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Apartheid and the unconscious: an introduction

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Introduction

This special issue invited contributors to revisit J.M. Coetzee’s “The Mind of Apartheid,” first published in *Social Dynamics* in 1991. Here, Coetzee asks what it might mean to come to terms with apartheid:

It is not inconceivable that in the not too distant future, the era of apartheid will be proclaimed to be over. The unlovely creature will be laid to rest, and joy among nations will be unconfined. But what exactly is it that will be buried? (Coetzee 1991, 1)

Responding to his own question, Coetzee reads the texts of sociologist and Broederbond intellectual, Geoffrey Cronjé. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Coetzee diagnoses the version of apartheid Cronjé set out during the period between 1945 and 1948 as an obsessional neurotic “counterattack upon desire” (18). What so disturbed Cronjé, Coetzee argues, was the “blunting [*afstomping*]” of psychological resistances to “race-mixing” (18). But Cronjé’s texts, as Coetzee reads them, also betray a psychic investment in precisely “the dissolution of difference” against which he set himself, a “fascination” with “the mixed” (21–22). Railing against miscegenation, it was always on Cronjé’s mind.

Having left an impression on official and actual apartheid, Cronjé’s apartheid was also an embarrassment for Afrikaner nationalists, during Cronjé’s lifetime but especially for later generations. As such, historians, Coetzee notes, had tended to downplay the significance of Cronjé’s texts, seeing them as an extreme outworking of apartheid on paper, a draft that would soon be revised, if not discarded and forgotten. But such a framing, Coetzee suggests, ignores the relation between the form of Cronjé’s prose, in which there takes place an elaborate, ritualised, repetitive – that is to say, symptomatic – forced removal of racialised objects of desire, and apartheid spatial planning. Apartheid’s discourse, Coetzee writes, “demanded black bodies in all their physicality,” but it also “made iron laws to banish them from sight” (2). This “continual hide-and-seek with desire” (11) cannot, of course, explain everything about apartheid, but the ambivalent, unconscious processes Coetzee reads into Cronjé’s texts are certainly discernible in apartheid’s later ideologues, who were no less concerned about “whites” and “non-whites” being “compelled to mingle,” and no less bent on the neutralisation of desire, on establishing desexualised “neighbourliness,” “the ordinary friendship of everyday life” (Verwoerd 1966, 493).

In foregrounding desire in his reading of apartheid, Coetzee was responding to revisionist, largely Marxian historiography on the origins of apartheid, which, from the late 1970s, has set out a series of influential critiques of liberal histories of South African “race attitudes.” Coetzee does not seek to displace political economy with libidinal economy. He suggests, rather, that the dominant critique of apartheid up to that point had not sufficiently taken account of the constitutive force of desire in the acts that divided apartheid South Africa. Coetzee does not, then, ignore the economic rationality of apartheid: “It did indeed flower out of self-interest and greed,” he writes, “but it also flowered out of desire and out of the hatred of desire” (Coetzee 1991, 2). Moreover, Coetzee suggests, Cronjé’s texts allow apartheid to be apprehended as a configuration of desire that, however censored from apartheid’s archives, had infected much of the population designated as “European.” Indeed, Coetzee’s reading implicates at every turn, making it difficult to know how far the contagion has spread, where the obsessive froth begins and ends, right down to Coetzee’s reading itself, which identifies – and identifies with – the movements of displacement that characterise Cronjé’s obsessions so as to know them.

