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Dear Reader:

In our fourth issue, Neal Bras picks up on something we hear almost every day from students: "I don't have any confidence." He explores the implications of the light of what certain revisionists have come to see as the authentic center of Freudian theory, viz., the concept of psychical continuity. Those who identify Freudianism with a rigid determinism, a seri-fy linker causality, will be surprised to discover the difference this point of departure makes. Neal's appreciation of the hermetic power of the idea of psychical continuity is appreciated by Rosemary Dorn who expounds on the practical implications. We welcome your further comments, Neal's exploration here reminds me of Kenneth Burke's flexible and unimpassioned deployment of theory throughout his career. In our next issue, we will have an essay by Robert Gottlieb on Burke's recapitulations.

James Zebrowski responds here to Susan Wells's "Vigilant sky Reeds Crown" with an incisive comment on the implications of Vigodsky's philosophy of learning for our pedagogy. The "zone of proximal development" is so powerful a concept that I think we must learn to salivate the jerry short term, novel Jon's idea of an "echoic composition" is full of interest for those who find themselves thinking about the social contexts of the making of meaning.

Recently, a correspondent wrote expressing approval of the format and style of our broadside, offering that "there is something salubrious in the very short essay form, something hindered by our usual self-indulgence in print." Yes! one model I've had in mind is Brecht's "Table from the Calendar"—the idea of telling political tales in as succinct a manner as the novel tales featured on religious calendars prepared for the observation of patrons in earlier ages. Think of Correspondences as The Writing Teacher's Almanac.

Your response to Neal's observations is welcomed, along with further comment on Vigodsky. And send your comments on method—why it shouldn't be, why we must have it, why we mustn't allow it, how to think about it—to me at the address below:

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Writing Without Confidence
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So much popular psychoanalysis affects the composition classroom—from the teacher's assumption of the value of personal experience to the student's assumption that a teacher will consider his motives. What counts is psychoanalysis: The biologically meaningful symptoms? The interpretation of dreams? The theory of development? Oedipus? The Freudian slip?

Almost a century after Freud and Breuer first argued that the tea of hysteric was meaningful, it is possible to identify the first principle of psychoanalysis to bring it into the composition classroom validly—and to help the composition teacher make progress with that same task which faced Freud and Breuer, to explain seemingly incomprehensible human activity. In this essay, that principle will provide a route to understanding that promising student who, despite the composition teacher's most dedicated efforts, fails to realize his or her promise.

According to Norman Reider, a contemporary American psychoanalyst, "the only absolutely necessary assumption for a psychoanalytic theory is the concept of psychical continuity and the continuity of psychical life." The locus classicus for Reider's position is Freud's definition of the meaningfulness of the symptom: "Let us once more reach an agreement upon what is to be understood by the 'sense' of a psychical process. We mean nothing outer by it than the intention it serves and its position in a psychical continuity."

For Freud, then, the meaningfulness of a symptom was the motive it served and its relationship to other meanings is a "continuity," a connectedness, of all other experience. If an individual suffered a significant memory gap, or if his behavior was incongruous or inconsistent, the assumption of continuity would result in an explanation. By restoring such gaps and interpreting incongruities, first through hypnosis,
The bright, sincere, "promising" students who never realize their promise are an enigma worthy of Freud. Despite important personal differences, they all seem to share one or more of a set of characteristics:

- At worst, these students do not complete a course, though they do not seem to have serious health or work problems, and if they receive incompletes, they do not finish the work within the time mandated.
- Certain essays that these students write seem in bits, in fragments, hasty, with no coherence, or with childish problems of spelling or punctuation; or, the essays are irrationally fat from what was assigned, so that it is impossible for a teacher to draw a bridge between what the student wrote and what the assignment required.
- In class, their answers are not appropriate to the question, the discussion is off the point.
- In conferences, or in the hall after class, the student may explain the source of the difficulty, or may not. Occasionally, there is a sort of picture as to take on some other role, of friend, patron, confidante, member of the family, even child with some of our older students—anything but teacher.
- Often in conferences—often conferences on the day the paper should have been submitted— I find myself giving encouragement or working through an imagistic that was due. Usually the student leaves the office bewildered and here is the crucial thing: between the appointment and the next class, the work somehow does not get done, the effort has served no useful purpose.

