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Apophenic Reading and the Politics of Psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT
Psychoanalysis provides a framework for understanding how phenomena like parapraxes, fantasies, and dreams are indices of unconscious processes. In this way it is a particularly suspicious undertaking, linking surface clues to what, by definition, cannot be known. This essay attends to the suspicious and skeptical registers of psychoanalysis to sense a resonance between what is made visible and invisible in the making of "nation" and "human." There is a secret history of psychoanalysis, in which it is bound up with political agitation, socialist movements, and skepticism of human exceptionalism. What about the suspicious method of psychoanalysis is threatening not only to psychic but to political repression? By tarrying in this secret history, and the strange, symptomatic ambivalences in psychoanalytic texts, this article suggests that the politically serviceable roots of psychoanalysis could be returned from their repression in the present day, to answer to contemporary abolitionist projects.

The idea of the unconscious

One of the most curious and counterintuitive assumptions of psychoanalysis is that there is a part of mind that cannot be directly known, experienced, or described, yet it exerts enormous influence on us, our lives, and who we come to be. Freud justified his theory of the unconscious by observing the various maladies suffered by his patients: obsessions that ruled their lives; painful interpersonal patterns repeated over and over; mysterious physiological symptoms; harrowing nightmares. These symptoms could not be accounted for, or did not respond to usual treatment methods. The theory of the unconscious is a conceptual schema that provides a way to account for these otherwise unaccountable phenomena. However, this "account" is never a direct reading of the unconscious itself, but something constructed from its traces and remains. Freud proclaimed that his theory of the unconscious was sufficient simply because it works: It organizes symptoms in a way that facilitates treatment, and when therapeutic technique assumes unconscious processes are at work, psychological treatments proceed as they are expected to (Freud, 1915).

While the idea of the unconscious allows symptoms to be meaningfully linked, it is difficult to speak meaningfully, or exactly, of the unconscious itself. It is unclear what is being referred to: Is the unconscious a "thing"? Can we call it "it"? Since the unconscious is inherently unknowable, everything said about the unconscious is a kind of metaphor, or heuristic: a useful, meaningful approximation, rather than incontrovertible truth. To write or speak of the unconscious is always a speculative practice, and our goal in doing it at all is not to be exact, but rather useful.

When Freud writes about his theory of the unconscious, he takes care to distinguish it from "the unconscious of philosophers": "By them the term is used merely to indicate a contrast with the conscious: the thesis which they dispute with so much heat and defend with so much energy is the thesis that apart from conscious there are also unconscious psychical processes." Freud's theory actually goes much further than this: There are "*two* kinds of unconscious" (1955c, p. 614; italics

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added). There is the unconscious that is wholly inaccessible to consciousness, and there is the *preconscious* (*Pcs*.), which consciousness has access to. The preconscious is like the entrance-way or foyer between the unconscious (*Ucs*.) and consciousness (*Cs*.). The *Pcs*. has a selectively permeable membrane: Things perceived or learned in consciousness may enter the *Pcs*. and stay there as short- or long-term memory. These are things you know, but aren't thinking about right now. They can be recalled, and brought back into consciousness either spontaneously or at will. Unconscious drives and wishes may also push up against the *Pcs*. membrane; while unconscious material doesn't exactly make it through, its imprints and echoes register in the *Pcs*. and show up to consciousness as a slip, remembered dream, or repetition.

What will be most interesting for our purposes here is that unconscious drives and wishes play themselves out in life, thought, and behavior. What is unconscious cannot be directly accessed, but it has profound, tangible effects. Unconscious drives and wishes resonate through the semipermeable membrane of the *Pcs*., to be either repressed again, or distorted into uncanny images or disavowed desires. The psychoanalytic method, then, is a cipher, which takes these surface signs and arranges, rearranges, reencounters, links, and unlinks them, until a meaningful illogic emerges from their strange correspondence.

Psychoanalytic suspicion

Psychoanalysis as a method and body of thought rests upon this fundamental assumption that there is a deep underlying and unknowable structure that profoundly influences what goes on "above ground." In this way it is a particularly *suspicious* enterprise. This point has been very much elaborated, particularly by Paul Ricoeur (1970), who gave us the term *hermeneutic of suspicion* to describe psychoanalysis. This essay tarries in these suspicious and paranoid registers of psychoanalysis. To tarry means to "stay in a place, especially when you ought to leave" (Tarry verb, n.d.), and we will stay in this text too long together, hoping to sense the strange connections and uncanny resonances that hum beneath the surface of a narrative.

> א An aleph note is a fragment, aside, or digression, which is inserted into the main body of the text, but distinguished from it. The aleph note, as used in the work of Giorgio Agamben, allows the text as a whole to open onto other horizons of thought that are not fully elaborated in the main text. The aleph note can be a door out of the present text and into another, making a connection that may have uncanny resonances with the present text's surface narrative. An aleph note is a clue into the underbelly of a text, which opens onto potentially endless of these connections or resonances. It is also necessarily undeveloped: An aleph note may be a moment where the text—just as a dream would—becomes "unplumbable—*a navel*, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown" (Freud, 1955c, p. 111, note 1). Like Freud's footnotes that are attended to later in the essay, sometimes these aleph notes are long enough that the navel of the text threatens to overtake, or overthrow, what is being said on the surface.

> א Tarrying is a method and object of inquiry for Ashon Crawley in his text *Blackpentacostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (2016, p. 4). Crawley writes: "The practices I analyze are a range of sensual, affective, material experiences: 'shouting' as dance; 'tarrying' as stilled intensity and waiting, as well as raucous praise noise . . . These practices of Blackpentecostalism not only trouble the assumptive logics of gender but also unmoor the matters of sex and sexuality. I ultimately argue that these choreographic, sonic, and visual aesthetic practices and sensual experiences are not only important objects of study for those interested in alternative modes of social organization, but they also yield a general hermeneutics, a methodology for reading culture."