Coetzee’s essay was by no means the first psychoanalytic reading of apartheid. Since its publication, however, “The Mind of Apartheid” has offered scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds a way of approaching the returns of the past in generations “further and further removed from direct experience of . . . Apartheid” (Jansen 2009, 140). In her introduction to the edited volume, *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela offers a difficult instance of this. If in the 1980s children were observed playing games that re-enacted, and perhaps allowed a processing of, the political violence around them at that time, Gobodo-Madikizela chillingly describes an eight-year-old girl at the centre of a “make believe game,” “the necklace game,” which she saw being acted out in 1996 in the township of Mlungisi in the Eastern Cape:

Rotating through the role of victim, then killers, then bystander, she seemed . . . to recall virtually everything that actually happened in a real necklace murder, even though she had not been born when the last necklace killing occurred in Mlungisi Township . . . As make-believe flames engulfed her, she threw her arms wildly into the air. ‘Now sing and clap your hands and dance. I’m dying,’ she said. Her friends started clapping and singing in a discordant rhythm, moving in circles around her ‘body.’ Gradually, the high-pitched screams of the girl with the imaginary tyre around her neck faded into a whimper as her life ebbed away. Consumed by the flames, she slowly lowered herself to the ground and ‘died’ (Gobodo-Madikizela 2016, 1–2).

Apartheid is revealed, in Gobodo-Madikizela’s account, in its uncanny return in a game played by children too young to have experienced it. But, Gobodo-Madikizela provocatively suggests, “the necklace game,” far from being isolated, illuminates other kinds of transmissions of apartheid: less dramatic, subtler, more mundane, they, like “the necklace game,” draw people into relational patterns governed by apartheid’s illogical logic, driven by processes and practices it would be difficult to bring before the law in the name of which they are frequently carried out.

Gobodo-Madikizela’s reading of “the necklace game”—like, perhaps, the “hide-and-seek” to which Coetzee points – extends a line of approach that has been crucial for psychoanalysis. It was Sigmund Freud’s ([1920] 1957) theorisation of his 18-month-old grandson’s game of “gone”—he plays it with a spool, with his mother, and with himself,

too, but all in the context of a World War to which his father had “gone”—that gave “the play of repetition and the repetition of play” (Derrida [1967] 2001, 369) a central place in the history of psychoanalysis. Indeed, six years before writing of his grandson’s game, Freud had already come to understand psychoanalytic transference – the “activation” of a “long-forgotten memory trace [*Erinnerungsspur*] of a scene” (Freud [1918] 1953, 46) in the relation between analyst and analysand – as a “playground” (Freud [1914] 1950, 152). In other words, psychoanalysis cannot but be drawn into the repetitious games it attempts to subject to the unbinding force of analysis. When brought to bear on the question the special issue addresses, it is not clear that any scholarship on apartheid could be entirely free of a transferential relation with the past, acting out, to varying degrees, what it apprehends.

While the experience “The Mind of Apartheid” aims to analyse cannot be restricted to people designated “European” under apartheid, Coetzee also does not explicitly concern himself with the perspective of those inscribed by apartheid as “non-European,” those who were forcefully, violently, removed, rendered simultaneously disposable and necessary to apartheid, libidinally invested with attraction and repulsion. Coetzee is quite prepared to give the unconscious – and “madness”—a place in the history of apartheid. Does the unconscious have a place in the history of the experience of the oppressions of apartheid? In resistance to apartheid? In the aftermath of the “freedoms” it secured? Coetzee withdraws from such questions, which have been at the centre of numerous more recent psychoanalytic studies. In what follows, we relate Coetzee’s reading to existing psychoanalytic literature, but without downplaying the question that “The Mind of Apartheid” places before a field. In what ways does “the necklace game”—and all the transferential war games of everyday post-apartheid life – entail not only the transmission of fear, cruelty, and hatred, but desire? If Coetzee’s essay has functioned as a spur for the papers gathered here, we also point to what we see as its blind spot, namely, the formation of the subject of apartheid.

Apartheid under analysis

What kind of unconscious is implied in existing psychoanalytic formulations of apartheid? What is apartheid in each formulation? And how does Coetzee’s “The Mind of Apartheid” fit into this field of inquiry?

Perhaps the most widely transmitted – but also severely criticised – psychoanalytic formulation of apartheid came through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC). Many scholars have worried over the diluted psychoanalysis with which the TRC treated subjects of the post-apartheid nation. The basic point here is that psychoanalysis seeped into the sense making discourses of post-apartheid South Africa, conditioning the relation of its subjects to the past, and to each other. The question is not whether or not psychoanalysis should be applied to apartheid’s transmissions. It has already been applied, and what remains is to make it adequate to the task of working through apartheid.

