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Understanding feelings: engaging with unconscious communication and embodied knowledge

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Understanding feelings: engaging with unconscious communication and embodied knowledge

Abstract

The field of emotional geographies raises challenging methodological questions about how researchers produce knowledge about the feelings of others. Countering scepticism about the methodological possibilities of psychoanalysis I argue for and illustrate its potential. Drawing on a single research interview, I show how psychoanalytic ideas about unconscious communication can be used to help to make sense of emotional dimensions of research interviews and the narratives they generate. I introduce the idea of the "receptive unconscious", which I connect with the building of trust and the concept of rapport. Turning to transference communications, I clarify the different ways in which researchers and clinicians work with unconscious communications. I revisit debates about empathy, which I distinguish from identification and link to the counter-transference. I show how my embodied, affective response during and after the interview gave me clues that eventually furthered my understanding of emotional dimensions of the interviewee's narrative. This analysis contributes to methodological debates about researching emotional geographies and to discussions of the methodological uses of psychoanalysis in social research. Rather than construing psychoanalytical methodologies as highly specialist and intrinsically different from generic qualitative research practice, it seeks to illustrate their potential in relation to critical forms of reflexivity well-attuned to understanding felt experience.

Key Words: psychoanalysis, unconscious, embodied knowledge, emotion, feelings, interviews

Understanding feelings: engaging with unconscious communication and embodied knowledge

Introduction

How is it possible to know how another person feels? Researchers interested in emotional geographies as a terrain that engages with people's subjective experience necessarily face this question. We know very well that what people say they feel bears a complex and problematic relationship to their embodied subjective experiences. There is an inevitable inarticulacy to feelings, which is lost when they are described in words (Harrison 2007). Moreover, people's accounts of their feelings are profoundly shaped by the conditions in which they are rendered or performed (McDowell 1992). And yet surely there is no better source of knowledge about people's feelings than the people concerned (compare Hitchings 2012)?

This dilemma has generated a variety of methodological innovations, many of which seek to go beyond talk of feelings (Crang 2003; Davies and Dwyer 2007). These innovations have included occasional uses of psychoanalytic ideas (for example Bennett 2009; Blazek in press; Bingley 2003; Bondi 2003a, 2003b, 2005a; Burgess, Limb and Harrison 1988a, 1988b; Healy 2010; Kingsbury 2010; Nast 2000; Pardy 2011; Pile 1991, 2010a; Proudfoot 2010; Sibley 2003; Thomas 2007, 2011; Wilton 2003). However, the explicit use of psychoanalysis remains relatively rare and perhaps marginal within emotional geographies. In this paper I argue for the potential relevance of aspects of psychoanalytic thinking about unconscious communication for understanding people's feelings relationally and for comprehending something of the affective tenor of their narratives. In so doing, I also extend ways of understanding the unconscious currently circulating in the field of psychoanalytic geographies. I develop my argument through discussion of a single research interview, which serves to illustrate some ways in which feelings are communicated non-verbally and non-cognitively through interview encounters, and in relation to which I reflect on how researchers might use such unconscious forms of communication. Before turning to the interview and my analysis of how my interviewee communicated and I communicated (some of) our feelings to one another, I review methodological debates about psychoanalysis in and around the field of emotional geographies, identifying key challenges and difficulties I seek to address through this worked example.

Psychoanalytic methodologies

In a paper published more than two decades ago, Steve Pile (1991) argued for the relevance of psychoanalytic ideas to the practise of interpretive human geography. According to Pile (1991, 460), geographers have been much "interested in the archaeology of knowledge and

language" and it could only be a matter of time before we turned to psychoanalysis as "the archaeology of the mind" (Pile, 1991, 460). He focused specifically on parallels between psychoanalytic and research relationships, describing them both as inter-subjective scenes, in which participants are drawn into complex multi-layered alliances. He suggested that we might use psychoanalytic ideas about the unconscious dynamics of transference and counter-transference to deepen and enrich the practise of qualitative methods. I address his challenge in this paper.

Although Pile's paper has been cited in many subsequent discussions of qualitative methods in human geography, researchers have not flocked to psychoanalytic ideas in the way that he envisaged. While renewed interest in psychoanalytic methodologies has become evident very recently, for example in a recent special issue of *The Professional Geographer* (Healy 2010; Kingsbury 2010; Proudfoot 2010; Pile 2010a; Thomas 2010), contributors have themselves acknowledged that "many geographers are sceptical about the value and viability of psychoanalytic methodology" (Kingsbury 2010, 519; also see Kingsbury 2009). I draw out and critically examine three strands of this scepticism, concerned with power relations, expertise and ways of knowing respectively. In relation to each I offer counter-arguments.

First, despite Pile's (1991) efforts to trace a shift within psychoanalysis away from an authoritarian view of the psychoanalytic relationship towards a much more egalitarian one, this was not sufficient to dispel a widespread view of psychoanalysis as a highly unequal enterprise in which patients are very vulnerable to abuses of power (Parr 1998). In relation to methodological debates, one of the most influential sources of the authoritarian view of the psychoanalytic relationship has been Ann Oakley's (1981) critique of the power relations of traditional approaches to interviewing: for Oakley, the psychoanalytic interview epitomised the problem she sought to expose and challenge. Ensuing discussion of interviewing in and beyond human geography (especially among those informed by feminism) has expressed much concern regarding the risk of reproducing or reinforcing pre-existing social inequalities within the research process (England 1994; McDowell 1992; Moss 2006). Although psychoanalytic approaches are barely mentioned within these discussions, Oakley's account is cited so frequently that at least implicitly her view of psychoanalysis remains unchallenged. In this context it is reasonable to infer that the dominant view of psychoanalytic approaches presumes them liable, or even likely, to constitute sophisticated methods for manipulating or subtly disempowering research subjects, or for doing violence to their stories.

Perhaps most problematic for social researchers attentive to the power relations of research is the possibility that psychoanalytic approaches encourage researchers to lay claim to knowledge that remains unknown to their research participants. Such psychoanalytically-based knowledge claims are suggested in some contributions to the nascent field of psychosocial studies pioneered by social psychologists, including Wendy

Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2000), Valerie Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001) and Simon Clarke and Paul Hoggett (2009). For example, in their classic text *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) made extensive use of the psychoanalytic concept of unconscious defences, describing their research interviewees as "defended subjects". Although they also emphasised the collaborative co-construction of narratives within interviews, to describe research participants as "defended subjects" implies that researchers know something about the personalities and emotional lives of research participants that the latter are unable to acknowledge themselves. While other contributions to psychosocial studies have problematised the self-knowledge of the researcher as much as that of their participants (for example Gadd 2004), the representation of research participants as "defended subjects" has tended to reinforce a dominant view of psychoanalytic approaches as likely to disempower participants and as failing to trouble the power dynamics of research. But, as Pile's (1991) account sought to argue, the supposed authority of the (knowledge of the) psychoanalyst has been troubled within psychoanalysis. In this context, my aim in this paper is modest: I seek to show how psychoanalytic ideas can be used to support the researcher's use of reflexivity in ways that are sensitive to the power dynamics of interviews, that position researchers as witnesses rather than as authorities and that elaborate methodologically a relational approach to emotion for which I and others have argued (Bennett 2009; Bondi 2005a; Evans 2012).

