SMART, DUMB, OR CULTURALLY CHALLENGED? A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE DYNAMIC UNCONSCIOUS

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ABSTRACT *This paper provides a social history of the concept of the unconscious, with particular emphasis on ethical and political dimensions of the concept. The historical review begins with late twentieth-century contexts for the recuperation within psychology of the concept of the unconscious, then turning to a parallel set of debates in the previous century. The ethical and political implications of two theoretical issues are addressed. First, the author discusses the question of whether conscious and unconscious are distinctly different systems of mind, rather than operating along a continuum. In taking up this controversy, the paper revisits the concept of the* preconscious *in Freud's structural model. Second, the author addresses the question of what is at stake ethically and politically in adopting* dramaturgical metaphors *in conceptualizing the unconscious versus a model that enlists* mechanistic metaphors. *In concluding, an example from the author's experience working in the area of women and war is introduced as an application of theoretical concepts.*

Key words: unconscious, preconscious, dissociationism, feminist psychoanalysis, war psychology

As reports circulated in Vienna of brutal treatment of soldiers by army doctors, Freud was called before the Austrian War Ministry to give expert testimony. Introduced in 1919, his testimony was a defence of psychoanalytic treatment of war neurosis and a repudiation of the method of administering electrical shock to emotionally ill soldiers to prod them back into active duty. Reports of mental breakdown and suicides following treatments, and even lethal doses of shock, raised disturbing questions about the psychiatric management of hospitalized soldiers. In challenging the prevailing method of treatment, Freud suggested that soldiers' symptoms told an unconscious story of visceral struggle and heroic defeat. He explained how symptoms such as paralysis were a means of psychically escaping an unbearable conflict between the command to kill and deeply internalized moral prohibitions against such commands, a conflict exacerbated by 'the ruthless suppression of his personality by his superiors' (1919, 212–13). Freud commented that

> only the smallest proportion of war neurotics were malingerers; the emotional impulses which rebelled in them against active service and drove them into illness were operative in them without becoming conscious to them. They remained unconscious because other

motives, such as ambition, self-esteem, patriotism, the habit of obedience and the example of others, were to start with more powerful until, on some appropriate occasion, they were overwhelmed by the other, unconsciously-operating motives. (Freud 1919, 213)

Beyond defending the psychoanalytic method on humanistic grounds, Freud was making a political intervention. Rather than attributing war neurosis to the problem of 'shell shock' or the assaults suffered at the hands of the enemy, Freud focused on problems of authority on the home front. Massive desertions and active resistance became widespread among soldiers on both sides of the war during its final years, and psychiatrists were summoned to separate the malingerers and the war resisters from the truly ill. It is likely that many soldiers *were* consciously resisting or malingering through their symptoms, if only from sheer exhaustion or 'combat fatigue'. Freud stopped short of defending those who consciously refused to return to duty but he did offer, through the concept of unconscious motivation, an escape clause that preserved the ideal of duty, honour, and patriotism even as it registered the power of resistance to such dictates. The irony in this psychoanalytic line of interpretation is that soldiers were only protected to the extent that such motives remained unconscious. Once rebellion became a conscious motive, the war injured were forced to join the ranks of the war resisters or return to the front.

In political crises such as this, the question of whether or not there is an unconscious or of the extent to which war neurosis is based on unconscious motives obscures the political and social contexts that give power to the idea. As Charles Elder (1994) suggests in his critical review of Freud's theories, the meaning of ideas is established through their use in language. Citing Wittgenstein, Elder asserts that the concept of the unconscious is a 'language game', registering a widely divergent set of meanings, depending on the context of its use. In the context of post-war politics, however, demarcating the boundary between conscious and unconscious domains of mind was no mere language game. To argue that the symptoms of war neurotics told an unconscious story subverted the ideology of individualism – with its insistence on self-determination, rationality, and 'manly' self-control – even as it opened up cultural space for new interpretations.

My own pathway through the history of the unconscious is via the rocky road of psychoanalytic feminist inquiry. Over the past several decades, a range of feminist theorists has turned to psychoanalytic theory to critique patriarchal psychic and social structures, showing how masculine identity is founded on the disavowal of the feminine (Dinnerstein, 1977; Benjamin, 1988; Chodorow, 1994). Male subjectivity is constituted through sexual difference, with woman (as Other) registering in the unconscious as the point of departure in the formation of the masculine subject. Although masculinity develops in opposition to that which is feminine, the male subject depends on its Other for holding in place a precariously constituted, defensively bounded masculinity.

These critiques have generated lively theoretical debates in cultural studies and feminist theory, but psychoanalytic feminism confronts intense resistance in the trenches of the anti-violence movement. Whatever the gains in exposing phallocentric fantasies, psychoanalytic interpretations appear to many anti-violence activists as mere word games. For many activists in the domestic violence field, where I have been carrying out a programme of research over the past several years, feminist invoking of the unconscious

is regarded as a political step backward (see Mankowski et al., 2002). Indeed, Freud's intervention concerning shell-shocked soldiers may be interpreted as the habitual response of patriarchs, preserving an ideal of manhood even as the ideal is modified under emergency conditions to take into account male fear and vulnerability.