Chabani Manganyi, one of the foremost psychoanalytic theorists of the psychic life of apartheid, characterises it in a series of essays first published in 1977 by its “‘Us’ and ‘Them’” conception of the world, a division impressed psychically in a process he calls a “coming into being of the unconscious” (Manganyi [1977] 2011, 12). Excavating the

way this “Us’ and ‘Them’” division returns symptomatically, Manganyi is especially attuned to the state of “universal helplessness and dependency” (10) in which human beings enter the world. What interests Manganyi is, precisely, the way a “sociological schema” (Manganyi [1973] 2019, 37–40) is impressed during infancy, and arrives, later, with an overwhelming afterwardsness.

While Gobodo-Madikizela writes of a “make believe game” that she does not fail to invest with reparative potential, Manganyi deals with the “violent reveries” of artists, which, he too stresses,” may be put to “constructive social use” (Manganyi [1977] 2011, 18). His first example is Aime Césaire’s “And the Dogs Were Silent,” where a slave murders his master. An attack is waged neither against the “self” nor on the “institutionalised tyranny” (7) of slavery and colonial rule; it is lodged, Manganyi suggests, in the space between them. If for Gobodo-Madikizela “the necklace game” was at least potentially a way of rendering the trauma driving it “more accessible and less fearful for the girls” (Gobodo-Madikizela 2016, 2), Manganyi calls the work at play in the “the literature of the oppressed” an “unmasking” (Manganyi [1973] 2019, 17). It is a confrontation, we might say, of the way “institutionalised tyranny” produces the “self.”

It would not depart far from Manganyi’s thinking to say that he is concerned with what Mary Douglas discusses as the remnants of “institution-building” (Douglas 1986, 67) always already underway from the beginning of a life, even in that “earliest social interaction” that, Douglas writes, “lays the basis for polarising the world into classes” (62), namely, an infant faced with the problem of discerning the “good breast” from the “bad breast,” as Douglas puts it drawing on child psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein, on whom Manganyi also draws. As Douglas glosses the Kleinian infant:

The questions it asks resemble military intelligence. It needs to know whether the source of milk, if external, is one breast or several, and if several, how to distinguish allies from enemies? Is this the good breast or the bad breast? Is it for me or against me? (62).

The possibility of a resolution of a state that splits the world into “allies and enemies” resides, for Klein, in a movement “from a partial object-relation to a complete object,” where “the object is loved as a whole” (Klein 1975, 264). An incapacity to hold the “good” and the “bad” together, in a single “*imago*,” is what Klein calls the paranoid-schizoid position, which calls forth “primitive defences” such as splitting. Although it should be stressed that Klein writes of positions, not stages, and that this does not necessarily constitute a developmental itinerary, even if that is often how Klein’s positions are frequently understood, to place “black anger”—a recurrent theme in Manganyi’s early writings – into such a framing inevitably risks the pathologisation of oppression.

For Manganyi, any analysis of the way an infantile state is recalled unconsciously requires focussed attention on the material social, political, and economical conditions under which the “helplessness and dependency” of early life is experienced. The relation between the returns of apartheid as an “Us’ and ‘Them’” division and the “military intelligence” at play in infantile states could only be responsibly pursued were one to consider imperial mothercraft, and the biopolitics of the maternal breast – the regulation of fertility, and thus a workforce, by the disciplining of lactation and infant feeding (Burns 2021; Hunt 1988)—and the devastating psychosocial effects of the migrant labour system and forced removals on black family and community structures (Marks and Andersson 1990). Not unaware of the risk of pathologising oppression, Manganyi

reverses the question. What would it mean, he asks, to deny a movement like Black Consciousness, as well as its inheritors, an encounter with “the resources of its cultural and historical unconscious” (Manganyi [1977] 2011, 8)? “Art, like unconscious processes,” Manganyi writes, “possesses the quality of shocking us out of our complacency by reflecting those contradictions and dimensions of human existence which prey on us while we sleep” (9).

