

OF SOUL AND WHITE FOLKS

“WHAT therapist would tell us to read history?” I began, looking out over the expanse of people in the large room. The audience was diverse, the racial mix that makes California so rich and complex. African American. Chicana. Salvadoran. Korean. Chinese. Indian. Brazilian. Cuban. Nigerian. White. I had come to the University of California at Berkeley to a conference on “The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness” to talk about the souls of white folk—borrowing from W.E.B. Du Bois’s term—assuming that we have souls and beginning with my own. The question of the relation of private emotion to public event to history had been the central preoccupation of *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, my attempt to describe seven years of organizing against Klan and neo-Nazi movements in North Carolina and to come to terms with my own history as a white person. After six years of organizing and four years of writing, all I had was a deeper set of questions, and I had brought them to grapple with at this peculiar and hybrid forum on whiteness.¹

Each of us in this late-afternoon Saturday panel, “Critical Studies of Whiteness,” was intent on making the absolutely necessary connections between academic study and antiracist intent. I was glad I was sporting my blue denim jacket. The queer panel had come right before me. I was the only woman on this panel, so I was butch-ing it up with the guys: David Roediger, David Wellman, and Noel Ignatiev (or his paper, at least). Noel’s contribution, a militant call for a new abolitionism, had just been read by a young friend because Noel could not come.

“Good luck,” David Wellman had nodded to me as I had stepped into the hot space Noel’s friend left behind the podium. I began to make clear that I do not assume that whiteness is monolithic. Its power as a constructed category has been its very historic malleability under the flag of biological determinism. If whiteness is a signifier of power and condition of access in U.S. culture, then women are less white than men, gay people less white than straight people, poor people less white than rich people, Jews than Christians, and so forth. Over the centuries, people of various European nationalities have climbed into and sometimes fallen out of whiteness, the

core of which has always been Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, propertied, and male (and now straight).

"Racism normalizes whiteness and makes people of color the problem," I continued "so white people are generic humans who don't have to look at ourselves. We escape scrutiny, and we escape accountability as a group for creating racism and as individuals for challenging it. One response is to begin to look at whiteness as a problem and to calculate its wages. This is the very necessary process of acknowledging white privilege. We can explain and assess the advantage of being white in terms of not going to prison nearly so often, becoming coaches of major sports, more easily and more frequently obtaining home mortgages, buying cheaper cars, dying less often from cancer, more frequently obtaining better jobs, being safer on the streets or when—or if—police pull us over, and on and on and on. But such a calculation can almost be too convincing. Why should anyone give up such privilege?"

I paused here, remembering the many young college audiences with whom I had spoken. I had come to believe that only dealing with white people on giving up privilege was counterintuitive. There must also be some fuller range of loss and gain, some deeper calculus to invoke.

"What we miss when we only calculate our privilege is insight into the profound damage racism has done to us, as if we as a people could participate in such an inhuman set of practices and beliefs over five centuries of European hegemony and not be, in our own ways, devastated emotionally and spiritually. The indigenous Hawaiian term for white person is *haole*—which means 'without breath, or spirit, or soul.'" I invoked Loretta's explanation from my recent Hawaiian sojourn.²

Commotion somewhere. A man. Shouting. It took a second or two to pull myself out of the text. To the left of the room . . . about one-third of the way back . . . a bulky white man . . . tall . . . corpulent . . . yelling at the top of his lungs . . . at me. I made myself focus on what he was saying, wanting to locate him politically: "white genocide! . . . racial slurs against Europeans!" A Right-wing kook. He hadn't opened fire, I realized with relief, so I figured he had not come armed. This was a scene he had come to make, I registered, and perhaps he felt safer screaming at a woman than at my male co-panelists. But I also knew he was yelling at me now because he thought I had said white people do not have souls. *That's not what I said, brother, I thought, what I said is that we need to tend to them.*

People in the room were beginning to respond hostilely. I felt responsible to use my place at the microphone. I knew this rant, this spew, this velocity of raw fury from Klan rallies I had monitored: it was like these guys were channeling; they had become vessels for the furious fear of the culture.

"What's your name?" I focused my attention on him with all the calmness I could muster, wanting to break his rant. "What's your name? What's your name?" I could see some of the people in the audience around him moving toward him deliberately. I assumed they were people with peace-keeper training. They were closing in to de-escalate and get him out of the room.

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"Damn!" I said wanting to move his do the same. If I had a couple of minutes what had just happened taken about five minutes.

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"What's your name?" After a few more repetitions, my question broke into his tirade, and he was still a minute. Then he answered, "Thorston! My name is Thorston!" He went off again on why he had renamed himself.

Oh, Lord, I realized, he's one of those Right-wing types who's renamed himself after some Norse god. Whatever self I had momentarily evoked was pretty fractured. But by that time three or four people were talking to him from close up, calmly I could tell, and had begun moving him out of the room. Some people in the crowd began to hiss at him. I signaled a request for quiet. We weren't out of the woods yet.

I was hardly advocating for Thorston's free speech. I believe too much in the power of language not to recognize its sometimes violent effects, and I had seen too often Klan marches allowed in North Carolina under the aegis of an interpretation of the First Amendment that allowed officials to dissociate themselves from responsibility for Klan and Nazi violence. As far as I was concerned, Thorston's outburst was at least a misdemeanor. But violent acts can breed other violence. There was enough of his energy afoot in the room to cause a brawl, which was not what most people had come for. I wanted to minimize that possibility as long as I was at the microphone. By now the group around Thorston had moved him out the back door, the sound of his yelling receding down the hall. I said a silent prayer for the people on the street and for any family he had at home.

