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## Danger and Deformation: A Social Theory of Trauma

### Part I: Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Contemporary Social Theory, and Healthy Selves

*The concept of trauma has migrated over time. A term first employed to describe a form of bodily or physical harm became a description of an overwhelming psychological experience suffered by an individual. Trauma now can also describe events of a nation's past where prior experiences jeopardize current social solidarity and interfere with members' ability to function freely in the collectivity. The identification of social trauma often serves as a prelude to development of policies of healing, forgiveness, or reconciliation. The following is the first part of a two-part essay that critically reviews the concept of social trauma. I argue that the concept of social trauma fails to distinguish between various types of collectively shared traumatic experiences, where each type yields a distinctive form of socially induced harm. The argument builds upon D. W. Winnicott's and Axel Honneth's intersubjective description of the features of a non-traumatized self that is characterized by the individual's capacity through illusory experience to feel recognized. This essay posits, in contrast, distinct social settings for trauma when individual recognition is denied and illusion is shattered. Part II will detail a typology of social traumas distinguished by their varied impact upon individuals and that should produce different strategies for social repair depending on the type of trauma experienced.*

#### Danger and Deformation

In a parable recounted not long ago by Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian social theorist and psychoanalyst (and humorist), a man finds himself admitted to a mental hospital because he

believes himself to be a piece of grain (Žižek, 2005, October 10). Working there intensively with a psychiatrist, he comes to accept the fact that he is not what he fears, and once having conquered his delusion, he is released. Shortly after his departure, however, he hurriedly returns and reports to the psychiatrist that upon his leaving he came upon a chicken and suffered a panic attack. Attempting to reassure his former patient, the psychiatrist reminds him that he is not something to be eaten and, therefore, needn't worry about the chicken. But the man responds: "I know I'm not a piece of grain, and you know I'm not a piece of grain. But," he continues, "I don't know that the chicken knows that I'm not a piece of grain."

Žižek retells this story as a dramatic illustration of how personal belief can transform a seemingly benign object—the chicken—into a terrifying threat, generating in the person the fear of his own annihilation. In so doing, Žižek articulates the psychoanalytic stance toward the material world as one largely subjectivized (in this case, delusional): a person's own internal life helps shape the meaning the external world assumes. One thinks and acts toward others as if they stand objectively independent when, in fact, they are shot through with specific meanings, part of our inner world, imposed on others and on things. The parable also captures the limits of therapeutic cure—the closed system of the dyadic relationship between therapist and patient. It is a relationship that cannot always defend against a social environment capable of overwhelming "healthy" insight or internal capacity. How much more precarious outside the psychiatric hospital the knowledge that one is not, in fact, a tiny morsel capable of being devoured, especially in an environment that, in all likelihood, contributed to the delusional thinking in the first place? Is it so surprising that, once away from the protection of doctor and hospital, the individual could not sustain his more mature belief in himself?

Our need to attach personal meaning to the external world of people and things and our capacity to sometimes wrongly perceive or distort the environment as hostile (or too-loving) present a challenge to those professionals who attempt to repair individual perception and restore in their patients a sense of well-being and a capacity to act effectively. While only a parable,

it might be said this man's relation to the chicken captures his terror that the world (or aspects of it) is intent on destroying him. It is his conviction that others outside are not sustaining but threatening, and it is the psychiatrist's aim to ease his suffering by offering, through deeper self-understanding, corrective perceptual tools. In the end, however, the man's new object world—the mental hospital and the psychiatrist—fails to provide him sufficiently with the resources to conduct himself as at ease with his environment—not dis-eased—and tolerant of his own ambitions and personal goals. With an environment that appears no different from when he entered (and that corresponds to his original internal world), he could only engage it again as dangerous and destructive.

Žižek's tale also makes us ponder the role of the social world in constituting individual human psychic experience. Why the chicken as the dangerous object? Why the experience of oneself as so easy to be devoured? Donald W. Winnicott, perhaps more than any other psychoanalytic writer, insists upon the constitutive role of others for the development of the individual psyche, and with respect to this man's delusional thinking, requires an exploration of the "external" or exogenous contributors to this tortured psychic life. When Winnicott (1973) notes that, at the moment of birth, there is no such thing as a baby, only a baby with caregiver, he underscores the irreducible role of the dyadic relationship in individual development. An infant does not require a perfect mother in order to thrive but requires a "good-enough" one. Surely something in this man's environment contributed to his delusional thought. And might not a better understanding of the specific exogenous sources of the delusion better prepare the patient and therapist to enable a more successful re-entry into the once hostile environment?

Beginning with Winnicott and now extending into much of current psychoanalytic thinking, psychoanalysis has moved significantly toward a fuller appreciation of the intersubjective as inextricably part of the individual, recognizing that basic psychological instincts themselves, while largely unconscious and "housed" in the individual, nonetheless are powerfully shaped through relations with others. Indeed, contemporary psycho-

analysis today might be described as a science of intersubjectivity, as most of the major concepts, including drives, fantasies, transferences and counter-transferences are now understood not as products of an isolated individual but rather as forged through interaction between self and others. Both in theory and in practice, psychoanalysis explores the characteristics of those relations that begin in the family in earliest infancy and extend outwards to more distal experiences with others. Implicit in Winnicott's formulation is his claim that the ability of individuals to experience others supportively and to act toward them accordingly—what he describes as a person's capacity to "use" the world as opposed to experiencing it as pure subjective projection, what Winnicott (1969) characterizes as "relating" to the world—depends on healthy self-experience, characterized by the intersubjectively derived ability to love and to trust.

