

THE INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS  
LONDON



The  
International  
Journal of  
Psychoanalysis

JUNE 2002 VOLUME 83 PART 3

## JUMPING FROM THE COUCH: AN ESSAY ON PHANTASY AND EMOTIONAL STRUCTURE

JONATHAN LEAR

Committee on Social Thought, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637, USA — jlear@uchicago.edu  
(Final version accepted 14 Dec 2001)

*This paper addresses two questions: first, how do phantasies work? Second, how do these mental activities affect a person's overall emotional life? The first question tends to be overlooked since those who accept, for example, projective identification as a basic mental activity tend also to treat it as an explanatory primitive. On this view, there is no further question to ask about how projective identification itself works; rather, other psychological and emotional phenomena are explained in terms of it. By contrast, this paper asks, how does projective identification itself work? The aim is not to provide a reductive explanation but to ask how it is that phantasies have the efficacy they have. To that end, one moment in the analysis of the Rat Man is re-examined. There is then an attempt to show the difficulties involved in weaving an account of phantasy into the broader-scale interpretation of emotional life.*

*Keywords:* phantasy, emotions, projective identification, Rat Man, defence, swerve, break, fear, development.

Since Freud's time, the most important development in psychoanalytic thinking has been an ever-increasing appreciation of the role of phantasy in human life. But how does phantasy work? This is a question that tends to be ignored—and there is a reason why. Consider, as a notable example, the phantasy of projective identification, first described by Melanie Klein and developed with clinical aplomb by her followers (Klein, 1946; Segal, 1957, 1964; Meltzer, 1966; Rosenfeld, 1971; Joseph, 1987, 1989; Hinshelwood, 1989, 1994). Those who accept the phenomenon of projective identification (and I count myself among them) tend to take it as a psychological primitive. Projective identification is invoked to explain certain aspects of how the unconscious mind works; there is not supposed to be a further question about how pro-

jective identification itself works. (And, of course, those who do not accept projective identification feel no pressure to explain how it works: they seek only to explain the relevant clinical phenomena in other ways.)

It almost seems as though there is a question without a questioner. *Almost*: the aim of this paper is not so much to answer the question as to show what a stimulating area of enquiry this might be. Note that this project is not in the least reductive: I am not trying to explain projective identification away, nor am I interested here in whatever neuro-chemical mechanisms might underlie it. Rather, the questions are: in what forms of mental activity does projective identification consist? How is it efficacious, that is, how does it do what it seems to do?

Since we are clinicians as well as theoreticians, there is another question that should engage us: namely, how do these workings of the mind affect a person's overall emotional life? This is one version of the question, how does the unconscious affect the conscious? It is also a question of the relation between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Ultimately we are concerned with an analysand's ability to experience and express his/her emotional life. As we look to the trees of mental functioning, we ought to keep an eye on the forest of emotional life.

Consider this moment from Freud's treatment of the Rat Man:

Things soon reached a point at which, in his dreams, his waking fantasies and his associations, he began heaping the grossest abuse upon me and my family, though in his deliberate action he never treated me with anything but the greatest respect. His demeanour as he repeated these insults to me was that of a man in despair. 'How can a gentleman like you, sir,' he used to ask, 'let yourself be abused in this way by a low, good-for-nothing fellow like me? You ought to turn me out: that's all I deserve.' While he talked like this, he would get up from the sofa and roam about the room, a habit which he explained at first as being due to delicacy of feeling: he could not bring himself, he said, to utter such horrible things while he was lying there so comfortably. But soon he himself found a more cogent explanation, namely, that he was avoiding my proximity for fear of my giving him a beating. If he stayed on the sofa he behaved like someone in desperate terror trying to save himself from castigation of terrific violence; *he would bury his head in his hands, cover his face with his arm, jump up and suddenly rush away, his features distorted with pain*, and so on. He recalled that his father had had a passionate temper, and sometimes in his violence he had not known where to stop (1909, p. 209, my italics).

What is the Rat Man doing? In the moment, he is not sure himself. He flails about for a self-interpretation and finally hits on one that Freud says is 'more cogent': the Rat Man is afraid that Freud is going to give him a beating. But why should Freud find *this* interpretation more cogent? This is a clinical moment

that is as difficult as it is important to understand.

It is difficult because there are three claims that all seem to be true. First, the Rat Man is not consciously afraid of Freud; second, the Rat Man is not unconsciously afraid of Freud; and third, the Rat Man is afraid of Freud.

But how could all three claims be true? On the surface, it looks as though we are caught in a contradiction, wedded to an inconsistent triad. In fact, all three claims can be true—and in seeing how they can all be true, we shall gain insight both into how phantasy works and how it intersects with and expresses emotional life. Note that I assert that they *can* all be true and not that they *are* all true. The Rat Man is not my patient; my only access to him is through Freud's case history. The analysis, short by contemporary standards, is long since over, and there is thus no way seriously to test alternative interpretive hypotheses. But the point is not to find out what was *really* going on with the Rat Man, it is to raise a possibility about what *might* have been going on with him. For whatever was going on with the Rat Man—even if Freud was completely correct in his interpretation—if this interpretive possibility is not ruled out, then there is a chance that Freud was approaching the Rat Man at the wrong level. And, of course, the real issue is not about Freud, it is about how we approach our analysands. We need to be alive to this possibility if we are going to stay open to all the interpretive possibilities that our analysands present us with.

