

THE OGDEN EFFECT: A DIALOGUE¹

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The field of contemporary psychoanalysis has been immensely enriched by the contributions of Thomas Ogden. His reflective writing and his unique reading of others invite us to “dream” with him. Ogden embodies the analyst in the act of engaging. Like Jorge Luis Borges, one of his most esteemed companions, he prioritizes the position of the reader. From that perspective his reading of authors like Borges himself, Freud, Klein, Winnicott, Loewald, and Bion infuses his own writings with the capacity to both integrate and creatively transform the ideas re-presented to us as readers. One comes out of Ogden’s papers stimulated by the immediacy of the encounter. His way of introducing us to these authors, and the links he establishes between psychoanalytic theory, practice and personal growth, is truly a masterpiece. How does he do it?

Keywords: analytic language, analytic third, reverie

La contribution de Thomas Ogden a immensément enrichi le champ de la psychanalyse contemporaine. Son écriture réflexive et sa lecture unique des autres auteurs nous invitent à « rêver » avec lui. Selon nous, il incarne l’analyste dans le processus de s’investir. Au même titre que Jorge Luis Borges, un compagnon qu’il tenait en très haute estime, Ogden accorde la priorité à la position du lecteur. Dans cette perspective, sa lecture d’auteurs comme Borges justement, Freud, Winnicott, Klein, Bion et Loewald insuffle à ses propres écrits la capacité d’intégrer, tout en les transformant de façon créative, leurs idées, qu’il re-présente aux lecteurs que nous sommes. La lecture

1. A briefer version of this paper was presented at the 47th IPA Congress in Mexico City in August 2011.

d'un article d'Ogden est stimulante dans la mesure où elle propose une rencontre instantanée. La façon qu'à Ogden de nous faire connaître ces auteurs ainsi que les liens qu'il établit entre la théorie et la pratique psychanalytiques et la croissance personnelle constituent réellement un chef-d'œuvre. Comment s'y prend-il?

Mots clés : langue psychanalytique; tiers analytique; rêverie

(Note: This paper is a back-and-forth discourse, in the spirit of Ogden's style of creating a dialogue with his readers. Gordon Yanchyshyn appears in roman, David Dorenbaum in italics.)

To read Ogden is to be invited into a dialogue with him, and when he is at his best, to “dream” with him. His influence on contemporary psychoanalysis is unique in a number of ways that we hope to convey. Ogden defines the fundamental goal of psychoanalysis as “enhancing the ... capacity to be alive to as much as possible of the full spectrum of human experience” (2005c, p. 8). This means “being ourselves,” or more accurately, *becoming ourselves*, i.e., becoming more fully human through a continual *interactive* process that *transforms* us. Ogden is preoccupied with this capacity for psychological growth that is unique for each analyst/analysand pairing.

What is powerful and convincing about reading Ogden is that he demonstrates this process of transformation in the very act of engaging us, the readers. Consider the opening lines to his book *Reverie and Interpretation*:

Words and sentences, *like people*, must be allowed a certain slippage. I do not mean to suggest that words, sentences (and human beings) can be said to mean (or be) anything we wish them to mean (or be). Rather, I am drawing attention to the stifling effect on imagination of our efforts to define, to specify with ever increasing precision, what we mean (who we are). Imagination depends on the play of possibilities. (1999b).

Already Ogden is collapsing the distinction between *writing about* psychoanalysis and *doing* psychoanalysis, between our creative relationship to the words we use and our creative relationship to the people we analyze. This is one of his unique abilities, a style that runs through all of his writing.

“I have never been able to write an analytic article in fewer than several hundred hours. The time needed for writing must be created—it is not simply there asking to be used for writing” (Ogden, 2005b, p. 22).

As I began immersing myself in the field of psychoanalysis, my attention was drawn to the proximity between analytic work and the work of the artist, but more in particular that of the writer. What a pleasure it was for me to read Freud and the writings of his contemporaries, which constituted the great classic papers of psychoanalytic literature. I felt I was in the presence of an aesthetic experience that at the time was very difficult for me to characterize.

What kind of literature was this, I kept asking myself. Clearly this wasn't poetry, but it felt like poetry. It wasn't theatre, but there seemed to be resonances of it. In a passage from Borges (1980c, p. 102) on the subject of poetry he writes, "[L]iterature is expression, literature is made of words and language is an esthetic phenomenon. It is hard for us to admit this: the fact that language is an esthetic fact."

