

sonal recollection of suffering. All three women describe the violence and privation they experienced as children growing up in an impoverished rural community. However, their stories differ profoundly in ways that reflect shifts in both power structures and discursive resources over the courses of their lives. The resulting contrasts enable Young to raise her own critical questions about the expressive power of different idioms, and about what is lost when oppression and victimization are recast in the narrow therapeutic language of abuse and recovered memory.

Glynis George considers the idiom of abuse as a focus of controversy in another marginalized community. Her narratives come from two women who grew up in a Francophone fishing village on the shores of western Newfoundland. Here, however, there is no question of "recovered memory"—both women clearly recall the practices they denounce. The dispute is rather about what these events signify and what should be made of them. When George's first informant appears on television to assert that "abuse is part of our culture," she brings down the wrath of her entire community. The ensuing dispute—which breaks down along gender, class, and ethnic lines—shows vividly that the remembering of abuse affects collective as well as personal identities, and that when claims to victimhood are made on more than one level, they can sometimes undermine each other.

Telling Stories, Making Selves Memory and Identity in Multiple Personality Disorder

Paul Antze

Near the end of his recent book on multiple personality and memory, Ian Hacking (1995) raises a curious question. How well, he wonders, can multiples live up to the old delphic injunction "Know thyself?" He is not asking here about the delusions or cognitive impairments imposed by a mental disorder, but rather about the limits of a certain discourse, a certain way of expressing and understanding oneself.

Hacking's interest in multiple personality stems from a larger interest in the phenomenon he calls "making up people" (Hacking 1986). This is his term for what happens when experts in the human sciences create new categories of human beings (the degenerate, the alcoholic, the homosexual) and then new bodies of knowledge about them. Because it is about human beings in social context, he argues, this kind of knowledge can loop back on its subject matter in unpredictable ways, so that it often helps create what it only seemed to describe. The reason is that once new human kinds have been turned loose in society, they take on a life of their own. People begin to inhabit them, invoking them to make sense of their lives or tell others who they are. (Thus a young man in therapy has "insight" into his latent homosexuality, or a drinker checks himself for the telltale signs of alcoholic thinking.) The talk of experts, in other words, can quite literally create new kinds of subjects, new ways of being human, new forms of self-understanding.¹

For Hacking, the recent multiple personality epidemic is a spectacular case in point. If he is right, then the people we call multiples are very

much creatures of a certain time and place. Their condition has been made possible, in a sense, only by specific historical circumstances—by the moral passion and entrepreneurial vigor of some psychiatrists, but also by a variety of social forces that give their theories resonance—feminism, the decline of the family, concerns about child abuse, popular ideas about trauma and memory.

Hacking is at pains to distinguish his view from the usual dismissive objection to multiple personality, that it is some sort of collective delusion based on suggestibility or play-acting. And yet there is an aspect of the phenomenon that he finds troubling. What happens to people who come to live inside this discourse, who use it to make sense of their lives? In a trivial sense they certainly pick up a kind of knowledge about themselves, a knowledge of alter personalities and unsuspected childhood traumas. But what about that deeper kind of self-knowledge enjoined by the delphic oracle? For Hacking, such knowledge is "a virtue in its own right," based in "deeply rooted convictions and sensibilities about what it is to be a fully developed human being" (1995: 264).

Can multiples win this kind of self-knowledge? Can they even pursue it? Having suspended judgment throughout most of his book, Hacking ends by aligning himself with those he calls the "cautious doubters":

They accept that the patient has produced this version of herself: a narrative that includes dramatic events, a causal story of the formation of alters, and an account of the relationships between alters. That is a self-consciousness; that is a soul. The doubters accept it as a reality. . . . Nevertheless, they fear that multiple personality therapy leads to a false consciousness. Not in the blatant sense that the apparent memories of early abuse are necessarily wrong or distorted—they may be true enough. No, there is a sense that the end product is a thoroughly crafted person, but not a person who serves the ends for which we are persons. Not a person with self-knowledge, but a person who is the worse for having a glib patter that simulates an understanding of herself. (266)

I am not so sure. Recently I concluded a three-year ethnographic study of a small support group for multiples in Toronto.² During this period nearly fifty individuals passed through the group, all of them currently under treatment for multiple personality disorder. The group was meant as a supplement to therapy, so conversations dealt mainly with problems in daily living: where to find help in a crisis, how to communicate with alter personalities, what to do if child alters came out at work. Two points struck me with great force.

First, while members shared experiences that most of us would find very strange indeed, they did *share* the experiences. Despite differences in background and educational level, they seemed to understand each other—at least most of the time. Listening each week as they traded advice or sympathy, I couldn't avoid the impression that their condition was something real—as real as any other human experience—and that they had amassed an impressive body of working knowledge about it. This was not self-knowledge in the grand sense of the word, but it was more than glib patter. They were exchanging something that had the look and feel of substantive information.

