

## APARTHEID'S LOST ATTACHMENTS (1): ON PSYCHOANALYTIC READING PRACTICE

Derek Hook  
Department of Psychosocial Studies  
Birkbeck College, London  
[D.Hook@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:D.Hook@bbk.ac.uk)

&

Department of Psychology  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Johannesburg

### Abstract.

*This paper, the first of two focussed on the topic of libidinal attachments between white children and black domestic workers in narratives contributed to the Apartheid Archive Project (AAP), offers a series of methodological insights derived from a Lacanian type of psychoanalytic reading practice. A Lacanian reading practice is one which emphasizes the importance of symbolic juxtaposition, of recombining different facets of texts, and of attempting to locate what I term the “absent mediator” implied by tacit conjunctions and associations within texts. In this paper I focus particularly on a puzzling aspect shared by a series of contributions to the AAP, namely the role of animals in the narratives of white participants, which appear to emerge precisely when the question of a loving relation for a black person is posed. I argue that this narrative device is an attempt to make sense of a prospective relationship, particularly when such a relationship is effectively prohibited by the prevailing rules of interaction. In response to pressing questions of inter-racial loss and love, and in respect of an ambiguous inter-racial relationship, recourse to an animal provides a fantasmatic “solution”, a model of how to manage a relationship that otherwise difficult to understand.*

**Keywords:** *Absent mediators, Apartheid Archive, Lacan, psychoanalysis, racism*

### INTRODUCTION.

One of the unintended consequences of apartheid's massive injustices of social division and inequality was – paradoxically – the production of relations of *racial proximity*. This pinpoints one of apartheid's internal contradictions: as its white beneficiaries came increasingly to rely on the domestic labour provided by an oppressed black population, so a series of intimate white spheres – the site of the home, and more particularly, the care of children – were effectively opened up to “inter-

racial” contact. It is for this reason that, psychoanalytically, the literature discussing the relationship of white children and black-childminders (“nannies”) (Cock, 1980 & 2011; Motsei, 1990; Ally, 2009) is so crucial to an understanding of the libidinal economy of apartheid. This literature speaks to the presence of intimacy within structures of power, to the factor of affective attachments, sexual and familial alike, occurring across seemingly impassable divisions of race.

Mbembe (2008) uses the phrase “disjunctive inclusions” in his description of those figures that were, as we might put it, “included out” of the structured inequality of apartheid. His interest are close to my own, certainly inasmuch as he uses this term to refer to the ambiguous inclusions of black subjects in apartheid’s cities, such as, precisely, “black nannies” who were permitted, to live on white properties. This poses the general question of racial intimacies in apartheid, and it directs us to childhood reminiscences produced by contributors to the Apartheid Archive Project (AAP), a collaborative research undertaking that has collected and analysed a corpus of narratives on the experience of apartheid racism (see <http://www.apartheidarchive.org/site/>). The AAP aims not only to record such narratives, itself an important aim in remembering history, but also to engage thoughtfully and theoretically with the narratives. As such the AAP encourages both a commitment to personal remembering and a joint intellectual commitment to interrogating narratives rather than taking them at face value (Hook & Long, 2011).

The first of the key topics of this paper can thus be specified by means of a question: how were such “disjunctive inclusions” managed, psychologically, by children, and, more precisely, by white children in particular?<sup>1</sup> A second key objective follows on from the first, as its pragmatic methodological consequence: how we might contribute to a form of psychoanalytic discourse analysis suitable to the task of analysing narrative texts of apartheid. It is in reference to the emerging area of Lacanian discourse analysis (see Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2003; Parker, 2005; Pavón Cuéllar, 2010; Neill, *in press*) that I hope to make a contribution. Before moving on to the first of the narratives that I want to consider, it helps to provide a little more detail on the scope of the narratives, and how they were collected. The AAP is comprised of a group of some 25 local and international researchers from a variety of backgrounds. All of the researchers have themselves submitted narratives to the project. Narratives have also been solicited from other academics, students and members of the South African public. The AAP offers an unusual richness, both in terms of who has contributed to the *corpus* of narratives and in view of the heterogeneity of the researchers writing about the archive. All working from the same bank of narratives, the researchers have “offered a range of analyses aimed at understanding apartheid history and its sometimes enacted, sometimes denied resonance in the present” (Hook & Long, 2011: 3). Let us turn then to one of the texts prepared for inclusion in the AAP, a text of particular relevance given our current concerns:

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<sup>1</sup> My approach may be criticized for prioritizing a white a perspective. It is worthwhile stressing two issues here. Firstly, I took my lead from narrative material contained within the Apartheid Archive, where white childhood reminiscences of apartheid featured prominently. Secondly, given the circumstances of apartheid in which white children were frequently cared for by black domestic workers, and where many black children would have had only infrequent access to white adults, it is unsurprising that such white experiences should be disproportionately featured in the material.

