



**Toward a Psychological History of Philosophy:
Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer (Träume eines
Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der
Metaphysik, 1766)***

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Abstract

This article explores Immanuel Kant's contributions to psychology (specifically, the "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer" of 1766 and the "Classification of Mental Disorders" of 1764) in order to illuminate some connections between critical philosophy and psychology. Early in his career, and, surprisingly, in texts about hallucinations and mental illness, Kant's expositions on the malfunctioning, (or extraordinary functioning) of the mind demonstrated interests similar to those that guided his philosophy decades afterwards. Kant's philosophy has been credited with informing later developments in psychology and psychoanalysis. But the article argues that Kant's early work demonstrates that early psychology also informs modern critical philosophy.

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Immanuel Kant's position that the external world conforms to our mental representations and that we thus seem to have enormous power to shape our own reality—but at the same time are hugely limited, never sure our representations of reality are adequate—is so foundational for modern philosophy and linguistics that it essentially has the status of a presumption in much work in those fields today. While it is well-known that Kant became a

professor of philosophy relatively late in life (in 1770, aged 46, when he was appointed to a professorship in logic and metaphysics at Königsberg), his earlier writings, including those on psychology and anthropology, are relatively under-examined in scholarship in philosophy, psychology, and German studies. This is in part because that work is simply not considered significant in relation to the seismic impact of his later philosophical production.¹ But early in his career, and, perhaps surprisingly, in texts about hallucinations and mental illness, Kant's expositions on the malfunctioning of the mind demonstrate interests similar to those that guide his philosophy decades later. Kant's philosophy has been credited with informing later developments in psychology and psychoanalysis. But the article argues that Kant's early work demonstrates that early psychology also informs modern critical philosophy.²

In order to do this, I first briefly explicate the contours of faculty (or empirical) psychology in the mid- to late eighteenth century in Germany; this was part of the intellectual context in which Kant produced his early writings. I then focus on Kant's exploration of aspects of psychology in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (*Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, 1766), and make reference to his *Classification of Mental Disorders* (*Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes*, 1764).

For Kant, a consideration of psychosomatic disorders was a way of exploring questions about consciousness and self-consciousness. The budding field of empirical psychology of the eighteenth century, in Germany in particular, included the observation and description of psychosomatic symptoms.³ In the eighteenth century, German psychologists generally worked within a dualistic framework, whose ongoing indebtedness to a Cartesian model of the self meant that German psychology diverged strongly from the French and English traditions prior to approximately 1770. While philosophers such as Locke rejected the sense of certainty and confidence about the self that came in the wake of Descartes's contention that consciousness (or the *res cogitans*) is the reliable repository of reason, German psychologists often

¹ A significant exception to the general under-appreciation of Kant's earlier work is Liliane Weissberg's *Geistersprache. Philosophischer und literarischer Diskurs im späten achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990).

² Here I am thinking of Freud, but also of earlier nineteenth-century psychologists and psychiatrists such as Heinrich Steffens and Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert. Check that they would have defined themselves as practitioners of those fields.

³ For more on the history of understandings of psychosomatic disorders and their significance in the history of psychology in Germany in particular, see Tobias Leibold, *Enzyklopädische Anthropologien. Formierungen des Wissens vom Menschen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert bei G. H. Schubert, H. Steffens und G. E. Schulze* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009). For information about the history of German psychology and psychiatry, I rely also on Matthew Bell's excellent volume *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and Thought, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

continued to separate the operations of consciousness from emotional states, which were attributed to the passions of the body.

By the 1770s, however, there was a shift toward “mental physicalism,” which included a view of emotional states as natural, gradually replacing the Cartesian-influenced model that had dominated the German-language tradition since the seventeenth century. This shift was not a complete rejection of philosophical psychology; rather, mental physicalists borrowed aspects of the thinking of Leibniz and Wolff, who had already revised Descartes on the point of the uniqueness of consciousness. Leibniz acknowledged that mental activity depends on the body. Wolff amended Descartes’ restriction of consciousness to the thinking subject alone, arguing that consciousness is constituted only in relations between subject and object. Like Leibniz, Wolff distinguished between initial physical sense perception, or sensation, and apperception, or the awareness that one is perceiving something. This two-stage theory of perception continued into German psychology’s transition into “mental physicalism,” which asserts the embodiedness of mind, but has no difficulty accepting a separation between physical sensation and mental perception (or apperception). Albrecht von Haller, Moritz, C.F. Pockels, and Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Caspar Lavater, and others mobilized theories dating back to antiquity about the embodiedness of mind to argue that mental functions correspond to various locations in the body. Imagination was considered part of that mind, and increasingly its functions were understood as organic. Imagination thus became a category of scientific interest as well as a topic in the aesthetic theory written during this same period.⁴

