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## Afterword

Sam Gerson

*“Something occurred inside of him then, something mysterious and definitive that uprooted him from his own time and carried him adrift through an unexplored region of his memory”.*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Ours is a fragile existence; and forever, we live in the wake of this knowledge. We are all surrounded and saturated with personal, familial, cultural, and historical pasts that propel us into the future—time simultaneously receding and shaping the form of our experience. Hurting along in the anything but linear trajectories of time, we move within the constraints of our finite bodies and journey within the limitlessness of our imagination. Throughout, we engage with essences that evade material presence, and yet remain continuously formative of our being.

The essays in this volume represent a project replete with paradox, as each author attempts to capture this enduring presence of the absent in our lives. Their work creates a lexicon that illuminates those nuances of lived experience that cannot be easily relegated to the domains of reality, fantasy, or dream. Throughout, we are reminded that our hearts, and minds, and souls often inhabit locales, times, and sensibilities that are felt as profoundly real, while simultaneously eluding current representation and habitation. These are the ephemeral essences that haunt us even as we may welcome their company—these are our ghosts, forever and everywhere, filling time and space, and that are both the shadows and the light of our existence. These are the ineffable presences of absences that, however elusive, are known viscerally and that leave us feeling touched by something untouchable. In their often unbidden emergence, the revenants of the past signal the inchoate and the unsettled in our existence, the captures that dislocate us from our familiar domains and sensibilities.

Indeed, it may be this potential state of disruption that most troubles our comfort and creates the haunting inventions that populate the emptiness, articulate our fear, and provide meaning and continuity in the void.

The multiple forms and functions of ghostly presences, and their ubiquitous existence across ages and cultures, may each signify a unique amalgam of danger and of safety. As felt or as fantasized, as myth or as metaphor, ghosts may be invoked to create meaning when belief is threatened with dissolution. They emerge from an abyss, from the gaps between life and death, from the fissures of bodies, between sensibilities of liveliness and deadness, escaping the dimensions of past and future time, lurking in shadows between darkness and light as they float between heaven and hell and promise a potential transit between despair and hope.

When faith begins to evaporate into the ether, ghosts may fill the absences with purpose. The ghosts that haunt also carry promise as they evoke both destruction and survival—they signal the impoverishments of traumatic loss as well as the sustenance of re-creation. And, as such, they may herald a morphing of memory into novel movement as the spirits of the past are awakened and, by their insistent claims to remember, arouse us from the illusory stillness of our sleep. In their spectral existence, ghosts may be imagined as inhabiting the realms between Eros and Thanatos.

Entering this vast territory, and anchored in the breadth and depths of psychoanalytic history, theory, and practice, the authors of this volume have all responded to the demands of the “undead” to be heard and they have joined in a quest to give voice to these forbidden, yet not forgotten, claims of the past. The clinical and historical material of this set of essays moves through the project of recognition and reclamation of ghostly presences by traversing four major yet intertwined realms. First are issues related to mourning, and, in particular, the challenges of mourning the ruptures in experience that are deeply etched in our patients, in ourselves, in our psychoanalytic traditions, and in the world as a consequence of traumatic loss and the dehumanization. Second, are the intriguing yet mysterious phenomena whereby unresolved loss, and the remnants of all the losses that cannot find resolution, are manifest in the psychological dynamics of future generations. Third, is how this transmission of trauma across generations can be mitigated, and even transformed, through new forms of therapeutic witnessing. And fourth is the cumulative impact of histories of injustice on all who would pause and reflect on the terrors and triumphs

In all of these domains, the authors arrived at their creative expression only after having entered into the lives and histories of their subjects in ways that could only be accomplished through their own steadfast availability to be startled, disturbed, and moved by the emergence of their own (and that of the psychoanalytic profession’s), sequestered pasts. The editors captured this compelling project when they wrote that “Ghosts haunt analyst and analyst, participating in impasses and uncanny experiences in the countertransference and in the transference. While more traditional spiritual practices involving hauntings seek to expel ghosts and demons, psychoanalysis and psychotherapies – drawing on trauma work – rather seek to have ghosts readmitted and repatriated (p. 9; Harris, Kalb, & Klebanoff).”