Secondly, the picture of multiple personality that emerged from their conversations seemed to me both more variegated and less dramatic than the one conveyed by case histories, talk shows, and literary "mitlographies." Some members lived on welfare and seemed to be constantly in and out of hospitals, while others held responsible positions. Their talk included a good deal of predictable anguish, but also much evidence of creativity and psychological insight. There were more than a few moments of high hilarity. There were clichés aplenty here, to be sure, but I also felt that at times members were wrestling in serious and honest ways with the question, "Who am I?"

While these observations may raise some doubts about Hacking's conclusion, they are consistent with his larger argument about the cultural specificity of multiple personality. Medical anthropologists have studied similar phenomena in a wide array of societies. Twenty years ago these were known as "culture-bound syndromes" (Yap 1969); today they are more often styled as "illness idioms" or "idioms of distress" (Nichter 1981). The change in terms reflects a shift in thinking, based on the recognition that culturally specific illnesses are more than exotic bits of pathology; and that understanding them must begin with a clear sense of their local meanings and uses. Especially where dissociation is involved, these can stray far from the realm of illness per se. The remarkable ethnographies of Michael Lambek (1981) and Janice Boddy (1989) both document forms of possession which result in enduring relationships between host and possessing spirit. Lambek has examined the subtle and often very complex forms of communication (with oneself and others) that such relationships permit, while Boddy has shown how possession offers public opportunities for what she has called "self-articulation" (1989: 232-37, 252-57).

My assumption here is that multiple personality is something of this kind (Anzue, 1992). If it is indeed a local idiom of distress akin to other dissociative idioms, then we should not be surprised at the way it enables sufferers to share knowledge about a reality they experience in common.

Such knowledge has its direct counterparts in the possession cults of Sri Lanka, Northern Sudan, and many other parts of the world. It should serve to remind us that the expression of suffering (or indeed anything else) requires a language, and that to use a language is to fill it out and make its objects real. We should also not be surprised that this idiom is appropriated in a variety of ways that could never have been predicted by the experts who first wrote about MPD. An idiom of distress is, like any language, a "form of life" as Wittgenstein put it. Thus it can evolve over time and lend itself to unexpected uses.

Looking at the current wave of multiple personality as an idiom of distress allows us to reformulate Hacking's question in a broader and perhaps more fruitful way, so that it is no longer about what the multiple can do but what the idiom allows. What kinds of expressive and reflective possibilities does it open? What does it foreclose? Questions of this kind cannot be answered in the abstract or by referring only to printed versions of a discourse. We need to see the language as individuals appropriate it in their lives.

One way of doing this is to look at the kinds of stories that people tell about themselves. Elsewhere I have argued that even trivial stories of this kind (a visit to the hair dresser's, a chance encounter on the bus) can be highly revealing when told in groups, where they often serve to translate shared ideas into experiential realities (Antze 1976, 1987, 1992). But asking about self-understanding and its limits calls for a different and more reflective kind of story, one that is usually accessible only through interviews or diaries. Stories of this kind—life stories, as they are sometimes called—mediate even more directly between abstractions and experience. Indeed, one might argue that they are the chief means by which grand cultural discourses like Christianity or psychoanalysis find their way into something resembling self-knowledge.³

Indeed, if Paul Ricoeur is right, then our very experience of identity, of being someone in particular, has a tacit narrative structure. In his recent book, *Oneself As Another* (1992), Ricoeur argues that we know ourselves as distinct from others and as continuous over time only through a process he calls *emplotment*, a perpetual weaving and reweaving of past and present events into characters, motives, situations, actions. In effect we are characters in a story that we keep revising as our lives unfold. As Ricoeur points out, this narrative labor has its own dynamic, driven by a perpetual tension "between the demand for concordance and the admission of discordances"—by the need, in other words, to find threads of continuity in the face of "diversity, variability, discontinuity and instability" (140–41). Clearly there are many ways of resolving this tension.

The tension Ricoeur describes surely finds a kind of boundary case among persons diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder or (to use

the new coinage of DSM-IV) Dissociative Identity Disorder. Both terms suggest a fractured sense of identity; either there are too many selves or one that doesn't hang together. But multiples trying to make narrative sense of their lives face an even graver form of discordance, this one at the level of memory. Many enter therapy with only dim or fragmentary recollections of childhood, yet they seem to be haunted by events from this period that return in other forms, as nightmares, "flashbacks," "body memories." They learn that these experiences hide secrets that hold the key to their recovery. It would be safe to say that for all multiples in therapy today, memory is a central obsession. In fact, while memory is central to anyone's life story, for multiples it is generally the *subject* of the story. This means that if we are to use life stories in attempting to grasp the kind of self-understanding fostered by multiple personality as an illness idiom, we must attend especially to the various ways these invoke memory in framing identity.

This is what I want to do in the pages ahead, drawing on excerpts from a single life story recounted by one of my informants. Before beginning, however, I want to consider some features of the larger discourse she appropriates. Like most multiples today, my informant came to her story with the help of a confessional practice known loosely as "recovered memory therapy." For the past several years this practice has been the focus of a bitter controversy involving feminists, different camps of psychiatrists, and advocates of the "False Memory Syndrome." "I don't wish to rehearse the controversy here, save to say that it situates the stories told by multiples in a highly charged field. My interest lies rather with the "master narrative" that guides recovered memory therapy and does so much to shape multiple personality as a cultural idiom.

