

# JOHN WATSON IS TO INTROSPECTIONISM AS JAMES BERLIN IS TO EXPRESSIVISM (AND OTHER ANALOGIES YOU WON'T FIND ON THE SAT)

**Maja Wilson**

I was in the Yale archives for the first time, reading the correspondence of early behaviorists John B. Watson and Robert M. Yerkes, and I couldn't stop sneezing. A venerable looking scholar next to me, inspecting ancient manuscripts with a magnifying glass, moved to the back of the room. Apparently, I was allergic to history.

My very present problems had brought me to the archives: as a high school teacher, I had felt oppressed by the system of high stakes standardized testing mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The stated intent of NCLB was to promote equity, but the effects of testing seemed to be quite the opposite. Despite the modern rhetoric of equity associated with testing, I wondered if the original intent behind the creation of standardized tests foreshadowed the disastrous effects I saw playing out in schools.

I knew that the first large scale standardized test in the United States—the Army Alpha Test (AAT)—had been created by eugenicists and used to promote their causes. Robert M. Yerkes, an avowed eugenicist, had helped create and administer the AAT during both World Wars. His assistant, Carl Brigham, published *A Study of American Intelligence* in 1923, in which he argued for “selective breeding” to preserve the integrity of the “Nordic race.” The AAT had revealed, according to Brigham, that southern and eastern Europeans had scored lowest on the test.

Brigham's book fueled growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, and was used by Harry Laughlin, appointed by a House committee as an “expert eugenics agent,” to propose and pass the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, which targeted eastern and southern Europeans. While Brigham renounced his position in the 1930s, he helped to transform the AAT into the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

The troubling origins of standardized testing were well known. I was at the Yale archives because I suspected there was more dirt to be dug up. I had a hunch: Besides creating inequity, it seemed to me that standardized tests were oblivious to (or disrespectful of) the experience of teachers and students. I had seen that dismissal of teachers' experience in the rationale for the "research-based" educational agenda that went along with the tests (see Institution of Education Sciences) and I wondered if I would see evidence of this dismissal of individual experience in Yerkes' theoretical orientation toward his work.

There were over 200 boxes of Yerkes' papers, manuscripts, and notes, so I thought I'd look first in the correspondence between Yerkes and his friend and colleague Robert B. Watson, the father of behaviorism. In my view, Watson's work with infants couldn't have been undertaken if he took infants' experiences seriously.

Watson was famous for his research on primates but also for his popular child-rearing book, *The Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, in which he argued that, "mother love is a dangerous instrument" (1928, p. 87). The book, written in 1928 "with the assistance" of his wife, Rosalie (she was not given a proper byline), was based on Watson's infant experiments. Watson was interested, among other things, in knowing if he could condition fear in infants. He systematically conditioned his young test subject, an eight-month-old boy ("Little Albert") naturally unafraid of any animal, to be afraid of a fuzzy bunny, and, by association, a fur muff and a furry-faced Santa Claus (1928, pp. 23-30). He proudly presented this research in *The Psychological Care of Infant and Child* as proof that parents (and, specifically, mothers) are to blame for children's fears, laziness, and neurosis; furthermore, in Watson's estimation, no parent knows how to be a good parent, and his work in behaviorism was the answer.

How could Watson live with himself as he systematically instilled fear in Little Albert? Was this simply the case of a researcher's natural enthusiasm in the days before International Review Boards? Or was there something particular about Watson's mindset, assumptions, or theoretical orientation that engendered callousness? Had Watson spoken of these experiments to Yerkes? Did Yerkes share Watson's mindset or assumptions? I felt that Yerkes, imposing standardized testing on hundreds of thousands of soldiers and then generations of schoolchildren, was somehow akin to Watson, instilling fear in a baby—at least in the sense that I suspected each man of a certain blindness to his test subjects' experiences.

As I paged through letter after letter, I found myself slipping—like a traumatized infant myself—into the world of early twentieth century American psychology, a world of artifacts and conversations that bewildered me: descriptions of rat mazes; blueprints for a stimulus boxes large enough for dogs and monkeys

(Letter to Robert Yerkes, October 17, 1912); Watson's description of his experimental work with babies (Letter to Robert Yerkes, October 12, 1916); Yerkes' repeated attempts to get Watson to leave the advertising work he did at J. Walter Thompson Company in the 30's and return to the laboratory; Watson's request in 1919 for Yerkes to send three hundred blank Army Alpha test booklets and blanks to The Gilman School, at which his youngest son was a student (Letter to Robert Yerkes, March 29, 1919); Watson's objection to Yerkes' use of the multiple choice test in his primate research (Letter to Robert Yerkes, May 12, 1916); and a debate about the battle between the behaviorists and introspectionists (Watson, J., Letters to Robert Yerkes, April 7, 1913; October 27, 1915; November 1, 1915; October 24, 1916). I suspected that my sneezes weren't just a physiological reaction to the dusty pages I was leafing through, but a fear of becoming lost in this historical rat maze.

I knew nothing of primate research, nothing of introspectionism, and I was beginning to forget why I had come to the archives in the first place. Finally, it was Watson's mention of Edward Titchener that reoriented me. But instead of returning me to the problems that had sent me to the archives in the first place,<sup>1</sup> Watson's full-fledged behavioristic ire at Titchener and the introspectionists led me to a problem that had plagued me as a student of composition studies: James Berlin's full-fledged social epistemic ire at Peter Elbow and the "expressionists."

## JOHN B. WATSON'S BATTLE AGAINST TITCHENER AND INTROSPECTIONISM

I first caught on to Watson's battle against Titchener in a letter from Watson to Yerkes in 1916. In this letter, Watson refers to a slight disagreement he is having with Yerkes regarding the future of behaviorism. Watson summarizes Yerkes' position: that psychology should continue on its current track, as defined by Titchener and the introspectionists, and Yerkes and Watson's shared interest in behavior should be absorbed into physiology or biology. Watson strenuously objects to this separation, asserting his unwillingness to leave psychology in Titchener's hands.