By the same token, Winnicott describes how various forms of individual pathology result when proper social conditions do not exist, when there is not a good-enough mother or a sufficiently supportive environment. Outside impingements can interfere with self-development, a "false self" can emerge or other expressions of personal difficulties, each of which is generative of on-going pathological social relations (Winnicott, 1960). Not surprisingly, psychoanalytic interest in externalities has typically focused on the harmful impact they can hold for individual development and the significance of others in the creation of various forms of personal pathology. The role of events or a series of events too overwhelming for a person to process, i.e. trauma, has therefore taken on a new urgency within the psychotherapeutic paradigm. Psychological trauma has become the focus of psychoanalytic attention because of others' capacity to inflict sustained damage on the psychic life of the individual. But, for Winnicott and other analysts, trauma is defined only in terms of the person who suffers it, because of how individuals vary in their response to similar, even identical, external circumstances. A feeling of overwhelming helplessness or aloneness, for example, can occur in one person after a short period of time, while another may have far greater tolerance before trauma occurs. Not every one responds similarly to the same set of external stimuli; what constitutes trauma for one person demonstrates more internal capacity in another.

Moreover, responses to external stimuli vary according to developmental age, psychological maturity, and to other features of the person that shape resistance or proneness to traumatic response. Yet, at its core, this emphasis on the intersubjective as constitutive of traumatic response holds the experience of trauma as an interpersonal failure, not an external, "objective" one. The soldier caught in crossfire may suffer later from PTSD, but not because of the danger of war *per se*. Rather, the wounded or those with their life on the line suffer traumatically because the danger faced at the moment overwhelms any internal capacity to feel invulnerable. Both external event, i.e. dangerous others, and its internal processing yield an after-the-fact onset of traumatic symptoms.<sup>1</sup> It is the abandonment of a sense of (irrational) security which was accompanied by an unconscious and abiding fantasy that another, e.g. mother, was present to always-protect oneself from harm. The dying soldier in Iraq, it has been reported, is often found calling out at the end for his or her mother or for Jesus.

War, in sum, is not the traumatic experience *per se*, though it often describes an interpersonal situation characterized by dangerous others whose aim is to injure or destroy. In this setting, a heightened possibility exists for individuals to feel themselves stripped of an internal presence of more powerful guardians, unconditionally protecting them from harm. Instead, they feel their utter helplessness and mortality, abandoned by those who were guarantors against our own destruction. To one degree or another, those who have not suffered trauma harbor the (irrational) knowing that "it can't, or won't, happen to me." It is this conviction of our specialness that danger threatens. But when too much danger occurs and it is experienced as such, *this* is the trauma of war. Trauma might be thus defined as an event or series of events remembered as so dangerous as to be impossible to preserve an equilibrating belief in a world that presumes our presence. To know otherwise is to know one's own oblivion.<sup>2</sup> For those so traumatized, these events survive into the present, transforming at times the here-and-now to a there-and-then. There is a timeless quality in which, at any moment, memory can be triggered and the past can reassert itself *as if* it were the present (Prager, 2006; Stolorow, 2003). Fantasies of one's safety and invulnerability cannot effectively

do battle with the real experiences of one's fragility in a world of others and things more powerful, intent on one's harm or uncaring for one's safety.

Yet despite the uniqueness of meaning-making for each individual, an appreciation of the intersubjective character of social relationships also encourages a parallel focus on how the psychological experience of specific social forms—extending beyond the not-good-enough mother and the family of origin—contribute to the development of unhealthy individuals: how social characteristics have the potential to generate personal deformation, how and what forms of social repair and reparation are required to best respond to collectively-induced forms of individual pathology. This description of different forms of broadly conceived social requisites for healthy and unhealthy development, and of the range of possibilities that social failures may take, is an analysis yet to be accomplished. It is the specific domain, I argue, of psychoanalytic sociology.

Once again, to return to the previous example, war describes ideal-typically the *essence* of a specific form of intersubjective failing that might occur and that heightens the possibility of creating in the individual long-term psychic damage. Not every soldier endures trauma as a result of a particular dangerous encounter but, if trauma results, its expression is shaped by the soldier's realization after the event of the in-fact existence of dangerous others making real one's own mortality. And not every potentially traumatic experience, e.g. sexual abuse, carries with it a direct confrontation with the actual possibility of death. Different frustrated wishes, needs, and fantasies may be activated, different forms of helplessness possibly engaged—none a match for the real experience of one's physical vulnerability to another. In this case, trauma is the result of an inability to reconcile unconsciously taken-for-granted presumptions of wholeness and of bodily integrity. A sense of being protected by others proves to provide no defense against the realization that others, in fact, have intent to harm. Again, the experience of human helplessness traumatically deforms the self but not exactly in the same ways as when, on a battlefield, one confronts the real possibility of death. The *traumatic* response to violations of the body is personal. There are some for whom the same kind of violation does not produce an incapacity to

process the event or events; some may be able to process it as an experience in the past that does not continually bleed into the present. But trauma describes the state for those in whom the memory of dangerous experience overwhelms a capability to fend off psychically the specific danger to which one has been exposed.

