-112; see also Bessel Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Kolk, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* Ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995) 158-182. For a standardized view of diagnosis for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, see the American Psychiatric Association Task Force on DSM-IV. As background literature, see also Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, 1895, *Studies on Hysteria* (London: Vintage, 2001) and Sigmund Freud, (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams* Trans and ed. James Strachey, Vol. IV, (London: Hogarth Press), 1966.

come up to treat him except Dr. Gottlieb. And the only reason he let him come up was that he, Father Smith, had converted to the Jewish religion" (*TTS*, 112). Another told tales of untold miracles, while a third woman—exasperated by nonsensical chatter—blasted the others with her own, more prophetic and pastoral-theological diagnostic speculation: "He could be doing vicarious penance for the awful state of the world. It is, after all, good Catholic practice…. The Carmelites and the Desert Fathers have been doing it for centuries. This really slays me. Here we are on the very brink of World War Three, on the brink of destruction, and nobody gives it a second thought" (*TTS*, 113). Indeed, she is right. Father Smith *has* holed up in the tower, contemplating the age of Thanatos, which—as the priest will confess to the analyst in a bazaar reversal of role functions—began with the Holocaust in the name of, not only religious dogmas, but scientific dogmas as well.

Perhaps the most astute argument for the shared failures of the dogmas of religion and science is to be found in Mark Johnson's "The Virgin and the Cooling Tower: Literature as Science in Percy's the Thanatos Syndrome."[132] Johnson discusses Percy's insertion of the "Father Smith's Confession" and "Father Smith's Footnote" sections, noting Percy's use of Fredric Wertham's *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence*[133] as a source for the development of Father Smith's storyline. In discussing the Weimar psychiatrists as the precursors to Hitler's power, Johnson writes, "Wertham is sharply critical of Freud's theory of a 'death instinct' because he sees it as not an explanation but an evasion of an explanation, arguing instead that violence is not an

[132] Mark Johnson, "The Virgin and the Cooling Tower: Literature as Science in Percy's The Thanatos Syndrome," *New Orleans Review* 16.4 (1989): 22-26.

[133] Fredric Wertham, *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

inborn instinct but a perversion of human relations and as such 'deeply embedded in our institutions'" (25, quoting Wertham, 364-367). Johnson notes the significance of Percy's essay "The Diagnostic Novel" as an important companion text for reading *The Thanatos Syndrome* since it was simultaneously written. In that essay, he notes Percy's emphasis that "the contemporary writer's problem is that 'the consciousness of Western man, the layman in particular, has been transformed by a curious misapprehension of the scientific method,' an idolatry of science that has led modern man 'to believe that his very self is also the appropriate domain of *them*, that is the appropriate experts of the self'" (22, quoting Percy, 44). Therefore, the novelist as diagnostician is ultimately therapist, providing an alternative way of knowing, using art as an instrument just as scientifically and cognitively as Galileo used a telescope. Johnson argues that, in Percy's view, the novelist is charged with "nothing less than the exploration of the options of postmodern man" (22, quoting Percy, 44). Johnson also writes that Percy concurs with Wertham's challenge that artists and intellectuals have a certain responsibility to provide against violence the "best weapons," reducing events of terror into proportions we can comprehend; for the best artists are not afraid that their work will be used for the public good. Wertham says, as Johnson notes, "Art is a power. If in a given society it is not, we should scrutinize why it is not" (250, quoting Wertham, 326). Johnson reads Percy as accepting Wertham's challenge. As Johnson concludes, the message from the Virgin to the children— "Keep hope and have a loving heart and do not secretly wish for the death of others" —is so "laughably naïve and so accurate that Percy had to put it in the mouth of a psychotic priest. Still, he put it in the book" ("The Virgin and the Cooling Tower," 26).

Building upon Hardy's essay,[134] Howland argues for two distinct plot lines, following two dislocated planes of note: "one immanent and horizontal, the other transcendent and vertical,"[135] where it is Father Smith alone who inhabits both realms. She notes that Father Smith is a part-time employee of the forestry service, which puts him atop a huge pole like St. Simeon Stylites, a 5th century Syrian ascetic. Also, Percy has transformed him from being Fr. Rinaldo Smith to Fr. Simon Rinaldo Smith, signifying a naming which is important for establishing a point of connection between the two dislocated planes and distinct plot lines. She writes, "… it is Fr. Smith alone who sees the real danger in Comeaux's social engineering, concluding that Comeaux's euthanasia program contributes mightily to the devaluation of human life" (*The Gift of the Other*, 132). She argues that "[the] intersubjective relationship between the priest and Tom More, who no longer knows what he believes, offers hope at the end of the novel. In addition, Tom More's continuing work with his patients, to whom he listens as they name for him their unformulable selves, demonstrates Percy's continuing interest in the intersubjective nature of language" (*The Gift of the Other*, 23). Howland's text is a beautifully written critical reading. While others might think *The Second Coming*[136] would have been a more positive note upon which a writer could hope to end a career, with Eros triumphing over Thanatos, she emphasizes that, "… Percy issues a warning that death is in the ascendancy in the 20th century, because the spirit of abstraction is abroad in the land" (*The Gift of the Other*, 131), making *The Thanatos Syndrome* a most

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[134] John Edward Hardy, "The Thanatos Syndrome," in *The Fiction of Walker Percy* (Urbana: UP of Illinois, 1987), 225-270.

[135] Mary Deems Howland, *The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1990), 131.

[136] Walker Percy, *The Second Coming* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980).

appropriate novel to leave as a legacy. Her critical work supports, via Marcel's theories of intersubjective relations, my reading that the novel is, to us, Percy's more clinical "message in a bottle," if read as a therapeutic, storytelling playground for writing about Peircean triadicity from the point of view of one having been wounded in battle, trying to avert the end.

Walker Percy, playing with Peircean secondness and thirdness, puts psychoanalytic theology in a position to address the post-modern mindset and the post-human cultural milieu, which has become, in *his* diagnosis, too trusting of more dyadic expressions of religion and science, failing to keep one in check with the other. Dogmas are dogmas, after all. When confronted, what does the dogmatic view have to say about whatever mysteriously happened, suddenly, in the well house of Tuscumbia, Alabama? It is as if Percy is raising the need for a different kind of dialogue by saying something like, "So much for civilization, Dr. Freud; the illusion from the past of this presently realized future is that language, but not God, is probably dead. Now, what shall that mean for theories of subjectivity where speech acts cannot prevail beyond human relations?"