In Ricoeur's book *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970, p. 32), Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche are presented as the "three masters" of the school of suspicion. All three thinkers built their bodies of work around the demystification of a false consciousness, respectively arguing that there is an underlying structure beneath ego, within commodity and capital, and in religious belief. But Ricoeur suggests that they share more than the demystifying nature of their "destructive" or critical moves. To answer to their disenchantments, they each invented their own "art of *interpreting*" (p. 33). And this interpretation is an exercise of the suspicion fundamental to their thought. Because Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche were not only "great 'destroyers,'" but also constructed interpretive methods,

Ricoeur argues that "these three masters of suspicion are not to be misunderstood . . . as three masters of skepticism." For Ricoeur, skepticism has no "positive" or constructive element. However, there is a constructive element to skepticism in the theory of abolition. Abolition not only refuses, critiques, and destroys, but also produces, constructs, and generates different institutions and forms of relation—and this generative construction is implicit to abolition's refusals (Davis, 2011). Abolitionist skepticism is a productive, constructive skepticism that Tiffany Lethabo King uses as a critical frame that refuses the Western theoretical tradition that produced humanism and post-humanism. It is "theoretically generative" in its refusals, a point demonstrated in an essay quoted by King, written by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang about the refusals in Audra Simpson's decolonial critique of ethnography. Tuck and Yang write:

> ...refusals are not just subtractive, but are theoretically generative, expansive. Refusal is not just a "no," but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned. Unlike a settler colonial configuration of knowledge that is petulantly exasperated and resentful of limits, a methodology of refusal regards limits on knowledge as productive, as indeed a good thing (Tuck and Yang quoted in King, p. 169).

Although Freud, psychoanalytic theory, and the other two "masters" of suspicion designated by Ricoeur are firmly within the tradition of Western humanism that King is skeptical of, in this essay, I will be attending to the tensions and ambivalences within psychoanalysis itself that symptomatically undermine the human as a supremacist and exclusionary organizing principle. The idea of the 'human' is ill-at-ease within humanist discourse. Furthermore, I suggest that as a method that has made an art and a science out of putting oneself in relation to that which is unknowable, psychoanalysis can be understood, like Simpson's methodology of refusal, as a method that "regards limits on knowledge as productive, as indeed a good thing." Thwarting the usual positivist mode of knowledge production, psychoanalysis asks, what can be done with that which is impossible to know?

The enchantment of words

Psychoanalytic treatment proceeds by free association. The patient lies down, facing away from the analyst, and says anything or everything that comes to mind. It is one of the analyst's tasks to create an environment in which the patient is able to speak freely. The analysand's associations are the surface clues—the points of contact—between unconscious processes and conscious mental content. They provide an opportunity to use speech in a particularly queer way; that is, free association makes queer use of language. In her book *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use*, Sara Ahmed (2019, p. 200) writes: "We can pick up the connection between what is queer and what is given. Queer uses would be about releasing a potentiality that already resides in things given how they have taken shape. Queer use could be what we are doing when we release that potential." If we take speech as what is *given* in the psychoanalytic scene, then the method of free association could be seen as making queer use of that speech insofar as it activates a latent potential embedded in otherwise "ordinary" language. Psychoanalytic speech is charged and comes alive with an associative, resonant, indeed *magical* power. Freud writes of "the 'magic' of words" (1905, p. 292) in psychoanalysis:

> A layman will no doubt find it hard to understand how pathological disorders of the body and mind can be eliminated by "mere" words. He will feel that he is being asked to believe in magic. And he will not be so very wrong, for the words which we use in our everyday speech are nothing other than watered-down magic. But we shall have to follow a roundabout path in order to explain how science sets about restoring to words a part at least of their former magical power. (p. 283)

Profoundly, psychoanalysis, which has often been called "the Jewish science" (Frosh, 2003), is a science that reinspires language with its enchanted, magical, performative power. In free association, the analyst and patient follow a tenuous thread of thoughts, attend to the latent connections therein, and create meaning that follows an (il)logic internal to their relationship. "Meaning" can take the form of a verbal interpretation, or an interpretive action, or a (counter)transferential feeling that occurs in

a session. Through making meaning with their patient, the analyst is able to learn *how to be with their patient* such that they create a relationship that is, perhaps, maturational. In this way, the analyst does things with words.

ℵ In Walter Benjamin's five-page fragment "Doctrine of the Similar" (Benjamin and Tarnowski, 1933, p. 68), he writes: "Since this non-sensuous similarity, however, reaches into all areas of reading, this deep level reveals a peculiar ambiguity of the word 'reading' in both its profane and magical senses. The pupil reads his ABC book, and the astrologer reads the future in the stars. In the first clause, reading is separated into its two components. But the second clarifies both levels of process: the astrologer reads off the position of the stars in the heavens; simultaneously he reads the future and fate from it." And, Freud, from the last paragraph of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "And the value of dreams for giving us knowledge of the future? There is of course no question of that. It would be truer to say instead that they give us knowledge of the past. For dreams are derived from the past in every sense. Nevertheless the ancient belief that dreams foretell the future is not wholly devoid of truth. By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all leading us into the future. But this future, which the dreamer pictures as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into a perfect likeness of the past" (1955c, p. 621). And André Lepecki, in *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (2016, p. 151), "If the angel of history flies with its back toward the future unfurling behind its wings, it is because the angel's duty is to remind us that the mo(ve)ment of time is multidirectional, just as it is the angel's task to persist in searching history's detritus for any clues that might help in planning (always uncertain, always drifting, always necessarily re-planned) future actions, drift lanes, gestures, and movements. This is the only way forward: looking back, attending to those who have perished from the blows of history."