*The Rat Man is not consciously afraid of  
Freud*

In the moment, the Rat Man has little conscious understanding of what he is doing. He is suffering a moment of reflexive breakdown: that is, his capacity for self-interpretation has become impaired (Gardner, 1993; Lear, 1998b). And he later comes up with a 'more cogent' explanation—he certainly does not take himself consciously to believe that

the good Doctor Freud is actually about to thrash him. Rather, the Rat Man has taken on the role of self-analysis and is ascribing to himself an unconscious belief.

And in so ascribing such a belief to himself, the Rat Man is implicitly following out an idea that goes back to Aristotle. Emotions are not just affective outbursts, they have complex structures. In particular, they make an implicit claim for their own appropriateness. Fear, for example, is not simply a feeling: it is constituted by a sense that one is being threatened. Fear purports to be the *right* response to some perceived or imagined threat (Aristotle, 1984, p. 2202; Lear, 1998a).<sup>1</sup> It is precisely because the Rat Man does not *consciously* believe that Freud is going to beat him that, given his fearful reactions, he is tempted to ascribe some *unconscious* reason for his fear.

*The Rat Man is not unconsciously afraid of Freud*

The argument in favour of the first claim might seem to provide evidence for the idea that the Rat Man is unconsciously afraid that Freud is going to beat him. For if the Rat Man is behaving fearfully, yet has no conscious understanding of what he is doing, then isn't that evidence that he is unconsciously afraid? Certainly, that is the line of reasoning taken by both the Rat Man and Freud.

And we do have to accept the interpretive possibility that the Rat Man is unconsciously afraid of Freud. That is, the second claim *could* be false. This would be the situation in which the Rat Man's fear of Freud was preconscious. In this case, there is an articulated fear-structure directed at Freud, though because of some inhibiting or repressing force, that fear-structure is kept from the Rat Man's conscious understanding. Perhaps this is the way it was for the Rat Man.

But if we look at the reasoning that Freud

describes, another interpretive possibility suggests itself. Namely, that while Freud and the Rat Man take themselves to be making an empirical discovery about the Rat Man's unconscious, they are in fact following out the logic of a concept. For if one assumes the Rat Man is afraid, and there is no conscious belief that Freud is a threat, then there is *conceptual* pressure to conclude there must be an unconscious belief.

It is in this way that the unconscious can come to be conceptualised as more rational than it is. For it is part of our concept of belief—as well as the other propositional attitudes—that one cannot have them one by one. They have to fit together in some more or less coherent way (Davidson, 1980, 1984). In this picture, irrationality can enter in only one of two ways: either unconscious beliefs and desires interact with conscious beliefs and desires in irrational ways or unconscious beliefs and desires hook on to the world in inappropriate ways (Davidson, 1982; Lear, 1998b). It is as though the Rat Man's unconscious has beliefs which themselves hang together, but it is not very good at keeping track of time and is very short-sighted. Thus the unconscious mistakes Freud for the Rat Man's father. All this follows from the assumption that an unconscious belief is what explains the Rat Man's cringe.

In short, the Rat Man and Freud seem to think the following interpretive inference is legitimate: from (a) the Rat Man is acting fearfully and (b) there is no conscious belief that Freud is a threat, it is valid to infer (c) that there must be an unconscious belief. But if we assume this form of interpretive inference is valid, we will end up conceptualising the entire unconscious along the lines of the preconscious. That is, we are in danger of attributing too much structure to the unconscious. And thus we are in danger of attributing more mental organisation to our patients than they, in fact, have. Again, perhaps the

<sup>1</sup>The standard reference would be to Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.5, 1382a, 22–3.

Rat Man did have all this organization; perhaps he did have an unconscious belief that Freud was about to beat him. But what if he did not?

Once one recognises this possibility, one can see that there is a real danger that Freud is collaborating with a rationalising defence. It may be that they are both attributing to the Rat Man more intelligibility than his acts possess. This has important consequences for technique. For if the Rat Man is acting for inappropriate reasons—and if he is able to act for those reasons because he is unconscious that those are his reasons—then the proper therapeutic technique would be to bring these reasons to light. The Rat Man would then be able to see that his hitherto unconscious reasons were bad reasons. When good reasons can interact with bad reasons, one should expect the Rat Man's fear to diminish and eventually to evaporate. But if all of this is a rationalising defence, then what at first sight looks like a therapeutic technique—'making the unconscious conscious'—on further reflection looks like the construction of a false self.

### *The Rat Man is afraid of Freud*

How might we otherwise conceive of what is going on with the Rat Man? And how might we otherwise think about how to help him?