Historians of psychoanalysis often note the plasticity and shifting contours of the concept of the unconscious, even in Freud's various theoretical texts (Ellenberger, 1970; Chertok, 1978; Jaffe, 1979; Charney, 1992). My interest is less in 'pinning down' the unconscious empirically than it is in understanding how the very instability of the concept is overdetermined by broader social and historical forces. Beyond this, I show how the Freudian unconscious, in all of its permutations, has a close affinity with the problem of sub-jugated forms of consciousness. From this perspective, the unconscious may be understood as a register for challenges to dominant forms of consciousness and for those aspects of human experience not readily assimilated into the social order.

Like many other ideas that encompass a vast history and swath of intellectual terrain, the concept of the unconscious is open to widely varying social and political uses. To suggest that an individual is acting on the basis of unconscious motivation may be to forgive or to condemn, depending on how this inference is placed within a larger drama and constellation of meanings (Riker, 1997). At a minimum, the enlistment of the concept is a demand for a different story, and a search for meaning beyond what is most readily available.

In this paper, I offer a social history of the concept of the unconscious, with particular attention to the ethical and political dimensions of the concept. My interest is in how periods of insurgency and political mobilization work their way into conceptions of mind, and particularly ideas about divisions within the mind. A central theme of my book, *Pillar of Salt* (Haaken, 1998) is that the unconscious has a close affinity with the feminine in Western thought. The rational is associated with the masculine, with public life and rule-governed reality; the non-rational is associated with the feminine, with private life and the interior world. My current work extends this line of inquiry to include a broader array of social transformations that shape Western discourses of mind. There is a practical, applied aspect to this project. It grows out of an interest in working through problems that emerge at the convergence of clinical and political practices, particularly where power relations must be taken into account.

To pursue the social and political uses of the unconscious is not to suggest that psyche and society are coterminous on some grand scale, nor does it imply that discourses on the mind are reducible to actual mental processes. There is always some risk of oversociologizing the uncon-scious, or of positing a substrate of human potential beyond the reach of civilization, a positive reservoir of energy that inevitably orients human strivings toward freedom. Contemporary psychoanalytic cultural theory tends to reject static notions of either human nature or social identity, empha-sizing instead the shifting borders of psychic experience.

In working at the borders of psyche and society, some theorists argue that the uncon-scious is a psychic container for those aspects of human experience that are disavowed or disallowed in the process of socialization (Wyatt, 1990; Toronto, 1991; Gillet, 1995; Herron, 1995). The mental boundary between 'me' and 'not me' maps the cultural formation of the human subject,

with the unconscious serving as repository for those aspects of experience not readily integrated into normative consciousness. We might expect that female divisions in consciousness are organized around repression of desires and identifications associated with the masculine, just as male psychology is normatively organized around the disavowal of the feminine.

This paper goes beyond the question of the *content* of the unconscious to consider historical influences on conceptions of psychic *structure*. My review begins with two late twentieth-century contexts for the recuperation within psychology of the concept of the unconscious: developments within cognitive psychology and the trauma therapy movement.

In taking up debates in these two arenas, I start with a parallel set of debates a century earlier. In both historical periods, two interrelated theoretical questions dominate the stage. First, there is the question of whether conscious and unconscious are distinctly different systems of mind, versus operating along a continuum. This question remains an area of active debate within psychology, but the social and political implications of this distinction are not typically articulated (Giora, 1989; Gillett, 1995). In taking up the controversy, I revisit the concept of the *preconscious* in Freud's structural model, suggesting that this concept is more dynamic in Freud's work than is generally thought. While the preconscious is generally not used in a dynamic or even a particularly psychological way in clinical discourse, I make use of the concept of the preconscious in attending to phenomena at the borders of consciousness. Second, there is the question of what is at stake in adopting *dramaturgical metaphors* in conceptualizing the unconscious versus a model that enlists *mechanistic metaphors*. Differences at this level of meta-theory are not readily resolved empirically. Rather, my interest is in addressing what is at stake in theorizing divisions in mind, particularly in light of their ethical implications.

TRAUMA THERAPY AND THE RECOVERY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Patriarchy has a long history of ferreting out concealed malevolent motives in woman, stripping her of claims of rationality. In the women's movement of the 1970s, feminists were unified around a refusal of all things Freudian. Feminist-informed psychology seemed most hospitably aligned with behavioural perspectives – with attention to what women had failed to observe occurring before their very eyes. The psychoanalytic clinical story seemed to cast women as perpetually prone to dreamlike states, irrational and hysterical in their utterances. In breaking out of the shadowy confines of the private sphere and entering public life, feminists were wary of any psychology that seemed to keep women in the dark. To suggest that 'no' sometimes means 'yes' could only fortify, it seemed, the very patriarchal authority that censored the female voice.