The concept of social or cultural trauma, while now employed in both psychoanalysis and social science, offers only a broad acknowledgment of how the external world can dramatically impinge on a given population's ability to develop freely, promoting instead traumatic deformation (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, & Sztomпка, 2004; Giesen, 2004; Schivelbusch, 2003). The category has now come to signify an extremely wide range of phenomena, e.g. war, genocide, racism, rape, enslavement, kidnapping, forced migration (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). A subjectively informed sociological analysis that distinguishes between kinds of social trauma can help complete the picture, first identified by Winnicott and carried forward by others, of the inextricable connection between the psychology of the self and the role of others in its generation. Later, I will identify various social features essential for good-enoughness and describe propitious facilitating social conditions that promote individuals' healthy and non-delusional relation to the outside world. At the same time, I will detail a range of conditions in the external world that, by failing to provide to social members safety, support, and succor prefigure the onset of trauma. What will be offered is a description of various types of social trauma, a characterization of different types of intersubjective psychic formations in conditions that overwhelm (or discourage) a healthy engagement between oneself and the surrounding social environment. By analytically specifying distinctive types of psychic deformation, linked to the external danger that overwhelms, it may be possible to specify policies of social redress more finely calibrated to the specific kind of harm exacted.

### Social Trauma and Restorative Justice

In the modern era, beginning with the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials at the end of the Second World War, the Al-

lied Powers enforced their recognition that the German past had been dominated by unjust, illegal, and immoral actions. Without some form of institutionally administered accountability, life simply returning back to normal would not have been possible; legal proceedings were implemented to reassert publicly a framework and policy of restorative justice. The Nuremberg trials appealed to and reasserted the rule of law by trying and punishing offenders for past wrongs committed. The trials themselves took on a public face and thus not only served the cause of justice but also demonstrated to Germans and non-Germans alike the re-establishment of legal authority that differed from Nazi rule. The restoration of the rule of law and the proper punishment of criminals who had violated the law constituted the victors' effort at social redress.

More recently, a new model of accountability has emerged, one first forged in the 1990s in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission following the end of the system of apartheid. This was an entirely novel response to the nation's past, one that appreciated the traumatic experiences of South Africa's racism for both perpetrators and those perpetrated upon, as well as the need, if a politics of retribution was to be avoided, to transcend those bifurcated categories of victims and victimizers. Rather than relying solely on legal trial and punishment, a new standard of justice was introduced: by publicly acknowledging past wrongdoing one became the recipient of a collective act of forgiveness. Past wrongs were (putatively) laid to rest. Similarly, the TRC operated in-the-open, its hearings broadcast for the nation to see and hear: creating a liminal moment to establish clearly the end of one traumatic era and the creation of a new, inclusive and more just one (Prager, 2008). The Commission's aim was to avoid a violent politics of retribution, instead attempting not only to rely on legal sanction to punish wrongdoers but also to prevent an inverted expression of revenge toward previous persecutors. Through the activities of the Commission, the Government sought to overcome prior categories of social identity—white and black, perpetrator and persecuted, persecutor and victim—to demarcate a new present, one characterized by reconciliation, from a disavowed past. Just as the French revolutionaries of 1789 sought to replace a particular identification as member of one of three Estates

with a universal identity as French *citoyen*, the new South Africa, through the TRC, sought to demarcate those who embraced the present on behalf of building a new future—the post-apartheid South Africa. Those who engaged with the TRC, simply because of their participation, distinguished themselves from those who, as a result of their failure to participate, persisted in their old identifications as either persecutor or victim.

Elsewhere I have addressed how psychoanalysis, as the study of intersubjective social relations, adds to a sociological understanding of various initiatives taken by large collectivities, even whole societies, to address their traumatic pasts (Prager, 2006; 2008). Contemporary politics worldwide now more readily accepts that the process of psychological "healing" among its affected population is required for the organic, on-going, non-distorted, and post-traumatic development of the collectivity. Various politics now embrace the precept that the overcoming of trauma necessitates some form of institutional innovation: self-conscious social repair, typically achieved through an in-the-present, larger-than-self, intersubjectively-constituted and activated community of listeners as witnesses. The need to hold perpetrators accountable—rather than to attempt to forget the past—has become in many politics the *sine qua non* for the restoration of healthy social development. Redress, repair, reconciliation, and forgiveness no longer serve simply as interpersonal categories that describe *ex post facto* healing between two individuals when their relationship has been breached. They also characterize a carefully delineated, often newly constructed social process that demarcates a historical past from an on-going, distinctively different present. Persons in charge who seek to respond to the realities of gross social traumas have been implementing *ad hoc* commissions on reconciliation and reparation. As I have suggested (Prager, 2008), an in-the-present healing environment—one created *de novo* and functioning in-the-present—is required to distinguish trauma as a feature of the past, distinct from the here-and-now. Its purpose ultimately, I argue, is the restoration or reactivation of some version of the original fantasies of personal invulnerability (or omnipotence) accompanied with reassurances of the fundamentally benign nature of the world of others. Otherwise, trauma remains a contemporary phenomenon, regardless of

how long in the past its origins. Unless trauma serves as only a description of what had happened in the past, it continues to shape a person's—and a collectivity's—meaning and actions toward the social environment and threatens even to endure into subsequent generations (Prager, 2003). And as a result, whole societies and the individuals who comprise them lose their capacity to orient themselves toward the future.