What do my colleagues and I intend to do? We may ask the student what the source of the difficulty is that stands in such contrast to the student’s potential. We may try to analyze the extramural information and, perhaps, assign something out of our composition theory—prolific writing, or the stages of composition in Ann Berloho’s double helix—or try to find some flow in the student’s composing method. But it doesn’t work.

When everything fails, the teacher gets tough—gives B’s, changes course procedures in the sixth week, and expands a pedagogic liberation into sympathetic college wide—though not depriving students of freedom to fail... This, to me, seems extraordinary more than the teacher’s novel frustration. The single most important thing about students of this type is that they tend to receive more time and attention than all other students, but that the time and effort produce no more or whatever. Whether or not the student is not meeting his potential, I am not getting more, and at some cost.

One thing that does write me consistently about promising students who don’t come through—and they can be hockey players from Nebraska or returning women from the suburbs—is how often they say that their basic problem is that they “lack confidence.” When I last taught Intermediate Composition, one student said the obvious, “I don’t have confidence,” and the class picked it up like the Greek chorus at a revival meeting.

Beider refers to an elaboration of the basic assumption of psychanalysis, viz., the meaningfulness of the symbol in the context of a psychological continuum. It comes from David Rapaport’s essay, “The Scientific Method of Psychology.” It is one historical event in the psyche [4] life so
have anything to do with mother, it has to be assumed that there is a psychic[al] continuity in thinking about the familiar declaration, "I lack confidence." We can rephrase the statement to recognize explicitly. But if it is meaningful, it has an insertion: "I lack confidence for a purpose," or "I disavow confidence—I need to lack confidence." But we now have the problem of understanding what is meant by "lacking confidence." This question can also be approached, in the light of the basic assumption of psychological continuities, that it is to say, the particular motive for losing confidence must rest in the psychological continuity in some part of the student's psychical life. Assuming that motive does not originate in the student's relation to us as a class, it must rest in some current or prior experience outside of class. Lacking confidence may not get the student very far with us, but it's not the whole picture—there's more to the student's psychical continuity than our pedagogic contact.

However, to be an interpreter, espousing agent, bogy-body, trooper, counselor, questioner-into-the-personal-life and especially to be the student's therapist is not appropriate. It is an invasion of the student's privacy, which the student, particularly given his or her lack of performance, may feel inadequate to resist. To act like a therapist will complicate and may compromise the role of teacher. If we obtain the relevant personal information, it may seem unfair to the students and to ourselves, to place that information aside and make academic demands on the student. Further, unless we are trained therapists, we now have information we are not professionally trained to use, except perhaps to refer the student to a counselor (which is what we might have done in the first place).

Occasionally, over the years, without prying, we get enough factual information from therapy to conclude that students may suggest what motives we might think:

- Many students are the first in their families to attend college, and we occasionally discover that no one at home supports their doing so. Families and friends may be jealous, frightened or angry—and not without reason: the student who does well with unchanges. Those at home may be left behind, or left out. Lack confidence works this situation into a compromise: the student goes to school but doesn't accomplish enough to warrant a split with his or her family.

- For a few, they go to school, putting a strain on housekeeping and making demands on the spouse, calling into question a spouse's lack of equivalent ambition, may lead to scenes of violence. Preventing a separation, sustaining a family with young children, may thus be a motive for disavowing confidence.

- There is the truly psychosocial realm of persistence of the past, the student with parents who were told that he or she is stupid by past teachers who, in turn, may have replicated parents who might also have attacked the student. To disavow confidence may serve to protect the student's love for a cruel figure in the past.

- Any student who truly does what we ask is rebuilding his mind, acquiring new mental structures, and that is terribly difficult. The mental states of learning may be a motive for "disavowal," which has been defined simply as "refusing to recognize the reality of a traumatic perception."

- The basic assumption of psychosociality is fully compatible with the sociological analysis of status-related discourse phenomena. It is safe to say that code-conflict between the student and the teacher may provoke enough anxiety to motivate disavowal as a defense.