Later in the eighteenth century, imagination regained some of the status it had enjoyed in the Renaissance, when it was considered a force powerful enough to have physical effects on the imaginer and his surroundings. Ludovico Antonio Muratori’s influential *On the Power of the Human Imagination (Della Forza della Fantasia Umana, 1745)* stated that the faculty of imagination (based at least initially on perceptions of physical sensations) can produce not only dreams but visions, hallucinations, phobias, and somnabulistic states.⁵ These manifestations in turn reveal the workings of a realm acknowledged by Leibniz, and later by mental physicalists: an area of the mind that lies beyond consciousness and functions without our conscious assistance or intention.⁶

⁴ In the mid-eighteenth century, for instance, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten wrote the *Aesthetica* (1750-1758) and other pieces that helped create aesthetics as an area of philosophical inquiry. Baumgarten re-defined aesthetics as the study of the sense of beauty, or taste, as opposed to the study of sensation in general.

⁵ Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *On the Power of the Human Imagination (Della Forza della Fantasia Umana)* (Venice: Giambattista Pasquale, 1745). Cited here in Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970) 112.

⁶ Perhaps the earliest explicit documented thinking about the unconscious is in Plotinus’s *Enneads*: when we are either focused on an external object to the exclusion of all else, or when

Attempts to interpret and ascertain the sources of dreams and also waking visions have been made for centuries, and dreams were also a topic of fascination for faculty psychologists in the late eighteenth century. Kant's contemporary Karl Philipp Moritz, editor of the first journal of empirical psychology in Germany, the *Journal of Empirical Psychology* (*Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*; published in ten volumes between 1783 and 1793), included case histories in which subjects recounted their dreams. The German romantic philosopher and author Friedrich Schlegel observed and protocolled a female friend's magnetism treatments for approximately six years, and paid considerable attention to her recollections of her dreams, which he interpreted as clairvoyant visions.⁷ Kant also used the term "dream" to mean vision, hallucination, or illusion, and his focus in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* largely is on the processes in the mind that lead to the formation of these representations of reality. Here *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* anticipates key aspects of Kant's own later philosophical production.

The questions that Kant poses in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* about clairvoyance and life after death may seem out of place relative to his later philosophy, but such questions were not considered strange in the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, a time in which paranormal phenomena often were taken seriously.⁸ However, faculty psychologists working in the wake of mental physicalism suspected that paranormal occurrences actually originated within the self, or in the interactions between self-consciousness and other minds. But the fact that ghostly visions originate within our own and other minds did not rule out the potential existence of what Daniel Tiffany calls an imaginary and material realm, or a "material occult."⁹ Tiffany explains that a "basic inclination of materialism" is "to make the intangible tangible."¹⁰ Representations of occult experience in Kant's early work reflected this desire to make the intangible tangible via explorations of the possibility of a material, body-based occult realm. Questions about life after death and contact with ghosts posed a problem for Enlightened philosophers and psychologists, and Kant addressed that problem right at its source by relocating the spirit world within the body, a move utterly consistent with the mental physicalism that dominated psychology during the years when he wrote *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. For Kant, however, this move is performed

we are performing habitual acts, we at least briefly become unaware of our own existence. See *The Enneads* 1.4: 10.21-33; trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber, 1956) 49. See also Bell, *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and Thought, 1700-1840*, 8.

⁷ Laurie Johnson discusses Schlegel's protocols in detail in "The Romantic and Modern Practice of Animal Magnetism: Friedrich Schlegel's Protocols of the Magnetic Treatment of Countess Lesniowska," *Women in German Yearbook* 23 (2007) 10-33.

⁸ Karin Schutjer, *Narrating Community After Kant: Schiller, Goethe, and Hölderlin* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 34.

⁹ Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 3.

¹⁰ Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* 5.

as part of an effort to ground and legitimate metaphysics, rather than as part of an attempt to justify esotericism or occultism.

