

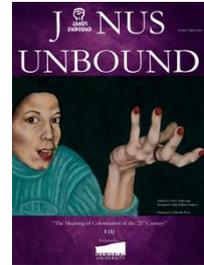
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## On the Micro-Colonial

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I think I interpret mainly to let the patient know  
the limits of my understanding.

— D. W. Winnicott (1969, 87)

I want to give him a name, one that extends beyond the clinical conventions of the arbitrary and anonymizing initial, a name that safeguards the confidentiality of the analytic space as it sheds light on the why and the what spoken within.

I will call him David, in reference to the biblical figure of the humble shepherd who slays Goliath with a slingshot, of, in another version of the story, the child that defeats the aggressor while the adult tasked with that same responsibility stands helplessly by, of, according to yet a third of the story's versions, a defender that fights a foreign enemy who, as it turns out, is a blood relative.

In his younger years, David also went by a name chosen for him by his maternal grandfather, and used solely by the beloved forebear: Jake. David has chosen that same name for the dog he recently adopted. He now welcomes canine Jake to share his bed for a couple of hours every night in a small room in the basement while Amelie, David's exceptionally light sleeper wife, spends her nights alone in the main bedroom up the stairs. Thirty years prior, David/Jake had his bedroom in the basement of his parents' house. Back then, it was mother who slept seemingly unawares in the matrimonial bedroom on the second floor while, two levels below, father sexually assaulted his son on regular nocturnal visits.

This chapter in David's life started when he was eight and lasted till he reached puberty five years later, by which time his father lost all sexual interest in him. Throughout that period and the decade that followed, David maintained a silence around the assaults, a silence he wore as a badge of honour and a testament to his resilience. "*The baby that never cried*,"<sup>2</sup> the one that "*never really needed any attention*," as he was already cast in the family story, the baby that most likely recognized the futility of crying as a means of getting any attention, grew into a self-reliant recluse.

In his late teens, David accepted at face value his father's confessed remorse for the assaults; he believed he could now put his history behind him as he prepared for a university education away from home. On his own, he sank instead

### DEDICATION

This text was originally presented at the "Colonial Fantasies; Violent Transmission" conference held at the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association, Stockholm, May 2019. It is dedicated to Antonio Calcagno.

into a depression for which he initially sought professional help but eventually medicated with the heavy use of alcohol. He endured his suffering through active isolation: he lived alone, worked the late-night shift, preferred pornography to actual sexual relations, and spent most of his free time immersed in video games. He also reclaimed his isolation as a point of pride, as proof of self-sufficiency, even superiority, as much as a preemptive strategy against unwelcome intrusion. In time, he went to graduate school, travelled a fair bit, and eventually returned to his home city to complete specialized, professional training.

Fast forward to when, in his mid 30s, David's world fell apart, again, when his father committed suicide with a gun to the head a day after he was arrested for sexually assaulting the neighbours' grandson. For David, the basement could not have been any more welcoming. You see, in this version of the biblical confrontation, the enemy was never vanquished; the punctuation that is the slingshot, or bullet, to the head simply marks the end of one iteration as it makes way for another. It may then be more useful to understand David's struggle as less with isolation *per se* as with the company he must keep. Goliath has not been slain and David is no hero. Each is a "man of the in-between"<sup>33</sup> and has no one other than his enemy for company. "*I am not my father; I will not repeat his ugly deeds.*" "*No, no. I am very much like my father; I am as guilty as he is.*" "*I am as broken; I must redeem us both by resisting the impulse that prolongs the tragedy.*" David feels alone with his desire. What he hopes for from me, his analyst, and what he has consistently identified as his aim for his analysis, is that I not stand idly by but sustain him as he occupies the "in-between" so that he may take charge over his desire and keep it confined to the realm of fantasy.

In one respect, it makes a lot of sense to attribute much of the suffering and struggles he went on to experience to the abuse David endured at the hands of his father. The depression, isolation, and substance use, to name but a few of the components of his adult life, fall in line with a seemingly uncomplicated chronology of causes and effects. This chronology recalls Freud's formulations of psychopathology in terms of a theory of seduction whose clinical and political failings have impeded many a study of childhood sexual abuse. In order to sustain a theory initially grounded on a presumed event, though ultimately formalized around an unconscious fantasy, Freud adapted Ernst Haeckel's famed "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" principle and advanced the view that sexuality's vicissitudes in the life of the individual replicate an evolutionary path leading back to an all-powerful primal father (a Goliath in David's case), who is "killed, eaten, resuscitated, and retroactively reigns over everyone" (Lepoutre 2016, 63).