*A man named Dyson worked for my parents. He was affectionate and good-willed man, generous, and he was loved by the family. I remember him always at work in the kitchen. He was considered a good man, trustworthy. In the racist codes of the time he was a "good African" by which was meant that he was faithful, self-sacrificing and big-hearted. He was no doubt, in colonial parlance, a "kitchen boy". I guess that for significant periods in my first years I was under his care. Perhaps there were carefree times before an awareness of race came into play and I was genuinely effusive and natural with him. I can only hope so. I don't know how and when a change occurred – even for sure that one did – but I do remember at a certain point becoming excessively formal with him, avoidant, distanced, as if a type of enacted superiority and distance had become necessary.*

*Try as I might I cannot think of touching him, of any loving physical contact, although I am sure that there must have been. This still puzzles me: at what point was it that I became rigid, aware of the need to keep myself apart, to be aloof. These were the appropriate behavioural codes, the implicit rules of contact that I had assimilated. I was aware that Dyson, despite his smiling and forgiving nature had registered the change in my behaviour and was, I think, saddened by it, yet nonetheless respectful of the stance I had taken.*

*The time came when the decision was made to leave Zimbabwe. It was a difficult parting; new homes had to be found for the dogs – a particular focus of tears and disbelief for me on the eve of our departure – and a reliable family needed to take over the mortgage of the house that couldn't be sold under such short notice. The most awful moment in all of this for me, the most poignant and irreversible, was to see Dyson crying, distraught, seemingly inconsolable, on the day we left. Worse yet than this heartbreaking feeling for me was the sense that I could not now break the façade and run up to him and hug him goodbye. I needed now to maintain the self-conscious role of distance and coolness that I had imposed.*

*Part of what shames me about this episode is that I went beyond the explicit prescriptions governing racial interaction; I enacted a more extreme type of coldness and detachment than was required. The distance I affected could not have been derived from my mother, who always seemed far more at ease, natural in her interactions with Africans. My lack of demonstrativeness may simply have been a case of not knowing how. Not just a willed aloofness, but perhaps also a sense of simply not being able – certainly not within the codes of white racist masculinity – to express love for Dyson. That is what continues to disturb: the fact that I was responsible for this. I had not merely mimed a "white man's bearing", that is, a deportment of racial superiority, I had taken it upon myself to exaggerate it, to exceed what may have been expected of me by my parents and grand-parents. The words "I loved Dyson" seem both historically true and yet not subjectively real; factual, and yet difficult to personalize. What is far easier to imagine is that my parents had loved Dyson. This poses the question: where in my childhood unconscious did I place Dyson? Did I ever question his role – as surely I must have – as a member of my family ...? An uncle ...? Was Dyson my "other daddy" (conceivable perhaps as the good, ever-present daddy relative to the strict white daddy who seemed at times less approachable)?*

*Was there ever a time that I addressed him as such? How would I have been corrected? What other faux pas might I and other white children in such racially-charged situations have made on the way to assimilating the rules of racialized existence? More significant perhaps was the fact that such mistakes - so I would guess - were very infrequently made. Perhaps if and when they did happen, they were so vigorously repressed that they were never repeated. Perhaps this was the missing antecedent to my reserve and distance in respect of Dyson – a faux pas of the heart? Why is it, however, that I feel so sure that I never made any such mistake with him?*

It is worthwhile offering a few brief analytical comments on the above text. There is an echo of a key signifier in the first few lines; the word “good” is repeatedly attached to the figure of Dyson (this is even more apparent in the longer version of the text from which the extract is drawn). Psychoanalytically we may pose that there is a form of idealization occurring here which functions both perhaps as a defence (against knowing Dyson, against a more fully-rounded, non-stereotypical view of him ...?) and as an element in the racist logic of “one good native”, that is the praise of the rare trustworthy black man who is the exception that proves the rule.