In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant attempts to defend his views of the project of metaphysics against assaults not only from occultists, but from the threats to coherent subject philosophy posed by the mind itself, and particularly by the mind's malfunctions. Kant locates mental illness in moments when the split between the transcendental and the nontranscendental is most apparent—or, when relationships between body and mind break down. As he works on making a case for a stronger role for sense perception in the constitution of knowledge, Kant argues that ghostly visions and other symptoms of mental disorders are ways of knowing that are based neither on coherent principles of reason nor on reliable sense perceptions, but on a basic estrangement within the self.

In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant simultaneously establishes a philosophical basis for understanding psychological experience, and argues for the role of an embodied psyche in constituting philosophical knowledge.

Dreams of a Spirit-Seer was inspired by the Swedish theologian and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, whose report of clairvoyant and other out-of-body experiences entitled *Arcana Coelestia* (1747-1758) offered Kant the chance to attack arguments that rationalists such as Wolff had made in favor of the soul's immortality and immateriality. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant wishes to assert that rationalist philosophers and esoteric mystics alike have equally little proof of an immaterial and immortal soul. He aims to demonstrate that the intense desire to see and to communicate with a ghostly world originates in the desire to believe that good moral actions performed in this life will be rewarded in the next, and that this belief is not only unfounded, but unnecessary. Virtuous actions should be their own reward; it is precisely the knowledge that this life is the only life that enables truly moral behavior—morality that exists without expectation of compensation in an afterlife. But before he can assert this, Kant must construct a somewhat labyrinthine proof of the impossibility of the existence of ghosts.

According to Kant, visions of ghosts are neither mystical nor incomprehensible, but rather completely explicable: such phenomena are, says Kant, the products of the minds of “dreamers of sensation,” whose visions of a spirit world seem initially similar to what he calls the visions of a world of ideas, divorced from experience, produced by rationalists, or the “dreamers of reason.”¹¹ It is appropriate to call individuals in both categories “dreamers,” since in both cases the “alleged visions” (whether of ideas or spirits) are “mere delusions of the mind.”¹² The “dreamers of reason” are “dream castle builders...each of them living peacefully in his own world of thought, to the

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976) 40-41 (A58-62). All translations of this text are my own.

¹² Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 40 (A58-60).

exclusion of everything else,”¹³ while the “dreamers of perception” are “those who claim to have occasional intercourse with spirits.”¹⁴ Both types of dreamers, the metaphysicians and the mystics, make the crucial mistake of believing their ideas or visions to be unique, and of thinking that they therefore possess a specialness of experience: they commit the error of asserting that they know, or see, a reality accessible to no one else. This is bad for philosophy in general; the rationalists’ lack of acknowledgment of other minds means that their achievements cannot compete in the “common world” in which scientists are very much at home.¹⁵

However, while Kant begins his attack on the possibility of the soul's immortality with a comparison between rationalism and spirit-seeing, he then separates the two, calling them different “not only in degree but in kind.”¹⁶ While the deluded philosopher, the “day-dreamer,” is able to “reckon...his delusions as products of his own activity,”¹⁷ the spirit-seer, even while fully awake, and in possession of perfectly healthy physical powers of perception, nevertheless perceives imaginary objects as external (“as if they were truly placed amongst the objects which he really perceives through his senses”).¹⁸ Like the aforementioned Muratori, whose work on the imagination appeared just two decades before *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant grants that imagination is a force powerful enough to convince us that products of our own fantasy are external objects. But Kant uses a specifically dualistic understanding of mind and body to contend that the imagination that engages in this type of projection is not just powerful, but sick.

Following Descartes, Kant asserts that

*all representations of our imagination are accompanied by certain motions in the nerve tissues or the vital spirit in the brain called ideae materiales, i.e., perhaps by concussions or vibrations of the subtle element secreted by the nerve tissues; which, however, resemble the motions which could be produced by the sense impressions of which these nerve vibrations are copies.*¹⁹

In the “nerve vibrations of fantasies” (as opposed to the vibrations that come from physical sense impressions), the “direction lines of motion intersect one another within the brain,” meaning that the subject cannot “distinguish his mental delusions from real perceptions received from outside through his senses.”²⁰ This lack of differentiation is at the basis of the “type of mental

¹³ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 39 (A57-58).

¹⁴ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 40 (A58-60).

¹⁵ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 40 (A58-60).

¹⁶ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 41-42 (A60-63).

¹⁷ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 41 (A60-62).