The ubiquity of psychosociality clieks encourages us to assume that teachers have access to students' "Unconscious." But something different is meant by this "Unconscious" than out-of-consciousness aspects of the personal, the unconscious and Freud himself — in art's career, accepted the second type of unconscious. Let's agree to take the term "Deep Unconscious" as the locus of human instincts and the domestication of these instincts in the infant in order to create a real person. This domestication carries the classic psychomotor of the "Oedipal conflict." If you believe in Carj Jung, the unconscious also contains memories of a racial evolution from animal to human. I would argue that composition teachers do not have access to such a deep, instinctual unconscious. We work with our students' fundamental ways of dealing with reality with ego functions, if you like, and they are partly unconscious, but not deep like that.

I would illustrate the difference with a parable that David Rapaport tells for precisely this purpose of differentiating the deep unconscious from the mechanisms of dealing with reality.

There was a Eastern king who heard about Moses. He heard that Moses was a leader of men, a good man, a wise man, and he wished to meet him. But Moses, busy wandering forty years in the desert, couldn't come. So the king sent his painters to Moses and they brought back a picture of him. The king called his physiognomists and astrologers and asked them, "What kind of man is this?" They went into a huddle and came out with a report which read: This is a cruel, greedy, self-seeking, dishonest man. The king was much puzzled. He said, "Either my painters do not know how to paint or there is no such science as astrology or physiognomy." To decide this dilemma, he went to see Moses and after seeing him cried out, "There is no such science as astrology or physiognomy." When Moses heard this, he was surprised and asked the king what he meant. The king explained, and Moses only shook his head and said, "No. Your physiognomists and astrologers are right. That's what I was made off. I bought against it and that's how I became what I am."
The point is that even for a major psychoanalytic figure such as Rapaport, depth is not equivalent to importance. We need not be in contact with the deep unconscious to be doing something important, helping our students to develop the mechanisms for dealing with reality very important, and nobody else is contributing much to that except teachers.

If a student is disavowing confidence as a compromising solution to a conflict, he or she is unlikely to admit it, for the admission would be an admission, the opposite of the defense. The teacher forces him or her interpretation of the disavowal onto the student, the defense will lose its power as a compromise-solution, and the student will be forced to adopt a harder defense against him or her conflict.

The gap between promise and accomplishment in our students, like other psychical splits, tends to get more severe, the student identifying more with the negative side. The student’s split expresses a good-bad idealization, the “good” promise vs. the “bad” failure-to-deliver. Ironically, we interpreting the student’s behavior deepens the split and contributes to the student’s identifying with his incompetence, for the teacher’s act of interpretation implies that the teacher knows the student better than he knows himself. Our showing our wisdom by interpreting to him puts us on the side of the good intelligent promise, and the student on the side of the bad failure-to-deliver. How grateful the student appears at the end of the office hour in which the interpretation was given.

Being interpreted is frightening, especially if one has not voluntarily entered a therapeutic relationship. It may seem like being possessed. Michael Balint, in The Basic Fault, has articulated overly-deep interpretations by Kleinian therapists on the grounds that it is frightening to have someone seeing inside oneself and defining one with his interpretations, whatever they are. The fright may be all the greater if the teacher, whose role is not defined as therapist, proceeds under the therapeutic arc.

Anyone who relies on as debilitating a defense as disavowing confidence is not going to surrender it upon hearing the teacher interpretation. Teachers are not vested with the power to understand the long-term nature of motive interpretation. In other words, therapists must respect the power of romance as much as the power of insight. Teachers may provoke a sudden outbreak of relief by interpreting, but every therapist knows that what matters is the long-term process, year after year, and that for many patients the darkest time is after the dawn.

Guided by the inference of a powerful hidden conflict in students’ psychical continuity, a teacher should act so as to lessen the need for defense, rather than trying to bring it to light. To avoid deepening the good-bad split of the “lack of confidence defense,” a teacher might design assignments which re-idealize and integrate the student’s composition work. If one is teaching literature, one might assign the collection of observations, or metrical auition, or word-level exercises—anything to get away for the moment from “vision,” “psychological problems,” and other millennial concepts which contribute to the idealization. Students might be asked to work every day in class, and to do small-scale, humble activities at home—anything to develop patterns of habits and strengths, rather than to stimulate conflicts between the ideal and a felt worldlessness.

My title, "Writing Without Confidence," item, is not facetious. The idea that a student must develop "confidence" to write exacerbates this type of unconscious conflict. The crucial thing is this: if you have a student "full of promise" who isn’t doing much, teach the “not doing much” and not to the “promise.”

