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**The Grief that Affords us a Polis:
Remembrance, Amnesty and the Work of Mourning**

Introduction

What is not remembered is the serpent in the garden of one's dreams.

—James Baldwin

This is the faith from which we start
Men shall know commonwealth again
From bitter searching of the heart.

—Leonard Cohen

A nearly ubiquitous and endless agon between remembrance and forgetting plagues the contemporary polity. There is hardly a conflict—violent or latent—in the world today that is not fueled in part by insistent remembrance of historical grievance. From Belfast to Baghdad to Jerusalem to New Orleans, historical wounds have such salience for political struggle that the very coherence of *the past* is cast into doubt. In countries that have undergone a recent transition from autocratic rule, there has been an explosion of interest in the remembrance and negotiation of the violence inflicted upon the population through and by the previous regime. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is perhaps the most famous, but certainly not the only, example of this marked tendency towards an accounting of past wrongs in the service of a democratic future.¹ In fact, in the past three decades there have been over thirty such commissions operating in the world, including recent or ongoing ones in Peru, Uruguay, Panama, Yugoslavia, East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Ghana.² These tribunals both raise, and attempt to answer, intensely difficult ethical and political questions surrounding issues of guilt, responsibility, power and justice.

¹ Jonathan Allen, "Balancing Justice and Social Unity: Political Theory and the idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *The University of Toronto Law Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 3. (Summer, 1999), pp. 315-353. W. James Booth, "Communities of Memory: On Identity, Memory, and Debt," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 2 (1999).

² Eric Brahm, "Truth Commissions," *Beyond Intractability*, no. June (2004), http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/truth_commissions/.

Negotiation of a traumatic past, however, is by no means restricted to the so-called “developing world.” In the United States there is continual and often hostile negotiation over not only the content of the past but its place and role in the shaping of the future. Groups within the polity differently remember ostensibly common objects; where one sees innocence the other locates a legacy that is anything but innocuous.³ The liberal state approaches such political dissonance by pursuing a policy of neutrality that encourages a forgetting of past trauma in the name of equal standards and the rule of law.⁴ From its earliest formulations liberalism has aimed to defuse political conflict by draining the well of discontent that is filled by remembrances of historical grievances. Anne Norton, however, has identified this strategy as “perverse self-exculpation”—a willful denial of the past through which “persistent inequalities... appear as the wreckage of a defeated enemy: foreign and unsightly, [but] holding no threat to the current order.”⁵ W. James Booth, moreover, has made the case that strategies of amnesty and forgetting are inadequate for the achievement of justice, given that justice bears an intimate relationship to the insistent remembrance of historic *injustice*.⁶ On Booth’s reading, memory is not only a prerequisite for justice but the mark of a necessary fidelity to those who can no longer represent themselves or make their voices heard. There is not only a politics to memory but an ethics of remembrance: ghosts need our blood in order to speak.

However, the case for remembrance of past trauma shares inadequacies with the liberal strategy of forgetting. Groups within the polity often mobilize on the basis of shared memories or traumas, attempting to bring public scrutiny and power to bear on historical or ongoing grievances or injustices. Yet despite its potential for addressing heretofore unavowed losses, Wendy Brown has flagged the tendency towards politicized identity as a form of “wounded attachment,” finding that such attachment reflects rather than resists an inclusive/exclusive logic it purportedly finds dissatisfactory.⁷ The haunting of the polity by these specters can be malign as well as benign. Fidelity to ghosts can often betray or

³ Witness the recent episode in Jena, LA in which the hanging of nooses on a schoolyard tree by white students was considered an innocent “prank” by many within the white community, whereas it could not be (and was not) so lightly taken by a black community cognizant of the violent history of the object. Steve Coll, “Disparities,” *The New Yorker*, October 8, 2007.

⁴ One hears the will towards neutrality in the claims of Chief Justice Roberts in the recent ruling on the use of racial criteria to promote classroom diversity. As Roberts wrote in the majority opinion, “The best way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” See the ruling for PARENTS INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS v. SEATTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1 ET AL.

⁵ Anne Norton, “Reading in the Shadow of History,” *Social Text*, no. 56 (1998).