¹⁸ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 41 (A60-62).

¹⁹ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 44 (A65-66).

²⁰ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 44 (A65-66).

derangement” that leads a “confused victim” to project objects of fantasy outside of himself.²¹ Kant thus ascribes the ghostly visions of Swedenborg and others to a mental confusion (based, again, in a disturbed relationship between perception and nervous vibrations) so intense that it approximates a “disease” ranging in severity from “neurosis” to “madness.”²² Disturbingly, this problem is not limited to individuals; by 1790 at the latest, Kant sees the popularity of Swedenborg and other mystics as a phenomenon representing a veritable “wave of hysteria in the country,” an “evil” resembling a contagious epidemic—but one that likely will be of limited duration. In a letter to Ludwig Borowski written that same year, he says:

*The doctors of the soul will no doubt have as difficult a task to fight this epidemic, as the doctors of the body had a few years ago when the Russian flu spread overnight from Vienna to all the countries in the world. Nevertheless, the flu epidemic ceased as suddenly as it had started.*²³

The dilemma would seem to be solved. Kant has demarcated spirit-seeing from other types of “day-dreaming” by referring to the ultimate basis of sense perception, a foundation for knowledge that, in the particular case of ghostly visions, is disrupted due to organic defect (a problem of communication between nerves and imagination). And yet Moses Mendelssohn, in his review of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, identifies a basic ambiguity in the text.

*The joking earnestness with which this work is written leaves the reader now and again in doubt as to whether Mr. Kant wanted to make metaphysics ridiculous or spirit-seeing believable. It contains the seeds of important observations that deserve more serious development, some new thoughts about the nature of the soul as well as several asides against the accepted systems.*²⁴

The ambiguity to which Mendelssohn refers points to more than inconsistencies or incompleteness in Kant's argument. There is also a sinister subtext in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* about the nature of consciousness, which implies that not only do we not know the thoughts of another: we may not even reliably know our own thoughts. Well before the Freudian unconscious appears, Kant's piece demonstrates a disquieting sense that a realm is *there*, *within me* but somehow *not present* to me—not available to my sense perception. The misdirected nervous vibrations that lead to “sick” displacements of fantasy objects from the imagination to the external world

²¹ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 44-45 (A65-67).

²² Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 44-45 (A65-67).

²³ Kant, from a letter to Ludwig Ernst Borowski of 1790, cited here in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Related Writings*, trans. John Manolesco (New York: Vantage Press, 1969) 159.

²⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, "Rezension der *Träume*," *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, des vierten Bandes zweytes Stück (Berlin and Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1767) 281.

reveal the mind's capacity for strangeness and for estrangement—not just from others, but from itself.

Although Kant separates the errors of the rationalists from those of the spirit-seers by relying on a way of understanding body and mind as both substantial and dual, this explanation is insufficient (as Mendelssohn implies) to do away with any need for a sense of something outside of ourselves that is nevertheless linked to our own imaginations—or, in this case, to do away with any yearning for a metaphysical belief system. Kant admits his own inclination “to assert the existence of immaterial natures in the world, and to put my own mind in the same category as these beings.”²⁵ The soul, in his understanding, is “as if bound to two worlds at once”—the immaterial and the material world.²⁶ This does not mean that ghosts really exist. Rather, the soul is the place where the material and immaterial world coexist. The immaterial world resembles a predecessor of Freud's unconscious rather than a realm independent of us where the dead really do live on. And this is a world that is part of all of us, not only of the sick or the mad.

The “dreamers of reason,” who do not make sufficient contact with a community of others (a community he will later argue is constituted most fundamentally in the “common sense,” or *sensus communis*), may not be “sick” in precisely the way that spirit-seers are, but Kant's division between the two categories of dreamers is not completely neat.²⁷ For one thing, the rationalists and the spirit-seers are both prey to what Kant calls the “flattering hope for a continued existence after death” that contemporary philosophers of various persuasions have made part of their systems.²⁸ Rather than be completely critical of this hope, Kant admits that his own

*lack of knowledge is also responsible for the fact that I did not dare to deny completely the truth of the various ghost tales; on the contrary, I have always maintained a certain reserve and a sense of wonder towards them, doubting each story individually, but attributing some truthfulness to all of them put together.*²⁹

The uncertainty that underlies Kant's attitude toward ghost stories as a whole points to a possible acceptance of their greater, communal “truthfulness;” namely, their ability to represent a need to imagine different modes of existence that nevertheless do not fit into any particular belief system.