Dr. Percy, positioning himself as a theological psychoanalytic thinker and storyteller for the 21st Century, has the beginnings of an answer. He says, via Father Smith, that the fact that the Jews are still present is God's sign that God shall not be subsumed. As for language, Father Smith tells Tom More, "Words no longer signify…. Words have been deprived of their meaning" (*TTS*, 118). What this means in the context of the novel is that actions will come to speak *louder* than words; which is why Father Smith says, especially since he is a *failed* priest, he prefers to work with dying people. As the priest explains to the analyst,

> I took in the dying. Do you want to know why? Because dying people were the only people I could stand…. You can't fool children and you can't fool dying people…. They tell the truth. Death makes honest men of all of us. Everyone else lies. Everyone else is dying too and spending their entire lives lying to themselves. I'll tell you a peculiar thing: It makes people happy to tell the truth after a lifetime of lying. (*TTS*, 244)

Thus, the *Thanatos Syndrome* is about choice where choice can be had and the choice is always between life and death and how love serves as some kind of mediator between the two when truth has to do with however it is language *is* triadic behavior. In this age of Thanatos, while language may no longer signify, dialogue creates every activity where life has a chance to become a choice and the choice comes about only by way of consciousness. If actions speak louder than words in an age of Thanatos, and if horror takes effort, then *listening* becomes the louder activity and the wordless task of the theological psychoanalyst, displacing a silent God with a human relation of being.

E. Theological Psychoanalysis for the Unbearable Eventness of Being

It is, after all, *how* Father Smith came into himself through *speech*, telling his own story to a rehabilitating scientist, in spite of the fact that Dr. More is sometimes more curious about diagnosing than learning. Father Smith begins their second scene after having summoned Dr. More back to the fire tower:

> "Something happened to me after you left." He is turning the azimuth. "No doubt it is a psychological phenomenon with which you are familiar. I know that you work with dreams. What I want to ask you is this: Is there something which is not a dream or even a daydream but the memory of an experience which is a

thousand times more vivid than a dream but which happens in broad daylight when you are wide awake?"

"Yes." I am thinking of his "spell." It could be a temporal-lobe epilepsy—which often is accompanied by extraordinary hallucinations.

"It was not a dream but a complete return of an experience which was real in every detail—as if I were experiencing it again."

"Yes?"

"Is it possible for the brain to recapture a long-forgotten experience, an insignificant event which was not worth remembering but which is captured in every detail, sight, sound—even smell?"

"Yes, but I would question whether it was insignificant." (*TTS*, 235-236)

This introductory dialogue between the priest and the psychoanalyst sets up an odd section of the novel called, "Father Smith's Confession," followed by another section, "Father Smith's Footnote." Structurally, these sections are stuck within the novel to *perform* something—similarly to how Percy stuck the 40-page semeiotics primer into the middle of *Lost in the Cosmos*—saying something more than can be said, speaking more loudly than words can signify. The scientist writing the scientist listening is the scientist peering into the disjunction where the mind and the body are trying to speak both sign and symptom, symbolically.

Patrick Samway makes the argument, in review of the evolution of the novel's manuscript and typescripts, that Percy allowed the character of Father Smith to grow slowly and subtly, along with the novel itself, ultimately discovering "a character who

perceived a haunting, radically disturbing mystery of such cosmic proportions about the Jews, the Holocaust, the devil, semiotics, and pedophilia that Percy himself could only be awed by it."[137] Together with Percy's notes for the novel and with archival research of the Farrar, Straus, and Giroux files, Samway tells the story of the novel's transformation with the last-minute additions of the "Confession" and "Footnote" sections. William Rodney Allen notes that such a "narrative-within-the-narrative" about Father Simon Rinaldo Smith's reminiscences of visiting Germany in the 1930's "conveys Percy's most direct fictional warning that contemporary American culture is moving toward an open expression for the death wish"[138] playing upon what Bercovitch[139] identified as U.S. literature's first distinctive genre, *the jeremiad*, based upon Jeremiah, the broken-hearted prophet, speaking out for people to remember who (and how) they are: in this case, *relational*. Haynes, however, argues that the real value of Father Smith's confession has to do with the nature of the flashback and the value of using Percy's novel to teach about the urgency of present-day conscience, given that the flashback scene sets up the performance of Father Smith's "Confession" and "Footnote," which is about identifying—not a cause and effect series of events—but a realization about the human condition being that, without conscience, we are all capable of carrying out *Thanatos*, irrespective of more ethical concerns expressed through revelations of love in the Christian narrative, which has to be rooted in Jewish history and identity. Haynes writes that Percy's message is clear for the perceptive reader:

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[137] Patrick H. Samway, "Two Conversations in Walker Percy's the Thanatos Syndrome: Text and Context," in *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher*, Ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991), 32.

[138] William Rodney Allen, "'Father Smith's Confession' in the Thanatos Syndrome," in *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher*, Ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991), 189.

[139] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: UP of Wisconsin, 1978).

> [A] Christianity allied with abstract ideals rather than rooted in unique revelatory events is likely to become another deadly ideology in the age of Thanatos. True Christianity will retain its base in historical reality and will find its identity in the space-time advent of Jesus the Jew; in Mary the young, red-faced Jewish girl; in apostolic succession; and in the penetration of matter by spirit. This religious return to history that Percy is advocating is a recurring theme in post-Holocaust Catholic thought.[140]

Living in an age of Thanatos means recognizing that "something unique has taken place in our time, something that must alter the way we view the world and all attempts to improve or govern it."[141] The parable of the Holocaust Percy has written into the middle of *The Thanatos Syndrome* is his attempt to say something in an age when words have potentially lost all meaning.

To say something when words mean nothing becomes a sign for an age where malaise is the norm. In his final analysis, as Percy says in "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," psychiatrists would do well to take note of "such a thing as transcendence" as part of human nature:[142]

> God is absent, said Johann Christian Hölerlin; God is dead, said Nietzsche. This means one of two things. Either we have outgrown monotheism, and good riddance; or modern man is estranged from being, from his own being, from the

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[140] Stephan R. Haynes, "Walker Percy and the Witness-People: Signposts in a Strange Land" in *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 106.