This transformation of the gravitational pull of ghostly presences into a livable history and a creative future is a truly radical endeavor; one that requires the courage of another person who chooses to remain available in the midst of the unspeakable horrors and the numbing ennui of uninhabitable zones of experience. The process of becoming a living presence, which may draw the other from their netherworlds, inevitably involves inviting their unspeakable realms to stimulate one’s own ghostly presences, and, in that resonance, to find a way to remain engaged, a way to hold on through the storms and the doldrums. And then, together, to come to know the old in a new way.

The perils and promise of active and therapeutic witnessing that I am sketching out here is most poignantly conveyed in the clinical work described by the authors in this book. Each vignette is an eloquent and inspiring testament to the awesome responsibility and reward of remaining present in the haunted fields of absence. And each of the quotations below is an exemplar of dedicated, live witnessing:

I was pulled into Sophie’s netherworld early on in treatment, where time and space were occluded, and we floated along together in a morass of melancholia (Klebanoff, p.45)

My own unformulated loss, and its attendant shame, collided with Frank’s desperate pleas to be held and deeply understood in his despairing depths. (Ferguson, p.76)

To create a live analytic third . . . I would have to lead the way, remembering and acknowledging my own ghosts before Aaron could begin thinking about his. (Feldman, p. )

The shadow of loss that fell across my life because it fell across my mother's had not been fully nameable for me, leaving me both inside and outside of it. It sensitized me to the trauma and shame the women I work with experience, but it also intensified my concerns about intrusion and trespass. (Kraemer & Steinberg, p. 70)

When she calls me she is calling out to some remembered universe of the human, in which there is the possibility of a living human bond. She calls in the possibility that she can be alive. (Grand, p. 134)

In these therapeutic engagements, ghostly hauntings are navigated, their origins and sequella are known, and the terror or numbness they evoked is altered into recognizable and habitable affect and memory through the enlivening presence of an other who exists as a witnessing third to the traumatized person and to the unbearable event.

Haunted histories affect institutions and cultures no less than they do individuals. And the excavation of the buried but undead phantoms in the development of psychoanalysis requires a similar willingness to become deeply engaged, both emotionally and intellectually, with that which was both impossible to fully permit and impossible to completely forget. Indeed, it is a voyage infused with the "uncanny." Freud (1919) described the uncanny as being "in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (p. 241).

Freud's portrait of the uncanny should be extended from the individual to include those that are embedded in the political choices, as well as the psychological dynamics, of the founders of psychoanalysis and of the traditions and practices that evolved from these origins. Reclaiming the neglected, banished, and devalued contributors to our field requires that current adherents acknowledge the harms of exclusion practiced by their forebears, so that its legacy is not a shadow darkening our contemporary practices but acts as a light illuminating paths away from hierarchical and prejudicial organizational ethics. Yet, it must also be acknowledged that contending with the force of the group to silence and obscure that which is threatening requires a similar courage to that of the clinician who deigns to enter the realms of a patient's repressions. As Butler, in his contribution in this volume put it: "The group elicits a fear of becoming a phantom to oneself. It elicits a fear of becoming a no-body engulfed by the vastness of

the intangible group skin . . . Bearing witness to the trauma of the group requires facing such fear" (p. 43).

And in this process of bearing witness, be it with patient or institution, it is well for us to hold in mind that such acts constitute the well-being of the witness as well as of the witnessed. Each participates in the creative act of altering the hauntings of the past into a base from which development may proceed—and so each, witness and witnessed, partakes in the project Leowald (1960) so aptly described as the movement of ghosts into ancestors.

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