By the 1990s the dynamic unconscious underwent a dramatic 'return of the repressed' within feminist psychology, primarily through the path of trauma theory. The trauma therapy and recovered memory literature brought the concept of unconscious memory onto the public stage in the 1980s and 1990s, through talk shows, self-help books, and legal battles over recovered memories of child sexual abuse (Haaken, 1998; Loftus and Ketcham, 1994). As bearers of traumatic memories and carriers of untellable stories, the female unconscious was valorized as an irrepressible force. The unconscious was conceived as a deep

reservoir of pathogenic memories, seeping into consciousness through symptoms but nonetheless preserved in the mind as imprints of actual external events.

Many feminists position women – and the oppressed generally – as guardians of repressed truths, possessors of a language silenced but not destroyed. Adrienne Rich, for example, insists that 'whatever is . . . is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language – this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable' (Rich 1979, 199). There is a certain affinity between feminism and beliefs in 'occult' psychological processes because women have themselves been hidden from history, operating behind a screen of masculine assumptions and fantasies (Doane, 1989; Toronto, 1991; Haaken, 1998). Beyond this affinity between the unconscious and the female position of holding rejected social knowledge, there is also a subversive dimension to discourses on the unconscious (Rose, 1995; Haaken, 1998; Benjamin, 1998; Frosh, 1999). Any project of progressive social change requires a capacity to transcend mundane reality, to probe for deeper meanings, and to uncover hidden potentialities.

Yet the notion that deeply buried secrets are particularly revelatory carried unintended costs for women and for feminism. When clinical reports of incest emerged in the therapeutic literature of the 1980s, most of the recollections described by women were continuous memories. Most women remembered the abuse, but there was little cultural or clinical support for exploring its impact. By the late 1980s, however, reports of 'recovered memories' swept the clinical field as increasing numbers of women began to recall sexual abuse in childhood. A number of these reports were probably based on actual past

events, but the privileging of dramatic accounts – memories excavated from the bowels of the unconscious – served to displace attention from more everyday, pervasive aspects of women's oppression. The trope of repressed memory was itself a reaction to cultural denial of the injustices born by women. But the terms of this exchange between trauma therapy and the psychoanalytic legacy left the female psyche in a deficit state.

In much of the trauma literature of this period, the problem of female disengagement from intrusive experiences was cast through the discourse on dissociation. This mode of emotional distancing became highly associated with femininity, and more specifically with sexual abuse. Unable to escape an abusive encounter, the sexual abuse victim protected herself by entering a trance state (Herman, 1992; Freyd, 1996). Implicit in the application of the trauma model to the problems of women was the idea that a fragmented identity and sense of disconnection originated in a decisive, dramatic rupture of the female self.

Dissociation is a term used to describe a failure in the normal integrative processes of mind, such as fugue states or dissociative identity, or it connotes a means of establishing emotional distance. In the former sense of the term, dissociation refers to a fragmented, unintegrated sense of self, an identity in a state of flux. As a defence, dissociation encompasses a broad range of distancing responses, particularly in response to feeling captive to the will of another. Rape survivors, for example, often describe the experience as a feeling of 'not being there' (Herman, 1992).

Dissociation is sometimes confused with Freud's concept of repression in that both terms refer to unconscious forgetting (Giora, 1989; Singer, 1990). Although he initially adopted Janet's dissociation model

of 'double consciousness', Freud later rejected it. Freud's repression model, although undergoing significant shifts over time, was a more dynamic model of unconscious processes than was the dissociation model. Repression implied that events with affect-laden, personal meaning are never passively stored in an unconscious realm of the mind but rather are filtered through motivational states and psychic structures. Internal demands upon the ego, such as impulses and fantasies, are the primary sources of unconscious forgetting and of various splits within the ego. In other words, mechanisms of defence are organized intrapsychically, often in relation to anxiety-provoking internal images or sensations. As the child enters adolescence, for example, new moral capacities and preoccupations collide with intensified sexual awakenings, and these conflicting pressures heighten the meaning of sexual encounters.

Many psychoanalysts believe that repression may be lifted under clinical conditions, but it is generally assumed that the ego – a term encompassing various reality-monitoring and anxiety-regulating functions of the mind – continues to disguise unconscious material. In the dissociation model, however, the unconscious is assumed to be more directly accessible, with divisions expressed through alternating states of awareness or identity. In other words, dissociation permits movement in and out of walled-off areas of the mind. Repression, on the other hand, implies a 'deeper,' less accessible unconscious. Dissociationists claim that under conditions such as hypnosis, split-off areas of mind (such as traumatic memories) directly surface in consciousness (Singer, 1990).

In his history of the concept of dissociation, research psychologist Ernest Hilgard locates psychology's contemporary revival of interest in divided consciousness in the countercultural movement of the 1960s. While this movement may be interpreted as a form of intergenerational rebellion, it was also a struggle with patriarchal authority.

