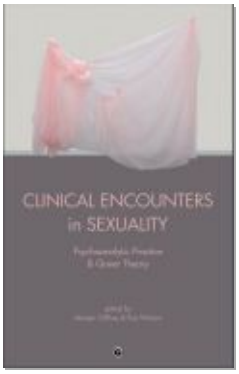
5 | Ethics: Out of Line, On Hold.



5 | ETHICS

Out of Line, On Hold: D.W. Winnicott's Queer Sensibilities

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Ethics beyond Reciprocity

This chapter situates its discussion of ethics in the work of the mid-twentieth century British psychoanalyst, D.W. Winnicott. Winnicott's theorization of transitional objects and good-enough mothers has inspired the scholarship of thinkers such as Mary Jacobus (2005) and Adam Phillips (1989); at the same time, Winnicott's output figures, in Deleuzian terms, as a minor literature in the larger psychoanalytic landscape. The sympatico of Winnicott's work with many recent queer-theoretical investigations of intersubjectivity alone necessitates our continued reappraisal of what he may teach us. Unlike that of Jacques Lacan, who devoted a seminar to the ethics of psychoanalysis, Winni-

1 I wrote most of this essay five years ago or so. Life is full of entropy (even without the bedragglement of degenerative chronic pain) and had there been world enough and time, I would have revised it from start to finish. As it stands, however, the present version is a testimony to an earlier moment in my thinking. I accept responsibility for its faults (including its penchant for over-writing) and only hope my decision to publish it, as is, is more useful than not. For a revision of these pages, see my forthcoming book, *Contingent Figure: Aesthetic Duress from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*.

cott's contribution to psychoanalytic ethics must be trawled in pieces, and culled without prior sense of what that ethics might eventually resemble. In this sense, the very practice of returning to Winnicott resembles the non-paranoid reading position of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a queer theorist who taught, more than anyone I can think of, the inseparability of ethics from the surprise of not knowing in advance where desire might converge with rigor, gauziness, creativity, and or delight. To read Winnicott alongside Sedgwick is to aspire toward for an ethics freed from the normatively non-contingent, but no less predicated on the contingencies of availing dislocation.

"Let us treat the men and women well; treat them as if they were real; perhaps they are" (Emerson 1983, 479). Ralph Emerson's exhortation surfaces near the mid-point of his essay, "Experience," a sustained meditation on the grief of not only having lost his son to scarlet fever, two years prior, but of what he describes as the grief that he cannot grieve. Emerson's formulation laconically introduces some of the terms that inform my understanding of ethics as it bears on queer theory's relation to psychoanalysis. In its echo of analogously stated scenes of exhortation in the poems of Catullus and Herbert, the wishful élan of the opening two-word rejoinder illuminates one's wish for ethics to provide some version of clearing, of collectivity capable of moving between thought and action. Not unrelated, ethics takes as its object less the fact of relation than some relational hypothesis of care: not only how we *ought* to treat each other but how we might. The temporally indefinite processes of analytic treatment take as foundational that our "actual" — constative, physical, etc. — position in the world is at best a small percentage of all the equally incontrovertible forces by which we are constituted: contra conventional (e.g., non-psychoanalytic) standards, these latter, psychoanalysis has shown, are often one's most resistant, least remediable elements. A person's realness, by Emerson's formulation, isn't what justifies or necessitates one's care for them. The latter arises in the generative, literally creative space between what could be real and what "is." We find here a productive syncope between ethical treatment and the latter's

implicit ontological grounds. That the former might arise in the temporary suspension rather than demand of the actual opens onto queer theory's own pre-occupations with the question rather than fact of the real as it might open onto rather than oppose the unreal, and by extension, the ways in which the literalness of our selves (our lives and their relations, centrifugal and centripetal alike) opens onto rather than opposes the figurative.

How have we moved so quickly from ethics to this notion of the figurative? For one, I think of the incessantly indeterminate relation between analogy and simile, and the ways that the action if not being of both categories explicitly depends on a precipice or imaginative leap internal to each. The leap — the willingness of what it is to recognize itself (if only reductively) in what isn't as a capacity for hypothesized being — lodges in the little auxiliary idiom of "as if." To return our attention to Emerson, however, it's not that creative believing is in service or otherwise subordinate to fact, but that the inhabiting of possibility suggests an indefinite, un-ending end in itself. Somewhat differently put (and in ways both informed and illuminated by Winnicott and Sedgwick alike), the queer psychoanalytic ethics imagined in these pages takes as its own point of departure that believing in something isn't inferior or prior to the fact of it, but a form of being unto itself: unwavering, as though we might treat the men and women well in a *perhaps* whose virtue lies in its ultimate non-equivalence to its nominal object.