In 1989 a paper published by Thomas Ogden in the Psychoanalytic Quarterly fell into my hands: "Misrecognitions and the Fear of Not Knowing" (1988). For the first time I encountered an author who was using words to articulate the aesthetic textures of psychoanalytic writings. The proximity I had perceived between the work of the psychoanalyst and the work of the writer began making sense to me.

In his paper "This Art of Psychoanalysis (2004b, p. 857) Ogden writes,

Psychoanalysis is a lived experience. As such, it cannot be translated, transcribed, recorded, explained, understood or told in words. It is what it is. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to say something about that lived experience that is of value in thinking about aspects of what it is that happens between analysts and their patients when they are engaged in the work of psychoanalysis.

I considered this a very fortunate discovery. From then on, every encounter with Ogden's writings led to new surprises. Confidently I can say that my readings of "The Analytic Third: Working with Intersubjective Clinical Facts" (1994), "The Music of What Happens in Poetry and Psychoanalysis" (1999a), "This Art of Psychoanalysis" (2004b), "On Holding and Containing, Being and Dreaming" (2004c), and "On Psychoanalytic Writing" (2005b) were the pillars that contributed to the consolidation of my professional identity as a psychoanalyst.

The writing of the "Ogdenian" text is such that, in the manner of a poem, it invites us to participate in an intimate conversation with the author.

How does he manage to create what I call the "Ogden effect"? Through his writings, Ogden has the remarkable capacity to function as the Sancho Panza who accompanies us in our quixotic experiences in our work as

psychoanalysts. The Ogden effect renders him capable of acting as the Virgil who descends with us to the deepest, innermost circles in our Dante-esque explorations with our patients. It is as if, through his writings, Ogden constructs a potential space that invites one to conversation, to what he would call “shared dreaming.” I think of it as a form of hospitality that emerges as a result of being a reader. Reading becomes a performative act.

“One of the themes in literature, like one of the themes in reality, is friendship,” writes Borges (1980a, p. 19), an author of Ogden’s predilection.

I could say that friendship is one of our Argentine passions. There are many friendships in literature. Literature is woven of friendships. We can invoke a few. Why not to think of Quijote and Sancho, or Alonso Quijano and Sancho since for Sancho Alonso Quijano is Alonso Quijano and only at the end he turns into Don Quijote?

Psychoanalysis is also woven of friendships.

Here I quote Ogden (1988, p. 643) from my first reading of that paper on misrecognitions from the Psychoanalytic Quarterly:

What the individual is not able to know is what he feels, and therefore who, if anyone, he is. The patient regularly creates the illusion for himself (and secondarily for others) that he is able to generate thoughts and feelings, wishes and fears that feel like his own. Although this illusion constitutes an effective defense against the terror of not knowing what one feels or who one is, it further alienates the individual from himself. The illusion of knowing is achieved through the creation of a wide range of substitute formations that fill the “potential space” in which desire and fear, appetite and fullness, love and hate, might otherwise come into being.

It is difficult to “locate” Ogden in terms of any single theoretical affiliation because he emphasizes that each of us, himself included, selectively attends to, “translates,” and then interprets the many available psychoanalytic theories in our own unique way. As he puts it, “Analytic language that is ideological is no longer alive because the answers to the questions being raised are known by the analyst from the outset and the function of language has been reduced to the conveying of that knowledge to the analysand” (1999b, p. 219). His writing therefore is integrative. Having said that, he draws mainly on the work of Freud, Winnicott, and Bion, but his reading of their complex and distinct meta-psychologies is itself a creative and ongoing transformation. In this way he is like Hans Loewald, who does a close reading of many of Freud’s concepts but translates them into

a dramatic and fresh object-relations language that is completely his own.² Ogden continues in the same tradition as he examines the similarities and differences between the writings of Freud, Winnicott, and Bion (1992). The question immediately becomes: How is it possible to integrate such a broad, complex range of analytic thought? Ogden's answer can perhaps be condensed into two statements:

1. All three theories deal with the ways in which we can develop or block our potential to fully experience what it means to be human. In a pair of 1992 articles, Ogden develops the concept of the *psycho-analytic subject*, defined as the individual's capacity to generate a sense of experiencing subjectivity ("I-ness"). This bridging concept creates a link between the otherwise diverse perspectives of Freud, Winnicott, and Bion.
2. All of these theories, Ogden maintains, articulate the ways in which we think about and experience ourselves and our relationships as a series of dialectics. *Dialectic*, as Ogden defines it, refers to pairs of opposites that simultaneously create each other, preserve each other, and cancel out each other in a continuous dynamic relationship. Common examples would be presence and absence, black and white, sound and silence, coming and going. These pairs are coexisting modes of generating experience.