[141] Stephan R. Haynes, "Syndrome and Shoah: Walker Percy's Parable of the Holocaust," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 8 (1994): 389.

[142] Walker Percy, "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, Ed. Patrick H. Samway (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 262.

> being of other creatures in the world, from transcendent being. He has lost something—what, he does not know; he knows only that he is sick unto death with the loss of it. ("The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," 262)

Freud argues something similar in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.[143] In fact, it is as if Walker Percy writes in response to Freud's text. As Freud states, the problem has to do with how to mitigate aggression in light of the super-ego commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (*Civilization and Discontents*, 108). Because of such a dilemma, Freud argues that Ethics is the relation between Religion and Science in a way that it becomes a therapeutic attempt to qualify and diagnose human relational systems, suggesting that—particularly in an epoch of potential total annihilation such as Freud too surmised we are living within—civilization has become neurotic (*Civilization and Discontents*, 110). As the tensions mount between Thanatos and Eros, Freud wonders if the day will come when the pathology of cultural communities will be addressed in prophetic ways that demonstrate how the nature of guilt creates ambivalence, reaching such heights the individual within the group finds hard to tolerate (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 96). In his conclusion, he notes that the "fateful question" has to do with whether or not the human species will be able to reach a point of development of culture so that aggressive instincts will be mastered within communal life, overcoming the death wish. Freud writes in conclusion, during a time when Hitler was already at work, "And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers,' eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But

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[143] Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," (1930) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. Vol. XXI, 1927-1931 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966.)

who can foresee with what success and with what result" (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 112)?

If the individual *acts out* the **failure** of the speech act—just as Father Smith and Dr. More surmise—then human beings resort to *non*verbal expressions, which signify both hidden hostilities and also longings for imagined communities. The life drive, which is expressed triadically as event with meaning, shall always be for the *relation* and not aimed for the object alone. As Freud says, "We may well heave a sigh of relief at the thought that it is nevertheless vouchsafed to a few to salvage without effort from the whirlpool of their own feelings the deepest truths, towards which the rest of us have to find our way through tormenting uncertainty and with restless groping" (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 96). We have reached a point along the evolutionary path where we face not only the death of God, or of language, but also of Love; and if Love loses, nothing shall remain.

F. Conclusion: Choose Eros

In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, it is the thwarted drive for love that leads to the syndrome of death. Between the Freudian analyst and the priest, signifying conversation ensues. In conversation, the two discussants make observations about time and place and try to diagnose what Percy himself is working out experimentally within the text: what he called, actually, a Christian apologetic, but not necessarily in the same way as other critics, like Desmond, have attempted to force upon him to say. I argue it is not so much that there are overt Christian themes in the novel; in fact, if the Christian story in *The Thanatos Syndrome* is about anything, it is about the *failure* of the Christian story and the subversive way such a failure has another kind of agenda to perform.

Whatever there is to say, then, about a Christian apologetic that Percy did not get to say so overtly, for good or ill, will have to be linked with a return to Freudian roots, where what he *does* get around to performing is that one listens actively to another—displacing an absent God—because it is language that changes the brain all the same, in the midst of absence, recognizing that silence performs a different kind of presence. At the end of *The Thanatos Syndrome*, "Well well well" (*TTS*, 372) as an utterance is a good-enough Trinitarian symbol and consciousness that becomes, within the context of story, "…not a 'thing,' an entity, but an act, the triadic act by which we recognize reality through its symbolic vehicle" (Percy, "FR," 287).

Whereas Percy wrote *The Thanatos Syndrome* as a sequel to *Love in the Ruins*, one must wonder about the parallels with Freud, as he wrote *Civilization and Its Discontents* as something of a sequel to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[144] Both physicians of the soul[145] addressed malaise in terms of happiness at odds with the peculiar mix of Eros and Thanatos toward conscience and the makings of civilization where human beings have evolved now to the point of having to choose, actively, between life and death for the entire species as well as for all of creation. Freud says that guilt is often not perceived, just as Percy has Father Smith say, "horror takes effort," meaning: evolved humanity is unconscious of guilt that appears, all the same, as *malaise* (or *Unbehagen*, translated for the title as *Discontents*); or, as Freud notes, Christians call

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[144] Sigmund Freud, (1920) "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. Vol. XXVII, 1920-1922 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966.)

[145] Early on in the novel, Tom More describes himself as being "an old-fashioned physician of the soul," saying: "My science I got from Dr. Freud, a genius and a champion of the psyche—Seele, he called it, yes, soul—even though he spent his life pretending there was no such thing. I am one of the few left, yes, a psyche-iatrist, an old-fashioned physician of the soul, one of the last survivors in a horde of Texas brain mechanics, M.I.T. neuron circuitrists" (*TTS*, 16).

sin (*Civilization and Discontents*, 99). Walker Percy's message in the bottle to us in this 21st century, during an age when Thantos threatens, has to do with choosing Eros in ways, Freud too surmised, that could become important via intersubjective stories, overcoming the gap between the body and mind.

Conclusion: Multimedia Palimpsest

> As readers, we are witnesses precisely to these questions we do not own and do not yet understand, but which summon and beseech us from within the literary texts. What is the relation between literature and testimony, between writer and the witness? What is the relation between the act of witnessing and testifying, and the acts of writing and of reading, particularly in our era?[146]
>
> - Shoshana Felman

A. "What does literature *do*?"

In "Down by the Riverside,"[147] Richard Wright tells a story about Mann, beaten not by the rains or the flood or the breaking of the levee or the death of his pregnant wife or the obscenities of racism or even the exhausting suffering the reader sees he endures toward his own survival. Mann was beaten, in the tragic end of the story, by the complicity of (un)natural and (in)human forces, culminating in a moment where running was all that was left for Mann to do. Wright's story, historically situated in the context of the 1927 Mississippi flood,[148] leaves the omniscient reader with the awareness that lesser men could not have endured. In the tragedy of it all, the empathic response to the story is

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[146] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) xiii (cited in text as *Testimony*).