To understand these disagreements—between Watson and Yerkes and between Watson and Titchener—I needed to understand Titchener's view of psychology, which had preceded Watson's. I turned to Titchener's 1898 *A Primer of Psychology*, which begins with a definition of psychology.

The Meaning of 'Psychology.'—The word 'psychology' comes from the two Greek words *psyche*, 'mind,' and *logos*, 'word.'

Psychology therefore means, by derivation, 'words' or 'talk about mind.' (1898, p. 1)

Titchener defined mind not as an object inside the body that either holds or does things to thoughts and feelings, but as "the sum" (1898, p. 5) of thoughts and feelings. In Titchener's view, "we must not say that mind 'has' thoughts and feelings; but that mind is thoughts and feelings" (1898, p. 6). If mind is thoughts and feelings, not an object, then the only way to study mind, the only method of the psychologist, is to look inward and talk about thoughts and feelings—introspection. To Titchener, then, psychology's subject was mind and its method was introspection.

The method of introspection had been used by Titchener's teacher, the German philosopher Willhelm Wundt, who had had created one of the world's first psychology laboratories in 1879. Because Titchener himself was interested in distinguishing psychology from philosophy and from the work of his teacher, he went to great lengths to make introspection an objective process that took several years of training: "only by looking inward can we gain knowledge of mental processes; only by looking inward under standard conditions can we make our knowledge scientific" (1898, p. 32).

But introspective psychology still depended on an individual's description of his private experience, an admittedly subjective basis for a field that Titchener claimed should be more objective and scientific. Titchener's approach to this problem began with implementing rigorous training for each introspector—he called them "Observers"—consisting of a series of standardized introspection exercises: For example, observers in training were instructed to describe what they experienced when listening to certain tones or when exposed to various lights. Titchener invented several instruments for standardizing these exercises himself, including a "sound cage," a mesh of wires surrounding the head connected to a telephone receiver designed to give each Observer practice in pinpointing the exact location of an auditory stimuli. In *Class Experiments and Demonstration Apparatus*, Titchener proposed a standard set of instruments for all psychology classrooms:

whenever possible, we should call on the class to do psychology for themselves. The demonstration apparatus which I have in mind are, then, apparatus which shall subserve this latter purpose: apparatus that shall standardise the conditions for such introspections as the lecture-room and the lecture-hour allow. (1903, p. 440)

Titchener considered Observers themselves to be highly trained scientific instruments, and he bemoaned psychology's great disadvantage in its ability to

share results and instruments across space and time. In the external sciences, scientists could easily ship specimens and the conclusions of their experiments to other interested scientists. But to facilitate the sharing of results and specimens in psychology, the inner science, Observers themselves would have to be shipped at great expense and inconvenience (1909, p. 278).

Still, the knowledge gained by Titchener's Observers was not scientific, objective, or standard enough for John Watson. Other philosophers and psychologists had critiqued Titchener's methods and aims—including the philosopher John Dewey, under whom Watson had studied at the University of Chicago at the turn of the century—but on far different grounds than Watson would. In his 1891 textbook, *Psychology*, Dewey outlined a transactional objection to introspection:

When introspective analysis begins, the anger ceases. It is well understood that external observation is not a passive process ... We shall see hereafter that there is no such thing as pure observation in the sense of a fact being known without assimilation and interpretation through ideas, already in the mind. This is as true of the observation of the facts of consciousness as of perceiving physical facts. (1891, pp. 8-9)

Dewey took no issue with introspection as a psychological method, but simply pointed out that observation is never objective. Watson, however, claimed to find Dewey's ideas altogether incomprehensible, proclaiming in 1936 that, "I never knew what he was talking about then, and unfortunately for me, I still don't know" (Watson, quoted in Cheney & Pierce, 2004, p. 14). We can imagine Watson pausing and winking at his audience—unfortunately for me. After living with almost a century's accumulation of behaviorist influence in everything from advertising to educational policy, we can, of course, wink back—unfortunately for us.

Dewey's colleague, the psychologist William James, also took issue with some of Titchener's ideas. He didn't discredit introspection as an appropriate method for accumulating psychological knowledge, but he disagreed with Titchener's assumption that mind was composed of elementary mental processes and that the goal of introspection was to discover and describe them. In "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology," James objects to "mental atomism," which he refers to here as "the traditional psychology":

The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartpotsful, barrelsful and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and pots all actually standing in the stream, still between

them the free water would continue to flow. It is just this free water of consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook. Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows around it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. (1884, pp. 16-17)

But Watson wasn't interested in Dewey's inherently subjective observations or James' "free water of consciousness." While James' objection to Titchener's mental atomism led to a conception of experience that influenced Husserl and other phenomenologists (Schuetz, 1941, p. 442), Watson's objections would extend to the very concept of consciousness itself—along with purpose, value, and meaning.

Watson had come to believe that mind or consciousness was a religious, medieval construct, unworthy of scientific inquiry. In a private disagreement about the topic with Watson in 1915, Yerkes suggests that perhaps "there should be encouragement given those who are willing to make use of it [introspectionism]" even as they continued their own behaviorist project. Watson counters two days later with what at first seems like a mild, conciliatory reply, suggesting that the two men, in fact, disagreed about very little (Letter to Robert Yerkes, November 1, 1915). But, as Watson points out in his next breath, the small area of disagreement that remains is actually the crux of the matter: introspection depends on the concept of consciousness, which is no more a scientific concept than the soul.