The difference, then, between a belief and a fact wouldn't only be that *one* is whereas the *other* might be, or even that one exists in the orbit of abstraction whereas the other exists as a thing in the world, but that one is still becoming or, more simply, is becoming. When I call this becoming figurative, I therefore wish to invoke figurative as an affective, and affectively vital, motion. To be figurative is not only not to be less real but maybe, more so. This account of queer theory's resistance to the facticity of being isn't meant to displace earlier accounts of queer theory's differently calibrated identitarian investments, or the fact if not of bodies or gender than that of the realness of desire itself. For one, I think of the flexible spaciousness of the former in many

ways as a quiescence of displacement as such; and in this regard, I understand the queer modality of possibility ("perhaps") along the lines of Roland Barthes's meditation on the Neutral, a porous category of resistance (such as it's possible) to resistance qua resistance. At least among more recent generations of queer persons in certain cosmopolitan spaces, we've come a long-ish way since the euphemistic language of gays interpellated less in terms of their lives than their lifestyles. At the same time, this leaning of "life" into "style" anticipates some of the ways that queer theory explores living as it opens onto what Foucault (1997), in "On the Genealogy of Ethics: A Work in Progress," calls "an esthetics of existence." Such a project is inseparable from the ways both homosexual persons and acts — "acts," a euphemism to which we shall return, as we further consider the impactions and instabilities of action qua category — have until recently (and as often, to this day) been subject to omission, degrees of censorship, compunctions of translation and mistranslation. In this respect, a certain strain of queer ethics begins not in the fact but the belief that the survival of such failed efforts at performative extermination depends first on a commitment to the unmistakeable life of persons so unremittingly denied the rights of the living. This is to say that queer theory's contribution to ethical thinking involves an expansion of the vocabulary by which we locate and articulate queer phenomena *as* real, visible, conversible. Counterveiling such an enterprise has been queer theory's wish to differently reclaim the slippery potency of queer volatility, and in so doing, complicate any person's wish to seem real.

It bears reminding that there is no more a single, monolithic queer theory than there is a monolithic psychoanalysis; queer theory, as a moniker for a constellation of disparate thinking, invariably only sometimes barely does justice to the important self-contradictions and auto-corrections it contains. Still, queer theory, as cultivated, taught, and practiced for the past decades, is remarkable for its simultaneous claims toward realness and a politically informed wariness of it. The wariness arises from a suspicion of realness as inextricable from ideological pulsions

that will always jettison some form of personness as its sacrifice. For instance, in the work of Lee Edelman (2004), the dubiousness of realness blooms into suspicion of a desire *for* realness: "a refusal — the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory — of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined" (4). Ethics, for Edelman, requires the eschewal of humanness as we know it, an uncompromising accession to the inhuman, which Edelman aligns with Lacan's account of the death drive: "the death drive refuses identity or the absolute privilege of any goal" (22). Set alongside an understanding of ethics as a care for "substantialization[s]," Edelman's work puts us in a bind of either/or. Either we avow identity, or we disavow it. This present chapter wishes differently to think about ethics in terms of the equivocation between avowal and disavowal; even as equivocation, for my purposes, mischaracterizes an interpersonal regimen that more precisely renarrates the relation between ethical and aesthetic contemplation. Aesthetic vitality, here, resonates with what the queer theorist, Judith Butler (2005), has described as "an experiment in living otherwise": "What might it mean to undergo violation, to insist upon *not* resolving grief and staunching vulnerability too quickly through a turn to violence, and to practice, as an experiment in living otherwise, nonviolence in an emphatically nonreciprocal response? What would it mean, in the face of violence, to refuse to return it?" (100).

Catherine Mills (2007) challenges Butler's aspiration toward such an ethics of non-violence in part because a passage such as the above "stands in tension, if not contradiction, with other aspects of her theorization of normativity and subjectivity" (134). Succinctly, even reductively, Mills calls attention to queer theory's own earlier and extant understanding of itself not only as a kind of violence, but as a certain necessary response *to violence*. What Mills in part wishes, reductively speaking, is for Butler's ethics not so quickly to give up on an Edelmanian aggressivity willing to eschew even antagonism (the returning of violence) for a sedulous white noise extrinsic to a normativity dictating

from outset the terms not just of its own call but of our limited sense of responses to it.

Can ethics be separated from norms, and can norms be separated from the latter's withering repertoire of abusiveness? In the words of a magic 8 ball, answers would seem to point to "no," to the extent to which our psychoanalytic or queer-theoretical purview is a Lacanian one. If ethical choreography is a feat of the Symbolic, then it goes nearly without saying a constitutive normative violence, as Mills writes, would be irreducible (155). An ethical turn to D.W. Winnicott, on the other hand, salutarily moves us from the grounds of the inexorable to a stage of improvisation no less instructive for its extemporaneousness. If ethics for some time has subsisted on a sense (earned or otherwise) of what it is or is not doing, Winnicottian ethics might well inhabit the space of not knowing if one is being or not, acting or not — of non-anxiogenically not knowing, and learning to undo the sequestering spaces of ontology and action.

