I wrote these notes during a course at the University of Chicago ("Fundamentals Concepts of Psychoanalysis," Spring 2025, taught by Jonathan Lear and Dr. Alfred Margulies). The "we" includes myself and four brilliant, perceptive classmates whose observations about our assigned readings deepened my appreciation for psychoanalysis and, hopefully, my grasp of some of its foundational concepts.

Abbreviations

Loewald, The Experience of Time (*ET*)

Loewald, Perspectives on Memory (*PM*)

Freud, Project for a Scientific Psychology (*SP*)

Laplanche and Pontalis, Deferred Action (*DA*)

§1 – Eternity and Fragmentation

Our first query concerned the differences and similarities between eternity, where "all meaning is condensed in the undifferentiated, global unity of the abiding instant," and fragmentation, "where one's world is in bits and pieces none of which have any meaning" (*ET* 405). We found Loewald's categorization of extreme sadness, despair, and depression as experiences of eternity counterintuitive. We usually think depression a consequence of a loss of meaning that renders life bleak, empty, and disorienting, much like fragmentation. We then noticed that Loewald is positing a soft equivalence between experiences of eternity and exceptionally intense negative affect ("in some respects akin"; *ET* 405). We corrected our understanding, but the issue lingered: the comparison still implies that both experiences collapse time and, more importantly, enclose the subject in an atemporal but meaning-laden space.

To clarify our doubts about the relationship between meaning and extreme negative affect, we turned to mourning and melancholia. When the melancholic experiences extreme depression, the external world fades from view, as does the nexus of relations it affords. The world curves inwardly as the ego morphs into an exclusionary libidinal object, resembling infancy's primary mentation. But it does not necessarily follow that meaning fades as well. A severe depressive episode may brim with meaning in relation to the lost object and its replacement in the ego, while also triggering overwhelming displeasurable affects, which Loewald associates with time's breakdown. We were not satisfied with this temporary resolution. It also wasn't clear to us whether experiences of eternity become meaningful only retrospectively, much like patients "gain access to a new level of meaning" only when spurred by "events and situations" or "organic maturation" after the experience (*DA*, 112). If the *nunc stans* abounds with meaning, are experiences of eternity already incorporated fully into a meaningful context? Can incorporation occur even though their unitary and undifferentiated nature seems to preclude self-awareness?

We also wondered what Loewald means when he describes these "exceptional" experiences as "limits beyond which our accustomed, normal organization of the world no longer obtains" (*ET*, 405). We recognized that Loewald is speaking about the impossibility of understanding the genesis and consequences of such exceptional experiences through a conception of time that denies them intelligibility. But we also pondered this statement's socio-cultural import. Are these experiences "seen as pathological" because they expose the taut efficiency on which the world of linear time, with clocks and schedules, so gluttonously feeds? Are they deemed foreign and problematic because they remind external observers of their unactualized potential for extraordinary and potentially life-changing episodes?

§1.1 – Memory and "Truth"

Meaning led us to Freud's *Scientific Psychology*. We were particularly interested in Freud's trust in Emma's accounts of her past. What guarantees that Emma's memories are veritable and not fictitious? Is a face-value approach to patients' recollections sufficient to

legitimize the analyst's interpretive work (*cf.*, *Mourning and Melancholia*, 246)? We raised this issue in the context of Loewald's passing remark on lying and inventing *ad hoc* "fables," an activity he contrasts with the production of "myths" essential to reconstructing the past (*ET*, 409). In other words, we were curious about effective strategies for analysts to identify and work through fables in the absence of external archival materials (i.e., photographs, recordings, drawings, second-hand accounts).

Did Emma report Memory B after Freud worked through Memory A with her, until he (and she) realized that it couldn't be a satisfactory explanation for her compulsion? The way Freud discusses the reasons for deflating the explanatory power of Memory A made us conclude he reached them in *post hoc* reflections, and we wanted to know more about the case, to better understand Freud's treatment of Emma and consider possible analytic responses to fictitious narratives and their consequences on treatment (*SP*, 353).