In other words, Watson didn't just disagree with the method of introspection, but with the very construct on which the method was based—consciousness itself. He thought it best to leave the soul and its secular counterpoint, consciousness, to religion; if philosophy wanted to take it up, then psychology must separate wholly from philosophy and study behavior alone. In fact, "religion," along with "mediaeval tradition" and "philosophy," headed the list of insults that Watson was most likely to employ in putting down Titchener and his introspective philosophy. Consider how he uses these terms in the opening four sentences of *Psychology from the Standpoint of the Behaviorist*, published nine years after Watson's small disagreement with Yerkes:

Mediaeval Tradition Has Kept Psychology From Becoming a Science.—Psychology, up to very recent times, has been held so rigidly under the dominance both of traditional religion and of philosophy—the two great bulwarks of mediaevalism—that it has never been able to free itself and become a

natural science. Chemistry and physics have freed themselves. Zoology and physiology are now in the process of becoming emancipated. (1924b, p. 1)

In the following six pages of the book, Watson characterizes psychology's concern with mind and consciousness with these phrases:

The Old Psychology of Mind and Consciousness

... deistic idol already fashioned and worshipped (vii) ... crude dualism ... theological mysticism ... mediaeval tradition ... religion ... philosophy ... mediaevalism ... soul ... so-called states of consciousness ... phenomena of spiritualism ... not objectively verifiable ... no community of data ... mental curiosities ... introspection ... serious bar to progress ... failed to become a science ... deplorably failed ... it would not bury its past ... hang onto tradition ... will not bury their 'medicine men' ... subjective subject matter ... (1898, pp. vii-3)

For all of his emphasis on objectivity, Watson presented his own ideas in an emotionally charged narrative. In Watson's story, psychological medicine men such as Titchener had been sacrificing science and truth on the altar of mediaeval philosophers. His stimulus-response experiments would arm psychologists with objectively verifiable data that would bury these psychological medicine men, emancipating psychology once and for all. Freed from the hocus pocus of mind and consciousness, Watson would help Man—including the military, parents, advertisers, and teachers—finally get control of his actions. (Or, rather, the actions of others.)

For those who cut their teeth on Freudian psychology, it might be tempting to note here that Watson had chafed under the rearing of a strict fundamentalist mother who expected him to become a southern Baptist minister (Buckley, 1989, p. 5). We might see his string of associations—from mind (“a concept as unscientific as the soul”) to religion (a “serious bar to progress”) to mother love (“a dangerous instrument”)—and understand his disposal of the first two as his own attempt to “become emancipated” from his mother. But that would be to put Watson on Freud's couch, a place he would never voluntarily lay his own head (not to be confused with his mind!).

Instead, Watson's definition of psychology—its subject, its methods, and its goals—is inextricable from his rejection of Titchener's. In the first lines of the article in *Psychological Review* (which would later be referred to as the *Behaviorist Manifesto*) Watson sets his definition directly in opposition to Titchener's:

Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods ... the behaviorist ... recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behavior of man, with all of its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviorists' total scheme of investigation. (1913, p. 158)

Everything about Titchner's psychology is dismissed here in one fell paragraph: introspection has no place; behavior is all that matters; and since both man and beast exhibit behavior, the study of animal behavior belongs with the study of human behavior.

To psychologists who believed in the study of mind or consciousness, two major assumptions made the study of animals irrelevant to the study of humans. First, animal mind or consciousness, if it existed at all, was too different from human consciousness to be of use. Second, introspection was the only method of studying mind; introspection involved speaking or writing, and animals couldn't speak or write. (They could, however, as Yerkes would try to prove, take multiple-choice tests!) But in rejecting consciousness, Watson disposes of the first major assumption separating human and animal study. In rejecting introspection as a method, he disposes of the second: animals (or humans, for that matter!) need not talk at all to be of interest to psychologists, who should only be concerned with behavior.

In redirecting psychology's gaze from mind to behavior, Watson didn't just open the door to animal studies—which is why he met Yerkes, who studied primates—but he also redefined psychology's application and goals. In Titchener's psychology, an understanding of an individual's thoughts and feelings had a crucial role to play in ethics, and he went so far as to assert, "Psychology is the foundation of ethics" (1898, p. 296). Titchener saw ethics as general laws that must be determined from the particular "facts of life" (1898, p. 296). He recognized that these facts of life are different in different societies, not to mention different for different individuals, so ethics must be sensitive to these differences. One way to assure such sensitivity was to use the insights of psychology—drawn from the experience of individuals—as an ethical check on the laws of ethics.

The same concern for individual differences in relation to generalizable laws is evident in Titchener's discussion of the application of psychology to pedagogy:

The problem of pedagogy is to lay down rules or norms of education ... the abstract "child" of psychology does not exist for education, not "the child," but real children, Katie Jones and Tommy Smith. Psychology cannot deal with Jones-ness



and Smith-ness, but only with child-ness. Science, indeed, can never be “applied” offhand. (1898, pp. 298-299)

While Titchener acknowledged that psychology is a science that generalizes, the method of his science—the description of an individual’s thoughts or feelings—led to his concern for the interaction of generalizations and individual experience. In other words, a science that made experience its special province had a special interest in how the application of that science affected individual experience.

The reverse was true in Watson’s science: a psychology that dismisses mind, thoughts, feelings, and consciousness as central constructs showed little interest in the effects of its application on individual (human) experience. Watson’s views on the application of psychology to education show none of the caution and respect for individual experience we see in Titchner’s discussion of “Smith-ness” and “Jones-ness.” To Watson, learning was a change in behavior in response to a stimulus, a process that is the same for Katie Jones as it would be for John Smith as it would be for a rat. Later, B. F. Skinner would take Watson’s position on the connection between rats and humans even further, leading Arthur Koestler to write in 1964 that, “for the anthropomorphic view of the rat, American psychology has substituted the rattomorphic view of man” (pp. 560).

Without an introspectionist’s grounding in the experience of the individual, Watson had no qualms about proclaiming the goal and application of psychology as the “control of behavior,” which very quickly came to mean, in practice, the control of individuals. While early critics of behaviorism attacked Watson’s lack of attention to states of mind or consciousness on moral grounds, they perhaps underestimated the potential power of behaviorism to do what Watson says it would: to control behavior.