Ethics beyond Action

Queer theory, like psychoanalysis, optimally illuminates the modes in which we relate to other persons and ourselves. Neither field ultimately is able or willing to describe any given modality in advance as erotic or non-erotic, as kind or unkind. The difficulties of legibility, for psychoanalysis, arise most saliently in the intractable and wily "fact" of an unconscious. The difficulties of legibility, in queer theory, sometimes arise in the wiliness of an unconscious (to the extent that so much of queer theory, including the work of Leo Bersani (1986), Judith Butler (1997, 1999, 2002, 2005), Tim Dean (2000), and others is indebted to psychoanalytic thinking), and sometimes in the wiliness of ideology — an apparatus, through dramas of internalization, itself only sometimes distinguishable from the Symbolic, itself only sometimes distinguishable from an unconscious. Queer theory, like psychoanalysis, optimally affords new vocabularies for ruminating instabilities of affect and epistemology as feeling and thinking negotiate and jostle the ossifications and eidolons by

which they've been displaced. I betray my own thinking's instabilities, here, in conjuring a sort of psychoanalytic macaronic to which practitioners of a given school rightfully might balk. Ditto a queer-theoretical macaronic that potentially whiplashes from the hyperbolic to the synecdochal. The investigation at hand lays out these fields as such for the sake of a terrain's outlines, but my own argument will hew to a vocabulary increasingly less promiscuous. For instance, I admit great interest — as a reader of both queer theory and psychoanalysis — in those moments when it seems unclear as to whether sex is a literalization of a certain acuity of interpersonal joy and travail, or a metaphor for differently recognizable and unrecognizable modes of joy and travail. As both literalization of relation and figure for it, sex potentially rewrites ethical pause not merely as a question of getting fucked or fucked over (or conversely, a wish to fuck with others), but more specifically as a question of how one crosses metaphorical and literal lines. Winnicott seems especially luminous in helping us to think about ethics in terms of linear surprise and conundra.

Sex, at its most banal, imputes the possibility of being one with another. Sex, on a differently banal register, assumes an anonymous aggressivity played out between bodies. But if sex is both literalization and metaphoricity, where elsewhere might considerations of interpersonality lead? In terms of queer-theoretical ethics, the dangerousness of sex — as either Freudian aggressivity or Lacanian *jouissance* — arises in the drama of internalization, by which we become our own worst nightmare which we act out on others. If subjectivity is read, following Michel Foucault and Leo Bersani, as the fruition of normativity, then subjectivity is the problem that sex brings to a head, and which sex has the potential to dismantle (Bersani 1986; Foucault 1997). This is to say that one of the ways ethics surfaces in queer theory is in the problematic of being a person but not wanting to be a person. Abdication of a subjectivity to which one is more or less is attached. What follows doesn't extend a counterargument so much as ask what is differently queer in interpersonality: all

the more so, when an ensuing ethics honors the difficulty, in Winnicott, of that prefixial "inter."

It behooves us to begin with Jacques Lacan, before Winnicott, for several reasons. For one, Lacan has written more on ethics, titularly speaking, than most psychoanalysts. Second, Lacan not only has energized much queer theory, but in many ways has provided the grounds from which to distinguish queer theory from queer studies. If the latter takes seriously the sympathetic responsibility of reading the empirical, the former presumes the hermeneutic difficulty of approaching the empirical. Hence Lacan's subtle distinction between action and the measure of action: if action is presumed as lost to the immanent thresholds of the signified, we might well less compunctiously trust our grasp of action's measurement, belated signifier of action, but at least in belatedness less of a mirage. To begin, that is, with Lacan, is perhaps to wish for a different beginning, which we might then find in Winnicott. Even as ethics, more generally, might describe the wish for both different beginnings and different ends.

Jacques Lacan (1992) writes, "If there is an ethics of psychoanalysis — the question is an open one — it is to the extent that analysis in some way or other, no matter how minimally, offers something that is presented as a measure of our action — or at least it claims to" (311). Following Lacan's reservations, we might well consider what this "something" is, or how this "something" is offered, how it is presented. The measurement of action — of the ways in which a person participates in or withdraws from the world — presumes, as Lacan nearly implies, that action itself might be intelligible enough for calibration if not valuation. While ethical involvement presumes some degree of purposive vocation, it remains unclear in Lacan's treatment of ethics how we might know action when we see it, or when we ourselves are acting. Already we find ourselves in the vicinity of ethical theatrics, as action slips despite itself into acting, which slips into the form of action without necessarily its consequence (even as ethics would conventionally insist on some assertion of consequentiality).

As queer theorists, including Judith Butler (2002) and Lee Edelman (2004, 102–11), have noted, Lacan's figure for psychoanalytic courage is Antigone, who — unlike Oedipus, who acts on misprision — acts in principle. In terms of ethics as it relates and does not relate to theatrics, it's worth noting that Lacan turns to a Sophocles character, turns inaugurally to theater. This is a move differently made by Winnicott, although as we shall see, when Winnicott turns to the theatrics of tragedy, he acknowledges the medium, the apparatus of genre, rather than eliding distinctions between persons and characters. This is an elision made by Lacan, which we need not, reading Lacan, repeat. Antigone, as figure, arises for Lacan and others as an instantiation of a theory — of her own theory — as much as she enables theories (of activism, feminism, kinship, politics) that follow. Needless to say, to speak of instantiations of figures too quickly glosses the "measure" of this instantiation, not to mention the theoretically vast (and ethically fecund) differences between being a character and being a person.

Ethics, following the example of Antigone, traces a circular movement from theory to action and back again. In the circularity, the distinctions blur not only between thinking and doing, but between activity, passivity, being, and feeling. Perhaps this blur in part explains why Lacan speaks of the measurement of action rather than of action qua action. Returning to Lacan's quotation, in "offer[ing] something that is presented as a measure of our action […] or at least it claims to," we are at least thrice-removed from the domain of action itself, as though analysis could at best only approach, in the manner of Zeno's paradox, what otherwise might be most at hand. Again, how Antigone acts or doesn't act mustn't overshadow that she is scripted, that her actions have been repeated, one production after another.