There are, of course, many close variants of the "lack of confidence" student; the assumption of physical constancy and intuition remains valid. A colleague at a university with somewhat weaker student notices that instead of referring to their "lack of confidence," her students make earnest promises to do better work—which they do not keep, but the two types of declarations perform similar functions. Students who make such promises place higher value on moral resolve against the negative side of their split then students who report the inner condition of "lack of confidence.

Another fact is the habitually bored student—who does nothing. The boredom, of course, puts the burden of guilt on the teacher for "being boring." This student projects his own internal conflict outward, directing it at the teacher in a way that the "lack of confidence" and "lack resolve" students do not. But the bored student is not "doing nothing" because the assignments are beneath him or are uninteresting to him. A teacher should therefore give such bored students special assignments more idealized, more "worthy" of them. No assignment will be worthy of a student who expresses his boredom by camouflaging an inner conflict about doing productive work. When the defenses of idealization, splitting, denial, and projection assert themselves, the basic assumption of psychotherapy suggests that the teacher de-idealize the pedagogist, thus roughly below the threshold of such conflicts. They should simply get the pain moving, ask confounded students to think of their wheels like the Sufis say.” Agonizes that, psychologically, they are.
Bibliographical Note

Bread and Scit
Rosemary Deen
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The reasoning patient of Neal Braun's essay leads us from a first principle: "Mental life is intentional and continuous," through familiar, psychoanalytic terms, to a problem teachers face but can't solve: Promising students who don't fulfill their promise. The problem appears nearly in ironic action, as the dedicated teacher makes it worse: to interpret such students to themselves deepens the split. They project their "good" promising self on to the idealized, wise teacher, and so more easily identify themselves with their incompleteness.

Along with the bread of patience, we find some didactic salt: analysis of student problems exposes some teacher problems when the teacher is the student's interests, counselor, questioner, therapist. For example: political problems of teacher power ("an invasion of the student's privacy which the student may feel inadequate to resist") or identity problems—for the student's imperfect self-identification is matched by the teacher's. The teacher is not a therapist: therapists, for one thing, "respect the power of resistance as much as the power of insight."

At first the essay's psychoanalytic axioms seem to be telling us what we already know. But we obviously don't believe it's our acts but our beliefs. Bringing Freud's hypothesis back to its context enables Neal to show, with reasoning from psychoanalysis, why teachers cannot treat their conflicted students psychoanalytically. The conclusion is very important: we help them with de-idealized work which keeps them from moving.

How? Do "small-scale, humble activities" mean that we give conflicted students special assignments, make-work from the current repertoire of "the writing process"? No.

For "any student who truly does what we ask is rebuilding his mind, requiring new mental structures, and that is terribly difficult." All students need assignments designed to integrate their work. That's the teacher's proper job.

...teachers do not have access to...[the] deep, instinctual unconscious. We work with our students' fundamental ways of dealing with reality—with ego functions....

That means we work with habit and elemental skills—though the word skill is too mundane for the rapid vocabulary expansion of today's theory, and 

There is a hard saying for teachers who get bored easily and want to bring their capacity for boredom into class work. But skill is, properly, power over self, and habit is the way to make writing easy and fluent. Our activities, I believe, must be as kernels are, small but containing their own power to develop and proliferate.

When I started to define such activities, I thought of a common type of "promising" student: she writes well, even brilliantly, on the first essay but slips, in later papers (though I fail to recognize the signs of stress because her "promise" had seemed accomplished), and finally blows the last necessity—sits through the final exam and kinda in an empty blue book. But having learned one real skill in the early days of the course, she could, at the end, be assigned pages of observations (fragments, but right on the point) and pull herself through.

We want pen-moving work which:

—begins early,
—"is done by the whole class,
—is in itself mind-building (is useful right away in other courses),
—is a rejoining sort of work.

Two practices fill this bill: rewriting single, key sentences, and writing observations.

By rewriting I don't of course mean copy-editing, mending with crossed sentences, but the rewriting in three to five—or eight to ten—variations of a single good sentence (an aphorism, as opening or closing sentence, a defining sentence) written by a class member. "All writing," Marie Ponsot says, "is an ordering of what the writer has in mind." What she calls "the fertility of syntax" means that rewriting can handle an idea: unpack it, turn it, take it a step further: it's "the natural way to keep thoughts going."