Remarkably enough, this guiding narrative is itself a story about narrative, memory, and identity. It is in some respects an old story, with clear antecedents in the work of Pierre Janet (1889 [1889]) and the early writings of Freud and Breuer (1955 [1895]). Its modern editions take a variety of forms, ranging from the sophisticated theories of Bessel van der Kolk (1988) and Judith Herman (1992) to the cruder accounts found in many self-help manuals. The core idea is that many common psychiatric disorders (including some severe ones) have their origins in traumas of early childhood—usually sexual abuse. The traumatic events can't be remembered because they have been "repressed" (or more accurately, dissociated) into a series of compartments separate from everyday consciousness. In van der Kolk's terms (1988), they are not "encoded into narrative memory," and yet they are preserved all the better for that. Cut off from any commerce with the rest of mental life, they remain as fresh and painful as the day they happened. In extreme cases they may spawn

alter personalities that show themselves only when the patient is an adult. But even if this doesn't happen, they usually find their way into a wide range of symptomatic acts—phobias, compulsions, nightmares. Moreover, they can be “triggered” by objects, words, situations in everyday life that act like hypnotic cues. The abuse survivor may experience sudden attacks of rage or panic or despondency accompanied by odd thoughts or inexplicable bits of behavior. Most abuse therapists believe these reactions offer a pathway to the dissociated traumas themselves. The task of healing is then a matter of helping the survivor to recover and relive these terrible events in a safe therapeutic environment. Once this has happened, the traumas can be reconnected to everyday narrative memory, where they lose their power to do harm.

As it informs therapeutic practice and the counsels of self-help books, this abstract theory can become something more—a template for experience or even a recipe for a kind of self-understanding. In the opening pages of her popular self-help volume, *Repressed Memories* (1992), Renee Fredrickson says this explicitly. “Repressed memories,” she tells her readers, “are pieces of your past that have become a mystery. They stalk your unconscious and hamper your life with their aftermath. They will tell you a story if you know how to listen to them, and the story will help you to make sense of your life and your pain” (24). She invites readers to embark on a “journey of discovery and healing,” in which “you must piece together mind and body clues to find out what you have forgotten. You will struggle at first to believe what you are remembering, but your healing will take place as you recover your memories.”

Symptomatically speaking, this journey can begin almost anywhere. Judith Herman argues that the sequelae of childhood sexual abuse can be extremely varied, so “disguised presentations” are more the rule than the exception. This means that some abuse survivors may appear to be psychotic or borderline, while others look relatively normal. Symptoms can range from phobias and eating disorders to insomnia, drug abuse, or even excessive daydreaming (Herman 1992, 121; Fredrickson 1992, 48–51). In fact, there is no way of ruling out a traumatic cause for *any* set of presenting symptoms.

It is in teaching patients how to understand these symptoms that recovered memory therapy offers a template for experience. As the quotation from Fredrickson suggests, symptoms, feelings, dreams, and other mental productions are important chiefly as clues in a kind of detective story. To know what they mean is to discover the memories hiding behind them. In the words of Gail Fischer-Taylor, a prominent Toronto abuse therapist, “Every symptom has its basis in the survivor’s history and is a potential entry point into the unearthing of memories.”⁵⁰ While this view of

symptoms has a vaguely Freudian ring, it is in fact radically different from the one found in psychoanalysis, where all mental productions are taken as complex, highly overdetermined expressions of ongoing fantasies and conflicts. Here the aim is simply to find out what happened.⁶ As in a detective story, the connections are made in part by surmise and deduction, but recovered memory therapy gives special authority to direct experience via altered states of consciousness: dreams, “guided reverie,” hypnotic regression, “flashbacks,” and (for multiples) reports from alter personalities. The assumption is that because traumas have been dissociated, they are most readily accessible in dissociative states.

So far it might seem that the point of recovering traumatic memories is purely instrumental. But there is something more at stake here, a kind of self-knowledge that is charged with moral and political valences. Advocates speak of “the tremendous reward of knowing your own history,” of knowing “who you are and where you came from” (Fredrickson 1992: 31). Judith Herman points out that learning about their early abuse enables adult survivors to “become comprehensible to themselves.”

When survivors recognize the origins of their psychological difficulties in an abusive childhood environment, they no longer need attribute them to an inherent defect in the self. Thus the way is opened to the creation of new meaning in experience and a new, unstigmatized identity. (1992: 127)

This last point is an extremely interesting one, because it suggests that the details of the abusive history may be less important for the patient’s healing than the *fact* of the abuse itself. The patient has discovered a decisive event in her past that has made her who she is, and that event is a crime, committed when she was a helpless child. Advocates agree that this is a painful discovery, one that brings anger, grieving, and, in many cases, a permanent break with her family. At the same time, once recovered memories have established the trauma as real, she is changed—one might almost say *diagnostically* changed—into a new kind of person: a *survivor*. The word itself suggests strength and a moral affinity to other kinds of survivors—of war, torture, the holocaust.