A second strand of scepticism arises from the status of psychoanalysis as a clinical practice, which has prompted unease about the competence of anyone without clinical training to use psychoanalytic methods (Bingley 2003; Oliver 2003). Discussing methodological approaches to studying emotion in social research, Janet Holland (2007) has presented the use of psychoanalytic methods as highly specialist and as requiring dedicated training. Holland equated psychoanalytic approaches with what has become known as psychosocial studies to which I have referred. Contributors to psychosocial studies concur with her view, and present their work as encompassing a distinctive methodological approach uniquely placed to explore the interface between psychology and sociology, including questions of emotion (for example Clarke and Hoggett 2009). Such claims do not encourage those without specialist training to explore psychosocial studies and it has not made much impact within emotional geographies.

In these circumstances a continuing reluctance to engage with psychoanalytic methods is, perhaps, not surprising. However others have argued rather differently. For example Paul Kingsbury (2010, 520) has challenged the mystique that sometimes appears to accrue to psychoanalytic methods, and on his account psychoanalysis has already had a substantial but largely unacknowledged influence on a wide variety of methodological debates in human geography, rendering it "at once central yet marginal, influential yet

rebuffed". He has sought to situate "psychoanalytic methodology beyond the couch" (*ibid.* 520), tracing, for example, the spatialities of desire made available through the adoption (via Zizek 1989, 2006) of Lacan's notion of the *objet petit a* (Kingsbury 2010, also see Kingsbury 2003, 2009). Elsewhere I too have argued that at least some aspects of the psychoanalytic practice are simply refinements of ordinary social skills, which can be developed and deployed by those without clinical training (Bondi 2003a, 2005a). In this paper I develop that line of argument further, focussing specifically on matters of emotion as they are communicated unconsciously, and I suggest when and how researchers might usefully draw on others with clinical experience.

Thirdly, Pile's (1991) engagement with psychoanalytic ideas led him to call upon interviewers and interviewees to talk about what goes on between them, and to disclose their respective assumptions about each other. His exhortation to interviewers to "talk about it" with their interviewees (ibid., 465) implied a view of the unconscious as relatively easily and unproblematically knowable by subjects willing to engage in self-reflection. This appeal to open communication and self-reflexivity has since been subject to considerable and sustained criticism. Linda McDowell (1992, 408), for example, found Pile's argument "highly dubious" and his representation of the interpersonal dynamics of research interviews as "idealized", specifically in his assumption that researchers can create "safe and supportive" environments in which interviewees are enabled to "share their experiences and feelings" (Pile, 1991, 459). Gillian Rose (1997) added weight to this view in her critique of anything approximating to the kind of transparent self-reflexivity Pile advocated. Criticisms also came from others engaging with psychoanalytic theory. For example, Felicity Callard (2003, 307) has drawn attention to a widespread tendency to neglect "the dark undertow of Freud's writings", including "his insistence of the refractory operations of the unconscious", which militate against "narratives of efficacious subjective transformation". Indeed, in his more recent writings Steve Pile (20101, 2010b, 2012) would seem to concur with this view of the unconscious as radically other, deeply disruptive, and certainly not available through self-reflection. Thus, a key rationale for the psychoanalytic turn envisaged by Pile (1991) has fallen away, to be replaced by a different view of both psychoanalysis and the scope for self-reflexive talk to generate valuable knowledge about the world.

In relation to interviews and especially the narratives they generate, Mary Thomas (2007, 543) has argued that studies of subjectivity and identity need to take seriously psychoanalytic ideas about the unconscious, but that "psychoanalysis in social science research cannot extend into the practice of psychoanalyzing our research subjects". This left her with a conundrum, positioning unconscious processes as central and yet reluctant to engage directly in any analysis of them. For Thomas (2007, 537) that which is unconscious is powerful and important, but intrinsically unknowable, and "only evidenced by its effects

(including material, linguistic and behavioural ones)". She argued firmly against any crossover between clinical practice and social science, insisting that "researchers untrained in analysis cannot discern unconscious effects" (*ibid*. 544) pertaining to individual subjects.

I take issue with this position for two reasons, and in so doing I argue that psychoanalysis provides resources for researchers to work reflexively with traces of unconscious communication. First, we should, I think, be wary of claims that endow any professional training with the kind of mystique that renders it *wholly* inaccessible to anyone other than those with many years of training. More specifically I argue that Thomas is wrong to imply that the capacity for "non-linguistic 'listening'" (ibid. 543) necessarily requires extensive professional training (as I have previously argued: Bondi 2003a, 2005a). Instead, and without in any sense attempting to "psychoanalyse" research participants, I seek to show how psychoanalytic ideas can be used to support researchers to make sense of at least some unconscious communications that occur in ordinary ways in and around research interviews. Additionally, in order to allay fears about unwittingly overstepping boundaries between research and clinical practice, I also seek to clarify differences between the uses clinicians and researchers might make of such communications. To do so I draw on my own hybrid position: I am both a social researcher and a professionally-qualified counsellor who uses psychoanalytic ideas in my small, part-time practice.

Secondly, Thomas's argument relies on an understanding of knowledge as linguistic, cognitive and rational. This is a highly contestable view, countered by much psychoanalytic theory as well as by non-representational geographers (for example Thrift and Dewsbury 2000) and in discussions of emotional geographies (for example Smith *et al.* 2009). On these alternative accounts, knowing is much more wide-ranging than cognition, including such things as embodied awareness of movement and feelings. In this context a useful psychoanalytic concept is that of the "unthought known", developed by Christopher Bollas (1987), which refers to that which is unconscious and not available to thought, but nevertheless "known" in the sense of registered somehow within a person's being. For Bollas (1987, 282) "there is in each of us a fundamental split between what we think we know and what we know but may never be able to think". Focusing on embodied knowledge, and addressing psychoanalysts, he has argued that:

> some analysands enable us to feel somatically rested and receptive, while others precipitate complex body tensions […] This is not a peculiarity of psychoanalysis, as in all our relations with people, we somatically register our sense of a person; we 'carry' their effect on our psyche-soma, and this constitutes a form of somatic knowledge, which again is not thought (Bollas 1987, 282).

On occasion, as I show below, it is possible to think about and make some sense of, such somatic registrations.

In responding to these three strands of scepticism about the methodological possibilities of psychoanalytic ideas, I have pointed to the relevance of a modified version of Pile's (1991) psychoanalytic framing of research relationships enacted in interviews. I have argued that psychoanalysis makes available potentially useful resources for working with the unconscious communication of feeling, and that these can be deployed in ways that are sensitive to power dynamics. I have acknowledged the limitations of "transparent" self-reflexivity and introduced the idea of knowledge that is embodied but unthought. In the remainder of this paper, I take forward these ideas through discussion of a particular interview.