Ogden not only integrates the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Winnicott, and Bion, but also re-presents them in a new synthesis. Three of his contributions deserve mention:

1. the *language* of psychoanalysis,
2. the *intersubjective* nature of analytic work that Ogden has described as the "analytic third," and
3. the role of "*dreaming*" or reverie in doing analytic work.

THE LANGUAGE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Ogden is unique, not only in what he writes about but also in the way he expresses it. He illustrates by example, an important theme that runs through his work: the language of psychoanalysis. For Ogden, though the choice of words that we use in our clinical and theoretical work is central, the way in which we communicate experience to ourselves and to others, the "music" in our work, is equally important. In his 1997 article "Some

2. See, for example, how Loewald expands and recreates the terms *internalization* (1962), *transference* (1960, 1971), the *Oedipus complex* (1979), and so on.

Thoughts on the Use of Language in Psychoanalysis”³ (1999b, p. 206), he draws some parallels between the experience of reading poetry and doing analysis: “What is it like to read this poem?” becomes “What is it like to be with this patient?” Think about this for a moment. He is suggesting, first of all, that there is something potentially alive and creative in even the most ordinary analytic conversation, an unconscious dialogue going on *side-by-side* with the manifest communication. He writes: “[Meaning ... is in the language being used, not under it or behind it” (p. 215). Second, Ogden is pointing out that the reader/analyst needs to be emotionally engaged for the experience to have meaning, and third, that the reader/analyst “translates” and transforms what is happening. “The analytic discourse requires of the analytic pair the development of metaphorical language adequate to the creation of sound and meanings that reflect what it feels like to think, feel and physically experience ... at a given moment” (pp. 208–209).

Ogden views his need to write as an integral part of his work as a psychoanalyst. Coupled with the centrality that clinical practice occupies, writing is at the heart of his desire as a psychoanalyst. His need to write is linked to the approach toward the point at which nothing can be done with words. The illusion that everything can be said must be suppressed and contained. If not, it becomes so vast that there is no more room or space for its realization.

This notion that encompasses writing and reading as integral components of psychoanalytic activity has been a catalyst for me. It has activated in me a form of listening during the sessions with my patients. It is a way of listening with the desire to write. “Analytic writing,” says Ogden (2005b, p. 15), “is a literary genre that involves the conjunction of an interpretation and a work of art. I think of this form of writing as a conversation between an original analytic idea (developed in a scholarly manner) and the creation in words of something like an analytic experience.”

Of course, the analytic dialogue also *differs* radically from the one between reader and author. The analyst is also listening for and speaks to what Strachey (1934, qtd. in Ogden, 1999b, p. 217) called the “point of urgency” of the anxiety and psychic pain that *interferes with* the full range of thoughts,

3. There are many striking similarities between the ideas in this paper and in Loewald’s brilliant 1978 paper, “Primary Process, Secondary Process and Language” (reprinted in Loewald, 1980). However, while Loewald examines the metapsychology of language, Ogden emphasizes the creative transformations that can take place in the discourse between the analytic pair.

feelings, and sensations in the present moment, anxiety and pain that prevent the analysand from feeling fully human. This leads to another facet of Ogden's perspective, the question of aliveness or deadness in the transference-counter-transference (1999b). One of his basic beliefs is that transference and counter-transference can be understood only in relation to one another, rather than as separate phenomena. In other words, he defines them as "aspects of a single intersubjective totality experienced separately (and individually) by analyst and analysand" (1999b, footnote p. 25, n1). Two other core beliefs are that "every form of psychopathology represents a specific type of limitation of the individual's capacity to be fully alive as a human being," and that the goal of analysis is the capacity to have "the experience of aliveness ... a quality that is superordinate" (p. 26).

Both as a writer and as an analytic practitioner, Ogden gives a great deal of thought to how *he* uses words and language. Part of what is creative and transformative in our theoretical ideas and clinical interventions is the ability to convey and evoke multiple levels of experience with our words. Some of the most memorable analytic ideas are more poetic than precise—their power lies in their ability to engage our own imaginations and associations, bringing static theoretical ideas to life. For example, think of Winnicott's statements about the earliest mother-child relationship: "There is no such thing as an infant" or "going on being." Or Bion's injunction to approach each analytic session "without memory or desire." Or Hans Loewald's metaphor for working through the transference neurosis: "[D]ue to the blood of recognition which the patient's unconscious is given to taste ... the old ghosts may re-awaken to life" and "in the daylight of analysis ... are laid to rest as ancestors."