> In the 1960s a substantial fraction of people, particularly the young, fed up with technology and contemporary society, turned inward to discover the range of human potential in other ways. These other ways included experimentation with psychedelic drugs, meditation, Eastern religions, ESP, and occultism. Much of this searching lay outside the scientific establishment, but it did not leave the scientists unaffected. (Hilgard, 1977, 2)

Hilgard's observation that interest in altered states originated in the countercultural movement of the 1960s stops short of explaining the implications of this historical insight. Dominant American values, many of which originate in the Enlightenment and the rise of capitalism, privilege the active (masculine) over the receptive (feminine) mode. Productivism, pragmatism and utilitarianism share this valuing of activity and mastery over sensuous activity, which interferes with these aims.

In reconciling the psychologies of East and West, distinctions pursued by Ornstein in *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972), Hilgard (1977) argues that active and receptive modes of consciousness coexist in all cultures. Hilgard draws on the paradigm of dissociation to explain a wide range of mental and social phenomena based on splits in consciousness, from trance, fugue and drug-induced hallucinogenic states, to possession states and multiple personality. Some of these states are more ephemeral while others are more sustained; some are more private and others more socially elaborated. Hilgard attempts to reduce the cultural divide between the Western Enlightenment and its competing worldviews, rejecting the view that hypnotic or highly

'receptive' states are more 'primitive' or 'regressive' than ordinary cognitive states.

Gaps and disjunctures in consciousness are inevitable in that much of human experience is not readily assimilated into conventional codes. Lacanian psychoanalysts describe this inevitable 'remainder' in human experience and how generative capacities in the human subject are both structured by the symbolic order and go beyond its representational capacities (Malone and Friedlander, 2001). The unconscious is the primary signifier for splits in consciousness, for the loss of an imaginary wholeness that can never be recovered.

Societies vary in how this psychic remainder is structured, however, and in how the non-rational is taken into account in cultural life. Most societies develop mechanisms for integrating what may be described as unconscious experience through the ritual management of altered states of consciousness. Whether through the use of trance states, dream imagery, masks, or rituals marking rites of passage, humans generate practices for bringing under symbolic control various fantasies and desires that pose a threat to available conventions.

This is not to say that there is some fixed quantum of desire generated in the course of human experience, nor is it to suggest that societies simply 'manage' desire through institutional controls. Advanced capitalist societies both generate and structure desire in ways that are quite different from early capitalist societies, which are yet again different from hunting and gathering societies. Further, the very concept of divisions in mind – splits between conscious and unconscious experience – may register historically emergent and culturally specific divisions within the society, rather than a universal condition.

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED IN COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Scientific interest in divided consciousness at the end of the twentieth century has a strong echo of debates that stormed psychology on both sides of the Atlantic a century prior. During both eras, theories of subdivisions within the mind suggested critical limits on human consciousness, even as they raised the question of latent potential (Hacking, 1995; Haaken, 1998). And in both eras, divisions within the mind generated feverish debate in the wake of a feminist movement. As women forced the renegotiation of gender boundaries, experimental psychology and dynamic psychiatry joined in intense debates over the power of subliminal states to break through dominant modes of consciousness.

Introductory textbooks in psychology routinely note the deep divisions between scientific psychology and psychoanalysis, divisions that led to their divorce early in the twentieth century. But this historical account, like many issued in the interest of establishing disciplinary boundaries, represses common origins.

Published in 1896, Alfred Binet's *Alterations of Personality* reviews the competing claims of French schools of thought concerning hypnosis, hysteria and 'double consciousness'. In defending the study of consciousness against the rising tide of an anti-mentalist psychology – 'the hypothesis which considers man a machine' – Binet invests consciousness itself with femininity, implicitly acknowledging that traversing states of consciousness carries theorists across a gender divide. We must recognize, he exclaims, that 'consciousness does not renounce her rights as easily as has been sometimes admitted, and that she can exist even when psychological activity is very low.'

Binet sought to mediate between dramaturgical and mechanistic conceptions of consciousness, in part by establishing the affinity between normal and exceptional states of mind. Wary of metaphysical currents within psychology, Binet was nonetheless critical of the form of threshold theory that dominated the field of psychophysiological research. In establishing formulae for testing the relationship between stimulus intensity and perception, threshold theorists offered little of theoretical value in sorting through the controversies that captured the era: the nature of hypnosis, hysteria, and 'double personality'. Binet went beyond what he termed the 'little facts' of psychophysiological research to investigate how the phenomenological unity of consciousness was established.

Much like Janet, Binet conceptualized hysteria as a deficit in the mind's ability to impose unity upon consciousness. Summoning Janet's pronouncement that hysterics, who were typically female, suffer from 'a contraction of the field of consciousness', Binet concurs that hysterics are highly distractable and prone to unstable states. The female hysteric, it seems, is captive to whatever appears in her field of perception, whether it be in the form of hypnotic suggestions, the rumblings of her own unconscious, or the trivial preoccupations of daily life. Binet notes that hysterics are able to sew, knit or write – the main activities permitted Victorian women – even as they display insensibility, that is, lack of sensation, in the trance state.