More immediately evident perhaps is the *indecision* exemplified in the text, the vacillation between direct assertions and equivocation. The author claims not to have known how and when a change occurred, even if one did, despite going on to discuss, in definitive terms, the change itself (“I do remember ...”). The framing of key postulates in terms of questioning, doubt, even negation is, psychoanalytically, a potential indication of repressed material. There are many such examples in the text: “perhaps there were carefree times ...”; “I cannot think of touching him”, “I never made any such mistake with him”, and so on. The tacit contradictions in the text – which, like much of white post-apartheid writing adopts the genre of a confessional (Nuttall, 2010) – are instructive. Take for example the repeated argument that the author may not have known how, or was simply unable, to express affection for Dyson, despite the suggestion that at an earlier time this had indeed been possible. Such evasions are then followed by an admission of responsibility for “racist deportment”. One of course needs to allow the author the latitude to develop and (re)consider a position within the course of a narrative. That being said, the movement of the text between these subject-positions – as determined by, or agent of racism – suggests that a “get-out clause” has been retained, that the issue at hand (a confessed responsibility) has not as of yet been fully resolved.

Notable too are the apparent *absences* on display, particularly apropos the subject’s apparent love for Dyson, qualified as not real but true, factual but not personalized, and seemingly delegated to his parents, all of these are potential markers of repression. Here the gaps, the missing pieces in the text, speak powerfully. As in the case of negative hallucination, there is a strong declaration that something *is not there*, yet this apparently non-existent object nonetheless needs to be carefully avoided, denied. Such conspicuous evasions point to the prospect of a latent belief. In the same vein, we might ask whether the question: “did I ever call him [daddy] ...?” reveals something of fantasy, which is not of course to assert that the child ever said anything of the sort, but merely to aver that such a relation had been the topic of fantasy. That is to say, this relationship begged a response, a degree of imaginative speculation. It posed the question of how the subject might understand himself relative to the opaque social

relationship he is presented with. Such a relationship in which both familial bond and racialized “master” and “subordinate” roles are invoked, is difficult to comprehend, it begs a type of formalization which fantasy might provide.

A further point of interest concerns something of only peripheral importance at first glance, the author’s brief mention of the dogs that will be left behind. This is clearly a narrative laden with affect, shot through with questions of emotional expression and reserve; nonetheless this is the single moment in the text where the narrator gives his emotions free reign (“a particular focus of tears”). We might risk the interpretation that what cannot be openly shown toward Dyson is expressed elsewhere, in the form of a substitute object. An additional line of questioning is sparked here, one which points to a puzzling aspect shared by a number of the narratives contributed by white South Africans. What is the role of the animals that are so frequently introduced into these texts; what is their narrative function; at what precise point do they appear within the narrative?

### **BRIDGING DISJUNCTURE.**

In earlier discussions of psychoanalytic discourse analysis (Hook, 2011), I have tried to emphasize how it may be necessary to employ a matrix of latent meanings to make guesses at what is “repressed” within a given utterance. There are of course many ways in which we may go about doing this; many of the suggestions I made in respect of the above narrative aim to develop just such an array of latent meanings. One of the richest possible sources of methodological inspiration for such an undertaking is, of course, Freud’s (1900) approach to dream analysis. While a detailed mining of the various “methodological” principles offered in **The interpretation of dreams** for the particular purposes of Lacanian discourse analysis has not yet, unfortunately, been undertaken, Lapping’s (2011) elaboration of guidelines for psychoanalytic social research has yielded a series of important methodological suggestions. Discussing how Freud’s idea of the overdetermination of images, symbols and signifiers in dreams may be applied to discourse analysis, Lapping (2011: 68) notes that “details that appear as insignificant or as having little psychic intensity may in fact be covering over the most intense psychical ... forces”. She (ibid: 71) stresses the need to identify associative tugs against dominant narratives, and emphasizes the importance of “attending to elements that connote symbolic relations outside the linear narratives of a dominant discourse”. Crucially, she also remarks: [A]pparently cohesive accounts cover over a set of more complicated relations, and they pose questions that invert the obviousness of what they are seeing ... [D]ominant discourse is unsettled by the construction of a symbolic juxtaposition (ibid: 72).