While notable contributions to the theme of this special issue have previously been made through Kleinian psychoanalysis, its implications in the problem under analysis have not been sufficiently noted. Attention should be drawn not only to a reduction of political currents in psychic life to Oedipal themes, or to a kinship with colonial discourse in notions of “primitive defences.” What should be underscored is also the presumption of the unconscious as a reservoir of impulses to be mastered by a unified subject that has recourse to “primitive defences”—this splitting subject can be opposed to the split subject presumed by Lacanian psychoanalysis, which we discuss later. Such an opposition corresponds with the racialised divisions between manual and mental labour that characterised colonial and apartheid rule. If an imprint of an “Us’ and ‘Them’” schema returns in the interactions of everyday post-apartheid life, if paranoid “military intelligence” appears to govern its parapraxes – the bungled actions, slips, mishearings, miscommunications, and so on – then the key question is how to think what Manganyi calls the “coming into being of the unconscious.” As we discuss later, this requires detangling instinct and drive (Laplanche 2011).

It is worth noting here two of the most well-worn psychoanalytic formulations of apartheid that emerged through an engagement with, or at the edge of, the TRC. The first is apartheid as “a complete lack of empathy on the part of one group for another” (Straker in van Zyl 1999, 249), a formulation of apartheid that has frequently been cast in the terms of Kleinian theory. As Gill Straker puts it, “empathy or concern which inaugurates the depressive position both promotes ambivalence at an internal level and modulates the use both of projective identification and the external enactment of aggression associated with persecutory anxiety” (Straker in van Zyl 1999, 249). Here, at the opposite end of the paranoid-schizoid position is the empathy of depressive position functioning (for a critique of the way Kleinian empathy does not sufficiently bring the subject into an encounter with “alterity,” with “the outside other,” see Benjamin 1998, 90).

The second formulation, equally Kleinian in orientation, is apartheid as “a proscription on mourning, specifically of the other” (Sanders 2002, 60). As Mark Sanders notes, “mourning, as the giving up of a loved object, presupposes desire for that object” (65), and it is for this reason, he argues – and here he explicitly draws on “The Mind of Apartheid”—that mourning the other was proscribed. Much the same can be said of empathy, which, as Phillips and Taylor (2009) suggest, entails a kind of pleasure that is of an altogether less discriminating, more promiscuous kind than that entailed in sexual relations. Phillips and Taylor are attuned to dangers of empathy. For them, however, while our morality compels kindness, it is a peculiar kind of repressive prudishness that prevents us from becoming more porous to the experience of the pleasures and pains of others.

Coetzee’s diagnosis of apartheid as “a counterattack upon desire” would thus seem to have direct bearing on both of these formulations of apartheid. Indeed, Coetzee’s essay can be read as an argument for mourning, and for empathy. Beginning at apartheid’s

gravesite, Coetzee's essay implicitly calls attention to Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. Like mourning, melancholia is a psychic state occasioned by a loss. The difference between them lies in the way the melancholic is uncertain of what they have lost in the object (Freud [1917] 1957, 245). It is in this light that we might read Coetzee's provocation to "reopen the coffin" (Coetzee 1991, 3).

For Freud, what distinguishes the presentation of melancholia from mourning is intense self-criticism, which, listened to carefully, can be heard as a symptomatic address to the lost object that has been incorporated so as to preserve psychically what reality has deemed irrecoverable: an attachment to an object is substituted by an identification with it, accompanied by ruthless self-critique. When used to think through post-apartheid melancholia, what should not be lost sight of is that, while apartheid without question produced numerous unmournable losses, there is also, and intimately knotted into scenes of impossible grief, "the "unmourned loss . . . of apartheid's symbolic network itself" (Hook 2013, 67), a loss of that which produced the other as other. The loss, we might say, of an "Us' and 'Them'" schema, which allows one to tell "allies from enemies."