In the next section of the paper I briefly contextualise the interview I have selected for exploration. The four analytical sections that follow begin with an exploration of the negotiation of trust between me and my interviewee, which, I argue, took place largely through unconscious modes of communication. In this context I introduce the concept of the receptive unconscious. Having illustrated how transference communications may present themselves within interviews, in the next section I discuss key differences in appropriate responses to such communications within research and clinical settings. Thirdly, I offer a psychoanalytic reading of what happens when interviewers are moved by the narrations to which they listen, drawing on the concept of the counter-transference and briefly addressing debates about empathy. Lastly, I illustrate and explore the embodied communication of feelings, making use of the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification. In illustrating different aspects of unconscious communication within and around interview encounters, I suggest that psychoanalytic engagement can serve as a form of critical reflexivity well-attuned to understanding felt experience.

Interviewing Katherine

The interview on which I draw was one of a series conducted with people who had recently embarked on counselling or counselling skills training courses. The wider research project explored the meanings of counselling work with a specific focus on counselling in the voluntary sector (Bondi 2003c, 2004, 2005b; Bondi with Fewell 2003, Bondi, Fewell and Kirkwood 2003). The interviews invited research participants to narrate stories about themselves in relation to three broad themes concerned with their pathways to training, their sense of what in their lives and in their personalities underlay their interest in counselling, and what counselling meant to them personally.

The particular interview I have selected was conducted with a woman I call Katherine. At the time I felt it to be an ordinarily positive and successful interview in which Katherine had offered a powerful and moving story about herself. She had volunteered to take part in the interview in response to information that had reached her through a training course on which

she had recently embarked, paid for by her employer. Katherine was a few years older than me, white, and spoke with a strong regional working-class accent, her voice deep and husky, probably from decades of smoking cigarettes, the odour of which hung in the air of the office where she worked and in which the interview was conducted (prior to the introduction of legislation that now bans smoking in indoor workplaces). After supplementing the information Katherine had already received about the project, explaining the purpose of the interview, inviting her to ask questions and completing consent forms, I repeated the themes I was interested in exploring with her and turned on the audio-recorder. We talked for about an hour and a half, in accordance with the time-frame I had set out in the information provided to her.

After the interview the audio-recording was passed to a professional transcriber. A few weeks later, I checked the transcript against the original recording and had a peculiar experience, which I explore below, of what I felt to be a discrepancy between my memory of the interview and what I heard on the recording. It was this sense of a discrepancy that drew me to revisit the interview once again for this paper.

In the discussion that follows I offer and explore examples of unconscious communication between interviewer and interviewee. As I show, these communications can be discerned from their effects and to do so does not mean claiming to know anything my interviewee did not know. However, I also argue that unconscious communication is an important way in which emotions are communicated inter-subjectively in the ordinary (and sometimes extraordinary) relational interplay between the members of what Rosemary Rizq (2008) calls the “research couple”.

Establishing trust: unconscious communication, the receptive unconscious and “rapport”

In this section I describe how my interview with Katherine began and how it might be understood in terms of processes of unconscious communication in which feelings around trust were mobilised. I argue that these are central to what is often called the building of “rapport” and, in order to conceptualise rapport psychoanalytically, I introduce the concept of the receptive unconscious.

During the first 15 to 20 minutes of the interview, Katherine explained how she had been prompted to embark on a counselling course because of experiences in her current job as an information and advice worker. In this job she found herself listening to people talk about all kinds of problems for which she had no practical information or advice to give. She said that one of the key reasons for embarking on the training was because, in responding to these people, “basically I just didn’t want to do anybody any harm”. She repeated this concern about the risk of harming someone several times, and also repeated her view that

counsellors “don’t give advice to people”. I listened, interposing a couple of brief questions about how she found out about courses and chose the one she was doing. My listening took an active and attentive form (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) in which my presence in the narrative is evident in the transcript in non-verbal utterances that let Katherine know I was following her, plus a few brief reflective and affirmative comments in which I offered back to Katherine what I thought she had said. For example, at one point, I said

> you were listening to people and you weren’t giving them advice, you were just letting them talk. But you knew that you wanted -; well you were a bit concerned that you -; about whether you might do somebody harm.

I offered this summary to Katherine in order to convey to her what I understood her to be saying, and implicitly offering her the opportunity to correct me if she wished. At the time I was also faintly aware of a link between what Katherine was saying about counselling and how I was performing the role of interviewer: I was not giving Katherine advice or making judgements, but inviting her to talk with a minimum of direct questions.

When I began to think about the transcript methodologically, I became aware that Katherine’s anxious refrain about not wanting to do anyone any harm, which she addressed to herself in relation to others, might also be understood as unconsciously addressed to me on behalf of herself. In other words, at the same time and as well as the manifest meaning of her motivation for seeking counselling training, perhaps she was also signalling an anxiety about whether I might do her harm through my conduct in this interview. Put another way, might she have been addressing a question about my trustworthiness? It is also inevitably the case that my noticing of Katherine’s repeated expression of concern about doing harm expresses something about me, including, perhaps, my own anxiety about doing harm to her. If feelings are understood to be relational then they do not belong uniquely to one person but are inspired in and through relationships. Without denying such entanglements, however, I want to consider how Katherine’s refrain might be thought about psychoanalytically. My proposition that questions about my trustworthiness might have been signalled in this refrain draws on two related psychoanalytic ideas. The first is that all speech carries multiple layers of meaning, hence the notion that we always say more than we (consciously) mean, or that there is always an “excess”, which is often affectively freighted. The second is the idea of unconscious transference, according to which statements about or addressed to others may simultaneously be statements made on behalf of the speaker and addressed to whoever is there to hear. I return to the second point in the next section but focus here on the unconscious communication of more-than-conscious meanings.

The possibility that an additional, unconscious, meaning of Katherine’s refrain about not wanting to do anyone any harm was an expression of a question she had about whether or not I might harm her fitted with my experience of the trajectory of the interview. After the

opening phase of 15 to 20 minutes, in which Katherine spoke of her work-related reasons for embarking on a counselling course, she moved into a deeply personal autobiographical story. Within a few minutes of beginning to tell me about her childhood, she observed "God, it's years since I've talked about this stuff", before moving straight on with her account. In this interjection and in the manner of her ensuing narration, Katherine conveyed to me that she had not consciously planned what she would tell me but that this entire phase of the interview unfolded spontaneously.

