

## **(Trans)Generational Hauntings: Toward a Social Psychoanalysis and an Ethic of Dis-Illusionment**

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Keynote Address, Spring Meeting, Division 39, APA, New Orleans, April 21, 2018. (A shorter version of this paper is in press at *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*)

I begin with a process note, a patient's dream that I recorded on September 6, 2005:

It's the Tuesday after the week when Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, and none of my patients has mentioned it at all until today. Today, a 55 year old white middle-class female patient tells me the following dream:

*I'm watching this dream unfold: there's a black woman who feels ill. She seems to get progressively worse. Her friends dig up a pit in the dirt and with water make it into a mud bath. They have her in it, rolling her around, back and forth, making more mud all the while. I'm worrying that they might be intending to put her under water. I don't want to be watching and not doing anything; I have to hope they have her best interests at heart and that they know what they're doing. The woman is in a delirium. When just her head is visible, her daughter, who has been watching, cries out, "That's my mama," and rushes closer to hug her. I don't remember seeing her submerged or getting better.*

*In the next scene, there's a whole crew of people escorting her to a tv show where she was supposed to be going on, but they were filling in for her because of her illness. Not only had she recovered, she looked absolutely stunning, glamorous: reminiscent of Oprah. Her friends were rushing ahead and there was commotion as they were letting the tv people know that she was coming and to plan for her to come on.*

I asked the patient for her associations, and she first said that it seemed to her the dream was about the personal transformation she was undergoing, one that held great excitement and promise but also great risks and anxiety. And then she said, "I don't know why the people were black." I asked what came to mind. She said it made her think of Hurricane Katrina and all the poor, black people. She said she was very upset about what was going on and then went on to speak disparagingly about "them," those horrible people in the Bush administration and in New Orleans who didn't think about how poor people without cars were going to get out. I was struck by the part of the dream where she says "I don't want to be watching and not doing anything," and where she *hopes* the people in charge know what they are doing but fears they don't. So I clumsily asked her if she perhaps felt complicit in some way. She said she did not; she'd never let such a thing happen.

Shame had set in for her, and I realized only later that in addressing the complicity, rather than her helplessness and her wish to do something, I had likely suggested that I was NOT complicit, as though I somehow was able to stand outside as the curious, but NOT HELPLESS onlooker.

The dream has many meanings at many levels, as all dreams do. We explored together, for example, the transference question she raised about whether I, the person in charge of her analysis, knew what I was doing. But the dream's meaning field extends out into historical transgenerational directions as well, and its social meanings are no less personal and deep than are the individual and family-centered meanings on which we usually base our interpretations. Indeed, the ghosts of past and present U.S. history are all over this dream, and I think you can see here both the opportunity I had to bring that history into the treatment as well as the way I unconsciously resisted doing so. Had I not bypassed what I suspect was my own shame, we might together have been able to connect emotionally to the dream's complex duality. On the one hand, the dream and associations point to a relational unconscious, formed in history, in which we are all interimplicated and interdependent. The dreamer feels concern and even love for the distressed black woman—"That's my mama." But whites, as perpetrators and bystanders, are called out as complicit in the ongoing destruction of black people. At the same time, the dream and associations point to a contemporary social reality whose dominant discourses deny interdependence and therefore disavow complicity. You can see the precise form in which such disavowal takes place in the dream's Hollywood ending. As in any disaster movie or Oprah show, a tale of hardship ends in the success of special individuals. Here, the poor black woman becomes a rich black woman. Race and class get split, and poverty is disavowed, although it re-appears in the dream associations—in all those poor people who couldn't get out. By the end of the dream, my patient's unconscious seems to have turned a tragedy in which we were all implicated into a spectacle. The tragedy of classism, racism, and the indifference to human vulnerability, manifest in all our contemporary domestic and foreign policies, becomes a colorblind story of rags to riches, of personal triumph over adversity. But the ghostly shadow of white classed indifference haunts the attempt to take refuge in this version of the American Dream.

I can think of no better way to start a talk on psychoanalysis, transgenerational haunting, illusion and dis-illusionment than with this dream. I have written about the dream before (Layton, 2009), in a paper about a neoliberal version of empathy that looks on at the distressed other from afar, as if the looker is a helpless and innocent bystander rather than an actor caught up with other actors in a Big History (Davoine and Gaudillière, 2004) riven by class and race inequality. I saw the dream, and my response to it, as emanating from a shared and haunted social unconscious in which understanding ourselves as interconnected citizens seems to compete, unconsciously, with an understanding of ourselves as sovereign individuals. In that paper, I suggested that if we ignore a ghostly trans-individual social presence, we risk playing our own role in perpetuating a perverse pact (Stein, 2005), that is, an individualistic and narcissistic culture that denies the way the psyche is embedded in the social. Today I want to focus more directly on the way the dream and my responses reflect the ghostly intersectional workings of racialized as well as classed psychosocial unconscious processes. I explore

the ways in which, for white people, these processes simultaneously unsettle white privilege and then work very hard to re-center it.

Although I imagine myself white (Coates, 2015) and am very economically privileged, I am aware that white advantage is lived in different ways depending, in part, on class, and, in part, on one's identifications. Some whites, like those my patient referred to as "in charge," wield official power. Some are close enough to the center to aspire to wield power. On the same day my middle-class patient reported her dream, an upper class white patient, by no means lacking in social conscience, told me, seemingly without shame, that she had benefited from Katrina by selling Euros that had gone up in value because of the hurricane.

Some whites have little class power but yet benefit from being white. Some of these think that it is only people of color that stand in their way of achieving the Dream. Some, like my patient and myself, know we benefit from being white and feel a lot of guilt and shame about it. As Cushman (2000) has said, "...whiteness signifies a kind of political power that few in U.S. society actually hold....And without power, privilege is just a kind of passing—anxiety-provoking, shame-inducing, and ultimately chimeric" (614-615). With that in mind, I hope to contribute here to the pedagogical project George Yancy (2012) proposes in his book, *Look, A White!:* to help white people acquire our own version of double consciousness, to try to see ourselves through the eyes of people of color so that the ghostly and destructive presence of white and class advantage become as visible to white people as they are to most people of color.