On the one hand, the scientific foundations for Freud's overarching parallel between species and individual have been shown to be erroneous and misleading (Gould 1985). On the other hand, we would do well to remember Foucault's lesson that the agencies of domination and the systems that constitute the subject across different contexts are not homologous (1976, 121-35), that power is not exercised uniformly no matter the relationship (parent/child, state/citizen, ruler/ruled) and that neither is the father a mere representative of the state nor is the latter an extrapolation of a father figure on a scale larger than the family's.

Recognizing that the passage from one context to another is hardly ever frictionless, I want to explore the structure that makes it possible for a desire to co-opt and redraw the psyche of one individual in the service of another—as per a

parent's abuse of a child for instance—the structure on the basis of which a micro-colonizing relationship is built. I want to elaborate a dynamic that is neither the miniature nor the outcome observed against the background of pre-existing social and economic formations, even as these latter have often configured the colonizer/colonized relationship in familial and sexualizing terms. Rather than focus on sexuality as fashioned by overarching structures (be they moral, legal, economic, reproductive), I want to address sexuality as producing and sustaining of such structures, sexuality as not simply an effect or a target but a bedrock and a driving force.

Thinking sexuality as installing rather than merely instantiating or submitting to a broader colonial dynamic calls for a reassessment of Freud's theorizing of seduction even though his developmental account of libido, both intra- and inter-psychically, is suffused with the colonial logic of conquest and discipline, efficiency and return. The reformulation proposed by Jean Laplanche under the heading of a "general theory of seduction" (1987, 89-148) seems to me to be more explanatory and more useful in this context. Ever the winemaker,<sup>4</sup> Laplanche the psychoanalyst recast seduction as an "implantation" of sexuality and thus a foundational stage in the formation of the unconscious. In so doing, Laplanche shifted the register of the inquiry into seduction from a "whether or not" to a "how and when" hence further complicating some of the polarities dear to the heart of psychoanalysis and, indeed, the larger culture: activity/passivity, source/aim, nurture/nature, perpetrator/victim.

As Laplanche saw it, the infant does not come into the world with a pre-formed unconscious replete with drives and fantasies. Rather, it is in the general seduction that takes place in the asymmetrical relationship between adult (parent, sibling, and/or caregiver) and infant that a psychic structure is set up. While it tries to make sense of relatively clear dynamics of preservation, adaptation, and attunement, the infant must also reconcile with signifiers originating in the adult yet "enigmatic" to both sender and receiver. These signifiers pertain to the repressed components of the adult's own sexuality as they are triggered by the interaction with the infant; the implantation they precipitate occurs unbeknownst to the adult and is therefore beyond their choice. Hence, the breast—actual, displaced or fantasized—is not just nourishing, stimulating or withholding for baby, it is more than simply good or bad; it is shot through with the adult's own often unconscious excitement and desire; ditto, among others, the gentle caress, the melodic coo, and the soft sway. Each exceeds its intended function and communicates beyond its manifest meaning.

Both infant and adult are thus actively, albeit differently, involved in an implantation that is neither deliberate nor necessarily malevolent. As they impact the infant, the adult's subtle pleasures do not run counter to, or at the expense of, a fledgling libidinal essence. Instead, and herein lies Laplanche's radical contribution to the classic metapsychological position, it is the impact of the unacknowledged and baffling signifier originating in the adult that constitutes the foundation upon which an infant's psychic apparatus is built. Thus, what sustains the infant's ability to make sense of that signifier and integrate it after its own fashion is a budding ego; the effect of the infant's failure to develop a full mastery and symbolization of this signifier denotes a process of repression and an incipient unconscious; and, finally, whatever exceeds the infant's ability

to fully “translate” the sexually imbued signifier, the residue that gets repressed, is the source-object of the drive, a permanent feature and a constant source of excitement and frustration. As a “generalized” theory of seduction, implantation describes a structuring process rather than a pathologizing dynamic: though forever translating and forever symbolizing, a human being does not always already belong in the world of the unconscious; it erects that world in its infancy as a dynamic solution to a surround it does not always comprehend.