In 1929, Watson and William MacDougall, a British psychologist, published their debate about behaviorism in *The Battle of Behaviorism*. MacDougall wasn’t opposed to behavioral studies: As he reminded Watson at the outset of their debate, MacDougall himself had been calling for psychologists to attend to behavior a full ten years before Watson began his first behavioral studies of infants. In fact, MacDougall called himself “The Arch-Behaviorist.” But MacDougall objected to Watson’s focus on behavior to the exclusion of concepts such as “‘incentive,’ ‘motive,’ ‘purpose,’ ‘intention,’ ‘goal,’ ‘desire,’ ‘valuing,’ ‘striving,’ ‘willing,’ ‘hoping,’ and ‘responsibility’” (1929, p. 69). He worried about the effects of a psychology that ignored such terms:

I submit to you the proposition that any psychology which accepts this mechanistic dogma and shapes itself accordingly is useless, save for certain very limited purposes, because it

is incapable of recognizing and of taking into account of the most fundamental facts of human behavior ... If all men believed the teaching of the mechanical psychology (and only beliefs that govern action are real beliefs) no man would raise a finger in the effort to prevent war, to achieve peace or to realize any other idea. So I say that the mechanical psychology is useless and far worse than useless; it is paralyzing to human effort. (1929, pp. 69-72)

On one level, MacDougall was strikingly wrong: the application of behaviorism (the control of behavior through the use of conditioning was immediate and widespread. On another level he was strikingly right: behaviorism was most famously used to not to further individual human interests, but to control individual humans in the interests of political and economic power.

The application of behaviorism for the purpose of controlling individuals to further the interests of political and economic power played out most distressingly through Yerkes' involvement in the war effort and Watson's involvement in advertising.

In April of 1918, Yerkes was called to an "Informal Conference on Morale" with the Assistant Secretary of War and the Chief of Intelligence to apply the work of psychology in creating a "systematic plan for stimulating and sustaining morale of troops" (Report of Informal Conference on Morale, 1918). It is worth noting that, in general contemporary usage, morale connotes a happy (or unhappy) individual emotional state. But in the first half of the twentieth century, the military definition of morale emphasized collective action (behavior): "the psychological forces within a combat group that compel its members to get into the fight" (Grinker & Spiegel, quoted in Manning, 1994). In this formulation, "psychological forces" may or may not have anything to do with emotions, much less happiness. What matters is group behavior: if the group is compelled to action, its morale, by definition is high. If it hesitates or refuses to get into the fight, its morale is low.

Of course, as MacDougall might point out, the experience of the soldier whose morale is in question matters greatly. MacDougall had treated victims of "shell shock" in the British army during World War I. Unlike some of his colleagues who used "disciplinary" treatments, which were "behavioural"—"electric shocks, shouted commands, isolation and restricted diet"—MacDougall's treatments followed "psychotherapeutic lines," emphasizing recalling the traumatic experience and discovering its individual meaning to the patient (Howorth, 2000, p. 226). This treatment wouldn't just help the soldier get "back into the fight," but would also help society figure out if the war is worth its experiential and psychological toll. But that toll—for instance, the years of depression, anxiety, and nightmares

that my grandfather suffered after serving in WWII—would mean nothing in the behaviorist's schema of morale, since my grandfather was able to “get back into the fight” shortly following several injuries and a Purple Heart.

Yerkes' behaviorist influence on the American military's discussion of morale could be seen a month after the first meeting of the Conference on Morale when the group met a second time. The title of the group changed slightly: “Conference on *Control* of Morale” (emphasis added). Yerkes' report on the “Scope of the Problem,” frames the problem in behaviorist terms, citing a “great variety and complications of *conditions* affecting morale” (emphasis added), asserting that “the problems are in the main those of human behavior” and so the appropriate person to study such problems is one “who has the ability alike to *predict* reactions and to properly relate methods of *control* to military requirements and needs” (emphasis added). In other words, Yerkes framed the problem of morale as a behavioral one, offering the behaviorist psychologist as its solution.

The group consciously drew on the German system of propaganda as a model for their recommendations, viewing morale as a lifelong process of patriotic conditioning. Approvingly reporting the Germans' use of school as a tool of propaganda and their use of “furloughs and rewards” (positive reinforcements) with soldiers, the group began to plot a comprehensive system to control of morale from the ground up. Yerkes credited his work with this group, and the multiple-choice test he devised to sort and reward recruits with promotion, with helping to win the war (Gould, 1981, p. 224).

Yerkes' application of behaviorism to the military may have helped to win the war, but MacDougall implied that “human effort” would involve the effort to end war. Even if the majority agrees that the war is a good cause, the experiences of those actually participating in the war cannot be dismissed unless, as Watson's behaviorists held, their behavior is all that matters. If it can actually be attributed to him, Yerkes' success in controlling soldiers' morale by focusing solely on their behavior and the conditions shaping that behavior likely confirmed MacDougall's fear: behaviorism at the expense of mind and consciousness is paralyzing to human effort.

Ten years later, Watson would leave the imprint of behavioral psychology on advertising (and generations of consumers) through his work for the J. Walter Thompson Company. In *Mechanical Man: John Broadus Watson and the Beginnings of Behaviorism*, Kerry Buckley argues that before 1910, advertisements emphasized rational appeals to consumers (1989, p. 138). Watson used his behaviorist techniques to condition consumers to associate products with emotions:

Advertisers, [Watson] cautioned, must always keep in mind that they are selling “more than a product.” There are “idea[s]

to sell—prestige to sell—economy to sell ... It is never so much as dry, solid, or liquid matter” ... in one carefully controlled experiment funded by the J. Walter Thompson agency, Watson found that smokers with definite brand preferences could not distinguish one brand of cigarettes from another. This reinforced Watson’s conviction that the marketing of goods depended not on an appeal to reason but upon the stimulation of desire. (139-41)

Watson’s large-scale experimental test on consumers (i.e. advertising campaigns) was just an extension of his test on eight-month old “Little Albert.” Just as he conditioned Albert to associate the rabbit with a loud noise, Watson encouraged advertisers to condition consumers to associate the product with prestige and love, or to associate the lack of a product with fear and rage. While Watson claimed to have been capable of reconditioning Little Albert back to a state of fearlessness (his mother removed him from the study before he could do so), there would be no attempt to “recondition” the public back to their senses. The application of behaviorism to advertising, which took place after MacDougall’s debate with Watson, would confirm MacDougall’s fears that the application of behaviorism would be useless in terms of serving “human purposes.”