I explore the process of transition from the first phase to the second later in this paper, but at this point note that Katherine's willingness to open up in this way is likely to be recognised by qualitative researchers as demonstrating the successful establishment of trust or "rapport". In a recent textbook on interviewing, Nigel King and Christine Horrocks (2010, 48) have noted that:

> building rapport with your participant is widely seen as a key ingredient in successful qualitative interviewing […]. Rapport is essentially about trust – enabling the participant to feel comfortable in opening up to you. There are no guaranteed recipes for rapport …

The trajectory of the interview indicated that trust was indeed established and appeared to enable Katherine to tell a deeply personal story. My experience in the interview was that Katherine had used the first 15 or 20 minutes to "check out" whether or not I was someone she could trust sufficiently to share with me more personal material. But what (if anything) did I actually do to build rapport beyond listening attentively?

Although I am an experienced interviewer, and a teacher of interviewing skills, not everyone I interview chooses to open up to me in the way that Katherine did. One way of understanding elusive differences between different interview encounters, is in terms of an unconscious dimension of two-way communication. If I am correct that Katherine's repeated reference to not wanting to do harm to others was, in part, an unconscious communication addressed to me about the possibility that I might do her harm, then what happened during the first phase of the interview can be understood as a period in which she tested out her sense of my trustworthiness unconsciously. As I have already said, during the interview itself I did not consciously think about this meaning of her phrase and I did not say anything designed to assuage her concerns, for example by reassuring her that I meant her no harm or wouldn't do her any harm. However, the fact that my later interpretation of her words as an unconscious communication made sense to me in relation to the trajectory of the interview, suggests that at an unconscious level something did register. In Bollas's (1987) terms, that "something" was unthought, but nevertheless "known".

In an essay about psychoanalytic technique, Freud (1912/2002, 37) advised the analyst to

> orientate his own unconscious, as a kind of receptive organ, towards the communicative unconscious of the patient, attuning himself to the analysand as the receiver of a telephone is attuned to the disc.

Through training and practice, clinicians aim to develop and refine their sensitivity to such communications, thereby become adept at "orienting" their own unconscious in the way Freud described. They also develop skills in utilising unconscious communications therapeutically. But even in the absence of such training and practice, unconscious communications are happening all the time. Thus, one way of understanding the largely non-verbal, out-of-awareness, process of building trust or rapport is in terms of the "transmission" and "reception" of unconscious "messages". On this account, in my interview with Katherine, several messages were transmitted and received unconsciously. As well as Katherine's words transmitting something more than she said, I received her latent meaning unconsciously. This unconscious reception was not sufficient: if Katherine unconsciously harboured doubts about my trustworthiness, something more must have happened to lead to Katherine's apparent decision to open up. Although I did not respond consciously or overtly to Katherine's concern about harm as if it was addressed to me, if I am correct about the latent meaning of her refrain, then it would appear that I did communicate something to her that put her at her ease. This was not in the content of my words but may have been in my tone, my manner, my style of listening. If, as psychoanalytic theory presumes, the unconscious is ever-present then surely this communication was unconscious too. So not only did I unconsciously receive Katherine's unconscious communications, but, in the terms of Freud's metaphor of telephony, I unconsciously "transmitted" back to her something that she could "receive" unconsciously (compare Campbell and Pile 2010; Pile 2012). These messages, I would argue, were saturated with (largely wordless) emotion: they related to how we felt in relation to one another, how we each sensed ourselves to be in the presence of, and affected by, the other.

King and Horrocks (2010), like other qualitative researchers, have no "recipe" for rapport. It is presented as involving skills that require practice to develop, but also as exceeding good practice guidance (Roulston, deMarrais and Lewis 2003). This suggests that despite the lack of explicit reference to unconscious aspects of communication in the interviewing literature, trust and rapport are implicitly understood to require unconscious negotiation, exemplifying Kingsbury's argument about the unacknowledged influence of psychoanalysis. Investigating the concept of rapport historically, Pile (2010a) has recently traced it to fore-runners of Freud, including the German physician and vitalist Franz Anton Mesmer and the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, emphasising its origins in theories of unconscious communication, as well as seeking to unsettle some of the assumptions made about it by researchers. Whereas Pile's historical analysis draws on examples from

clinical settings, the "rapport" that developed between Katherine and myself took place in her work-place in the context of a one-off research interview.

The character of the unconscious I have mobilised to explore this example of unconscious communication is rather different from the disruptive, "untameable", intransigent form emphasised by Felicity Callard (2003) and Mary Thomas (2007). However as Freud developed his theory of the unconscious, its forms seemed to proliferate:

> We now realize that the *Ucs [unconscious]* and the repressed are not coterminous; while it remains correct to say that all of the repressed is *Ucs*, it is not also the case that all of the *Ucs* is repressed. Part of the ego […] is undoubtedly *Ucs*. (Freud 1923/2003, 109).

Picking up on this, Bollas (2007, 27) has argued that

> our minds are far too complex [for the unconscious] to be about any one thing, be it a repressed idea, an id derivative, the transference, or anything. Indeed, at any one moment in psychic time, if we could have a look at the unconscious symphony it would be a vast network of creative combinations.

In Bollas's (*ibid*. 28) unconscious symphony, Freud's telephone metaphor is "a theory of the receptive unconscious". It is this receptive unconscious to which I have appealed in the example of the unconscious communication through which, during the first phase of our interview, we negotiated sufficient trust for Katherine's deeply personal and spontaneous autobiographical narration to proceed.

In drawing attention to the "receptive unconscious" I am not seeking to negate the importance of the repressed unconscious within interview encounters (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) and the narratives they produce (Thomas 2007). However, I am suggesting that qualitative researchers, including those interested in emotional geographies, might find this concept of the "receptive unconscious" helpful in order to understand elusive, but deeply felt processes such as the development of trust or rapport. In this discussion I have focussed on one specific unconscious communication, but close attention to the audio-recording and the transcript yield many more, another of which I explore later in this paper.

Unconscious transference communications in research and clinical practice

As I have noted, my interpretation of Katherine's repeated reference to the risk of harm as, in part, an unconscious communication addressed to me draws on the idea of the transference. Transference interpretations are a well-known staple of psychoanalytic practice, which respond to transference communications by making links between the analysands' past relationships, their current lives outside analysis and what takes place in their relationships with their clinicians. In this section, I explore Katherine's refrain further to clarify the different ways in which researchers and clinicians work with unconscious communications.

The transference meaning of Katherine's refrain became consciously available to me only after the interview so I did not consciously think about it or respond explicitly to it while I was with her. However my formulation could be construed psychoanalytically as a partial transference interpretation in which I took her explicit meaning, which referred to her life in the present but away from the scene of our conversation, and hypothesised that it might have another meaning related directly to our relationship within the interview. Had this come into my mind during the interview itself and had I decided to voice it, I might have put it into words by saying to her something like "maybe you are concerned that I could do you harm if I don't listen carefully enough".