### **The Duality of Unconscious Processes**

The ghost that haunts past and present US history makes itself known in unconscious processes that are fully psychosocial. Earl Hopper (2003), a member of the UK group analytic tradition, defines what he calls the social unconscious as:

...the existence and constraints of social, cultural and communicational arrangements of which people are unaware: unaware, in so far as these arrangements are not perceived (not 'known'), and if perceived not acknowledged ('denied'), and if acknowledged, not taken as problematic ('given'), and if taken as problematic, not considered with an optimal degree of detachment and objectivity. (p. 127)

While I like Hopper's definition, I don't think it quite captures the way that, as my patient's dream suggests, psychosocial unconscious processes point simultaneously away and toward truth. I used to teach popular culture, and one of my favorite articles was Fredric Jameson's 1979 piece, *Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture*. Jameson argues that the most popular mass cultural products generally become popular because they contain both progressive and reactionary ideological trends. Other pop culture critics have shown how the endings of mostly progressive works, like the end of my patient's dream, generally tie things up in a reactionary direction. Works of popular culture, like everything else, are shaped by unconscious process, and so, like dreams, they reveal the dual way that psychosocial unconscious processes work: resisting and conserving. In the week I started writing this paper, I saw a documentary called *Whose*

*Streets?* (Folayan, 2017), about the black protest movement that emerged against police violence in Ferguson. In the moderator's introduction to the film, he warned black audience members that the film would be hard to watch, and he encouraged them to get up and leave the room if they needed to. White people, he said, need to sit still and watch every frame. I felt unsettled. That night I dreamed there was a flood in one room of my house. The Oriental rug in that room was ruined, but all the other rooms remained unaffected. If you will allow me to perform a bit of self-analysis: in this dream, I am psychically unsettled by a flood at the very moment when I've begun writing this paper that begins with white complicity in the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. My unsettled state calls to mind Robin DiAngelo's (2011) concept white fragility, which describes how the evocation of white racism often calls forth defensiveness in whites. In the dream, I seem to be wrestling with the ghosts of racism and with how much privilege I'm willing to give up--an Oriental rug, ruined. But race and class privilege live in my very ability to imagine that the other rooms CAN remain unaffected. No such compartments, no safe spaces existed for many poor African-Americans caught in the traumatic reality of Katrina New Orleans. As in my patient's Katrina dream, here, too, what I have called normative unconscious processes push forcefully to restore the psychic equilibrium conferred by having, or even aspiring to have, white upper class advantage.

Slowly, I am coming to understand such dreams as offering a chance to experience a ghost of US history that, in this case, is manifest in the ways in which whiteness, white fragility, and class privilege intersect. As I look back over my career, my writings, my life, what strikes me is how I alternate between two different states of consciousness: in one, I am, as Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) would say, a Dreamer, imagining myself as white and blindly enacting in so many ways, in the clinic and out, my class and race privilege. And then at moments, something happens, maybe an interpersonal encounter, maybe something I read that puts me in touch, viscerally, with the ghosts of U.S. history. Suddenly, concepts like white privilege and intersectionality come alive and I become a little bit more "woke." I am part of a mixed-race and mixed-class group of therapists on a steering committee of a Boston chapter of Reflective Spaces/Material Places. More than once, the people of color in the group have found themselves pitted against each other while the white folks sit silently and seemingly innocently by, enacting what Solnit (2017) has referred to as "the willed obliviousness of privilege." We clash over whether class trumps race or race trumps class. When these interpersonal conflicts arise, it FEELS like we are unconsciously acting out trans-individual and trans-historical forces of structural racism and class struggle that we carry unconsciously, like ghosts, in our bodies and minds.

### **The Ghost**

In her book, *Ghostly Matters*, sociologist Avery Gordon (1997) puts forward the idea, now widely recognized by those in our field who write about transgenerational

transmission of trauma, that “impossible memories and unwritten histories continue living and often come to us as ghosts...” (Ferreday and Kuntsman, 2011, p. 1). Examining works of literature and photography, Gordon notes that ghosts often lie just outside a work’s frame; yet something inside the frame itself points toward the ghosts. Many of our contemporary psychoanalytic guardians have offered ways to understand and access these ghosts: Apprey’s (2014) pluperfect errand; Faimberg’s (2005) telescoping of generations; Abraham’s (1994) encrypted phantom; Laplanche’s (1999) enigmatic signifier, Salberg’s (2015) attention to transmitted attachment patterns, Grand (2000, 2009) on malignant dissociation. Gordon widens the frame, in a crucial way, of what most of our theorists of transgenerational transmission of trauma understand as ghostly. “The ghost,” she writes, “is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (1997, p. 8). Haunting, she continues, is “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known (2011, p. 2)...this socio-political-psychological state when something else, or something different from before, feels like it must be done, and prompts a something-to-be-done” (2011, p. 3). Ghosts come “demanding attention, looking for justice, challenging the way we know, act, and feel” (Ferreday and Kuntsman, 2011, p. 1). In the Katrina dream, my patient wishes she could DO something to make things different. What haunts, Gordon writes, are “the historic alternatives that could have been” (2011, p. 7, citing Marcuse). Her vision of the ghost conjures Davoine and Gaudillière’s (2004) plea that clinicians seek out the multiple ways that we and our patients are caught up, together, in what they call the Big History. “That’s my mama.”