⁶ W. James Booth, “The Unforgotten: Memories of Justice,” *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 04 (2002).

⁷ Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments,” *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993).

overwhelm fidelity to more lively others, or to ourselves.⁸ Historic injustices create bitter memories that can confine their bearers to a melancholic cycle of revenge and *ressentiment*.⁹ “Memory-justice” too often resembles the endless and violent searching of the Furies: a single-minded devotion to righting past wrongs often creates more injustice than it restores justice.

The unsatisfactory quality of the agon between memory and forgetting for democratic politics raises important questions for political theory and contemporary politics. Namely, how can we relate to and even tarry with trauma or loss (both ongoing and historical) without becoming defined by it? How can actors within the polity insist on the remembrance of their prior wounds without forsaking the possibility of achieving collective political settlements in the present and for the future? In short, what sort of memory work is necessary for democratic flourishing? Negotiating losses and trauma of the recent past is especially pertinent for democratic politics today, given both the intense suffering of the past century and early signs that the current century will continue a muted version of the trend—with spasmodic violence replacing continual warfare, and blacksites replacing gulags.

These questions are not new, nor are we lacking for potential answers from a range of perspectives and disciplines. Within political science there is an extensive literature concerning trauma, remembrance and amnesty, ranging from work on *transitional* justice for countries undergoing political or social transformation,¹⁰ to historical or enduring injustices within relatively stable states.¹¹ Alongside these debates is a vast literature chronicling the recent rise of public or official apologies for past injustices, such as France’s fuller acknowledgement of collective collaboration with the National Socialists during World War II, Japan’s apology for its colonial aggression, and Australia’s annual “Sorry Day,” which is meant to commemorate state-sanctioned violence against the aboriginal population.¹² We can add to this list recent explorations of the politics¹³ and ethics¹⁴ of memory, work which is roughly centered on the

⁸ This seems to be a central theme of Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, in which Sethe is overwhelmed and almost destroyed by the haunting of Beloved (the *revenant*).

⁹ Nietzsche wrote about the “sleeplessness” (*Schlaflosigkeit*) of bitter memory. See Booth, 777.

¹⁰ Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), D. Cohen, “The Rhetoric of Justice: Strategies of Reconciliation and Revenge in the Restoration of Athenian Democracy in 403 Bc,” *European Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 02 (2002).

¹¹ Jeff Spinner-Halev, “From Historical to Enduring Injustice,” *Political Theory* 35, no. 5 (2007).

¹² See R. R. Weyeneth, “The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation,” *The Public Historian* 23, no. 3 (2001). and A. Mbaye, “The Pragmatics of Public Apologies.”

¹³ J. F. Dienstag, *Dancing in Chains: Narrative and Memory in Political Theory* (Stanford University Press, 1997)., H. Adam and K. Adam, “The Politics of Memory in Divided Societies,” *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (2000),

remembrance/forgetting agon or dilemma. Furthermore, outside political science and political theory there is the growing field of trauma studies, with its focus on the social and political implications of post-traumatic stress disorder, the intransigence of traumatic memory, and the melancholic cycles of repetition through which trauma victims endlessly relive the past.¹⁵ Finally, the politicization of memory, whether through a skeptical approach to national traditions,¹⁶ or a Foucaultian emphasis on counter-memory and local tradition,¹⁷ has served simultaneously to undermine truth claims about collective histories *and* to sacralize or authenticate the fugitive or dispersed recollections of historically marginalized groups. Most of this work concludes—unsatisfactorily—as does Barbara Misztal in her essay “Memory and Democracy:” “balancing solidarity and cohesion sometimes requires the generosity of forgetfulness and sometimes demands the honesty of remembrance.”¹⁸ Such conclusions seem to leave us in stasis (conceived not so much as a motionlessness but as an endless struggle against and with two opposing forces). There is seemingly no principle of remembrance or forgetting with which we could close these debates.