Apophenia, paranoia, hysteria

Freud describes the psychoanalytic method as a kind of magic, because in free association, language has a material effect on the body and mind. Magic happens when two people attend to a latent psychic correspondence. Paradoxically, mainstream psychology has pathologized the practice of drawing meaningful connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, even though this is the very method on which psychological treatment is originally based. In contemporary, mainstream psychology, "the tendency to interpret random patterns as meaningful" is a pathological symptom, an "error of perception" called *apophenia* (Hoopes, 2011). But as the cultural and literary critic Susan Lepselter writes: "This definition … already contains within it a specific point of view, an assumption of power. Who decides what is really related or unrelated? Who defines whether the relations between objects—or between events, or between spectacles of dominance across various contexts—are random and arbitrary?" (Lepselter, 2016, p. 3). Classifying the connections between things as either significant or paranoid is already bound up in a power relation. Why does mainstream psychology pathologize and suppress apophenic thought? What operation of power is invested in this suppression?

The "paranoid" who senses an underlying meaning in seemingly random patterns could be said to have a hysterical relationship with a regime of truth. They may have experiences that exceed, or are unexplainable within, a dominant narrative. There is a certain morbid pleasure-fear in consuming information about unexplained phenomena, like disappearances or regional lore. Because these things cannot be explained by various authorities, there is a mixture of fear and excitation in hearing about something that has escaped from the pressure chamber of the commonplace and the certain. The assumed mastery over ourselves and our world is threatened by the unexplainable.

The unexplained is a hysterical eruption from a regime of truth. It is an excess, just as "hysterical manifestations have, by preference, the characteristic of being excessive" (Freud, 1888, 48). Hysteria results from "a *surplus* of excitation in the nervous system—a surplus which manifests itself, now as an inhibitor, now as an irritant, and is displaced within the nervous system with great freedom" (pp. 49–50, emphasis added). The particular flavor of jouissance that is pleasure-fear and nervous fascination is one way of feeling this hysterical surplus of excitation.

Hysteria is pathologized—it was *the* pathology that birthed the psychoanalytic method. By positing that unexplainable phenomena have a hysterical relation to a regime of truth, and by characterizing the affective experience of these phenomena as paranoid, I am not intending to reify the pathologization of hysteria, or paranoia. Rather, this is to draw attention to the fact that it *is* pathologized within a repressive psychiatric system, so that we may begin to ask why apophenic, paranoid, or hysterical ways of understanding the world are pathologized.

> ℵ Apophenia, as a method of association and substitution, is a poetic grammar, which emulates the eternal *yes* of the unconscious—there is no *no* there; all must relate; nothing is coincidence. Patricia Gherovici, summarizing Freud, describes the relationship between poetry and hysteria: "Freud wrote to Fliess, 'The mechanism of poetic creation [*Dichtung*] is the same as that of hysterical fantasies' (Masson, 1985, p. 251; translation slightly modified). Like the poets, the hysterics use language for its associations, for its images, in ways that are creative and can even at times subvert commonsensical expressions, producing a new grammar of metaphor. Freud was probably all the more aware of the poetic condensation at work in the discourse and bodily symptoms of the hysterics, as his own literary preferences were for the principles at work, devices and motifs, form and structure, of the novel" (Gherovici, 2015, n.p.).

In her symptomatic reading of "feminist historiographies of hysteria" (Mark S. Micale, "Hysteria and Its Historiography," quoted in Devereux, 2014, p. 31), Cecily Devereux points out that the second-wave feminist critical reclamation of hysteria began around 1981—right at the time that "hysteria" was removed from the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* and replaced with "conversion disorder," in 1980 (Devereux, 2014, p. 20). These feminist texts essentially argue that hysteria is a natural response to a culture of misogyny. Devereux reads them as also offering a "critical symptomatology" of hysteria that goes beyond romanticization, toward a notion of hysterical acts and readings that may be dangerous to that culture of gendered control—or be an antidote to it (p. 22). Historically, hysteria as a clinical category has been an *instrument* of misogynist regimes of power. Subsequently, it has been posited as a symptom of those regimes, pointing to the incompleteness-es or failures of gender as a regime, and a mode of resistance to patriarchy.

In the context of this article, we might ask: What is the threat, or resistance, within hysterical relationships to certain regimes of truth? And, what would it mean if hysteria—as a way of acting as well as understanding the world—was culturally depathologized, or not subject to surveillance and policing? Apophenic thought and hysterical acts should not be thought of as isolated incidents, but rather understood as arising from within a disavowed yet ubiquitous historical and present environment of control and domination. These acts resonate from the depths of a social, cultural, and historical unconscious. The apophenic reading, paranoid feeling, and hysterical enactment may be what escapes from hegemonic yet disavowed systems of social control like race, class, and gender.

To answer the former question, *what makes an apophenic hermeneutic, or method of interpretation, hysterical and therefore dangerous, and in need of control by a psychiatric apparatus*, we will need to go to the scene of early American psychiatry and its relationship with psychoanalysis. Briefly, psychoanalysis used to be the mainstream form of psychotherapy in the United States. From the 1920s through the 1960s, the field of psychiatry was dominated by psychoanalysts, and psychoanalysis as a profession was only open to those who already held a medical degree. A couple of things that contributed to the decline of psychoanalysis as the mainstream method of psychological treatment are the innovation in the 1960s and 1970s of psychopharmaceuticals and short-term therapies that could relieve symptoms more rapidly than psychoanalysis and return people more quickly to the work force, and the restructuring of health care in the 1980s toward a managed care model in which health insurance companies are involved in decisions about patients' medical treatment. Short-term, cheaper, and more easily measurable treatments are clearly favorable to both health insurance companies and employers. In addition, the psychoanalyst and historian of psychiatry Mark Ruffalo (2019) associates the decline of psychoanalysis with the application of psychoanalysis to "a whole host of social ills, including racism, poverty, and war." In other words, when psychoanalysts attempted to address these social, structural problems that also cause mental illness,

psychoanalysis was marginalized, and other treatment options that were wholly more profitable to the medical establishment (and nonthreatening to the class system and system of racial capitalism on which profit depends) were favored by insurance companies and became more accessible on insurance plans.