For Judith Herman this affinity is more than metaphorical. She argues that survivors of all these horrors can be shown to suffer from a common syndrome, which she calls “Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.” Seen in this light, trauma therapy takes on some of the qualities of a political act. The therapist must be prepared to set aside her traditional neutrality, stand with her client against the oppressor, and above all “bear witness” to what was done (1992: 135). By the same token, the client’s

struggle to recover her history is part of a larger struggle. Remembering is bearing testimony, breaking the conspiracy of silence (181).

To one whole school of critics, this narrative with its crusading overtones is little more than a recipe for false memories and the destruction of families (Crews 1994; Ofshe and Watters 1994). My concern is a different one, and it harkens back to Hacking's question about self-knowledge for multiples. Imagine someone who gone through recovered memory therapy and made its guiding story her own story, one that makes her life "comprehensible for the first time." What limits does this story impose on her sense of herself as a person, even on the questions she can ask?

In a recent article, Janice Haaken, a feminist psychoanalyst, offers some telling observations on this point. Both recovered memory advocates and their critics, she says, have failed to see that "the emotional truth of the past is never reducible to the concrete facticity of events but is always bound up in interpretation, both in the initial experience of events and in their later elaborations and working through in memory..." (1994: 118). Haaken argues that the concrete, historical interpretations favored by trauma therapists are in a sense impoverishing, in that they offer no place for fantasy, imagination, or moral ambiguity. They make the survivor's life comprehensible, perhaps, but at the cost of typecasting her as an innocent victim whose troubles derive entirely from her abuse: this "political construction of the victim" she says, "works against complex truths and honest self-exploration..." (123). Worse than that, it leaves the adult survivor, *qua* survivor, as someone without desire or moral agency of her own.

I would add that when memories are taken only as clues to real events, one runs the risk of becoming deaf to their subtler symbolic meanings. Memories visit us unbidden, not simply as records of the past, but as responses to our ongoing needs, hopes, predicaments. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, in fact, much of everyday mental life is informed by a complex metaphorical interchange between past and present. The past is important, not as a series of blind causes that have made us what we are, but as a body of compelling metaphors or prototypes that inform our present experience and behavior. To the extent they are formative, in fact, past events in psychoanalysis are not past at all. They are part of the "timeless unconscious" and thus present here and now—though of course in disguised form. Freud saw the transference as a way of making the unconscious conscious by conjuring it up as "a piece of real life" in therapy, so that one meets it on the same footing with the present.⁷ This makes the past into something that, at least in principle, can be reencountered, "worked through," and reappropriated as one continues to live. By contrast, a past composed of frozen events that "tell you who you are" may imprison the client in an equally frozen sense of herself as survivor.⁸

To put it briefly, then, we might say that recovered memory therapy offers clients the benefits of a new identity that exempts them from psychiatric stigma, affirms their oppression, and links their suffering with a larger political struggle—but that it does so at a price. The price is that it inducts them into an illness idiom that excludes fantasy, moral ambiguity, a sense of agency, and the kind of remembering that can offer openings to the future.

My concerns here begin to sound very much like Hacking's contention that multiple personality is a kind of false consciousness—that the multiple is "a thoroughly crafted person," as he puts it, but "not a person with self-knowledge." The difference is that I have been discussing the expressive limits of recovered memory therapy and its guiding narrative, not multiple personality as such. My strictures would certainly apply to multiples who understood themselves exclusively in these terms, but I do not think this is often the case. As Hacking himself has pointed out, today's multiple personality movement is the offspring of a curious marriage between the recovered memory movement, with its close links to the crusade against child abuse, and a more diffuse body of assumptions and expectations rooted in the history of hypnosis and spontaneous trance behavior (Hacking 1992; Kenny 1986; Ellenberger 1970). I would add that in addition to these "vertical" links to earlier dissociative theories and idioms, multiple personality has important "horizontal" affinities to some contemporary psychotherapeutic practices, including psychodrama (Moreno 1945), gestalt therapy (Perls 1969), transactional analysis (Berne 1961), and imaginal dialogues (Watkins 1986). Interestingly enough, advocates of all these techniques see them as ways to foster imaginative engagement with unrecognized dimensions of the self. What I am suggesting, then, is that multiple personality cannot be reduced to recovered memory therapy, and that because its own cultural sources are so diffuse and multiple, its expressive possibilities cannot be determined in advance.

The only way of assessing these possibilities is to look at an actual life story. The above discussion may enable us to do this with a heightened sense of the issues at stake. Certainly the limits of the recovered memory narratives are clear enough. It remains, however, to characterize the difference between stories of this kind and others that reflect a more authentic brand of self-understanding. Here again, I think Paul Ricoeur's work on narrative identity (1992) points the way to an economical and suggestive formulation.