To even begin to understand what Gordon means by the historic alternatives that could have been, we have to look honestly at our history, a history rife with fake news, with ghosts that call out the savagery haunting our illusory fantasy of being civilized. The exceedingly dangerous illusion of American exceptionalism, is, as Ta-Nehisi Coates rightly recognizes, the ideological centerpiece of our disavowed history of genocide and slavery. For Coates, this disavowal of an unpleasant truth infantilizes the population. In 1955, Coates’s own guardian, James Baldwin, also warned of the damaging psychic effects of living in illusion about ourselves. Baldwin wrote:

I do not think...that it is too much to suggest that the American vision of the world, which allows so little reality...for any of the darker forces in human life...tends until today to paint moral issues in glaring black and white—[and] owes a great deal to the battle waged by Americans to maintain between themselves and black men a human separation which could not be bridged. It is only now beginning to be borne in on us...that this vision of the world is dangerously inaccurate. For it protects our moral high-mindedness at the terrible expense of weakening our grasp of reality. People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a

state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster.  
(pp. 128-9)

Janice Gump (2000; 2010), Dorothy Holmes (2006; 2016), Barbara Fletchman-Smith (2011), Kirkland Vaughans (2016), Maurice Apprey (2014), Kim Leary (2000), Annie Lee Jones and Megan Obourn (2014), Neil Altman (2000; 2003;2006), Paul Wachtel (2003; 2017), Melanie Suchet (2004; 2007), Ryan Parker (2016), and others have spoken of the many ways that the disavowed legacies of slavery live on in the psychologies of and interactions among whites, blacks, and other people of color. An all too often missing part of this story, however, is the largely disavowed link between slavery, ethnic cleansing, and the history of US capitalism. Indeed, capitalism is the disavowed ghostly presence that haunts all our institutions, including psychoanalysis. Last year, after Section IX (Psychoanalysis for Social Responsibility, Division 39, APA) wrote and delivered an apology to indigenous peoples for harm done by psychology, I realized that, beyond knowing about historical genocide and about how our government currently enables capitalism to ravage native lands, I knew little about the specifics and ongoingness of white oppression of indigenous peoples. I turned to Sue Grand's (2018) essay, *The Other within: White shame and the Native American genocide*, and to Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014) book, *An Indigenous People's History of the U.S.*, and there I found many examples of laws that make absolutely visible the disavowed history of the intersection of race and class. The intersection is particularly clear in the perverse use of the terms savage and civilized. Government documents repeatedly enshrine white class privilege, offering a sense of superiority, of psychic and physical comfort, to all classes of whites. They repeatedly equate civilization with ownership of private property, calling savage those who have a different, communal relation to the land, and then using that distinction as an excuse to take the land. For example, the author of the 1887 General Allotment Act, Senator Henry Dawes, rationalized the act's destruction of the reservation system by complaining that in indigenous culture "there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization" (Dunbar-Ortiz, pp. 157-158). The "soul wound" that so differently afflicts white and indigenous populations is located right here, in the kind of classed and raced split that Erich Fromm (1970) referred to as having and using versus being (p. 3).

In his book, *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) makes visible the ghost as social figure by deconstructing the illusion of whiteness. He accomplishes this by repeatedly referring to white people as Dreamers who call themselves white. Dreamers' projections outward of their vulnerability and destructiveness are manifest in racist institutions and policies that trap people of color and enable Dreamers to go on dreaming. Coates is writing a good 40 years into a period of neoliberal dominance, when class and race have been dissociated in different ways. Not long after Martin Luther King, Jr. planned a poor peoples' campaign to make manifest the united interests

of poor whites and poor people of color, King was murdered and the Republicans' right-wing Southern Strategy offered, for the nth historical time, an invitation to poor whites to identify with whiteness and dis-identify with people of color. By the late 70s, Democrats, every bit as invested in finance capital and the globalization of capitalism as Republicans, began to practice their own form of dissociation of race and class, advocating a multicultural identity politics that disavows class difference (see Fraser, 2017). Both strategies have initiated new ruptures in the link between people and their social world, new betrayals of trust in what Jessica Benjamin calls a moral third (2004; 2009; 2017). Both strategies underwrite white race and class privilege, but, among whites, they largely benefit the upper class. While Dreamers do not all share the same agenda, they all live in the illusion that whiteness guarantees superiority and invulnerability, and this, as Baldwin said, makes them dangerous to themselves and to others.

For me, looking at this history has brought on a horrific sense of dis-illusionment, a loss of comforting illusions. Dis-illusionment, the undoing of disavowal, is a painful process. It first entails a willingness to become conscious of historical trauma (Salberg and Grand, 2017), a process that renders visible the ways this trauma, alive in intersectional ghosts, haunts all of our institutions in the U.S., including the theories and practices of psychoanalysis. Guardians inside and outside our field have helped me confront my own illusions. They have pushed at me to WAKE UP and see the ghosts. Facing these ghosts evokes shame at harm done, at benefitting from harm done, what Mary Watkins (2018) refers to as deserved shame. Watkins and Lynne Jacobs (2014) call on us not to bypass that shame but rather to move closer into it, a second moment of the work of dis-illusionment. As Phil Cushman (2000) and Gill Straker (2004) have suggested, white deserved shame arises from experiencing a conflict between ideals of equality and awareness of benefitting from racial and class inequities. Moving closer into shame can lead to feeling a real concern for the other, and to remorse, which Gobodo-Madikizela (2016) recognizes as the perpetrator's acknowledgment of harm done, his plea to the victim for readmission into the human community. When we bypass deserved shame, we are likely to repeat the conditions that keep oppression in place. Unconscious deals get struck between conflicting demands to turn toward the truth and to turn away from it. It was my bypassed shame that shut my patient down as she began to question why black people appeared in her dream. It was my bypassed shame that made me miss the chance to explore her love for the woman in the mud, her wish not just to stand by but rather to heed the call for something to be done.