These statements are provocative in their vagueness—our first reaction is "What is he *talking* about!" And that's precisely how we enter into our own private and very personal dialogue with what Winnicott or Bion or Loewald or Ogden "really" means. So, too, in analysis: if we are to really "know" our analysands and help them to get to "know" themselves more fully and speak in their own voices, we have to be involved with them in a living and changing relationship, speaking in our own unique voice.

Dispersed through his texts, one can find traces of authors such as Heaney, Borges, Frost, William Carlos Williams, and others. In the following sentence as Ogden is linking psychoanalytic writing with imaginative writing, for example, the first half of the sentence is constituted by Ogden's voice, and the second is Robert Frost's from a verse written in 1939, quoted by Ogden

(2005b, p. 19): “The equivalent in [psychoanalytic] writing is to allow the piece ‘to tell how it can ... It finds its own name as it goes.’”

These authors perform the function of voices that Ogden acquaints us with in his attempt to put words to an experience that “just is.” In Ogden’s words (2003, p. 593), “The analytic writer is continually contending with the reality that an analytic experience—like all other experiences—does not come to us in words. An experience cannot be told or written; an experience is what it is. One can no more say or write an analytic experience than one can say or write the aroma of coffee or the taste of chocolate.”

Ogden’s approach enables us to recognize that language at this point is not a power; it is not the power to tell. It is not at our disposal. As the French writer Blanchot (1982b, p. 51) says in his study of the “space of literature,” “[In the language of literature] what denies affirms. Wordless, it speaks already; when it ceases, it persists. It is not silent, because in this language silence speaks. The defining characteristic of ordinary language is that listening comprises part of its very nature. But at this point of literature’s space, language is not to be heard. Hence the risk of the poetic function. The poet is he who hears a language which makes nothing heard.”

THE ANALYTIC THIRD

Ogden began writing about the “analytic third” almost twenty years ago (1994)—his 2004 paper is the most recent reworking of his original idea. In it, he defines the analytic third as the jointly created unconscious life or intersubjectivity of the analytic pair, analyst and analysand. This concept is an elaboration of Winnicott’s famous statement, “[T]here is no such thing as an infant (apart from the maternal provision),” and becomes instead “[T]here is no such thing as an analysand apart from the relationship with the analyst” (2004a, p. 167) and vice-versa. In saying this he is also incorporating the idea of the unconscious interplay of transference and counter-transference described by Bion (1962), as well as the intersubjective field theory of Madeleine and Willi Baranger (1961/2008).

But Ogden extends the idea by stating that Winnicott intentionally left out the other paradoxical statement, that there *are* obviously two separate physical and psychological entities, infant and mother, and so too analysand and analyst. The united relationship therefore coexists in dynamic dialectical tension with the two individuals in their separateness.

One of the pleasures of reading Ogden is that he brings his ideas alive with detailed clinical illustrations. In this 2004 paper, for example, without any background information he parachutes us into an analytic session with a man with whom he had been working for three years, and describes

his own puzzling daydreaming. Over the next six pages, Ogden tracks the chain of associations that the analysand relates, as well as his own silent associations and verbalized comments. For the analysand *and* for Ogden, this includes both here-and-now associations and childhood memories.

This kind of contextualizing is critical. It is only this kind of detail that allows us, the readers, to see what material Ogden selects as the most important clinically, how he theoretically makes sense of it to himself and what interventions he makes as a result.⁴

The work of psychoanalysis requires us to stay put in a room for extended periods. The task is really daunting. It is hard to conceive of someone strapped to a chair under a fastened seatbelt engaged in a voyage of the kind that others read about in books. It is a place of solitude similar to the solitude of the writer. Here I quote Blanchot (1982a) in his description of what he refers to as “the essential solitude” of the writer. It seems to me that there are resonances with the position of the analyst in confronting “the essential solitude” in the analytic situation:

When I am alone, it is not I who am there, and it is not from you that I stay away, or from others, or from the world. I am, not the subject to whom this impression of solitude would come—this awareness of my limits; it is not that I tire of being myself. When I am alone, I am not there. This is not a sign of some psychological state, indicating loss of consciousness, the disappearance of my right to feel what I feel from a center which I myself would be. What approaches me is not my being a little less myself, but rather something which there is “behind me,” and which this “me” conceals in order to [come?] into its own. (p. 31)

It is from that place of solitude that I very much welcome being in the company of an author like Ogden—an author who is present in the form of the “third,” similar to what he describes as taking place between patient and analyst (2004c, p. 863):

The analytic situation, as I conceive of it, is comprised of three subjects in unconscious conversation with one another: the patient and analyst as separate subjects and the intersubjective “analytic third.” The unconscious intersubjective “analytic third” is forever in the process of coming into being in the emotional force field generated by the interplay of the unconscious of

4. In his 2008 book, Dale Boesky forcefully argues that this method of case reporting is crucial in order to be able to make coherent comparisons between psychoanalytic theories and techniques.

patient and analyst. The “third subject of analysis” is a subject jointly, but asymmetrically constructed by the analytic pair.