To approach this clinical moment of rupture adequately, we need to go back to a moment of theoretical rupture and rethink it. By the end of the First World War, Freud came to see that there were important psychological phenomena that could not be explained in terms of the various functionings of the pleasure principle.

But he assumed without argument that what he needed to find was another principle. And perhaps he is right that there is another principle, but I do not think we have yet figured out what it is. I have argued elsewhere in detail that Freud's argument in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not sufficient to estab-

lish the death drive as a principle of mental functioning (Lear, 2000, ch. 2). I cannot go through that argument here, but the general idea is that, given the actual empirical psychological phenomena Freud cites, the postulation of the death drive is a theoretically extravagant conclusion. The question then arises whether there might not be more austere ways to conceptualise the phenomena? Roughly speaking, I think Freud was right to think that certain phenomena—e.g. traumatic dreams, certain kinds of compulsive repetitions—are exceptions to the workings of the pleasure principle, but that in trying to conceptualise them, he went off the theoretical deep end.

Let us simply abandon the assumption that if there are exceptions to workings of the pleasure principle, there must be a 'beyond', a hidden principle waiting to be discovered. And let us ask instead how we might characterise austere the empirical content of Freud's important discovery. It seems to me that what Freud has shown is that, on the broadest possible scale, there are two different types of unconscious mental activity. The first is by now familiar workings of the mind according to the loose associations of the pleasure principle, which Freud so brilliantly described in *Three Essays on Theory of Sexuality*, *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Studies on Hysteria*. Here we have displacement and condensation, as well as various forms of inhibition and repression, which altogether serve to diffuse our associations as well as express them in dreams, bodily expressions and other symptomatic acts. These are, of course, all sorts of different mental activities, but they can all be summed up under one grand type: the functionings of the mind according to the pleasure principle. (Indeed from this broad perspective, the mind functioning according to the reality principle is only a variant: the search for pleasure through realistic considerations.) I call this type of mental functioning *swerve* because it exercises a kind of gravitational pull on the entire field of conscious mental functioning,

bending it into idiosyncratic shapes. By way of analogy, we detect the existence of black holes by the way light swerves towards them. We detect this type of unconscious process by the ways our conscious reasoning, our bodily expressions, our acts and our dreams swerve towards them.

Before 1920, Freud thought he could account for all the relevant pathology in terms of psychological conflicts that were themselves all instances of swerve-like mental phenomena. The kernel of Freud's discovery in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that this is not so. There are significant psychological phenomena that cannot be understood in terms of any type of swerve. We need to recognise a fundamentally different type of mental activity which is in fact the disruption of primary-process mental activity itself. I give the generic name *break* to all types of mental activity that serve to disrupt—or break apart—the ordinary functionings of the mind. So, for instance, the so-called dreams of the traumatic neuroses are instances of break because, as Freud showed, they are not really dreams. That is, they are not an ordinary manifestation of the wish-fulfilling capacity to dream, rather they are a disruption of that capacity. In traumatic neuroses, the ordinary swerve-like capacities of the mind are repeatedly disrupted, and the mind gets stuck in repeated disruptions.

There are three features of break that need to be emphasised. First, break is a *genus* concept, not a species. This is an important fact: do not let your eye skim over it. In conversation, colleagues have assumed that I am trying to introduce a new mental force, and then the natural response is, 'Why do we need it? Don't we already have the concept of trauma?' That is like saying, 'Why do we need the concept of an animal, when we already have the concept of a human being?' The point of the concept of animal is not to

introduce a new species—as though we have humans, chimps and now we also have animals as though it were the discovery of yet another species. Nor is it to say that now we have the concept of animal we no longer need the concept of a human being. Rather, the concept of animal allows us to see, at a higher level of generality, that there might be some salient things in common between humans and, say, anteaters. With the concept of animal we can see a certain unity where before we only saw differences.

And so it is with the concept of break: the point is not to introduce it as something at the same level as trauma, but additional to it, nor is the point to replace the concept of trauma with the concept of break. Rather, the point is to divide mental activity into two broad categories: those which manifest the ordinary functionings of the mind, and those which disrupt them. In the broad genus of break, there are myriad species: trauma is the obvious example, but included in this category are also 'attacks on linking', as well as moments to be found in projective identification, introjection, various forms of acute bodily attacks and spasms, as well as certain kinds of moments of dissociation and fugue states. In particular, those that are extremely minor, non-traumatic and difficult to detect: these are the sorts of break Gray listens for in his close process attention (Gray, 1994; Goldberger, 1996). One of the values of the concept break is that it encourages us to think about what one of Gray's minuscule breaks and a massive psychotic break might have in common.<sup>2</sup> I do not pretend to be able to give a complete taxonomy of all the kinds of break, but I think that that it is a fruitful area for future research.

The second feature of break that needs to be remembered is that breaks can come from inside as well as from outside the individual mind. Another person or an event can inflict a

<sup>2</sup>There is a tendency to assume that the primitive mental phenomena Melanie Klein describes must be utterly different from the minuscule disruptions Paul Gray describes in his close process monitoring of high-functioning neurotics. The generic concept of break enables us to see something in common.

trauma upon us that utterly disrupts mental functioning. But, on Freud's economic model, the human being is himself a repository of drives and psychic energy that can on occasion overwhelm the mind.