How might we expand upon this methodological speculation? More precisely, how might we utilize a strategy of symbolic juxtaposition to trace the unconscious of a text? One answer: by staggering two or more seemingly discontinuous elements within a given narrative. The idea of overlaying apparently disconnected scenes as an interpretative tactic is something familiar to students of psychoanalysis. A personal example suffices. I started a session (as an analysand) complaining about a work colleague who had, I thought, unfairly snubbed me. I discussed some other banal events of the previous day, and then suddenly recalled an incident in a prison where I used to work as an honorary psychotherapist. A prisoner had recently told me how he never lost his temper. Should someone do him an injustice he would bide his time, wait

till the person was totally at ease, and then, when he least expected it, stab him in the back. No great analytical *nous* is needed to pose an interpretative hypothesis here: I, presumably, wanted to do just this to the work colleague: to stab him violently in the back.

This is of course a crude example, and the tentative reading I have suggested remains open to different interpretations. One might speculate that the desire in question was far more paradoxical or masochistic in nature, that, for example, I may have wished to be stabbed in the back. There certainly is room to go further here, particularly if we take seriously the idea that a successful interpretation should surprise the analysand. The assumption here of course is that a successful interpretation touches precisely on repressed material, on ideas that a subject disavows, that they cannot “own” as pertaining to them (hence the surprise factor). The above interpretation might be seen as less than surprising – although it did in fact produce a mild shock in me – as in need of further, more developed interpretation.

Here it is worth noting that, from a Lacanian perspective attentive to the role of the signifier, the verbal formula “stab him in the back” is an idiom with various metaphoric extensions. This formula – an effective shorthand for betrayal – could be the persistent signifier underlying the generation of a dream image or, as in this case, the seemingly spontaneous recollection of a memory. It is worth emphasizing the poly-vocal, overdetermined and, indeed, *re-interpretable*, quality of the signifier in question so as to avoid the pattern of formulaic interpretations that the worst of psychoanalysis is infamous for. I am thinking of course of the endless regurgitation of a finite series of conceptual motifs – castration anxiety and penis envy would be two classic and not unproblematic Freudian examples – and superimposition of a series of caricatured themes as explanatory scripts for virtually any situation.<sup>2</sup> The Lacanian emphasis on *signifiers* rather than merely symbols would help then move us away from any one single reductive sexual reading of the formula in question (the sexual connotation of “to be stabbed” is clear), without of course definitively ruling it out.

What the stabbing example brings home - if for the moment we credit the first interpretation as valid (“I want to stab my colleague in the back”) - is the need to attend to the *form* of what is being said. Unconscious desire, that is to say, is never simply stated, afforded first-person propositional form. It appears instead as the result of the combination of elements, as an implicit but not obvious relation between them. Leader (2003: 44) puts this as follows: “when a wish cannot be expressed in a proposition (‘I want to kill daddy’), it will take the form of a relation, a relation in which the ‘I’ is missing”. This is one way of understanding Lacan’s (1992: 126) insistence that “half-saying is the internal law of any kind of enunciation of the truth”, namely that we need to ask what hypothetical idea emerges “in between” two apparently unrelated narrative fragments once juxtaposed.

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<sup>2</sup> It could be countered that what makes these motifs such effective interpretative tools is the resonance they have over so wide a variety of surface phenomena. In short, echoes of such concepts might be used not so much as interpretations, but as mechanisms to prompt the flow of further material.

We might offer this as a methodological maxim for psychoanalytically-informed types of discourse analysis: treat the effect of intercalation – that is, the posited insertion of an implicit connection, a posed relation between two disconnected narrative elements – as a modality of unconscious expression. Freud's description of dream-pairs proves a helpful means of expanding upon this idea. If a dream-wish has as its content some forbidden behaviour towards an individual, says Freud, "then that person may appear in the first dream undisguised, while the behaviour is only faintly disguised" (1932: 27). In the second dream however we would expect that "[t]he behaviour will be openly shown ... but the person made unrecognizable ... [or] some indifferent person substituted for him" (ibid: 27). Commenting on this passage, Leader (2003) points out that Lacan's thesis, following the influence of Lévi-Strauss, advances upon Freud's. It is not simply then the case that a forbidden thought would be disguised, hidden via means of substitutions of subject, object or indeed act itself – although presumably one would want to keep such a possibility open – it is rather that the forbidden thought "only exists ... as a slippage between the one and the other" (Leader, 2003: 44). Leader (ibid: 44) continues: "A man has two dreams ... In one, he loses a blood-soaked tooth and stares at it in absolute horror. In the other, his penis is being examined in a medical test and no problems are found. Neither of the dreams represents castration as such, but it is in the relation between the two that the reference is to castration is situated."