## **THE RESEARCHER PAUSES TO DAYDREAM ...**

Several battles had indeed been fought in those archived letters and texts, and the corpses of human purpose, mind, and consciousness littered the dusty pages. It was a heartbreaking spectacle to witness, and my vantage point of nearly a century didn’t make it much easier to bear. I began seeing the behaviorists’ initials on everything about my life I felt to be lonely or controlling. Standardized tests? R. M. Yerkes. Consumer culture? J. B. Watson. Computer grading programs? R.M.Yerkes + J.B.Watson 4-Ever.

Though I had found some of Titchner’s work amusing, and agreed with Dewey’s point that introspection changed the emotional state under observation, I felt a kinship with the introspectionists. I mourned the loss of Titchner’s respect for “Smith-ness” and “Jones-ness” and the influence of behavioristic systems of standardized testing and educational research that had come to shape schools. I had a new explanation for my sense of alienation as a teacher; I had descended from the losers of Watson’s war.

A lost cause always drives me to desperate mental (if not behavioral) measures. I imagined calling for a National Day of Introspection. Individuals all over the country would stand up and introspect—rising from wheelchairs in nursing

homes, climbing on top of desks in schoolrooms, walking out of cubicles in office buildings, stepping from cars in the rat maze of suburban sprawl—all of us standing to boldly speaking the sum of our thoughts and feelings, our consciousness, our mind. The fact that no one would listen would be irrelevant. We would be rising from the carnage, asserting that Watson had won the battle but not the war, that we would not be controlled, that mind mattered.

I knew the image teetered on the edge of insanity, but it made me feel better, so I let it linger. I was looking around me, wondering if the gentleman at the table next to me, texting with one hand and tapping the mouse of his computer with the other hand, would be willing to introspect as a subversive act. I suspected not. Who would join me? I ran through my list of family and friends. As a graduate student, I had so few friends left that I skipped directly to leading figures in the field of composition studies I'd been living with for the past years. Peter Elbow? Definitely. Donald Murray? To be sure. Jane Emig? Hell, yeah! James Berlin? Pshaw. Never in a million years.

That's when it hit me—my thesis, the result of my hours of scholarly research: James Berlin was a behaviorist. James Berlin was a behaviorist? The words were so entirely absurd that they couldn't possibly have come from me. They must have infected me from without, and the only way to rid myself of them was to figure out what they meant. It was either that, or start embroidering National Day of Introspection t-shirts.

## THE “EXPRESSIONISTS” AS INTROSPECTIONISTS

I was proceeding with a working thesis—James Berlin was a behaviorist—which I almost completely rejected. Without a doubt, James Berlin would have shared Professor MacDougall's distress at the exercise of power at the expense of human interest. Ira Shor's pedagogy, which Berlin admiringly describes in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” (1988), is based in a rejection of the consumerist culture that Watson helped create through his work in advertising. Berlin's work is suffused with an ethical sensibility completely lacking from Watson's.

Still, something felt true about my fantastical thesis. I backed up to the most reasonable image in my research-induced fantasy: the picture of Elbow, Murray, and Emig, publicly and subversively introspecting with me. This part of my daydream proved both simple and supportable: Elbow, Murray, and Emig were, in some important way, like Titchener. The comparison held up when I placed a passage from Titchener's psychology textbook next to a passage from Murray's 1970 article, “The Interior View: One Writer's View of Composition”:

A mental process is a process which can form part of the experience of one

person only ... Not only does the mental process go on inside of you, it is so entirely inside of you that you are the only person who can ever get at it and observe it. (Titchener, 1989, pp. 9-10)

And,

At the moment of writing the writer has a fundamental aloneness ... I have found that at the center of the process I am alone with the blank page, struggling to discover what I know so that I can know what to say” (Murray, 1970, p. 22)

Each man put the experiences of an individual at the center of his work. In fact, as I re-examined the works of Murray and Elbow, I realized that they, along with other leaders of the writing process movement, had built an entire theory and practice around introspection—their own, and their students’.

The fact that Murray, a columnist for the *Boston Globe*, would write about his writing in 1970 was not entirely remarkable. Writers had written about their experiences of writing long before he did, and his published work is peppered with their insights: in *The Interior View* alone, Murray quotes no less than 10 authors who write about their writing, including Goethe, Spender, and William Carlos Williams. What was remarkable, perhaps, was that Murray was not just writing as a writer, but as a writing teacher, and he was beginning to construct a theory of how we compose and how we could teach composition from his introspection and the collected introspection of generations of great writers.

Surely, as Tom Newkirk points out, some of the practices Murray advocated—conferencing, regular discussion of student writing, daily writing—had been practiced by Barrett Wendell in the late 1800’s (Newkirk, 1994, pp. 88-89). But Wendell’s theory of composition was not grounded in his observations of his own writing practice; instead, he describes “elastic general principles” that are “observed by thoroughly effective writers” (Wendell, 1891, pp. 2-3). While he does focus on thought and emotion, asserting that they are “the substance of what style expresses” (1891, p. 4), he never describes how a writer manages to compose from those thoughts and emotions.

Wendell is perhaps more comfortable introspecting—observing and narrating his thoughts and feelings—as he reads an example of good style; his discussion of style includes a lengthy (and quite moving) description of how Robert Browning’s style in “*Grammarians’ Funeral*” (1891, pp. 8-11) affects him. He builds a theory of composition, in a sense, around his observations of himself

as a reader: I observe coherence when I read x, a great poem, and therefore, that poet must have observed the principle of coherence. His advice to writers, then, is to observe the principle of coherence, and his job as a writing teacher is, in part, to describe the principle of coherence and its effects on a reader.