On the face of it, the empathy for which Coetzee calls is different to the order of post-apartheid empathy. It is not an empathy across the chasms that divided South Africans during apartheid, but one that asks "us" to "inhabit with part of ourselves Cronjé's position as writing subject," a mode of "tracking" through which, Coetzee writes, "we catch glimpses of apartheid nakedly occupied in thinking itself out" (Coetzee 1991, 2–3). Ostensibly different to post-apartheid empathy, Coetzee's aim is to find within the "lair" of Cronjé's "heart speech" precisely an unrefined version of the kind of empathy that has become the mark of a post-apartheid psychic disposition: "Cronjé's text occasionally comes alive with the stirrings of desire" (20). They are "stirrings," to be sure, that Cronjé quickly contains, controls, attacks – and, indeed, the stirrings are only legible in the symptomatic walls around them – but at the "heart" of apartheid racism, for Coetzee, is desire for the other as other. The order of post-apartheid empathy, we might say, is all too often one for a less defensive form of apartheid. While there are those who would measure transformation by desire across the colour line, this does not address "apartheid's symbolic network," which, to repeat, produced the other as other. Can this be mourned?

Apartheid's signifiers

Coetzee likens his reading of Cronjé to that of Dupin, the detective from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Jacques Lacan's "Seminar on "The Purloined Letter,"" an iteration of his "insistence of the signifier," offers a way of beginning to think through "the coming into being of the unconscious."

In Poe's story, a letter is stolen twice in two scenes that are, for Lacan, repetitions with an almost structural symmetry. In the first scene, a letter is taken by Minister D from under the nose of the Queen, who can do nothing but let it be taken lest she alert the King to its existence. In the repetition of this scene, the Minister, whose apartment was being searched daily by the police for the letter, has the letter taken by Dupin, who pays the Minister a visit, just as the Minister had paid the royal couple a visit. Dupin is able to retrieve the letter by putting himself in the place of the Minister. Explaining his success at retrieving the letter, he relates a story of a boy who entices his fellows to play a game. The

boy holds in his hands a number of marbles, while the other must guess whether the number of marbles he holds is odd or even. If they guess correctly, they take a marble, if incorrectly he takes a marble. The boy is a master at the game, the key to which is his capacity for “identifying with the opponent” (Lacan 1991, 45). “At first glance,” Lacan states, “it is a matter of simple psychological penetration, a kind of egomiming. The subject adopts a mirror position, enabling him to guess the behaviour of his adversary” (180). The Minister, too, had been able to lift the letter from the Queen, grasping its significance by putting himself in her place, but he had become ensnared in the whole drama that possessing the letter entails, becoming possessed by it. The secret to the boy’s success at the game – and Dupin’s success, too, depends on this – entails getting beyond “sympathetic rapport with the opponent,” which takes place at the level of “imaginary intersubjectivity” (180–181). It is only because Dupin can extract himself from the possession of the letter – because of a handover of the letter by Dupin to the Police Prefect – that, for Lacan, Dupin escapes repetition, and his position can be compared to that of an analyst. Like an analyst, he is paid, which neutralises the “repetition automatism” (45) the letter engenders. Whereas desire across apartheid’s differences has been advanced as a threshold of the post-apartheid, from a Lacanian perspective there is no question of encouraging empathy; it is, rather, a matter of learning to step outside an imaginary realm of rivalry, idealisation, and narcissism. Empathy is an imaginary relation, and, what is more, it is a police matter, even, perhaps, a matter of “military intelligence.”