In the process of moving into shame, whites will have to give something up. We will have to mourn the loss of, if nothing else, a sense of innocence and goodness. Facing the ghosts forces acknowledgment of whiteness' simultaneously true and false offer of safety and invulnerability, of what Yancy (2012) refers to as whites' missileic projections

of vulnerability and badness onto people of color. Only through the painful process of undoing the disavowals that underlie psychosocial illusions might we then be able to imagine historical alternatives, to conceptualize and address the ghosts' demand for justice, for a something-to-be-done. We need an ethic of dis-illusionment that will keep us attuned to and call on us to disrupt the constant reiterations of laws and norms that sustain systemic racism and class inequality, that will attune us to group unconscious processes that we ignore at our peril. But everything in our dominant culture is set up to enable white people not to see the ghosts that expose race and class privilege. Indeed, a vast amount of cultural and psychological work goes into keeping heterosexual upper class and white advantage invisible, and into keeping class privilege split from race privilege.

### **An Ethic of Dis-Illusionment**

Guardians in our own field have helped me formulate what I'm calling an ethic of dis-illusionment. They have warned that perhaps our most prominent and dangerous psychosocial illusion is that dominant culture is healthy, and they have shown that powerful psychosocial unconscious processes fight mightily to support that illusion. As a feminist psychoanalyst who spent my early career writing and teaching about gender, I did not expect to find my starting point for elaborating an ethic of dis-illusionment in Freud, but indeed I did, and I found it in Freud's work on disavowal (1927, 1937, 1938). Alan Bass (2000) has persuasively argued that, late in life, Freud began to sense that disavowal, and not repression, was the primary defense mechanism at the heart of all repetition compulsions and resistances (1937, pp. 235-38). In *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, Freud wrote: "If the perception of reality involves unpleasure, that perception—i.e., the truth—must be sacrificed" (p. 236). Freud's insight about turning away from painful truths became central to Bion and to many of his followers. Bion (1962a,b, 1970) asserted that when the raw emotion evoked by frustration is not adequately contained, lying, rather than thinking, may become a customary way of defending against what he called catastrophic change. According to Bion, lies may well be painful to live with, but they are less painful than the truth, which can threaten to annihilate the self and its bonds. If the truth can be tolerated, however, it is possible to learn from experience. For both Bion and Freud, then, disavowal, turning a blind eye to painful truths, is at the heart of perversion, repetition, and the inability to learn from experience (see Guralnik, 2016).

The Freud that is usually taught in institutes is generally not the Freud who wrote social treatises like *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). I have been fortunate to teach Freud to undergraduates majoring in Social Studies at Harvard and to Ph.D. students in a program on community psychology, liberation psychology, and ecopsychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. The Freud I teach in these extra-analytic spaces argued, early on, that neuroses are collective responses to oppressive social conditions (Freud, 1908). This Freud critiqued the oppressive side of the bourgeois norms of his era and the symptoms that spoke loudly of that oppression. His early example, of course, was hysteria, a disease largely seen in white middle-class



female patients who were extremely intelligent but whose developmental paths were blocked by sexist patriarchal norms. Think Anna O., Bertha Pappenheim, feminist social work pioneer who coined the term talking cure. But, unfortunately, we must also think Dora (Freud, 1905), with whom Freud re-enacted those sexist norms. In the very beginnings of our field we find the tension between radical and conservative forces of psychosocial unconscious process. When the tension is broken by disavowing truths that contest dominant social norms, here heterosexism, the psychic equilibrium of those who benefit from conforming to those norms is restored. Meanwhile, for those oppressed by these norms, enactments like the one with Dora become fresh instances of betrayal (see also, Brickman, 2003). Here, at our very origin, are two Freuds, a radical Freud offering a psychoanalytic ethic of dis-illusionment and a conservative Freud enacting a psychoanalytic ethic of adaptation (see Zaretsky, 2015). The tension between these two ethics haunts our field; too often, disavowal wins the day and we lapse into an ethic of adaptation.

For the radical Freud, psychoanalysis was an heir to the Enlightenment project of questioning authority and resisting conformity. Freud's contribution to the Copernican Revolution was his discovery of the unconscious, that which decenters our illusions about ourselves, specifically, our fantasy that we are master in our own house. "A great part of my life's work," Freud said, "has been spent to destroy my own illusions and those of humankind" (cited in Barglow, 2018, unreferenced epigram). In *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, written during World War I, Freud (1915) said that to understand the horrors that his country and countrymen were perpetrating in the name of civilization, which, here and elsewhere, he named as white (p. 276), we would have to reckon with the fact that we humans are neither as evil nor as good as we think we are. Freud called out the hypocrisy of the state, which, at that very moment, was enacting unimaginable barbarities that its own laws prohibited its citizens from enacting. Evil, he argued, cannot be eradicated, and conscience, "is not the inflexible judge that ethical teachers declare it, but in its origin is 'social anxiety' and nothing else" (p. 280). Freud was quite aware that an ethic of dis-illusionment is far from pleasurable, but as a lover of truth, he hoped it might deter us from committing the kinds of savagery perpetrated in the war, savagery, again, that hides behind claims to being "civilized."

### **From a Radical Ethic of Disillusionment to a Psychology of Adaptation**

Erich Fromm, one of radical Freud's most radical heirs, took the next step in developing an ethic of disillusionment. Like Jacobson, Fenichel, Reich and others of his left-wing contemporaries, he saw capitalism as a perpetrator of evils. Fromm (1941, 1962) developed the concepts of the social unconscious, what a given social order requires its subjects to repress, and social character, including what he called, as early as 1946, consumer capitalism's marketing orientation. In his prescient 1970 book, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, Fromm warned against the devastating effects of harboring illusion: "The grave danger to the future of man," he wrote, "is largely due to his incapacity to recognize the fictitious character of his 'common sense'" (p. 26). Fromm argued that the crisis within psychoanalysis had ensued in part from a betrayal of the radical Freud, a betrayal most manifest in ego psychology. The conformist Freud of ego psychology,

he felt, fit with the common sense of an historical era in which a radical bourgeois liberalism had itself become coopted by a consumerist, individualist ethic. Like many others, Fromm accused ego psychology of fostering a psychology of adaptation. Contesting ego psychology's focus on conflict-free zones, Fromm saw conflict as ever present and as central to a radical psychoanalytic ethic.