Ricoeur proposes a distinction between two dimensions or aspects of personal identity. On the one hand there is *sameness*, Ricoeur's term for the side of identity that depends on fixed attributes—race, gender, birthplace, but also habits and traits of character. Sameness constitutes identity

through permanence in time, but also through similarity with others who share the same attributes (1992: 121). It is implicit whenever we speak of "identifying" with specific persons or groups. It is also clearly implicit in the notion of "identity politics." Ricoeur's term for the other side of identity is *selfhood*. What he has in mind here is the kind of identity implicit in our ability to make commitments or keep promises, to be someone who can be "counted on." But this ability implies something more—an ability to project ourselves forward in time, to say who we will be tomorrow. Identity in this sense of the word is unavoidably an ethical project, but it is also an unfinished one. It depends on "self-constancy," as Ricoeur puts it, on a sense of what matters to us, but this is a sense that remains open to change in an ongoing dialogue between experience and memory (1992: 163–68).

For Ricoeur, the task of narrative self-understanding is to mediate between these two poles of identity, to balance sameness with ethical openness, to anchor selfhood in a personal and social history. Although he doesn't address the issue directly, his work implies that narratives based on either side alone would risk premature closure, replacing the dialectic of self-understanding with blind affiliations or a dry and abstract sense of duty. It is the tension between selfhood and sameness that sustains an open narrative.

Ricoeur's language affords us a way of translating Hacking's question into narrative terms. Instead of asking whether multiples can know themselves, we can now ask in what ways and how "openly" their life stories succeed in framing a narrative identity. In these terms it is easy to categorize the standard recovered memory story as a one-sided narrative of "sameness." Variants on this story are common enough in survivor newsletters and self-help literature, where they often serve polemical ends. However in my experience the stories told privately by multiples tend to be more complex and interesting; this is especially true of the accounts given by those strong enough to pursue careers and other outside interests. Statistically speaking, these stories may not be typical, but they certainly offer a more complete picture of multiple personality as an expressive idiom. The example that follows is a case in point. It includes some of the classic elements of "sameness" found in recovered memory therapy, but there are other currents as well. Some of these imply a more imaginative engagement with the past and suggest an emerging sense of Ricoeurian selfhood.

The woman I shall call Beth is now a pastor in a small Protestant church in eastern Manitoba. At the time she joined the group she was still a divinity student—a slim, quiet woman in her late thirties, given to wearing plaid shirts and faded jeans. Though reserved at first, she found her voice and eventually became one of the group's most active participants—someone who could be counted on to show up every week and talk about herself, but also to listen thoughtfully to others.

Beth had been diagnosed with MPD several months before joining the group. At the time she arrived she said she and her two therapists had contacted nearly forty alter personalities. Like many other "high-functioning" multiples, Beth had always been able to maintain a certain degree of "co-consciousness" with her alters, even when they were in control. She was one of the few participants who would switch regularly during meetings, usually to a wise-cracking child alter named Belinda. However, even these switches seemed governed by an adult sense of appropriateness, since they normally took place only during the early, "social chat" phase of the meetings, or on the rare occasions when someone else produced a child alter.

Beth grew up in a small town in southern Manitoba, the eldest of four children. Her father had suffered a series of mental breakdowns when she was young and so never held a steady job. She remembers her home as "a bad scene—just full of tension and bickering." On finishing high school she moved to a nearby city to begin training as a nurse. Over the next decade she held several nursing positions, including one year as a psychiatric nurse. She also started work toward her B.A. However, she felt drawn toward the church and pastoral counseling. Eventually she took a job as a lay chaplain with a Christian youth organization, which she held for seven years. Her departure from this job coincided roughly with a personal crisis in which she came to recognize her sexual abuse as a child. However, she was not diagnosed as a multiple until more than a year later, by which time she had already begun her divinity studies.

My interviews with Beth took place on two occasions, separated by nearly two years. In the first, shortly after she joined the group, I asked her to tell me how she had come to recognize that she had been abused and to experience herself as someone with "other parts." The second interview took place after she had been ordained and had begun preaching to her first congregation. This time I simply asked her to tell me about how her life had changed since our first interview. The two interviews together yielded about five hours of taped material.

This material conveys a story—a single story, I think—but it is not a linear one. There are false starts, digressions, repetitions. Sometimes the action circles back on itself as recent events turn into portraits of an unsuspected past. At one level it describes a kind of mid-life crisis that takes place over a period of about three years. However, because the crisis is experienced through the prism of recovered memories and multiplicity, it becomes a story about her entire life, especially her childhood. It is also in every sense a story about identity.

In what follows I want to consider three narrative strands in this material, as illustrated in three sets of excerpts. In each of these Beth invokes

memories in a tacit effort to reframe her identity. But she does so in a three very different ways.