"Damn!" I said into the mike, "Shake it out!" I flicked my hands at the wrists, wanting to move his energy out of my body. I encouraged people in the audience to do the same. If I had had a little more sense about me, I would have given everybody a couple of minutes each to talk to the person sitting next to them about responses to what had just happened. But I was still focused on my speech, and Thorston had taken about five minutes of my time.

I began again. "Like I was saying, we have a problem with the souls of white folks."

NOT COMFORT, BUT POWER

W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the first to explore the economic cost of racism to white people, as my co-panelist David Roediger had examined in his own work. For a modicum of economic privilege and a dollop of racial superiority—what Du Bois called the "psychological wage" of being white—white workers gave up class solidarity that could have created better working conditions for all races. But Du Bois also recognizes that the loss here is as much psychological, or spiritual, as material: "[The white worker] began to want, not comfort for all men but power over other men. . . . He did not love humanity and he hated niggers."⁴ In gaining power, whites lose comfort of the nonmaterial kind: ease, well-being, consolation, help, solace, and relief. In acquiring hatred, whites lose feelings and practices of love.

I had become intensely interested in exploring what we whites give up as human beings in love of humanity to a racist system, a concern for psyche as human soul,

spirit or mind—the larger self. In the United States we have not been able to have a clear conversation about our emotional pain. We substitute arguments about reverse discrimination or immigration or special rights that obfuscate the sources of pain in historical imbalances of power. The business of therapy, both professional and self-help, has emerged in this century in the United States to deal with the psychological damage, which in a culture structured around scarcity and profit happens to people first in the context of our racist, sexist, and homophobic families. But these therapies are highly depoliticized. This failure of therapy to take into account the political causes of personal and family distress is another factor that insulates white people from realizing the damage we suffer from racism and therefore from realizing our own stake in changing racist systems for ourselves, as well as for people of color. We need to balance calculations on the benefits of whiteness (and maleness and heterosexism and the drive for profits) with calculations of pain and loss for all people in this culture; for example, sixty million people suffering from alcoholism, the leading killer in the country; stress that contributes to heart disease and cancer; 50 percent of the population with eating disorders; thirty-four million adult women sexually abused.⁵

These considerations of the personal cost of exploitative systems are not abstract questions for me. My mother was chronically ill and addicted to prescription drugs, from which she died a slow and painful death; my father, Tim, Dallas, and I were left to fend for ourselves amid our mother's periodic bouts of illness. During these times my mother (who was lively and loving when she was feeling good) withdrew almost completely from us physically and emotionally to deal with her pain, not wanting to inflict it on us; or she left home indefinitely for the latest cure. Part of my legacy was a deep sense of pessimism and a distrust for the world in which I found myself. For many years, I carried pieces of her pain. Raised in a segregationist family in Alabama, I had an increasing sense of alienation and difference throughout my adolescence: a growing disquiet about my mother's mental health, an increasing dismay over white racism literally exploding all around me, and a fear that I was both the same as the white people with whom I was raised and, as an unacknowledged lesbian, different in a way that would keep me from ever finding or giving love. Each of us from our childhoods bring our configurations of joy and suffering and this was mine.

This fear, this silence, this sadness: in their thickness they were surely more than one generation old. In my readings about the history of racism, which I incorporated in *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, I searched for the interfaces between my (white) subjective life and history. I found them repeatedly. I had known that part of my mother's sadness came from having lost her father, whom she idolized, when she was three. He died of influenza in 1918, in part because he was in poor health from having caught malaria when he went off as a young man to fight in the Spanish-American War. He was an engineer, a traveler, an adventurer—having caught his second case of malaria from an expedition up some Central American river when he was in Panama working on the canal. I had never considered his relationship to his own father, Judge James

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Cobb, who came sharply into focus for me in the process of writing: Confederate officer; Democratic judge who threw Republican Reconstruction officials into the chain gang; and congressman, until he was kicked out of Congress for voter fraud against an insurgent interracial Populist movement in 1894. Before he died, he helped redraft the Alabama Constitution to bring in Jim Crow the same year that my father's grandfather, Charles Segrest, died in Bryce's, the state insane asylum. And, I know from my mother's stories, Judge Cobb beat his children, including my grandfather Ben—who perhaps left home for war and adventure fleeing this rigid father.

Charles Segrest's psychic break seems liked posttraumatic stress disorder, now more familiar to us from Vietnam vets. My aunt explained the stigma under which she and my father had grown up, having a certified crazy person in the family. What I saw was at the root of both my parents' pain: In a very real sense, it originated in my families' involvements in racist wars and their aftermath, racist peace.

Political struggle, like therapy, has been a source of healing in my life. If I was using therapy to pursue more emotional balance, I was also, on a parallel track, increasingly politicized. Coming out as a lesbian in 1976–77 was the first step in my politicization and it opened me up creatively. I began writing seriously and joined a collective doing lesbian feminist cultural work. This soon led me to antiracist activism within the lesbian and gay community. In 1983 I left both a closeted teaching job and what was beginning to feel like ghettoization within the lesbian community. I began organizing against a growing neo-Nazi movement and climate in North Carolina, with many other people, a majority of them heterosexual African Americans. I increasingly focused my anger outward in organizing for social change: of the homophobic world that had so isolated me and of the racism that had dismayed me with its violent fury as a child and an adolescent. I had an instinctive sense that the forces of race and class that white Alabamians had acted out so flagrantly were the same forces that, interacting with a misogynist world, were still destroying my mother's health. This action worked synchronistically with my reflection on family history in therapeutic spaces.