Fromm claimed that treating patients with an eye toward deconstructing the phenomenon of common sense would require analysts to engage in "a radical critique of their society, its overt and especially its hidden norms and principles" (p. 3). He called for a psychoanalysis that examines the "pathology of normalcy," "the psychological phenomena which constitute the pathology of contemporary society (p. 29)," Too often, Fromm said, his contemporaries colluded with patients to make analyses not too disturbing. As Russell Jacoby (1983) put it in his book, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis*, psychoanalysis, once a "cultural and political force," was, in this era, reduced to a trade (p. 10).

### **Erik Erikson: Ethics versus moralism**

Fromm praised a few contemporaries who he felt had resisted betraying the radical ethic of psychoanalysis, and one of those was Erik Erikson. Like Freud, Erikson (1976) made a very important distinction between moralism and ethics, one that directly challenges an ethic of adaptation. Moralism, he wrote, derives from an early superego structured by the rules of conduct of one's culture, while ethics develop later and center on what he calls "the more affirmative sense of what man owes to man, in terms of the developmental realization of the best in each human being" (p. 414). Erikson felt that, throughout life, we struggle with conflicts engendered by contradictions between our formation within conventional norms and our wish to be better and fuller human beings. These conflicts reveal themselves in what Erikson calls "deals" between "our ethical and our most moralistic sides..." Such deals, he says, "eventually permit us to commit or to agree to the commission of enslavement, exploitation and annihilation in the name of the highest values" (p. 414). In my patient's Katrina dream, and in my response to it, for example, we can see the deal we struck between our awareness of white complicity in the tragedy of structural racism and our wish to take refuge in goodness and innocence.

Freud would not have disagreed with Erikson. Already in 1915, he argued that the internal factor that disposed us to be able to attain ethical capacity, to transform egoistic into social instincts, to curb our tendencies toward savagery, is our need for love, "an advantage for which we are willing to sacrifice other advantages" (p. 282). Other traditions also root ethical potential in love, for example, Kleinian views on the wish to make reparation (Carveth, 2017), or relational views on the pleasurable effects of attunement, empathy, and mutual recognition (Benjamin, 1988, 1990). But needs for love and belonging can just as well dispose us to conformity, Fromm's concern, as to

the call of truth. Unlike moralism, ethics requires the capacity to reflect on what has been merely taken in as convention. Translated to the clinic, I imagine that an ethical stance, in Erikson's view, would primarily entail helping patients become conscious of the deals they have struck between adhering to convention and heeding the less safe call of truth. Again, our attention is called to the psychic struggle between illusion and dis-illusionment.

### **Normative Unconscious Processes**

I consider my own work on normative unconscious processes to be in the tradition of dis-illusionment laid out by radical Freud, by Fromm, and by Erikson. Most of what I've written about in the past fifteen years or so centers on conflict between normative unconscious processes, which work toward reproducing cultural inequalities of all kinds, and what I've called, borrowing from Gramsci, counterhegemonic processes that work to reintegrate those crucial parts of us that we have split off from ourselves under the pressure of social norms. This was my way of capturing the duality of psychosocial unconscious process. I like Erikson's way of describing what I'm after as "deals" we make to negotiate our conflicts between what has brought us love, social approval, and security, financial and otherwise, and what, to my mind, has simultaneously made us sick and destructive to ourselves and others.

I came to the concept of normative unconscious processes from reading what has become, in the past 20 years, a treasure trove of clinical papers that describe racialized and gendered enactments. Papers like Kim Leary's (2000) *Racial Enactments in Dynamic Treatment* and Neil Altman's (2000) *Black and White Thinking*, as well as responses to that paper by Gump (2000) and Cushman (2000), resonated for me with what I had learned from several late 20<sup>th</sup> century social movements, academic theories of deconstruction and intersectionality, and relational analytic feminist theory, for example, Benjamin's (1990, 2004, 2009, 2017) ethic of mutual recognition, subject-subject relating, and acknowledgment of harm done. My writing has always focused on understanding how individuals live and contest dominant identity categories, consciously and unconsciously. In my book on gender (Layton, 1998/2004), I wrote about how identity categories can both facilitate and thwart growth. But soon after, I became interested in exploring more about the way that identity categories and internalized social norms impede growth in the service of adaptation. I began to discover numerous examples, both in the psychoanalytic literature and in my own work, of clinical enactments that unconsciously reproduce heterosexism (Layton and Bertone, 1998; Layton, 2002), racism (Layton, 2006a), classism (Layton, 2004), and neoliberal versions of subjectivity (Layton, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014a,b,c, 2015, 2016, 2018). I do not think of these kinds of enactments as clinical errors. Rather, they are relational repetition compulsions in which psyches shaped by social inequalities of all kinds unconsciously reproduce the very psychosocial structures that caused psychic pain in the first place. These psychosocial repetition compulsions are depth and not surface.

How does the process of shaping, suffering, and reproducing occur? In my gender book (1998/2004), I argued that binary norms of gender and sexuality mandate a splitting off of ways of being that are deemed improper in a person's particular subculture. Classed and raced cultural and subcultural systems differentially assign "goodness" and "badness" not only to particular gender performances but to particular psychic states, emotional expressions, and ways of being, for example, dependence and shame. The family, peers, other social groups mediate the process. As Freud, Erikson, Sullivan, and Fromm all suggested, love, the need to be loved, the need to belong, the need to attach in ways our love objects can tolerate, play a significant role in how we forge our sense of self and self in relation. From the outset of life, we begin to get conscious and unconscious messages about what a proper girl or boy of our class and race is supposed to be in order to be lovable; a sense of good-me, bad-me, and an unconscious and usually dissociated not-me begin to form. All three me's are psychosocial.