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, in *Werke* 2: 934 (A25). References to this edition are given henceforth as TGS.

²⁶ Kant, TGS 936-937 (A30-31).

²⁷ The theory of the *sensus communis* is elaborated most fully in 1790 in the *Critique of Judgment (Kritik der Urteilskraft)*, here trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987) §21, 5: 293-296.

²⁸ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 51 (A76-78).

²⁹ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 52 (A78-79).

According to Kant's understanding of how vibrations in the nervous tissues communicate a perception that is then, post-perception, represented in the imagination, ghostly visions—like the imaginative re-representation of actual external objects—must be based on something past, on a memory of a perception of past experience (even if that experience is immediately past). And yet that past is disconnected from our present re-representation of it, in the case of both ghostly visions *and* the representation of real sensations within our imagination.

This is another area in which Kant's distinction between misguided philosophers and ghost-seers is not quite sufficient to do away altogether with intuitions of another realm, beyond the bedrock realm of sense perception. The very split between past mind and present mind that marks neurotic delusions hails from empiricist thinking such as John Locke's, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which lays the foundation for the later Idealist development of a concept of inner perception, or “reflections” (perceptions of the life of the soul) as opposed to “sensations” (perceptions of the external world). Both are sensory—consciousness is not “non-sensual”—but they are fundamentally dissociated.³⁰ The same problem that other minds pose for our self-understanding (a problem that Kant's notion of the *sensus communis* cannot fully dispense with) is posed by our *own* minds—our past mind is in a sense “other” to our present mind. The doubt that this implied understanding of the imagination raises in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* anticipates Wittgenstein's challenge to the Cartesian concept of the mind as an inner theater,³¹ in which the possessor of that mind knows its contents uniquely and reliably.

In the *Arcana Coelestia*, Swedenborg addresses the topic of “What it Means to be Outside of the Body, and to be Carried By the Spirit to Another Place.”³² While this title may be evocative of fantasies of alien abduction, it also represents an uncanny sense of disorientation. Swedenborg recalls his own experience of this feeling:

While wandering through the alleys of a city, and through fields, and at the same time in conversation with spirits, I thought I was as alert and perceptive as at other times...but after I had walked in this way for several hours, I suddenly could see my body, and I was aware that I was in a different place, which astonished me greatly. I realized that I was in the same condition as those, of whom it is said that they are "mentally taken to another place," because as long as this lasts, you do not even think of the path, even if it encompasses several miles, hours, or days. You feel no weariness; you are led

³⁰ Manfred Frank, *Selbstgefühl. Eine historisch-systematische Erkundung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002) 93.

³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §258, cited here in Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 303.

³² From the excerpts from Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* in Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 97.

*along paths unknown to you, up to a certain place. This happened so that I might know that man can be led by the Lord, without knowing whence and where.*³³

This passage, which resembles a description of a fugue state (albeit with theological overtones), explains in part the fascination that Swedenborg did hold for Kant.

In the *Classifications of Mental Disorders* (*Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes*), which appeared initially in 1764 and was republished in 1798 (but without seriously taking the intervening critiques into consideration), Kant challenges the ancient concept that "disease occurs when the soul—spontaneously or by accident—leaves the body or is stolen by ghosts or sorcerers...(and that the) healer searches for the lost soul, brings it back, and restores it to the body to which it belongs."³⁴ Both the *Classifications* and *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* attempt to do the work of that ancient and discredited healer, but in an Enlightened and modern context—the act of representing and attempting to understand mental disorder is an attempt to search for the lost soul and bring it back.

Kant is aware, however, that he cannot complete this work, and that awareness is represented in a frequently quoted letter to Charlotte von Knoblauch of 1763, which contains Kant's admission that, while he "found it unnecessary in the past to worry much about (spirits) or to allow myself to shiver and be scared by the dead in the darkness of a cemetery," reading Swedenborg's tales has given him pause. It is difficult, Kant says, to "raise any serious objections to (those tales') truth and credibility." Kant concludes that the "portrait (of Swedenborg) is very strange."³⁵ But Kant's fascination is not with the possibility of the immortality of the soul or the ability of certain individuals to communicate with spirits; this simply does not "conform to the rules of sound reason" to which he always submits such accounts.³⁶ His interest is in the difficulty Swedenborg presents for a coherent understanding of time and space—for instance, Swedenborg inexplicably has knowledge of a fire burning fifty miles from his present location—and his fascination is with the

³³ From the excerpts from Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* in Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 98.