Leader's conclusion? "When something cannot be expressed as a meaningful proposition, it will take the form of a relation between two sets of elements" (2003: 47). There is a more direct way of making the same point, as applied to the task of discourse analysis. When confronted then by an instance of narrative disjuncture – or, clinically, by a sequence of ostensibly disconnected thoughts - we should ask: what implicit link between these elements has been "subtracted"? Or, put slightly differently: what is the absent mediator which would need to be reconstructed if the connection between scenes is to be understood? The factor of "what is not there" is hence vital, much as is the case in Freud's famous (1919) discussion of beating fantasies, also discussed by Leader (2000), where the various permutations offered by the patient ("my father is beating a child", "a child is being beaten", "my mother is beating a child") never includes the crucial formulation "I am being beaten by my father", which of course, pinpoints the unconscious fantasy. Freud is only able to arrive at this missing element via a construction, that is, by positing what is the missing formula in a sequence might be, a formula which can be deduced from but is by no means contained within the variants which precede and follow it.

Let us now turn to a second Apartheid Archive narrative, one in which the effect of narrative disjunction is apparent:

*It is a lazy Sunday afternoon ... I am bored, and I need to ask Phyllis something. I burst into her room. The door was half shut I think, but I have no respect for her privacy, there are no boundaries between her space and mine. The scene on the bed is a surprise to me, I live in the sexually repressive days of apartheid. These scenes are "cut" from the movies that I watch at the cinema. The beautiful tall man enmeshed with Phyllis becomes the hero of my novel written into a lined exercise book in the long hours of the weekend and evenings before lights out.*

*Of course I am the heroine, but I am myself, not Phyllis, a bit older though as I want to be enveloped in his arms too. We are having a relationship across the "colour bar"; he is a young activist, organising ... a stone-throw away from where I live. It is 1976, he is becoming increasingly politically active. He is a leader. I am in love with him, and of course I am against apartheid. He is murdered, like so many other young men of the time, at the brutal hands of those masquerading as public protectors. I survive, to join the struggle, to tell the tale. Phyllis also plays a role in the book, a small part. I am ashamed now for walking into her room.*

*Notions of "us" and "them", difference and "otherness" are central to my early constructions of the world. But it is complicated. The community I grow up in is so tightly woven, based on notions of a shared history, religion, culture, we only know each other. I am at preschool with the same children that I matriculate with. I hardly ever meet or even speak with a member of an "other" community. Of course apartheid and other discriminatory practices are woven into the fabric of our day-to-day lives, but my primary sense of difference is about who is part of my community and who is not. There are always Black women living with us. Not a part of the family, but living on the premises of our home. They perform the submissive role of servant, yet I know they have power too. Since my mother is absent, all of us know where we can get our comfort, enfolded in the large warmth of our "nanny's" arms.*

*In our house, in an area reserved then for white people only, there is a separate unit for domestic workers attached to the house. Two rooms with a bathroom between them. Phyllis lives in one of those rooms. Besides my sister, she is my favourite person in the world in those years – she is young, beautiful, full of fun. When she is angry with us, she knocks us on the head with her third finger, it is so painful we shriek, but it passes very quickly, unlike some other pains I know. She brought the chicken to our house, which became our pet as it raced around our garden clucking. When it disappeared one day, only to reappear on our dinner table, my long commitment to vegetarianism began!*

*Sometimes, as we rough and tumble, which I catch a hint of the sweet-sour scent of Phyllis's addiction to alcohol. She also died young, just like my hero, ultimately a consequence of the same violence. I found this out much later. I never knew her story. I never asked her. Just wrote my own.*

The narrator in the above extract bursts in on a sexual scene, a scene which prompts an imaginative foray into Phyllis's world. The aspect of fantasy seems in this respect clear: the description has a noticeably cinematic aspect ("I am the heroine"), it is clearly indexed as fictitious (he becomes "the hero of my novel"), and it maintains a masturbatory quality. This projection of the author into an "other scene" appears however to stop short of identification. The author sees herself, a little older, as the beautiful tall man's lover, and plainly states: "I am myself, not Phyllis".