Rewriting teaches revising, as act most students don't know (a fact most teachers don't know). Irresistibly easy to learn, rewriting can also teach. Marie tells her students, that "words rewritten are taken deeply into the mind. If you really want to learn something, write and rewrite about it until you envision it, and then write out what you see."

Writing observation (as distinguished from inferences) is to say, "The poem begins in the past tense, goes to future..."
tense, and ends in the past without ever having gone through a present," instead of, "I feel the poem is mysterious." The impressionistic, optimistic, "cri-
tiquing" talk that he's on in writing and literature courses, like the "millennial concept." Naïl mentions, keeps students afloat among the indefinite and indeterminate. But observations foist a student's naiveté to one of his best para
des of himself: the unpremeditated response of intellec
tiveness to emphasis and relationships.

Rewriting and observing are personal and authorial, yet
publicly recognizable and confirming. They are practices
which teach inductively, are consecutive, cumulative, and
can be repeated incrementally. They are writing which,
apparently done "in him," actually ranges through and
connects mental points. This is calming and constructive.
In order to make place for them and put them into play, a
teacher may have to do a little "de-idealizing" of self and
work more prospectively on course design.

Near the end of their dialog Socrates asks Meno
whether he has observed the statues of Dardan in curiosit
things which run away unless they are tied down:

if you have one of his works unthrawn, it is not worth
much; it gives you the slip... But a restrained specimen
is very valuable, for they are magnificent creations. True
opinions are a fine thing and do all sort of good so long
as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long.
They run away from a man's mind; so they are not worth
much until you tether them by working out the reason.
Once they are tied down, they become knowledge, and are
stable. That is why knowledge is something more
valuable than right opinion. What distinguishes one
from the other is the telos.

trans. W.K.C. Guthrie

The beauty of the statues is not for Socrates incompatible
with the homelessness of the telos, working out the reason.
So the ordinariest of rewriting produces a sentence from
each student which is repaving so as on the board assist
seemings of all the other students, different but equal in
excellence. The moments of observation are revolving,
because they keep us near the heart of what we read. Make-
work "procesing" is disheartening. We w initiated work
with a reality which we construct as orderly and reasonable
and handle. Then the fact that mental life is intentional and
continuous work in favor of all our students.

Tropes and Zones
James Thomas Zebroski
Slippery Rock University

Sonti Wells, in Correspondence Two, has performed a
valuable service for writing teachers in "Vygotsky Reads
Capital," one of the most significant and stimulating
explorations of Vygotsky's theory available. Wells shows us
both how to read Vygotsky—dialectically and philo-
sophically—and how NOT to read Vygotsky—a "social"
Piaget or Koh Goodman, as a best instrument psychologis
unaware of and uninformed by the rich contributions of
the humanities and the fine arts. Though ignored by most
American discussion, much support; for Wells's reading
exists among students and colleagues who knew Vygotsky
and worked with him in the late 1920s and early 1930s.
Wells states, "No empirical researcher can use Vygotsky's
categories as they stand... (rather) they enable us to
analyze concepts historically." D. Elkonin, a co-worker of
Vygotsky, confirms Wells's intuitions. He wrote in the
Spring 1967 issue of Soviet Psychology concerning the
misleading of Vygotsky's chapter on concept development
in Thought and Language:

It should be especially stressed that the studies mentioned
were not devoted to establishing the empirical course of
development, but were abstract experimental models of the
developmental process... Unfortunately, it is still
rare to meet with the interpretation of Vygotsky's
research as modeling, rather than empirically studying
developmental processes (36).

Vygotsky was apparently working out the theoretical and
decisions and conceptual implications of his position. Well's interpreta-
tion is a rare but welcome gloss on this very issue.