Could we use affect as evidence that a myth is not a fable? Presumably, a fable won't elicit the same affective intensity as a myth that approximates the truth, even if the patient doesn't know that or how it does. We wondered if affect does always reveal truth, providing "evidence" for ascertaining the authenticity and significance of recollections. There may be cases where patients express resistance through inhibitions of affect, and we wondered how much seemingly impenetrable inhibitions may impair the analyst's ability to extract operationalizable data from the patient's past. The depth of a patient's awareness seems to make a big difference as well. But, again, we weren't sure how an analyst could gauge whether or not the patient is consciously and willfully lying or lying as a consequence of unconscious resistance.

We then considered repetition (in the non-technical sense) as a path to ascertain a memory's authenticity. If we asked Emma to describe Memory B on several separate occasions, and if her reports differed vastly every time, something else may be at play that requires keener skepticism and a different intervention. That seems like a lot of tampering with the patient's recollective powers, and we wondered if and why Freud would be more or less open to a similar approach than Loewald.

Does it even matter if a patient's reported memories are authentic, so long as they endow the past with meaning and open pathways to alleviate psychic ailments? The implication of Loewald's mention of fables suggests it does matter; a myth can come "dangerously" close to a fable (*ET*, 410). Yet, we recognized that we shouldn't interpret "authentic" too rigidly. For a memory to be veritable, it need not be a perfect simulacrum of an "objective past." We then tried to articulate the two distinct but complementary notions of truth at play in the readings: (1) truth as a factually objective account of an experience and (2) truth as a meaning-endowing reconstruction of an experience.

We made sense of this distinction by returning to Loewald's treatment of time. His push against a linear conception of time reminded us of hypnosis, which treated the past as a static repository of emotionally-charged perceptions and the present as a retriever of those perceptions. Loewald alludes to a similar notion in his remarks on the early stages of psychoanalysis, where psychic life was understood as "wholly determined by our unconscious past" (*ET*, 404). His disavowal of a simplistic view of psychoanalysis as a reductive project that shrinks actions and desires to the infantile past resembles the first notion of truth, which hinges on the faithful reproduction of perceptual relics and fails to acknowledge their inaccessibility.

Loewald instead stresses the need for understanding the present as a producer of the past, a creative collaborator—not as a spectator who awaits the future as "nothing but a time when a past state would be attained again" (*ET*, 404). Insofar as the present can endow the past with meaning and change its value for the future, recollections are "true"; they're revelatory and liberating, regardless of their factual accuracy. There's something fatalistic about the "static" view, and we appreciated Loewald's emphasis on dynamicity and interrelation, which also reveals a careful charity towards individuals affected by pathologies. We partly interpreted this charity as an invitation to revise our conception of such a fundamental category as time in hopes of better serving those whose healing depends on it.

These comments finally brought us to Loewald's fascinating allusion to history: "In psychoanalysis, more than in any other form of psychological research and treatment, man is taken as a historical being, a being that as a race and as an individual has a history, has run and continues to run through a course of development from something simple and primitive to something complex and 'civilized'" (*ET*, 402-403). The scare quotes made us think Loewald has reservations about "civilization," which we partly explained by a reluctance to articulate specific prescriptions about cultural variables like marriage. Yet, the equivalence between "self-aware organization and conduct of life" and "a more human life" does seem to betray the assumption that historical development somehow corresponds to psychical maturation (*PM*, 324). What does it mean to have a "civilized" psyche? Are "complex" and "civilized" synonymous with structural complexity? Does "civilized" carry normative overtones about psychic wellbeing?

Despite the implicit admission that understanding time as dynamic and relational complicates the analytic project—or because of it, perhaps—this notion seems to endow analysts and analysands with a richer sense of agency. Time becomes a deed. We make time as it makes us, much like analysts and analysands co-create each other in hopes of flourishing amidst life's vicissitudes.

§2.1 – Therapy and Childhood

We began our final session with Bacon's critique of O'Shaughnessy. We first pondered temporality in the context of his analysis. More specifically, we wondered why O'Shaughnessy was willing to diagnose Leon so thoroughly in what seemed like a very short period. We remembered our previous discussions of some Kleinian analysts' preference for communicating their diagnoses to analysands shortly or even immediately after having first articulated them. We also recalled earlier discussions of analysis' temporal requirements, to which we have returned time and again since reading Freud's "On Beginning the Treatment," where he notes that "psycho-analysis is always a matter of long

periods of time, of half a year or whole years—of longer periods than the patient expects" (129). O'Shaughnessy is clearly aware of time's fundamental role, which she mentions in relation to the internal good object's vulnerability, transience's intensifying effects on the worth of the world and its objects, and the inevitable agitation that accompanies termination ("On Gratitude," 255, 257, 258). Yet, we felt she did not address time as a prerequisite for "working through" resistances and coming to grounded interpretations about their psychic roots. We wished we had more material to better understand the rationale behind O'Shaughnessy's analytic timeline.