Third, and most importantly, a person can become active with respect to break. That is, in periods of stress and anxiety, a person can use the heightened psychic energy to disrupt his own mental functioning. In this way, break can become a primitive defence mechanism.<sup>3</sup> It can also be used to provoke more minor disruptions: in this way, small breaks can be incorporated into more sophisticated defences.

Let us go back to the Rat Man. Here is what I suspect was happening. (But, remember, my aim is not to establish that this is what actually occurred with the Rat Man, I only suggest it as a live interpretive possibility.) As the transference with Freud is unfolding in swerve-like ways, the Rat Man's anxiety is also increasing. The anxiety becomes too much for the Rat Man to handle, and he induces a break by jumping up from the couch or cringing before Freud. It is at this abrupt and surprising moment that Freud looks to the transference to explain it. This is not strictly speaking false. But it is ironic, because a transference has been developing all along and it is precisely when this transference development gets disrupted that Freud looks for the appearance of transference.

If this account is correct, then simply to interpret the Rat Man's acts as fear of Freud is to go off in the wrong direction. If it makes sense to say that the Rat Man is afraid of anything, it is more likely that he is afraid of the development of his own emotional life. To put it paradoxically, he is too afraid to be afraid. Less paradoxically, the Rat Man suffers so much anxiety that he invokes break as a primitive defence and thus he is never able to develop a mature emotional life. In

particular, he is not able to get to the point where he can experience fear as a fully fledged emotion.

To say that an emotion like fear can be 'fully fledged' suggests that the mature capacity to experience fear is itself the outcome of a developmental process. And like any developmental process, it can be interrupted, inhibited or distorted in various ways. In a mature and healthy expression of fear, a person takes up the various fearful somatic responses—many of them automatic—and embeds them with good reasons. On the one hand, fear reaches down into our gut; on the other hand, it reaches out to the world and makes a claim that fear is the right response.

Of course, this is a complex developmental process, and thus there are many points along the way for disruption and inhibition. Now many of these truncated expressions, from a behavioural point of view, will look just like fear. And they are fearful expressions in the sense that they are the expressions of a primitive capacity that, if allowed to develop, would develop into the mature capacity to express fear. In the case of the Rat Man, the problem is that these fearful expressions are themselves being deployed to disrupt the development of the capacity to experience fear.

We are now in a position where we can make the case for the fact that the Rat Man *was afraid of Freud*: we need only note that in ordinary English we use emotion-words, like 'fear', not only for fully fledged emotions, but for all the truncated versions along the developmental route. When we call an infant's outburst or the Rat Man's cringe an expression of fear, we do so not simply because of the qualities of the outburst itself, but because we implicitly locate that outburst on a developmental spectrum at whose furthest end is the 'fully fledged' expression of fear. In effect, this is to use Aristotle's distinction between fear as a *potentiality* and

<sup>3</sup>What Bion (1959 in Bott Spillius, 1988) calls an attack on linking is one type of such a defence mechanism.

fear as an *actuality*.<sup>4</sup> Ordinary language, we note, is happy to call both cases an expression of fear. The danger that we, as analysts, must avoid is to interpret a truncated emotional outburst as, say, a (fully fledged) expression of fear and then feel obliged to discover all the features of the fully fledged emotion. I suspect that this is what the Rat Man and Freud do when they move from saying that the Rat Man's jump is an expression of fear to saying that there must therefore be an unconscious belief that Freud is about to beat him.

But, still, our interpretive problems are not over. For this 'cringe-and-jump-from-the-couch' is not an unproblematic member of the developmental capacity to express fear. In fact, it is a disruption of that very capacity. Normally we are inclined to think that the expressions of emotional life are themselves part of a developmental process in which the emotions themselves gain in complexity and structure. But in this case we have an affective display which, while on the surface it looks like an expression of fear, is in fact deployed in the service of disrupting and thus inhibiting the development of the capacity to experience fear. In other words, in this dramatic moment, by looking at the behavioural manifestations alone, we have an emotional display that we cannot decide whether it is an expression of the capacity to express fear or a disruption of that very capacity.

Should we call an act that disrupts the capacity to express fear itself an expression of fear? I don't think that there is a straightforward answer to this question. For psychoanalysis reveals a complexity of psychological activity that goes beyond any of our ordinary intuitions about how to employ a concept used in a natural language, such as that of fear. Nevertheless, I think that a case can be made for the Rat Man's outburst being an expression of fear. At first it seems counterintuitive that anything that disrupts

the capacity to express fear should itself be considered an expression of fear. But this intuition is trumped by another: that we learn to apply the concept of fear on the basis of fairly casual observation of behaviour and reports of feelings. The Rat Man's outburst is observationally identical to an outburst that would be on the developmental route to the expression of fear as a fully fledged emotion. This latter outburst would unproblematically be called an expression of fear, and the Rat Man's outburst is observationally identical to it. Thus there is reason to call the Rat Man's outburst an expression of fear. If we follow this line of reasoning, then it seems we have to accept a surprising consequence: that emotions can be self-disrupting. The expression of fear can be used to disrupt the development of the capacity to express fear.

