



Ottawa Psychoanalytic Society Société psychanalytique d'Ottawa

OPS SCIENTIFIC MEETING

Presenter: Dr. Arthur Leonoff

**Date: March 14 – Saturday – 10:30am to 12:30pm (Ottawa time)
via Zoom (please RSVP to ottawaps@yahoo.com)**

Title: Suicide and its Discontents: Essential Aloneness

Presentation type: Scientific paper and discussion

Abstract: The author explores the genesis of a particular form of suicidality, finding its roots at the beginning of life. Following Winnicott's theory of "essential aloneness," as a pre-object relational state associated with a primal state of peaceful quiescence, it is proposed that some suicidal subjects may lack this developmental capacity. They can find no sanctuary from psychic pain. It is primitive agony without respite for which 'unaliveness' is deemed a triumph over suffering. One finds a regressive wish to recover essential aloneness and not necessarily a wish to permanently end one's life. The short but well chronicled life and death by suicide of poet Sylvia Plath, as well as a clinical case example, are both discussed in support of this hypothesis.

Readings:

Leonoff, A. (2025) Suicide and its discontents: essential aloneness. *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 33: 205-224.

Cheifetz, P. (2018) The Suicidal Diary and the Absent Analyst. *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 26:99-119.

Clark, H. (2020). *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath*, London: Jonathan Cape Limited.

Maltsberger, J. T. (2004). The descent into suicide. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85: 653-667.

Learning objectives:

After attending this presentation, the participants will be able to:

- 1) Identify a form of chronic suicidality that can be traced to origins in childhood.
- 2) Appreciate the concept of "essential aloneness" that Winnicott introduced to identify a primal state of blissful comfort, a safe haven from turmoil, that remains at the core of the self.

- 3) Further understand how these suicidal states emerge in the process of psychoanalytic therapy, and how they can be addressed within the analytic dyad.
- 4) Understand the suicidality of the poet Sylvia Plath in light of the concept of essential aloneness.

Bio:

ARTHUR LEONOFF is a Supervising & Training Analyst with the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society, a recipient of the Citation of Merit, and an Honorary member of the American Psychoanalytic Association. He is the past chair of International New Groups in the IPA. Dr. Leonoff is in his fifth decade of private practice and remains an active teacher and supervisor within the Quebec English Institute.

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Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://zoom.us/j/4844761127?pwd=MG8zVVNyRVFIWEZ1emlMN2RzTXhwZz09>

Meeting ID: 484 476 1127

Passcode: 485239

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*This event is an Accredited Group Learning Activity (Section 1) as defined by the Maintenance of Certification Program of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and approved by the Scientific Chair of the Ottawa Psychoanalytic Society.*

*If you would like to receive participation confirmation, please fill out the feedback form and email it to [ottawaps@yahoo.com](mailto:ottawaps@yahoo.com)*

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**Please note that there is a \$40 fee for participants who are not CPS members or OPS Guests, and a \$20 fee for students:**

By cheque:

Send a \$40.00 cheque made out to "Ottawa Psychoanalytic Society" to:  
The Treasurer, OPS  
c/o Louise Morel  
2089 Orient Park Drive  
Gloucester ON K1B 4W1

By online purchase:

Make payment by following the links: <https://ottawaps.ca/scientific-program/>

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We deal with RBC. The e-mail address associated with our account is [ottawaps@yahoo.com](mailto:ottawaps@yahoo.com). Your payment will be automatically deposited into our bank account; there is no need for a security question / answer.

## SCIENTIFIC MEETING EVALUATION FORM

**Meeting title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **# Credits (Hours):** \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate the quality of the activity on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

### *This activity*

|                                                             |                                      |                                      |                                      |                                      |                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Met the stated objectives</i>                            | <b>1</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>2</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>3</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>4</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>5</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Enhanced my knowledge</i>                                | <b>1</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>2</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>3</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>4</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>5</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Satisfied my expectations</i>                            | <b>1</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>2</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>3</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>4</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>5</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Conveyed information<br/>that applied to my practice</i> | <b>1</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>2</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>3</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>4</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>5</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Allocated <math>\geq 25\%</math> for interaction</i>     | <b>1</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>2</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>3</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>4</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>5</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Was free from commercial bias?</i>                       | <b>1</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>2</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>3</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>4</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> | <b>5</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |

**What did you learn or how will this event impact on your practice?**

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**Please indicate which CanMEDS roles you felt were addressed?**

- ☐ Medical Expert   
 ☐ Scholar   
 ☐ Collaborator   
 ☐ Communicator  
☐ Manager   
 ☐ Professional   
 ☐ Health Advocate

**Evaluation of Presenter(s)**    *Overall Effectiveness*    *Content Relevance*    *Teaching Methods*

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**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/ SUGGESTIONS:** (please use verso if needed)

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