This synchronism also provided part of the framework by which I understood my antifascist organizing. The acquittal of Klansmen and neo-Nazis for the murders of anti-Klan demonstrators in Greensboro in 1979 had opened a floodgate of white supremacist organizing and racist violence. The neo-Nazi White Patriot Party was organizing all over the state, running candidates for public office (free publicity for the most racist propaganda), and marching its battalion, first one hundred, then three and four hundred strong, through little towns. We began to show links between members of the White Patriot Party and The Order, a white terrorist organization in the West. We were doing our best to sound the alarm, but the resistance was incredible. The epidemic of cross burnings across the state were "pranks" or "isolated incidents," according to reports in county newspapers. Patriot leader Miller's boasts of building up a white Christian army to take back the South—a violation of the state's paramilitary laws—was merely free speech, although it was accompanied by increasing

acts of racist violence. I kept telling reporters: this man is confessing to a crime (breaking the state's paramilitary laws). What we kept running into felt like the massive denial I had experienced in my community as an adolescent, when most of the whites I knew had refused to acknowledge the reality, much less the moral significance, of the violent white resistance to black freedom movements. I began to formulate a metaphysics of genocide: people don't need to respond to what they can pretend they do not know, and they don't know what they can't feel.

THE ANESTHESIA OF POWER

What emerged on both the therapeutic and the activist parts of my life also began to show up in my intellectual work, giving me more theoretical language for the nexus of political and emotional states, what I have come to understand as the "anesthetic aesthetic" of racism. "Next to the case of the black race within our bosom, that of the red on our borders is the problem baffling to the policy of the country," former President James Madison explained in 1826. The southern white plantation experience of the "black race on our bosom" is one of many locations that can give us some language for the intimate historical experience of racism in the United States. Our regional black-white experience of racism is not the only racial experience in the United States, of course, or in the South; but it is one of the prototypical ones.

In the South, this experience was captured both in slave narratives (the liberation stories of slaves who escaped the South) and slave apologists (the white southern writers who generated defenses of slavery in the thirty years before the Civil War, when slavery as an institution was under the complex set of challenges that eventually brought it down). The apologists are much more frank about claiming racism than we are today, when much of racial language is coded but racism is still entrenched: the playing field of five hundred years is supposedly evened after three decades by two Civil Rights laws; U.S. culture is supposedly now color blind; and the primary form of discrimination is supposedly reverse discrimination experienced by white men. African American literary critic Houston Baker Jr. has recently made the point that W.E.B. Du Bois and others have made: as the South goes, so goes the nation. *The Mind of the South* (Wilbur Cash's book) is also a study of our national mind, especially where racial consciousness is concerned, says Baker. He writes, "Cash got the psycho-cultural commonalities of southern *ressentiment* and racism absolutely 'on the mark' not only for the Confederate states, but also for the United States at large. He captured, that is to say, the *mind* of America in providing a comprehensive analysis of what he called the *South*."⁶

Reading the unapologetic apologists for slavery can give us insight into the enduring effects of racism on white consciousness shaped within the family—and that's the human family, as well as the plantation family, shaped within our species being. This is the link with Africa for all of us who have grown up in nations built by European settlers on foundations of slave cultures.

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On southern plantations, this family was quite a mess. The white father/master/owner was married to a white woman, who bore his white children. But he also raped the African women who were his slaves, who also bore his children. The white children inherited their darker siblings, whom they never acknowledged as kin. The white women got the rap for frigidity, the African woman for promiscuity, a split that justified the white father's rape. When the white father wanted to, he could sell off the black portion of his family, send them down the river, breaking the hearts of African parents and children alike.

I first read *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* in 1983 in a National Endowment for the Arts seminar taught by James Olney. Olney provided my first introduction to slave narratives and the black theorizing about them. Over the years, I have returned to Douglass's *Narrative*, as I did when I wanted to explain the identity confusions inherent in the plantation family:

The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father. . . .

The master is frequently compelled to sell this class of his slaves, out of deference to the feelings of his white wife; and, cruel as the deed may strike any one to be, for a man to sell his own children to human flesh-mongers, it is often the dictate of humanity for him to do so; for, unless he does this, he must not only whip them himself, but must stand by and see one white son tie up his brother, of but few shades darker complexion than himself, and ply the gory lash to his naked back.⁷

Remarkable in Douglass's explanation of the effects of the "double relation of master and father" is the mirror, the effect of the "double relation of slave and son." Douglass explains in the early section of his narrative that "the whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true."⁸ In the passage cited, he displaces responsibility for the beating onto the white mistress. The father is "compelled" to sell his slave (children); the father is the master who "must" whip them or watch his sons do the same. Douglass must give the father/master either no agency, or no humanity, and it is the agency that goes. Douglass describes his master's beating of his Aunt Hester because she had been keeping company with an African, Ned Roberts. Douglass makes clear the sadistic, sexualized nature of the whipping, the motive for which is the master's compulsion to maintain sexual control: "Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back, entirely naked. He then told her

to cross her hands. . . . 'Now you d—d b—h, I'll learn you how to disobey my orders!' . . . The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin."

Douglas called this event "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass." This "blood-stained gate" is also the vaginal passage into an institution of chattel slavery that "follows the condition of the mother."

Douglas gives a terrifying description of the way that the near total control of white plantation men over African bodies created depraved white people of all genders capable of executing, condoning, and encouraging great atrocities. What happens to white emotional life in such an environment? Is there anything left from all of this that white folks can call a "soul"?

