

HALF-OPENED BEING

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Doors

the door represents ... how separating and connecting are only two sides of precisely the same act. The human being who first erected a hut ... cut a portion of the continuity and infinity of space and arranged this into a particular unity in accordance with a single meaning.... By virtue of the fact that the door forms ... a linkage between the space of human beings and everything that remains outside it, it transcends the separation between inner and outer. Precisely because it can be opened, its closure provides the feeling of a stronger isolation against everything outside this space than the mere unstructured wall. The latter is mute, but the door speaks. (Simmel, 1994: 7)

Space without doors evokes a terrifying condition of endlessness and pointlessness, but doors make space habitable, giving us the *room* or *capacity* for home and world and self. This role in cosmogony is recognised in the sense of reverence that touches people whenever they approach a threshold. The obstacle of the door not only marks beginning and end, it is the beginning of ends, as evident in the etymology of 'limit'. In the one moment, the door separates and connects (see Eliade, 1971; Berger, 1984; Phillips, 1994: 83ff).

Whereas contracts or interactions are based on the overcoming of distance, relationships rely on insides and outsides that only feel apart when already together. In other words, they rely on the Janus-faced door. A door literally *implies* two fascias, and its limen animates every experience of the in-between or liminal (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969; Clément, 1994). A door could even be defined as the mysterious substance that separates and connects the two sides of life. Consider, likewise, the ontology of the hinge, that connection that separates the eloquent door from the mute wall. The wall itself allows no play of inside and outside, but, by suspending sides, the hinge gives us the sense of events and spaces unfolding (Bohm, 1985). However hard

it is for logicians to accept, people are, as Bachelard said, the paradox of ‘half-open being’ (1969: 222).

This reflection on doors, paradoxes and liminality addresses the transitional terrain postulated by Winnicott in his accounts of child development and ongoing creativity. Between insides and outsides, is a

third part of the life of a human being... an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated (Winnicott, 1991: 2).

Although explicitly talking of teddy bears, art and religion, Winnicott could be talking of the paradoxical *implications* of a door when he says that transitional phenomena display ‘the substance of *illusion*’ (1991: 3). His point is that the ability to *hold* paradoxical positions is required for culture, and thus for the development of children and for ordinary adult life:

We share a respect for *illusory experience*, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings.
(Winnicott, 1991: 3)

Scrupulous concern with logically resolving the paradoxes of inside and outside is a pathology, leading to psychic defences that stifle play, creativity and the liveliness of life (1991: 14).

If Winnicott is right, poststructuralists are pointing to a pathology when they show how conventional social thought reduces the play of insides and outsides by treating them as binary oppositions. Whereas the phenomenology of the door shows that closure relies on openness as a persistent possibility, a present absence, analysts committed to identity and autonomy use it to refer to an absolute break. They seek to

reduce doors to walls. But paradox isn't so easily evaded, for an impermeable wall no longer closes off an outside. Indeed, experience 'within' a doorless and windowless wall requires the language of limitlessness!

A major example of this obsessive concern with closure is found in the western sentimentality about childhood as a special state of innocence, for this distinction is founded on disgust and abjection (Rose, 1992; Matthews, 1994). Childhood is presented as a developmental stage that people should leave, and many adults can't leave it often enough, repeating their renunciation at adolescence, adulthood and middle age, at their children's birth and parents' death. Many children grow up feeling forever on the edge of a miraculous rebirth into the freedom and independence of adulthood. They can't wait to put the sticky contamination of their childhoods behind them.

This developmental story is *doubly* obsessed by issues of openness and closure, for it celebrates the child's overcoming of its initial 'absence of differentiation between the world and the self, whence arise the feelings of participation and the magical mentality which results' (Piaget, 1973: 266-7). If sociality is based on interaction, the child's sense of participation and substantial illusion is abhorrent, *lacking*, because it doesn't recognise the distance that identity must overcome. The Piagetian childhood must burn its bridges to produce the distance required for the adult's contract story (cf. Pateman 1988). Accordingly, after first assuming that everything active is alive and conscious, Piagetian children finally restrict these qualities to animals and perhaps plants, thereby finally cutting themselves off from the child's world (Piaget, 1973: 220-1). In *The Child's Conception of the World*, Piaget describes the child as

a being knowing nothing of the distinction between mind and body....

Compared with us, he would experience much less the sensation of the thinking self within him, the feeling of a being independent of the external world.... But, above all, the psychological perceptions of such a being would be entirely different from our own. Dreams, for example, would appear to him as a disturbance breaking in from without. Words would be bound up with things and to speak would mean to act directly on these things. Inversely,

external things would be less material and would be endowed with intentions and will. (1973: 49)

The child's thought is characterised as animist and magical, like the thought of 'primitive cultures' (1973: 193).

Whereas Piaget confidently characterises participation as lack, of differentiation, we share Winnicott's emphasis on the lifelong significance of this sense of immersion and participation. Instead of modelling adult sociality on interaction or contract, as a joining of identities, we argue that it is grounded in, or flows as, a continuation of the child's sense of participation in a living world. Piaget treats adult thinking as self-sufficient or detached process, but, as Merleau-Ponty insists, any adult position in the world rests on a child's sense of pre-positional participation:

in reality, it must be the case that the child's outlook is in some way vindicated against the adult's and against Piaget, and that the unsophisticated thinking of our earliest years remains an indispensable acquisition underlying that of maturity, if there is to be for the adult one single intersubjective world. My awareness of constructing an objective truth would never provide me with anything more than an objective truth for me, and my greatest attempt at impartiality would never enable me to prevail over my subjectivity..., if I had not, underlying my judgements, the primordial certainty of being in contact with being itself, if, before any voluntary *adoption of a position* I were not already *situated* in an intersubjective world (1962: 355).