This is important because with the turn of mainstream psychology away from the analysis of root causes of symptoms, toward quick fixes amenable to the fast pace of capitalist exploitation, there was also a turn away from, or repression of, apophenic thought. Something about the apophenic psychoanalytic method, which encourages slow attendance to surface symbols in order to sense a deeper meaning obscured by the busyness and struggle of everyday life, needed to be repressed.

The threat of apophenia

Susan Lepselter's book *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny* (2016) is a quasi-ethnographic study of UFO experiencers and conspiracy theorists in the United States. Lepselter understands the suspicions, fantastical half-memories, and grand theories of her interlocutors as apophenic. Approaching her study from the perspective of cultural anthropology and literary studies, Lepselter attends to the poetics and performativity of conspiratorial tales, rumors, disclosures, and revelations, as her primary texts.

> And so the stories here are the real objects. They are performative, a form of verbal art. Attention to their formal properties entails a kind of ethnopoetics—not in the usual sense of analyzing the poetics of a non-Western culture, but rather those of a strange mirror, reflecting and distorting the dominant discourses imploding inside an empire (Lepselter, 2016, p. 17).

Lepselter conducted her research throughout the 1990s. She traveled to UFO destinations around the southwestern United States, joined UFO experiencer groups, attended UFO conferences, and formed relationships there. However, Lepselter writes:

> Although this book depends on people who shared their talk with me over the course of many years, it is not an ethnography in the traditional sense, and the object of study does not emerge in a single, unified place. [. . .] the structure of the book mimetically performs the multiple, fragmentary, but parallelistic nature of the sometimes elusive object I want to track. (Lepselter, 2016, p. 17)

Many of the UFO experiencers she spoke with had a similar story: They felt that something was missing, psychologically; there was some partially remembered feeling of paralysis, suspension, and fear. When they first saw the cover of Whitley Strieber's popular account of his encounter with intelligent aliens, *Communion: A True Story*, they were overcome with a sense of recognition: "*this is what happened to me*" (Lepselter, 2016, p. 5). This book was their gateway to communities of people who had encountered extraterrestrial life, or just suspected that something had to be out there. In these groups, they paid attention to suspicious correspondences and strange, fantastical phenomena, such as numbers that seem to repeat everywhere; mysterious people who appear, say something impossibly specific that no one else could know, and vanish … the UFO experiencers woke up one day with unfamiliar scars; "had missing time"; woke in the middle of the night to see an unknown figure standing in their room (p. 7). Through gathering together and sharing their experiences and suspicions, they were able to make sense of the otherwise inexplicable. Lepselter writes:

> The people I write about here cultivate apophenia, not as an "error," but instead as a way to begin seeing those things that have become invisible. They foreground the naturalized patterns that normally go without saying. It is in one sense an endless bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966), but rather than building something concrete from the "odds and ends" at hand, here the product is never finished; you select the part for the rush of its echo to another part. Here each found or revealed sign leads on to other resemblances, other openings. (p. 4)

> **א** "The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium" (Freud, 1955c, p. 525).

There is a potentially endless series of correspondences, resemblances, and associations that open onto a realm that has been made invisible.

> ℵ Below the "jumbled surfaces of the ordinary," below the "bright, broken bits of fantastic things" (Lepselter, 2016, p. 4) that populate everyday life, there are unconscious correspondences. Walter Benjamin, in his brilliant fragment called "Doctrine of the Similar," asks his readers to consider a *non-sensuous similarity*—a resemblance that cannot be apprehended. Benjamin first establishes the absolute basicness of the mimetic faculty for human behavior: in language, learning, socialization, and play. He speculates on the evolution of language as a mimetic faculty, agreeing with Rudolf Leonhard that "Every word—and the whole language—is onomatopoetic" (Benjamin and Tanowskim 1979, p. 67). There is a non-sensuous similarity between the words, in different languages, for the same thing. While often those words are sensuously dissimilar to each other, there is a latent correspondence in their shared meaning. Benjamin writes: "along with language, writing has thus become an archive of non-sensuous similarities or non-sensuous correspondences" (p. 68). These non-sensuous similarities are a far larger set than the set of consciously perceived similarities: "The cases in which people consciously perceive similarities in everyday life are a minute segment of those countless cases unconsciously determined by similarity. The similarities which one perceives consciously, for instance in faces, are, when compared to the countless similarities perceived unconsciously or not at all, like the enormous underwater mass of an iceberg in comparison to the small tip which one sees projecting above the waves" (p. 65).
>
> Benjamin calls this enormous, looming mass of non-sensuous similarities in language the "magical side" of language (p. 68). Insensible correspondence is what gives language a magical, performative, fetish quality. This is also the magic of language in the psychoanalytic situation, in which unseen threads are drawn between dreams and desires. Lepselter, too, understands the uncanny vernacular she witnesses as having a performative, animated power: "What I do look at here is how the real is constantly deconstructed in the discourse itself. People talk about a space that slides between 'memory' and 'dream', subverting the discrete borders of the real. This is a book about stories and discourses—traces of loss and accelerative bits of imagination, in real, material utterances, agitations of the air" (pp. 16–17).
>
> In Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud actually traces the non-sensuous similarity of the concept "uncanny" in different languages, just as Benjamin suggests. He looks in various dictionaries, and writes a long exploration of synonyms of *uncanny* in different languages. But just before this comparative study there is a passing line that should be attended to: "But the dictionaries that we consult tell us nothing new, perhaps only because we ourselves speak a language that is foreign" (Freud, 1919, p. 221). Perhaps "we ourselves speak a language that is foreign" might refer to speaking in any instance: every language is foreign to us. Our words, which at times can feel so familiar, so natural that they seamlessly, performatively create the real, may actually be an alien thing. This is an uncanny formulation: What is familiar is suddenly revealed to be foreign, strange, unknown; or, the strange resonates with an unmistakable familiarity, giving the sense that, perhaps, "our memories are not simply our own" (Lepselter, 2016, p. 162).
>
> This is the double disenchantment–enchantment bind of psychoanalysis, refracted in another frame. In demoting the ego from the position of "master of its own house," Freud demystifies or disenchants consciousness. However, as Ricoeur says, "the same doubter who depicts the ego as a 'poor creature' in subjection to three masters, the id, the ego, and reality or necessity, is also the exegete who rediscovers the logic of the illogical kingdom" (p. 35). Freud disenchants and re-enchants consciousness in the same turn, with the concept of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis is a science, but an enchanted science that makes use of the magic of words. It is an uncanny formula itself: At the heart of what should be most familiar, most intimately known (consciousness) is something unknowable, foreign, alien. Words live with a tacit curative power. In these very inversions lie the psychoanalytic hermeneutic of suspicion: a defamiliarization and interpretation.