Henry Hughes, a slave apologist writing in 1854, gave some insight into the soul-destroying dynamic of the plantation. I found the following remarkable passage reading *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South*, edited by Drew Gilpin Faust. Hughes wrote of what he called the "Orderer's [a]esthetic" and its implications for human relationships. "But the esthetic system is both positive and negative. It is not for the production of pleasure only. It is for the prevention of pain. It is both eunesthetic and anesthetic. Warrenteeism [his euphemism for slavery] as it is, is essentially anesthetic. It systematically eliminates bodily pain. It actualizes comfort for all."¹⁰

What remarkable claims! Such accounts as Douglas's of his master's beating of Hester show how completely Hughes encodes the masters' point of view in his analysis of slavery as a system that "eliminates bodily pain." Clearly, it does not eliminate pain in African bodies, who are not considered fully human. It rather intensifies pain beyond endurance. But what does it do to white bodies? What is this "anesthetic esthetic" that Hughes articulates?

I went to the dictionary. While aesthetics is that branch of philosophy that deals with judgments concerning beauty, it comes from *aisthesis*, "to perceive." *Anesthesia* adds the prefix *an-*, signifying a blocked perception translated as "insensibility . . . the loss of sensation without a loss of consciousness." Sensation is "a perception associated with stimulation of a sense organ or with a specific bodily condition" connected with "the faculty to feel or perceive."¹¹ Sensation, then, begins in impulses from eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, central nervous system—as the brain "perceives" or interprets them. These sensations also have associated feelings—localized somatically in the chest and metaphorically in the heart.

I find that Buddhists' insights about consciousness are helpful in unpacking this anesthetic aesthetic, given that consciousness has been the subject of description and investigation in Buddhism for twenty-five hundred years. According to Buddhism, five aggregates compose the human: form, feeling, perceptions; mental formations, and

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consciousness.¹² Form, or *rūpa*, means our body, including our sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue/mouth, skin, and nervous system)—in other words, our sensations from and of our body. The second aggregate is feelings (*vedana*), which “are like a river within us, and every drop of water in that river is a feeling.” The third aggregate is our perceptions (*saṃjñā*). How we “notice, name, and conceptualize” often involves distortion, or false perception, which is usually painful. Feelings and perceptions are/become mental formations, the fourth aggregate. These mental formations, if based on distorted perception, can form what Buddhists call knots—the equivalent of neuroses or psychoses in Freudian terms; which is to say, all those places we get stuck. The fifth aggregate is what Buddhists call our store consciousness.

The fifth aggregate is a kind of aggregate of aggregates: it is both individual and collective consciousness that “contains all the others and is the basis of their existence.” Each of the aggregates lies as a seed in the store consciousness. Each contains all the others. Using a Marxist metaphor, the fifth aggregate of consciousness is the base, generating the others as superstructure as they rise out of, and fall back into, store consciousness. It is mindfulness, various forms of meditation, the seventh step on the Noble Eightfold Path, that helps one get down to the generative level of store consciousness and find and shift the negative seeds there, transforming painful mental formations such as selfishness, malevolence, malice, and anger into wholesome ones, such as equanimity, self-respect, and humility.¹³ Thus meditation shifts *chitta*, the “mind in the mind”—what Marxists might call ideology or generative systems of ideas.

The particular anesthesia of slavery as Hughes celebrates it seems to block what Buddhists call the first and second aggregates—body, or sensory information, and feeling, or emotion—leaving a more abstracted reason, the mental formations of racist ideology.¹⁴ Necessary to the slave system was the masters’ blocked sensation of its pain, an aesthetic that left him insensible not only to the fellow human beings he enslaved, but to the testimony of his senses that might have contradicted ideologies of slavery.

The Civil War diaries of Mary Boykin Chesnut provide an equally remarkable gloss, from a white woman’s (slave mistress’s) point of view, on Hughes’s notion of the soul-destroying anesthesia necessary to the maintenance of power. The contradictory position of woman and mistress made Chesnut more vulnerable to feeling the pain of domination and gave her the space to articulate her contradictory status. Mary Chesnut’s husband served in Confederate President Jefferson Davis’s cabinet during the Civil War, and she enjoyed her status and vehemently supported the Confederate cause. Yet her diary in places makes analogies between the condition of women and of slaves. She felt the schisms in her culture more than many white upper-class women of her day, making her both observer and site of struggle for the forces contending within southern slave society in its penultimate moment. She describes a “tragedy” she observed on the auction block: “A mad woman taken from her husband and children. Of course she was mad, or she would not have given her grief words in

that public place. Her keepers were along. What she said was rational enough, pathetic, at times heart-rending. It excited me so I quietly took opium. It enables me to retain every particle of mind or sense or brains I have, and so quiets my nerves that I can calmly reason and take rational views of things otherwise maddening."¹⁵

Here we arrive again at the anesthetic of slavery. The African woman in her reasonable grief gives voice to her pain, and Chesnut's perception of her situation rends the white woman's heart, arousing dangerous sensation and feeling—"excitement"—which she immediately blocks with opium in a "systematic elimination of bodily pain." She loses "sensation without the loss of consciousness," and her quieted nerves leave her a distracted rationality—the ability to "take rational views of things otherwise maddening." This process also distorts the body's feedback system to let us know that something is dangerously awry.