It is in the drama of drama (to risk tautology) that psychoanalytically-informed ethics finds itself in the domain of queer theory, specifically, in the domain of dubious ontologies. Is Antigone merely an example from which persons might learn, or is she a character played by an actor, from whose staged actions

we might learn. The degree to which her actions are her own or already scripted returns us obliquely to questions of normativity and nonviolence, as invoked by Judith Butler. In Winnicott, however, doing and being differently solicit queer theoretical attention, since the distinction between the two is itself a gendered one. The blur of being and doing likewise describes some of Judith Butler's most influential work on gender performativity. *Doing's* floundering, flamboyant confusability with *being* is its own gender trouble — to recall the title of Butler's early work. Or as Winnicott (1992[1966]) appositely writes two decades earlier, "The male element *does* while the female element (in males and females) *is*" (178).

These confusions of the ontological and the aesthetic inform nearly all of Winnicott's contributions to psychoanalytic thought and practice. Furthermore, these confusions suggest that ethics (how one acts, as illuminated by what one thinks) and queer theory, via Winnicott, already are structurally analogous. I would be inclined to think of Winnicott, in this context, as the father of queer theory, were he not so under-estimated and under-invoked in queer-theoretical enterprises, and were the bestowal of paternity so variously, ideologically fraught. If not the father of queer theory, then to use Winnicott's (1992[1964]) own self-identification, in the context of a clinical session: "I am still being used as a brother-mother." (340) As brother-mother of queer theory, Winnicott teaches us that subjectivity is as much a fiction as it is an aspiration, that creativity is far more psychical necessity than filibuster of the empirical. The dubiousness of self-identificatory credulity — evident in ruminations as different as Butler's (1999) accounts of performativity as destabilization of gender; Edelman's (1994, 3–31) study of metonymic slippage as a rhetorical heroism against the oppressive identity politics implied in the essentialisms of metaphor; Bersani's (1986) innovation suggestion of masochism as Darwinian solution to the world's barrage of instability (Bersani) — can be found, with great intelligence and compassion, in Winnicott's work (see, in particular, 1971).

Reading Lines

Winnicott's interest in the variousness of dubiousness matches, I think, that of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, denominated the mother of queer theory, to whose work we shall turn in the next section. Although in the spirit of Winnicott's own identifications, perhaps Sedgwick might no less be imagined as *sister-father.* Alongside Winnicott's clinical cross-identifications, transferential ebullience arises in Winnicott's thoughts on William Shakespeare, which perhaps only now can be felt and understood as the radical, enabling tentativeness that they are. Earlier in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis,* Lacan (1992[1959–60]) opines that "*Hamlet* is by no means a drama of the importance of thought in the face of action" (251). Lacan perhaps unsurprisingly turns to *Hamlet* in the context of ethics — "Hamlet's apathy belongs to the sphere of action itself" (251). Winnicott, anticipating Sedgwick, turns to Hamlet for the ways epistemological contretemps dovetail with an insolubly inadequate gender-system, itself the convoluted return of, if not materialization, of a certain Cartesian breakdown. Winnicott's (1992[1966]) Hamlet isn't inert on account of too much thinking, but rather on account of his inability to think sufficiently, deeply, enough: "It would be rewarding to hear an actor play Hamlet with this in mind. This actor would have a special way of delivering the first line of the famous soliloquy: 'To be, or not to be….' He would say, as if trying to get to the bottom of something that cannot be fathomed, 'To be, …or…' and then he would pause, because in fact the character Hamlet does not know the alternative. At last he would come in with the rather banal alternative '…or not to be'; and then he would be well away on a journey that can lead nowhere" (179). Winnicott's account of what I shall call Hamlet's queerness accrues to the factitiousness of reasoning as placeholder for a more satisfying sense of veracity:

> Hamlet is depicted at this stage as searching for an alternative to the idea "To be." He was searching for a way to state the dissociation that had taken place between his male and

> female elements, elements which had up to the time of the death of his father lived together in harmony, being but aspects of his richly endowed person. Yes, inevitably, I write as if writing of a person, not a stage character. (181)

How quickly we move from Hamlet's endowments to Winnicott's treatment of Hamlet as though he were a person. How quickly, that is, we move from a rift between "male and female elements" to a rift between ontology ("a person") and aesthetics ("a stage character"). It likely is more accurate to note that Hamlet's queerness — as the simultaneous volatility and recalcitrance of gendered pulsion — is inseparable from the "awful dilemma" of existing in and out of the aesthetic, of being and not being a person at all. *Hamlet's* exploration of ethics cleaves to Hamlet's own exploration of ethics, which might no less be described as Hamlet's queerness or Hamlet's aesthetic predicament. Of less interest, for Winnicott, than Hamlet's relation to his father, Gertrude, Claudius, or even himself, is Hamlet's queer relation to *Hamlet*. Winnicott is self-conscious of *Hamlet* as both text and production ("it would be rewarding to hear an actor play Hamlet with this in mind…"), as Lacan similarly is attuned to the textuality of *Antigone*. Unlike Lacan's readings of tragedy, however, Winnicott can't help but conjure the counterfactual of Hamlet's own awareness of himself as text. In Lacan's vocabulary, Hamlet's queerness may reside in the near-recognition of oneself as one's own *object petit a* — an asymptote brushing up alongside the Symbolic, but more than anything else arising as the stuttering unavailability of the very signifier one most, in the moment, needs. Winnicott more straightforwardly offers the following — again, as though aesthetic traversal were ineluctably coextensive with problematics of gender.