In this article we show how our senses of home and world and self rely on our magical and animist senses of participation, on the suspension of Piaget's distinctions between mind and body, inside and outside, subjective and objective, and self and other. Piaget's characterisation of adult thought only shows how often adults are alienated from their own ways of knowing and being. If actually lived through a distinct sense of inside and outside, and without a sense of the life *in-between* self and other or subject and object, existence would be an experience of horror.

The speaker who reacts to the atmosphere in the lecture theatre; the sailor who listens to the wind and reads the clouds; the novelist whose characters create their own lives; the surfer who rides the imperceptible lines of force etched into the water's surface; the reader who enters and breaths the text: adult thinking often derives from immersion in and relation to the world, and not from severed distance. The knowledgeable person hears and touches the world where the ignorant or incompetent person insists on its externality and dumb passivity. These relational forms of knowing highlight the importance of processes like intuition, revelation and inspiration, and of in-between media like air, angels, ghosts and spirits. We therefore want to continue where poststructuralism leaves off, pursuing its criticisms of binary oppositions into a concern with the paradoxes *between* separation and connection, and then into an interest in varieties of religious experience.

Secrets

A closed door opens the capacity for closing others out. It opens a space of secrets that is crucial to the development of selfhood. We learn this as children through the beginning of our lifelong fascination with boxes, doors, cupboards, houses, buried treasure chests and caskets. These 'are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these "objects" ... our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy' (Bachelard, 1969: 78). In insisting on the mutual implication of our selves and these living objects, Bachelard is decisively undercutting Piaget's model of the child's separation from the world.

The significance of cryptic spaces is demonstrated by my three year old son who, before going to sleep, lovingly tucks under his pillow a picture he's drawn of himself. Similarly, as a ten years old, Jung secretly carved a little manikin, wrapped it and hid it for a year in a box in the forbidden attic. He didn't understand his actions, but knew that his security and life depended on the secret: whatever situation arose, he gained strength by thinking of the manikin secure in its hiding place. His autobiography

ascribes the episode a major role in his individuation and character-formation, as ‘the climax and conclusion of [his] childhood’ (1973: 22).

According to the standard account of childhood development,

the child’s discovery of the concept of secrecy ... heralds the birth of an inner world. When the child learns that thoughts and ideas can be kept within him/her and are not accessible to others, he/she realises that there is some kind of demarcation between his/her world, which is ‘inner’, and that which is ‘outer’. (Meares, 1992: 7; cf Dunbar, 1996: 80ff)

This secret place has contradictory implications. While, it divides people into inner and outer states, subjective and objective selves, an outside appearance and an inner essence, we will also see that when someone is most inside they feel opened out. The power of the openable door to feel closed allows insiders to feel as if there are no sides, as if they are opened *out*, whole or cosmic. Meares adds another ‘paradox’: because secrets can be shared, the child’s discovery of a distinct inner world opens opportunities for connection with others (1992: 11). This claim, however, shouldn’t be taken as an endorsement of Piaget’s assumption that connection is a secondary process, occurring after children have properly realised their distance from the world. Secrets aren’t simply held back from relationships: they only come to life in the erotic tension of relations.

Had Jung been unable to imagine anyone interested in his secret, it would have died as surely as if it had been discovered. I remember the naked delight on the face of a four year old boy when three seven year olds announced they’d play hide and seek with him. ‘We’ll let you hide first. We’ll count to ten thousand and then come and look for you’. Going first! Ten thousand! The little boy could hardly believe his luck. He rushed here and there before settling on a place behind a tree, where he hid, and hid, and hid, as his vitality and confidence wilted. Unless sought, there is no secret and no self. Rather than revealing a binary demarcation of inside and outside, secrets exemplify a persistent sense of the life in-between without subject or object, neither

one nor the other, inside or outside. They indicate the simultaneity of separation and connection rather than the development of a *distinct* self.

The connection implied in the most intimate or private can be readily observed at boarding schools, where I've worked as both student and 'mistress'. One night recently, for example, the girls were outside their dormitory, brushing their teeth, when I came to put them to bed. The empty dorm was a picture of chaos and spontaneity. The girls' belongings - mainly clothes - bulged every which way from swollen dressing tables. They had been abandoned and were motionless, yet were alive, lunging from the snug privacy of the girls' drawers, reaching for the bags they were to enter, for the holidays. They seemed to represent the states of mind of the girls: they too were already, flagrantly, on their way to the homes where, they imagined, their insides could safely hang out.

Slowly, I began to feel a pattern in the mess. The sight now reminded me of *trompe l'oeil*, for the clothes and belongings which seemed haphazard also seemed placed. Although secrets allow girls to establish a role distance and uniqueness against a background of boarding school seriality, the secrets only work if the unknowing is known (Goffman, 1967, 1972). Accordingly, the exposed intimacies in the dorm were those which the girls might want public. They were gift wrapped, to display, and thereby *generate*, and somehow also *deepen* a mystery. They might be defiant defences, to ensure that the otherwise same knew of their exclusion from the girls' innermost hearts, or they might be membership tokens, to allow the girls to celebrate together their different secrets. Either way, such open secrets demonstrate separation's need for a vital relation with connection. By highlighting the display integral to the intimate, they endorse Tournier's shocking suggestion that clothes are the human soul (1983: 199).

Open a dressing table drawer at boarding school and you'll find the husks of the tantalising secrets that make up a person. The drawers are to the dormitory what the soul is to the student. They hold secrets safely so the dorm can hold the girls safely, and girls hold secrets so that the secrets can return the service. When I was a student my drawers held notebooks: a spelling book of favourite words, a little album with

photos of home-town friends, and a sticker book. In fastidiously attending to them I looked after myself. Although I couldn't *guarantee* that others hadn't searched my drawers, I was content that no one knew my notebooks existed. These, then, weren't open secrets: the hiding of the books in which I hid was itself hidden.