The danger for us analysts is that we unwittingly move from thinking that this outburst is an expression of fear to assuming that it cannot also be a disruption of the capacity to express fear. This is one reason why we need specialised psychoanalytic concepts, like phantasy and projective identification: to render clearly the psychological complexity of an event that goes beyond our ordinary use of emotion-language. It seems to me that the Rat Man's outburst is a manifestation of projective identification. In the transference, the Rat Man's anxiety has been rising. There is, I suspect, an internal punishing figure—let us call it the Rat Dad—which was itself formed in phantasy by various internalisations of his father, and which now performs severe superego functions. Intrapsychically, the Rat Dad is acting up, and so is the rebellious ego-figure of the Rat Child. In a burst the Rat Man tries to relieve his anxiety by projecting a bit of himself—namely, internalised Rat Dad—out on to Freud.<sup>5</sup> In short, what we see in the Rat Man's jump from the couch is less a manifestation of the capacity

<sup>4</sup>In Lear, 1998b, pp. 93–98, I make the case that Aristotle's distinction between matter and form is also of great help in understanding this clinical moment.

<sup>5</sup>This mental act is strategic, but it is not intentional. (See Johnston, 1995 and Lear, 1998b.)



to express fear and more a display of intrapsychic structure spread out over the analytic situation (Bird, 1972; Loewald, 2000; Lear 1998b). The Rat Man is cringing before his own superego.

But how does this projective identification work? Projective identification is not magic; it has real efficacy, yet it is puzzling how this efficacy is achieved. Of course, we know how to describe projective identification—in phantasy a person takes a piece of him/herself and projects it into another person—but what does this mean? How does it work? Our sense of the reality of projective identification is that a certain capacity of the person tends to go missing (Hinshelwood, 1994). So, for instance, in the case of the Rat Man, his capacity to express fear has been thoroughly disrupted. This is ironic—and at first counter-intuitive—because it looks as though the Rat Man is expressing fear. And yet it is part of the capacity to express fear that allows a person to be attuned to the world in the right sorts of ways: that a person can have a sense of what is salient. True fear is of its essence oriented to the world. It is a response to what a person takes to be genuinely worthy of fear. And if fear makes an implicit claim that it is an appropriate response, then a mature and healthy capacity to express fear ought to be sensitive to those aspects of the world that are threatening, and distinguish them from those that are not.

It is just this capacity that the Rat Man so thoroughly disrupts. In the moment of the jump he cannot tell whether he is responding to something in the world or something in himself. In projective identification, he has rendered thoroughly confusing the distinction between self and world. He has thus also disrupted his capacity for self-interpretation: in the moment, he has virtually no idea what he is doing.

It seems to me that the daunting and immediate power of projective identification comes from the fact that it is a species of break. In his jump, the Rat Man gives himself a break. That is, in response to anxiety the

Rat Man invokes break as a primitive defence and thus disrupts his emerging emotional life. He forcibly projects the Rat Dad out on to Freud: but that is just what it is for him thoroughly to disrupt his own mental functioning. For his own internal capacity for superego functioning has now gone missing. He acts as though it is now located over there, in Freud.

Then, having induced a break, he dreams and rationalises around it in swerve-like ways. That is, he begins to imagine and to think that he must be unconsciously afraid of Freud. That is, fear of Freud is now being constructed *ex post facto*. It is not, then, that fear causes the Rat Man to jump from the couch; rather it is that his jumping from the couch causes him to try to form the emotion of fear.

By way of analogy, I once had a psychotic patient who said to me, 'Everything was all right until my life left me.' Unlike a neurotic slip of the tongue, this patient was trying to report the outcome of a psychotic projective identification. When this person's wife left their trailer, he went into a catatonic trance and had to be taken to the hospital. In a massive psychotic break, he disrupted his own capacity for emotional life. The overwhelming power of the phantasy arises not so much because he imagines or day-dreams that he has died, but because he induces a massive break. If phantasy were only a dream-like content—or the process by which such content was formed—we would not be able to explain its remarkable power. To understand that power, we need to understand projective identification not as a swerve-like phantasy, a dream that he and his wife are one person. Rather, we need to understand it in terms of a massive break that is induced by the loss of his wife.

The case of the Rat Man's jump and my patient's catatonic break can show us something significant about the difference between swerve and break. In particular, it is not that break is always a contentless trauma and swerve the only mental activity with content.

In projective identification a content-saturated capacity of mental functioning is forcibly disrupted. In the case of the Rat Man, his superego capacities, which are saturated with Rat Dad meanings, are forcibly disrupted; in the case of my patient, the meaning of his life—his wife—is the occasion of the disruption of his capacity to live. The difference between swerve and break, then, does not lie in the fact that in swerve there is manipulation of content and in break there isn't; rather, the difference lies in the type of manipulation involved. Think of the difference between reading a journal article you strongly disagree with and saying 'That's ridiculous', on the one hand, and physically ripping up the pages of the journal, on the other. In each case there is a manipulation of content. But in the former case our thoughts are working through the meaning; in the latter case we are physically destroying the vehicle of meaning, the printed word. Swerve dreams through meanings; break breaks them up.