After the decline of interest in spiritualism, hysteria and hypnosis in the late nineteenth century, the concept of the unconscious suffered a century-long banishment from scientific psychology, regaining legitimacy as a topic of psychological inquiry in the 1980s. In clinical settings and in laboratory research, the problem of divisions and subdivisions in the mind's access to knowledge was a central motif. The cognitive revolution in psychology facilitated some of this new focus on 'non-conscious' aspects of mind as well as the burgeoning literature on implicit memory, a term that emerged from laboratory research on forms of memory that were not accessible to conscious awareness (Eagle, 1987). But the 'cognitive unconscious' was quite different from the Freudian or dynamic one. As Elizabeth Loftus and Mark Klinger (1992) put it, the question was no longer one of whether or not there *was* an unconscious but, rather, whether it was 'smart or dumb'. The Dumb Unconscious (the one preferred by most cognitive psychologists) was much like a factory worker carrying out boring, routine tasks. The Smart Unconscious (the one preferred by many clinicians) evoked the more romantic image of the storyteller or artist, subverting conventional consciousness from below.

It is not surprising that many women in the trauma field embraced the Smart Unconscious, though this hidden intelligence was conceptualized as more akin to an archivist than a storyteller. As Schank and Abelson point out:

> This phenomenon of the untellable story is familiar to psychoanalysts. They typically regard the dangerous content as repressed, and not available to consciousness. With this view, one of the goals of analysis is to undo repression and enable the patient to have insight into the hidden motives. We (cognitive psychologists) prefer to think that untold, negative autobiographical experiences are partially conscious but surrounded by confusion resulting from many unsuccessful attempts to edit and tell them, leading to the absence of useful indexes. (Schank and Abelson, 1995, 46)

The aura of mystery surrounding the concept of repression, with its associations

of dramatic upsurges of alien knowledge from the bowels of the unconscious, has little to do with most actual psychoanalytic approaches to repression. Yet Schank and Abelson's vocabulary of 'useful indexes' and functional filing systems is too removed from the personal vicissitudes of memory and mind, too mechanical as a metaphor, to capture much of what is at stake in the telling of untellable stories.

In 'recovering' the unconscious from scientific psychology's own past, cognitive psychologists often intervene in the uncertainties it evokes through a hyper-rational discourse. The cognitive unconscious is based on an information-processing model, where the mind is able to pursue several cognitive functions simultaneously, such as driving a car while carrying on a conversation. Whereas this cognitive model emphasizes the mind's tendency to organize information hierarchically and efficiently in order to prevent mental overload, the psychoanalytic model stresses conflictual aspects of self-knowledge. In dramaturgical terms, the unconscious refers to those subplots or marginal characters in the theatre of consciousness that represent unassimilated aspects of self-experience. In contrast to the cognitive model, which stresses the relative autonomy of mental functions, psychoanalysis emphasizes the dynamic interdependence of states of mind.

Memory researcher John Kihlstrom and colleagues, for example, offer, in place of the 'hot and wet' Freudian unconscious, which is 'hallucinatory, primitive, and irrational', a cognitive unconscious that is 'kinder and gentler than that and more rational and reality-bound' (Kihlstrom et al., 1992, 789). Yet for rebellious storytellers who feel all too bound by conventional realities, the visceral appeal of the hot and wet unconscious, over against scientific psychology's cool and dry one, may vivify more powerfully the messy aspects of life, so often born by those on the margins.

FREUD AND THE POLITICS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

In his essay on the concept of the unconscious, published in 1917, HK Haeberlin sardonically commented that 'the notion of the unconscious is the most prolific metaphor that has as yet arisen in psychology. Nothing could be more stimulating to the imagination than the realm of the unconscious as the Nibelheim where the dark libido flows' (cited in Miller, 1950, 78). Scientific psychologists have an understandable wariness toward enchanting concepts that elude systematic investigation, concepts ripe with romantic sensibilities. Throughout the history of scientific psychology, the concept of the unconscious has been doggedly critiqued and deconstructed, jettisoned to the realm of the humanities.

Lancelot Law Whyte argued in 1960 that the idea of the dynamic unconscious 'is the supreme revolutionary conception of the modern age: it undermines the traditional foundations of Europe and the West' (Whyte, 1960, 9). Casting this trajectory through the guiding anima of the Western Enlightenment and the rise of capitalism, Whyte suggests that

> the ultimate driving force behind the discovery of the unconscious was that element of surplus vitality, or refusal to be content with life as it is, which had the power to force self-conscious man to transcend his image of himself, to become richer as a person by recognizing the limitations of his current idea of himself. (Whyte, 1960, 69)

With the aim of reconciling Freud's scientific project and contemporary cognitive psychology, Matthew Hugh Erdelyi (1985)

traces the history of Freud's employment of a wide range of metaphors and analogues in describing psychic structure. Erdelyi argues that Freud's project was limited by the analogues available to him and that some of his reasoning anticipated the modern computer revolution, with its multi-layered, multi-modal systems of information tracking. Beyond the metaphorical range of computer analogues, however, are key dramatic elements of the psychoanalytic paradigm: the role of the body, emotions, passions, and morality in the formation of human consciousness, aspects of Freudian theory that Erdelyi minimizes in his effort to bridge the gap between cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis.