Strangely, my trust in my room-mates' discretion relied on our indiscreet fascination with one other. They wouldn't strip and rape me, through my intimate possessions, because this would destroy the relationship on whose energy we relied. I trusted them to understand that a closed treasure chest holds more interest than an open one. The former lives imaginatively, the latter sinks into the dispiriting objective externality that Piaget ascribes to reality. Bergson is thinking of the latter's desiccation when criticising the drawer as a model of memory (1913: 5).

There was never a pattern to when I would take out my notebooks and fuss over them. It depended how 'I' was feeling. However, I rarely attended to even these secret secrets in the absence of others. There was something curiously arousing, for example, about taking them to my Prep class and working on them once I had finished my homework. My desk created a private space but anyone walking over to discuss school work would encroach on it. If this occurred while I was tending my books, my hackles would rise, my heart palpitate, and my books would suddenly vanish. So many close shaves! Such stimulating delight! Evidently, the meaning of my secret books was only kept alive by the maintenance of this erotic connection with others. Through this game, I also flirted with myself, teasing my self out, trying to catch it, to discover what was special to me.

By withdrawing aspects of my self from others, I fostered my own little secret: a special part of me, for me. But it did not emerge dutifully whenever I opened a notebook, and it wasn't simply in the books' contents. My ability to feel it depended on a lively allure, on the erotic relation I maintained with myself. When the secret self was threatened, when it was on the edge because of the presence of another other, I could sense it strongly. I couldn't grab it, apprehend it, but I could feel it, caress it, smell its perfume:

[T]he caress does not know what it seeks. This ‘not knowing’, this fundamental disorganisation, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always to come. And the caress is the anticipation of this pure future without content. (Levinas, 1985: 69)

At base, my self derives from mystique, from the life of this primitive connection *in-between* the ‘I’ and the ‘me’, to use Mead’s terms (1934). It doesn’t derive from the ‘I’ or the ‘me’ but from the *relation* that makes them possible.

According to Bousquet, ‘I am my own hiding-place’ (cited in Bachelard, 1969: 88). By hiding my manikin books in drawers, I was also hiding my secret from me, so that I could feel it through my desire for it. In this way I kept alive the self-love from which I drew strength. Bachelard observes that ‘all positivity makes the superlative fall back upon the comparative. To enter into the domain of the superlative, we must leave the positive for the imaginary. We must listen to poets’ (1969: 89). To maintain a sense of uniqueness, the self must remain beyond our own reach and speech. The relation involved in this self-love doesn’t fit the Freudian model of narcissism, for, as much as my room-mates, I appreciated the inestimable value of the unopened treasure chest. Had I sought to enter the casket and lay claim to its contents, I would have closed myself off from the world of difference, turning the box into a final resting place.

Bed-Time Stories

For we are where we are not (Jouve, cited in Bachelard, 1969: 211).

Ordinarily, bedrooms might be the most intimate and comforting rooms in a Western home, but they aren’t where people are most individual or self-certain. Where *am I*, and where *am I*, when I feel at home? When asked where they felt most at home in their childhoods, students in my tutorials nominate beds, tree-houses, cupboards under

stairs. One student then explains that in the safety of her cupboard, with the door closed, she was never just herself, but could be anywhere and anyone she liked, a princess, an Indian, an astronaut. The ‘self’ was most at home in the non-place and non-time that allowed it to play with its mysterious reserves without needing to reach a conclusion or give an account. The closure of a door opened a world. In this inner of the inner of the inner there's a vital nothingness that's also the fullness of mystery.

‘Every poet of furniture’, says Bachelard, ‘knows that the inner space of an old wardrobe is deep. A wardrobe’s inner space is also *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody’ (1969: 78). The wardrobe is only deep because it closes. The very solidity of the inner sanctum’s boundaries allowed them to dissolve, like the wardrobe walls in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, which unaccountably disappeared to give entry to the magical country of Narnia (Lewis, 1950), like the walls of the locked bedroom to which Max was sent in *Where the Wild Things Are*:

That very night in Max’s room a forest grew and grew – and grew until his ceiling hung with vines and the walls became the world all around and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max and he sailed off through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are. (Sendak, 1975).

Safe at home, in reverie, we play games and roles like ‘astronaut’: more than this, though, we play the world, as someone playing a piano brings it to life by testing its limitless resources, as someone plays the world through ritual performance. In play, in a condition of inspiration and bliss, we’re in the world and the world is in us. Our home is the place of dreaming, which means that our faculties are scattered, here *and* there. The self at home is at home *and* away, dispersed *and* contained, all over the place *and* grounded. We don’t express ourselves as much as recognise ourselves in the doublings of imagination.

An example can be found in my five year old son’s ‘reading position’, which is his favourite place in the world, his home at home. This position involves being snuggled in a parent’s lap, enfolded within the open book, held in the room, protected in the

house. But in the core of this Babushka doll, there's nothing. The intense stability of reading position is a form of travel, and my son has disappeared. Look at his fingers, on the page, *in* the page. Callois notes that the tightrope walker must be hypnotised by the rope (1961: 138), and there's a glazed and rapturous look in my child's eyes as he follows the thread of the story. Reading transports him, to other lands and times, to the no-where and no-time of once upon a time. When you open the book you open a door, to read a book well you must also leave it. As Duras puts it, 'one always reads in the dark... Even if one reads in broad daylight, outside, darkness gathers around the book' (cited in de Certeau, 1988: 173). The darkness is not the enemy of light but its guardian angel, bent over its shoulder, whispering possibilities.