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Classification of Mental Disorders*, trans. and ed. Charles T. Sullivan (Doylestown, PA: The Doylestown Foundation, 1964) vi. *The Classifications* offers a model for mental illness not unlike a spectrum model of today's psychiatry: illnesses happen in stages, and manifest, at varying levels of intensity, the same basic underlying problems. This implies that we could all be vulnerable, or could demonstrate these traits in various levels at various times in our lives. Ellenberger is cited in *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* 6.

³⁵ From Kant's letter to Charlotte von Knoblauch of August 10, 1763; quoted here in *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 100-101, 105.

³⁶ Kant, letter to Charlotte von Knoblauch, in *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 100.

disorienting sense of displacement represented by that anecdote, as well as in Swedenborg's own account of disorientation in passages from the *Arcana Coelestia* such as the one above.

The only afterlife of the dead about which we can know anything takes place, for Kant, in the finite, mortal, present and remembering soul. Spirit-seeing and clairvoyance appear in Kant's precritical writings as a manifestation of a desire that is not unlike what Freud will later call the repetition compulsion. This desire for repetition, Freud says, "lend(s) to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and (is) still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children;" it is "a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients."³⁷ Clairvoyance is also a phenomenon that reminds us of the compulsion to repeat: "All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner 'compulsion to repeat' is perceived as uncanny."³⁸ Kant's *Dreams*, in spite of its argument and because of its content, acknowledges that the spirit-seer or clairvoyant transposes onto the future what is already, in the present, a basic and universal sense of estrangement: I *can* only think *of* myself as an object. Non-mediated reflection about anything is not possible, let alone about consciousness. In Kant's words, I "cannot *enter into* the thinking of myself as a spirit."³⁹ The only way to imagine myself is as the kind of externalized object fantasized by the spirit-seer. Kant's attempt to divorce the organically based delusions of spirit-seers from the willfully created illusions of rationalists ultimately helps to demonstrate that the rationalist Wolff's assertion (itself repeated any number of times in the history of the philosophy of consciousness) that consciousness "requires both a subject and an object" applies not only to both types of projection, but to most everyday thinking as well.⁴⁰

Metaphysics, says Kant, is really just a "science of the *borders of human reason*."⁴¹ On the one hand, metaphysics grants us the ability to use reason to see things otherwise hidden; on the other, it opens the way to even more uncertainty. Consciousness philosophy permits us to identify and pursue what Kant calls "the real task" of modern thought: that of making

*the unity of consciousness (which is part of understanding) visible to itself, in the context of the relationships of the soul to the organs of the brain (which belong to the external senses), and to make the seat of the soul, as its local present, visible.*⁴²

³⁷ Freud, "Das Unheimliche," GW 12: 251/"The Uncanny," SE 17: 238.

³⁸ Freud, "Das Unheimliche," GW 12: 251/"The Uncanny," SE 17: 238.

³⁹ Kant, TGS 947 (A49). Emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ Cited here in Bell, *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and Thought, 1700-1840* 20.

⁴¹ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 76-77 (A115).

⁴² Kant, "Über das Organ der Seele," *Werke* 11: 259.

But while metaphysics allows us to see this problem of the relationship between body and mind and between mind and mind (making “the unity of consciousness visible to itself”) in the first place, it cannot provide the answers: “This not only an unsolvable problem for metaphysics, but also in and of itself contradictory.”⁴³ Modern thinkers know that personhood emanates from the top down; the location of the soul's “seat” has moved from the intestines to the brain.⁴⁴ But this removal of the center of thought from the “abdominal brain” to the head has not done away with the phenomena of dissociation, disorientation, and the need for a sense of connection to other selves, other consciousnesses, that Swedenborg expresses so urgently and confidently in writings that were immensely popular.⁴⁵

The attribution of hallucinations and clairvoyant visions to disordered nerve vibrations does not alleviate a fundamental anxiety of and about transcendental philosophy: namely, the fact that that philosophy leaves the relationship between the subject's constitution of the world of appearances and the real existence of objects “undecided” or “floating.”⁴⁶ Kant's ambiguity about the distinction between metaphysics and spirit-seeing leads indirectly to the unsettling realization that perhaps anyone could fall prey to fantastic delusions, despite the claims of rationalists and mystics alike that they have special access to an immaterial realm.