On the morning after the 2016 election, a supervisee told me about a patient, one of many, who had come in talking about the election. The patient was a Muslim lesbian who suffered from feelings that she was sinful, the wrong kind of Muslim. In her country, indeed, homosexuality is a crime. She had been talking recently about her fraught relationships with men and women, but on that day she spoke only of her fears about a president who was outspokenly anti-Muslim. At some point in the session, the patient became self-conscious about talking about the election and said, "I guess I should go back to talking about me." By "talking about me," she meant talking about her difficulties in intimate relations. This common sense version of "me," one consonant with the largely adaptationist ethic of our profession, reduces the "me" solely to the patient's intimate relations. The patient, however, had been gesturing toward a ghost outside the usual frame: the "me" that exists in a social context, and that psychosocial "me" was very much tied in with what she was struggling with, her fractured relation to being Muslim.

For years, I have lamented the many ways in which our field dissociates the psychic from the social, a premier instance of an institutional enactment of normative unconscious process. I have resignified Bion's phrase, attacks on linking (Layton, 2006b), to illuminate those instances in which, for example, class or gender or race are left out of the picture of both patient's and therapist's subjectivity. Normative unconscious processes reproduce inequality precisely where the link between the psychic and the social has been dissociated; it is precisely here and in limiting our concept of social context to a socially decontextualized family that a radical ethic of disillusionment gives way to an ethic of adaptation—in this case, adaptation to a neoliberal individualism. Davoine and Gaudillière (2004) have helped me appreciate the costs of omitting from our work not only an awareness of unequal gender, race, class norms, but also the Big History and the ways that patients and therapists are caught up and variously placed within it.

Psychic deals--resistance to and compliance with the historically specific norms that have built and that sustain dominant culture--make their presence known in a ghostly fashion. Some years ago (Layton, 2001), I wrote about an 8 year old white lower middle class girl, a friend's daughter I named Emily. Emily had made a series of 3 films with her male playmate, which they titled *Lovestruck I, II and III*. The trilogy revealed how the girl was working her way, in play and fantasy, into intersectionally complex gendered, classed, and raced positions. You could see which human capacities and desires Emily was repudiating as not-me to attain the positions of girl, white, upper class. Her desire for whiteness, for example, as well as her conflict about what she'd have to give up to get it, became visible in the film script as a repudiation of attributes associated in dominant white culture with blackness. A black kidnapper was conjured to represent crime and dangerous sexuality. Her classed desire for upward mobility, as well as her conflict about that desire, became visible in the way the films staged her growing attraction to a lower class boy who was at first shunned but who became an "appropriate" object of desire after he demonstrated that he had the attributes of a good bourgeois. The notion of what was desirable did not come solely from within – although Emily had made her own brew of what she had experienced, the shape of her desire was intergenerationally transmitted and mediated by parents, peers, teachers, and the all white structure of the gentrifying geographic spaces in which she was living her life. Those white spaces segregated her from intimate contact with people of color and their living conditions. And so, although she surely would come to know of these conditions, she would be taught how NOT to take notice of them. Not to know the history hidden in plain sight. Any sense of complicity, as in the Katrina dream, would most likely register as a not-me experience.

A short video by Aimee Sands (2010), *What Makes Me White*, gives another view of how one becomes white and middle-class. In it, two little girls living in Westchester County, New York, are picked up by their grandfather in his large 1950s car and taken for a visit with their grandparents in New York City. As the car enters a poor black neighbourhood, the grandfather clicks down the door locks and rolls up the windows. One little girl is then seen gazing out the window with a perplexed look. In this short video, we see how whiteness comes into being as a fear of blacks and black neighborhoods. Blacks are cast outside; whites are shut inside. The poverty of the black neighbourhood is the ghost haunting the scene of the grandfather's fear and the granddaughters' introduction to whiteness. The ghost holds a hidden history that, if known, would reveal that the grandfather's fear is firmly built on missilic projections and disavowals, on white rage enacted in genocide, slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, school segregation, mass incarceration.

As *Lovestruck* and the Sands video reveal, transgenerationally transmitted normative unconscious processes enact, in a private sphere dissociated from the public sphere, what Patricia Williams (1997) has described as hatred learned in the context of love. Such hatred damages the self while upholding and reproducing the norms of dominant culture. Roger Frie (2017) has recently suggested that, so long as we police our psychoanalytic frame in such a way that family memory remains distinct from collective memory, from the Big History, we will not adequately deal with the soul wounds of class inequities and classed racism. I ask you again to consider the possibility that what we

call depth merely touches the surface, a surface on which the disavowals of history, our illusions, are allowed continuously to repeat themselves.

### **White Class Advantage in the Clinic**

I now want to look at how white upper class advantage, the neoliberal version of whiteness, is damaging and is built into the work we do. I explore some of the ways that the psychoanalytic space is haunted by deals that normalize structural inequalities and I ask: At what psychic cost do we hold on to the illusion that the dominant culture is healthy? I look for the ghostly presence of resistance as well as the ways that we counter that resistance as we seek psychic equilibrium. I focus on white-white therapist patient dyads because it is perhaps most difficult to see the hauntings of white class privilege there (see Cushman, 2000, note on p. 616; Bodnar, 2004). My guardians for this part of the project are the many of you, from multiple generations, who have openly made yourselves vulnerable in centering your work on intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, and on the way the effects of cultural inequities play out in the clinic (Altman, 2000; Bodnar, 2004; Bonovitz, 2005; Chavez, 2016; Dimen, 2003, 2011; Duran, 2006; Gentile, 2013, 2014; Grand, 2007, 2013, 2014; Gump, 2010; Guralnik, 2010; Harris, 2005, 2012; Hartman, 2005; Hassinger, 2014; Hollander, 2017; Holmes, 2006; 2016; Leary, 2000; Rozmarin, 2009, 2011a,b; Saketopoulou, 2011; Straker, 2004; Suchet, 2004, 2007; White, 2002).