[147] Richard Wright, R. (1936) "Down By the Riverside" in *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

[148] For the historical context of the 1927 deluge linked with Richard Wright's stories and for biographical information as background for Wright's writing, see William Howard, "Richard Wright's Flood Stories and the Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927: Social and Historical Backgrounds" in *The Southern Literary Journal*, Spring 1984 v16 i2 44(19). http://www.pipeline.com/~rougeforum/floodstories.html#24 (accessed on July 20, 2008).

to wonder about the point of endurance if what really *lessens* men are the constructions of otherness that perpetuate a kind of difference that has, historically, only justified crimes against humanity.

What does literature do to tell a story that matters toward change? How do stories provide opportunities for engaged and service learning where life and love create new possibilities for ethical, social, and political action? Is literature, like the Mississippi River, an in-between space where borders along the banks—built up by levees or walls of disciplines—name and protect inhabitants of potentially opposing lands? In Wright's story, it becomes important to ask how the Mississippi River figures like a potential re-traumatizing space of rupture within literary and historical moments in ways that function to guide new metaphors for interdisciplinary dialogue.

Can new media contribute to inter-textual possibilities for an interactive practice of reading and listening? "What does literature *do*?" was an interesting question posed to me by a student after Hurricane Katrina and Rita pounded the Gulf Coast, after the levees broke, displacing thousands. It was a question that haunted me while I was developing a syllabus for an upcoming literature class. It was a question I wanted to address after hearing a tired and tearful physician of New Orleans respond to a question about how he held up, making the call about which critical care persons to evacuate, knowing that the ones left behind would likely die. Instead of only responding with medical terminology, he confessed to the interviewer he kept reciting passages of great literature he had not known had influenced him so much, except for in those dark moments of decision. "What does literature do?" became a guiding question as I realized, in listening to the physician, we do not know until we know.

Throughout this dissertation, I have engaged an interdisciplinary query partially in response to my student's original question. In conclusion, I will share the collaborative findings of my class and with the Percy family and also a displaced congregation from the Ninth Ward of New Orleans.

B. In Between Reading and Listening: *Witnessing* as Response to a Call

When a literary site marks a trauma, can literature make a difference in the classroom conversations toward new realizations and outcomes? Through story that is past yet still presently active within historical contexts can human beings learn to listen by reading or to read by listening?

In 1992, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub published an important text for any serious scholar of trauma studies. *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* is divided between the tasks of reading and listening in both the clinic and the classroom. Felman, as scholar and teacher, writes five of the essays, demonstrating skills of theory and practice; Laub, as psychoanalyst and testimony archivist, contributes two, focusing upon bearing witness to an event after the event. In the first chapter, entitled "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," Felman tells the story of the impetus for the book, asking, "Is there a relation between trauma and pedagogy?" (Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 1) She presents a case study of a classroom in crisis, having become traumatized by the viewing of Holocaust survivor testimony. She states:

> I would venture to propose, today, that teaching in itself, teaching as such, takes place precisely only through a crisis: if teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of a

> (explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps *not truly taught*: it has perhaps passed on some facts, passed on some information and some documents, with which the students or the audience—the recipients—can for instance do what people during the occurrence of the Holocaust precisely did with information that kept coming forth but that no one could *recognize*, and that no one could therefore truly *learn, read* or *put to use.* (Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 53)

Hers is a most radical statement, one to be taken seriously, one, also, to be guarded against.

Partly following her lead, I present a confluence of all I have attempted to address in previous chapters at the same time as I point to something beyond where multimedia exceeds with image and sound what text alone cannot perform. I present my own classroom case study, yet one that is not as conscious of itself as Felman's class came to be; rather, guarding against the violence of perpetuating a rupture of consciousness, this classroom engaged image, text, and sound more *un*consciously, playing with how to retell a critical encounter that involves the human capacity to envision new outcomes through more triadic, symbolic ways and means, such as Walker Percy emphasized throughout his life's scholarly/ literary work.

I concur with my literary and psychoanalytic deconstructionist teachers and therapists that trauma testimony provides for witnesses moments of shattering, stammering, rupturing insight which exceeds cognitive capacity, possibly creating traumatic events of learning. However, I hold fast to what I read *in Freud* all the same, suggesting Eros finds performative opportunity through dreams, play, and story. I suggest

long-term benefits for other-regarding action *play* upon the life drive of students seeking to live most ethically in a global world which awaits and expects their participation and positive contributions. Whatever it is that is absent from utterance—signifying a gap where a breach of consciousness is marked more aptly by a stammer, or silence, or symbolic gesture—the reader, ultimately, must make of it what she or he will, as Freud himself says about *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to his friend Sándor Ferenczi.[149] I argue the reader constantly links between multiple forms of information in order to make a pathway for a new story, constantly emerging, creating networks of play where it is possible for ongoing dialogue, critical questions, and engagement to direct longer-term, community-benefiting empathic responses that just might take years to come to fruition when a person—such as the New Orleans physician—suddenly realizes in critical moments of reflection that literature *does do something*, only it is difficult to address what that is or how that works across time and space.

In this 21st century, I would now venture to suggest, new horizons exist where stories of others continue to address, more justly, traumatic events of the past. Herein lies the hope if hope is to be had: this is what literature does: *it lives*.

C. An Emerging Hybrid Theory

In *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise*, the "Foreword" conveys a sense of what Shoshana Felman discerns is at stake: "the vitality

[149] As cited previously in chapter 1, see Sigmund Freud, (1919) "Letter from Sigmund Freud to Sándor Ferenczi, March 31, 1919" in The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi Volume 2, 1914-1919, Edited by Eva Brabant, Ernst Falzeder, and Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch under the supervision of André Haynal. Translated by Peter T. Hoffer, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1993-2000), 340-341.

of texts and the textuality of life."[150] Analysts of texts remind analysts of persons that "patients" have authority. Equally, analysts of persons remind analysts of texts of the impossibility of reading when listening implies there is, ultimately, no return to an event that, like a sentence, can be rationally ordered and structured for re-reading. The "reader," too, is "read" when listening, turning interpretative efforts inward and not just outward upon an object such as a text might become in a way a person never can (or should), because a listener listens only through him/her self, paying attention to what is not known as much as to what can be known. Dori Laub eloquently describes from his own experience in listening to a woman's testimony of surviving the Holocaust: "...it was through my listening to her that I in turn came to understand not merely her subjective truth but the very historicity of the event, in *an entirely new dimension*" (Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 62, my emphasis). "An entirely new dimension" implies a moment of a shift that reinterprets what might have previously been either interpretable or uninterpretable: extra-textual, all the same, not only inter-textual.