I use the term "partial transference interpretation" to differentiate this kind of (hypothetical) response from one that also makes connections to the speaker's past, especially their early relationships with parental figures. On Patrick Casement's (1985, 44) account, a "full" transference interpretation brings together three elements, namely the "here and now" relationship between clinician and analysand, the "there and then" history of the analysand's patterns of relating and "there and now" concerns in the analysand's life outside the clinical setting. Saying to Katherine "maybe you are concerned that I could do you harm if I don't listen carefully enough" refers only to the "here and now" relationship. However Katherine's "there and now" concerns are also engaged in the implicit link to her concern about harming others. To illustrate what a full transference interpretation might look like, had I been in possession of sufficient information, I could, hypothetically, have added to the statement "maybe you are concerned that I could do you harm if I don't listen carefully enough" something along the lines of "as you have felt harmed by X before".

Are statements of this kind appropriate within a research setting? Reflecting on his relationships with research interviewees, Pile (1991) described some taking on a friend-to-friend quality while others were more cross-generational and more akin to a step-son to step-father relationship. He suggested that "it might have been possible to see how these […] transferences affected what went on in each interview by talking about it" (Pile 1991, 465). In other words, he seemed to advocate making full use of opportunities to interpret and explore transferential dimensions of research relationships during the course of interviews. Others have been more cautious. For example Thomas (2007) has insisted that researchers cannot possibly gather sufficient information in one-off or even repeat interviews to interpret the transference. Clinicians would tend to agree with her. For example, Casement (1985, 44) has written "it may take several sessions or even weeks before a full transference interpretation can be convincingly offered to a patient, whether based on a dream or other communication". The qualifier "convincingly" is important, and in this context Bollas's (1987) concepts of the receptive unconscious and the unthought known are again relevant. On his account, the development of a transference interpretation takes place through the unconscious

communications between analyst and analysand within the analytic setting, in which the unconscious receptivity of the analyst is central:

> It will be many months after greeting a new patient before I have some 'sense' of the person's private and unconscious use of me as an object within the field of transference. […] Our psychoanalytic understanding of the transference has always been that this psychological phenomenon is a re-living in the analytic process of earlier states of being and experiencing. But I wonder now if this is strictly true […] In his discovery of psychoanalysis Freud created a situation […] in which the individual could live through for the first time elements of psychic life that have not previously been thought.
>
> Such a view of the transferences holds that it is not merely a reliving […] but a fundamentally new experience, in that 'something' is given a certain dosage of time, space and attentiveness in which to emerge. (Bollas, 1987, 277-8)

For Bollas, therefore, a transference interpretation must have been "lived" within the unconscious experience of those between whom it is transacted. Only through this kind of "living an experience together" (Winnicott 1945/1958, 152) is there any possibility that an unthought known might become something it is possible to think about consciously.

It follows from this that, whether or not it oversteps a boundary between research and clinical practice, offering something that looks like a partial or full transference interpretation to a research interviewee is problematic because it is unlikely to have been "lived" in the unconscious communication between researcher and research participants. It would not therefore actually constitute a transference interpretation in the sense that Bollas means. Thus, while Thomas (2007,543) has argued against attempting to "psychoanalyze our research subjects" as individuals, I am arguing that it is not even possible to do so, at least in relation to the transference, because such psychoanalytic work can only be done by unconsciously "living an experience together".

In this context it is important to note that research interviews ***do*** offer what Maxine Birch and Tina Miller (2000) have called "therapeutic opportunities" in the sense that participants may in some way feel better for talking to a researcher who is deeply interested in some aspect of their lives and perhaps especially their emotional lives. Elsewhere I have argued that we should not be surprised by this, and that psychotherapy has nothing like a monopoly on the therapeutic (Bondi 2013, also see Clark 2010). However the fact that research interviews may be experienced as therapeutic opportunities does not mean that any therapeutic effects they have come about in the same (or even similar) way as those arising in psychoanalysis or psychotherapy.

If making statements that connect the interviewee's past ("there and then") and/or present ("there and now") with the "here and now" of the interviewer-interviewee relationship

do not constitute transference interpretations in the sense of having been unconsciously lived together, the question remains for researchers as to whether they are appropriate to offer. I would argue, against Pile (1991), that in most circumstances they are not appropriate. There are two reasons for this view concerned with the context of the interview and the stated purpose of the interview. With respect to context, widespread cultural representations (and misrepresentations) of psychotherapy matter and interviewers need to be alert to the possibility that the kind of links I have described may be recognised by those we interview as having an affinity with therapeutic settings. Consequently they may generate confusion even if they do not, strictly speaking, blur a boundary between research and therapeutic settings. With respect to the latter, unless researchers have explicitly contracted with those they interview to reflect on the research relationships into which they enter, the researchers would surely be going beyond their remit if they were to do so.

To clarify this further, in my interview with Katherine, during her autobiographical narration, I offered occasional comments that made links between the past and the present as she presented them. For example, at one point I remarked on how she had told me that she hadn't felt that she fitted in when she was growing up and often continued to feel that now: "going back to early on about not fitting in […] you've gone on feeling like an outsider?" Such interventions bear some similarity to the links that might be offered in a therapeutic setting. However, since the interview explicitly asked for a conversation about how Katherine's wider life experiences might have had a bearing on her recent decision to embark on a counselling course, they were directly relevant to the stated purpose. Moreover, because such links did not refer to the "here and now" relationship, they did not take the form of transference interpretations. By contrast, to bring in the "here and now" by suggesting that her anxiety about doing harm to others might have also expressed a concern about whether I might do her harm, would be of a different order. Given the purpose of the interview, to have sought reflection on the "here and now" relationship might have constituted a breach of trust that would have undermined rather than supported the process of building rapport in which we were unconsciously engaged.

In summary, the unconscious processes with which clinicians work necessarily pervade research encounters. Researchers cannot help but be embroiled in unconscious work, including unconscious transference relationships, with research participants. In so far as we make conscious decisions about how to respond to unconscious communications, including transference communications, I have argued that we need to (a) be aware of the risks of creating unnecessary confusion for our participants (b) remain true to the explicit, contracted purpose of our research encounters, and (c) be content to trust the work undertaken through the receptive unconscious.

On being moved: counter-transference and empathy

As I have indicated, the main phase of my interview with Katherine consisted of a rich and complex autobiographical account of her life. I found her account deeply moving and I was sometimes very close to tears. So was she: I could see the tears well up in her eyes and sometimes they spilled over. I felt at ease with my tears and with hers because it seemed to me that they matched the sadness of the story she told. I felt that she communicated to me important features of the emotional texture of her narration told, and that I understood her well enough to bear witness to its feeling content. But how?

The outward facts of our life stories had little in common. Katherine grew up in a poor working class community in a large city with a long history of socio-economic adversity. She left school with minimal qualifications, had a baby in her early 20s and had since worked in unskilled manual and low-grade clerical jobs before moving to her current post. Born a few years after Katherine, I was raised in a middle-class household in an affluent commuter town in a much more prosperous region. Via a university education, I had moved into professional employment and did not have any children. While we were of similar ages, and shared gender, nationality and (white) racial positionings, our life experiences had been very different. My capacity to understand the feelings she sought to convey did not come from similar circumstances or other experiences we had in common. And yet I seemed to feel – embody – something of the emotional quality of the story Katherine narrated to the point of mirroring her tearfulness.