In Buddhist terms, Chesnut's empathetic response to the African woman's pain was a moment of *bodhichitta*, or "mind of love"—our ability to feel compassion from the pain we share with others. Pema Chodron describes *bodhichitta* as "our soft spot—our innate ability to love and care about things . . . a natural opening in the barriers we create when we are afraid."¹⁶ This moment of perception had Chesnut on the path to reexamining herself and her culture. ("Looking into one feeling, you can discover everything.")¹⁷ But she has neither the resources, nor the courage, and resorts to opium to short-circuit such a transformative process. Seeing implies action, unless the paths of perception are blocked. Action expands perceptions because it shifts and enlarges our point of view and our capacity and motivation to process bigger chunks of reality.

"Poor women, poor slaves." Mary Chesnut only articulated what Hughes and others explained more dispassionately: "All other people in the State, who are not sovereign people, are subsovereign. To this class belong women, minors, criminals, lunatics and idiots, aliens and all others unqualified or disqualified," not to mention how it might make a person lunatic or criminal to be constantly "unqualified or disqualified."¹⁸

These passages from Hughes and Chesnut describe and defend the institution of chattel slavery that in concert with the genocide of indigenous people formed the foundation of racism on this continent. They suggest that there is not only a psychology but also a physiology of racism: it encodes itself in our consciousness, closing the doors of our perception. That presence that it partially displaces when it does so is part of that larger self that I am calling soul.

In their frank charting of the psychology of mastery in the U.S. South in the mid-nineteenth century, Douglass, Hughes, and Chesnut articulate a process basic to racist consciousness and to the generic consciousness of domination. As Hughes explained, "In any order there are two classes. These are the, (1) Orderers or Superordinates, and the, (2), Orderees or Subordinates. This, of necessity."¹⁹ The cost to the dominating consciousness is a sense of existence as alien, in Hegel's terms.

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These southern descriptions of power also recall Freud's passage where he lamented his lack of connection: "I cannot discover this oceanic feeling in myself. It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings. One can attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where this is not possible—and I am afraid that the oceanic feeling too will defy this kind of characterization—nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational context which is most readily associated with the feeling. . . . From my own experience I could not convince myself of the primary nature of such feeling."²⁰ Where Mary Chesnut frankly resorts to opium to contain her feelings, her bodhi-chitta impulses, Freud (who had his own cocaine problem) resorts to psychoanalysis to justify the absence of his "attempting to discover a psycho-analytic explanation of such a feeling."²¹

What happens to lost sensations and feelings? Freud described a process of projection, which he associated with the state of paranoia: "An internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its context, after undergoing a certain degree of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception." The history of racism, colonialism, sexism, and heterosexism (all states of paranoia) demonstrates, as well, that not only are perceptions suppressed, distorted, and externalized, but also emotions: one's fears about oneself, unexamined, become distorted fears about the Other.²² In the process of repression and projection, distorted feelings migrate, they do not disperse; sexual feelings, or instincts, especially so. By Freud's formulation, in fact, instinctual gratification, and therefore revolt and freedom, all lie outside of civilization, or European culture, which is constituted to repress them and so continually projects them beyond itself. He observes that the human "desire for freedom may be their revolt against some existing injustice" that springs "from the remains of their original personality, which is still untamed by civilization and may thus become the basis in them of hostility to civilization." Here Freud draws on Darwin to code civilization as European, with the original untamed personality coming from more primitive cultures that Europe subdued: civilization and its discontents, sublimation and prior instinct recapitulate the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Repression of instinctual feelings, like conquest of "primitive" cultures, made inevitable what Freud called the "return of the repressed," a kind of psychic revolution congruent with anticolonial national independence movements then active in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.²³ Freud points in these passages to some fundamental characteristics of the "original personality" (species being?) that desires freedom and instigates revolt. I would liken this aspect of self to the larger self of soul, or spirit, which can be reclaimed even within the masterful self if it commits itself to such honest self-scrutiny and (relative) freedom.

Freud's theory of projection provides an illuminating context against which to read his assessment of the relationship between suffering and addiction. He moves here from the macro of civilization to the micro of "our own organism," which surely we can read with reference to Freud's own cocaine problem:

The most interesting methods of averting suffering are those which seek to influence our own organism. In the last analysis, all suffering is nothing else than sensation; it only exists in so far as we feel it, and we only feel it in consequence of certain ways in which our own organism is regulated. The crudest, but also the most effective among these methods of influence is the chemical one—intoxication. I do not think that anyone completely understands its mechanism, but it is a fact that there are foreign substances which, when present in the blood or tissues, directly cause us pleasurable sensations; and they also so alter the conditions governing our sensibility that we become incapable of receiving unpleasurable impulses. The two effects not only occur simultaneously, but seem to be intimately bound up with each other.²⁴

“Averting suffering” by chemical means surely induces an anesthesia, or blocked perception, not only to pain but to pleasurable feelings as well, such as the “oceanic” feeling of connection and bonding. This aversion of suffering by intoxication or other compulsive processes is the emotional and chemical basis for addictions. Within the recovery movement, problematic addictions range from heroin and booze to shopping and the wrong kinds of love.

If, as I have argued, anesthesia is necessarily encrypted in mastery, addiction produces anesthesia. The history of colonialism shows the material process through which such encryption occurred.