Now one eerie feature of projective identification that needs to be accounted for is its transmissibility. Projective identification not only has a sender, it has a receiver—and on occasion it can have a powerful effect on the receiver. How does this work? It is unsatisfying simply to respond 'by projective identification'. We want to know how projective identification works. By way of analogy, in certain cultures, a voodoo curse can have an overwhelming impact on its target. There is no question about its efficacy. The problem lies not in the voodoo itself, but in the voodoo theory of voodoo: for, in answer to the question of how it works, it can only answer 'by magic', or 'by voodoo'. Voodoo's efficacy is itself taken to be a primitive. As psychological theorists, we ought to be able to do better than that with projective identification. In particular, those of us who take projective identification seriously should not want it to look like magic.

In order to demystify the reception of projective identification, one can imagine my psychotic patient as himself on the receiving

end of a projective identification. (I have little idea what really happened.) Before his own break, his partner is getting herself stirred up and, in a moment of high anxiety, she projects her murderous rage into him. That is, instead of expressing her anger in a somewhat mature fashion, she actively disrupts her capacity for rage. Her own capacity for anger has gone missing, but she now experiences her partner as full of her murderous rage and she flees out of the door. Perhaps she says something like, 'Go to hell!' and stomps out. My patient takes this message with psychotic literalness: not only is the message drained of all metaphor, but also the utterance of the words is experienced as a physical intrusion (Segal, 1957). Of course, there is an important sense in which this person is right about his experience. The utterance 'Go to hell!' is a physical act: the air has moved from deep inside the speaker's body; it is expelled with a collapsing chest, a moving mouth and tongue and, perhaps, with glaring eyes. The air between them is set in motion and the soundwaves penetrate my patient's ears and a message is taken into his body. In that sense, my psychotic patient is right about what happened to him: a piece of meaning that is itself physically instantiated has been taken into him. He is mistaken about the routes of its efficacy.

What has actually happened is that my patient is psychotically attuned to his partner; in particular, he is attuned to her rising anxiety. This causes him to become more anxious himself. As she explodes in break, he follows suit. Inducing a break is his first line of defence and, given the message, he sends himself to hell. By the time he comes for treatment, the massive break has already occurred. By contrast, the Rat Man's jump from the couch is a significant break *within* the analytic situation—and Freud goes looking for hidden emotions. But if the above interpretation is correct, the point of the therapy ought not to be for the Rat Man to discover the hidden contents of his emotional life, but for him to acknowledge that, in an

important sense, he has not yet allowed himself to have an emotional life. For when a powerful emotion starts to develop, the Rat Man develops so much anxiety that he disrupts the whole process with a break. A *genuine* acknowledgement of this would usher in a new way for the Rat Man to relate to himself.

How might this happen? As a matter of technique, this is not an easy process to handle. After all, if this interpretation is correct, various forms of break are the Rat Man's tried and true defence mechanisms. They were laid down in infancy and, precisely because they are so easily triggered, they have prevented any more sophisticated defences from developing. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that these primitive defences constitute who the Rat Man *is*. Is there, then, any hope of therapeutic action? The Rat Man induces a break when he feels anxiety, and he feels anxiety easily because he lacks more sophisticated defences. So one initial therapeutic aim is to keep the level of anxiety low. In this way, one deprives the Rat Man of his primitive defences, but in a benign way: one reduces the occasions for deploying them. Most likely there will be breaks no matter what one does. But the hope is that there will be more occasions where the Rat Man learns to tolerate certain levels of anxiety—no matter how low those levels might appear from an outside perspective—without immediately resorting to a break. Thus there arise occasions in which the Rat Man can start to live with his emotional life, rather than immediately disrupt it.

A second therapeutic aim is resolutely to avoid collaborating with any rationalising defence. Instead of joining the Rat Man in postulating an unconscious fear, one could help him to see that he has just anxiously disrupted his emotional life. The fundamental attitude would no longer be one of discovery of hidden emotions; rather, it would be one of commitment to allowing emotional life to unfold.

Third, remember that some breaks can be

of great therapeutic value. Precisely because break is a genus and not a specie, it comes in many different flavours and intensities. Massive breaks can be destructive to the mind, but less intense breaks can be of value in breaking open rigid structures. Every core unconscious phantasy is itself an implicit metaphysical theory: it provides the person whose phantasy it is with a sense of what is and what is not possible. If a person inhabits, say, an unloving world, then everything that happens to him/her will be experienced as unloving. Lack of love will permeate not only everything that actually happens to him/her, it permeates everything that *might* happen—just so long as he/she continues to inhabit this unloving world. For in this world, unloving possibilities are the only possibilities there are. Even when we consider a high-functioning neurotic—an 'ideal' analysand—we will eventually find that there are core fantasies which structure this person's life and, indeed, come to structure the transference. With a high-functioning neurotic, the structuring fantasies can be astonishingly protean. On the one hand, the fantasies reach out to interpret every experience in its light—so that every experience turns out to be somehow disappointing, or somehow a lack of love—and, on the other hand, the repetition is far from automatic or rigid. The core phantasy can be quite creative in taking in new experiences and metabolising them in terms of old structures.