Crucial also is the element of appropriation; the beautiful man is now her lover and Phyllis is reduced to a minor character ("Phyllis also plays a role in the book, a small part"). That is to say, the predominant mode of identification here seems to be the hysterical identification with the place of another which is to be distinguished from identifications based on a loving bond that entails an internalization or replication of the



other. To reiterate the elementary psychoanalytic qualification: hysterical identifications are essentially opportunistic; one can be wholly indifferent to the figure of identification, who proves merely the vessel of identification by means of which the identifying subject attains a desired object or position. Phyllis, in short, becomes the imaginative vehicle that enables the narrator to live out the romantic vision of a heroic woman against apartheid. It is via Phyllis and her lover that the narrator becomes able “to join the struggle, to tell the tale”.

The mid-section of the narrative provides some of the socio-historical context (a “tightly woven” white community in which “we only know each other”) explaining why difference becomes such a fantasmatic (and indeed sexual) preoccupation. What also becomes apparent here is the necessity of a mediator – an object of sorts – to manage a relationship between the narrator and the black domestic worker. This is a relationship which is both intimate (“all of us know where we can get our comfort”) and yet nonetheless contractual (“They perform the submissive role of servant”); it is simultaneously “familial” and yet decidedly not. I made this point at the outset of the paper, that the conditions of apartheid led to such contradictions, the prospect of loving attachments (“comfort, enfolded in the ... warmth of our nanny’s arms”, “... she is my favourite person in the world”), indeed, even of erotic attraction, occurring within a oppressive, hierarchical, racially-structured social relations.

The problem that is constituted by the relationship with Phyllis is underscored by the narrator’s comment that her “primary sense of difference is about who is part of my community and who is not”. This is a puzzling relationship to make sense of. Phyllis, who is both a part and not a part of the narrator’s family (or, as she puts it, of the “premises of our home”) is difficult to place in the given set of symbolic familial roles. I should add here the obvious qualification that the nature of this relationship and Phyllis’s potentially ambiguous status within it were of course very well defined within the framework of apartheid itself which provided the discourse and associated social norms of “nannies”, “domestic workers”. As many of the Apartheid Archive narratives make abundantly clear, apartheid rationality was thoroughly ingrained within white South African children who understood their prerogatives all too well (as in the narrator’s admission: “I have no respect for her privacy”). Crucial to grasp however is that apartheid ideology nonetheless exhibited clear social contradictions that could not always be explained away, and that inevitably sparked a type of fantasy, which we can understand as an attempt to make sense of incongruous social roles and identities.

These considerations go some way perhaps to explaining what at first seems an anomalous element in the unfolding narrative: the chicken that becomes the family pet and that abruptly turns up on the dinner-table, igniting thus the narrator’s commitment to vegetarianism. Although this may appear a relatively arbitrary component of the narrative, there is, as Freud warns in respect of dream interpretation, much of significance in this seemingly trivial element. The chicken is a *pet*, a designation that places child and animal in appropriate domestic roles and that affords a familiar and thus stable familial “object-relation”. The chicken is owned and yet – so it would seem – loved. There is a proprietorial relationship in place that has not precluded the development of ties of affection. The text implies that the narrator was saddened by the loss of the pet, although this loss nonetheless benefits her. The animal serves an

important purpose even in its demise: it becomes the basis of the narrator's ideological commitment to vegetarianism.

The link between Phyllis and the chicken is not only metonymic (the chicken is an extension of Phyllis who "brought [it] ... to the house"). "Phyllis also died young" the text tells us, introducing an ambiguity: who might the "also" refer to (the young hero no doubt, but also, given its proximity in the text, the chicken?). There is a parallel between Phyllis and the pet here in view not only of their sudden deaths, but in terms of how each benefits the identity of the narrator; each is an object of appropriation. As noted above, Phyllis provides the materials of a story that the narrator crafts about herself, a story which would appear to be crucial to her formative political identity (as "against apartheid"). This, obviously enough, is a non-reciprocal and an unequal borrowing. Phyllis provides the imaginative basis for the narrator's story about herself; she becomes essentially a device in the narrator's own self-fashioning, her own perspective, her own "real" story never being involved ("I never asked her. Just wrote my own").