Let us first look at a key psychoanalytic structure, the frame. And let's begin with the frame of our conference, the spring meeting attended largely by white people who can afford to come. Last year, several people of color spoke about microaggressions involving white administrators, enactments that, whatever was consciously intended, served to keep the space safe for white people. I'm not talking about this or that bad racist person. This problem is structural, a normative unconscious process that caters to white fragility and thus works to keep white people comfortable. It does so in multiple ways: first, by performing a conscious and unconscious denigration of people of color – they can't possibly be psychology professionals like "us"!—second, by segregating blacks from whites, since the presence of blacks might remind whites of their complicity in structural racism—"what are these black people doing in my dream?" The hard work that goes into policing separateness only reveals the ghostly truth of how deeply connected white and non-white are. Yancy talks about how uncomfortable he feels in the all-white spaces of philosophy conferences. "One ought to wonder, he says, "about the specific white normative frame that structures such spaces... its disciplining effects on bodies of color" (loc 1992). For Yancy, the frame is race. But, as I have been arguing, the frame is both raced and classed. Indeed, I'm pretty sure that not all of us here who call ourselves white DO feel at home here. However, what I do think is that, like my friends' daughter Emily, we unconsciously imbibe in spaces like this one what we need to be and do to become the kind of person that does feel comfortable. How to speak, how to use our bodies, etc. This psychic work lies very much at the intersection of race and class. Gender, too.

In his 1967 article, Jose Bleger calls the frame a 'ghost world' that is never noticed unless it changes or is missing. Focusing on the psychoanalytic situation as an institution, Bleger writes: "we must accept that institutions and the frame *a/ways* make

up a “ghost world,” that of the most primitive and undifferentiated organization” (p. 512). Bleger argues that the frame sustains the patient’s fantasy of omnipotence and safety; if uninterpreted, it becomes the site of a perfect repetition compulsion that leaves the patient at risk of ending treatment with an adaptive ego. In Bleger’s definition, an adaptive ego takes comfort in belonging but is not self-directed.

Bleger’s work needs to be rendered psychosocial by placing the frame in a historicized relational context. In a recent two-part series in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* (Seligman et al 2017a,b), in which therapists reflected on their clinical experience post-election, we see the tension that arises when therapists confront the politics of the frame. Several therapists spoke of having to break their own frame rules as the political reality crashed into the room. Spielberg (2017), for example, says “that my rules about the boundary between the political and the clinical no longer made sense” (p. 367). Many spoke of patient frame breaks, like lateness, but also how they themselves began enacting frame breaks, like letting sessions go over time. What was striking to me was how few writers questioned the politics of the frame from which they had shifted. To me, the lesson here was that keeping politics out of the therapy frame IS in fact the enactment of a politics. A politics that fosters adaptation. A perverse pact.

To make more visible the politics of the frame, I offer two final vignettes.

### **Vignette 1 (From Layton, 2014b)**

A middle-class white female patient of mine had become ashamed of what she felt family members condemned as too much desire for attention. When I began seeing her, she was in fact quite constricted. Sometime during our work together I moved into a home office, which I had decorated in higher style than the office I had been renting. In our first meeting in the new office, the theme of entitlement and selfishness arose. The patient spoke about having just read Barbara Ehrenreich’s (2001) book, *Nickel and Dimed*, and said she felt guilty and indulgent about having hired a maid for the first time. I said, “It’s hard to acknowledge that you’re privileged.” She agreed and held out her hands to show me her nails. She said, “I get my nails done, I have a therapist in Brookline in a place like this.” My own privilege having been invoked, I think I felt anxious and vulnerable and did not know what to do with the deserved shame evoked by the harm done by privilege: hers, mine, ours. I remember having tried to normalize the privilege, saying something like, “You don’t have to feel guilty for having nice things.” This comment closed down something the patient was trying to say, something that went against the neoliberal grain because it attempted to connect her fortune to the misfortune of others. My first comment had kept the question of privilege open; the second one closed it down. I could have explored our mutual discomfort about our privilege and its connection to the lack of privilege all around us. But, in a turn away from truth, I instead normalized privilege, a neoliberalizing practice that keeps the long history of ever morphing class and racial inequality in place.

### **Vignette 2**

In her recent paper, *Who is the Sufferer and What is Being Suffered?*, Nancy Hollander (2017) writes about her work with a white upper middle-class female patient she names L, a corporate lawyer “whose frenetic life leaves little opportunity for her to be with her

infant daughter” (p. 644). L had come to resent and envy her child’s Latina nanny, which played out in the treatment as a demand for special attention from Hollander and fears that Hollander would retaliate and reject her. Hollander describes how the working through of the maternal transference based on familial etiology led to the patient being able more easily to assert herself with the nanny “and to claim her place as her baby’s mother” (p. 644). However, as Hollander goes on to note, there was something “uncannily absent in the frame” (p. 645), what I’m here calling a ghost. The ghost as social figure, in this case, the figure that marks what the destructive white neoliberal subject destroys in both self and other, became visible to Hollander when the patient said something that reminded Hollander that her patient was paying the nanny less than minimum wage and was requiring of the nanny “excessively long work days and nights” (p. 645). At that moment, Hollander realized that she and her patient, both white, had unconsciously occluded the way that the nanny had been treated as an “other” in their work, how both had unconsciously projected “dissociated and denigrated emotional states of insecurity and vulnerability” (p. 646) onto the nanny. Hollander then “struggled” to find a way to raise this in the treatment. She simply noted that they had “not talked much about the nanny’s personal life and experience and [wondered] what that might mean” (p. 645). Her patient was surprised at recognizing this to be true. Eventually, the patient began to talk about how paying the nanny low wages violated her own social values as it simultaneously gave her an enigmatic gratification. And this made her realize that she had been denying how much of her anxiety had been generated by her firm’s downsizing policies. L’s “privileged class/racial position” allowed her “to experience her agency through her role as a boss with absolute control over her worker” (p. 646). The perverse repetition here is that L is able to tolerate the dehumanizing conditions of her workplace in part by creating intolerable conditions for the nanny and becoming inhuman herself.