So, how can we approach such a person? There are, of course, many ways. But one way is to listen for breaks. For breaks are not choosy: they will disrupt any structure, even neurotic structures. This is one reason why it helps to listen with the broad-scale distinction between swerve and break in mind. As we listen for swerve—in associations, dreams and interpretations of events—we can hear the person elaborating her core fantasies. To adapt Freud, we admit swerve

into the transference as a playground in which it is allowed to expand in almost complete freedom and in which it is expected to display to us everything in the

way of pathogenic instincts that is hidden in the patient's mind (Freud, 1914, p. 154).

One of the things we are listening for is what, for the analysand, constitutes his/her structure of possibilities. It is precisely at a moment of break that this structure gets disrupted. And in what I shall call a lucky break there opens up an opportunity for new possibilities.

So let us go back for the last time to the Rat Man's jump. The Rat Man seems to have behaved in a typical fashion: he induces a break as a primitive defence and then tries to cover it over in swerve-like ways. In the aftermath of the jump, he starts to look for hidden emotions, tries to engage Freud in finding interpretations that would rationalise his behaviour, even humouring Freud by associating to his jump. Here we see swerve trying to restore ordinary mental function in the aftermath of a break.

But now let us imagine a slightly different Rat Man. Suppose Freud had already done a fair amount of analytic work with the Rat Man in such a way that the Rat Man himself came to understand, if only inchoately, that he had a tendency to disrupt himself. Let the jump from the couch be another break, provoked by rising anxiety. But in this jump the Rat Man can, in his very jump, recognise something ego-alien in his activity. He is going through the motions (again), but they no longer strike him as really his. Instead, he can see for himself: here I go again!

This is the same break as before, but now it is being used in a completely different way by our imagined Rat Man. In both cases the jump is a disruption of ordinary swerve-like mental functioning, but in this latter case, the imagined Rat Man is able to experience it as such. The original Rat Man had a break too, but he immediately absorbed it into his world of possibilities. It instantly became one more example of being afraid or angry. For the actual Rat Man, *all* his possibilities were fearful or anger-filled. But the imagined Rat Man, in his jump, can see, perhaps for the

first time, that not everything need be like that. This is what it is to experience a possibility for new possibilities.

What emerges—and it is no exaggeration to say so—is a new form of experience that is itself the manifestation of a new form of life. Between a Rat Man who is still searching for his hidden emotion and a Rat Man who is able to acknowledge that, up until now, he has been using his truncated emotions in the service of evading emotional life, there is not merely a difference in belief or cognitive state. It is a difference in way of life. The two imagined Rat Men inhabit different experiential worlds. The Rat Man who continues to look for hidden beliefs is still in the business of avoiding emotional life, in the name of discovering what it is. The imagined Rat Man who can recognise that he has been using his emotionally tempestuous life strategically to disrupt the development of a more vibrant and attuned emotional life—he at last is ready to open up to life itself.

The analytic attitude is, I think, above all, a peculiar form of commitment. To spell out the complexities of this commitment is beyond the scope of this paper. But it certainly involves a commitment to allowing emotional life to unfold (under the aegis of an analytic gaze). This in turn requires that one recognise that there are ways in which one can disrupt one's own emotional life and, thereby, one's own emotional development. In short, one needs some kind of recognition, however implicit, of the phenomenon of break. One needs to learn how to avoid invoking it as a primitive defence; one also needs to learn how to use it as an occasion for opening up possibilities for new possibilities. Only in this way can a new form of experience emerge.

#### TRANSLATIONS OF SUMMARY

Cet article pose deux questions: comment fonctionnent les phantasmes, et comment ces activités mentales affectent-elles l'ensemble de la vie émotionnelle d'une personne. La première question a tendance à être négligée du fait que ceux qui

acceptent, par exemple, l'identification projective en tant qu'activité mentale de base, ont aussi tendance à la traiter comme primitive explicative. Il n'y a aucune autre question à poser, sur ce dernier point de vue, au sujet de la façon dont fonctionne l'identification projective; ce sont les autres phénomènes émotionnels et psychologiques qui sont plutôt expliqués en fonction de celui-ci. A l'opposé, cet article pose la question de savoir comment l'identification projective elle-même fonctionne? Le but n'est pas de fournir une explication réductrice mais de demander: comment se fait-il que les phantasmes sont aussi efficaces qu'ils le sont? De ce fait, un moment dans l'analyse de l'Homme au Rat est réexaminé. L'auteur s'efforce ensuite de montrer les difficultés présentes dans le fait d'entrelacer le récit d'un phantasme dans l'échelle d'interprétation générale de la vie émotionnelle.