Some may find it reassuring to think Laplanche’s reformulation of seduction in terms of a care that, at times, may go awry, a care that, given the proper resources, is teachable, trackable, correctable. Two aspects of implantation must remain unsettling. First, since, at bottom, it is a confrontation with the fact of an enigma, implantation is fodder for, on the one hand, an Aristotelian sense of amazement and wonder in the face of a world to be discovered and enjoyed and, on the other hand, an unavoidable experience of doubt, of incompleteness, of a limit as to what can be understood and metabolized. As products of implantation, the formation of the unconscious and the subsequent structuring of the psyche are hence possible only on the condition of failure as well as success, of injury, as some would say, as well as growth. Second, implantation recruits more than what is supposedly healthy or pleasurable of the adult’s unconscious and its desires. The sincerest of intentions and the most responsible of child-rearing practices notwithstanding, the interaction with the infant recruits as much of the adult’s ambivalence, narcissistic gratification, and toxic projection as it does his or her benign eroticism. Before us are not mutually exclusive best-and-worst-case scenarios but the most common, indeed inevitable, and co-extensive components of the interaction between one unconscious and another. What the infant translates into its ego and what remains untranslatable in its unconscious are never exclusively wondrous and/or innocuous. Garden variety implantation, which lends the psyche its dynamic topography, is invariably accompanied by “intromission” as the violent variant that stymies growth and installs elements that short-circuit differentiation and resist metabolization (Laplanche 1992, 358).<sup>5</sup> At stake, then, are an invitation, an encouragement, a welcome into a world of pleasure and care as well as an unyielding territorialization and a hindering implantation for the benefit of one unconscious at the expense of another. As both dynamics unfold, we witness a conflictual acculturation, an installation of divided identities, and prescriptions regarding objects, aims, and means.<sup>6</sup>

The simultaneity of implantation with intromission calls up the classic psychoanalytic recognition of a quasi-ubiquitous co-occurrence of opposites in terms more foundational than complementarity, compromise or ambivalence. Thought processes (primary, a-rational, unconscious/secondary, common sensical, conscious), drives (binding and life-affirming Eros/destructive and de-linking Thanatos) and principles (pleasure, as minimization of tension/reality, as liberation and deferral) are among the building blocks of a complex and ever-active psychological apparatus that exceeds the familiar patterns of oppositionality and resolution. At the end of the day, Laplanche’s reformulation of seduction as the origin story of an unconscious grounded in implantation and intromission further extends this co-occurrence and helps reveal the extent to which

we are colonized in the most elemental of gestures at our most basic, most structural of cores: we are libidinal in so far as we are colonized and colonized so as to be libidinal.

The fact that, presumably, seduction may start out in the most caring of implantations does not shield it from intromission; nor does that fact exclude it from colonization. Instead, it is colonization itself that is opened up beyond the logic of presence and absence and onto a spectrum of timelines, modes, and intensities. We may now rethink what we typically understand by colonization as a re-colonization; rather than the infliction of a traumatic injustice on an otherwise innocent and unblemished organism, we witness a driving of wedges into pre-existing splits (the enigmatic, the un-metabolizable) and a harnessing of certain components intrinsic to, in this particular context, the child's psychosexual structure and dynamics in order to make way for a new re-colonizing intromission in the service of the colonizer.

If sexual assault is a re-colonization, then one can only guess at the complex chain of past seductions that paved the way for a scenario where a father abuses his child while mother does not or cannot recognize what is taking place under her own roof. David's early history must be placed in a context that incorporates the conditions that produced "*the baby that never cried*" as well as the ends to which it was, and continues to be, deployed. No matter how thorough or earnest the retrograde analysis, elements of this history that belong both to David and to his parents—separately as well as a couple—shall remain forever inaccessible, untranslatable. By that same token, no matter how competent or responsible, the clinician must contend with a factor of the enigmatic (endemic as well as inherited) as it permeates the analytic relationship and shapes it as yet another link in the chain of seductions.