We then moved to a corollary issue, which we felt Bacon rightly underscored. A conception of the unconscious as a continuous but invisible force that determines whatever behavior is observable in analysis seems to imply the constant need to reach beyond appearance, to suspect that there always lies something hidden in the analysand's mind, awaiting disclosure. We do not deny that this is very often the case, but we pondered the implications of taking this outlook to its extreme. For example, Bacon recalls O'Shaughnessy's reading of his decision to "sit on a small bench between two cushions" as indication of an "invisible Oedipus complex" (an idea she developed in a paper ["The Invisible Oedipus Complex"] whose scope and conclusions Bacon oversimplifies). If for O'Shaughnessy the cushions represented "de-sexualized parents whom he holds apart and around himself" ("The Invisible Oedipus Complex," 106), for Bacon the bench was simply comfortable: "If memory serves, I sat there because the bench was near the door and was comfortable enough for 50 minutes." We could still surmise that his wish to sit "near the door" betrays a deeper aversion to the analytic situation, a reluctance to be in the room that could in turn be explained as a symptom of an even deeper phenomenon of which he is unaware, and on which the analyst can help him shed some light. But a statement of this kind is exactly what prompted our concerns in the first place: what could warrant a similar judgment about a young adolescent? It seems unlikely that we could reach a conclusion comparable to O'Shaughnessy's without an *a priori* conviction in the veracity and ubiquity of the Oedipus complex. To Bacon's point, however, may not always be warranted. We did not think this skepticism implies that every interpretive act should be discarded as

vacuous projection. It does imply, however, that analysts need to develop an acute sensitivity to balance their commitment to detecting pervasive and invisible dynamics with a commitment to ensuring that analysis does not turn into a contrived search for ulterior motives and subliminal meanings that may not fit the situation. This sensitivity seems especially relevant for children, and we wondered how contemporary training programs take it into account.

On a related note, we also felt there was not enough justification for involving such a young individual as Leon in analysis. This impression sparked additional questions about contemporary practice: what guidelines do analysts use to determine whether or not a child should begin psychoanalytic treatment? How common is psychoanalytic treatment with children as compared to other forms of treatment? We were particularly concerned with a lack of discussion of Leon's parents. Although parents may have varying degrees of authority, the final decision to enroll their child in therapy is almost always theirs by law. This decision initiates analysis, but parental influence is thereafter excluded from the analytic space. The analytic sessions themselves are only privy to child and analyst. Sealing off parents from the intimacies of the analytic space seems a problem, especially in cases where parents insist so much that therapy be part of their child's life, perhaps against their child's will altogether. The parents may be enacting unanalyzed pathologies of their own. The child's inability to choose may also mar the analytic space before it is even entered in a way that does not seem applicable to consensual adults whose judgment holds sufficient practical authority. This again reminded us of Bacon's essay, which identifies his parents' insistence that "he thank adults in authority" as the reason for what O'Shaughnessy instead read as heartfelt gratitude. We have previously discussed the "power differential" between analysts and adult analysands, but we felt that more needs to be said about this differential in the context of children, for whom parental authority could be transferred onto the analyst much more poignantly than adults.

Winnicott's case study from "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" seemed to us a better, more fruitful example of what a comprehensive analysis with a child

might involve. For one, Winnicott relates a long interview with the boy's parents, which yielded several useful insights, though it failed to disclose a crucial detail he would only find out in an interview with the boy himself. "[T]wo psychiatric social workers and two visitors" were present in this second interview (16). Winnicott then held a third interview with the parents, where he explained to them—not to the boy—what he thought was the problem. In other words, Winnicott seemed much more sensitive to the family's role, not only in the boy's psychic turmoil, but also as an integral part of his analysis. We recognized that Winnicott provides many more details that "On Gratitude" could offer, but we still thought it fair to conclude that the two essays betray two orientations that, despite their shared Kleinian foundations, hinge on considerable procedural differences.

