

The Colonization of Psychic Space
A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression

Kelly Oliver

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For my parents, Virginia and Glen Oliver

INTRODUCTION

Why Turn to Psychoanalysis for a Social Theory of Oppression?

Many theorists who approach social theory using a psychoanalytic framework do so by applying psychoanalytic concepts to social phenomena.¹ They take concepts like melancholy, desire, or abjection and extrapolate from the individual to diagnose particular social situations, cultural productions, or the psychic formations of certain groups of people.² Although such concepts have been developed critically, they rarely have been transformed into social concepts; rather, theorists either apply psychoanalytic concepts to the social, show the limits of applying psychoanalytic concepts to the social, or combine psychoanalytic theory with some particular social theory, such as Marx's or Foucault's. In this way, either psychoanalysis is abandoned for its inability to move from the individual level to the social, or its fundamental concepts remain intact (and therefore limited) even after their social applications.

My project here is not to apply psychoanalysis to oppression but rather to transform psychoanalytic concepts—alienation, melancholy, shame, sublimation, idealization, forgiveness, and affect, as the representative of drive—into social concepts by developing a psychoanalytic theory based on a notion of the individual or psyche that is thoroughly social. If the psyche does not exist apart from social relationships and cultural influences,

a social psychoanalytic theory is necessary not only to diagnose social phenomena but also to explain individual subject formation. We cannot explain the development of individuality or subjectivity apart from its social context. But neither can we formulate a social theory to explain the dynamics of oppression without considering its psychic dimension. We need a theory that operates between the psyche and the social, through which the very terms of psychoanalysis are transformed into social concepts. To this end, I develop social notions of alienation, melancholy, shame, affect, sublimation, idealization, and forgiveness—concepts underdeveloped in psychoanalytic theory that are key to transforming psychoanalysis into a useful social theory.

Even though Freud discusses civilization and the infant's move into the social, traditional Freudian psychoanalysis rarely addresses social problems, particularly oppression and its psychic consequences. As many theorists have shown, however, psychoanalysis can be deployed in interesting ways by applying it to nontraditional objects of study such as immigration, assimilation and depression, homosexual melancholy, racism and desire, lesbian disavowal, and lesbian fetishism.³ Many of these applications of traditional psychoanalytic concepts, however—whether taking on concepts wholesale or rejecting the concepts as inapplicable—risk presupposing or implicitly accepting the psychoanalytic notion of the individual psyche as fundamentally at odds with the social realm. And when they do consider the social conditions that produce the psyche, most still employ Freud's family romance or some negative version of it.⁴ Although Freud acknowledges the effect of social conditions on the psyche, he and his followers rarely consider how those social conditions become the conditions of possibility for psychic life and subject formation (outside the family drama). Like Freud, contemporary psychoanalytic theorists, including object relations theorists, consider the social as founded on the relationship between the infant and its caregiver; the social, then, is defined as a relation between two people. But there is another social dimension to consider: the larger sociohistorical context and political economy within which that relationship between these two develops. Although object relations theorists, especially feminists, do consider how patriarchal culture affects the development of a gendered subject, too often they reduce the psychic dimension of the equation to sociological facts about the gender of caregivers and imitation of gender roles.⁵ So, while they consider the subject's social position, they give a simplified account of subjectivity.

Elsewhere I have introduced the distinction between subjectivity and subject position as the difference between one's sense of oneself as a self with agency and one's historical and social position in one's culture (see

Oliver 2001). Subject positions, although mobile, are constituted in our social interactions and our positions within our culture and context; history and circumstance govern them. Subject positions are our relations to the finite world of human history and relations—the realm of politics. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness—the realm of ethics. And although subjectivity is logically prior to any possible subject position, in our experience, the two are always interconnected. This is why our experience of our own subjectivity is the result of the productive tension between finite subject position and the infinite response-ability of the structure of subjectivity itself.

The subject is a dynamic yet stable structure that results from the interaction between the subject position's finitude, being, and history and subjectivity's infinity, meaning, and historicity. Architects and engineers have worked with the principle of tension-loaded structures that use tension as support. A classic example is the Brooklyn Bridge. In a sense, the subject is a tension-loaded structure, but its flexibility makes it more like what architects call a *tensile structure*. A description of the difference between the two structures by the architect Frei Otto (1967, 15) is suggestive: "The capacity to transmit forces and moments by tension-loaded materials is found in animate and inanimate nature," while tensile structures "are found more frequently in animate nature. . . . Flexible tension-resisting skins and sinews are necessary whenever the supporting system is movable." The stability of tensile structures is the result of opposing forces pulling in two directions, through which a membrane's double curvature receives its structure and resistance. Subjectivity is analogous to the structure and resistance that result from a membrane or skin being stretched in two directions and held together by tension. Like Otto's famous architectural design using the tension of two opposing axes of force to support a fabric (which architects call a membrane, or "flexible stretched skin" [12]), the subject is a tensile structure. The two axes whose tension supports the subject are subject position and subjectivity.