Contemporary politics, in many different settings around the world, have conjoined the personal with the political, the past with the present. It is now widely accepted that a new politics requires the forging of new self-identities and the undoing of old ways of perception and their replacement by more inclusive, less divisive identities of oneself in relation to other members of the community. All of this has resulted in an extension of the idea of psychological trauma to one of social trauma as the aggregated effects of individuals being caught in the crucible of some event or set of events larger than their capacity to process and psychologically accommodate. And, in fact, social trauma, and a polity's need to self-consciously attempt to overcome the psychological effects of past actions have become both part of political discourse and the subject of social scientific analysis (Prager, 2006; 2008). But just as the concept of psychological trauma experienced by an individual encompasses a whole range of experiences that vary not only in severity but in kind, requiring different forms of therapeutic responses to aid healing, so too does social trauma require greater specificity. Not all social traumas are the same, either in origin or in long-term consequence; the specific nature of social trauma, at the personal level, requires acknowledging the unique conditions in which it occurred as well as identifying the corresponding measures to undo its legacy.

### **Intersubjectivity, Multidimensionality, and the Persistence of Childlike Expectations toward Others**

Before providing a description of three distinct constellations of social trauma requiring different forms of social redress (the focus of Part II of this article), I need to describe a post-Freudian theory of the self that forms the basis of this

analysis and that now seems more widely to inform everyday understanding of how socially-situated selves develop through time. Different politics around the world presume a common working model of their citizens' psychology, an almost universally held presumption that events from the past have enduring effects on actions and feelings held by individuals in the present (Prager, 2008). Not far different from the view that children often display personal qualities that emerge more fully into adulthood—the acorn (should it thrive) always becomes its own oak tree—is the sense that this “normal” developmental process can be derailed through extraordinary external events or circumstances. This is the modern view both of the personality and trauma's capacity: from infancy to adulthood, the individual develops an increasing ability to act autonomously within the social world unless extraordinary events are overwhelming and therefore interfere with this normal maturational process. Then, traumatic social experiences become inscribed; others within the body politic become either friend or foe, and divisions between groups—good and bad others—threaten the possibility for social cohesion. Given these conditions, political elites may choose to implement ameliorative social measures to promote trauma's healing and repair, to construct self-consciously a (democratic) community of equally acknowledged selves.

The significance of the social world for personal development—especially the understanding of ways that past social conflict, patterns of torture, collective exclusion, etc. can distort a person's capacity to constructively interact with the social world in the present—reflects two important assumptions. The first is that open, healthy political and social processes depend on the construction of healthy selves. As new legal, economic, political, and cultural changes are being implemented, their impact on individual citizens cannot be ignored. “Social engineering” of the self is a responsibility too of the political elite, no less important than the implementation of new social policy for managing natural resources, developing political, legal, and cultural institutions of civil society, and providing for the exchange of goods and services, all of which, are intended to signify disruption or disjuncture from the now disavowed past. Second, the shaping of the “new” person in society is not

restricted to family policy: measures to support, strengthen, and educate family members in the post-traumatic society, while necessary, are hardly sufficient to generate constructive, engaged members of society. Extra-familial measures, like the TRC in South Africa, seem to be necessary to better ensure that traumas of the past not persist in defining the politics of the present.

Advances in empirically based sciences, including psychoanalysis, similarly emphasize not an intra-psychic theory of self-formation but an interactional one. A theory of the self now includes a more robust understanding of the external environment as a fundamental dimension of selfhood, one that either fosters healthy self-development, i.e. producing an individual more fully capable of engaging the world as it presents itself, or as inhibitory to that formation. This view of self-in-formation corresponds not only to Winnicott and other psychoanalytic writers who emphasize the role of the "facilitating environment" but also to sociologists like George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, Howard Garfinkel, Anthony Giddens, and Pierre Bourdieu, each of whom underscores the inextricable—and even simultaneous—connection between the formation of the self in interaction with others and the structured patterns of social life outside the person. Scholars whose work has been built on careful observation of infant development similarly describe the importance of psychic resonance between infant and external others (Stern, 1985; Beebe et al., 2005).

At the same time, the theory of the self, I argue, needs to preserve the core Freudian insight, still a feature of contemporary psychoanalysis, that all phenomena external to the person are filtered from the "inside-out"—much of it beneath cognition—thus preserving the original psychoanalytic contention concerning psychic realities, both primitive and mature, as co-existing in the individual: primary process, unconscious thought and affect, timeless and fantastic, with other more conscious, rationally-based, secondary process thinking, logical and reasonable. The pre-linguistic and non-cognitive foundations of the self, also critically shaped by the outside environment, are dimensions critical to healthy self-functioning with others, and capable of being pathologically distorted in the face of social

trauma. Sociologists and social theorists have appreciated far less the critical role of unconscious thought and fantasy.