Kant's use of Swedenborg's claim to have seen spirits in order to demonstrate the lack of basis for a rationalist belief in the soul's immortality is consistent with his attempts, during this same period, to prove that perception is the only reliable source of knowledge about the self and the world, and that our perceptions may be communally validated. In a letter to Moses Mendelssohn of April 8, 1766, Kant states that metaphysics in the form practiced by the rationalists is already delusional, a “dreamed-up science.”⁴⁷ When he eventually does found his own project of metaphysics, in the critiques of the 1780's, Kant separates the aims of empirical psychology and

⁴³ Kant, “Über das Organ der Seele,” *Werke* 11: 259.

⁴⁴ By the Renaissance, as Roy Porter explains: “No longer were the viscera or ‘vitals’ where the essential self lay. The new centre of symbolic gravity lay up in the head, the brain and the nerves.” *Flesh in the Age of Reason* 60.

⁴⁵ Magnetists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Dietrich Georg Kieser (1779-1862) resuscitated the notion of the “Unterleibsgehirn,” which Kieser described as encompassing the “Gangliensystem und dessen Centralgebilde” (in *Über thierischen Magnetismus und Somnambulismus*, 1846; cited here in Heike Scheuerbrandt, “Die Stimme der Natur. Dietrich Georg Kiesers Auffassung vom tierischen Magnetismus,” *Athenäum. Jahrbuch für Romantik* [1999] 236).

⁴⁶ Rolf-Peter Janz, Fabian Stoermer, and Andreas Hiepko here cite Herbert Herring's *Das Problem der Affektion bei Kant in Schwindelerfahrungen. Zur kulturhistorischen Diagnose eines vieldeutigen Symptoms*, eds. Rolf-Peter Janz, Fabian Stoermer and Andreas Hiepko (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003) 19n34.

⁴⁷ From Kant's letter to Moses Mendelssohn of April 8, 1766; cited here in Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 114.

transcendental philosophy, saying that the knowledge we gain from observation cannot justify the deduction of the categories of thought, or the “principle of right.” But the principle of right, even in Kant's transcendental philosophy, remains unthinkable without what he calls a “coherent self-feeling;” this “subjective consciousness is, however, a violent condition. It is an observation turned on itself; it is not discursive, but rather intuitive.”⁴⁸ This intense, intuitive, pre-conscious state precedes reflection in every single mind, those that produce proofs of reason based on perception as well as those that imagine bizarre visions. Kant compares the hallucinations of spirit-seers to the “monstrosities” that a collector of natural objects must possess in his cabinet along with his perfect specimens, and includes an analogy to repression here as well: the collector of natural and healthy objects must possess deformed objects, but must be “careful, not to let everyone see them and not to let them be seen too clearly.”⁴⁹ The metaphor of the natural history cabinet is another indicator of what Monique David-Ménard has called the “proximity between thought and madness” throughout Kant's philosophy.⁵⁰

After the completion of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant never again addressed this dilemma or Swedenborg in depth, although his letter of 1790 to Borowski as well as a letter of 1795 to S.T. Sommering, in which he criticizes the con artist Calioastro as well as the practices of Franz Anton Mesmer, do refer to the popularity of the paranormal. The translator of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, John Manolesco, ruminates:

*The name Swedenborg does not appear once in all the three Critiques, whilst relatively obscure names which exerted some influence on his pre-critical development abound throughout his critical works... Was Kant trying to forget him? Or the circumstances which led to the writing of the Spirit Seer? Did he ever worry secretly about a possible confrontation with the arch-spirit seer, the worst of all madmen, in the Noumenal World?*⁵¹

What we do know is that Kant ends *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* by saying: “Human reason was not meant to try and part the highest clouds in heaven or lift from our eyes the curtains in order to reveal to us the secrets of another world.”⁵² Even in this somewhat dismissive conclusion, an intuition of another mode of existence, one that cannot be subsumed into a belief system (whether philosophical, psychological, or theological) is present, despite the denials, in

⁴⁸ Kant, lecture on *Metaphysik LI*, cited here in Manfred Frank, *Selbstgefühl. Eine historisch-systematische Erkundung* 94. Frank points out that this view is strongly influenced by Leibniz, in that it describes an unconscious process as preceding the act of conscious reflection.