> In this way it is the play (if Hamlet could have read it, or seen it acted) that could have shown him the nature of his dilemma. The play within the play failed to do this. It could be found that the same dilemma in Shakespeare provides the problem behind the content of the sonnets. But this is to ig-

> nore or even insult the main feature of the sonnets, namely, the poetry. Indeed, as Professor L.C. Knights (1946) specifically insists, it is only too easy to forget the poetry of the plays in writing of the *dramatis personae* as if they were historical persons. (1992[1982], 182)

The ease with which we (or Lacan, or Winnicott) might confuse *dramatis personae* with historical persons is countered by the difficulty of *dramatis personae* actually learning from their *mise-en-scène* as though simultaneously inhabiting and estranged from it. How to be historical and aesthetic at once? How to weather not only the aesthetic architecture by which one is surrounded, but the aesthetic quiddity one is? Hamlet's only possible means of insight — the search for an alternative to being more persuasive than not being — resides in the impossibility of reading one's own aesthetic inevitability. Hamlet's problem, to return to Lacan, is less about action versus thinking, than the queer misfortune of being aesthetic but misrecognizing how such a circumstance might be mobilized. Winnicott invokes the pathos of performativity decades before queer theory imagines performativity as activism.[2] Pathos, insofar as Hamlet's particular performativity luxuriates, dolorously, in its own bristling ennui.

Winnicott's interest extends not only to literary characters perceived and misperceived as persons, but also to persons, in clinical practice, oppositely unable to *feel* real. If doing and being signal a psyche's choreography of gender, the sense of one's inauthenticity or self-depletion signals a psyche's queer stumbling. Winnicott's psychoanalytic work thus ballasts a form of queer theory predicated on aesthetics rather than desire. Or, on

2 Queer theory's understanding of performativity is indebted to J.L. Austin's sense, in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), of performative utterances, i.e., words that are able to perform actions as potently as they are imagined to describe them. Words *are* actions. The paradigmatic performative utterance is the conjugal "I do," in which saying those words renders one, in certain particular situations, married. See Butler (1997); Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003).

the simultaneous attractions to and fears of desiring one's own aesthetic status. A sense of being in the world but not of it is not unto itself innovative, but Winnicott's engagement of self-distancing, through the duration of his career, is jarring for both its ubiquity and its particular psychoanalytic context.

If, as Lacan notes, the unconscious is structured like a language, then a psychoanalytic ethics might well be imagined not only as the presentation of a measure of action, but as the incessantly difficult project of staging a dialogue with one's self, the nurturing of untethered soliloquy into interlocution. As M. Masud R. Khan (1994[1986]) suggests, in his introduction to Winnicott's *Holding and Interpretation,* Winnicott found himself in Hamlet's non-feasible hypothetical vantage as much as did his patients. "Like the patient," Khan writes, "[Winnicott] too became partially an observer of the clinical process" (15), which is to say that clinical practice for Winnicott afforded, if only obliquely, better and for worse, a form of Hamlet reading *Hamlet*.

The collusion of queerness and self-perceived fictiveness informs at outset the experience of the patient whose analysis fills *Holding and Interpretation's* pages. "In the first phase, he came in a state of depression with a strong homosexual colouring, but without manifest homosexuality. He was in a bemused state and rather unreal" (Winnicott 1994[1986], 19). Said patient "admitted into an institution himself because of unreal feelings" (19). Once again, we find queerness "colour[ed]" by the weather of non-reality. Feeling unreal, versus bearing "unreal feelings." Contra various homophobic narratives of homosexuality's genetic realness or non-realness, Winnicott's practice takes homosexuality as a problematic of incredulousness; a hermeneutics of suspicion turned psychically inward. Again, it merits repeating that homosexuality, in Winnicott's studies, accrues as much to questions of ontology as such, as it does to normative conceptions of erotic attachment. Survival of distance, for Winnicott, describes a fundamental impediment and requisite of subjectivity. Distance, for Winnicott, collects most movingly, around the balletically strenuous hocus pocus between mother and infant.

As often, however, distance describes the aesthetic disjunct of auto-affection. He writes, "The excitement in relation to me had only been indicated and had not appeared" (29). Or as the same patient offers, from the same analysis, "I feel that you are introducing a big problem. I never became human. I have missed it" (84).