Significantly, the contemporary critical theorist and social philosopher Axel Honneth (1995) emphasizes aspects of the self that lie beneath cognition and recognizes their powerful role in orienting and organizing human action in society. He introduces into contemporary philosophical and sociological literature an intersubjective, inter-psychic conception of selfhood, one that helps provide an avenue to consider the ways different traumatic social experiences can have reverberating, particular, and debilitating unconscious impact on individuals. While far from abandoning a communicative theory of interaction, as promoted by among others his mentor Jürgen Habermas, Honneth incorporates a whole dimension of pre-linguistic and affective experience in his understanding of the social processes that shape individual selves. Challenging the original Hobbesian view of the self as simply comprised of the isolated, atomistic individual motivated simply by a self-preservative and egocentric instinct, Honneth builds instead on Hegel's claim concerning the human drive for recognition. He offers a multi-dimensional theory of the self, not as motivated exclusively by self-interest (me versus others) but as a multi-layered construct of ethical relationships (or, one might say, social attachments characterized both by mutual rights and obligations) between self and other. The self, Honneth argues, has no standing except as a member of a collectivity of others. It is defined from the beginning as a result of social interaction. Without a social world, there might exist a human biological organism (though one whose existence necessarily would be extremely short-lived) but certainly no sense of self-consciousness. Dependent as we are on the other for our formation, Honneth insists on the ethical (as opposed to merely instrumental) character both of our own self-regard and our need for others: it is impossible to cast any reflection upon ourselves independent of our relation to a particular social world in which we find ourselves. Our sense of ourselves as independent and as acting freely, paradoxically, is the product of existing social relations and institutions.

Honneth recognizes that this process in which a person develops a reflexive awareness of oneself as a person takes form



over time—from infancy to adulthood—and becomes more complex as one moves from birth to physical maturity. Yet the mature or adult self never sheds its pre-history; selfhood is the result of a layering process, in which early formative childhood experiences, principally affective, non-cognitive and pre-linguistic and located within the primary attachment patterns in the family, interact with increasingly more distal, less personal relationships in communities of others, friendship groups, schools, and other institutional affiliations. Unlike Habermas (and Hobbes), Honneth recognizes the important role of unconscious contributions—emotional, non-rational responses to people and things—driven by early childhood formations that build upon affectively-felt attachment patterns whose groundwork has been laid in a psychologically distant past. Said differently, the complex, adult self depends typically on an expanding set of interpersonal relationships and social experiences. In these more impersonal groupings, one seeks similarly, just like from the family of origin, acknowledgement of oneself as worthy of care (love), as entitled to equal standing as others (rights), and as uniquely possessed with individual traits and capacities (solidarity). In each of these spheres, the personal aim for recognition from others—to be accorded love, respect, and admiration from the social world of others—directs action.

Recognition, Honneth makes clear, expresses and answers the uniquely human impulse—the requirement for others' to affirm one's own sense of well-being—and captures more completely the fundamentally social and ethical character of our personhood. Mutual recognition produces a fulfilled person, as well as describes the requisites for a solidary society. His understanding of human nature stands in sharp contrast to those who restrict human action, bottom line, as motivated simply by rational calculation and self-interest. Thus, Honneth's most widely known writing in the English-speaking world is *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Contemporary Politics* (1995). Disrespect, or the denial of these basic human requirements, for Honneth, motivates those who aspire for positive change through collective action. And recognition, as Hegel himself emphasized in its original formulation, expresses a human striving for self-realization through the social commu-

nity; its denial generates a politics of self-assertion demanding greater recognition. This is Honneth's important contribution to a contemporary understanding of selfhood: he describes the self paradoxically as having the appearance (to ourselves and to others) of existing independently of the reflection of others, standing alone, and being guided by self-centeredness (or selfishness) while, in reality, being dependent, from infancy onwards, on a social world that enables, even encourages, the illusion of isolation to exist.

The distinction he draws between the phenomenology of selfhood and the immanent, unconscious sustaining social context upon which it is built brings Honneth's understanding of the self close to a contemporary psychoanalytic view. In fact, Honneth relies heavily on the work of the British pediatrician-turned-psychanalyst, Donald Winnicott, to describe the early childhood affective needs provided by the mother (the first other) to sustain the healthy growth and development of the infant. Here, Honneth contrasts Winnicott with Freud. Winnicott, he argues, introduces the facilitative role of surrounding others as essential to self-development while Freud only offers a theory of individual drives and instincts seeking gratification. As a result, Freud offers a social theory emphasizing an individual's struggle to gratify sexual and aggressive impulses *through* others. Society necessarily serves to restrict the full-blown, direct, and immediate expression of those drives. Sexuality and aggressivity or, more broadly, subjectivity are generated internally and are the product both of biological and psychological impulses seeking satisfaction, requiring various forms of sublimated activity, while society, according to Freud, necessarily has to construct and repress their unmediated expression. In this view, self and other stand in an adversarial relationship to one another, and the development of ego-control, or the reality principle, represents an individual's satisfactory accommodation to the desire for self-gratification (id impulses), on the one side, and obedience to social restraint on the other (super-ego demands).