On the one hand, my son actively plays the roles, feels the pain, is the hero of our stories, perhaps darting to the toy box to grab the necessary props. On the other hand, reading is an experience of intoxication and passivity, of allowing one's self to be swept away. Likewise, as anyone familiar with this reading position knows, it's not easy to say who is reading to whom, or who is reading through whose eyes, or who is breathing for whom. Parent and child are absorbed into each other and into the book, but on the serious playful condition that they won't be required to identify the boundaries. Reading position is a deliciously monstrous form, even though it is also my son's most centred and concentrated form. 'When I read I am one thousand men, and I am never more myself than when I do' (C.S. Lewis, cited in Tredinnick, 1997: 48). My son knows how to use this playful subjunctive mood to undermine the indicative mood of my proper Fatherly law (see Le Guin, 1990: 37ff). My 'No' is met with his 'But Maybe'.

The monstrous forms involved in children's reading are often the subject matter of the books. Take Arnold Lobel's 'Shivers', from *Days with Frog and Toad*. Good friends Frog and Toad are snugly at home before the fire on a cold dark night.

'Listen to the wind howling in the trees,' said Frog. 'What a fine time for a ghost story.'

Toad moved deeper into his chair.

‘Toad,’ asked Frog, ‘don’t you like to be scared? Don’t you like to feel the shivers?’

‘I am not too sure,’ said Toad. (1979: 28)

And so Frog begins his story, about being a small frog who is lost and separated from his parents after a picnic in the woods. His parents had warned him about the Old Dark Frog, a terrible ghost who comes out at night to eat little frog children for supper, and as night falls, out comes the fearsome Old Dark Frog, announcing that he will eat little Frog. As narrator, Frog draws out the tension, making ever more exquisite the line between the pleasure and pain of the audience, and at each step Toad interjects ‘Frog, did this really happen?’, to which Frog replies ‘Maybe it did and maybe it didn’t’. Finally, when Frog has stretched the narrative line as tightly as he can, he describes how he outsmarted the ghost and found his parents. They all got safely home. Toad asks again if the story was true, and again he’s given an inconclusive answer.

Frog and Toad sat close by the fire.

They were scared.

The teacups shook in their hands.

They were having the shivers.

It was a good, warm feeling. (1979: 41)

This might be a story about stories about stories. Like other hungry giants and monsters in children’s stories, the ghost that threatens to eat Frog could be the awesome story that carries away and consumes the identity of the child. The rapturous passivity of being swallowed up, with its ecstatic suspension of identity and truth, works on such a thrilling edge of bliss and fear that it’s always an anticlimax when the child escapes, the story ends, and the book’s door closes. The ghost is desperately desired at the same time it is feared; it is feared but it is also as safe (and yet as dangerous) as the encompassing parent reading the story. The strange ghost that threatens to consume the child is in fact utterly familiar, not only because the child knows it’s coming and recognises in it other giants, witches and monsters, not only

because it's uncannily like the child's parents and stories, but because it's uncannily like the child itself, with its desires to eat the world and the stories and parents it loves and hates. In Sendak's book, Max was locked in his room because, when his mother called him "WILD THING!", he responded by threatening to eat her up. Later, when he's about to return to his mother, the Wild Things plead with him, "Oh please don't go – we'll eat you up – we love you so!"

Because outsides and insides imply each other, the surprise of wild things waiting outside your door is always expected. Monsters are there with a message just for you, they are your muse, your fate, your route to becoming, the stranger you are to yourself (Serres, 1995; Steiner, 1989). In this annunciatory encounter, are you inside or outside the door? All doors are reversible, all insides are the outsides of somewhere else. It is never possible to say, as we pass through a door, whether we're coming in or going out, but rather than the door's failing, this is its particular blessing. The door allows us to relate to monsters without necessarily or finally being devoured by them. Perhaps more important, it allows them to be meaningful, to be *our* monsters. This is not to invoke the familiar psychoanalytic reduction that the monsters *are* truly us, that the apparently outward journey of Sendak's Max was *really* an inner one. It is to insist that the inner and outer imply one another, and that the monsters and us, and the world between, belong together (Capra and Steindl-Rast, 1992).

At home, held, we can safely allow ourselves to be possessed by possibilities we might elsewhere refuse to recognise. We can welcome the ghost and learn from it how we belong to a larger world than our ego recognises. Accordingly, Bachelard (1969: 6-7) claims that the chief benefit of the house is that it

shelters daydreaming, ... protects the dreamer, ... allows one to dream in peace.... [T]he house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind.... Without it, man would be a dispersed being.... It is the human being's first world. Before he is 'cast into the world', as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle.

The cartoonist Michael Leunig wonderfully describes the magic of these places of safe unintegration:

I built fairy homes in the garden [as a child] and in the flower petals I would make little beds for the fairies to sleep on, and in the morning I would rush out to see whether they'd visited and sure enough they had, I was sure, I could see the marks. To this day the way I work is probably not too different – when I make a cartoon I'm making a little fairy garden in my mind. It's the same feeling. I'm engrossed in creating this fantasy, believing some magic is going to come into it, and when they get published it's my hope that people enter into it in the way the fairies entered into my garden places. (1998: 30)

The house is a box holding the secret that we're not limited by our enclosures.

The Holding Environment

The sense of integration that comes from the house or the reading position differs from the clear and distinct self that might be fantasised on the basis of a mirror image. If the cradle of the house is the integrated person's bedrock, people are strangely held together with sinews of reverie, sleep and dream. The forces that integrate and accommodate us are precisely the experiences that *we* don't have, that we don't *have*, that aren't located: they are forces that possess or have us, that carry us away to somewhere else. As Levinas puts it, our conscious thought and our deliberate actions rely on deeper processes of rapturous passivity, of possession, inspiration, entrancement, intoxication (1989: 151). The 'real world', beyond the house and cradle, is accommodated within a living concerned cosmos that is created and found through bedtime reverie: 'cosmic reverie gives the dreamer the impression of a *home* in the imagined universe' (Bachelard, 1971: 177). The house and the reading position shift attention from the distinctly located self to the endless possibilities, the nothingness, the mysterious darkness, of the self's pre-position (Serres, 1995).