As Lacan reads Poe’s story, each of the characters “will be defined solely by their position in relation to this radical subject” (196–197). That is, the letter. For Lacan, symbolic structures do not merely mediate human experience. Symbolic processing functions, rather, in a way that completely bypasses conscious subjective experience, to overdetermine the subject who emerges as the effect of the signifier. Once transposed to the domain of apartheid’s symbolic order, this offers a way of traversing the knots of the paradoxical – even apparently tautological – idea of an author of ideological pronouncements who is simultaneously authored by this self-same ideology. When Coetzee comments that “the mad voice of apartheid is not one that can be switched on or off, but in fact runs the entire show” (Coetzee 1991, 23), he gestures towards, but leaves unexplored, the overdetermining agency of the symbolic, and the institutional forms of racism capable of replicating patterns of exclusion and privilege in the absence of any individual racist intention: apartheid as an automated asubjective machinic apparatus that possess an efficacy which exceeds the consciousness of those subjects who utilise their resources to express, order and legislate their worlds (cf. Derrida [1967] 2001, 286). What Coetzee refers to as apartheid thinking is, from a Lacanian standpoint, the incessant, self-replicating, automated repetition of apartheid’s chosen signifiers as they reverberate between scenes of public enactment, on the one hand, and the dreams, the repressed wishes, and unconscious productions of those who occupy its symbolic terrain, on the other.

Though four of the seven papers gathered here draw explicitly on Lacanian psychoanalysis, the invitation to participate in this issue did not, in fact, invoke Lacan’s writings. To address the “coming into being of the unconscious,” the invitation put Coetzee’s question—“But what is it that will be buried?”—into dialogue with Jean Laplanche’s notion of a “burial in the unconscious” of an “enigmatic signifier” (Laplanche 1999, 155).

While Laplanche's "enigmatic signifier" builds on and retains a correspondence with the Lacanian "insistence of the signifier," it is also a "displacement of the Lacanian Symbolic" (Fletcher 1992, 106). For Laplanche, there is no symbolic "big Other," only other people, and the otherness of the unconscious that emerges from "the essential asymmetry of our first months" (Laplanche 2011, 87).

If the Lacanian "big Other" is what "provides the 'rules of the game' that enables and coordinates everyday ideological interactions and presumptions," Hook notes in his article here an indefensible corollary – which, as he emphasises, requires critical scrutiny – when this is brought to bear in an analysis of apartheid, that "the subjective accountability of the white beneficiaries of apartheid might be negligible" (Hook this issue). While Hook approaches this by stressing the Lacanian notion of "separation," as distinct from "alienation," where the former is a process whereby the subject acquires a limited possibility for choice, Laplanche offers, against the "signifier" as shorthand for the symbolic order more generally, an approach that amplifies "the 'address' aspect of the signifier" (Laplanche 1999, 160).

The situation of an infant taking in milk, or its substitutes – a situation to which we have already alluded in the discussion of Manganyi's work – is the exemplar, for Laplanche, of what he calls the "fundamental anthropological situation" (Laplanche 2011, 102), an infant without an unconscious, not initially, being cared for by an adult with one. As Laplanche argues, messages of care are parasitised by the sexual unconscious of the adult, presenting to the child an enigma that neither the child nor the adult fully understands. This fundamentally shifts the source of the unconscious, from the symbolic to actual others.

It was the way Laplanche writes of the unconscious emerging through a "burial" that seemed a productive provocation, allowing a link between Coetzee's question and "that hyperarchaeological site that is the human being" (Laplanche 1999, 152), as well as a set of questions, different to those of Coetzee, about "reified fragments of enigmatic messages that continue to interpellate and excite the subject from within" (Fletcher 1999, 39). Such a perspective also seemed necessary, when conceptualising the special issue, to push Coetzee's reading, which contents itself with "tracking" leaky displacements of desire without accounting for the way "displacement inaugurates the drive" (Butler 2014, 98). For Laplanche, the breast – broadly construed as infant feeding – is at first soothing, it pacifies, alleviates a physiological tension, and the infant will exert their instinctual aggression, a biological inheritance, to access it; gradually, through metonymic and metaphorical processes, what is contiguous with the milk taken in will be found pleasurable – the nipple, the breast, a neck, its smell and so on – and other forms of incorporation will become exciting. Put schematically, the sexual drive emerges, for Laplanche, through "leaning, and then detachment or deviation" from processes of self-preservation, through a "movement which deflects the instinct, metaphorises its aim, displaces and internalises its object" (Laplanche 1976, 22, 23). In other words, if Laplanche allows a particular way of reading Coetzee's question, what he would warn against – and what Manganyi's work, too, cautions against – is any understanding where the "unlovely creature" being interred is in any way "a prehistoric animal lurking in us from the start" (Laplanche 2011, 156). From the perspective Laplanche offers, the "unlovely creature" will have been formed out of processes of address, of designation, assignation,

and identification – issued by actual others in the early stages of a life – parts of which will have been buried, left untranslated.