In contrast, Winnicott, like Honneth, emphasizes instead that healthy development requires a mutually supportive relationship between self and other. Rather than necessarily representing two warring forces, self and other—and despite their differing needs—find a way to accommodate lovingly to

one another. Winnicott describes the process most clearly: it is the activation in the child of a reconciling, or reparative, instinct—what Winnicott (1958a/1975; 1958b/1975) calls “ruth” in comparison to the initial pre-social impulse of “ruthlessness”—so as not ruthlessly to destroy the other (and the objective world). Meanwhile, the mother, or caregiver, possesses the (more mature) capacity to tolerate the child’s hostility (competition, aggression, sexual desire) and to contain it without also destroying the impulse for self-expression. Heinz Kohut (1984), another contemporary psychoanalytic writer and the founder of “self-psychology,” writes similarly of the healthy self:

a cohesive harmonious firm unit in time and space connected with his past and moving toward a creative-productive future...only as, at each stage in his life, he experiences certain representatives of his human surroundings as joyfully responding to him, as available to him as sources of idealized strength and calmness, as being silently present but in essence like him, and, at any rate, able to grasp his inner life more or less accurately so that their responses are attuned to his needs and allow him to grasp their inner life when his is in need of such sustenance (p. 52).

Kohut offers his own vocabulary to describe the same phenomenon (without, however, Winnicott’s (1969) insistence also on the need for the other to resist hostile attacks): the healthy individual freely affiliates with the world of others only when others are experienced as more-or-less benign and share in concern for one’s well-being. And without this supportive external environment, the individual cannot activate himself or herself to engage the world toward “a creative-productive future.” As Kohut and Winnicott both assert, this stance toward one’s human surroundings is an instinctive, automatic, and unconscious one. It precedes and shapes cognitive and conscious positions adopted by persons toward their surroundings. Honneth (1995) invokes these same claims about the unconscious, similarly noting the key contribution the environment plays in shaping its formation. The individual able to affiliate fully with others requires simultaneously *self-capacity* and *other-nourishment*.

While it is possible to distinguish analytically between self and other, the fates of both ultimately are inextricably tied together.

Honneth nonetheless shares with Freud and all of psychoanalysis the understanding that mature adults, while appearing to be governed by goals quite different from the infant, never fully shed their own early infantile desires. One of Freud’s signal contributions to modern thought is his description of the developmental stages of the psyche, where later psychosexual stages are built on the edifice of former ones. The archaeological metaphor invoked by Freud reflects his understanding that while the earliest achieved, most infantile, most sequestered aspects of selfhood may forever remain largely unaware, or buried, to the person, they nonetheless persist and require sustenance and affirmation. Thus, adult selfhood typically constitutes a complex conscious and unconscious psychic structure, consisting of this layering of both affective and cognitive needs that continually seek gratification or nourishment from a social field sufficiently tolerant of this assertiveness. Self-hood develops ontogenetically through three stages toward the achievement of mutual recognition. In Honneth’s language, the self becomes more complex through the developmental cycle: from emotional love (in primary affective relationships) to legal recognition (as an equal member of the legal and inter-personal order) to solidarity through approval from others (acknowledgment by others of particular traits and capacities). The pre-requisites for a healthy sense of selfhood, following from this developmental trajectory, are: 1) self-confidence, corresponding to the foundational need for love (individual care and secure attachment); 2) self-regard, corresponding to a need to be accorded equality of treatment, what Honneth describes as recognition through equal standing; and 3) self-esteem, corresponding to the need to be distinguished by one’s own particular capacities and traits, what Honneth characterizes as recognition of one’s unique membership in the social collectivity, yielding group solidarity. Each, according to Honneth, are component parts of the mature self, each developing over time on the shoulders of prior relationships and earlier experiences, yet each capable of being compromised during extreme times of stress or personal challenge. Perhaps more than Winnicott, Honneth invokes a language of self-development that emphasizes most

clearly the actual interpenetration of self in a world of others; healthy self-development, or mutual recognition, requires the achievement of a synchrony between individual wants and societal capacities.<sup>3</sup> But whether one is drawn to the language of a psychoanalyst or that of a social philosopher, there is an unmistakable congruence in conviction that it is impossible to theorize about healthy self-development without describing a social world healthy enough to recognize those members who comprise it, just as it is impossible to understand healthy societal processes without acknowledging the critical role of healthy-enough individuals to constitute it.