What does such an associative link tell us? Is this a case of the disguise-by-way-of-substitution that Freud discusses in dream pairs? Or are the narrative elements in a Lacanian manner as suggestive of an unconscious idea that exists only as a possible intercalation between components? The task then is to consider what the result would be of superimposing these narrative pieces. Such a conjunction, I think, provides one way of telling us something about the relationship to Phyllis that cannot otherwise be admitted. As is by now evident, Phyllis is "owned" by the family, the narrator has certain "rights of privilege" over her as a condition of such an unequal relationship. Phyllis cares for, gives happiness and love to these children, yet seems ultimately to be discarded by the white family ("she ... died young ... I found this out much later") who appear to have known little about her life ("I never knew her story").

This is not to cast doubt on the love felt by the narrator for Phyllis. The affective dimension of these relations should not be dismissed; there was no doubt a degree of quite genuine love, although, then again, one can love quite sincerely in a fashion that consolidates a relation of condescension, as one loves a child, or indeed, an animal. We might say then, extending this point and following the implication of overlaying of overlaying these narrative components, that Phyllis's relation to the family is akin, in many ways, to that of a pet. Shefer's (2012) discussion of black domestic service in white (post)apartheid households highlights many of these issues. Domestic service, she notes, was a prime site not only for racist ideology, but of black submissiveness (a point affirmed also by Cock, 1980; Motsei, 1990; Ally, 2009). Such domestic practices, in short, allow for the engendering of "normative white privilege and authority through the ... control the white child is granted in relation to Black adults" (Shefer, 2012: 308). Echoing the point made above, Shefer (2012) observes that while in a fundamentally unequal sense the domestic worker is, nominally, a member of the family, she remains nonetheless, "owned" and controlled by adults and children alike.

One might be tempted to draw a line under our analysis at this point, concluding that our investigations have led us to an "unconscious of the text" that is summarily racist inasmuch as it extends a longstanding colonial trope in which black person and animal are equated. It is true that the animal-human link is, even if only implicitly, apparent in

both of the narratives cited here; both may be critiqued as extending a racist theme on exactly this basis. That being said, such an apparent finding does not exhaust all that can be said, psychoanalytically at least, about these texts.

It proves profitable to compare the two narratives featured here, both of which, like a number of the narratives contributed by white South Africans, share an initially puzzling feature: the sudden appearance of an animal in their discussions of racism. Although the animal in the first narrative appears only briefly, it has, arguably, a crucial role to play as a mediator, a means of linking the white and black characters in the narratives. Interestingly, the animal in the two above texts, despite obvious contextual differences, occurs at a similar moment in the narrative. It appears when the question of a powerful affective and loving relation for a black person is posed for the white subject. More importantly perhaps – especially for a Lacanian approach that does not prioritize affects over symbolic considerations – an animal emerges when the difficulty, indeed, the *impossibility*, of a certain symbolic relationship becomes pressing. The problem is precisely that of symbolic positioning, of how to make sense of a prospective relationship – or find an analogue for it – particularly when such a relationship is not socially viable, is indeed effectively prohibited by the prevailing rules of interaction.

What is so notable in the above narratives is not only that the libidinal relation in question appears to lack an obvious framework of comprehension, but that a material component is involved as a means of mediating the symbolic relation. There is an effective adjunct to the personal relationship, an “operator” of sorts which provides an effective frame of comprehension for the relation in question. The spontaneous recourse to an animal enables the narrators, however temporarily, to bridge an impasse. In response to pressing questions of inter-racial loss and love, and in respect of an ambiguous inter-racial relationship, which is as much that of familial tenderness as that of effective “ownership”, this operator provides an answer. This makes for an interesting experiment, to ask how the given “animal mediator” presents a solution of sorts for the problems evinced in each of the situations. The puzzle of the ambiguity inherent in the relation with a loved domestic worker results in a tacit equation: Phyllis–as-pet. In the first narrative, we might venture that the loss of the dog provides the paradigm for how to deal with the loss of Dyson. What is intriguing about this hypothesis – perhaps as in the case of Winnicott’s notion of “healing dreams” – is that the unconscious labours to provide a solution.