1. Discovery

In telling how she learned that she had been abused as a child, Beth begins not with memories or flashbacks, but with a series of intuitions that grew out of her work as a nurse and counselor. "In the summer of '84," she begins, "I had a nightmare." But then she backs up:

In the spring of '83 I started seeing a chaplain because I had a couple of students I didn't feel I was counseling appropriately. Maybe he suspected something, because I remember him asking, "What does this trigger?" and I couldn't answer. And then that summer I worked in palliative care the whole time. In the fall I came to the counselor and said, "I've been so in touch with other people's pain all summer, now I really feel in touch with my own." At the end of that conversation I remember him telling me, "Beth, you're an abused child," but I couldn't accept it.

That was fall of '83. In the summer of '84 I was at a cottage with some friends and somebody gave me a book. It was the story of a special ed. teacher who was working with these kids—and I found myself really identified with this special ed. teacher. And then she's talking about this relationship with her lover and I found I could no longer identify with her. And then I found myself identified with one of these little kids that had been abused. Just before going to bed that night I was at a part in the book where the little kid loses it totally and is under a bed and won't come out. That night I had a nightmare, and in the nightmare I admitted I was physically abused. I had never done that before. I was really quite shocked by that. I went back to my counselor and said, "Guess what . . ."

As she worked with her counselor over the next several months, Beth began to recognize the full extent of her physical abuse. There were no repressed memories involved here, she says: "I never lost memories of the physical abuse. I just had never called it that." She began to withdraw from her family and finally made a decision to change the spelling of her last name. By her own account this "triggered an incredible grieving process," one that continued to deepen over the course of the following year.

As this happened, Beth found herself brooding over other troubling features of her life, including her evident aversion to relationships with

men. She had always managed to think of this in religious terms, as being "called to singleness." Now she began to see the actual fear lurking behind this high-minded idea. She also "began to feel there was this wounded child inside me, this kid who could be different ages at different times." These thoughts led her to another realization:

In the spring of '87 I was walking on the beach praying, and it was as if I had this puzzle and I was trying to put together all these different pieces. I was starting to notice all these different things. . . . As I was praying, I'm not sure what happened, except I realized my sexuality had been abused. I didn't have any memories at that point.

Several points in this narrative segment are striking. Although no repressed memories have appeared as yet, it bears the clear marks of a recovered memory narrative. It begins with symptoms—inappropriate counseling, troubling identifications. Beth's chaplain explains them by proposing that she is a certain kind of person: "Beth, you're an abused child." She rejects this proffered identity, but another, more frightening symptomatic experience compels her to accept it. In doing so she merely redefines what she already knew about her unhappy childhood, but the effect is profound. Now she no longer belongs to her family, but to the company of the abused. She confirms this shift in a little ritual of *disidentification* by changing the spelling of her name. In Ricoeur's terms, it is interesting that so much in this initial change of identity is framed in the language of identification, of sameness. And yet it is Hacking's work that best explains what happens next. Hacking (1991) has shown that the term child abuse has only come lately to bridge the previously unrelated concepts of cruelty to children and incest. Increasingly, the paradigmatic "abused child" is in fact a victim of incest. Thus in seeing herself as an abused child, Beth gains access to other forms of "sameness" implicit in this term. She has been abused, but in how many ways? Does the physical abuse explain all her symptoms? What has she forgotten? Questions like these illustrate what Hacking calls "semantic contagion" (1995: 255–59). They cannot explain Beth's conviction that she was sexually abused, but they show how it is thinkable in the absence of specific memories.

2. Discontinuity

Beth's dark revelation on the beach seemed to set off a long downward spiral into fatigue, paralysis, and depression. During this period, she says, "even God became violent to me." By the following spring she felt she couldn't go

on with her job anymore and decided to resign. Her plan was to resume her former occupation as an obstetrical nurse. But three weeks after taking up this new job she was injured in a car accident.

After the accident it was like I was a different person. I couldn't access the confidence or even the faith I'd had before. . . . Once I'd been injured they told me I'd never be able to work as a nurse again. So the only thing I thought I had was gone. The other thing I thought I had was a good relationship with God, which had now been blown apart. . . . My best friend walked away. So I was really quite alone and quite broken.

She thought of going back to her old job as a lay chaplain, but now she felt a mysterious barrier to that whole part of her life. The work she had done easily there now seemed impossibly difficult.

I would say to Connie and Dave, the chaplains who were helping me, "I don't understand it, but I can't access the strength I had when I worked for CYC. I don't feel it's even me," I remember saying. "I know I did all these talks. I can still pick up a file and give a talk, but I can't feel it the way I felt it before."

During this period Beth became even more convinced that she had been sexually abused, but she still had no memories. On her chaplain's advice, she began seeing a new therapist who had worked with other abuse victims. After several weeks the therapist pointed out that she seemed to be dissociating in their sessions.

And somehow everything fell into place at that point. I knew I had the key. Early on Linda [her therapist] had told me, "You've got a message inside you: don't tell, and if we could get to that message we'd get a lot of information." So I went home one day and focused on this "don't tell." And I got this incredible pressure and pain in my vagina, just this incredible pressure. And this voice saying don't tell, this isn't wrong, don't tell. And I could see myself sitting on top of my chest. So I asked, "How old are you?" and I could see I was like nineteen months old. . . .¹⁶

Well, that was a flashback. I had triggered a flashback.