#### The Traumatized Self:

#### The Collapse of Illusion and Varieties of Social Traumas

In "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," one of his most influential psychoanalytic essays, Winnicott (1971) writes that there is "the third part of the life of a human being; a part that we cannot ignore . . . an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute." He goes on to explain that this "is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the *perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated*" (p. 3; emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> The perpetual task for human beings is the challenge to create and preserve a realm of being that Winnicott calls *illusionary*, the world that is neither self nor other, but *in-between*.<sup>5</sup>

In this essay, Winnicott describes the phenomenon of the transitional object—the special possession of the toddler, neither an extension of oneself or of mother, but of an in-between that holds special meaning and significance, irreducible to the child's own thumb, say, or to the mother's breast. This is a uniquely specific domain for humans, Winnicott argues, an illusionary realm that, in time, shifts in focus from the teddy bear to childhood play and, more significantly, represents the foundation of art, religion, and science. The third realm, in short, is where much of human activity resides throughout life,

for it is the domain through which we continually mediate between subjective needs and desires and an external reality of limits and constraints. Winnicott writes,

Should an adult make claims on us for our acceptance of the objectivity of his subjective phenomena [I believe I am Jesus Christ] we discern or diagnose madness. If, however, the adult can manage to enjoy the personal intermediate area without making claims [Jesus Christ speaks directly to me], then we can acknowledge our own corresponding intermediate areas [our own religious belief], and are pleased to find a degree of overlapping, that is to say common experience between members of a group in art or religion or philosophy (p. 18; author's additions in brackets)

Other domains of social activity also describe forms of common experience, similarly dependent on the health and vitality of an illusionary realm: democratic politics (Prager 1993), the economy, and various forms of cultural expression. And, as Winnicott so brilliantly captures it, this third realm of human experience requires collusion between self and other, both for its creation as well as for its maintenance. The various products of civilization depend on the stability of illusionary domains—creative realms of activity—that are achieved intersubjectively. Human accomplishments, according to Winnicott, represent first the achievement by the individual of an internal object—what I have here described as fantasies of the other—that is "alive and real and good enough (not too persecutory)" (p. 13). For these internal objects to possess these characteristics, what is also required is the "existence and aliveness and behaviour of the external object" (p. 13). Originally, then, illusion depends on the joint activity of infant and mother. When there exists sufficient synchrony between the wants of the infant and the responses of the mother, the transitional object, play, and the elaborated domain of illusion then becomes possible. "Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from with-

out? The important point is that no decision on the point is expected. The question is not to be formulated" (p. 17).

If this is the precondition for the development of illusion, it can also be said that illusion's continuity throughout life keeps on requiring intersubjective "collusion," though members of the family of origin are no longer the central actors in this cooperative enterprise. The continued availability of fantasies of one's aliveness, wellness, and a more-or-less sense of one's own omnipotence and capacity for spontaneity, accompanied with a not-too-persecutory other, depends on the absence of events or series of events that allows the unconscious inner world to remain unchallenged. Other individuals typically come to occupy a transferential place in a person's inner world; new relationships come to do the work originally established in first primary relationships.

*Traumatic harm* is another way to describe the confluence of these two dimensions: danger and deformation. Trauma is a psychic event. It is the product of dangerous objective moments that *upon personal reflection*—i.e. after the fact—rupture (or overwhelm) an uninterrupted persistence in oneself of a belief in one's aliveness, wellness, centrality, and presentness. "I almost died just then." At the same time, it is a product of the collapse of the subjective capacity to hold fantasies of others' protection that generate a sense (however irrational) of personal safety and security. "This could have happened *to me*." When danger conjoins with personal deformation, illusion is destroyed. The capacity of a person to live spontaneously in the in-between space collectively constructed is compromised. Those traumatized often retreat into a private world preoccupied with self-care and self-defense. The result is the construction of transitional space, an inability to engage playfully in a more-or-less benign shared world co-constructed with others. Instead, traumatized persons protect themselves from the external world and single-mindedly struggle, oftentimes futilely to the point of paralysis, so as not to be overwhelmed by a sense of impotence, despair, and rage (Derwin, forthcoming). There is no longer an *in-between*, or it is severely compromised.

Winnicott, here, captures how being (truly) human, permitting individuals to affiliate freely with the social world as

it presents itself, is a joint-enterprise between self and other, an intersubjective achievement that, when healthy conditions obtain, enable every person to preserve a sense of a personal, grandiose interior distinct, though still in relation to, an external, objective world. Honneth builds upon this specific characterization of intersubjectivity to describe the fragility of this in-between world, the numbers of ways that individuals can fail to feel fully recognized, and the dangers non-recognition holds for personal gratification and social solidarity when healthy conditions fall short. He specifies the particular and different ways in which disrespect or non-recognition can express itself in the individual—a failure to feel loved, respected, or admired. As already indicated, selfhood, for Honneth, feels fully constituted, or recognized, when an individual sufficiently experiences love (care, strong affect, and secure attachment), respect (equal standing among others), and admiration (esteem in one's own unique being).

By acknowledging, as does Honneth as well other psychoanalysis, that psychic structuring is multi-layered and complex, we better understand the need to distinguish between various kinds of social traumas that potentially have devastating impact on one's own sense of selfhood. Complementary to Honneth's analysis of the components of healthy selfhood, various forms of potentially illusion-destroying behaviors toward individuals require greater differentiation from one another. Different kinds of social traumas potentially compromise different component parts of the self: What forms of behavior by external actors deprive individuals, in different ways, of an ability to negotiate this in-between space between subjectivity and external opposition? What behaviors place feelings of love and confidence in jeopardy, undermine the sense of respect, and upend personal self-esteem? How is the sense that one is loved by others jeopardized through external behavior? What kinds of social behaviors threaten feelings of one's equal standing with others? How is the experience of a benign external world of others who appreciate one's own unique capacities and traits, i.e. admiration, destroyed as a result of specific social actions?