Few thinkers have confronted the paradoxes and perils surrounding memory and democracy more as powerfully as did Paul Ricoeur. In his work spanning five decades, and especially in his epic *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur warned against the dangers of melancholic fixation to historical trauma, while simultaneously asserting that plural testimonies of trauma were necessary for creating and sustaining trust between citizens in a democratic polity. Ricoeur’s “memory-work” involves the collection of the wounds and scars of history so that they might be worked through at “the level of genuine discourse.”¹⁹ While Ricoeur was not blind to the difficulties of establishing open discussion amidst embedded hierarchies of power and privilege, he hoped to articulate an “ethics of discussion” that can guide remembrances in order to weave a common narrative out of disparate—and even antagonistic—

I. Amadiume and A. A. An-Na'im, *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing, and Social Justice* (Zed Books, 2000), H. Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life* (Univ of North Carolina Pr, 1995), E. Jelin, "The Politics of Memory: The Human Rights Movements and the Construction of Democracy in Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (1994).

¹⁴ A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Harvard University Press, 2002), P. Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting," *Questioning ethics: contemporary debates in philosophy*.

¹⁵ B. L. Green, "Psychosocial Research in Traumatic Stress: An Update," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 7, no. 3 (1994), D. LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999).

¹⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ B. A. Misztal, "The Sacralization of Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 1 (2004), M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Cornell University Press Ithaca, NY, 1977).

¹⁸ B. A. Misztal, "Memory and Democracy," *American Behavioral Scientist* 48, no. 10 (2005).

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "Imagination, Testimony and Trust: A Dialogue with Paul Ricoeur," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Kearney and Dooley.

strands. Following Todorov, Ricoeur thought we could extract “exemplarity” from traumatic events by establishing a reflective distance between them and us.²⁰ By establishing this distance we can develop a practical wisdom (*phronesis*) that can memorialize past events without sacralizing them, instead allowing them to contribute to future action and the possibility of justice.

Ricoeur’s democratic project of generating trust across traumatic divides takes place not only amidst the living legacies of genocide, colonialism and racism, but within the larger context of a compromised modernity. Ricoeur finds that “the West” has finally been divested of its world-historical pretensions by the disastrous violence of the last century. This presents an opportunity for “historical consciousness”—now stripped of its progressivist illusions—to develop what Ricoeur calls the “politics of a just memory.”²¹ History unmoved by spirit can finally accede to responsibility and promote the recognition and negotiation of trauma in an open and public discourse. Yet this project is met at the outset by a problem and a paradox. In the absence of transcendent standards, there is no obvious way to “settle” the claims of/over the past—no Archimedean position from which we can judge history or declare amnesty. As a result, we suffer simultaneously from a *lack* and a *surfeit* of memory: “too much memory here, *not enough* memory there.”²² Our time is marked both by an insistence on memory at all costs—*never forget*—and an equally persistent call for forgetting—for *getting past* unfruitful debates and memories. Along these lines Ricoeur detects an analogy to psychoanalytic theory and practice, with public discourse split between melancholic repetition and forced forgetting. Both serve to keep repressed memories out of the conscious mind (or “the level of genuine discourse”) and negate the possibilities of “working through.” Following the logic of the analogy, Ricoeur posits memory work as a kind of therapeutic process akin to the analytical situation, through which the analysand’s (or the public’s) past is re-created and narrated—a collective version of Freud’s famous “talking cure.” As Ricoeur puts it, the experience of analysis can become “a model and guide concerning the ways of facing tragedy and sorrow in the normal circumstances of life.”²³ Ricoeur goes further, even grafting his project of crafting historical narratives of trauma and a “politics of just memory” onto Freud’s idea of the “work of mourning” (*Trauerarbeit*).²⁴

²⁰ ———, “Memory and Forgetting,” *Questioning ethics: contemporary debates in philosophy*. Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the 20th Century*, trans. D. Bellas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

²¹ {Hannoum, #1}

²² {Reagan, 2005 #2}

²³ {Ricoeur, 2003 #3}

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 323.