Perhaps ironically and from hybrid forms of scholarship where new economies emerge presenting "entirely new dimensions," any interpretative effort shall be forced to follow a new path: an ethical path of indeterminability, just as deconstructionist theorists posit. However, in between listening and reading, new possibilities for continued exploration exist where post-conscious, post-humans[151] process "information multiplicities" which exceed control. Information proliferation now defines (and

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[150] Shoshana Felman, "To Open the Question," *Yale French Studies* No. 55/56, 1977 as reprinted in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982), 3.

[151] As cited in chapter 3, see N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999), 2-3.

unravels) our post-traumatized, still violent, positionings for co-existence. As John Johnston writes, "Information multiplicities are profoundly corrosive of older cultural forms and identities, dissolving subjects and objects alike into systems, processes, and nodes in the circuits and flow of information exchange. But they also bring about new kinds of energy and even strange new forms of 'artificial life.'"[152]

In asking the same question of my students my professors ask me—*What have you learned?*—I discovered 21st century students are already steeped in multimedia renderings in response to print media, processing and producing information already in multiplicitous ways. The relation between trauma and pedagogy, I suggest, must now address the re-production of storytelling in a way that expands students' responses of reading/listening with new skills of qualitative research methods utilizing multimedia formats.[153]

D. Portraiture Methodology: "Messy Texts Teach"

Qualitative research is opening new and innovative avenues for interdisciplinary discourses about research methodologies. Norman Denzin paints a bleak picture for the current multicultural, global scene: a climate of privatized fear rules, perpetuating public outbreaks of terrorizing behavior while democracy is under siege as the division grows between the poor and the wealthy. "We live in a new garrison state" he says, which

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[152] John Johnston, *Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998).

[153] Thanks to friend and colleague, Dr. Brian Croxall, for sharing an interview between Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler in *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, translated by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity-Blackwell Press, 2002). When asked if multimedia supports were ever-pressing on the new horizons of critical scholarship and performance, Derrida upholds "the norms that matter to me" in ways that exclude image and sound from replacing print media.

creates "troubled spaces" where a "radical performance enthnography must enter."[154] Together with Lincoln, Denzin suggests a "seventh moment" of inquiry is upon us where the future should be the focus in conjunction with past moments of inquiry, historically situated, which continue to effect us: traditional (1900-1950); modernist (1950-1970); blurred genres (1970-1986); the crisis of representation (1986-1990); postmodern or experimental (1990-1995); post-experimental (1995-present).[155] Denzin suggests "performance ethnography *is* moral discourse" ("Performing (Auto)Ethnography Politically," 258).

Denzin's description of the "seventh moment" in qualitative inquiry privileges the aesthetic method of portraiture as "messy texts" provide transparency, creating opportunities for dialogue and critical insight. Portraiture methodology has five foci that can become foundational for pedagogical practices of reading and writing in response to literary moments and spaces of catastrophe: 1) emergent themes, 2) relationships, 3) contexts, 4) voices, and 5) the aesthetic whole ("Performing (Auto)Ethnography Politically,"18, citing Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis).[156] Portraiture methodology maintains an ethical commitment to the research participants as context is considered important for conveying depictions of individuals rather than an impartial representation that removes the researchers' biases from the equation. Portraiture dismantles the notion that the researcher is the only authority on the life of the research participants, privileging

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[154] N. K. Denzin, "Performing (Auto)Ethnography Politically" in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, v25(2003), 258.

[155] N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, Y. S., "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition, edited by Denzin and Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000).

[156] Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis, J. H., *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

more naturalistic inquiry.[157]

Lawrence-Lightfoot[158] argues research that focuses only upon failure becomes facile. Health and resilience are worthy for study as much as pathology and disease. Portraiture seeks to examine the ways in which subjects meet, negotiate and overcome challenges, providing measurable indices and artistically rendered representations of voice and the actions of research participants. Thus, portraiture utilizes mixed methods, generating both quantitative and qualitative data. Via thick descriptions, researchers convey to an audience an aesthetic whole which not only analyzes the data set but also includes narration of the researcher claiming "positionality and subjectivity with regard to the research."[159]

Portraiture methodology deconstructs the research aims, creating "messy texts," in ways that open up further questions and dialogue for continued study. While frustrating for hard science, companionable humanities studies utilizing portraiture methodology can best serve pedagogical practices and/or more ethical considerations for the study of human subjects such as those posed by critical race theorists.[160]

E. A New Hermeneutic: Multimedia Palimpsest

The following story is historically multi-layered and psychically complex, providing richness for ongoing discussions in literary, cultural, psychoanalytic, and

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[157] Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, E. G., *Naturalistic Inquiry* (London: Sage, 1985).

[158] S. Lawrence-Lightfoot, *The Good High School*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[159] A. D. Dixson, T. K. Chapman, and D. A. Hill, "Research as an Aesthetic Process: Extending the Portraiture Methodology" in *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(1), 2005, 16-26.

[160] See D. D. Bernal, D. D. "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research" in Harvard Law Review, 68(4), 1998; Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Patricia Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice (Minneapolis: Minneapolis UP, 1998); and S. Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992).

technological fields of inquiry and performance. Originally, I created a crude version of a website in an attempt to allow the mixed media to speak beyond what text alone could convey. Now, however, I am attempting to retell a story, interspersing bits and pieces of film and audio files, narrated more traditionally by text. From the outset, the *play* I attempted to capture within the website is already threatened by this more linear style of linguistic performance in writing because it removes some dimension of the reader's own capacity for hypertextual play.

As already mentioned, the case study I present here is about a classroom experience. At the same time, it is about my own experience of researching the Walker Percy family. In so doing, I discovered a story that is not conscious: one that is too painful for consciousness: a story, yet, that captures the multiple ways in which survivors *limp* (Freud) or *stammer* (Caruth and also one of Felman's students) toward life, beyond deadly experience. I caution the reader to keep in mind and to consider the circularity, inter-textuality, and depth of simultaneous multiple processing capacities that an experience of a less linear process, via multimedia, in years to come, will best convey.