I first picked up the connection between addiction, with its blunting of emotion, and capitalism when I read Marvin Harris’s explanation about how Europeans’ acquired taste for the new beverages coffee and cocoa had finally made African slavery profitable. The sugar that went into both drinks came from sugar plantations in the Caribbean. The addictive qualities of sugar, cocoa, and caffeine created enough of a market that the huge losses in the slave trade (which is to say, all the Africans who died in the Middle Passage) could be offset by the new, addictive demand for sugar.²⁵ The triangle trade from Africa to New England to the Caribbean also had at its center sugar and rum, another addictive substance. The cash crop for slave plantations in North Carolina was tobacco—which also fueled the growth of Durham, my hometown, by robber tobacco baron James B. Duke. Duke liked to brag that he taught the world to smoke. One of the first companies to use modern marketing techniques, American Tobacco sent free cigarettes into the desert of North Africa or gave them away on the streets of Asian cities or handed packs to immigrants coming off the boats in the United States. Duke, too, understood that an addictive demand would allow him to run up his supply. Expanding capitalism had built addiction into the U.S. culture, starting with slavery.

The CIA-backed Contras in Nicaragua sold cocaine in Los Angeles in the 1980s, although *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb’s story that top CIA officials knew about this was later repudiated by *Mercury News* executive editor Jerry Ceppos.²⁶ There is only so much twelve-stepping can do by itself in the face of racist, genocidal government schemes that create addiction for profit and control. As Elayne

Rapping argues in today’s world, do imperatively to keep up public discourse by engendered.”²⁷

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Rapping argues in *The Culture of Recovery*: "That these [addictive] behaviors, in today's world, do indeed reflect the growing self-destructiveness of people trying desperately to keep up and succeed in a competitive, market-driven world is masked in public discourse by the idea that 'addictive disorders' are genetically—not socially—engendered."¹⁷

The twelve steps, which I learned in the several years I attended Overeaters Anonymous, gave me a set of emotional guidelines that, when I applied them, could indeed help, in the words of the program, restore my personal emotional life to sanity. But I felt some equally deep need to help restore to sanity the life of my culture. As far as amends go, how does a culture make collective amends for slavery, or genocide? That collective dimension was surely what South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission struggled with. Would folks have a different attitude toward affirmative action, say, or reparations, if they thought politically about amends and saw their own emotional investment in a restored cultural sanity?

The projection that happens in the space between Hegel's dominating self and dominated other, between Hughes's Orderer and Orderee, results in a high state of unconsciousness: in Hughes's terms, *anesthesia*, a stripping away from fuller consciousness a strata of perception. Psychoanalysis was Freud's brave attempt to heal the breach. In Freud's later theory, this dynamic became an internal drama, with the ego caught between the dominant superego and the repressed id. The affective void from which feelings and perceptions have been blocked in oneself and cast onto Others is the space where addictions arise; it is also the psychological space from which whiteness and maleness have been mobilized throughout their histories. This void both justifies exploitation (by projecting onto the exploited all the cast-off fearsome and evil feelings of the exploited—Freud's projection) and holds it in place (the exploiter cannot then feel the violence of his acts, because he cannot feel—Hughes's anesthesia).

Within U.S. culture, various therapeutic movements since Freud have begun to reveal the extent to which exploitative relationships have cost us personally, familiarly, and socially. They have elaborated the cost of our anesthesia; of how the emotional void, once vacated, is filled again and again with destructive and compulsive thoughts, feelings, and habits. In the past twenty years, also, the Right has made use of what Lawrence Grossberg calls "affective epidemics"—around drugs, the family, nationalism, and so forth. "Questions of fact and representation become secondary to the articulation of people's emotional fears and hopes. This partly explains the new conservatism's 'ideological' successes: they have been able to control specific vectors without having to confront the demands of policy and public action. Similarly, they have been able to construct issues with enormous public passion . . . without leaving any space for public engagement."¹⁸ The current "war on terror" is the latest of these affective epidemics, through which the Bush administration is escalating foreign intervention (domination) and domestic repression. Such affective epidemics are clearly qualitatively different than the revolutionary emotion that Audre Lorde evoked. She writes, "For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to

give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within."²⁹ The alternative, as Marcuse puts it, "The era tends to be totalitarian even where it has not produced totalitarian states."³⁰

This affective void echoes through the terrible, moving, and fascinating testimony from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, now available on the Internet. The TRC testimony provides an incredible store of narratives from which to examine perpetrators of political violence, both in their individual and their systemic manifestations. The commission looked at forty years of state-sanctioned violence under apartheid. Many members of the security forces came forward to ask for amnesty during this process. Many of their narratives suggest that even their hottest crimes of torture and dismemberment were cold—that their hatred was experienced (in retrospect, at any rate) not as an intensification, but as a lack of emotion.

Here is one of the killers of Steven Biko: "I am not glad and I am not sorry about Mr. Biko. It leaves me cold."³¹

Or here is an exchange between one of the commissioners and Brig. Jack Cronje, one of the operatives from Vlakplass, the government training center for torturers and assassins:

JUDGE NGOEPE: Now if you were in charge of the operation and, as you have testified, it was an accident that this man was eliminated, why didn't you stop throttling him?

CRONJE: Well, I could have stopped it, but I did not expect that they would throttle him so long that he would die.

JUDGE NGOEPE: Brigadier, really. Did you expect the man to survive being throttled by two men, and after this man had been tortured and assaulted?

CRONJE: I did not expect that they would throttle him that long, so long that he would die.

JUDGE NGOEPE: Well, as the officer in charge, why didn't you watch and when you could see what was going on tell them to stop? You were responsible. You gave the orders.

CRONJE: Yes, I was responsible. But I did not watch all the time. I was looking in front of me.³²

Or here is an exchange with Colonel de Kock, a member of the elite security force twice awarded the Police Star for Outstanding Service and the Silver Cross for Bravery involved in at least seventy killings during a ten-year period:

ACKERMAN: How would your enemies describe you?