Lepselter is surrounded by these stories and theories, all sharing scenes of abduction, captivity, immobility, and control. Indeed, these are crucial tropes of American conspiracy. She begins to understand these surface clues as symptoms of disavowed and repressed national narratives. There is an affective resonance between these "accumulating and recursive images" (p. 4) and certain tacit histories and systems of power, such as the class system, Native American genocide, and U.S. slavery.

> There is abduction and release; there is captivity and restoration. There is paralysis, and there is mobility. There is the centripetal force of containment, and there is the centrifugal force of flight (Bakhtin 1981). There is the captivity of amnesia and the release of recollection. All these are connected expressions of a larger structure, a broad figure that includes all of these dimensions of captivity and liberation. And it is grounded in the forceful insistence of *freedom* as a master metatrope of American national identity. (pp. 6–7)

Lepselter conspiratorially reads these conspiracy theories, taking an apophenic approach to the mythic tropes of abduction, paralysis, and control that reappear and bubble up through the cultural consciousness. What she discovers is that these particular images are traces of an American political unconscious—they are like glitches in the matrix of the American dream. Except in this formulation, the conspiracy narratives are actually the fragments of the remembered dream, the glimpse of the unconscious, which tells us about the hidden structuring conditions of U.S. empire.

Resonance :: Transference

What is the nature of this unseen but felt connection between UFO narratives and the history of state oppression and its afterlives? Lepselter describes it as *resonance*, which is an affective sense of similarity. Resonance "entails mimesis, but the resemblance is partial and fluid. It is *felt*. [...] Resonance is not an exact reiteration. Rather it's something that strikes a chord, that inexplicably rings true, a sound whose notes are prolonged. It is just-glimpsed connections and hidden structures that are felt to shimmer below the surface of things" (p. 4). Resonance is felt in an experiencer's first encounter with Strieber's nonfiction book on UFOs. There is resonance between one person's UFO abduction story, and another's, and another's. There is resonance between the conspiracy themes of alien mind control or reeducation, and the forced assimilation of Native peoples in state-mandated boarding schools. There is resonance between the abduction, captivity, and immobility reported in UFO experiences, and the abduction, captivity, and forced labor in the U.S. enslavement of African and Native American people, which built the national infrastructure and economy. These foundations of the nation are still disavowed, and are actively being censored by Republican propagandist campaigns against the teaching of American history in U.S. schools. "The original stories of historical trauma don't always make it up for air. (If they did, they would no longer haunt.)" (p. 19).

Resonance is like a cultural transference, through historical time: There is a structural or affective reiteration of trauma in a different place, or time, or people. Something is leaking, resonating from the past inside the present. Resonance feels uncanny, because of its "half-rhyme" harmonization with the past: It is a "flashing up" of the would-be familiar in a strange guise.

> ℵ Lepselter writes: "Resonance produces aesthetic intensity and the poetic pleasure of repetition with variation not only in consciously artful stories but also in the lived embodied metaphors and the felt, discursive practices that compose phenomenological reality. Then resonance rushes into affect, 'its impacts suffered or barely voiced' (Stewart 2007:8). In ordinary life it's felt in moments, flashes. 'The flashing up is real. It is delusional' (8). The flashing up . . . I think of how, describing intertextuality, Richard Bauman quotes Bakhtin's image of the meeting point between texts as a 'light flashing' (Bauman 2004:4); it is an image that suggests the electric liveness of an utterance, dynamic at its point of coillumination" (Lepselter, 2016, p. 24). See also Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar": "In other words: it is to writing and language that clairvoyance over the course of history, yielded its old powers. So speed, that swiftness in reading or writing which can scarcely be separated from this process, would then become, as it were, the effort or gift of letting the mind participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things only in order to become immediately engulfed again. Thus even profane reading, if it is not to forsake understanding altogether, shares this with magical reading: that it is subject to a necessary speed, or rather a critical moment, which the reader must not forget at any cost unless he wishes to go away empty-handed" (p. 68). And Lepecki, *Singularities*: "[Walter Benjamin's concept of] a dialectical image is a critical constellation, a theoretical-aesthetic montage linking apparently unrelated or unfamiliar elements that, once set into relation to one another, express a given historical and political situation through 'an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash' (Benjamin 2003:473), and that precipitate a 'profane

illumination' (Benjamin 1978:179). A dialectical image is therefore highly performative: it triggers a sudden awareness of hitherto unacknowledged social forces that determine present conditions and that invisibly propel the habitual notions of daily life" (Lepecki, 2016, p. 143).