The next several weeks brought a whole cascade of these flashbacks, each with its attendant child presenting an abusive scene. The children all had different ages that served them for names ("the eight-year-old"; "the

two-year-old"), and once they had appeared, they became part of Beth's life. As might be expected, they often turned up in therapy, but they also started coming out unbidden at other times as well. Beth called this group of alter personalities "the Memory Kids" because each was linked to a specific set of childhood scenes. Over the next several months she and her therapist succeeded in piecing these scenes together into a truly horrific chronicle of sexual abuse at the hands of her father.

Beth's story up to now is a familiar variant on the recovered memory pattern: she finds her repressed memories by way of dissociation and becomes a multiple in the bargain. What happened next, however, could not have been predicted. Just as the story of her abuse was coming into focus, she had another visionary experience:

I woke up one morning, early early, with this pain in my chest like somebody was pounding on it from the inside. . . . I realized it was somebody pounding like crazy, just a-whompin'. So I asked the other kids if they would stop it. I said, "Whoever's doing that has to stop it," and the Memory Kids said, "Well, it's Marybeth."

A series of these encounters over the next several weeks served to introduce a whole new set of alters whom Beth came to call the "Executive Kids." They were much stronger than the Memory Kids, less fearful, but also harder to control:

When the Memory Kids came, they needed a lot of nurturing, but they responded really well to that. . . . The Executive Kids didn't respond to that at all. When they first came out they claimed not to know me. . . . Most of them thought I was pretty useless.

The Executive Kids brought a surprising piece of news: *they* were actually the ones who had been in charge of Beth's life during much of her adolescence and adulthood. As she came to know this new group of personalities, a new version of her own history emerged, one that was less autobiography than "serial multiplicity." "What I think now," she says, "is that when I was about ten the abuse just got to be too much for me. So I went under and they started doing things, depending on who had the right skills." This version of events threw a new light on some of the gaps in Beth's memory, her sense of vagueness about entire periods in her life. It also gave her something more important—a way of understanding her long lapse into depression and incapacity:

What I think is that after the accident we switched again, but this time somehow I got jarred loose. That's why I couldn't relate to my

old job—I wasn't the one who did it! Also, I came back in much the same state as when I went under, kind of broken and confused. It was really a difficult time, and just so similar to what I'd grown up with. Losing everything that had promise for me. Being victimized by structures bigger than me through no fault of my own. No support, not sure what the future held and so forth. I think that's why the switch happened—somehow I was just *back*.

There is a revealing ambiguity in this last phrase. "I was just back" could mean "I, the adult, was back in the situation I experienced as a child." Or it could mean, "I, that unhappy child came back from my place of hiding." Clearly it means both. The ambiguity helps us to understand what is at stake in this "realization" and others made possible by the "Executive Kids." Here again dissociation offers Beth a way of drawing on memory to make sense of her life. But this is no longer memory as record of decisive facts; it is memory as *metaphor*. In this respect Beth's experience of the Executive Kids opens up some of the same expressive possibilities as the Freudian notions of transference and the timeless unconscious. As alter personalities these figures allow—in fact compel—Beth to meet and come to terms with each of her former selves, not as a fossil or shadowy construct, but as "a living presence," in Freud's memorable phrase. Here, in other words, the imaginative, theatrical dimension of multiple personality as an expressive idiom offers a way of loosening and compensating for the frozen sense of the past implicit in recovered memory therapy.

3. Difference

The third narrative strand I want to consider is a brief one that appears only in the second interview, where Beth reflects on the experience of being ordained and on her new role as minister. Beth explains that, internally, the most important recent development is that "we finally got to Elizabeth, the one I call the first-horn. Linda, my therapist, thinks she's probably the core personality. She's the one who was there before the abuse began." Elizabeth can be "co-present" with Beth, and when she is, the world looks different: "When she's there, I see things in 3-D. When she's not, everything's flat. I'd never seen the colors of a sunset. But how do you know what you don't see? When she first came out, I've had to stop the car because she was so overwhelming."

Elizabeth has the ability to see other people in a more subtly shaded, three dimensional way as well. Seeing the local farmers in her congregation, men she likes and respects, she thinks of her father.

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Leonard [Beth's father] grew up on the farm. He loved the farm. Like when I—when Elizabeth looks at these men on our lay leadership board, she sees, like, they're so much like Leonard, in that they're very shy. There's one of them who always comes up and speaks to me, and he's *painfully* shy. I can see the tremendous effort he's making. He's similar to Leonard in that when he's self-conscious he walks kind of slouched over. . . . Leonard would do well in this community if he could have—whatever he couldn't get over.

Elizabeth was telling Linda that she had seen light in Leonard when she was little, and how the light gradually got darker and darker until it was gone. And she was describing how she sees shadows over the light in some of these men, but somehow they can embrace the light, and so they live from the light that's in them. It's like a rim around the moon—the shadow's there but the light prevails. But somehow in Leonard the light went out.