DE KOCK: Cold-blooded.

ACKERMAN: Other words you want to use?

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DE KOCK: Determined and persevering.

ACKERMAN: How do your enemies see you?

DE KOCK: As merciless.

ACKERMAN: What else?

DE KOCK: I have not met that many, because most are dead.

ACKERMAN: Have you ever tried to estimate how many lives you've taken?

DE KOCK: One doesn't do it. It's a terrible thing to think about.³³

For most of the perpetrators, their Christian faith and anticommunist ideology provided their motivation and their excuse. They operated out of their mental formations, in other words, rather than out of their feelings—at least in what they would admit publicly. “I want to use the word ‘hate,’” said Craig Williamson (murderer of Ruth First), struggling to articulate his motivation. “It’s just virtually impossible to tell you how . . . I don’t think it was hate, but how totally and utterly determined we were to win the war and eliminate and destroy the enemy. . . . It was an obsession.”³⁴ Dirk Coetzee, who admitted to six murders and seventeen other serious crimes, explained the feeling of pleasure that came from doing his job well: “I was prepared to kill as many people as I was instructed to kill. I absolutely felt like a hero. I mean, you were there to please your bosses.”³⁵ Former President Botha, under whose regime the most intense state terrorism occurred, testified in a remarkable statement: “I am sick and tired of the hollow parrot-cry of ‘apartheid!’ I’ve said many times that the word ‘apartheid’ means good neighborliness.”³⁶ Here we are back to the anesthetic aesthetic, to slavery that “eliminates bodily pain.”

In its final report, the TRC observed: “The white community often seemed either indifferent or plainly hostile to the work of the commission, and certain media [the Afrikaner press] appeared to have actively sought to sustain this indifference and hostility. . . . Often, it seemed to the commission, there was no real appreciation of the enormity of the violations of which these leaders and those under them were accused, or of the massive degree of hurt and pain their actions had caused.”³⁷

From a position of an anesthetic aesthetic, apartheid, like slavery, is both for the “production of pleasure” and for the “prevention of pain”—it “maximizes comfort for all.” Both put the lie to Freud that suffering “exists in so far as we feel it” because it begs the question of *who* feels. Suffering is never an individual phenomenon; and, in fact, denial of feeling in the dominant Self can be literally torture for the Other.

What, then, is the cost to white people of racism? Perhaps now we can more accurately make the assessment, recognizing that racism implicates systems of oppression based on gender and class, on patriarchy, capitalism, and heterosexism:

Racism costs us intimacy.

Racism costs us our affective lives.

Racism costs us authenticity.

Racism costs us our sense of connection to other humans and the natural world.

Racism costs us our spiritual selves: "a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole," as Freud's poet friend tried to explain.

OUT OF SLAVERY

Of course, not only white people pay this cost. And not only Orderers do. Frederick Douglass knew that he, too, paid the cost of his affective life to slavery when he, like many other slave infants, was separated from his mother, an abandonment over which she had absolutely no control. Douglass reflects: "For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child." Douglass never saw his mother "by the light of day." Four or five times, she walked the twelve miles to see him after her day's work. "Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger."³⁹

Douglass's gendered narrative tells the story of "how a man was made a slave . . . and how a slave was made a man" through his process of many years of reclaiming the oceanic feeling of connection. Ironically, this life of feeling was also all around him in his fellow slaves, singing their way through the woods, their spirituals "revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness . . . a tale of woe . . . tones loud, long, and deep." Douglass learns "the pathway from slavery to freedom" when his master forces his mistress to stop teaching him to read because "it would forever unfit him to be a slave." Poor white children in his neighborhood teach him the alphabet, and they "express for [him] the liveliest sympathy." He begins to abhor slavery so much that he wishes himself dead, until he learns the word *abolition*, the light "breaking in on [him] by degrees." He realizes his strong attachment to his young white friends when he is sent back to the country from Baltimore.⁴⁰ Back on the plantation, he falls under Covey, the slave breaker, and is whipped severely over a period of months, broken in "body, soul and spirit." He runs away to ask his master for mercy and is refused. On the way back, he is befriended by Sandy, a slave with a free wife. Sandy gives him a magical root that "would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me." Sandy's solidarity and his medicine prove powerful, and the next time Covey attacks, Douglass fights back, beating the white man soundly. Covey never beats him again. Defending himself gives Douglass self-confidence and a determination to be free. By appropriating violence and the ability to inflict pain, Douglass contradicts the anesthetic aesthetic that slavery "actualizes comfort for all [white men . . . people]." By defending himself, finally, when being beaten, perhaps he breaks his psychic identification with his white master/father and reclaims some identification with the black mother/slave, which augments his capacity for feeling. Up until this point, Douglass has carried the bur-

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den of a white masculinity; by using the violence of slavery against itself, he genders himself as black.⁴⁰

He is sent back again to Baltimore, where he teaches other of his "dear fellow slaves" to read in a Sabbath school at the house of a "free colored man." "I loved them with a love stronger than anything I have experienced since. . . . I believe we would have died for each other. We never undertook to do anything, of any importance, without a mutual consultation. We never moved separately. We were one; and as much so by our tempers and dispositions, as by the mutual hardship to which we were necessarily subjected as slaves."⁴¹

Paradoxically, the "number of warm-hearted friends in Baltimore, — friends that [he] loved more than life," make his final escape both "painful beyond expression" and finally possible. Douglass can escape the slave South when he has completed the making of the slave into not so much a man as a human, by reclaiming his capacity to feel and love (including to love his African self enough to defend himself from white violence).