Ricoeur's invocation of *Trauerarbeit* is promising but under-developed. Moreover, Ricoeur imputes certain elements into his reading of Freud (and mourning) that push *Trauerarbeit* in an eschatological direction that is alien to the Freudian project and to psychoanalysis more generally. Influenced by Heidegger, Ricoeur thinks that both the surplus and the deficit of memory are distractions from the essential task of being towards death. This existential posture is the only way of confronting the ultimate cause of human anxiety and despair, and the best chance we have for developing our capacities for care and forgiveness. Forgiveness is, after all, the telos of Ricoeur's work: the solution to the paradox of memory and the cure for the ills of civic distrust. However, the introduction of ontological responsibility to a memory/mourning project invests the latter with epic pretensions that can just as easily erode trust as nurture it. Our attentiveness to and care for others can dim as we listen for the hushed voice of absent Being. Moreover, Ricoeur's "anthropodicy" crowds out the tragic insights of psychoanalysis whereby the "narcissism" of every telos and eschaton is identified as illusive wish-fulfillment.²⁵ As such, the project of trust-generation that Ricoeur bases partly on his reading of psychoanalysis is far weaker than it first appears.

And yet this project cannot be abandoned. As Danielle Allen has noted, the problem of distrust in a polity breeds a set of civic maladies that "corrode democratic citizenship from within."²⁶ Allen's proximate context is post-civil rights United States, where habits of citizenship have (haltingly) adjusted to the inclusion of African Americans but where patterns of interracial trust and practices of political friendship across the races have not fully developed.²⁷ For Allen, political distrust results from the visible and invisible sacrifices inherent to political life in the United States and to democratic citizenship more broadly. As she writes, "of all the rituals relevant to democracy, sacrifice is preeminent."²⁸ By this she means simply that the spoils and burdens of collective action are always unevenly distributed. She refers to this as the "hard truth" of democracies; namely, that "some citizens are always giving up things for others."²⁹ Yet in the United States, this 'hard truth' has often been concealed—partly by the perpetual invocation of mythic opportunity, but primarily because sacrifice has been historically concentrated within

²⁵ {White, 2007 #7}

²⁶ {Allen, 2004 #9} p.xx.

²⁷ "Poll Finds Obama's Run Isn't Closing Divide on Race." *The New York Times*, July 16, 2008.

²⁸ Allen, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29

a politically invisible segment of the population—the black and white underclass, and the black community more generally. Ideals of democratic citizenship require that sacrifices be honored and reciprocated, but Allen—following Ellison—notes that black sacrifices for the polity have been and continue to go unrecognized, meaning that reciprocity is defused and citizenship remains a fugitive ideal in a deeply flawed polity.

If we are unwilling to accept the civic ills bred by entrenched patterns of distrust, then Allen thinks we will need to develop new habits of citizenship to address the hidden aspects of democratic decision-making—loss and disappointment. Such habits would have to include “methods for dealing with political loss and for developing forms of interaction among citizens that would allow for the constant redistribution of patterns of sacrifice.”³⁰ In order to craft these habits, Allen thinks we need to confront another ‘hard truth’—which she draws from her reading of Ellison—namely, that “losses do not disappear but are retained in the fabric of society.”³¹ This admission is startling insofar as it overturns a central tenet of liberal political theory (to which Allen is ostensibly committed). Liberalism, stoked by the immediate trauma of the English civil wars and nursed by the nightmare of endless conflict, has long asserted the value of a short memory in the interests of civic concord. Hobbes’ fifth law of nature—compleasance—demands an ahistorical identity for historical selves. Relatedly, Hobbes refers to mourning as “ignorant” and unproductive speech, and he hopes to isolate grief within the private sphere—where its affective power will not threaten the precarious peace of the polity. Yet Allen finds that when inherent sacrifices and retained losses are not publicly acknowledged and worked-through, the polity risks the development of a “collective neurosis.” In order to redeem the promise of democratic citizenship in the face of this neurosis, sacrifices within the polity must become visible, voluntary, and honored. These criteria, in Allen’s words, “establish a framework for mourning processes that can eventually reconstitute trust.”³²

Allen’s evocation of mourning—like Ricoeur’s—in the context of democratic politics raises more questions than it answers. On the one hand, efforts for just remembrance and mourning seem to be essential democratic tasks. Insofar as the past, in Faulkner’s famous phrase, “is not past,” then working through the living traumatic legacies of the American polity is a pressing concern—whether the legacy is

³⁰ Ibid., 37

³¹ Ibid., 110.