Yet Erdelyi does venture into territory not typically explored by cognitive psychology. He concludes that the most appropriate analogues to Freud's conception of mind are sociopolitical in that *censorship* and hierarchical controls are so critical. The ego is much like a beleaguered bureaucracy mediating between the demands of the masses – the forces of the 'id' – and forces imposed by the ruling powers represented through the superego. Freud's placement of the superego along the axis of conscious and unconscious and as a structure straddling the ego and the id may signify Freud's increasing anxiety concerning the irrational aspects of the state. Censorship may take primitive or enlightened forms, but in either case, there are psychic costs. Much like an underground movement or a defeated enemy, banished desires organize themselves for a 'return of the repressed'. In exile, these forces garner insurgent strength more effectively than when they are forced to integrate into the dominant social order.

In a work published in 1942, James Grier Miller also notes the centrality of political censorship in Freud's metapsychology:

> As a culture gains organized power, it not only serves as a frame of reference for what the individual will communicate, but it also begins a censorship which is in many ways similar to modern wartime censorship . . . Freud recognizes mechanisms in human behavior which parallel the functions carried on by the socially appointed censor. (Miller, 1950 [1942], 280–1)

Although Freud introduced many of the main lines of his theory of the unconscious in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), his 1915 monograph, *The Unconscious,* brought many of his lines of thinking together into a theoretical synthesis. The preconscious, Freud argues, is the mediating agency of mind, operating 'as a screen between the system conscious and the system unconscious' (Freud, 1915, 615). In differentiating two realms of unconscious mind, Freud insisted that fantasies originating in the dynamic unconscious – areas of mental life that have undergone repression – may enter consciousness under the disguise of more accessible ideas. Nonetheless, the preconscious operates as a gatekeeper, detecting the concealed markers of alien desires or wishes.

> Their origin is what decides their fate. We may compare them with individuals of mixed race who, taken all round, resemble white men, but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other, and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges of white people. (Freud 1915a, 191)

How are we to understand such racialized metaphors of mind? Was Freud enacting or deconstructing the paranoia of censorship? By enlisting the analogy of racial mixing and barriers to assimilation, Freud expresses some of the 'origins' of his own theorizing. Freud's anxiety about assimilation may have

influenced his emphasis on the preconscious as the gatekeeper for the ego. His sense of being the perennial outsider, even as a privileged insider, infused his thinking about the tense co-mingling of states of mind at the border of consciousness.

Freud describes a pre-war European world where there is 'tolerance for differences' and where formerly excluded groups may now participate in 'civilized' society (Freud, 1915b, 277). The industrial world was one of increased mobility and the breaking down of traditional borders. But this mobility also took the form of political instability, displacement and vulnerability to new threats, culminating in the crisis of the First World War. 'Relying on this unity among the civilized peoples,' Freud began, 'countless men and women have exchanged their native home for a foreign one and made their existence dependent on the inter-communications between friendly nations' (Freud, 1915b, 277).

Like many other middle-class German Jews, Freud was sensitized to the precariousness of what he and others conceived as a modern European state still under the control of an enlightened monarchy – 'a new and wider fatherland, in which he could move about without hindrance or suspicion' (Freud, 1915b, 277). By the close of the Great War, Freud was not alone, of course, in viewing the war as the collapse of rationality.

THE UNCONSCIOUS IN CRITICAL PSYCHOANALYSIS

The continuing resonance of the Freudian unconscious for those identified with overthrowing the dominant social order is less in the specific content, location, or mechanisms of concealed agencies of mind. Rather, it is in the psychic boundaries it maps, boundaries constituted precariously through the censorship of border guards. In resisting dominant forms of rationality, liberation movements have a potential affinity with psychodynamic discourses on the unconscious. The concept of the unconscious requires that we attend to experience at the margins of what is most readily noticed and, as a heuristic, it opens up psychic and social space for new forms of storytelling. But the unconscious also points to the role of its interpreters, stationed at the threshold where inchoate aspects of mind are transmuted into a narrative form.

From the perspective of a critical psychoanalysis, one may err in the direction of an overly romantic or an overly pessimistic view of the unconscious. To view the unconscious as a reservoir of unrealized potential – as repressed desire, creativity or relationality – takes us some distance in developing a theory of resistance. If the existing social order overrides basic human needs or drives, as Freud argues in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), there is the perpetual risk of revolt. Freud insisted that some degree of repression and frustration of drives was necessary, but a determining factor in the balance of psychic powers was in how frustrations were shared in a society, as well as compensations for relinquishing infantile pleasures.

Freud resisted nineteenth-century romanticism and its use of the unconscious to imagine a substrate of organic unity in human consciousness, prior to the alienation produced by Western civilization. He also refused the spiritualizing of the unconscious associated with Jungian psychology and its mystical notions of the 'collective unconscious'. Taking up this tragic Freudian vision, Lacanians also critique utopian uses of psychoanalysis, particularly those projects that minimize the inconsolable and the irreparable aspects of splits in human

consciousness (Flax, 1990; Smith and Ferstman, 1996).