What does Frederick Douglass's reclamation of his own humanity and his "love of humanity" have to teach white people? Well, for one, he responded to his "family dysfunction" first by escaping, then by changing the structures that created the dysfunction. Douglass's narrative is part of his attack on the slave system that created his and many others' misery. And Frederick Douglass (with the help of a few other people) *abolished slavery* by such efforts. Perhaps if we are really to "systematically eliminate bodily pain" of family dysfunction, as Hughes would have us do, we should systematically eliminate racism, homophobia, sexism, and capitalism. As Marcuse explained in the preface to *Eros and Civilization*, "Private disorder reflects more directly than before the disorder of the whole, and the cure of personal disorder depends more directly than before on the cure of the general disorder."⁴²

We can see in Douglass's narratives the evolution of radical subjectivity that Brazilian Paulo Freire called *conscientização*, which involved a praxis of action and reflection. This "critical thinking . . . perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as static entity . . . [and] does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved." Thus Douglass learns to act, and reflect, and act, and reflect, until he has gained a fuller humanity for himself and his culture. Consciousness is not only critical *thinking*, as Freire terms it, but, as we have seen, a thick soup of thought, feeling, and sensation, much of which may not always be aware. Such a dialogue requires an intense faith in humanity, in the "power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in [the] vocation to be more fully human."⁴³ It also requires, I am beginning to suspect, a practice of mindfulness.

Mary Chesnut's pain, felt in response to the black woman on the auction block, was her spontaneous biological and spiritual reaction to another human's exploitation and grief, the reassuring mark of her humanity. Then she chose opium. The

Grimké sisters, white southern women of Chesnut's generation, made another choice: abolitionism. The active engagement with real structures, with (in Freire's term) "reality as transformation," not only alleviates future suffering, it is itself therapeutic, because it brings us as humans back to our birthright of "love of humanity" and an "oceanic feeling" of connection, with ourselves, with one another, and with the animate world; it brings us to the palimpsest moment when, or the place where, the fact of love surpasses the fact of death, and we are restored our lost sense of eternity. This moment of eternity is the moment of the present, the moment when all can be transformed, and it's the only moment anyone ever really has.

VIEWING WITHOUT SANCTUARY

The loss of soul I have evoked here cries out as well from the photographs in *Without Sanctuary*, almost one hundred photographs of lynchings in the United States. I had seen one or two of these pictures in anti-Klan educational material. When I heard about James Allen's collection of these pictures, which were reproduced as mementos for the public ritual of lynching, I felt a need to view the entire volume. I found that the Duke library had one copy in Special Collections, not available for general circulation. I appreciated this decision. It would be too easy for anyone to Xerox the photos and use them for various kinds of racist harassment. Viewing the volume in Special Collections also required a level of deliberation. So I caught a bus over to West Campus, found Special Collections, filled out a card, and sat there with the book in front of me. I turned the pages slowly, reading all of the texts before turning finally to the photographs. Then I turned the pages slowly, making notes of my responses:

Without Sanctuary, the title says, *Photographs of Lynchings in America*.

You notice anything first: the grass dead from the bulb's glare, branches caught in the river's bend; you notice the white men's hats—white straw with black bands, fedoras, and there a cap; the frontispiece a sea of white men's white hats.

You notice the white people's eyes looking into the camera beneath, beside, above . . . the glee or pride or vacancy; seldom if ever a shadow of doubt or pain. But you do not notice the bodies hanging there in ones or twos, as many as five; mostly men or what used to be, hanging mostly. But one man is sitting dead at a tree base. They are mostly hanging by rope or chain from limb or lamp post.

Laura Nelson and her son hang from a bridge on which the crowd posed May 25 somewhere in Oklahoma. You notice one white woman's parasol above her white child. You notice the four loops in the noose around the neck of Leo Frank. You begin to notice the angle of the heads above the nooses: some sideways, some forward as in prayer, some faces to the sky.

But, finally, all you can see is the gravity of bodies: the terrible plumb lines.

Suddenly, Frank Embree, July 22, 1899, is alive and looking straight at you, a frontal nude, his wrists cuffed in front, slashes on his black torso. Frank Embree is

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bearing witness, his eyebrow quizzical. But don't turn the page, because there he is hanging there, from an oak tree this time. Just the page before and unafraid he startled you watching him.

You cannot locate the white child who wrote to an unidentified mother, "*I have seen a man hanged. Now I wish I could see one burned.*" But you know Joe, the son who wrote, "*This is the barbecue we had last night,*" because his picture is to the left of the body, white face with an X over it.

Not expecting more from white people, my own relations, it is the trees who disappoint: the oak, loblolly pine, maple, the coniferous, the deciduous—branches, bark, limbs.

Without Sanctuary, the title says.

"In America everything is for sale."

Finally, I notice how the bodies lean toward each other, the ones lynched together—an arm across another's chest, heads on one another's shoulders: a respite there? An *embrace*? Arms cuffed behind backs arch the heads upward: not gravity now but *flight*? The pitch cloud in the book's staple looks as if he burned the photographic plate on his way out. That dark smudge between the trees was never a body; more an ash that marks my forehead. It is this photograph that recurs to me three days later, its charred torso like some third eye, our lashes rain; and finally, finally, finally I can weep.

Without Sanctuary, the cover says. But it is there in the leaning bodies, the glint of light off the river, the witnessing trees. I do not believe there was no sanctuary; only that there was no shame.**