Murray calls this approach the “exterior view of writing, principally examining what has been written or studying patterns which have evolved by the analysis of what has been published” (1970, p. 21). He doesn’t dismiss this view as useless, but explains his own view differently: “I do not see writing from the exterior view but from within my own mind and my own emotions as I try to write every single day of my life” (1970, p. 21). Murray’s attention to his own experience—like Titchener’s almost a century earlier—leads him for a concern of the experiences of his students as individuals:

There is no one way to write and there is no one way for the student to learn to write. We must accept the individual student and appreciate his individualness .... ultimately he [the student] has to learn the process for himself. (1970, pp. 24-25)

Three years later, Peter Elbow would publish *Writing Without Teachers*, in which he warned readers that his advice to writers is based on his own experience:

Though much or all of this may be in other books—some of which I have probably read—it seems to me my main source is my own experience. I admit to making universal generalizations upon a sample of one. Consider yourself warned. (1973, p. 16)

Elbow’s generalizations are the product of his introspection about his writing process. He describes how he came to the practice of freewriting: when he got stuck while writing, he would,

... take out a fresh sheet of paper and simply try to collect evidence: babble everything I felt, when it started, and what kind of writing and mood and weather had been going on. (1973, p. 18)

Similarly, when Elbow successfully broke through his writing block,

I would often stop and try to say afterwards what I thought happened. I recommend this practice. If you keep your own data, you may be able to build your own theory of how you can succeed in writing since my theory of how I can succeed may not work for you. (1973, p. 18)

Elbow didn't just introspect in order to arrive at the principles that student writers must observe: he proposed a form of introspection as the means by which each individual student writer might "learn the process for himself" (1973, p. 15).

Ten years after Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*, Murray would suggest in *Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader* that the point of the writing conference was not to examine the student text, but to interact with the introspecting student—the "other self" created by the student's introspection. Murray claimed that the writer must be his own reader, and that in reading his own writing, he forms two distinct selves: the first self who writes; and the "other self" who reads, counsels, advises, and navigates the territory mapped out by the writing for the first self. The other self also introspects: "the other self articulates the process of writing" (Murray, 1982, p. 142).

Lest we confuse an articulation of the process of writing with a purely behavioral description of what the writer does, Murray assured us that the teacher must first acknowledge and respond to the writer's descriptions of his feelings as he writes (1982, p. 145). The writer needs this other self to develop and grow, and the teacher can help make this growth possible simply by encouraging, expecting, and listening to the other self speak.

## FROM INTROSPECTION TO FREUD: LAYERS OF SELF

Despite my fear that Watson had littered the pages of history with the corpses of mind and consciousness, introspection was clearly alive and well in the 1970s and 1980s, at least in composition studies. Introspection might have fallen out of vogue in the wake of behaviorism, but the "interior view" of the introspectionists had survived and been nurtured elsewhere while it waited for Elbow and Murray to surface anew as spokespersons. While writing process movement founders such as Murray, Elbow, and Emig never drew directly on Titchener's work or mention the method of introspection, they drew consciously on Freud's work. Three years after Murray proposed nurturing the student writer's "other self," Janet Emig described the multiple selves—or multiple layers of self—that must be attended to by the writing teacher. Her version of Murray's "other self" had a Freudian twist: the writing teacher must nurture the student's unconscious self.

Rather than dividing the writer into two separate selves as Murray did, she divided the self into layers. These layers first take the form of skin in her opening startling and wonderful image of the writer who has dutifully produced "the conscious student theme" (1983, p. 46):



the theme seems to have been written from one layer of the self—the ectoderm only, with student involvement with his own thought and language moving down an unhappy scale from sporadic engagement to abject diffidence. (Emig, 1983, p. 46)

Emig quickly drops the skin analogy—we hear nothing further about the ectoderm or endoderm—but in this line, she vividly plants the idea of the layered self, some of the layers exposed on the surface, and some submerged underneath. It was a small leap to Freud’s concept of the conscious and unconscious self, and the related (though not strictly interchangeable) constructs: the id, ego, and super-ego.

Freud never viewed the conscious or unconscious as having different locations within the body in any literal sense. But popular imagination did. Even now we talk of “uncovering” our unconscious thoughts, of “peeling the onion” of our selves in therapy, of repressed or recovered memories which implies a place where the forgotten memories have been stored, held under the surface, hidden from our conscious self, which lies at the surface. Emig was not a Freudian scholar, and did not cite Freud in “The Uses of the Unconscious in Composing” (1964) so she was likely working with this popular understanding of the spatial division of the conscious and unconscious selves.

Like Murray, who wanted to see a shift from the “exterior view” of composition to the “interior view,” Emig argued that traditional writing instruction doesn’t allow the student to “consult this [unconscious] part of the self” and “conspires against his inwardly attending” (1983, p. 46). She discusses how author Rudyard Kipling personified the “unconscious part of the writing self into daemons” (1983, p. 49) and how Amy Lowell described dropping a simple topic for a poem “into the subconscious much as one drops a letter into the mailbox. Six months later ... the poem ... was ‘there’” (Lowell quoted in Emig, 1983, p. 52). Writing teachers needed to encourage inward attending—journeys to the unconscious—if students were to write papers that went beyond (or below) the “surface scrapings” produced by a traditional overemphasis on the surface of the self—the control of the conscious mind.

Five years after Emig’s “The Uses of the Unconscious in Composing,” Murray would make his plea for the role of procrastination in composing on the grounds that procrastination allowed the subconscious to do its work. In *Write Before Writing*, he describes why writers procrastinate:

They sharpen well-pointed pencils and go out to buy more blank paper, rearrange offices, wander through libraries and bookstores, chop wood, walk, drive, make unnecessary calls,

nap, daydream, and try not ‘consciously’ to think about what they are going to write so they can think subconsciously about it. (1978, p. 376)

To Murray, Elbow, and Emig, one legitimate subject of composition studies was the writing self, and that self was divided: into the writing self and the other self; into the unconscious or subconscious and conscious; or into the id, ego, and super-ego. Emig and Murray emphasized the subconscious mind, unconscious mind, or the id as a corrective to the overemphasis in traditional writing instruction on the conscious mind. Just as the concept of self (or “selves,” or “layers of the self”) was central to the work of early writing process pioneers such as Murray, Elbow and Emig, consciousness (not in the Freudian sense), or mind had been central to the work of introspectionists such as Titchener. And this comparison provided me the bridge to my otherwise absurd claim that James Berlin was a behaviorist. To use an analogy that would never show up on the SAT: John B. Waston is to Titchener as James Berlin is to Murray, Elbow, and Emig.