While psychoanalysts in the feminist and Marxist traditions uncover the place of the marginalized Other in the unconscious of the oppressor (Doane, 1980; Benjamin, 1998; Frosh, 1999) many postcolonial writers make use of psychoanalysis to work through the intrapsychic costs of domination for the oppressed. The unconscious signifies the legacy of the past that remains psychically active, registering a gap between objective conditions and subjective states. In *Black Skin, White Masks,* for instance, Franz Fanon describes the psychic colonizing of the oppressed and how contrary feelings of rage and desire bind slaves to their masters. At the same time, Fanon suggests that the formation of the unconscious is different for whites than for blacks. 'Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to "make it unconscious." The white man, on the other hand, succeeds in doing so to a certain extent, because a new element appears: guilt' (Fanon, 1967, 150). In critiquing Sartre's formulations concerning the Other, Fanon argues that 'their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious. That is because the white man is not only The Other but also the master, whether real or imaginary'.

On a societal level, the resolution of traumatic splits in consciousness depends not only on the capacity of the group to contain intense affects but on how disturbing experiences are represented and worked through over time. The unconscious may be invoked to generate a story of individual plots and motives; but it also may be appropriated to redistribute responsibility for suffering. Just as Freud made use of the unconscious in protecting shell-shocked soldiers from military prosecution, many liberation movements implicitly make use of

the idea that the master operates in a disguised form in the psychic life of the oppressed.

THE SOCIAL UNCONSCIOUS: A CASE EXAMPLE

This paper began with a discussion of Freud's intervention in the debate after World War I over the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers. In this final section of the paper, I return to the problem of how the concept of the unconscious enters into discourse over moral responsibility for war. In carrying out a research project several years ago on women and the Sierra Leonean Civil War, much of the discussion in the research group centred on the question of how to understand forces operating *behind* the violence. The project resulted in a documentary film, *Diamonds, Guns and Rice: Sierra Leone and the Women's Peace Movement,* which developed in consultation with Sierra Leonean women living in refugee camps in Guinea, as well as Sierra Leonean peace activists in the US. When we began working on the film project, the Sierra Leonean civil war was big news, with images of villagers with mutilated limbs capturing the international spotlight.

Much of the cross-cultural literature on armed conflict implicitly enlists the concept of the unconscious in arguing for the long-term effects of war, whether in the trauma associated with witnessing violence and suffering loss, or in the intergenerational transmission of unresolved grievances. The dissociation model of the unconscious has gained particular currency in campaigns to show how victims may become perpetrators, enacting scenes of violence in a hypnotic replay of past violence (Herman 1992).

As our film project developed, the issue of how to represent the violence carried out by large numbers of Sierra Leonean youth

became a central concern. In Western media reports, there were two stereotypical portraits of the young rebel. The Bad Rebel was cast as consciously given over to evil and destruction; the Good Rebel was portrayed as hypnotically drawn into combat, performing acts of violence in a drug-induced state. Drugs play a role in most wars, of course, primarily as a means of enduring the horror of death and the alienating effects of military life, but our concern was with how this attribution of altered states circulated to limit exploration of the complex forces driving the war, including the motives of youth in joining the rebels and the role of global economic institutions in perpetuating the violence.

Much like Freud's concept of the preconscious, operating at the borders of consciousness through fluctuations in censorship, representing the horror of the war was less related to *accessing* images than it was in *translating* images into the realm of the speakable. The Sierra Leonean women consulting on the film project brought photos of mutilated bodies, insisting that these dramatic images of violence were vital in breaking through the defensive wall of indifference in the West. In discussing the use of footage for the film, I argued that extensive focus on mutilated civilians may arouse a sense of the extremity of the situation, but it may as readily create a sense of hopelessness about the situation.

Part of their insistence on images of mutilations and destruction, I came to learn, was that those were the only images available. Most left their country with little in the way of material goods, including photos. For many months, women in the group worked on retrieving photos from the library and from individuals in the Sierra Leonean community, with these photos serving as transitional objects in building a sense of hope. Without idealizing the past, it was important to find representations of Sierra Leonean cultural life before the war – to represent its vitality and richness as not entirely destroyed.

While Western models of reparation centre on translating inchoate, disturbing experiences into a narrative form, much of the work of refugee women and peace activists preserves something of the ineffability of the experience. Music, poetry and dance embodied the sustained goodness of the collective past, even as the destructive side of the culture was confronted through storytelling and theatre. In interviews with refugee and immigrant women, there was a rhythmic moving in and out of disturbing imagery, a vacillation between the good objects and the bad objects in the traumatic past. Musu Kanu, a Sierra Leonean refugee who came to the US after the rebel assault of 1999, helped me understand this dynamic interplay. After describing the atrocities that took place on the day her village was burned down by the rebels, she drifted off, murmuring 'I don't even want to think about it'. We sat for a while and I asked her what she ate in the bush to survive. As we talked about these very tangible aspects of survival, Kanu went on to describe how she and the other women would gather to pray. A devout Christian, Kanu drew on her faith to sustain her. But so, too, did she find strength in her female companions who fled with her to the bush, sometimes grabbing whatever children were within reach. 'We stood tall, as *women,* because, you know, when you fall, your husband will not be by your side.'