⁴⁹ Kant, TGS 981 (A113-114).

⁵⁰ Monique David-Ménard, "Kant's 'An Essay on the Maladies of the Mind' and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*," trans. Alison Ross, *Hypatia* 15.4 (2000) 83.

⁵¹ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Related Writings* 28.

⁵² Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* 84 (A126-128).

Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, of the stories that make us aware of that intuition in the first place.

By focusing on mental disorders, and in particular on phenomena such as clairvoyance, Kant does not reject experience that was inexplicable to the conscious mind; rather, he helps introduce that experience to mainstream philosophy. And, together with early German faculty psychologists such as Karl Philipp Moritz, Kant paves the way for the acceptance of the investigation of psychosomatic symptoms in mainstream psychology. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant asserts that clairvoyance cannot function as proof of the existence of an immaterial, immortal soul. Instead, clairvoyance and mental illness serve as forms of proof that the sufferers desire transcendence; they long for other forms of relatedness and community. The examples Kant explores of displacement (of objects of the imagination to the external world, as in the case of spirit-seeing) and of dissociation (between body and mind, as in the case of mental illness) prove something about our minds, something within us, rather than proving that the thing we imagine (fearful experience, illness, ghosts) exists.

Kant anticipates Freud's view that "in insanity there hides a piece of forgotten truth"—that is, something basic about reality surfaces in the symptoms of illness, and in particular the tendency of the past to return in some form.⁵³ Kant's precritical writings do indicate a need to somehow link present mental disorders with past experience, along with a need to find present explanations for inexplicable past events. This look to the past is repeated by the texts themselves; Kant's reference to "melancholy juice" in the *Classifications*, for instance, repeats an aspect of traditional biomedicine's theory of the humours. But Kant did not actually subscribe to that theory; rather, by re-mobilizing terms from ancient medicine, Kant evokes the principle of the past at a time when there really was no satisfactory explanation for the malfunctions of the mind.

In a sense, the uncertainties about the project of metaphysics that Kant ambiguously addresses, and then "forgets" during the critical period, come back in the work of Friedrich Schelling, who treats similar issues in a way much closer to that of Spinoza and without a demonstrable need for a totalizing system. His fragment entitled *Clara: Or, on Nature's Connection to the Spirit World* displays an openness, not toward the possibility that ghosts actually exist, but toward the possibility that our intuition allows us to imagine other forms of existence.

Although in his later, and much more famous, career Kant turned away from psychology explicitly, the significance of his early work should not be overlooked. The interest in psychological disorders and the human need for the supernatural, even during and after the Enlightenment's debunking of ghosts, persisted in much later depth psychology, and of course in psychoanalysis as

⁵³ Freud, *Der Mann Moses*, GW 16: 191.

well. On the one hand, studies of mental disorders and speculation about their roots in the unconscious mind proliferated during the latter half of the eighteenth century; on the other, proponents of mental hygiene proposed relatively undifferentiated “solutions” to psychosomatic problems. One such contribution is Kant’s late essay entitled *Of the Power of the Mind to Be Master of One’s Morbid Feelings Through Simple Decision* (*Von der Macht des Gemüths, durch den blossen Vorsatz seiner krankhaften Gefühle Meister zu sein*, 1798). Here Kant provides advice about diet, balanced work and relaxation, and healthy breathing that he developed from his own experience with “hypochondriasis,” a range of physical complaints with no clearly ascertainable cause.

One reason why we should take Kant’s earlier psychology texts seriously, however, is their very position at the juncture of premodernity and modernity, at a time when faculty psychology was clarifying its own boundaries. Philosophers have argued recently that Kant’s theory of self-consciousness, elaborated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) presents a view of the intellect as much more active and spontaneous than did previous philosophy, which saw the intellect largely as a site for abstract analysis.⁵⁴ Such a view is already arguably in development earlier in Kant’s career, and his interests in psychosomata, hallucinations, and visions attempt to position thinking about these phenomena solidly in the emerging modern, Enlightened, “disenchanted” age. Kant’s positions are highly modern, and they are constructed in and through the form of the disciplines of nascent faculty psychology as well as of philosophy.

⁵⁴ I am grateful to Alexandra Newton, who has pointed me to the work of John McDowell, Christine Korsgaard, and others working on new understandings of philosophies of self-consciousness, including Kant’s.