To return to Davoine and Gaudillière (2004), we can see how Hollander, her patient, and the normative parameters of treatment itself are all caught up in the Big History, a neoliberal and globalized history that includes the demand to be a defensively autonomous entrepreneurial self in a precarious employment world. It includes as well what Ehrenreich and Hochschild called the “care drain,” the immigration of mostly female caregivers from the third world to the first world. Leaving the nanny’s story out of the frame perhaps LOOKS like what Bleger refers to as creating a self-directed self, a successful analysis. But, as Hollander asserts, what it really does is reproduce a neoliberal entrepreneurial subject that, in projecting vulnerability outward, draws its ego boundaries around exclusion and devaluation of the non-white, lower class other. To me, this is a very good example of what Erikson calls a “deal.” Normative unconscious processes of both patient and therapist, one might say, at first collude to reproduce egos safe in their feeling of belonging to the institutions of dominant culture, here psychoanalysis and the corporate world. An ethic of adaptation. Hollander concludes that had she not seen what I’m calling the cast-off and disavowed ghost of white neoliberalism, she would have left “intact the neoliberal split between the private individual and the social individual or citizen, a split that hinders the development of empathy and accountability” (p. 645; see also Layton, 2009). But she didn’t – demonstrating that we have the power either to preserve white upper class psychic equilibrium or to resist and enact an ethic of dis-illusionment. Indeed, both vignettes



clearly reveal that technical choices that focus on the individual as psychosocial, as embedded in history, are quite different from those that focus on the individual as separate from the social.

## Conclusion

I conclude with some thoughts about the ghostly social figure that haunts the practice and institution of psychoanalysis, and I offer some thoughts on how to access that ghost and respond to its demand for something-to-be-done. Fromm (1970) argued that patients seek therapy because they have a vision of a better life, one of being rather than of having and using. The ethic of having and using, of course, has long been dominant in the U.S. It has historically been ideologically centered in The American Dream. In an op-ed, David Brooks (June, 2017) cited de Tocqueville's 1830s commentary on white Americans as follows:

They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands. Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart. (cited on A23)

Belief in the American Dream is a classic example of an Eriksonian deal; the Dream has always thrived by disavowing the racism and classism on which it was built, on disavowed slavery and genocide. De Tocqueville's words reflect on the psychic toll paid by white patriarchal Americans who buy into the Dream. Confined in the solitude of his own heart. As Baldwin (1998/1972) put it more than 200 years later: "... I have always been struck, in America, by an emotional poverty so bottomless, and a terror of human life, of human touch, so deep, that virtually no American appears able to achieve any viable, organic connection between his public stance and his private life" (p. 385). Both men evoke the effect on whites of segregating themselves from situations that evoke deserved shame, an effect that, as LeBron (2013) writes, increases "moral disadvantage."

The ghost of being demands that we look honestly at our history. It haunts the ethic of having and doing, a raced and classed ethic. In its current neoliberal version, the American Dream radically measures the worth of human beings in terms of productivity and economic success, a success its version of capitalism simultaneously keeps most people from being able to attain. Altman (2005) and Peltz (2005) coined the term, "the manic society," to describe the contemporary psychic effects of an ethic of having, using, doing, optimizing, of disavowing dependence, vulnerability, and need. The children of the white middle-class exhaust themselves trying to attain the dream of having and using, and they appear in our offices with familiar symptoms. A white middle-class patient of mine once said that the message she got from her educated parents was "Yale or Jail" (Layton, 2016), a BIG HISTORY message that encapsulates the connection between the white dream and its disavowed nightmare of mass incarceration, ghettos, and other forms of structural classed racism (Layton, 2016). Recall my patient's association to her Katrina dream: "I don't know why the people were

black.” When we think we ought to cut off talk that conceives of the self as psychosocial, because it isn’t the stuff of therapy, we consciously or unconsciously normalize and thus reproduce a conception of selfhood that is quite in line with the white neoliberal version of subjectivity that radically splits the psyche from its formation in unequal social matrices and power structures.

To heed the ghost’s call for something-to-be-done, we need to demand change in our psychoanalytic institutions. We need to know the history of our profession and to recover from it the precious insights about group unconscious process that analysts like Bion and his followers have given us. We should demand courses that are psychosocial, not the ones that celebrate diversity, but the ones that look squarely at the psychic effects of the history of class, gender, and race relations. Demand that your white institutions reflect on their whiteness, that they invite and make financially possible the inclusion of people of color. And then listen to what they have to say. Demand technique courses that point up the differences between conceptualizing ourselves as sovereign individuals rather than as psychosocial historical beings, courses that reflect on the ways in which we often are called upon to treat social problems as if they were individual problems. I invite you to imagine the techniques we would need truly to reach historical psychic depth. Heed Kim Leary’s (2014) call for psychoanalytic training to include a community component and for us all to work at higher structural levels than solely at the individual private practice level. Think about what form reparations might take, both for the field of psychoanalysis and for the culture at large. Whites need to get up close, get proximate (Stevenson, 2015) to be able truly to see the ongoing destructive effects of white supremacy.

This historical moment offers a good chance for us and our profession to get woke. We’ve had such opportunities before, and we didn’t go there. Indeed, if anyone in our profession had listened to Fromm and Fanon in the 50s or, later, Martin-Baró (1994), I’d probably not be standing here these many years later having to argue that psychic process is permeated by history and social circumstance. It is late, but hopefully not too late to see the ghost, not too late to reflect on the tension between unconscious processes that resist conformity, that lovingly seek repair, and unconscious processes that work to restore the destructive psychic equilibrium of the dominant. Not too late to turn away from the temptations of a psychoanalytic ethic of adaptation. Not too late to embrace a psychoanalytic ethic of dis-illusionment and make our profession one that contributes to creating racial, gender, sexual and class equity.

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