Transference, in the technical psychoanalytic sense, is "the patient's conscious and unconscious experience of the analyst in the psychoanalytic situation as it is shaped by the patient's internalized early life experiences" (Auchincloss and Samberg, 2012, p. 266). Freud describes transferences as "new editions or facsimiles of the impulses and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis" (Freud, 1901, p. 115). The patient's origin story is rehearsed in the situation of the analytic treatment, with the analyst playing the role of an important other from their early life. It is not an exact repetition, but an inexact mimesis: a rehearsal of an earlier occurrence that haunts. As a "facsimile," the transference is the chord struck in the present that harmonizes and resonates uncannily with the past.

In the playing space of the psychoanalytic situation, that past can be re-encountered, and perhaps reenacted differently. Thus, the very core of psychoanalytic work entails resonance, in the poetic and technical way that Lepselter means, and the effect of resonance is achieved through apophenia.

> The sense of uncanny resonance becomes an expressive modality, a vernacular theory, a way of seeing the world, an intimation of the way *it all makes sense*. It becomes both performance and theory, creating a sense of an occult design that might someday be apprehended below the jumbled surfaces of the ordinary. Accumulating and recursive images, and the felt connections between them, reveal how historical trauma gets lodged in the bright, broken bits of fantastic things. (Lepselter, 2016, p. 4)

Reading Lepselter's constructions through psychoanalysis, we can think about an "expressive modality" as the stage-play of the psychoanalytic scene, a "vernacular theory" as the particular language that develops between an analyst and patient, and "historical trauma" as not only at the scale of sociohistorical trauma across centuries and nations, but also the personal history of one patient's traumas. We also must ask how these scales relate.

The secret history of psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic transference resonates with disavowed, repressed histories and wishes, producing a transcript, translation, or *facsimile* of the haunting thing. There is also a disavowed history of psychoanalysis itself. Psychoanalysis is often regarded as an inaccessible, arcane, too-expensive therapy by and for the intelligentsia; its history as a free public service for all has been forgotten. Elizabeth Ann Danto's historical survey of the interwar period of psychoanalysis in Europe is a powerful reminder. *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice* (2007) follows the robust history of founding psychoanalysts' commitment to social justice movements. These analysts "saw themselves as brokers of social change for whom psychoanalysis was a challenge to conventional political codes, a social mission more than a medical discipline" (Danto, 2007, p. 4). In 1918, Freud spoke to the psychoanalysts gathered at the Fifth International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Budapest, and insisted on the creation of "institutions or out-patient clinics … where treatment shall be free" (Danto, 2007, p. 1). Following this call, at least 12 polyclinics offering free psychoanalysis were founded in the interwar period in Berlin, Vienna, London, Budapest, Zagreb, Moscow, Frankfurt, New York, Trieste, and Paris, where people of all economic backgrounds could receive psychological treatment.

> Between 1918 and 1938 psychoanalysis was neither impractical for working people, nor rigidly structured, nor luxurious in length. At least one fifth of the work of the first and second generation of psychoanalysts went to indigent urban residents. This made psychoanalysis accessible to students, artists, craftsmen, laborers, factory workers, office clerks, unemployed people, farmers, domestic servants, and public school teachers. […] The broad-mindedness of interwar political culture set a tone that allowed people from franky opposite social worlds to meet in a psychoanalyst's waiting room. (Danto, 2007, p. 2)

A place where people from opposite social worlds and different economic backgrounds could meet and build trust is a place potentially threatening to a capitalist order, which depends upon atomization and the suppression of class solidarity. Several prominent psychoanalysts were specifically interested in understanding, and making use of, the connections between psychoanalysis and Marxist praxis. One of these was Otto Fenichel, an analyst and Marxist who wrote, "We are all convinced . . . that we recognize in Freud's Psychoanalysis the germ of the dialectical-materialist psychology of the future, and therefore we desperately need to protect and extend this knowledge" (quoted in Danto, 2007, p. 8). Fenichel thought that psychological "prophylaxis" (which is a term he uses interchangeably with "mental hygiene," here meaning, essentially, preventative mental health care) would entail social protective services: "Would it not be the first task of such a mental hygiene to provide work, bread, and satisfaction of the basic needs for everybody?" (Fenichel and Rangell, 1996, p. 588).

> ℵ Francisco González, in the paper "Only What Is Human Can Truly Be Foreign: The Trope of Immigration as a Creative Force in Psychoanalysis," writes: "I have speculated that under conditions of significant trauma to the social third, the psychological space of the dyad may not be sufficient for healing. Restoration of the social requires work in the social. Provision of a good-enough cultural surround—necessarily a materialized one (in art, ritual, language, . . . forms of hospitality, food, etc.)—may be required in order for the patient to recover the confidence in cultural forms needed to do psychological work. The enclave provided by such a protected cultural space replicates the material surround of 'home,' if only transitionally" (2015, p. 30).

The anarchist psychoanalyst Otto Gross wanted to push the capacities of psychoanalysis further, as a theory and inciting force of revolution. His 1913 article "On Overcoming the Cultural Crisis" (Gross and Turner 1913) in *Die Aktion* begins: "The psychology of the unconscious is the philosophy of revolution: i.e., this is what it is appointed to become because it ferments insurrection within the psyche, and liberates individuality from the bonds of its own unconscious. It is appointed to make us inwardly capable of freedom, appointed because it is the preparatory work for the revolution" (quoted in Graham, 2005, p. 281).