Storytelling Practices

> In the Spring of 2006, I designed a class around the following course description: Recent catastrophes such as 9/11, the tsunami, and hurricane "Katrina" (compounded by delayed responses for aid) give us pause to wonder how people rebuild their lives after traumatic ruptures. Beyond physical devastation, mental and emotional anguish lingers, often resulting in further sufferings from PTSD symptoms. Clinical researchers and therapists struggle over how best to respond to persons, post-traumatic experience, as events haunt memory and identity

> temporarily shatters when people become displaced and dispossessed. As readers with this dilemma in mind, we will try to hear *how* people speak their stories and not only what it is they say, as so much more is often left unsaid.

As a student of "trauma theory" and a clinical research assistant for a PTSD research project during which I listened to over 300 lower income out-patients of Grady Memorial Hospital inventory their exposure and reactions to traumatic events, I became convinced that retellings matter, over and over again. On the one hand, trauma narratives have the potential to trigger episodes of re-experience that flood consciousness with too much fear and anxiety; on the other hand, if carefully listened to, a person can retell a story in such a way as to say enough, guarding against too much. If one listens and observes, the storyteller makes new connections with past experience creating potential for resilient outcomes as much or more than becoming vulnerable to reinforcing symptoms of traumatization.

I wanted to teach students how to hear a traumatic narrative within literature, so they could be better readers of real people when talking is most important against the flooding of consciousness. In addition, as a reader of people myself, I understand my responsibility in the classroom to be about always teaching while protecting students as traumatic material resonates in affective ways. My strategy for protecting would be to empower and equip students to teach, retelling some kind of story through independent research projects they designed toward their final presentations. In this way, their affective qualities could fuel their searches, spawning new questions and visions for how they can become active in their own lives, beyond classroom learning.

The class was an experiment in discerning how students learn to read by having to

participate actively in the retellings of stories. We read the book of Job, narrative fragments from the Trail of Tears, interviews with Columbian desterrados and discussed the difference between fact and fiction in memoirs in text and filmic translations. We listened to Bob Dylan and looked to Marc Chagall, wondering how story emerges through form. We talked in pairs and in groups and attended extra-credit events to break out of the more mundane time of ordinary classroom lectures.

As a result, the students' projects varied in form and content, reflecting the multi-cultural aspects of the literature as well as the backgrounds of students so gathered, demonstrating how the classroom space can become interdisciplinary when students pursue their own voices and disciplinary interests. Students' final projects resulted in powerpoint presentations, analyzing Chinese fables and English translations as told to one student by her grandmother, PTSD symptoms in second and third generation Holocaust survivors, WWII and Vietnam veteran stories of combat, and illegal immigrant stories of survival. One student made a film, reading the cultural hyphen between Korean-American. Another student, a baseball player at Emory, made a documentary about the importance of the New York Mets season after 9/11. This student, Julian, from Brooklyn, told us what it was like to turn 16 on the day the towers fell.

I had not planned to take students to New Orleans. One day in class, just after I had returned from visiting the Percy family, I was giving a lecture about semiotics and Julian was across the room from me, nodding off to sleep. In order to help him stay awake, I called him by name, gently, "Julian, ask me where I was yesterday." A spontaneous discussion happened between us. I told him some of what I had seen. I

ended up showing the class Phinizy Percy's film, "Survivors,"[161] and then Julian said, "Well, why don't we go." So we did.

The "Storytelling Practices" link conveys something of the students' encounter with a particular site of trauma. In the opening clip, the listener hears the voice of a student expressing her memory of what it was like to stand in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans a few hundred yards from the breach in the levee: "Of course this is 'Ground Zero,'" she said. "There is nothing here." The traumatic rupture of the formerly protective shield (of the levee) could not hold. The experience of being at the site of "Ground Zero"—better known as being a marker from the previous traumas of towers or bombs falling—marked her speech of this experience of standing in an empty space with sudden awareness for what other sites of traumas could have meant without having previously stood in those other troubled spaces.[162]

Other voices narrate with words and phrases as voice-overs to go along with the students' images: *frozen in time… untouched… ghost town… empty.* Reflecting ambivalence, students' voices convey no illusions about whether or not they made a difference, except that they were there, listening, reading signs of destruction, not turning away—avoidant and dismissive—but looking into the faces of people who had lost everything, witnessing without words.[163]

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[161] Phinizy Percy, "Survivors," 2006. http://web.mac.com/phinpercyfilms/Phin_Percy_Films/Survivors.html (accessed July 27, 2008).

[162] Many thanks to friend and colleague, Dr. Leah Wolfson, for helping me "read" this student's expression, making the link with other sites of trauma.

[163] http://web.me.com/melissa.sexton/storytelling_practices (accessed July 27, 2008).
Name: students
Password: voices

Interview

The Percy family history is well documented.[164] While I have been a reader of Walker Percy's fiction[165] for many years, I only recently became a scholar of his more academic writings after becoming acquainted with members of his family. I was introduced to Melissa Percy Spalding through a student in a Southern literature class I was teaching. The student asked if I would welcome having Walker Percy's niece—daughter of "Phin," Walker's younger brother—as a guest lecturer to coincide with our reading of *The Second Coming*.

Melissa Percy Spalding's lecture to the class was an incredible gift since she talked freely about her family's history in ways I would not have chosen to do with as much candor, given the generational struggles with depression and suicide, as well as themes of aristocratic families and lifestyles. Additionally, as was important background information for the novel we were reading, she discussed "Uncle Walker's" fascination with language, and particularly with Helen Keller's learning from Annie Sullivan, since her cousin Ann Boyd was deaf. Melissa told the story too of her grandmother's drowning

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[164] Bertram Wyatt-Brown has written two Percy family biographies. See, *House of Percy: Honor, Melancholy, and Imagination in a Southern Family* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) and *Literary Percys: Family History, Gender, and the Southern Imagination* (Athens, GA: Georgia UP, 1994). See also Lewis Backer, *The Percys of Mississippi: Politics and Literature in the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983) and William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941). For reading related to the roles of the Percy men in the 1927 Mississippi flood, see John Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998) and also PBS documentary film produced and directed by Chana Gazit, *Fatal Flood*, 2001. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flood/filmmore/fd.html (accessed July 28, 2008).