Such a dialectic reading of Vygotsky helps us to place his
work in its proper philosophical and historical "social"
Vygotsky's theory of mind comes out of a dialectic world
view that finds its sources in Marx, Hegel, Leibnitz,
Spinoza, and Heraclitus, a tradition quite different from,
and often at odds with, the notions popular in Anglo-
American circles. Such a view stresses the dynamic, the
relational, and the social. When we lift Vygotsky's text out
of this context, when we try to understand Vygotsky's ideas
apart from the forms they take, when we try to read
Vygotsky without reference to the work of Karl Marx, we
tend to narrow and distort Vygotsky's ideas, and then we
are surprised to find that those notions don't seem to have
any potential application. And so composition theorists
(among others) have been fascinated by Vygotsky's work
for several years, but haven't known exactly what to do
with it.
Current interest in Vygotsky's concepts of the zone of proximal development is a case in point. Zo-ped (short for "zone of proximal development" or ZPD) is the "distance" between a person's ability to solve a problem independently and the ability to solve a problem with the help of a more capable peer. To be sure, zo-po ped is a powerful corrective to the axiom on which school teaching, letter and number grading, and programmed learning rest. Yet we must also remember that zo-ped is not simply the new fundamental "particle" of experimental analysis, one more variable to add to our multi-variates analytics. We must keep in mind that the social and class-dimensions of zo-po ped are essential, even when the apparent subject of study is a mother-child or teacher-student "dyad." Relations between people collaborating on "problem solving" (or problem posing) are not simply individual interactions but are profoundly social. An analysis of the social contexts and their class implications ought to provide a discussion of the interactions, not simply be ignored or tucked on to the end.

Zo-ped suggests that composition is always ethos-composition, a social act as well as an individual activity. So when I lift my pen to compose, I speak—but so do all those others with whom I am interwined in the word. I speak through others to others and to myself. Writing, then, in a Vygotskian perspective, is more than an individual product, more than an individual's process or set of procedures; writing is a relation, a social relation, first shared by a community (we others) and then transformed by the writer in her unique way. Zo-ped shows us how such social relations are passed on, modified, and further developed: not simply when we keep this social-individual dialectic in mind.

We all have our zones of proximal development and the helping us are often practiced. In this sense, the enfolded and unfolded depending on the situation. The "words" that we recognize in our reading often lead our writing—we know intuitively what the "word" means long before we can properly use it in writing, let alone speech. Even in the writing act, this reading/writing dialectic manifests itself when the writer alternates between "before" and "after" the page, between the page and "creating" the text of the utterance. My style, then, is the struggle, the movement, the dialectic, between the particular voices that I hear—the specific discourses and world I have internalized behind those voices—and the texts that I am creating, that are emerging from this dialogue. Style emerges from the zone of proximal development.

But zo-po ped is obviously not limited to literate activities. Vygostskians have been clear about the importance of all forms of art in social and individual development. Vygotsky wrote The Psychology of Art, in which he argues that "Art is the organization of our future behavior." (246). The collaboration central to zo-po ped goes even to the seemingly individual experience of art since "Art is the social within us, and even if its action is performed by a single individual, it does not mean its essence is individual." (246). We educate our feeling and individualize our emotions through art.

Well's interpretation of Vygotsky helps us to put his work in its proper context; her interpretation also suggests the usefulness of a close reading of all his works. (As Warren Herenden points out, we need complete, un-abridged, and reliable translations to do this.) Wells says, "Vygotsky found in Marx the tropes and figures of thought that he needed." I find it curious that so much of Vygotsky's metaphors, his tropes and figures, in spite of his popularity and the fluidness of deconstruction. If we do explore Vygotsky's tropes, we find that he is a contextualist, to use Stephen Pepper's term. Vygotsky uses mind and society as event. The four-stage model that Vygotsky borrowed from Marx (and P. Blansky)—suggests the various moments of which Kenneth Burke calls the four master tropes: metaphor (hears or simple equivalence); metonymy (complex or serial exchange); synecdoche (sppecif concept or universal equivalent); irony (concept or money). Burke's Appendix D in The Grammar of Motives thus becomes a gloss on Vygotsky (and Marx).

Finally, Vygotsky talks of mind in specifically topographic, geologic, geographic images. Thinking is a cloud shedding a shower of words; the word is a raindrop reflecting the spectrum, the rainbow, of consciousness; motive is the visual moving the clouds. Vygotsky calls the four. His tropes are of the earth, of the biosphere. Vygotsky leads us out of the factory and the brass instrument lab and into the open fields where we can better contemplate the weather of mind and society.
Correspondences

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