This sense by an interviewer of "feeling with" an interviewee is often described as empathy and tends to be positively valorised in qualitative interviewing (Fontana and Frey 2000; Kvale 2006). In the context of this valorisation, I have elsewhere described empathy as "a process in which one person imaginatively enters the experiential world of another" (Bondi 2003a, 71). This version of empathy has been subject to criticism for being idealistic and simplistic in promoting the idea that anyone can ever "step into another's shoes and see the world from that person's perspective" (Jurecic 2006, 3; also see Evans 2012). This has prompted Cate Watson (2009) to argue that "empathic understanding in qualitative research runs the risk of becoming a form of colonization of the other as the object of research". While I would concur that this conceptualisation of empathy is deeply problematic, it is not the only understanding of empathy available. Although I accept that my own description quoted above is flawed, I would still defend the argument in which it was embedded, in which I differentiated psychoanalytically between empathy and identification (Bondi 2003a). On that account, the risk of colonisation to which Cate Watson referred arises from processes of identification, which, I continue to argue, are related to, but insufficient for, empathy.

Criticisms of empathy tend to equate it with identification, which does indeed risk colonising or erasing the other by assuming that my feelings as interviewer correspond

directly to the feelings of the interviewee. However, the conceptualisation of empathy I prefer is one in which unconscious processes of identification, such as projection and introjection, are necessary but not sufficient. What is also required is an ongoing sense of the alterity of the other, which is not available in identification. The capacity to use projection and introjection while retaining this sense of alterity draws on what Ronald Britton (2004) has called the "third position". This "third position" is an unconscious process (not a fixed position) in which one is not only a subjectively engaged participant in a two-person relationship but also an observer of that relationship. This third position as process is intrinsic to the possibility of self-reflexivity in which the self's relation to its self is both experienced and observed. Unconsciously it also allows us to move between being subjectively absorbed in an interviewee's narrative as well as maintaining the capacity to "step back" from that absorption (Bondi 2013). On this account, empathy does not generate direct or perfect apprehension of the subjective experience of another. Rather it requires effort and is always imperfect and faltering. However much of the experience of the other is accurately recognised, empathy also entails acknowledging that the effort to understand can only ever yield an imperfect grasp of what the other feels (compare Jurecic 2006). In my interview with Katherine I did not at any point say anything like "I know what you mean" or "I understand how you must have felt". Such formulations are emblematic of identification and risk the kind of erasure to which critics of empathy are alert. I would argue that they are not, in fact, empathic on the definition of empathy for which I have argued because they fail to acknowledge the limits of the speaker's understanding. My empathic responses to Katherine were much more tentative because I remained aware that any understanding I had was limited and partial.

Conceptualised in the terms for which I have argued, empathy is part of the counter-transference. In a classic statement, Paula Heimann (1950, 81) defined the counter-transference as "cover[ing] all the feelings the analyst experiences towards his [or her] patient" and as "an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious". She argued that a key purpose of a training analysis was not to render the analyst immune from feelings but "to enable him [or her] to *sustain* the feelings that are stirred in him [or her], as opposed to discharging them (as does the patient), in order to *subordinate* them to the analytic task" (Heimann 1950, 82, original emphasis). When the feelings stirred in the analyst are similar to those of the patient, contained (rather than discharged) and thought about (subordinated) in relation to the analytic task, they can be described as empathic (Bolognini 2003).

Interviewers may not have the experience of a training analysis but they nevertheless do something broadly similar, although differently framed. The interview provides an opportunity for the interviewee to talk about and otherwise convey aspects of his or her experience and in so doing to "discharge" his or her feelings, whereas the role of the

interviewer is to contribute to the conversation with the purpose of supporting the interviewee's narration. Even when interviewers contribute examples from their own lives, which is sometimes promoted in the interests of mutuality, such contributions are necessarily framed by their position: a personal story told by an interviewer plays a different part in an interview from a story told by an interviewee (Avis 2002; Goodrum and Keys 2007). In Heimann's language, the thoughts and feelings of the interviewer are not, therefore, "discharged" in the interaction of the interviewer in the same way as those of interviewees. However, if the interviewer's thoughts and feelings are "sustained" rather than obliterated, they may be useful in deepening the understanding of the interviewee's subjective experience. This idea is consistent with a number of discussions of the emotional experience of fieldwork that have argued for researchers' feelings to be thought of as data (for example Bennett 2009; Bondi 2005a; Evans 2012; Kleinman and Copp 1993; Meth with Malaza 2003; Wilkins 1993). I develop it further in the next section.

Lost (for) words: embodied communication of feelings through projective identification

The psychoanalytic concept of the counter-transference can help researchers think about the meanings of their own feelings in relation to the stories told by their interviewees. This is especially the case in relation to impacts that register primarily through their somatic effects on researchers, which, in psychoanalytic parlance, are often understood in terms of projective identification, in which the unconscious feelings originating in one person are projected into and felt by a recipient (Klein 1946/1991; also see Bollas 1987; Bondi 2003a; Casement 1985). Such effects may go unnoticed but when they are noticed, they are often troubling, demanding attention and yet also inexplicable, impacting on us bodily and yet somehow also interfering with our capacity to think. They provide us with evidence of the disruptive character of the unconscious. However, if they can be worked with, they can provide invaluable resources with which to approach the task of understanding the feelings of others.

In what follows I illustrate qualities of such unconscious somatic effects, and the sense I eventually made of them, by exploring a chain of events in my non-cognitive, somatic experience of my interview with Katherine, connected to the transition from the first phase in which trust was being established to the second in which Katherine's autobiographical narration unfolded. What was said as we entered this transition is shown in extract 1.

Extract 1

1	Liz:	Yes. So it was really, it was your work here that led you onto
2		the course?

3	Katherine:	Yeah.
4	Liz:	And I'm wondering if we could take it back a step and, and
5		what led you into the kind of work that you're doing here?
6		
7	Katherine:	(Laughing) My whole life must have been chance. It was
8		definitely just chance.

Katherine then spoke briefly about leaving a previous job and coming to her current post. My next intervention was spoken rather softly, gently and falteringly, with the interaction proceeding as shown in extract 2.

Extract 2

1	Liz:	Well I'm wondering actually, as you said that, em, you just,
2		you know, you don't plan to do things, they just happen, well I
3		wonder if we could actually go back to the, go back to the
4		beginning about you?
5	Katherine:	About you?
6	Liz:	Yeah, and so, where are you from originally?
7	Katherine:	Originally I was born in X, which is a very poor area of Y, just
8		off Z. Do we want all the nitty gritty stuff, do we want all sort
9		of/
10	Liz:	What would you like to tell me; what do you think's important?
11		
12	Katherine:	On reflection what do I think's important?
13	Liz:	Mmm [the question seemed to be to herself not to me]
14		[Long pause lasting several seconds]
15	Katherine:	I was born in X ……

Katherine then proceeded with her autobiographical account without further verbal prompting from me.