Of one thing we can be certain: the more insidious an intromission, the deeper the reach of the subsequent colonization. After many years of analysis, David can conjure only the vaguest of terms to express his feelings regarding what transpired in that childhood basement bedroom. "*Maybe paedophilia is an orientation and father couldn't help himself.*" "*After all, he was married to a narcissist; she chose not to take care of him.*" "*Come to think of it, neither of them could be trusted with anything; they put down both of my dogs while I was away on a school trip; they couldn't bother to give them their meds.*" There is sorrow when David speaks of his dogs, anger at the mention of mother, yet hardly anything beyond a most tepid disappointment with father. Aside from certain classic defences (displacement, intellectualization, splitting) and the dissociative tenor typical of a victim of repeated trauma, David's reticence may be attributed to a number of factors: while he does not share his father's choice of sexual object, he recognizes his is not altogether within the realm of the "normal" either; as far as he's concerned, maintaining a two-decade silence over the abuse he endured burdens him with the lion's share of the responsibility for the pain suffered by his father's other victim(s). As the shame and guilt generate more silence, the reenactment in the clinical setting of a formative mistrust, the resourceful self-reliance and the wish to protect the other from possible harm mean that, again, David must confront his Goliath on his own, often outside the analytic space. I may provide him all manner of valued support; I, however, may not take part in his struggle.

Much as these concerns complicate the relationship David and I have, they remain, in principle at least, more or less grist for the analytic mill, potentially given their due and perhaps even surmounted. And yet, .... Recognizing the extent of our work and its enduring positive effects for him and acknowledging, with the requisite humility, that another clinician may very well do better as well as otherwise, my sense is that part of David's re-colonization is enclosed within an intractable intromission and may remain forever unspoken, if not indeed unspeakable—which, of course, is not to say un-lived. Over and above what grooming, collaboration, and guilt typically produce in such scenarios, David's silence points to a limit beyond which it seems to me his analysis may not venture. There is, however, something that can be said as to the ways in which this limit keeps David company, the uses it serves him and, curiously, the utterances it affords him.

With roots in both implantation and intromission, David's "being with" his limit structures his sense of self and his sexuality; it speaks to his way of "being with" himself, an other or a group—of belonging, failing or refusing belonging. While there is much that may be said of the affective qualities to each of these modes, I, at this point, would like to concentrate specifically on the mechanisms of fantasizing and "fantasying" as elaborated by Winnicott (1971), on how they engage implantation and intromission and, in the process, make way for particular styles of "being with"—namely, solitude and loneliness.

Implantation is the course of a signifier translated, repressed, recovered, retranslated, dismantled, and rebuilt anew; it is the polysemy of symbolization where meaning and possibility are created. This is what Winnicott (1971, 35) identified as fantasizing in all its manifestations (e.g., dreaming, playing, finding), as a poetry that builds layer upon layer of meaning and an imaginative planning that precipitates and looks forward to action as much as it is shaped by it. In contrast, recognizing in the individual what Marx had identified in group ideology and Nietzsche in nihilism, and echoing "phantasying" from the English rendition of Freud's reference to a split-off thought activity (1911, 222), Winnicott described "fantasying" as lacking in poetry, as the dead end of a stark scene where little, if anything, happens, or rather where the thing that does happen is the prevention of anything of substance from ever happening. This is what Deleuze (1962) once called the reactive. Fantasying is an isolating activity that drains objects and relations of meaning and reduces them to ossifying procedures—think the idle daydreaming of the perfect and perfectly satisfying life (talents, careers, partners, finances) in the face of a painful, disorganized, and/or fleeting reality. As a counter to the diverse and unpredictable, fantasying installs a numbing and repetitive dissociation (Winnicott 1971, 27) that is a paradigmatic precursor to intromission.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between fantasizing and fantasying is a distinction between solitude, aka the capacity to be alone (Winnicott 1958), and loneliness, between an openness to the generative and unfamiliar and the seemingly self-sufficient yet ostensibly deadening. Sense, theoretical and practical, would rather such categories stand apart from one another. Experience tells a different story.

Fantasying is no mere resistance or malady. David's loneliness revolves around an endlessly repetitive confrontation with a Goliath that will not die, indeed a Goliath that must not die since his death can only be the outcome of a

violent act of self-mutilation. When colonizer and colonized are entrenched in the same psychic space, the cost of their conflict is borne primarily by the colonized. Of porn and video games, each is an engagement with someone else's fantasy and, in David's case, evidence of his reluctance to nurture his own inner world. In conjunction with the bouts of excessive drinking, these are also his ways of placating and numbing his nemesis, of keeping him confined to the basement. As at once toxin and remedy (*pharmakon*),<sup>8</sup> each reinforces the walls of Goliath's prison, secures his confinement, and guarantees that the enemy shall remain caught in a consuming struggle to an ever-deferrable death.