I find it helpful to understand this process in relation to Winnicott's (1965a, 1965b) concept of unintegration. Winnicott would accept Piaget's claim that the infant doesn't inhabit his body with an 'adult' sense of self/other and subject/object distinctions. He lives in a condition of primary unintegration, 'experiencing' a disparate array of feeling states unintegrated by an ego. This dispersal is tolerable, even pleasurable, as long as the child is periodically brought together through the mother's care. As Winnicott says, 'A baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship' (1964: 88). By literally gathering her baby in her arms, by holding, feeding, bathing and rocking him, the mother allows him to *feel something* (Phillips, 1988: 79). By putting herself in-between his bits, and in-between him and the world, and by intuitively anticipating and responding to his desires, and thereby upholding his magical ability to realise the fantasy that he and the world are as he desires, the mother affords a viable self and an inhabitable world to the child. His experience of integration is based, therefore, on the mother's purposeless love providing a holding environment within which unintegration is safe. Babies are swaddled in sheets, in the rhythms of rocking, in the caress of a lullaby, in their parents' arms. At first these forms of holding are explicate orders, but as the child develops, the mother-child relation becomes an implicate order that allows, that is enfolded -- held -- within, the child's self (Bohm, 1985).

As this implicate order becomes a way of life, the exoskeleton becomes less conspicuous than a developing vertebrate structure – the backbone of the ego. The ego alone, however, can never carry someone. More often than adults notice or admit, they're carried by 'external' forces. The mother, for example, couldn't intuit her child's needs were she autonomous. Instead she finds that the hugs she gives her child are returned: she hugs herself, makes herself safe, is given access to childhood pleasures and daydreams. She is the parent to her child, and that child is located outside *and* inside. To give another example, most adults go to bed still rely on the swaddling of routines, rituals, hugs, cuddly blankets, doors and windows. These are cases of the holding *mother* being transformed into a cultural and relational *matrix*. Likewise, creativity is nurtured within the rules of play and the frame around art: these forms of holding protect participants while the rules of vertebrate identity are

suspended (see Winnicott, 1991; Bateson, 1972; Huizinga, 1970; Milner, 1987: 79ff; Simmel, 1994; Wilshire, 1991).

If parents and children hold and imply each other, we need to consider the stuff that connects and separates one from the other. Archetypically, this stuff is air, and the aura, energy, atmosphere or environment we feel in a bedroom is living proof of an implicate relational order. Accordingly, when we're healthy, the air in our home is full of love, holding us like a mother, allowing us to be alone but not lonely, to be unintegrated yet safe. When we're unhealthy, the air may be a thick and suffocating force or we may rattle around our houses like peas in a bowl, unheld, unconnected, disintegrating, unable to find any purchase.

Margaret Wise Brown celebrates the loving space of nothingness in *The Quiet Noisy Book* (Brown and Weisgard, 1993). This hymn to the morning concerns a dog called Muffin.

Quietly something woke him up.

A very quiet noise....

As quiet as quietness....

As quiet as someone eating currant jelly.

As quiet as a little kitten lapping milk....

Quiet as air.

Quiet as someone whispering a secret to a baby.

What do you think it was?

Muffin knew what it was!

It was -

the sun coming up.

It was the morning breeze.

It was the birds turning over in their nests.

It was the rooster opening his mouth to crow.

It was the day.

Muffin is cradled by a cosmos that doesn't crowd or abandon, that holds both specificity and connection.

If Muffin hears the world in silence, another Margaret Wise Brown picture book finds it in the blank page. *Goodnight Moon* (Brown and Hurd, 1947) features an infant itemising the (transitional) objects in its environment as it says goodnight to each in turn, presumably seeking to assure itself of the world's continuing existence and presence during the chasm of sleep. 'Goodnight room/ Goodnight moon/ /Goodnight clocks/ And goodnight socks'. Towards the end of the book, a hauntingly 'blank' page unexpectedly appears, with the strange text 'Goodnight nobody'. Then the book ends 'Goodnight stars/ Goodnight air/' – the pictures on these pages are interchangeable – 'Goodnight noises everywhere'. The 'old lady' who was sitting with the infant at the beginning of the book has left by the final page, which is dominated by the moon visible through the window.

The infant in this story can feel the presence in the nothingness, the body or spirit in the no-body. This air of tenderness comforts her in the face of the unthinkable anxiety of abandonment or suffocation. Because of the door, this air can fill the bedroom and also escape from there to produce a cosmos. It is important, then, that the moon is outside the closed room *so that* it can return inside, bringing to life and filling with love the air and world between. The moon and infant are not one, any more than the mother and child are. But they hold each other, regard each other, and belong to each other. It is *her* moon, she is *its* friend, she looks at it with the love that she knows it feels looking at her: we could speak of the infant's love of the moon, using the ambiguity of the possessive to draw attention to the substance of the in-between. This is the love, the reversibility and belonging, that holds us in a concerned cosmos. We live in this cosmos through substantial illusions: sometimes we see air and sometimes stars, sometimes foreground and sometimes background. *No-body* and *nothing* are the infinitely tender horizon that bring every *thing* to life: they are God, the Holy Spirit (Capra and Steindl-Rast, 1992; see also Brown and Charlot, n.d.).

The integrated self described and extolled by Piaget and Meares, therefore, is an important socio-cultural achievement, but not a steady state. Rather, than transcending

or lessening the significance of ‘childish’ states, integration and unintegration fold into each other, like doors that open and close. The secret around which we integrate and distinguish ourselves is the nothingness of reverie. The confines of the house lead us out into the world.

Moreover, integration isn’t an outcome for which we are personally responsible. Home happens and can’t be willed. Rather than arriving home, homes takes you by surprise: it occurs to you that you’re really at home when you’ve found yourself lost in the wider world of imagination. Home is a relation between stability and movement or inside and outside, each condition generated in the same moment, shadows of or reversible grounds for each other, none of the terms having to identify itself or give up its mystery. The self is in suspense, between these terms.