Clinically, it isn't entirely reasonable to suppose Winnicottian practice as the therapeutic catalyzing translation of experiential fraudulence into ontological veracity—such an account underestimates Winnicott's non-pathologizing interest in phenomena of fraudulence; and too quickly presumes that an experience of veracity would could as fraudulence's "cure." Such a misprision falls under what Leo Bersani has in several instances denominated the normative pastoral impulse of unrigorous deformations of Freudian and Lacanian therapy. More precisely, Winnicottian practice delineates a constellation of fraudulence, as much as the conundrum of veracities by which the former are adumbrated. Speculatively, Bersani's myriad accounts of the intractability of aggression (Bersani and Dutoit 2004, 124–25), keep their distance from Winnicott's own theory of aggression for similar reasons, the extent to which Winnicottian aggression would seem either banal or falsifyingly roseate (see Winnicott 1971, 89–90). Bersani's career-long investigation of aggression in no way amounts to simple advocacy of aggression; aggression's recalcitrance and often capricious materializations compel Bersani's more recent work on forms if not of "solving" aggression, than circumnavigating it. Winnicott (1971), with wonderful counter-intuitive verve, insists on aggression as an act of love:

> A new feature thus arrives in the theory of object-relating. The subject says to the object: "I destroyed you" and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*. (120–21; emphasis in original)

Such an account of aggression neither circumnavigates nor solves a Freudian or Lacanian embeddedness of aggressivity, so much as dispense with its vexing permanence altogether, a needle in a balloon. At the same time, Winnicott's theory of aggression arises only after an infant has discovered his separateness from the world (which is to say, his mother). Before this initial estrangement, the mother and child are bound in what Christopher Bollas (1987), following Winnicott, describes as the infant's first aesthetic situation (32). This is to say that aesthetic being, in Winnicott, precedes all other forms of being. Any sense of being real is subsequent to the largesse of shared fictiveness. Such a scenario both resonates with and complicates Bersani's (2008) and my own recent work on aesthetic subjectivity and aesthetic personhood, respectively. We might, in the anteriority not of violence or aggression but of aesthetics, think of an ethics predicated on the latter.

Arts of Losing: Winnicott with Sedgwick

This primal aesthetic moment, unlike, for instance, a Freudian primal scene, is predicated on the non-distance between subject and object: more radically, on the non-distinguishability of subject and object. We may call, for present purposes, our subject the infant. The infant has desires and needs that he is altogether unable to satisfy. In this limited sense, the infant is purely female, pure being without the capacity to *do*, in the Winnicottian sense of "a male element." The infant, however, has no sense of this incapacity, and no sense of a difference between being and doing, because the mother — specifically, what Winnicott calls the good-enough mother — supplements the infant's purely ontological and non-transitive vacancy with action choreographed as the infant's own. The infant is hungry and before the recognition of hunger, the mother nurses him. The infant wishes to be placed in a different position and before the registration of discomfiture settles, the mother repositions him. I am reminded here, of the distinction between being real and feeling real, in the above clinical study.

I am reminded of simultaneously immense and minimal distance between veracity and non-veracity; or less cynically posed, of the possible irrelevance of the distinction in a subject whose first memory — were the memory ever accessible, which it is not — would be of this exceedingly subtle drama without roles. Beyond the infant's incapability of so early a recollection, it seems plausible that there would in fact be nothing to remember, insofar as the materfilial economy's success is the semblance of having exchanged nothing. One remembers what no longer is there, but there was, on many registers, nothing there to lose. Never loved, never lost, the paradigm that structures Judith Butler's account of Freudian melancholy, has no place in Winnicott's version of never loved/never lost, if only because the success of the good-enough mother will have assured the infant that there was never a mother, per se, to have lost in the first place. Recognition *of* the mother, and concomitantly love of the mother, only would occur in the first pang of unsatisfied infant need. Prior to this, even as the infant at this stage cannot understand love beyond a barely burgeoning narcissism, and never lost, to the extent that his matrixial sustenance depends on a sense of their having been nothing to lose. I think here, of course, of the work of psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger (2006).

The mother's efforts are devoted to the infant's sense of omnipotence — that whatever he needs might be availed nearly before even the recognition of need (Winnicott 1971, 285). This maternal aesthetic, which is an environment the infant habits without perception of its difference from himself, seeks to nullify the boundary between the imagined and the actualized. The mother (more specifically, the mother's breast) arises as the infant's first encounter not with the female element (he already is this), but the male element (the mother's unceasing *doing* for the sake of doing's own evaporation in the field of what the infant rudimentarily *is*). Such a formulation suggests the residuum of this primal aesthetic implication which leads to weaning and autonomy but unsurprisingly remains as ghost-structure; that which was never there remains never there. Beneficently haunting and heuristically audible in least discernible of whispers, the

aesthetic unconscious subtends any subsequent form of ontology, betrays the extent to which *being* and *doing* can't help but braid and unbraid subjectivity's nostalgia for and unawareness of its fundamentally aesthetic condition.

Winnicott's contribution to an ethics of psychoanalysis would therefore complicate Lacan's account of measurement of action, at very least because of action's insolubly confused relation with being, of the salutary and ingenious insistence on an ethics necessarily predicated on a psychoanalytic aesthetics in excess of the rhetoric of dreamwork, the artistic permutations of a repetition compulsion's serial structure, the inaccessible Platonic figura from which the empirical, in most contexts, depressively is withdrawn. If ethics, in our current political duress, conjures an agonistic relation to omnipotence, Winnicott clarifies an omnipotence beholden less to ideology or hegemony than to aesthetic fragility. Omnipotence, for Winnicott, quite literally (and figuratively) is *work in progress.*

Winnicott's insights illuminate the thinking of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2008), whose most recent work gravitated to the idea, in both Marcel Proust and C.P. Cavafy (2006) of *queer little gods.* Conceived on some level as a form of Roman *penates*, Sedgwick's queer little gods, nominally and otherwise, speak to the condition of Winnicott's aesthetically enabled infant, whose queerness resides in both the factitiousness of its omnipotence, as well as in the veracity of that factitiousness: the queerness of being without capacity, of belief in capacity without conscious cognizance of omnipotence's own complicated repertoire. Conscious cognizance, even as an unconscious organized in aesthetic terms would both harrowingly and/or ebulliently remonstrate any form of autonomy unaware of its own contingency.