In telling the story of the Civil War, I wanted to create some holding space within the text of the film – some meaningful representations of 'good objects' in a world of overwhelming destruction – that could help viewers contain the disturbing material

presented in the film. On a political level, representations of ravaged Africans, stripped of their full humanity, serve to rationalize paternalistic interventions. As sociologist Merema Toure described it, the Western discourse on 'tragic Africa' is as potent a tool in post-colonial domination as is the image of out-of-control Africans. Whether depressed or acting out, Africa is portrayed as the perpetual adolescent, in need of European guidance until it 'matures' into Western-style democracy.

Some of the women interviewed discussed this movement between the tolerable and intolerable aspects of their situation. Bondu Mani, secretary for the women's centre in the Massakondou camp, on the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone, stressed the necessity of bringing the community together around projects. 'We have to be engaged,' she insisted, 'in order to put it at our backs. Otherwise, the trauma will never leave you.' By creating a community garden, for example, the group builds a sense of collective strength and restorative capacity. Yet Sister Catherine Dauda, director of a centre for child soldiers, insisted that 'we have to remember and understand what has happened to us. Otherwise, it will come up again and again. The elders have failed the youth, so they took up guns and went into the Bush.' Sister Catherine organized theatre groups in the refugee camps that incorporated child soldiers in scenes reenacting the war, including the mutilations. While seemingly contradictory approaches to trauma recovery, these two perspectives were part of a necessary dynamic of moving between the present and the past.

Understanding the influence of colonialism and neocolonial economic policies provided an additional holding ground for addressing what Fanon terms the 'racial distribution of guilt' (Fanon, 1967, 103). In looking for photos and video clips to use in the film, I came across early twentieth century photos of African workers who had been similarly mutilated by British bosses. These mutilations were carried out to warn workers, who laboured under slave-like conditions, of the severe penalties of resistance or sloth. In the documentary, we introduce these photo images – eerily similar to the mutilations carried out by rebels – to suggest how the war is a re-enactment of the trauma of the colonial past. This is not to suggest that there is a direct causal connection between mutilations Africans suffered at the hands of colonial powers and current expressions of violence. Rather, these images are introduced to interrupt the defensive distance created through Western moral outrage. It is not so difficult to recognize the rebels as a source of villainy, and to join hands in calling them to justice. It is more difficult, however, to bring into focus the more distant players, those with no visible blood on their hands. More difficult still is showing how these players beyond the realm of the readily visible may also be very much at the centre of the action.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of the dynamic unconscious – a focus of philosophical and scientific investigation for over a century before Freud – was not simply a response to the Western Enlightenment, with its demand for rationality and a unified self, nor was it merely an extension of Romanticism. As a concept concerned with psychic borders and latent subjectivities, the dynamic unconscious captures a wide terrain of historical struggle over divisions within the mind. The geographical displacements generated by the industrial revolution, the period of intensified colonial expansion, and the mass

movements and political instability that characterized the long period prior to and following World War I combined to shape the psychological theorizing of that period.

The integration of countervailing aspects of mind remains a daunting one because we continue to live in an alienating world, where masculine dominates over feminine, North over South, white over black. In resisting dominant forms of rationality, liberation movements have a potential affinity with psychodynamic discourses of the unconscious. The concept of the unconscious requires that we attend to experience at the margins of what is most readily noticed, and it focuses awareness on the power of repressed ideas, images, and experiences. The employment of the term invites new forms of storytelling and transgresses common sense reasoning, but the unconscious also points to the role of interpreters who intervene at the preconscious level of experience – at the threshold where the forbidden and the admissible elements of experience collide.

There are myriad social uses of the unconscious, both debilitating and creative. On the debilitating side, the historical affinity of femininity and the non-rational binds women to a symbolic order that silences them. On the creative side, the unconscious may be viewed as a heuristic, opening up unformulated experience and disallowed desires. Working between these two poles of the problem requires attention not only to the scientific status of the concept of the unconscious, but to its generative meaning as a marker of social boundaries. The threshold between conscious and unconscious is highly mediated and overdetermined. It may have less to do with concrete mental locations or mechanism, or buried memory, than it does with the shifting borders of human subjectivity within concrete, historical situations.

If the division between conscious and unconscious is conceived as too wide, theorizing such divisions may take on a religious aura, with the concept serving as an idealized container for unrealized possibilities in the social world. Or it may take the form of a paranoid gaze, registering preoccupation with a monstrous substrate in human nature, akin to original sin. But if in our theorizing we collapse the distance between discordant states of mind, or assert harmonious hierarchies with lower order functions happily supporting higher order ones, there is also a loss in the ethics of our theorizing. In mediating these dual tendencies in theories of mind, I have suggested that attending to the borders where psychic and social registers meet may take us some distance.

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