Dieser Artikel adressiert zwei Fragen: erstens, wie funktionieren Phantasien? Zweitens, wie wirken diese mentalen Aktivitäten auf das allgemeine emotionale Leben einer Person? Die erste Frage wird leicht übersehen, da diejenigen, die projektive Identifizierung als eine grundlegende mentale Aktivität sehen, dazu tendieren, dies als einen erklärenden Stamm zu sehen. In dieser Sicht gibt es keine weitere Frage zu stellen, wie projektive Identifizierung selbst funktioniert; stattdessen werden andere psychologische und emotionale Phänomene damit erklärt. Im Gegensatz dazu fragt dieser Artikel, wie projektive

Identifizierung selbst funktioniert. Die Absicht ist nicht, eine verkürzte Erklärung zu geben, sondern zu fragen, wie es passiert, dass Phantasien die Wirkungskraft haben, die sie haben. Zu diesem Zweck wird ein Moment in der Analyse des Rattenmanns neuerlich überprüft. Dann wird der Versuch unternommen, die Schwierigkeiten aufzuzeigen, die entstehen, wenn man eine Beschreibung von Phantasie in die weitere Interpretation von emotionalem Leben einbindet.

Este artículo trata dos temas: primero, ¿cómo operan las fantasías? Segundo, ¿cómo afectan estas actividades mentales la vida emocional general de la persona? Con la primera pregunta, la tendencia es a pasarla por alto, pues quienes aceptan, por ejemplo, la identificación proyectiva como una actividad mental básica, tienden también a tratarla como elemento explicativo de nivel primitivo. De acuerdo a esta visión, no habría ninguna pregunta adicional sobre como opera la identificación proyectiva misma; más bien, otros fenómenos psicológicos y emocionales se explicarían a partir del concepto. Por contraste, en este artículo la pregunta es, ¿cómo opera la identificación proyectiva en sí? La intención no es producir una explicación por reducción, sino preguntar cómo es que las fantasías tienen la eficacia que tienen. Con tal fin, se reexamina un momento en el análisis del Hombre Rata. En seguida, hay un esfuerzo por mostrar las dificultades inherentes a entretejer la función de la fantasía dentro de una interpretación más amplia de la vida emocional.

## REFERENCES

- ARISTOTLE (1984). *Rhetoric*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. J. Barnes. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- BIRD, B. (1972). Notes on transference: universal phenomenon and hardest part of analysis. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 20: 267-301.
- BOTT SPILLIUS, E. (1988). *Melanie Klein Today, Volume 1: Mainly Theory*. London: Routledge.
- DAVIDSON, D. (1980). *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (1982). Paradoxes of irrationality. In *Philosophical Essays on Freud*, ed., R. Wolheim and J. Hopkins. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- (1984). *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- FREUD, S. (1909). Notes upon a case of obsessional neurosis. *S.E.* 10.
- (1914). Remembering, repeating and working through. *S.E.* 12, pp. 147-56.
- GARDNER, S. (1993). *Irrationality and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- GRAY, P. (1994). *The Ego and Analysis of Defense*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson.
- GOLDBERGER, M. (1996). *Danger and Defense: The Technique of Close Process Attention. A Festschrift in Honor of Paul Gray*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson.
- HINSHELWOOD, R. (1989). *Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*. London: Free Association.
- (1994). *Clinical Klein*. London: Free Association.
- JOHNSTON, M. (1995). Self-deception and the nature of mind. In *Philosophy of Psychol-*

- ogy: *Debates on Psychological Explanation*, eds, C. Macdonald and G. Macdonald. Oxford: Blackwell.
- JOSEPH, B. (1987). Projective identification: some clinical aspects. In *Projection, Identification, Projective Identification*, ed. J. Sandler. Madison, CT: Int. Univ. Press, pp. 65–76.
- (1989). *Psychic Equilibrium and Psychic Change*. London and New York: Routledge.
- KLEIN, M. (1946). Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. In *The Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume 3: Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*. London: Hogarth Press (1975), pp. 1–24.
- LEAR, J. (1998a). *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.
- (1998b). Restlessness, phantasy and the concept of mind. In *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.
- (2000). *Happiness, Death and the Remainder of Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.
- LOEWALD, H. (2000). The transference neurosis: comments on the concept and the phenomenon. In *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs*. Hagerstown, MD: Univ. Publishing Group.
- MELTZER, D. (1966). The relation of anal masturbation to projective identification. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 47: 335–42. Reprinted in E. Bott Spillius (1988), pp. 102–16.
- ROSENFELD, H. (1971). Contribution to the psychopathology of psychotic states: the importance of projective identification in the ego structure and the object relations of the psychotic patient. In *Problems of Psychosis*, eds, P. Doucet and C. Laurin. The Hague: Excerpta Medica, pp. 115–28. Reprinted in E. Bott Spillius (1988), pp. 117–37.
- SEGAL, H. (1957). Notes on symbol formation. *Int. J. Psychoanal.*, 38: 391–7.
- (1964). *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*. London: Hogarth Press.