³² Ibid., 110.

slavery, Jim Crow, Vietnam, or “the 60s.” And yet it is difficult to see how such mourning work should proceed—difficult, even, to see how *collective* mourning is possible in the first place, when the “we” that would mourn is splintered along racial, class, geographical, and even temporal lines. Recent episodes of public mourning only seem to confirm this difficulty.³³ Moreover, as with the memory/forgetting aporia, a democratic work of mourning faces dual dangers of absolute foreclosure and endless woundedness. For who will be able to say when “we” have mourned adequately? If the collective project of working through mirrors the individual therapeutic situation, then how will it terminate?

This dissertation, by mining the tradition of psychoanalytic theory in conversation with political and social theory, hopes to contribute to the possibility of what could be called a *democratic work of mourning*. By employing psychoanalytic concepts I hope to better negotiate the memory/forgetting aporia while outlining a process whereby civic trust can be developed amidst sacrifice and loss. At first blush, there may seem to be little value-added in such an approach. After all, Freud’s seminal investigation of the work of mourning seems to replicate the unhelpful dichotomy between remembrance and forgetting, while promising a therapeutic cure that would foreclose continual reflection on traumatic legacies. Yet within Freud’s later writings and subsequent psychoanalytic theory we can distinguish a work of mourning that acts as a process of reflection *on and by* lost objects that establishes a (trembling) distance between self and other, between what is lost and what or who remains. The work of Melanie Klein in particular assists in the task of, in Eric Santner’s words, “integrating damage, loss, disorientation, decentered-ness into a transformed structure of identity, whether it be that of an individual [or]...a culture.”³⁴ This in turn can help us discern the outlines of a relationship to historico-political sacrifice and trauma that mitigates both wounded attachment and hasty forgetting and assists the formulation of a principle of democratic cohesion amidst plurality.³⁵ Ricoeur provides the theoretical entry point for my project with his evocation of Freud and the psychoanalytic tradition, and Allen provides the political entry point in her discussion of racial trauma and democratic sacrifice in the United States. Yet neither Ricoeur nor Allen has fully explored the ability of psychoanalytic theory to address the paradoxes and perils surrounding memory

³³ Witness the episode of the Reagan funeral, where efforts to achieve consensus on the life of the deceased foreclosed what could only generously be called a mixed legacy.

³⁴ Santner, *Stranded Objects*, xiii.

³⁵ Barash, “Politics of Memory,” in *Questioning Ethics: Debates in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Dooley and Kearney.

and mourning in the context of sacrifice, trauma, and distrust. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic theory is particularly helpful in these areas.

However, some may object to the operating assumption of this project—that political phenomena can be explained or illuminated using psychoanalytic categories and concepts. Why precisely should we apply this language—originally developed to explain and treat individual psychosis—to collective problems and contexts? After all, the analytic relationship involves an investigation of the idiosyncratic memories—repressed and otherwise—of the analysand. And Freud famously rejected the idea of a collective psyche, even if he simultaneously conjectured about a collective unconscious inheritance.³⁶ Can the insights of the therapeutic situation be generalized to the political realm? And why should we bother to try?³⁷

I can think of several responses to these questions and doubts, each of which will be fleshed out more fully in the chapters that follow. The first answer has to do with the value of analogical thinking. Through imaginative transposition, the language of psychoanalysis can cast political problems into a strange yet resonant light (Freud, of course, is the first practitioner of this interpretive strategy). The notion of “repressed” memories within living legacies has traction in political/cultural debates, especially in relation to questions of identity, trauma, and sacrifice.³⁸

Moreover, as Dominick LaCapra has reminded us, the restriction of psychoanalytic concepts to individual psychosis rests on untenable assumptions about both public and psychic life. As he puts it, there are “*collective* processes of interaction, mutual reinforcement, [and] censorship that further repression, denial, or avoidance.”³⁹ Struggles over national identity, history and memory are surely sites where we can discern the interplay of these forces, meaning that collectivities are as susceptible to analysis as any individual who sits uncomfortably on the proverbial couch. Psychoanalysis can then

³⁶ Of original patricide. See Freud’s “Moses and Monotheism.”