§2.2 – Truthfulness and Truth

The tension between intricate analytic interpretations and surface-level accounts led us to consider truth. To put it as broadly as possible: what is truth, and what is its role in psychoanalysis? We thought one productive way to approach this question would be to distinguish truth and truthfulness. Truthfulness is an attitude, an orientation, a commitment to searching for truth and adjusting our behavior accordingly. This commitment requires the assumption that truth exists. Whatever truth is, this distinction seems to call for a provisional definition of truth as fact, a static object of cognition, perhaps expressible linguistically. There is much to say about language, especially as linguistic articulations of intuitive insights often mark a threshold beyond which those insights become public and concrete, somehow deepening their affective consequences and affording a clearer path to psychic integration. Many of Dr. Margulis' case studies seem to suggest as much (e.g., the suicidal man who was finally able to *say* that his father loved him, and that he loved his father).

As far as analysis goes, is truthfulness more consequential than truth? Psychoanalysis seems concerned with truth in relation to the mind's moods, functions, and dynamics. Truth in psychoanalysis is *for* something—integration, health, psychic harmony. It was not

obvious to us that the same can be said of a truth pursued for the sake of, say, curiosity about the world's inner workings, so long as that curiosity excludes a direct concern with the status of one's psyche. The pursuit of truth may not always be in the service of psychic integration, but psychoanalysis does seem to owe its existence to this notion. This comment reminded us of the possibility that the truth of a psychoanalytic interpretation is always contingent and contextual, a possibility Loewald treats in different terms when he stresses the mind's "history-making or time-weaving memorial activity," which we took to entail the enduring need to narrativize the past, to fit its salient relics into a semantic pattern ("The Experience of Time," 410). Psychoanalytic truth should perhaps be thought of as pragmatic or aesthetic, as best validated by its processual sequelae, rather than as empirical and thus corresponding to a set of past or unconscious entities that seem to lie beyond verification. Indeed, well-arranged fantasies could be essential for a healthy relationship to truth and truthfulness. The abeyance of reality may actually reveal truth. Appearance and truth may then be more intimately related than often thought. We remembered reaching similar conclusions in past sessions, though we still wanted to discuss this theme more closely.

We tried to complicate the picture by involving volition. One of the analyst's tasks is to assist patients in discovering what they do not *want* to know, helping them appreciate the need for knowing what they do not want to know. Does not knowing always entail not *wanting* to know? Some experiences, uncanny or traumatic, internally produced or externally imposed, can stunt our capacity to know, and maybe even our desire to know. We also wondered whether the desire for truth is indeed universal. Could we say that the desire to know is universal, but the will to know is not?

The desire to know the truth brought to mind transience. We seem to experience the world's evanescence as a continuous deferral, from moments past and moments future, from loved objects gone and their wanted reattainment. We pondered what that might entail for our search for truth. Dr. Lear reminds us that the integration of an ego ideal is a perpetual project; it is, "to use Freud's language, *interminable.* There is no point at which the project is completed, where one has reached bottom" (45). This statement applies to

truth for integration, though we also felt it works for more "disinterested" pursuits of truth. Insofar as pursuing the truth involves shedding off appearances, accepting our erotic yearning for truth must imply accepting the suffering that pursuit is bound to bring. We pondered the therapeutic value of articulating this acceptance explicitly. Aware of time's unforgiving passage, we moved on.

§2.3 – Rhythms, Sounds, Goodbyes

We turned to the body, which we wished we had discussed more often throughout the course. We remembered Freud's study of hysteria, in which he noted that psychoanalysis could cure physical symptoms. Insofar as the psyche encompasses the body, unity between the psyche's different layers requires unity with the body. But what does that mean? Does psychoanalysis' commitment to the unconscious necessarily entail a mind-body dualism? If so, what might mind-body integration entail, in theory and practice? We were also interested in the potential of psychoanalysis for treating paralysis, seizures, and other such bodily ailments.