What Laplanche calls the “fundamental anthropological situation” extends “beyond the relation between parents and child” (Laplanche 2011, 103), and he stresses the constitutive role of “an adult cultural world in which the child is totally immersed from the outset” (129). The aforementioned attention to mothercraft – and the social conditions in which childcare takes shape – is implied. This aspect of Laplanche’s work, as Shannon Sullivan suggests, “implicitly extends Fanon’s sociogenic account of the ‘epidermalization’ of racism . . . explaining exactly how other people magnetise the psychophysiological skin of a child, generating its unconscious out of this process” (Sullivan 2003, 20–21). Sullivan may underestimate the differences between the versions of psychoanalysis elaborated by Fanon and Laplanche, which are neither meagre, nor fully resolvable. One might say, however, that the trauma of which Fanon writes is determined by the “enigmatic messages” of a “cultural situation” through which “a host of information and a series of propositions slowly and stealthily work their way into an individual” (Fanon [1952] 2008, 130–131), and are implanted under and onto the skin. What Laplanche calls “enigmatic messages,” Fanon calls a “cultural imposition” (167–184).

Interventions

Derek Hook’s “The Desire of Apartheid” places obsessional neurosis within a Lacanian frame, where it is understood as a “strategy for locating one’s self in a structural relation to the desire of the Other.” He then rereads Cronjé’s obsessions through a Lacanian frame as a fantasmatic response to the enigma presented by a lack in the symbolic. If there has been a tendency to ignore the sociality of the unconscious, Hook is abundantly clear on the political implications of his formulation of apartheid, which, as previously noted, underlines the Lacanian notion of separation: “Apartheid’s white subjects need answer . . . for their enjoyment of the symbolic systems of racism that they found themselves located within and that they played their part in perpetuating” (Hook this issue). Here, the Lacanian notion of the *objet petit a* takes centre stage.

In his contribution to this issue, “Burying the Superego?” Jaco Barnard-Naudé reads apartheid not only as a spatialised instantiation of an obsessional neurosis, but, refracting Coetzee’s argument through Lacan, of the “rule of the superego in the mind of apartheid.” Here, Barnard-Naudé amplifies the “the superego’s law” that obsessional neurosis entails, reading apartheid as a site of obscene superegoic enjoyment. As the title of his paper suggests, Barnard-Naudé reframes Coetzee’s question: “Can apartheid [. . .] as the law of the superego be buried?” (Barnard-Naudé, this issue). The Lacanian notion of separation is extended when Barnard-Naudé suggests the idea of “mourning as an injunction, mourning as the law to which we must submit in order to begin to come to terms with this strange object that is apartheid’s superego” (this issue). The implications of this for post-apartheid black subjectivity – an “enforced psychosis,” a black Hamletism, or melancholia, as Barnard-Naudé argues – will resonate strongly with two articles recently published in *Social Dynamics*, Bhekizizwe Peterson’s (2019) “Spectrality and Inter-generational Black Narratives in South Africa,” an important piece to which Sakiru Adebayo (2022) recently returned in “Post-apartheid Melancholia.”

Ross Truscott's paper, "Auditing and the Unconscious," focusses on a chain of repetitious re-enactments played out in academic audits, an obsessional neurotic and biopolitical game all academics and students are forced to play in universities today, where the stakes are, in more than metaphorical terms, life and death. Drawing on the work of Nikolas Abraham and Maria Torok, Truscott posits an "intergenerational phantom" within an auditable subject who appears "possessed not by his own unconscious but by someone else's" (Abraham cited in Truscott, this issue). "By what scenes from the past are audits haunted?" Truscott asks: "What memory traces do audits reactivate? What phantoms do audits seek to exorcise? Can we speak of the demons by which auditing is possessed? And what sort of working through the past would this call for?" (Truscott this issue).