Insomnia

Night, the essence of night, does not let us sleep. In the night no refuge is to be found in sleep. And if you fail sleep, exhaustion finally sickens you, and this sickness prevents sleeping; it is expressed by insomnia.... In the night one cannot sleep (Blanchot, 1989: 267)

Between the sleep-time story of *Goodnight Moon* and the morning chorus of *The Quiet Noisy Book* falls the doorless and unheld horror of insomnia. Involving an ego ineffectually seeking a grip in a careless and distant ‘real world’, the pathology of insomnia indicates what ‘life’ might be like if we fulfilled Piaget’s model of adulthood. This life without pre-positional connection becomes a life without distinction, from which the ego can’t separate. There’s a sense of dispersal in insomnia, but because it lacks the limits of doors, the movement isn’t held in a cosmos or world. The moon has turned its back on the loveless insomniac.

When suffering insomnia, I toss and turn in the bed without finding comfort or purchase or a way to close off the experience. *this position try on the side no roll over don’t panic stay calm breathe breathe at least there’s no cramp tonight try*

your hand under the pillow it's so quiet there must be a sound somewhere it might be better on my back and when I get to sleep the children will wake me to take them to the toilet breathe you forgot to breathe I wish the clock wasn't so loud oh no what is the time? this is a disaster I've got classes tomorrow no don't think about the time it'll only make it worse how can she sleep? she's stealing the sheet it's so hot kick the sheet off maybe I need a drink I should get up that's what I should do but I'm too tired and I really need to sleep maybe the pillow will be cooler if I turn it over I can't get up I'm too tired I need to sleep now. The more I will myself to sleep, the less I can find it, and while I know this, and know I should break the cycle, I lack the sense of 'I' to allow me to get up. My muscles won't move to my will. *That's the last straw there's the cramp.* I can't sleep and I can't wake. My mind churns monotonously, with relentless menace. Images and phrases come and go. These aren't experienced as my ideas, just ideas that I can't stop, ideas that I'm condemned to witness forever. Occasionally they seem interesting, though I'm suspicious of such feelings at this time of night, but even then I can't force myself to get up and write them down. Much more often the ideas are stale, banal and nonsensical, but I cannot stop them repeating self-importantly, like the cheaply-made advertisements on rapid rotation on midnight television.

Late-night commercial television, indeed, seems modelled on insomnia. Imagine a rolling image on a television set couldn't be turned off, ever, and imagine you couldn't leave the room, or focus on the set, or switch off your attention, or get comfortable: here you have an approximation of the 'experience' of insomnia. It isn't that *you* have insomnia, or that you *have* insomnia, it's that the television and everything else is insomniac. Insomnia menaces the insomniac with the prospect of an endless life without witnesses, relations or vitality. Life goes on with the flatness and silent noise of the sleepless wakeless night, but one isn't *living*. Insomnia indicates that it is the doubled moments of normal waking life that are so precious, when the awareness of death makes you know you're *alive*. In other words, it indicates the importance of everyday ecstasy it lacks.

Insomnia gives me an inkling of the panic and horror of unintegration in an environment that doesn't hold you. 'To sleep badly is precisely to be unable to find

one's position. The bad sleeper tosses and turns in search of that genuine place which he knows is unique. He knows that only in that spot will the world give up its errant immensity' (Blanchot, 1989: 265). Blanchot identifies sleep as a defence against the true night of insomnia, and Winnicott might claim disintegration as another.

Disintegration is preferred to the horror of pointlessness because, being brought on by the 'victim', it leaves the fantasy of omnipotence intact (1965b: 61). Disintegration isn't as impersonal and impassive as the insomniac's unheld unintegration.

Levinas drew on childhood memories when using insomnia to characterise his principle of 'there is' (1985: 48ff; 1989: 29ff, 169-70; Llewelyn, 1995: 48ff). The child, he says, can feel the silence of her room rumbling, with the sort of full emptiness you hear when holding an empty shell to your ear. What she hears is not the pulsing concerned cosmicity that might hold her in Margaret Wise Brown's world, but the absolute and impersonal 'there is' that droned before creation. Neither being nor nothingness, 'there is' is horror and panic:

In insomnia one can and cannot say that there is an 'I' which cannot manage to fall asleep. The impossibility of escaping wakefulness is something 'objective', independent of my initiative. This impersonality absorbs my consciousness; consciousness is depersonalised. I do not stay awake: 'it' stays awake. Perhaps death is an absolute negation wherein 'the music ends' (however, one knows nothing about it). But in the maddening 'experience' of 'there is', one has the impression of a total impossibility of escaping it, of 'stopping the music' (1985: 49)

According to Levinas, then, the horror of 'there is' isn't the fear of death but a fear of being, of being possessed by a something which is neither thing nor nothing.

Shakespeare populates his plays with spectres, ghosts and sorceresses to allude to this limit between being and nothingness: 'this impossibility of escaping from an anonymous and uncorruptible existence constitutes the final depths of Shakespearean tragedy' (1989: 33). The insomniac cannot escape the mania in which they participate, for once they've lost their house, the world matrix, the insomniac is no longer

possessed of or by self, is not self-possessed. You cannot leave insomnia but can only be inexplicably delivered from it, when some thing reveals a door that breaks the spell of the relentless 'there is'.

Ghosts

Ghost stories are to ghosts what sleep is to insomnia. Ghosts stories rely on and reinforce a sense of being held; they can make you feel secure in openly welcoming the ghost at your door. Ghosts, however, are those restless spirits who can't find the sleep of death, who toss and turn without finding a position, who escape their crypts. They are dispirited because they are not *in-between* anything. Without a limit, they are nothingness that can't hold meaning, that can't become full. Ghosts are renowned for their ability to walk through doors and walls, but their misery is that they can't *not* walk through every obstacle. And because they can't hold or be held, or find a limit, they're lost souls, reduced to inarticulate placeless endless background wailing. If you listen at night, you can hear them. We have one at my boarding school. You can't *meet* a ghost, you become ghost, as I did when the girls left for their holidays.