I would like, before closing, to include a few further reflexive comments on the methodological undertaking attempted above. My aim in analysing the foregoing material is not to pin the charge of racism on the above authors. It pays here to refer to Silverman’s (2008: 124) comment that to judge someone’s unconscious fantasy ultimately misses the point, for such ideas would not have been repressed “if they were not as abhorrent to that person’s consciousness as they are to our own”. Furthermore, a discourse analysis is by definition focussed on the broader discursive currents animated within the language productions of the speaker, not on the singular speaker themselves. My objective is to show how the text might be said to speak beyond itself, to extract something that is *implied* but *not explicitly said* by the text. These methodological provisos in place, it is nonetheless necessary to stress again the problematic epistemological status of what I am asserting of the text (take for example, the extrapolation that, in respect of the third narrative, Phyllis’s relation to the family is

akin to that of a pet). This idea is nowhere stated in the text; it cannot as such be ascribed to the author. The argument could just as well be made that this idea exists more *in the mind of the interpreter* than in the author of the text. As Pavón Cuéllar (2010) warns, this is often the lure of imaginary understanding in attempts at discourse analysis, that one's "findings" are essentially a projection *of the analyst's own* reading.

We may offer a slightly different perspective on the same issue, by stressing how interpretation itself often engenders an impasse. In Lacanian terms, we could say that interpretation is, in many instances, precisely what causes the unconscious to close. This, more precisely, is a twofold problem concerning both the heavy-handed imposition of the discourse of psychoanalysis and the factor of the over-eager interpretations of the analyst which impedes the flow of material. This is a point well made by Lapping (2011) in her exploration of what Lacan (1991: 228) has in mind with his counter-intuitive notion that within psychoanalysis "there is only one resistance, the resistance of the analyst". She (2011) crystallizes Lacan's underlying point: resistance is the product of the analyst's interpretation. Although of course the situation of text analysis is different, the same conclusion may be drawn: inertias of analysis, resistances in analysing, are typically the result of the analyst's impositions. The clinical strategy here would be to align oneself with whatever opens the horizon of further interpretations, "to bring this desire into existence", to encourage and facilitate its expression, in often differing and multiple forms, rather than close it down by virtue of the need of the analyst to impose authority, mastery, understanding.

To read for the "unconscious" of a text is then perpetually to risk "wild analysis". Textual interpretations of this (psychoanalytic) order are potentially ethically problematic, and not only for the reason that they very often are more a function *of the reader* than of the discourse of the text itself. Such interpretative attempts utilize a set of clinical strategies for material over which the reader has no clinical warrant. If such interpretations were to be utilized in the clinical context they should not – I would hope – take the form of definitive declarations on the part of the analyst. If such an interpretative association were to be eluded to, it would presumably be hinted at far more gently, enigmatically perhaps, in such a way that the analysand could take it up, respond to it. This then poses a series of ethical challenges for the prospective use of Lacanian discourse analysis, challenges that need be considered and responded to within the life of any given research project.

#### **DESIRE WITHOUT END.**

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer a comment on the second narrative cited above which responds to the earlier distinction between Freud's theory of dream-pair substitutions and the Lévi-Strauss idea (1963) that one needs to look for *a relation between elements*. What emerges in the above text is not simply a case of substitution. Yes, there are a series of telling parallels between Phyllis and the pet, and questioning what such a substitution might mean or imply would perhaps be a useful analytical exercise. As in "stabbing in the back" episode cited earlier, such an initial substitution (the prisoner's actions as my own desired actions) opened things up, it enabled further questioning of what might be repressed. Other possible extrapolations of desire were made possible. To fix upon a single substitution as the key would, very possibly, have closed down additional interpretative possibilities; my own possible desire to be "stabbed in the back" would not have come to light in this way. A further interpretative

leap was required here; the initial substitution was just the springboard for a hypothesis that required elements of both apparently disconnected narrative components, but that ultimately proved greater than the sum of their parts.

Levi-Strauss's (1963) emphasis on the *relation between elements* within the study of myths proves so important to psychoanalysis because it suits an engagement with the over-determined nature of psychical material. Levi-Strauss famously asserted that there is no one totalizing version of the Oedipus myth; there are only variants, and the only regularity we can trace within the matrix of versions we might plot is that of certain types of relations between components. The link to the work of psychoanalysis seems clear: the prospects of re-interpretation of any over-determined psychical material means that there is never one singular, triumphant interpretation. This provides an important ethical guideline for Lacanian discourse analysis: we do an injustice to the complexity of the material in attempting to extract a single over-arching message.

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