In her article, "The Afterlife of Apartheid," Gobodo-Madikizela examines the multi-generational traumas that have been carried into the post-apartheid. Gobodo-Madikizela builds on but also takes critical distance from "the language of 'ghosts' and 'haunting'" to offer what she calls a "tri-directional temporality" through which a "social unconscious" (Gobodo-Madikizela this issue) operates. While clearly Gobodo-Madikizela and Truscott share several concerns – most notably, the affect that drives students in protest – Gobodo-Madikizela's paper presents a clear challenge to psychoanalytic recourse to "spectres." Here, Gobodo-Madikizela makes a contribution both to understandings of apartheid, as it is relived in the present, and to the elaboration of a theory of the unconscious that may be useful to such an undertaking.

In a careful, incisive reading of Coetzee's suggestion that what he is doing is "listening closely to what [Cronjé] says and even more closely to what he does not say, is afraid of saying" (Coetzee 1991, 3), John Mowitt pursues what he calls the difference between listening to what is merely left unsaid, on the one hand, and listening to the unconscious, on the other. Coetzee, Mowitt suggests, tends to the former, despite promising the latter. This difference amounts, for Mowitt, to apprehending the emergence of the drive in the subject, as opposed to Coetzee's "tracking" of displacements of desire. In Mowitt's terms, the difference trains "attention to what in the formation of the subject . . . offers repression its foothold." Put differently, he pursues "the coming into being of the unconscious."

In her paper, "The Ears of Apartheid," Willemien Froneman considers the way "apartheid discloses itself musically and sonically" in white popular music of the 1950s and 60s. Provocatively, Froneman suggests that "white musical practices seemed to run counter to the very racial ideologies in which they were embedded, their affective charge residing precisely in instantiating musically the 'contamination,' 'mixing' and 'degeneracy' that ideologues, like Cronjé, were at pains to avoid" (Froneman this issue). Froneman's key intervention is the suggestion that the defence employed against desire for the other was not repression, but disavowal: building on Coetzee's reading, she argues that in the sonic realm apartheid's discourse was perverse, not neurotic. Whiteness hears and does not hear blackness.

In her paper, "Between Racial Madness and Neoliberal Reason," Kiasha Naidoo considers two scenes of "contagion" either side of the "madness" of apartheid: an outbreak of the bubonic plague in the Cape Colony in 1901, and of the COVID-19 pandemic in Cape Town in 2020. Engaging Coetzee's essay, Naidoo pushes back against his psychoanalytic reading to bring into the foreground apartheid as "a project of economic exploitation." The kind of psychoanalysis Coetzee deploys, she suggests, is

able to deal with neither the ways in which “cheap, black labour and the exploitation thereof was necessary to the functioning of apartheid,” nor how post-apartheid South Africa disposes of unexploitable black bodies, bodies deemed, under a neoliberal order, as uncreditworthy. And yet, this is not presented as an either/or, but rather as a treatment of the example, where each of these instances disclose an underlying continuity that is left to be read, so as to be addressed.

Naidoo’s paper draws on Michel Foucault on biopolitics, and on his interlocutors. It is in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* that Foucault introduces the notion of biopolitics, and it is here, too, that he problematises the “repressive hypothesis” (Foucault 1978, 1). In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault extends the idea of biopolitics, and here he places psychoanalysis among what he sees as “totalitarian theories” (Foucault 2004, 6). But this does not preclude, for him, their further usage. Such theories “can be used at the local level,” Foucault states, provided “the theoretical unity of their discourse is, so to speak, suspended,” rearranging their elements, reinscribing them in response to local questions, leaving them “cut up, ripped up, torn to shreds, turned inside out” (6). That, in a sense, has been our aim: not to apply psychoanalysis, but to rethink it, and its methods, as it is brought into new encounters with the legacies of apartheid.

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