³⁷ Olick, in speaking of the theoretic pitfalls and aporias of a collective psyche, asks, “is this the best contemporary scholarship can do to explain what are surely cultural over and above psychological processes...surely there must be other models than a reduction to individual psychology!” As will become clear, I think the use of psychoanalytic theory involves no such “reduction.”

³⁸ Of course, there is a certain irony at work here. Throughout most of recorded human history, mourning has been understood primarily as a social and cultural practice - with set time-periods for grieving involving strict hierarchies between those closest to the deceased and those more tangentially related. Nevertheless, after psychoanalysis (I would argue), mourning has been “democratized”—cut loose from the dictates of cultural groupings and turned into a (more) universal project drawing on far-reaching theories of human needs and development. There are problems with this, to be sure, but ultimately it means that the context for mourning has been broadened and the “rules” and “meaning” of mourning have been called into question.

³⁹ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, 173.

clearly help us to diagnose the ills of the polity—Ricoeur's *too much/too little memory*, Allen's disintegrative distrust—and evaluate the adequacy of the regnant responses.

Psychoanalytic theory can be particularly helpful in these areas. According to Cornelius Castoriadis, the dividing line between psychoanalytic and political theory is highly artificial and ripe for removal. Psychoanalysis aims at (but does not promise) individual autonomy just as politics aims at collective autonomy. Of course autonomy is a highly fraught word, in the wake of poststructuralism and deconstruction. However, autonomy—long associated with enlightenment rationalism, which establishes its sovereign claims only by the violent subjugation of its others—comes to mean something else than Cartesian mastery under the shadow of psychoanalysis. Freud may still read by some as a quintessentially modern thinker,⁴⁰ one who buttresses rather than undermines the power of the modern sovereign subject.⁴¹ Yet within Freud's writings on *Trauerarbeit*—and in subsequent psychoanalytic accounts of mourning such as Klein's, Torok's and Abraham's—we find not so much a sovereign subject transcending trauma through a talking cure but an inter-subjective *topos* of analysis: a *topos* located both in the space between analyst and analysand and between each and the swirl of characters, passions, and attachments through which they are continually formed and re-formed. This *topos* can be generalized in order to refer to spaces *not yet created or inhabited* in democratic theory and practice—sites where the sacrifices inherent to political life can be honored and reciprocated and the narratives of trauma and loss articulated and “worked through.” It is worth remembering that Freud's famous articulation of the psychoanalytic project—*wo es war, soll Ich werden* (where it was, so I shall become)—was considered by its author to be a task “of and for culture” (*Kulturarbeit*).⁴² Mourning, like analysis, is “always already” a collective endeavor. By understanding analysis less as a therapeutic relationship than as an interpretive *topos*, this project will be able to identify spaces—both present and absent—whereby collective trauma can be worked through, sacrifices can be named and honored, and trust can be haltingly constructed. Bonnie Honig has spoken of the need for such “mourning spaces” whereby we

⁴⁰ Putting to the side what “modernity” actually signifies. For an interesting discussion of modernity's contested (if not illusory) boundaries, see Bernard Yack, *The Fetishism of Modernities* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997).

⁴¹ Olga Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity, and Mourning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 172. “Freud's view of character...relies on...the appearance of the law of the father [which] puts an end to all the ‘creative and artistic’ activity that preceded it.” One reason for this (incorrect, in my view) reading of Freud has been the influence of the schizophrenic interpretation of Freud by Foucault. For an incisive tracing of Foucault's reading(s) of Freud, see {Derrida, 1994 #10}

⁴² See Strong, 57.

can engage and reconfigure our collective desires. Through these spaces we can reflect on the desires of others and in the process achieve a distance from the lost or repressed object. Working-through aims to create this distance; it overcomes neurotic impulses whereby we repeat or re-act the past (which is little else but the return of the repressed in unconscious form). The psychoanalytic task is to make conscious these repetitions and overcome them. The political analogue is to symbolize trauma and find room to reflect on it within a public, inter-subjective discourse.