Wilhelm Reich was another Marxist psychoanalyst who ultimately proved to be too radical for both the Communist Party and the International Psychoanalytic Association (he was eventually expelled from both). Reich was too focused on sexuality for the Communists, and his politics were too risky for the Freudian base, which at the time was being threatened by the Nazi regime. Benjamin Harris and Adrian Brock write, in the paper "Freudian Psychopolitics: The Rivalry of Wilhelm Reich and Otto Fenichel, 1930–1935":

> Under optimal circumstances the heterodoxy of the psychoanalytic Left might have been tolerated by the Freudian and Communist leaderships. But in Berlin and Vienna in the early 1930s, circumstances for the German Communist Party and the International Psychoanalytical Association were far from optimal. Under increasing attack by the Nazis, the KPD and the IPA tried to dissociate themselves from the work of the revolutionary Left-Freudians. When the Reich-Fenichel group failed to accept this distancing, more drastic steps were taken. As the most prominent oppositionist, Wilhelm Reich was eventually purged by both the Communists and the Freudians. (p. 592)

Today, little remains of the politically revolutionary Freudians in any of the main fields of psychotherapy. It's true that the Freudo-Leftists were eventually rejected by Freud and the psychoanalytic establishment. But many, many early psychoanalysts were declared socialists, Marxists, and communists (Danto, 2007, p. 9), and the establishment—not just a politically oriented fringe—was motivated by a spirit of progressivism in the free clinics. Why was this radical spirit of psychoanalytic practice relegated to history? It was the acute vulnerability of Freud and the largely Jewish psychoanalytic community in the years leading up to Hitler's regime that prevented Freud from allying himself with doctors who were calling for psychic and social liberation. Stephen Frosh, in the essay "Psychoanalysis, Nazism, and 'Jewish Science'" (2003), makes the connection between Nazism and the repudiation of the political Freudians clear, in the case of Reich:

> Reich had joined the communist party in Berlin in 1930 and caused dissent within it both because of his particular views on the gravity of the working class's defeat with the advent of Hitler and because of his promotion of sexual liberation (Sharaf, 1983). His political radicalism was also of concern within the psychoanalytic movement . . . With the arrival of the Nazis in power, however, the threat posed by 'political' activity to the safety of psychoanalysis within Germany was seen by Freud as well as by [Ernest] Jones as potentially extremely damaging, with Reich . . . as the most obvious representative of this tendency. [. . .] Promotion of the idea that 'psychoanalysis has no part in politics' was a key element in the defence of psychoanalysis against the Nazi critique of its inherently destabilising nature, and was precisely the line taken by Boehm and Müller-Braunschweig [temporary directors of the German Psychoanalytic Society] in their negotiations with the Nazis. (pp. 1322–1323)

Faced with the imminent threat of the Nazi regime, the psychoanalytic establishment needed to distance itself from its political radicalism and disavow its "*inherently destabilizing nature*." Psychoanalysis was already under threat by the Nazis because Freud was a Jew, and a significant majority of leading psychoanalysts were Jews. There is a longer story of psychoanalysis during the Nazi regime that cannot be told here, but is helpfully unpacked in the Frosh essay just quoted from. What is important here is that as the Nazis came to power, political radicalism in psychoanalysis became a liability for the institution, instead of one of its necessary attributes. The version of psychoanalysis that continued under the Nazi regime was a distorted version, void of its progressive and indeed revolutionary spirit—which, as a field of psychotherapeutic practice, it never regained.

Textual ambivalence

Psychoanalysis thus contains, within it, its own repressive processes that were necessitated (as are many repressive processes) by a traumatic environment. This repressive process also manifests at the level of psychoanalytic theoretical writing. An ambivalence exists in Freud's texts, which belies discomfort, unease, and perhaps fear of the implications of his own theories. Ann Pellegrini discusses this ambivalence in the paper "The Dog Who Barks and the Noise of the Human: Psychoanalysis After the Animal Turn" (2018), and I only attempt to paraphrase part of its argument for our purposes here.

Freud's theory of the unconscious demotes the ego from the position of "master of its own house" (Freud, 1917, p. 142). Since it is inherently inaccessible and unknowable, the unconscious is, profoundly, an alien impulse at the very heart of what we think of as our "human" selves. Freud declares that psychoanalysis is the third of "three severe blows" to human exceptionalism and the "universal narcissism of men" (1917, p. 138). The first is the Copernican revolution, which decentered Earth from the center of the universe; the second is Darwinian evolution, which placed the human in direct genealogical relation to other animals and life on earth. The third psychoanalytic blow to human exceptionalism is the unconscious: We are not in full control or possession of our own minds; there are covert processes that structure being and behavior. Pellegrini writes that this may be a reading of psychoanalysis that "chastens [human] fantasies of mastery (Singh, 2017) and welcomes the dis-ease of the *unheimlich*, the unhomely home (Freud, 1917, p. 142; see also Freud, 1919). Nevertheless, the force of anthropo-centrism and the will to reduce and master the disturbance of the alien return again and again in Freud's body of work" (Pellegrini, 2018, p. 15). Freud himself, in writing psychoanalysis, is "not of one mind": He vacillates between human exceptionalism and humility, self-possession and dispossession (p. 16).

Something about Freud's own theory is too threatening to be fully assimilated into the project of psychoanalysis. Pellegrini follows the thread of a subtext in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that starts growing, unwieldy, until it threatens to overtake the main body of the text. These two "extraordinary multipage footnotes [. . .] take up nearly one half of the text of Chapter 4 of 'Civilization'" (p. 16). In the main body of the text, Freud takes a moralistic stance to species distinction, identifying with the human as superior and exceptional to other animals and the natural world. However, in the footnotes, Freud labors over the "effort required to delineate human from animal and to elevate humans above all (Ray, 2014, p. 30)" (Pellegrini, 2018, p. 16). He writes that human exceptionalism is something learned, something that humans are socialized to regard as natural. Freud discusses how "upbringing" and the

enforced developmental stages of children in his society ensure that children learn the value difference between human and animal, just as their sense of self in distinction to the environment begins to cohere in the developmental process (Freud, 1961, p. 47, note 1). That this point starts as a footnote and grows, ending up as almost half of the entire chapter in which it occurs in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, is profound. The strong illusion of human exceptionalism cannot be fully maintained; the message of the human animal and learned speciesism grows and threatens to overtake it in the text.