Like Watson, who rejected the concept of consciousness and thus the central concepts of introspectionists like Titchener, James Berlin would reject the self at the center of Murray, Elbow, and Emig’s version of composition studies. Berlin’s criticism of the self in the late 1980s boils down to his view that the self—as a private space—does not exist, and the self that does exist cannot be trusted in the way that Elbow, Murray, and Emig trust it.

Berlin’s critique of this private self begins with a discussion of the concept that Berlin would put at the center of his composition theory and practice: ideology. Drawing from Theborn’s interpretation of Althusser’s definition of ideology, Berlin establishes his working definition of ideology as “economic, social, and political arrangements” (1987, p. 667), which privilege certain groups and their interactions with each other and the material world. He “situates rhetoric within ideology” (1987, p. 667), which means that he sees rhetoric as advancing instead of mediating various ideologies.

Berlin labels the rhetoric of Elbow and Murray as “subjective” or “expressionistic.” He labels Emig’s work in *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* as “cognitive rhetoric,” but ignores her “Uses of the Unconscious in Composing,” which would probably have qualified her for membership as an expressionist. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, he identifies the focus of Elbow’s expressionistic rhetoric:

His emphasis, like that of all the expressionists considered in this section, is on the “I,” on defining the self so as to secure an authentic identity and voice. This type of expressionistic rhetoric focuses on a dialectic between the individual and

analogy as a means of getting in touch with the self. (1987, p. 153)

While Berlin acknowledges that Elbow and Murray's version of expressionistic rhetoric was actually a protest against the dominant political and pedagogical ideology and practice of the mid-twentieth century, he asserts that their focus on the individual perpetuates a naïve understanding of the self that undermines its own potential for changing dominant political and economic inequalities.

Berlin claims that expressivism's focus on discovery of the self is problematic in two ways: it doesn't acknowledge the ways in which the self has been formed by ideological forces, so it often replicates dominant oppressive ideologies; and a focus on individual self-expression can be appropriated by the dominant ideology because it leads to only individual resistance (1987, p. 676). Individual resistance is impotent; a rhetoric that doesn't lead to collective action, in Berlin's mind, supports hegemony.

Here to save the day is social epistemic rhetoric. In Berlin's description of social epistemic rhetoric, knowledge results from the dialectic between a person, the social group in which the person is acting, and the "material conditions of existence," all of which depend on language because they are "verbal constructs" (1987, p. 678). Furthermore, language—in which all three elements of this dialectic are grounded—is itself the result of social construction in discourse communities, so the individual is never really an individual. In essence, the "self" or knowledge or idea that the student in an expressivist classroom is discovering and expressing is actually the product of social construction and ideology. According to Berlin, ideology is inescapable but "must be continually challenged" so as to reveal its economic and political consequences for individuals ... (1987, p. 679). In Berlin's opinion, the only rhetoric prepared to continually challenge and reveal ideology is the social epistemic.

Pedagogy based in a social epistemic rhetoric, then, starts by showing students the ways in which they have been constructed by their social, economic, and political realities in ways that make them feel powerless. Then, it attempts to help them work towards "a social order supporting the student's 'full humanity'" (Berlin, 1987, p. 680). Berlin describes Ira Shor's interdisciplinary study of the hamburger as an example of social epistemic pedagogy. Shor's class used economics, history, health sciences, sociology, English, and philosophy in order to analyze the modern rise of the hamburger and its effects on students' lives. According to Shor, the only goal worth considering in a classroom is the goal of "liberated consciousness" (Berlin, 1987, p. 682).

Berlin's critique of expressivism is curious, on many levels. None of the expressivists he critiques would oppose several of his main assertions: that language

is social; that different teaching practices express different ideologies; that one of the goals of writing instruction is liberation. But despite these major areas of agreement, there is something incredibly aggressive about Berlin's treatment of the expressivists. Like Watson's *Battle of Behaviorism*, in which Watson is determined to advance behaviorism at the expense of introspectionism, Berlin is engaging in an act of warfare against the expressionists. This is hard to see, at first, since Berlin's writing comes across as completely rational, academic, and disinterested.

But his attitude is revealed in the one metaphor that manages to invade his otherwise sterile prose. Held up next to the writing of the expressionists, Berlin's writing is almost completely stripped of metaphor and analogy—no surprise, since he associates metaphor and analogy with the expressionists. But one recurrent metaphor stretches throughout Berlin's *Rhetoric and Ideology*, a more polemic essay than his (relatively) descriptive categorization of various influences on writing instruction in *Rhetoric and Reality*. The metaphor, embedded in the word "camp," is undeveloped in the text but central to Berlin's attitude in the text: the image of a battle between Berlin and the expressionists belies Berlin's academic, rational, reasonable tone. Berlin's "camps" are not separate but happily co-existing summer camps on opposite sides of the same lake, with expressionists sunbathing on one shore and social epistemics drinking bug juice on the other. Instead, they are the camps of opposing armies, bunkered down and strategizing against one another. Or, at least, Berlin is bunkered down and strategizing against the expressionists; he is looking to defeat them.

Berlin's aggression seems contraindicated. In an ethnographic study of expressivist writing classrooms conducted in 1994 at Boston College, Karen Surman Paley (2001) found how the writing in these classes resists the divisive categories imposed by Berlin. The "expressivist" instructors she studied invariably moved students beyond the personal in ways envisioned by the social epistemics. Furthermore, Paley visited the class of Patricia Bizzell, whom Berlin labels a social epistemic, and describes the ways in which Bizzell's focus on the social led to personal, autobiographical writing (2001). In other words, the focus on the individual Berlin ascribes to the expressivists and the focus on the social that Berlin ascribes to the social epistemics do not work against each other in practice, although he set them apart in theory.