Trauerarbeit, as we will see in the chapters that follow, is best conceived as a slow and patient “work of severance”—the means of establishing a separation or distinction between the lost object and the mediating ego. The ego itself is a “poor creature” beset by the competing desires and claims of “three masters”: the social world, the id, and the super-ego. When an object of our love is lost, the ego undertakes a halting process of negotiation between the demands of these three forces, each of which pulls in a different direction. Ultimately, if successful, *Trauerarbeit* effects the “introjection” of the lost object, a paradoxical process through which the latter is simultaneously *detached from* and *brought into* the ego. As developed below, Freud’s work of mourning is a work of *reflection*: both of reflecting on and being reflected by what is lost. As Castoriadis puts it, the goal of analysis “is to instaurate the patient’s capacities for reflection as definitively as possible (which does not mean at all that the goal of the analysis is for the Conscious to dominate the Unconscious, that to understand is to heal, etc).”⁴³ Castoriadis refers to the promise of analysis as a “liberating contamination” of collective reflectiveness.⁴⁴ Reflectiveness is the ability to “see double, to see *oneself* double, to see *oneself* while seeing oneself as other.”⁴⁵ This means that we would pursue a distance from ourselves and from the crucible of trauma out of which we (never fully) emerge.

Perhaps the least inappropriate analogy for the psyche is one that Freud provides: the soul is like breccia, the conglomerate volcanic rocks of plural origin in which hard fragments are carried to the

⁴³ “State of the Subject Today,” 159.

⁴⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary,” in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁵ ———, “The State of the Subject Today,” in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

surface by erupting lava. Within this breccia-like formation, there is no final break from trauma or an absolute forgetting of loss; our proper response is less an amnesty than a sponson: the cessation of hostilities in the name of compromised subjectivity, or what Lear calls “responsible autonomy.” *Trauerarbeit*, on this reading, involves *cohabitation* with specters—with the unresolved wounds and unratified defeats within every political community. It resists the tendency to displace or repress these ghosts, or to see them as residuals or exceptions. In this sense, the work of mourning resists ultimate or final closure. Jonathan Lear speaks of repressed memories as being “without citizenship” in the land of consciousness.⁴⁶ Working-through is, then, an “opening of the borders”—the development of a conscious verbal account of archaic attempts at “say[ing] the same thing.”⁴⁷ And yet the “foreignness” of repressed traumas and lost loves is not absolutely negated by this symbolization. When the Furies gain admittance to the Athenian polis at the end of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, their strange/archaic anger is introjected but not eliminated.⁴⁸ Neither completely backward-looking nor absolutely future-oriented, *Trauerarbeit* honors the need for healing and resolution but knows that such coherence is shakily constructed and capable of rupture at any moment. *Trauerarbeit* can then provide insight into and direction for collective ways of relating to and negotiating loss, both in how polities articulate a version of the past and project a vision for the future.

From Chapter Two:

Melanie Klein and the democratic work of mourning.

Melanie Klein saw herself as carrying forward the work of Freud, but, due specifically to her analysis of small children (something in which Freud showed no interest), she ultimately reconfigured Freudian psychoanalysis in important and lasting ways. Particularly relevant is her re-writing of Freudian

⁴⁶ Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), 34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁸ Here I am drawing from Peter Euben’s reading of the *Oresteia*: Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990), see especially pages 88-89.

drive theory into a theory of human passions that are essentially *object-oriented* rather than narcissistic. Freud's *Trieben* are the irreducible quanta of energy in the human psyche; their incessant push to satisfaction is what keeps humans perpetually unsatisfied, and in particular their presence explains our alienation (or discontentedness) within civilization. Freudian *eros* is at base narcissistic; the psyche sees its internal and external objects as means for, or barriers to, its satisfaction. Hence Freud's "economic" mourning cycle, as articulated in "Mourning and Melancholia." According to Freud, mourning is a temporary interruption in *eros* or libidinal attachment's forward drive. The work of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*) is a "turning-away" from the lost object and a gradual renunciation of our emotional and visceral attachment. When this process is completed, the ego becomes "free and uninhibited"—ready to direct libidinal forces from the id towards more responsive objects.⁴⁹