During this transition phase, I was a little surprised to hear myself invite Katherine to "go back to the beginning" (extract 2, line 4). I was aware at the time that this wasn't a phrasing I usually used and that I found myself saying it without thinking about what I was about to say. This made the moment memorable and all the more so since Katherine did indeed "go back to the beginning" and tell me of the circumstances of her birth. However, when, some weeks later, I checked the transcript (produced by a professional transcriber and as presented above) against the audio-recording, I couldn't find my request that she "go back to the beginning". I repeatedly and somewhat frantically replayed a segment of the tape that included the long pause noted on extract 2 line 14, searching for the words there, and I completely failed to see the words where they actually were (extract 2, line 4).

After checking the transcript, I did not listen to the audio-recording again until I began to prepare a presentation that eventually gave rise to this paper. Having searched in vain for what, at the time, I felt to be missing words, I created a story, shared with colleagues, to fit what had become "the facts" in my mind. I said that I must have imagined saying those words rather than actually saying them and that in the intensity of my focus on Katherine's story-telling something telepathic might have happened (Pile 2012). This experience was why I was drawn to work with this particular interview later in order to explore it methodologically. Discovering that the words were actually on the audio-recording, albeit slightly earlier than I had remembered, came as a shock and undermined the story I had constructed about this interview. There were, therefore, at least four distinct elements of my counter-transference experience.

1) In the interview I heard myself say something I wasn't expecting and that surprised me.
2) When I listened to the audio-recording to check the transcript I had a powerful sense that I knew where the words should be, searched there compulsively and was perplexed by their absence. I was wholly unable to see or hear the words for which I was searching even though they were in fact in the transcript and on the audio-recording, and only a short "distance" away from the place in which I searched so intensively.
3) In response to these elements of my experience I felt compelled to create a story and to seek colleagues to listen to that story. In retrospect that appears to have been another kind of frantic activity that covered over my more fundamental inability to make sense of what I felt.
4) When I found the missing words in a different place, I was shocked and registered a strong flush of embarrassment as I realised that I had fabricated and circulated a story from what now looked like a foolish mistake. I also felt that I'd lost something else, namely the veracity of the story I'd constructed.

As I have indicated, all these experiences were emotionally charged and I felt the charge somatically before I found words to describe them. How, if at all, did these feelings relate to Katherine's narration?

Some of the key facts of Katherine's autobiography are as follows. She was the eldest of three siblings and, before the birth of her parents' second child, she had been sent to live with her grandparents on a permanent basis. She was told that this was for the sake of her health. The grandparents stayed just a few streets away from her parents but in an area locally recognised as "better". As Katherine grew up, she "wanted to be the same as [her] brother and sister" but never felt she fitted in, not belonging wholly with them or with her grandparents and their neighbours. As a teenager she got on well with her grandfather but fought with her grandmother. Her grandfather died when she was 19 and finally the truth was told: her mother's husband was not her biological father. The disclosure was presented to

Katherine in anger: she reported that grandmother “told me it was my fault that my mother had had such a miserable life because my dad threw me back in her face every time they fought”. At this moment, in the context of a significant bereavement, she “left and was thrown out” of her grandmother’s house and couldn’t go to her mother’s either, so went to stay with relatives in another city. She did not settle and a few months later returned to the city of her birth, initially staying uneasily with her grandmother. Within a few years, the man Katherine called her father died, by which time she was a lone parent with a one-year-old son. Determined not to repeat what had happened to her, she had not had a boyfriend since the birth of her child because she “wasn’t having any man tell him [her son] that he wasn’t his”.

A profound sense of displacement and not fitting in was clearly evident in Katherine’s narration, along with a deep sense of loss and sadness. The sense I make of my felt experience does not change this interpretation of her story in any fundamental way. However, when I was finally able to think about my sensations without resorting to frantic activity, they deepened my understanding of Katherine’s feelings. Using the various elements of my experience counter-transferentially and reflexively in the service of the analytic task of comprehending emotional qualities of Katherine’s narration, the first point to make is that they serve to remind me of the limits of my empathic insight into Katherine’s felt experience. My capacity to bear witness to Katherine’s story seemed to require something to register in my being somatically, and then to make its presence felt when I returned to the audio-recording on two subsequent occasions. Once I realised this and began to discuss my counter-transference experience with colleagues, I also remembered how, when I got home after the interview, I caught the whiff of tobacco smoke on my clothes and threw everything that I was wearing in the washing machine as well as swiftly washing my hair. There isn’t anything intrinsically notable about these acts, but my memory of them returned to me the powerful feeling that I had had to shake off or get rid of something after the interview, which, on the surface I felt had gone well (compare Parr 1998).

Understood as an unconscious effect, the compulsion to be rid of that faint odour of cigarette smoke was perhaps a signal that my unconscious processing of this interview was far from over and more specifically that processes of projective identification were at work. A sense of compulsion was again very strong for me when I searched for words in what I later discovered to be the wrong place. However, I was not yet able to think about these somatic registrations in relation to Katherine’s narration: in Bollas’s (1987) terms, they were unthought knowns, which I continued to carry within me for years. Psychoanalytic understandings of unconscious life indicate that this happens all the time and the vast majority of these effects remain forever unthought. Sometimes, such effects demand attention while their unconscious meaning remains wholly unavailable to us, prompting, for example, fabrications such as the story I told about the misplaced words (compare Callard

2003). Unconscious processes can be deeply disruptive, and in this case my failure to see and hear the words I was looking for, and my frantic search for them, made no sense to me but drove me to construct a wholly erroneous story. When I finally realised my mistake, the hot flush of embarrassment I felt was accompanied by a momentary desire to deny (not know) what I had now discovered.

Eventually, after returning to the audio-recording years later, I was able to think about what my body already knew, and to create "word pictures" for what I had felt earlier as well as what I felt in the present. It seemed as if I had registered what would turn out to be visceral reminders of feelings that Katherine had conveyed to me. Words I'd remembered saying but later searched for frantically and unsuccessfully, together with the story I created to "explain" their apparent absence, seemed to carry a faint echo of Katherine's story, as if Katherine's feeling of always being somehow out of place was communicated via my bodily experience. The story of telepathic communication I had fabricated because of my inability to see what was in plain sight, now prompted me to think again of how, for 19 years, Katherine had lived with the effects of a secret about her parentage from which she was excluded, and with a cover story that never really rang true. She had grown up with a profound sense of displacement, searching for a place to belong but never finding it. The shock of discovering that the words I had frantically searched for had in fact always been there, but in a slightly different place, also made me think again of the world of difference it made for Katherine to live those few streets away from her parents and siblings. I was also bodily reminded of the impact of the eventual disclosure of the long held secret about her parentage, massively shocking in itself and surely all the more so given that she had just lost her grandfather.