These sporadic reflections on the somatic dimensions of psychoanalysis brought us back to Dr. Lear's essay on Loewald. We were particularly taken by the suggestion that "This passage [i.e., ghosts and ancestors] can persuade readers of its truth by inviting them to experience it for themselves firsthand in the very moment of reading it" (42). We wondered about the sonic dimensions of "verbal vehicles." With reference to Loewald's "new discovery of objects," Dr. Lear writes that "The turn of phrase can facilitate integration: the rhythm and sounds reach down to infantile pleasures found in experiences of order, yet the meaning opens out indefinitely in the direction of insight" (40). The footnote mentions Plato's *Laws*, though we can also turn to the *Republic*, where Plato suggests that musical training is the most potent pedagogic instrument. Graceful rhythms and harmonies find their way into the depths of the soul, in turn endowing it with grace and harmony (401d-402a). We then wondered how "rhythm" may serve as an explanatory category for transference and other such dynamics. Mr. M in O'Shaughnessy's "On

Gratitude" came to mind. Mr. M's twitches and loquacity (his "speed and excitement") "made him difficult to contact" (249). His haphazard and discordant "rhythms" destabilized the analytic space, threatening to preclude meaningful interventions altogether. According to O'Shaughnessy's report of her report, Mr. M's analyst "had to struggle not to get excited or collapse with laughter—be almost forced into the patient's mania" ("On Gratitude," 249). In a sense, Mr. M was as contagious as Plato's poets, who efface truth with appearance.

There is a physiological dimension in this tension between reality and appearance's protection by impulsive ticks—quick, sporadic sounds and motions correspond to stress and anxiety, symptoms of a resistance that wants to crowd the intimate space for fear of having to reckon with itself. The opposite seems to go as well, at least in this vignette, where Mr. M's increasingly subdued behavior paralleled the order he began to experience in his professional life. Yet, we did not think the relationship between someone's "rhythms" and affects is this simple and straightforward. Take silence, for example. Stillness and quietness can connote calm, tranquility, and a sense of comfortable belonging to a physical and psychic space, but they can also convey paralyzing fear. Two physiological states with identical external manifestations may betray radically different affective states. A person's "rhythms" may thus help to assess the status and progress of analysis, but we ultimately need additional material to form appropriate assessments.

Is talking about "psychic rhythms" just a metaphor? Or is there room to adopt this language more literally in clinical and scientific investigations of psychosomatic phenomena? We also thought a comparison between wordless sounds and speech could help us elucidate the latter's vital in psychoanalysis, which is after all a "talking cure." Why can words be so potent? Do they engage the imagination in ways mere sounds cannot? Why can rhythm disclose and deepen meaning otherwise unavailable? How might we harness sound in analytic contexts? What is the relationship between aesthetic form and therapeutic efficacy?

We also briefly considered possible differences between the psychic effects we can experience when reading someone like Loewald, who chose words to articulate psychoanalytic notions for expert audiences, and someone like Dostoevsky. One obvious difference is our awareness of the authors' motives. We know that Loewald's "Perspectives on Memory" wants to reveal something about memory. Do we ever know what a work of literature is "about"? This knowledge may or may not influence our encounters with words and the ideas they represent. We left this thought alone in the interest of time.

We ended with a brief but lively discussion of the curious effects imminent termination imposed on our conversation. The nearer we reached what we knew to be the final moment of our last meeting, the more we seemed to want to consider as many ideas as possible. Granular analyses gave way to general comments that sought to weave the threads we had been sewing throughout the course's weeks. As the end could no longer be delayed by thought, our minds seemed to feel additional liberty to pursue their fancies, as if fearful of the possibility that they could never again do so. We felt grateful for having learned from each other. Although every moment affords the possibility of insight, of deeper understanding, interpersonal interactions somehow make that possibility especially poignant. Even if we could not yet articulate exactly what it is we thought we had learned from each other, the moment's emotive charge sufficed to say we did. As Freud noted, and as O'Shaughnessy reminds us, transience does not entail a loss of worth. On the contrary, it deepens every moment's value. It also enables profound gratitude. It seemed to us that memorial activity intensifies as an experience reaches its final instant. We wondered whether that is always the case. By reminiscing on the earlier stages of an experiential arc, unearthing salient moments of enjoyment as the final moments of enjoyment blend with odd melancholy, the psyche prepares for a future of continual mourning, where memory is its only consolation. Saying goodbye reified our conceptual understanding of these notions. We could appreciate them anew, though their essence never changed. Painful though it is, we thought termination sublime—a precious testament to life, whose bounteous gifts we are all so blessed to know.