“DREAMING” IN ANALYTIC WORK

Bion’s influence on Ogden is most apparent in his emphasis on using counter-transference reveries or “dreams” in our work. Ogden summarizes Bion’s redefinition of what it means to dream: Bion extends Freud’s idea to include *waking unconscious dreaming*, as well as dreaming while we sleep, and says that dreaming is what allows us to *create* consciousness and unconsciousness and to maintain the difference between the two. As Ogden puts it, Bion “reverses the conventional wisdom that the ability to fall asleep is a *pre-condition* for dreaming. He proposes instead that dreaming is what makes it *possible* to fall asleep and to wake up” (2005c, p. 48). To “be asleep” for Bion means to be “unconscious of certain repressed elements that cannot penetrate the barrier presented by a ‘dream’” (Bion, quoted on p. 48). To “be awake” is to be “uninterruptedly conscious of what is going on in waking life (for example, listening to a patient, reading a book, viewing a film)” (p. 48). To be *unable* to “dream” erases the distinction between waking and sleeping, between reality and hallucination, and between emotional liveliness and deadness. This makes an enormous difference in how we listen to our patients and to our own thoughts and daydreams in a session. When an analytic process is at its best, the entire session can be imagined as a shared “dream,” a creative flow back and forth in the transference and counter-transference.⁵

Lately I have been reading some psychology books. I feel singularly disappointed. All of them spoke of the instruments or the themes of dreams. No one spoke of what I would have liked them to speak, about the strange, fascinating fact that we dream. (Borges, 1980b, p. 35)

The process of writing is preceded by a strong desire to write. There is a burst of energy. In a published interview, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (O’Driscoll, 2008, p. 350) says,

I remember coming back from the Melbourne Writer’s Festival in October 1994, going upstairs to the attic a few days later and starting in with the couplets the way a construction worker starts in with a pneumatic drill. Call it rage for order.

5. Ogden’s detailed clinical excerpt titled “The Purloined Letter” (2004a, pp. 169–174) beautifully reveals how he thinks about and works with the concepts of the analytic third and “dreaming” in a session.

There is a similar creative capability in Ogden's writings. It is a form of energy, which gives us access to the materials of psychoanalysis from a different perspective. It is as if the spoken words in the context of the session have the quality of a very specific signifying capability that disperses itself in the atmosphere of the psychoanalytic act. From that place, free associations for the patient, and for the analyst, emerge in a unique form with a strong evocative capability, with literary capability, but also tremendously evanescent. One might think that these words have a performative character, that their meaning coincides with the act of their utterance.

Recently, I came out of a session with a patient feeling the necessity to write it down. This is a phenomenon that often happens to me. It is particularly significant when it concerns an account of a dream. "After all," says Ogden (2005b, p. 22) quoting Borges, "[W]riting is nothing more than a guided dream."

The writings of Tom Ogden have accompanied me over the years. Call it guided dreaming! They stand as a testimony that psychoanalytic writing at its best is no less an art than the practice of psychoanalysis. Both activities involve an effort to create clearances in which fresh forms of thinking and dreaming may emerge. I come out of Tom Ogden's writings with a renewed capacity to be surprised.

CONCLUSION

In the end, it doesn't matter *what* we think about Ogden's ideas. What matters is that his way of engaging us *makes* us think, opening up new possibilities within ourselves and in the way that we work with others. Ogden demonstrates this "opening up" in moving beyond analytic theory and technique into papers about the creative discourse that can occur in psychoanalytic supervision and teaching (2005d, 2006), analytic writing (2005c), reading poetry and prose (most notably Robert Frost and Jorge Luis Borges [1997, 2000, 2009]); and collaborative professional growth as an analyst (2009, co-authored with Glen Gabbard). I will give him the last word: "[W]hat I currently believe regarding ... psychoanalysis is in the process of changing even in the process of writing it (or, more accurately, *particularly* in the process of writing it) ... [which is a] life-long effort" (2005a, preface).

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The Ogden Effect: A Dialogue

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