Sharing a boarding house with the tumult of adolescent girls, I often feel drained, physically and emotionally, and at such times I often want the house to myself. I want their omnipotence dissolved. So when the last girl leaves for her holidays, the front door of the boarding house slams with more conviction than the girl alone could have produced. I can almost hear a reverberant *And stay out!* from the tired and impatient old house. I exhale dramatically. The house is now empty. But I do not feel a lifting of the weight I imagined was upon me: the house is heavy. And I suddenly feel out of place. The girls' absence unsettles me and renders the house unfamiliar.

The girls' absence lets me hear the house's silence for the first time. I listen anxiously for the sounds which belong in the house and, when contained within its walls, give it meaning: the girls screeching down the hall, their panics as they get ready for school, the incessant ringing of the telephone. I miss the girls' vitality, which can so effortlessly rope me in with a simple "Miss Ferguson...?". During the term I evidently

rely on this vitality without realising it, for now I must admit that I'm missing it. I thought they were making demands of me, but now I wonder if I demand their energy to sustain myself. Without it, I feel directionless and pointless. I reside in the boarding house because I'm employed to care for the girls. When the girls are not there, I am not a boarding house mistress, so why should I, and how can I, be there at all? I am a puppet whose strings have dropped to the floor. Without the personal and professional relations between myself and the girls, Miss Ferguson is null and void.

As I walk through the house with no one to greet, no one to avoid, and no one to discipline, I feel meek and hollow. Although the girls appear to believe the authenticity of Miss Ferguson, I do not. I go to strut down the corridor towards my room, as I do many times during the term, and find that my self assured posture has lost its glory. My inauthenticity is palpable to me. No matter, I console myself, of course this is how it feels when the house is empty; after all, there are usually 62 more people in the house, I would normally make 63; at the moment, I make 1. This confuses me, because despite knowing that I am on my own, I do not feel that I am the only person in the house. There are no other bodies, but I am acutely aware of the presence of the 62 absentees. I can actually feel the life of the absence, the something other than me. I try to assure myself that I will feel better when I reach my room. It's just a matter of pushing through the invisible company I now have within the house.

I pass the dormitories and their wide-flung doors proclaim their innocence. They tease me, daring me to enter and threatening to trap me in a question of the validity of my presence. Go on, have a look, feast your eyes, they mock, making sure I understand that when there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to seek. If I snoop, which is a desire I have, I might just be found out: by the girls, by Miss Ferguson or by my ancestors. I half expect to be surprised by a mirror, or some girls playfully hiding behind a door. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to look and I enter, but when I do, I am startled by the desolation. The austerity in the dormitories is so patently uninviting without the warmth of the girls and their belongings that my prying eyes and earnest body instinctively lock. I feel a shiver down my spine and I feel eyes behind me. I quickly turn around, and simultaneously increase my pace. The echo of laughter I

heard as the girls left for their holidays fills my ears and mutates in my imagination. I hear the girls laughing at my pointless voyeurism. What is she looking for...?

Who or what is playing on my mind?

It is not only the absence but also the space which disconcerts me. All this space with so many objects: basins, beds, tables, towel racks, empty dressing tables, showers. They are functional objects, stoically standing at the ready, proud of the number of human bodies they capacitate, despite the fact that there are no bodies now. These objects must wait, loyally, because they too have been abandoned. I wonder: what if the pipes under the basin were to rust and collapse?, or the bed springs were to snap?... Well, they might be found at some point, but won't be noticed right now. These possibilities apply to me also and this thought excites and spooks me at the same time. Why, I could sleep outside tonight, under the stars on one of the open balconies. I could take off all my clothes this instant and leave them right where they fall; if I didn't pick them up for a week, no one would know. The thrill of transgression turns to pointlessness...no one would notice. There are no witnesses.

I have to walk very briskly to my room because these feelings and questions wrap me up through every room I pass. If I walk very quickly and do not look around, perhaps I will not be seen. But this does not make sense: not seen by whom? There are no witnesses. There is no one to walk briskly to, and no one to walk briskly from: there is no one to see me.

I begin to wonder if my fear is that I'll see myself. Is it what my own eyes might see or not see that I am afraid of? Am I afraid of my own growing realisations? Afraid of my realisation that the person I know when the girls are here cannot possibly exist when they're absent. When the girls are away, am I merely part of the furniture!? Will I be found too? Or not? I know the answer to this immediately and I feel disconnected – literally, as if I have been taken out of the line. I am left hanging out of place.

The ‘Ghost of Miss Wentworth’ springs to my mind. Miss Wentworth was a boarding house mistress earlier this century. As the story goes, she was a cranky old spinster who tumbled to her death down the two flights of stairs leading onto the entrance hall of the boarding house. The floor of the entrance hall is marble, with a particularly dark patch at the bottom of the stairs. Anyone doubting the story of Miss Wentworth is escorted to the bottom of stairs, the corner of the carpet is peeled back and the proof revealed: it is the stain of Miss Wentworth’s blood!

The new boarders are introduced to this ancient myth of the boarding house via the older boarders, their older sisters, who were also introduced to her in their early days. This meeting is a ‘rite of passage’ of sorts. *The Ghost of Miss Wentworth!* I remember being quizzed by the Year 7 girls, just after their introduction to her. My words ‘what a load of rubbish’ echo in my head. Did I really dismiss her like that, I ask myself, repentant. I hear the girls squeal in protest and ask me to explain the ‘blood stain on the marble floor at the bottom of the stairs where she tumbled to her death long ago’!! They love this game, as I do. I enjoy their reliance on my cynicism; if it weren’t for the safety net my doubts create, there would be no certainty in their fear. There are boundaries for their imaginings and so there is security: I secure them. This is how it’s meant to be: carers and students holding each other, like children wrapped up in ‘reading position’.