However, it is crucial to note that Freud revised his understanding of mourning late in his career, and by the time he writes "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" his original theories of the libido and its narcissism are themselves revised or altered significantly. Or, rather, we might say that *eros* is joined by its unruly obverse: the death drive (*Todestrieb*). While many of Freud's successors and imitators have discounted the death drive as irrelevant, Klein took it seriously. It pushed her to revise the Freudian account of ego development during the Oedipal period, and it gave her insight into the place of aggression and fear in both the mind of the infant and throughout the course of human life. Her insights into the role of fear then impacted her theories on mourning, giving them a decidedly "non-economic" or non-reconciliatory—and decidedly social—character.⁵⁰ She hypothesized that all adult mourning is a replaying and re-working of an original object-loss that occurs in infancy. The early objects that create in us a sense of loss are also those that help us to work through it. Later in life we are just as dependent on supportive objects and contexts for the working through of our grief, and these contexts are public as often as they are private. In fact, according to object relations theory, there is no final line between private grief and public life; the world of attachments is "concentric, extending from the infant's first cry to

⁴⁹ See "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Standard Edition no. 14.

⁵⁰ Compare Freud: "We rely on (mourning) being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful." (244) Klein's work shows how the social world is always/already "interfering" with the mourning processes - shaping them in various directions, or making them impossible.

the broadest achievements and failures of civilization.”⁵¹ Ego development through mourning is a perpetual—and political—process.

For Klein, the early life of the infant is characterized by radical and bewildering dependence and a frustrating lack of control over one’s body and its needs. Insofar as the infant’s bare needs are met, it starts to develop a mental image of the ‘good’ caregiver. Yet when the caregiver is absent, the child’s wild needs work to develop an alternate image—the ‘bad’ caregiver⁵² who is absent when needed, or present when they are not wanted. Klein calls this time in the infant’s life the “paranoid-schizoid” position, because the infant has not achieved object permanence and has not realized that the ‘bad’ and ‘good’ caregiver are one and the same. Upon making this realization, the infant either maintains paranoid-schizoid fantasies by maintaining the split image, or it enters what Klein calls “the depressive position” (the “chaos inside him”).⁵³ If the child has received “good enough” care⁵⁴ then they are able to accept from this second position the fundamental ambivalence of their first objects—which have up to this point aroused equally intense hatred and fear, love and joy. By integrating these emotions, the child is able to achieve an uneasy balance between love and hate, a balance that is upended when new object-losses evoke the pain and anxiety first experienced in this position.

Klein thinks that successful resolution of the depressive position in infancy lays the groundwork for overcoming grief later in life. However, we should not read “resolution” here as a Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Just as Freud’s developmental stages are not necessarily progressive (or even “developmental”), Klein’s positions should not be understood as inevitably successive or, for that matter, terminable. In fact Klein thought that paranoid-schizoid splitting was a continual temptation throughout adult life; the stresses and anxieties of deeply-felt losses work to draw us back to this defensive posture. Within it we engage in defense mechanisms such as splitting, idealization, and projection. The lost object assumes a “larger-than-life” character, and we feel compelled to defend it at all costs; we thereby project the hatred that is mixed up with the object (and we have no attachments that do not involve hatred) into another object, or we absorb it into the ego and enter a period of self-loathing. To arrest this cycle (which

⁵¹ Gal Gerson, *Object Relations Psychoanalysis as Political Theory*

⁵² Klein uses the terms “good breast” and “bad breast” to specify that the first objectal contact is typically with the feeding mother. But it is not clear to me that we should reduce first objectal contacts to what has been typical so far, due to the risk that we might essentialize these categories, rather than seeing the early care-giving situation as fluid if structured, rather than natural and eternal.

⁵³ Klein, “Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States” (1940)

⁵⁴ The term is Winnicott’s, a later object relations theorist influenced by Klein.

matches Freud's description of melancholia), we must reintegrate the lost object into our ego by remembering its ambivalence—thereby strengthening our confidence in the outside world by accepting its and our transience. As Klein puts it, we can “bear to realize that the object was not perfect and yet not lose trust and love for (it), nor fear (its) revenge.”⁵⁵ By repairing the lost object, and restoring it to a place within our psyche, we learn to better cohabit with the ambivalent feelings through which we attach to others.

⁵⁵ “Mourning and its relation to Manic-Depressive States,” 355.