Taxing as it may be, Goliath's confinement and the fantasizing it requires make it possible for David to engage in a world other than his enemy's, to fantasize outside the constraints of monotony and futility, abuse and mistrust. And, with the help of Jake, fantasize he does. Lest we forget, the basement belongs to the child beloved by his grandfather and to the cared-for-canine as much as it does to the abuser and victim in this story. To Jake belong the responsibility and the relish to sustain a playful solitude that Winnicott understood as a "freedom from withdrawal" and an ability to "relax" whereby an impulse and a sensation "will feel real and be truly a personal experience" (1958, 34).

David's version of this experience is an elaborate construction project. While a quintessential metaphor for the unconscious, the basement is also where he has set up "*mission central*" for a complete renovation of his house. Here, he is guided by both creature comforts and "*Russian engineering*," that other construction paradigm by whose standards impermeable boundaries are paramount. Still, David is at his most comfortable as he fantasizes and plays, somewhere between illusion and utility. He delights in formulating ever-changing plans, he thrives in the searches and researches for tools and materials, often with little regard for timelines or practical ends. He takes pride in pursuing his project with as little help as possible from the outside, without, however, entirely retreating from his relations with others. It is in the context of these relations that his solitude thrives; this is evident in both the analysis and his daily life where separations and extended breaks from those he now considers standard fixtures (e.g., wife and analyst) are triggers for the most intense and most debilitating of symptoms.

Recall that, metapsychologically, we are in the realm of relational implantation/intromission—rather than Freudian one-person psychology—and in the realm of fantasizing, emblematic of the capacity to be alone, itself possible only within a dyadic relationship. After all, an infant and an analysand can enjoy being alone because parent and analyst are reliably yet unobtrusively present somewhere in the background. Tellingly, the capacity to be alone in one party in any given relationship flourishes when it is met with the other's capacity to leave alone, to accompany without intrusion or meddling. Since we are considering parents who were once children and analysts who were once analysands, their present capacity to leave the other alone is an outcome of earlier experiences of having been alone in the presence of a preceding other (parent and/or analyst), of having been left alone by that other and, most critically, of having left that other and disconnected from them, of having done so in, hopefully, the healthiest of ways, of, in other words, parents who, as children, snuck away from their parents' gazes, of analysts who, as analysands, left their analysts alone as well as behind where they belonged.

Solitude in the one is hence contingent on an attitude that is slightly more nuanced and a bit less innocuous than caring unobtrusiveness in the other. The aetiology of the capacity to leave alone incorporates an inevitable, though at times ethically and clinically troubling, element of disconnection, escape or neglect. This element is often overlooked or explained away as a mere foible or failure. Supposedly, the analyst who nods off, double books, forgets or mis-speaks, the analyst who, in a nutshell, slips, hasn't been trained enough or analyzed enough. Perhaps. Equally likely however is the possibility that such an analyst, and indeed every analyst, does not simply leave alone, let be, make room or give room for the other to grow but indeed abandons, avoids, neglects, idiosyncratically, purposefully or indifferently, as they had done in at least two of their most formative relationships.

In David's case, and perhaps in all of our cases, the other whose unobtrusive presence makes fantasizing possible is not exclusively a so-called "good" other. Drunk and distracted, Goliath remains at bay; sober, he may neglect his victim and leave him alone every so often. As with any colonizer, his longevity is premised on the colonizer's fantasy of separateness and superiority, the same fantasy that, perhaps unintentionally but no less critically, opens for the colonized some room beyond pain and duress.

## Biography

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## Notes

1. Unless otherwise stated, the italicized text is David's.
2. This, as suggested by certain versions of the Goliath account, is where the warrior came forward to bring to a close the battle between Israelites and Philistines as the two armies encamped across from one another (Yadin 2004, 380-81).
3. The Laplanche family owned Chateau de Pommard (Burgundy) from the 1930s onward. Along with his wife Nadine, Jean Laplanche managed the winery for decades, until the couple sold the property in the early 2000s.
4. The decision to render the French "*intromission*"—dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and meaning the introduction of one object into another—as its English cognate is unfortunate; the latter is nowadays associated with penile vaginal penetration and leads the reader of the translation to the conclusion that Laplanche was specifically referencing a sexual scenario (see Zeuthen and Hagelskjær 2015; Harris 2018). Laplanche was rather addressing the broader phenomenon of an intrusion that stands in the way of growth, the same one that plays a role in the formation of the super ego as a "foreign body that cannot be metabolized" (Laplanche 1992, 358).
5. Cf. Butler 2014.
6. Cf. Scarfone 2005.
7. See Derrida 1975.

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