[165] Walker Percy's fiction: *The Moviegoer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1961); *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966); *Love in the Ruins* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966); *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977); *The Second Coming* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980); and *The Thanatos Syndrome* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987).

after she and the three boys—Walker, LeRoy, and Phin—went to Greenville, Mississippi to live on the Percy plantation with "Uncle Will," who continued to raise the boys after losing both parents. Melissa said her father, Phin, had been in the car with his mother when she drove off a levee. He, too, almost drowned.

Melissa Percy Spalding kept in touch with me, giving me books to read, letters, and personal stories of what it was like to grow up in the Garden District of New Orleans, as well as in her literary and politically prolific family. Six months after Hurricane Katrina destroyed most of her hometown, she invited me to go with her to visit her dad as he was suffering from a terrible bout of depression both due to the devastation post Katrina, but also because he had only recently lost his wife, Jaye. The children of Phin—Camille, Will, Phinizy, and Melissa—asked me to conduct an interview with their dad, which they also filmed, capturing his stories on tape. The audio version of the "Interview" link is an edited version of my conversation with Mr. Billups Phinizy Percy in his Garden District condominium home on February 18, 2006.

There are five excerpts of the interview I have selected to include: "Losses" (6:36); "Uncle Will" (7:40); "Where Are the Jews?" (2:43); "War Is Exhilarating" (1:46); and "One Last Thing About Walker" (8:58). Together, these sections portray a deep affection, particularly for his "adoptive father," William Alexander Percy.

In his memoir, *Lanterns on the Levee*, Will Percy emphasizes an important point for Phin: he "adopted" the boys, making all the difference, honoring them by choosing them. Will Percy writes:

> My favorite cousin, LeRoy Percy, died two months before Mother's death, and his brave and beautiful wife, Mattie Sue Phinizy, two years after Father's. Their three

> boys, Walker, LeRoy, and Phinizy, came to live with me and I adopted them as my sons. Walker was fourteen, LeRoy thirteen, and little Phin nine. Suddenly my house was filled with youth, and suddenly I found myself, unprepared, with the responsibility of directing young lives in a world that was changing and that seemed to me on the threshold of chaos. (310)

David Horace Harwell recently published a collection of interviews he conducted—a "community biography,"[166] he calls it—talking about Walker Percy, not as in "the mythical role of the tragic hero, sage, or prophet" (9), as none of these suit, but pursuing him as someone who was "an avid conversationalist... [who] spent the majority of his time probing nearly every acquaintance like the physician he was, for evidence of spiritual pathology or health, for ideas about important subjects" (11). "Many people cried when they talked to me about Walker Percy" (1), Harwell writes, as an opening line. His collection of interviews is a community biography because, as he astutely observes, Walker Percy's life was "defined by its human environment, which emerged as a series of conversations about a man who lived for just such conversations" (11).

Of "Phin," Harwell writes, in comparison with his brother LeRoy, Phin's is a different kind of demeanor, one not so boldly taking over a room with the voice that sounds "like a good joke is on the way" Phin's demeanor, on the other hand, is marked by a "more rapid, almost excitable voice with a bit of an edge, but mainly he speaks with the cadence of someone who's caught onto an idea he can't wait to share" (154). Though "painful memories cause him to pause" (154), he does indeed surprise you with his wit. As I read through the interview Harwell conducted, I found the material familiar, almost

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[166] D. H. Harwell, *Walker Percy Remembered: A Portrait in the Words of Those Who Knew Him*. (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2006), 11.

verbatim in places.

Phin Percy likes to tell war stories. He served in World War II, first on PT boat duty with Jack Kennedy and then he went to school to learn how to man a submarine. He told me the most peaceful he ever felt was in the submarine on Christmas day, submerged, and the quiet was soothing. When he was discussing this moment, I wondered if that "peace" had anything to do with the earlier tragedy of having survived a watery grave. As the reader will recall, he was in the automobile with his mother when she drove off the road into a body of water and drowned. As I listened, I did not think it appropriate to probe with further questions, however, respecting the pauses for what they were: marks of memories too painful both to remember, yet too poignant to forget.[167]

But, Harwell asks:

> Do you have many recollections of your arrival in Greenville, how you coped with the losses? I'm trying to figure out whether these events charted a course for your life. I think that in Walker's novels, the loss of your father and your mother are threads that never leave the stories. I've probably been exposed to too much psychoanalytic theory, but I have to ask if the manner of your mother's death, and your being in the car with her when it went under water, influenced your own course in life, especially your approach to the war and your actions while in the navy (165-166).

And, Mr. Percy responds:

> I never thought about it that way before. Oh my, well, of course my mother's death

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[167] http://web.me.com/melissa.sexton/interview (accessed July 27, 2008).
Name: percy
Password: history

> struck me the worst because I was in the car with her and I was much older. I was only seven when my father died, and I didn't realize much about what was going on with him. But my mother's death will never leave me. I recall what happened over and over again. I don't—I don't know. How it affected me, I guess I just don't know. I know it has affected me a great deal. The death of any parent you love is going to affect you. More than her death, I frequently think about her years in Greenville as being unhappy years for her. She was unbelievably grateful to Uncle Will for inviting us all over there, but I don't think she ever quite realized what her place was there. I don't think she was ever that comfortable in Greenville. I don't have any recollections of seeing her smile, have fun, no recollections whatsoever. I remember her being one of the most beautiful ladies I had ever seen but always wearing a sad expression.... I hope we gave some pleasure to her (166-167).