Furthermore, Emig, Murray, Elbow, and Berlin ultimately have the same goal—to escape manipulation of the dominant ideology when that ideology works against the "human purposes" MacDougall so eloquently defended against Watson's focus on behavior. But Berlin's ire at the expressionist is perhaps not rational, and may be rooted in an unconscious reaction to the unconscious self, the very construct he derides in the expressionists' work. Thus, my absurd

sub-thesis: Berlin is a man uncomfortable with the unconscious. Yet, for all his attempts at consciousness and control, he cannot escape the unconscious: his ire at the expressionists is as much a gut reaction against their embrace of the unconscious as a conscious criticism of their theory or pedagogy.

While Emig never cited Freud, it may be useful to examine his description of the id in *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis* when trying to understand Berlin's response to the unconscious:

we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations . . . .  
It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organisation, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. (1989, p. 91)

The beginning of Berlin's discomfort is the preverbal nature of the unconscious. The unconscious is beyond and before language, in Freud's formulation, and we can describe it only by analogy. We know it only through its metaphoric manifestation through our dreams and in our feelings—our non-verbal reactions to events and people. But Berlin wants to believe that knowledge doesn't exist without rhetoric—"there is no knowledge without language."

In Emig's view, the unconscious, or id, knows things, not necessarily knowledge that comes through or from language, and in using the unconscious in composing, students can find a site of invention—a place to generate or discover knowledge. For example, my daydream—the image of Elbow, Murray, and Emig's participation in my National Day of Introspection—was an example of my subconscious invention. To mix Amy Lowell's unconscious mailbox analogy with Elbow's cooking metaphor, I dropped my research on Watson and the introspectionists into the mailslot, let it mix around and simmer with my previous discomfort about Berlin's attitude toward the expressionists, presto! Out came my daydream, the image of Murray introspecting and Berlin refusing, which was a preverbal thesis of sorts. That preverbal knowing, or image-knowledge, quickly turned to words when I meditated on it.

But Berlin's second, more urgent point of contention is with the idea that the id "produces no collective will" (1987). The collective will that interests Berlin, of course, is a collective resistance to the dominant ideology. However, Berlin forgets that Freud's complementary concept—the super-ego—could be viewed as the individual's internalization of the dominant ideology. Emig is just as interested as Berlin in overcoming the damaging aspects of the super-ego, or dominant ideology, but, unlike Berlin, she sees the id as immensely useful in this quest.

In Emig's view, the super-ego does damage on two fronts, and the use of the id can be used to correct both. First, the super-ego speaks in stale, flat, cliché. The id can provide fresh image and language to counteract these dead expressions. Secondly, and more to Berlin's point, access of the id can point to differences between the values of the dominant ideology internalized by the super-ego and the needs of an individual human being which are contained in the id. Let's consider an example from the Vietnam War, which played a major role in shaping Murray, Emig, and Elbow's views of on the role of authority in the classroom. A male student's super-ego may have internalized all forms of societal authority, including the authority of the draft. But, in an expressionist classroom, that student might be invited to listen to his unconscious, in a journal, or through freewriting, perhaps. He might find that his id is uncomfortable with the war. He might move to Canada or become a Quaker or even become an activist. Listening to your unconscious, then, for the expressionists, can be the first step in political action—individual or collective action.

But Emig's use of the id to escape ideology is frightening to Berlin, who views the presence of "desire" in the id as problematic. In Althusser's work, which Berlin relies on quite a bit, desire cannot be trusted, since ideology creates and structures desire. Thus, desire itself and all inner life is unreliable and cannot be trusted. While the expressionists and Berlin both want to escape manipulation of the ideological forces that abuse power, Berlin's distrust of the unconscious makes him suspicious of the expressivists. Emig sees the unconscious as a means of escaping the dominant ideology, but Berlin actually sees Emig's means of escape as a trap door. The only alternative, then, is for Berlin to consciously escape manipulation. There is nothing to trust, in Berlin's world, except social epistemic rhetoric, which helps him escape himself. He has consciously divorced himself from his id, and divorces himself from anyone who hasn't. The expressivists' acceptance and use of the id is not only naive, but dangerous, a trap door.

Berlin's criticism of the expressivists for failing to privilege collective over private action is the most distressing part of his critique. Elbow, Emig, and others protested Berlin's critique on the grounds that they are, quite obviously, interested in political action. But what concerns me most in Berlin's emphasis on collective action is what it reveals about his own attitude toward individual experience: in dismissing the value of an individual act of conscience, he expresses a disregard for the value of that individual's experience.

Berlin's dismissal of private acts of conscience points to a similarity between Berlin and Watson. Watson rejected consciousness, mind, and individual experience, and his dismissal of experience as a theoretical construct made him callous to the experience of the people whose behavior he would try to control—including Little Albert and generations of consumers. In a surprisingly

similar way, Berlin's dismissal of the value of the private self on theoretical grounds makes him callous to the experiences of those who take private stands against the dominant ideology. While the conscientious objector who moves to Canada instead of organizing a protest on Washington doesn't make any discernable difference in the dominant ideology, his private act of conscience certainly makes a difference in his own experience of his life, and this difference matters—to him, and to the people who love him. Berlin's inability to concede that private experience matters is disturbing, given his ethical stand on matters of ideology.

In the end, my absurd, unconsciously constructed thesis both collapses and stands. Berlin was never a behaviorist. But there are startling similarities between his battle with the expressivists and Watson's battle with the introspectionists. Berlin's ideological critique of the expressivists, for all its ethical posturing, suffers from the same problem that plagues Watson's critique of the introspectionists: his dismissal of the value of an individual's private experience—perhaps grounded in his own unconscious discomfort with the unconscious—leads him to dubious ethical territory. As Titchener reminded us, ethics must be based in a concern for the experience of an individual. Berlin's social epistemic theory cannot be ethically grounded if it wages war on expressivism; the two “camps” need to make love, not war.

## NOTES

1. I eventually returned to this dismissal of experience in my dissertation: *Writing Assessment's "Debilitating Inheritance": Behaviorism's Dismissal of Experience*. (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

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