Any sense I had of Katherine's feelings at the time she told me of these events was somehow insufficient in relation to what she sought to convey. It may be that, consciously or unconsciously, she was trying to protect me from the emotional force of her story; it may be that I was unprepared to hear this dimension of what she was saying. Understood in terms of projective identification, I felt – somatically – unconscious affects that originated with Katherine but which she needed to "discharge". Whatever the reason, an unconscious affective "excess" above and beyond the manifest content of our conversation, above and beyond my apparently good-enough empathic response, seemed to lodge in me, ready to return when I was able to begin to think about my feelings years later.

I am not claiming that I ever truly understood how it felt for her, but I am suggesting that my understanding deepened as a result of the reminders that were generated by my somatic experience of working with the audio-recording. I am also suggesting that, when used alongside the explicit content of an interview, counter-transference experiences of this kind can be powerful ways in which we develop knowledge about another person's feelings.

In the end, the example on which I have focussed is unusual because researchers do not often get the opportunity to return to interviews so long after the event. However, if we are to use the counter-transference methodologically, it is important to be aware that much of what we register unconsciously may remain unavailable for thought, whether temporarily or permanently. Psychoanalytic consultation may be helpful in making some things available sooner rather than later. For example, Sue Jervis (2013) has described how, when participating in a psychoanalytic consultation group for researchers, she became unexpectedly upset. This distressing experience helped her make sense of an interview she had previously found inexplicably difficult to use. Her account conveys a sense of returning on multiple occasions to an interview, which she eventually realised she had been struggling to "digest". In my own case, around the time I had interviewed Katherine, I was working on a paper in which I drew on stories offered by trainee counsellors to describe counselling as offering the promise of "resituating troubled selves" (Bondi 2003c, 866). I did not use Katherine's account in that paper although it could have offered a graphic example. Perhaps one reason why I did not was that my thinking about it was still unconsciously too troubled for me to do so.

Conclusion

I opened this paper by asking how it is possible to know how another person feels and I have turned to psychoanalytic ideas for guidance, responding to a call issued by Pile (1991) more than twenty years ago. Following Kingsbury (2010, 519), I have acknowledged scepticism about the "value and viability" of methodological uses of psychoanalysis. In attending to some elements of this scepticism I have introduced the idea of the "unthought known", the concept of the receptive unconscious and the potential for working with somatic knowledge. By attending to examples drawn from a single interview I have illustrated several forms of unconscious communication and explored how researchers might work with these.

Psychoanalytic ideas about unconscious processes suggest that feelings are communicated easily enough and may be registered ("known") by those to whom they are communicated. Indeed, the psychoanalytic concepts on which I have drawn presume that feelings arise and take shape relationally. The challenge for researchers lies in the capacity to think about what we register and work from within our emotional entanglement with others. Moreover, because much communication happens outside of our conscious awareness, and because our affective boundaries are so permeable, there is ample scope for confusion about the relationship between our own bodily sensations and the feelings of others. My opening question might therefore be rephrased in terms of how it is possible to think about feelings in ways that help us understand other people's emotional experience.

In this paper, I have attempted to show that it is possible to think about unconscious communication and to illuminate some of the limits and the challenges entailed. I have echoed Kingsbury (2010) and Pile (2012) in arguing that qualitative researchers already use ideas like “rapport” that rely implicitly on psychoanalysis. Paying attention to an interviewee’s repetition of a particular concern, I have illustrated how unconscious “excess” may present itself in ways that are relatively straightforward and uncontentious to trace using the idea of the receptive unconscious. In so doing I have sought to show how researchers might utilise psychoanalytic ideas to help illuminate otherwise elusive but nevertheless ordinary features of the interactions that constitute interviews, like the variably successful unconscious negotiation of trust.

In illustrating unconscious communication arising through speech, I have drawn on the idea of unconscious transference to recognise a latent meaning in a repeated phrase. I have explored in some detail differences between the uses researchers and clinicians might make of transference communications, considering specifically the case of transference interpretations, which are a classic and distinctive element of clinical practice. While I have acknowledged that interviews may offer research participants “therapeutic opportunities” (Birch and Miller 2000), I have also endorsed those who caution against the active incorporation into interviews discussion of the “here and now” (transference) relationship between interviewer and interviewee. I have made this case on the grounds that it is important that researchers honour the stated purpose of the interviews for which they recruit participants, and because, in a “therapeutic culture” (Furedi 2004) discussion of the “here and now” relationship carries particular risks of causing confusion. However I have also suggested that the way clinicians work with the transference is through a process of unconsciously “living an experience together” (Winnicott 1945/1958, 152), which is simply not available to researchers (compare Thomas 2007).

Sometimes, across all kinds of important differences, researchers feel moved by the accounts those they interview offer in ways that seem to mirror their interviewees’ feelings (Goodrum and Keys 2007). Such feelings carry risks, for example of effacing the other’s emotional experience by assuming it is the same as one’s own (Watson 2009) or of emotional exhaustion generated by over-identification with interviewees (Evans 2012). I have argued for a conceptualisation of empathy that draws on the psychoanalytic concept of a “third position” through which an awareness of alterity is retained alongside the emotional insights afforded by unconscious processes of identification. This sense of alterity keeps to the fore limits of understanding. When researchers feel like saying “I know just how you feel”, or find themselves bursting to share an example of their own, it is likely that unconscious identification (not empathy) holds sway. These are moments at which the relationships

between our own feelings and the feelings of the other need to be considered with particularly critical caution.

In exploring a chain of events I experienced in relation to a particular interview, I have illustrated how unconscious effects that register somatically sometimes disrupt one's capacity to think. Because I chose to revisit this interview some time after the event, I gained new perspective, which momentarily felt like a most unwelcome revelation, but which also enabled me to think about my experience as a product of projective identification in the counter-transference. I have shown how such thinking might help us to understanding the emotional "track" embedded and embodied in the narrations research participants offer.

Katy Bennett (2009, 248) has commented that she "can see the potential for those with appropriate training to adopt practices developed in psychotherapy for the purposes of social science research" but that she is "less certain" how someone "like me, with no such training, can […] approach such methods". In this paper I have attempted to shed some light on how social science researchers already take some ideas about unconscious communication (and the receptive unconscious) for granted in concepts like "rapport". I have also illustrated something of the variety of ways in which unconscious communication routinely occurs together with the potential such communications offer in our capacity to understand people's feelings. In particular I have suggested that our somatic experience may be a crucial source in the development of such knowledge. I am not suggesting this is easy or something that can be done without drawing on the expertise of psychoanalytic consultants. That psychoanalysis should occupy a contradictory position in relation to social research is, perhaps, par for the course.

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