Post Katrina

In a review of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *The House of Percy: Honor, Melancholy, and Imagination in a Southern Family*, Michael Kreyling[168] notes that Wyatt-Brown uncovers the "plot" of several generations of Percys—burdened by honor and melancholy—to uphold imagination as an answer to melancholia, acutely aware of the injustices of race relations with a certain sense of *noblesse oblige,* living within resulting tensions and making interventions when necessary and beneficial. Indeed, as every student of U.S. southern regional history knows, William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee* is important for documenting such a haunted, complex past and the transparent

[168] Michael Kreyling, Review of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *The House of Percy: Honor, Melancholy, and Imagination in a Southern Family* in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Feb., 1996), pp. 192-193.

role of the Percy family is at the crux of much relevant criticism.[169]

Kreyling makes an important and succinct observation about the Percy "burden of honor" that comes through in the film clips I present while touring the aftermath of Katrina with Phinizy Percy and Melissa Percy Spalding. Kreyling writes:

> Perhaps the region has as much to do with Percy suffering as family tradition. In other words, the family Percy might have been as much a part of the outside world as they were of the private world transmitted in the genes from one generation to the next. The Mississippi Delta, where the major branch of the family still lives and [is] the source of [its] wealth and social standing, is also the region were those at the absolute bottom of the socio-economic scale invented the blues. With only a superficial look, it seems that the Delta blacks and the Delta Percys were blues brothers—at opposite ends of the spectrum. (193)

While my photography and editing may lack the skills of more professional visual artists and documentary archivists, I think I have nevertheless captured an essential quality of the generational tension within the following clips:

1) "Losing Everything" (3:14)

2) "How Do You Deal?" (2:33)

3) "Did You Lose Them in the Flood?" (3:17)

4) "As Depressed as Possible" (3:09)

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[169] See Scott Romine, *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999); McKay Jenkins, *The South in Black and White: Race, Sex, and Literature in the 1940s* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1999); Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, "Mississippi Delta Planters and Debates over Mechanization, Labor, and Civil Rights in the 1940s" in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (May, 1994), 263-284; Ian D. Ochiltree, "A Just and Self-Respecting System?: Black Independence, Sharecropping, and Paternalistic Relations in the American South and South Africa," in *Agricultural History*, Vol. 72, No. 2, (Spring, 1998), 352-380; Robyn Spencer, "Contested Terrain: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 and the Struggle to Control Black Labor," in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), 170-181.

5) “Back to Normal?” (2:13)

6) “Ground Zero” (3:01)

7) “I’m Gonna Die in That House” (3:37)

8) “You Will Be Missed” (1:56)

The tone of the narration as much as the horrible images of destruction and the resulting stories of despair convey the complex and troubled historical past where one flood of 1927—about which William Alexander Percy’s memoir title is reflective—is repeated, yet with an opposite, still haunting effect although the central issue ironically remains: should the African American labor pool stay or go (remain evacuated or return) for the “good” of the economy.

As was the case in the 1927 Mississippi flood, Will Percy[170] was put in charge of the welfare of African Americans held and “managed” at gun point, encamped in the poor and troubled spaces of the levees until the waters receded, although Will tried to take a stand against his father, Senator LeRoy Percy,[171] and against the white land owners by recommending that the “labor pool” be evacuated for their own humane safety. Post-Katrina, Phinizy Percy—grandson of Will—gives voice to a similar theme, juxtaposed against a traumatic (personal on many levels) historical past, advocating for the reality that—in spite of Mayor Nagin’s call for African Americans to return home to make of

[170] For a brief sketch of William Alexander Percy, son of Senator LeRoy Percy and adopted father of Walker, LeRoy, and Phin, soo the PBS web instructional companion to the documentary film project, Fatal Flood. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flood/peopleevents/p_wpercy.html (accessed July 27, 2008).

[171] For a brief sketch of Senator LeRoy Percy of Greenville Mississippi, see the PBS web instructional companion to the documentary film project, *Fatal Flood*. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flood/peopleevents/p_lpercy.html (accessed July 27, 2008).

New Orleans a "chocolate city"—nothing remains to justify their return.[172]

Displaced Congregation

As we proposed through the course on "Storytelling Practices of the Displaced and Dispossessed," my return with students to New Orleans after visiting with the Percy family became somewhat inevitable, particularly since Julian issued the call for us to respond. The final piece of my concluding performance is a documentary film project a graduate student produced, incorporating students' filmic images and memories in conjunction with his own impressionistic aesthetic style. Perhaps the reader/viewer/listener would be helped by knowing that the filmmaker, Tommy Heffron—an up and coming scholar and artist now in graduate studies in the Chicago Institute of Art—has received awards and grants partially based upon his productions that include his independent stance of what it is like to experience deafness and be creative from that point of reference.

Steeped in affect, Heffron's film conveys imagistic and aural symbolic gestures and performances that say what language or text alone cannot fully communicate. Aesthetically, I would argue, Heffron's project unconsciously uses camera angles, blunt edits, silence, loud and muffled sound, cursing, reflecting, praying, moving while seemingly floating: all to perform a quality that speaks to the body-minded self, processing information multiplicitously, open to the outcome that is still indeterminate, yet not without speaking to what it means to be a human being with the capacity to live and to love. Interspersed throughout, Heffron edits in scenes and sounds from a church

[172] http://web.me.com/melissa.sexton/post_katrina (accessed July 27, 2008).
Name: breached
Password: levees

service on Easter Sunday. The service is significant because it is not like any other Easter service, in that the congregation met in a borrowed space, many having returned to see the Ninth Ward from which they had been evacuated. In this service, ironically, the main point of the preacher's story that is not included in the film tells the people to let it all go, moving on.[173]

This film serves as a capstone to my dissertation because it performs something of the life drive I find in Freud's gesture to witness his grandson at play, so as to also *move on*; at the same time, there is something within the experience of witnessing testimony in whatever form that takes that speaks to the longing for return human beings must forever seek to express, however symbolically, toward new futures where imaginations involve other-regarding drives of love, empathy, and even hope… in spite of the harsher realities that breach consciousness.

Respectfully invoking the memory of Felman's opening quote for this conclusion, *as readers, we are witnesses precisely to these questions we do not own and do not yet understand*. In our era, we must—as readers and witnesses—also seek to *play*, beyond the fields of trauma, lest we forget what it really means to be human.

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[173] The reader/viewer/listener should note the audiovisual file, although streaming on an independent server, takes approximately 10 minutes to open and is approximately 12 minutes in viewing duration. http://web.me.com/melissa.sexton/displaced_congregation (accessed July 27, 2008).
Name: heffron
Password: documentary

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