The girls flirt with the idea of Miss Wentworth, as I did at their age. Regardless of whether they really believe in her, brings to life literature’s many stories about boarding schools. More importantly, like Frog’s Old Grey Ghost, she connects the listener and the storyteller, and it is through this lively relationship between the new girls and the older girls that Miss Wentworth is able to give the house a life in some ways; her story, or even the idea of her, offers the girls an almost tangible sense of the history that enriches the house, in which they are participating through their storytelling. Miss Wentworth is alive then. And if my own experience is any guide, the girls on the first floor of the boarding house won’t ever feel unaccompanied by her if they wake at night and are forced to walk the dark ‘vacant’ corridor to their bathroom. As a student in this situation I longed for the mistresses who looked after me. I implored the darkness: why can’t they catch me out of bed now?!

When the Year 7 girls retold me the story this year I was unperturbed by it. Now, as it runs through my mind its suggestions make me nervous. The girls are snug in their homes, away from the boarding house, and Miss Ferguson is lost or absent and I am left to face the possibilities the girls have abandoned. I become the target of a mental possession which needs a boundary. I wish I was being told the story of Miss Wentworth by the girls, so I could employ Miss Ferguson's confident denial of ghosts. Is Miss Wentworth with me right now? I'm a self-reliant adult! I'm supposed to have grown out of believing in ghosts. How can I possibly be thinking of her?

I am frightened.

The recollection of my smug dismissal of Miss Wentworth follows me to my room and I feel ashamed for disrespecting her. Suddenly, I realise that because the girls are away, the need for my cynicism has vanished, so that it is me who is now insecure. I have a boundless uncertainty about her existence. But I realise that what I am really afraid of is the elusiveness of the selves I embody. I can't help slowly feeling overwhelmed by malleability: I do not know myself, I do not think I ever have, but I would be willing to submit to any of them now. Who or what does Miss Wentworth represent? Rather than feeling cynical, I sense an eerie identification with her...I too could just be one of the stories enriching the house.

My mind flashes back to when I was a student and was picked up and secured by my parents at the end of the term. By comparison, I now feel forgotten, as if I were a student whose parents forgot to come. Have I inhabited my own ghost? Have I given her a body momentarily? Was it *ever* Miss Wentworth? My little room awaits me in this big house. I am a mouse scurrying back to its hole in the wall.

When I arrive there, I'm relieved to find some comfort in my room's familiarity. Aesthetically, it is just as I like it, and, momentarily, I feel recharged, reassured by the reflections I see in my posters, photos, materials and clothes. I look closely at the crowd of posters on my walls, which leave very little wall space free. They are at once

windows for my eyes and a wallpaper that serves as a protective barrier against the boarding house and the girls. They enclose me and tuck me into my room.

Today, however, they cannot long protect me from my futility. Without the girls and the structure our relationship creates for me, I feel I'm standing in a room and a house with no walls. I again feel exposed and clingy: shameful. This feeling is not only physical, it also unsettles my sensitivities: what was that sound I'm sure I just heard? 'Hello, is anyone there?' No, no, Lucinda, that was silence you heard. This silence is too quiet and puts me on edge. It is a 'deathly silence' but it is not merely the death of the girls' presence. The house is a heavy weight, it is listless and uncooperative and I can't hold it up any longer. I can not do this on my own. I can't hold myself up. Where are my girls?! At this point I finally realise that the death is my own. It is that of Miss Ferguson. I am Miss Wentworth and this is the utter anguish of a ghost's existence. This is why they wail.

I now understand why Miss Wentworth is described as cranky. She's dangerously unreliable...life and its shadow, spirit and ghost. Miss Wentworth is alive, smiling benignly, when the senior girls ghoulishly evoke her death. But there's no lively smile when the community of story-tellers has dispersed and she breathes clammy dread down the neck of stragglers. Rather than bringing or being life, she insists you attend to the impersonal 'there is' of (your) formlessness. She is – I am – 'there is'. Although you experience horror in the face of this implacable nameless power, there's no distinct 'you' doing the feeling and there's no one who can save you through an act of will. Will you ever get out? 'There is' is what's left when relationships lose their life.

My posters try to defend me, but emptiness pushes into my private space through the gaps between them. I feel its surge, its mass, and then feel swamped and short of breath. Pointlessness empties my room of its secret life. I'm utterly dismayed by recognition of the feeling that I need to get out quickly, to find a door that still works. Agoraphobia and claustrophobia turn each other inside out: I'm crowded and abandoned, I'm smothered by the endlessness of doorless space (Bachelard, 1969: 220-1).

Paradoxical Being

The dominant assumptions about the self and sociality reproduce Piaget's. They instruct me to tell students that we – as adults, as progressive Western individuals – have outgrown belief in angels, ghosts and spirits. But angels, spirits and ghosts are the life-form of the paradoxes that are implied in doors and in humans as half-open being. They are substantial illusions, the tangible presence of nobody and nothing. As Winnicott and Bachelard insist, these paradoxes must be held: just as the self is separate and connected at once, angels are here *and* not here, and neither reductive alternative to this claim is as true.

Besides, whether we consciously believe in them or not, we know that ghosts, angels and spirits exist, and it may be this knowledge that leads to terrified denials. We live with them hidden around us, between us. They carry us away, they give us homes and an intersubjective concerned world, they even allow us to be decision-making individuals. And they haunt us with dissolution and pointlessness. When the headmistress speaks of 'school spirit', she means what she says, even if she doesn't integrate this into her conventional assumptions about rationality and distinct selfhood. If I confidently denied the existence of spirits to students, this spirit would be between us, holding the relation that gave force to this denial.