Here for the first time since I have known her, Beth depicts her father in something resembling ordinary human terms. She endows him with qualities (shyness, awkwardness) that she finds endearing in other men. She remembers that he wasn't all bad to begin with and wonders where he went wrong. She is drawing on memory again, dissociated memory, but this time she uses it reflectively, to make a comparison that hints at moral complexity.

Toward the end of this interview Beth begins to ponder her own passage through life in somewhat similar terms. In light of her rotten childhood, she wonders, why didn't she become a criminal or drug addict or something worse? The answer, she thinks, is that "we've always had this dream."

Actually it's Elizabeth's dream. This has been her dream, becoming a minister. But I think we're really fortunate that all the alters have respected the dream? That's been the common thread. I think that's what's kept us from being a juvenile delinquent or alcoholic or getting somehow lost . . . I think it was what kept me alive all those years when I was a kid. That I belonged to God, that I was gonna do something with my life, that I could help other people somehow. I don't remember any adult telling me that.

Here again we see Beth calling on memory to say who she is. But this time instead of seeking a diagnostic sameness, she is trying to explain just

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what it is that makes her different. Her answer begins to frame an identity that has nothing at all to do with "decisive facts," and that depends instead on a sustaining commitment that joins her past to her future. She continues to understand her life through the idiom of multiple personality, but what she understands begins to look very much like "selfhood" in Ricoeur's sense of the word.

Notes

1. Hacking's notions of "looping" and "making up people" derive in part from the work of both Nelson Goodman (1978) and Michel Foucault (1977; 1980). For a fuller discussion see Hacking (1994).
2. The group was founded by multiples in 1990. After a stormy first year, members made a public appeal for a non-multiple to serve as a volunteer facilitator; I agreed to do so in return for the opportunity to carry out ethnographic research. We worked out a set of guidelines for meetings and agreed that my role would simply be to remind participants of the guidelines where necessary. The only requirement for joining the group was that members be currently under treatment for multiple personality disorder. As it turned out, most participants were referred by their therapists.
3. Like most support groups, this one did not draw a random sample of the afflicted; for obvious reasons the severely disturbed either didn't come or quickly drifted away. However, since my interest was chiefly in the culture of multiplicity rather than the pathology of individuals, I do not think this represented a significant source of bias.
4. The use of narrative as a tool of self-understanding has clear antecedents in a Christian confessional literature dating back at least to St. Augustine, who came to identify knowledge of self with knowledge of God's will. For an early and insightful discussion of confessional practices and their mediating role in "systems of self-direction," see Nelson (1905). More recently, Foucault (1978) has noted the ubiquitous role of confession as tool for the "production of truth" about subjects in modern societies, a truth shaped by the discursive practices of law, medicine, psychiatry, and education.
5. See Hacking's chapter in this volume.
6. In a workshop given to other therapists in 1993, Fischer-Taylor described her own discovery that her lifelong mood swings were in fact "feeling flashbacks" triggered by sounds or smells. For example, she explained, she had always felt a strange sense of pain and sadness

when she listened to the piano sonatas of Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn. Finally she summoned up the courage to explore this with her therapist by recreating the scene when she first heard the music. Phrases came up: "Don't do it. Leave me alone." She shouted them out, she said, "and as I was doing this I started to get the actual visual memories." Her mother played the piano, she said, and she concluded that her father had abused her in the evenings when her mother was practicing these pieces.

7. Interpretively speaking, in fact, recovered memory therapy offers an intriguing parallel to the historical literalism seen in fundamentalist readings of the Bible. Contrast the very different view taken by analysts such as James Hillman, who emphasises the role of the imagination: "[A] trauma is not what happened, but the way we see what happened. A trauma is not a pathological event but a pathologized image, an image that has become intolerable . . ." (Hillman 1983: 47).
8. Clearly there is a fundamental difference between the re-enacting of motifs from early life in transference and the dissociative "abreaction" of traumas in recovered memory therapy. While both might be considered ways of making the past present, the therapeutic point of transference is to provide a way of exposing and reworking metaphorical links between past and present; the therapeutic point of abreaction is to re-experience repressed traumas in their full emotional intensity and then to reconstruct the events themselves in narrative form.
9. In fairness to Judith Herman, it should be said that she recognizes this as a potential hazard. She believes, however, that with good therapy a survivor can free herself of the traumatic past and begin the "re-creation of an ideal self" using her newly liberated capacity for imagination and fantasy. "It takes courage to move out of the constricted stance of the victim," she says. "But just as the survivor must dare to confront her fears, she must also dare to define her wishes" (1992: 202).
10. In fact Ricoeur points out that when national identity is founded exclusively on this kind of sameness, shared traits become solidified and "lend themselves to exploitation by the most harmful ideologies" (1992: 123).
11. I asked Beth how she could tell just by looking that she was nineteen months old. She said she couldn't tell that exactly, but she could "see" that she was alone in the house with her father. "My mother had another baby when I was nineteen months old, and so he had to care for me, because she was in the hospital."

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