This set of discrete questions underscore two central assertions of this essay. First, up to now, social trauma has been narrowly treated as a single and more or less conceptually

simple phenomenon, with inadequate attention given to its various forms. Second, by failing to distinguish between types of social trauma, insufficient attention has been paid to how specific forms of social behavior produce different types of psychic collapse, contribute specifically to distinct challenges for social solidarity, and encourage consideration of specific forms of social repair or redress. In Part II of this essay (forthcoming), a typology of social traumas will be offered. Without recourse to more fine-grained analyses of social trauma, strategies undertaken by various polities, large and small, to address past trauma and to heal its members may badly miss the mark.

As a counterpoint to Honneth's tripartite framework for the fully recognized healthy self, I offer three types of social trauma that threaten illusion and challenge the possibility for the achievement of mutual recognition. I describe 1) *traumas of lethality*, in which the loving self is placed at risk; 2) *traumas of violence and bodily harm*, where the illusion of safety and security is guaranteed by a social contract based upon equal rights is undermined; and 3) *traumas of personal invisibility*, when the failure to be recognized as an individual produces anti-social results and therefore generates a withdrawal of solidary connections with the larger whole.

### Notes

1. Early in his thinking on trauma, Freud (1926 [1925]) makes clear that traumatic harm is understood not by a description of the external event itself but by the ways it becomes internally felt and remembered: "Man seems not to have been endowed, or to have been endowed only to a very small degree, with an instinctive recognition of the dangers that threaten him from without... The external (real) danger must also have managed to become internalized if it is to be significant for the ego. It must have been recognized as related to some situation of helplessness that has been experienced" (p. 168).
2. For an extended discussion of contemporary debates on psychological trauma, see Prager (1998) and Lays (2000). Psychological trauma, as I have argued elsewhere (Prager, 2006), is always an after-the-fact experience. *Nachträglichkeit*. It is an internal psychic response generated after the dangerous event confronted is remembered (whether minutes later, or months, or years) and that proves emotionally overwhelming. Further, the resultant feeling of helplessness is an unconscious memory as well, returning in the person back to a time when psychic structures of omnipotence were not yet in place. But despite the fact that trauma is a memorial process in these two senses, I leave the question of memory largely aside in the subsequent discussion of psychological and social trauma (see also Prager, 1998; 2008).
3. The writings of Erich Fromm, especially *The Art of Loving* (1956), are an important precursor to Honneth's multidimensional, depth-psychological, and intersubjec-

4. In my view, this essay stands as an extremely important contribution not only to psychoanalysis but also to 20<sup>th</sup>-century social theory and ought to be recognized as such. Written roughly at the same time as many important sociological contributions to an understanding of the self, it provides a depth psychological framework for the relation of the individual to social structure. That framework was largely absent from his contemporaries and the later 20<sup>th</sup>-century and only now, especially in the writings of Honneth, is being incorporated.
5. A note on terminology: Winnicott chose to speak of this third-realm of experience as "illusory." His use of the term differs from a common-sense understanding of illusion as something false or untrue. He also uses it differently from Freud, as in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), where Freud describes a person's belief in God to be a distortion emanating from unfulfilled personal needs. Freud expressed the view that through greater understanding of unconscious forces and needs, illusory religious belief, like illusions more generally, in time can disappear. For Winnicott, illusion is neither false nor a distortion. Illusion expresses rather the capacity of the human being to relate to an immaterial though nonetheless real world, invests it with special meaning, and acts toward it as real. Shared illusions, like religion, science, or the arts, despite their being neither subjective nor objective but rather *in-between*, nonetheless produce real in-the-world consequences. For Winnicott, this third realm of human experience describes a uniquely human capacity, forming the basis for all creative activities. Rather than being a disparaging term, it is for Winnicott the ultimate in human achievement and can only be generated intersubjectively.

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## The Path of Phocion: Disgrace and Disavowal at the Philip Johnson Glass House

*Philip Johnson graced his iconic Glass House with a single sciento painting, Landscape with the Burial of Phocion by Nicolas Poussin, an intrinsic signifier of the building that frames it. Analyzed within its physical, cultural, and political context, Burial of Phocion condenses displaced, interlacing representations of disavowed aspects of Johnson's identity, including forbidden strivings for greatness and power, the haunting legacy of the lesser artist, and the humiliation of exile. It is argued that Phocion's path from disgrace to posthumous dignity is a narrative lens through which Johnson attempted to reframe and disavow his political past.*

Every time I come away from Poussin I know better who I am.

—attributed to PAUL CÉZANNE

Is all that we see or seem  
But a dream within a dream?

—EDGAR ALLAN POE, *A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM*, 1827<sup>1</sup>

### An Invitation to Look

Although he would during his life amass a formidable collection of contemporary art, the architect Philip Cortelyou Johnson (1906-2005) chose to grace his country residence, the Glass House, with but a single *sciento* Old Master painting, Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with the Burial of Phocion*,<sup>2</sup> purchased

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