There is, alas, not enough of Sedgwick's work on queer little gods. After many years living with cancer, Eve died in the summer of 2009. *I wish there were more,* as a way of wishing Eve were still here. As a good-enough mother — father of queer theory, incessantly *doing* in such a manner that we might think we were doing; doing so much that we ourselves felt enabled by her own luminous industry — Eve has been teaching us her im-

minent withdrawal for several decades. What will we do without her, as succinct and inadequate formulation of theoretical weaning. *I shall not be here forever,* as perhaps the most awful and important of her points of departure. I both thought of and think of Eve as good-enough mother, allowing me in fleeting, miraculously irrational moments, to feel like a queer little god, the Winnicottian infant for whom aesthetic play arose as ethical lynch-pin. Eve's consideration of queer little gods is as non-ideological as Winnicott's sense of unduly (or, ethically, duly) empowered infants, for whom delusion is synonym for safety, for whom delusion never encounters the normative binary of the veritable. Non-ideological, to the extent that Eve's *doing* inspires her queer infants (myself included) to become queer little gods aspiring to become good-enough mothers. If there were a way to mourn Eve's awful extrication from the empirical world, it would be in the sense that her mode of imaginative capacity, in producing us, has become our world, such that an imagined Eve might approximate the Eve we have lost. Eve, nominally, of a sudden feeling as allegorical as Henry James's naming May Bartram, *May*. Eve on the brink, and in following her into a world of aesthetics and figuration, we realize that we were as much enabling as we were enabled.

That queer little gods might dream of becoming good-enough mothers describes a queer pedagogy for which Winnicott paves the way. Way and away, utility and distance, brought together by somatic exhaustions and sublimations recalled as axiomatically aesthetic. To mourn the loss of a good-enough mother (and here I defer to Freudian melancholy, or at least some less strictured version of it) is to find a good-enough mother inhabiting one's own egoic vantage. Weaning (of the Winnicottian mother, of Eve) would in the most sublimely ethically fashion guarantee one's own balletic instruction as element of one's own eventual doing, borne of one's own floundering but hopeful being. The incorporated object isn't chiding so much as inspiring. If weaning, following Winnicott, is a form of never loved/never lost, we have here, between Winnicott and Sedgwick, a form of melancholy so magnificently capacitating to deserve another

word. The Roman *lares*, watching over the family. We are both the family and the watchful. We tend and are tended, touch and are touched. Taken-for-grantedness in the infantile regime is the precondition for allowing into one's psyche the cultivation and care that made this take-for-granted possible in the first place. Melancholy isn't the suspension of work, but the non-shattering inheritance of unfinishable labor. Unfinishable, partly because it is a fiction borne of fictive premises. And simultaneously, because the good-enough definitionally soars far beyond "enough's" own limited expectations.

Drawing Lines

Again, the implausible extricability of ontology and aesthetics describes the domain of both Winnicottian theory and ethics, writ large. Aesthetics recalibrates ethics as the hinterland between being and doing, subject and object. If to speak of an ethics of psychoanalysis compels reconsideration of an aesthetics of psychoanalysis, then it is necessary to consider further how aesthetics informs Winnicott's clinical practice, as metaphor and technique. Much has been made of Winnicott's maternal aesthetics (and this art's coextensive relation to the aesthetic desiderata of an analytic session[3]) even as this form of environmental holding has yet adequately to be imagined in the context of Winnicott's clinical predilection for what he called the squiggle game (Winnicott 1992[1964–68], 299–317). The squiggle game goes as follows: Either Winnicott or his patient makes a squiggle on a sheet of paper. Whoever makes the first squiggle passes the paper to the other person, and that person sees in the squiggle something — a woman wearing a rakish hat, a bird in a nest — which, through additional lines is realized. The person who has "realized" the first squiggle then is responsible for enacting the next doodle, which is passed for "realization" to the person who initiated the prior doodle. The rules of the game are succinct. Someone begins. Someone turns the squig-

3 See Mavor (2007).

gle into something more or less intelligible; in either an additive fashion, or (in the spirit of Michelangelo's sculptures) in having discovered in the squiggle something that already had resided within it. Winnicott distinguishes, throughout his papers, between games and play, the former as the inhabiting and negotiation of pre-conceived structure, versus the latter as fruitful, digressive loss in imagination freed from structure. The squiggle transaction is posited as a game whose implicit goal is to free its participants *from* the game, to free the two into play.