Pellegrini reads Freud's vacillation, or ambivalence, between defending human exceptionalism, and exposing his readers to the "false-consciousness" of the human, symptomatically: "as multi-determined traces of the defensive role species distinction plays in the precarious becoming of the human" (Pellegrini, 2018, p. 16). Freud's ambivalent defense of the human is brilliant because it thinly veils the human's "precarious becoming," and resonates with the deeper structuring principle of its illusion.

The unconscious of the "human"

To ask after the unconscious of the human is to ask what it is that the notion of the human defends against, denies, disavows, and represses. Earlier, in Susan Lepselter's study, we discerned disavowals of the United States' national project: its history of Indigenous genocide, chattel slavery, and the continuous afterlives and hauntings of both. The notion of the "human" defends what Sylvia Wynter terms the "overrepresentation of Man" *as* the human (Wynter, 2003). This overrepresentation figures the (de)valuation of life. What psychoanalysis gives is a method of attending to the symptomatic fault lines in the dominant narrative, those parapraxes and dream-fragments, which hint at a deeper structuring process. The deeper structuring processes of the "precarious becoming" of the human are, of course, racialization; the looting and debilitation of populations; environmental extraction; the disciplining of gender. Curiously, what lies in the very fault lines of psychoanalytic theory, disavowed and haunting like a parapraxis, is skepticism about the hypostatization of the human as "Man," and a notion of the unconscious that undermines the Western liberal subject's dominance.

In her critique of posthumanist, nonrepresentational theories that endlessly "decenter the subject," Tiffany Lethabo King points out "how perverse and reprehensible it is to ask Indigenous and Black people who cannot seem to escape death to move beyond the human or the desire to be human. In fact, Black and Indigenous people have never been fully folded into the category of the human" (King, 2017, p. 167). Rather than liberating the "human" from the Western liberal ideal of subjecthood, posthumanist discourse is simply the latest development in the philosophical tradition that produced this ideal. Thus, it perpetuates the violence it would disappear in its rhetoric. In her essay "Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight," King positions decolonial refusal and abolitionist skepticism as tactics that Black and Indigenous scholars of color have used to thwart posthumanist discourses. These "practices of refusal and skepticism interrupt and out codes of civil and collegial discursive protocol to focus on and illumine the violence that structures the posthumanist discourse" (p. 164). King writes: "I link misandry (skepticism of humankind-as-man) to the kind of skepticism and 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that Black feminist scholars like [Sylvia] Wynter, [Zakiyyah Iman] Jackson, and [Amber Jamilla] Musser at times apply to their reading and engagement with revisions to or expansions of the category of the human, posthuman discourses, and nonrepresentational theory" (p. 166). Abolitionist skepticism and decolonial refusal are the hermeneutics of suspicion that are "needed in order to truly address the recurrent problem of the violence of the human in continental theory" (pp. 164–165).

Perhaps there is a resonance between abolitionist skepticism and psychoanalytic suspicion. Not only because they have both been described as hermeneutics of suspicion, but because of the way that the notion of the "human" breaks down in a symptomatic reading of psychoanalysis' own histories and

texts, making sensible the human's "precarious becoming" (Pellegrini, 2018, 16). Abolitionist skepticism, as skepticism of the overrepresentation of the human as Man, is another way of studying and attending to this precarious becoming.

> ℵ See Lepecki, *Singularities*: "But why call them angels, with all the fluffy poetics and theological resonances of this term? Why not simply call these agents of history human? Because their political force derives precisely from their hesitation to fully partake of the category of the human. This hesitation, I suspect, was also present in Benjamin's own fascination with the parahuman figure of the angel" (2016, p. 162).

Reparative readings

If we read psychoanalysis, a hermeneutic of suspicion, *suspiciously*, if we read as a conspiracy theorist, we have to attend to its secret histories, and its footnotes that threaten to overtake its cover story. To feel what resonates with the unconscious of psychoanalysis itself, we must attend to the slips in its texts, and its half-forgotten revolutionary dreams.

This paranoid reading of psychoanalysis is also meant to be a reparative reading, for it intends to show that while the spirit of radicalism in psychoanalysis feels repressed today, this spirit is proper to the desires and investments of psychoanalysis itself, and its repression had a specific historical cause. Indeed, the psychoanalytic method, when arranged as a public service for all, and approached as a psychic and political liberation tactic, is a powerful tool for recovering what is made invisible within a particular sociohistorical regime. The suspicious method of psychoanalysis was engineered to produce a facsimile of the repressed in the psychic realm, and its method has much potential use in a psychopolitical society of control that outsources its repressive function to its constituents.

> ℵ See Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*: "It is inefficient to exploit people against their will" (Han, 2017, p. 3). And Lepecki, *Singularities*: "In this account of planning, we can glimpse the three principles of Lemon's choreographic angelology: universal doubt, the structured orientation and openness toward the encounter, and planning as subversion of authorial policing" (pp. 158–159), and "an *experienced performer*, a dancer or singer or actor who works in the grooves of historical consciousness and with the critical-affective dynamics of historical forgettings and rememberings, in other words, that works not as servile angel but as angel of history, *is the greatest threat*" (2017, p. 148).

This reparative reading of psychoanalysis might seem counterintuitive, since its dominant narrative in culture, and the way it is usually understood, is as a normalizing technique that relies on, and reinforces, patriarchal systems of domination, and colonialist discourses. However, there are other narratives to attend to besides the dominant one, which the psychoanalytic method itself teaches. To recite Ann Pellegrini, after Audre Lorde: Did the master's tools only ever belong to the master? Perhaps these tools can be recovered, to help us feel what resonates with the unconscious of "nation," and "human," and help to disorganize their capacity to structure life.

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