Squiggle, an excellent, childish word for a mode of communication Winnicott forged with his child patients. There is nonetheless more to the squiggle game than its childishness, or even its analytic utility. The squiggle game, as I shall argue, literalizes interpersonal necessity as aesthetics distilled to irrevocable contingency. And the multiple mobilities of this aesthetic humbly offers a model of aesthetic ethics from which both psychoanalysis and queer theory might learn. The squiggle literalizes what Sedgwick, in the context of Cavafy's queer little gods, imagines as ontological indeterminacy — the squiggle simultaneously is and is not. While the squiggle's completion may seem the more conventionally aesthetic gesture, the production of the squiggle itself is the more aesthetically demanding. Where is the pencil headed, and how to defer the pencil's vagrancy from prematurely understanding its possible pulsions toward intelligibility, when the latter, strictly (and non-strictly) speaking, is the responsibility and pleasure of the initiator's artistic participant? How to withstand the desire for completion, and how to leave open what might be foreclosed, for the sake of the other person's imagination. The squiggle game relies less on artistic prowess than on a particular form of self-withholding imagination predicated on the eventually generous gift of its own motivated or happily self-abandoned incompletion. The squiggle is aestheticized by its inscriber's collaborator. The relational energies, here, recall those of both the Winnicottian maternal aesthetic apparatus, as well as the more familiar affective particularities of analytic transference and counter-transference. What will one person give the other? How to share in the creative phe-

nomenon of the squiggle-transformation having been offered as either incomplete or ineluctably implicit, or some unspeakable conjunction of the two?

The squiggle game replicates on a graphic level the transactions of infant and good-enough mother, transactions themselves replicated in the analyst's role as good-enough mother. Beyond this, the squiggle game allows the child analysand, graphically, to assume the role of mothering to Winnicott's own squiggles. The analysand, that is, realizes what Winnicott's squiggle already needed, or on only a slightly different register, already potentially was. The aesthetics of holding and being held are materialized in literal aesthetic venture, even as the squiggle itself suggests the mother herself, shared by two queer little gods. As Winnicott writes, "the mother (or part of the mother) is in a 'to and fro' between being that which the baby has a capacity to find and (alternately) being herself waiting to be found" (47). The squiggle, as correlative to both materfilial magic and to the mother without whom that magic is possible, always nearly exists on several personificatory registers, even as its avowed innocuousness (innocuousness in part dependent on the aesthetic production's contingency) relies on its sheer materiality, passed between persons. Nearly existing as personification coincides with the squiggle's nearly existing as art, as communication. The virtue of the squiggle in part lies in its nearliness, in which approximation brings persons and aesthetics closer together than definitiveness could. The squiggle in its metaphorical and literal traversals, offers the possibility of psychoanalytic subjectivity as the nearliness of being a person as that approximateness moves toward adjacent proximities of being art. We find ourselves in this juncture removed from Bersani's account of pastoral therapies attached to the corrective realization of clinical accounts of fictiveness. The squiggle, at its most certain, remains a squiggle, even as what it *might* be flourishes in multiple simultaneous directions. This approximateness importantly revises accounts of incoherence and ontological dubiousness espoused as queer theory's ethical aspirations. Incoherence can't help but lean on a fiction of coherence. This binary dissolves (what Bersani re-

cently has called conversation's liquifying speech) in the field of approximateness, in which one cannot choose between fabrication and non-fabrication because each category is equally approximate to the other.

Winnicottian nearness (only nominally distinguishable from Winnicottian spaciousness) arises in a form of graphic collaboration that enriches our understanding of Lacan's account of the unconscious as being structured like a language. Language, syntactically, is governed by rules, capable of evasion as much as confession, of succinctness (the Freudian joke) as much as volubility (free-association). Language, likewise, minimally is shared between two people, and like a Freudian joke, achieves greatest intensity in the confluence of lucidity and surprise, or what Freud (1990), in the context of jokes, calls bewilderment and illumination (9). The squiggle, as a form of language, rewrites talk of the unconscious as predicated on memory inseparable from its immanent or futural materialization as something else. I think, here, of Bersani's account of subterfuge in the work of Henry James: the possibility of a lie living long enough in its particular environment to justify if not erase its own opening prevaricatory gambit. The squiggle's linguistic bravura — the following of non-syntactic rules for the sake of flirting with a syntax of association inseparable from the disarticulation from those original rules — resides in its humility, and in the strangeness of the squiggle only barely existing, communicatively speaking.

In this sense, the squiggle recalls the graphically, fastidiously dalliant works by Cy Twombly. Following Roland Barthes, Twombly's graphic executions — like Winnicott's squiggles — both precede and follow methodologies of intelligible writing: Twombly's graphemes anticipate writing in their stern incompleteness and solemnly mark what of writing remains, in the wake of its own foundering. An unconscious structured like a language, versus a squiggle, versus a Twombly. In the latter two examples, the unconscious — what can be imagined in ethical terms — withholds itself on the brink of volubility; is interested in the rhetorical plethora onto which it opens, with-

out committing to it. We are approaching and even caring for something like an unconscious without presumption, *prima facie,* of its architecture or contents. We return, again, to Bersani's account of psychical virtuality, in which the strength and utility of an unconscious depends on its inability to see beyond its own immanent and futural opacities. A psychoanalysis wed to this literally sketchy psychical landscape would require an exegetical language as mutational as the unconscious' own fitfulness, a language or repertoire always on the verge, whose veracity falls *toward* the plausibility of veracity. The fictive is won from itself only in the offing, rather than being embedded in a psychical lexicon which it can only bolster or betray. In lieu of Hamlet's inability to read his own lines in advance of speaking them, we have fallen into the near-coterminous formation and deformation of lines being read across two persons.

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