One's sense of oneself as a subject with agency is profoundly affected by one's social position. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere and continue to argue throughout this book, we cannot separate subjectivity from subject position; any theory of subjectivity—psychoanalytic, phenomenological, poststructural—must consider subject position. While Freudian psychoanalytic theory has addressed itself to questions of subjectivity and subject formation, traditionally it has done so without considering subject position or, more significant, the impact of subject position on subject formation. Even most recent applications of psychoanalysis to the social context

of subject formation have not reformulated the very concepts of psychoanalysis to account for or explain how subjects form within particular kinds of social contexts. Instead, such applications use psychoanalytic concepts to diagnose certain kinds of psychic or social formations. But to explain the effects of oppression on the psyche—why so many people suffer at the core of their subjectivity and its concomitant sense of agency when they are abjected, excluded, or oppressed—we need a psychoanalytic social theory that reformulates psychoanalytic concepts as social and considers how subjectivity is formed and deformed within particular types of social contexts.

Theories that do not consider subject position and the role of social conditions in subjectivity and subject formation cover over not only the differential power relations addressed by some contemporary theorists using psychoanalysis but also the differential subjectivities produced within those relations. Theories that do not start from the subjectivities of those othered but rather start from the dominant subjectivity presuppose a defensive need to abject or exclude some other to fortify itself. Without considering subject position, we assume that all subjects are alike, we level differences, or, like traditional psychoanalysis, we develop a normative notion of subject formation based on one particular group, gender, or class of people. Instead, we need to start from the position of those who have been abjected and excluded by the traditional Freudian model that normalizes a male subject. Without a psychoanalytic theory for and revolving around those othered by the Freudian model subject, we continue to base our theories of subjectivity on the very norm that we are trying to overcome; in this way, our theories collaborate with the oppressive values that we are working against. A psychoanalytic theory of oppression must consider the role of subject position in subject formation, that is, the relationships between subject position and subjectivity.

Some philosophers and cultural critics maintain that the subjugation and violence that result from oppression are just different forms of originary subjugation and violence inherent in all subject formation. Theories that level suffering by proposing that all subjectivity is born from subjection and exclusion, however, cover over the suffering specific to oppression.⁶ In so doing, they risk complicity with values and institutions that abject those othered to fortify the privilege of the beneficiaries of oppressive values. For, if various forms of social or political oppression are just reiterations of subjection or alienation at the core of subjectivity, then there is no reason to think either that some forms of violence are unique to particular situations and that therefore some forms of violence are unjust or that we can overcome social and political subjugation or alienation.

Some members of the Frankfurt school, along with some object relations theorists and other critical theorists following them, focus more on the relationship between the psyche and the social than traditional Freudian theorists do.⁷ They insist on accounting for subject position in their analyses of subjectivity. In general, however, their theories too often either merely extrapolate from the individual level to the social level, oversimplify the psychic dimension of life in favor of the social dimension that determines it, or insist on or presuppose the dichotomy between the social and the psyche, or ultimately reject the possibility of formulating a psychoanalytic social theory altogether.⁸ While Freudians overemphasize the psyche apart from its social context, some traditional critical theorists do the same with the social to the point that it completely determines psychic dynamics. If Freudian psychoanalytic theory leads us to assume that psychic transformation can take place only on the individual level (usually in therapy), some critical theorists and object relations theorists lead us to assume that psychic transformation can take place only on a grand social scale. Rather than privileging the individual ego and psyche, or social institutions and political economy, however, we need a psychoanalytic social theory that develops concepts between the psyche and the social by socializing psychoanalysis.

Most psychoanalytic models of subjectivity and subject formation, including both ego psychology and object relations theories, suppose a primary struggle between the individual and the social order that is constitutive of subjectivity.⁹ Such models propose that subjectivity develops through alienation from, and/or subjection to, the social realm. Here, I argue that it is not alienation or struggle but forgiveness that is constitutive of subjectivity understood in a new way. I develop a psychoanalytic social theory of forgiveness as an alternative to both philosophical and psychoanalytic notions of subjectivity as based on struggle with, and alienation from, others and the world. Much nineteenth- and twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory and continental philosophy (including existentialism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, and critical theory) are based on, or presuppose, an antagonistic relationship between self and other, between subject and object, between individual and society. My project is to develop a theory of subjectivity that is relational but not fundamentally antagonistic, or at least not constitutionally antagonistic.

Many post-Hegelian theorists who recognize the intersubjectivity of subjectivity—Freudians and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorists (including object relations theorists), phenomenologists, and critical theorists—have not taken the relationality of subjectivity to its limit.¹⁰ To do so would mean going beyond intersubjectivity and admitting that there is no subject or

individual to engage in a relationship with another subject—to engage in an intersubjective relationship—prior to *relationality* itself.¹¹ It is relationality that is primary, not one subject or the other, or two self-consciousnesses encountering each other and looking for mutual recognition—this can only come later after the foundation of subjectivity has been established (if only provisionally). Representation, language, or other nonlinguistic visceral and more bodily forms of communication and meaning always mediate this relationality—it is always mediated by our attempts to respond. Responsivity is both the prerequisite for subjectivity and one of its definitive features. Subjectivity is constituted through response, responsiveness, or response-ability and not the other way around.¹² We do not respond because we are subjects; rather, it is responsiveness and relationality that make subjectivity and psychic life possible. In this sense, response-ability precedes and constitutes subjectivity, which is why, following Levinas, I argue that the structure of subjectivity is fundamentally ethical. We are, by virtue of our ability to respond to others, and therefore we have a primary obligation to our founding possibility, response-ability itself. We have a responsibility to open up rather than close off the possibility of response, both from ourselves and from others.¹³

If Freud normalizes a white male European subject, and we risk perpetuating this normalization by using his concepts without transforming them, then why turn to psychoanalytic theory at all? Even if we could do away with the prejudice of Freud's nineteenth-century theories and their twentieth-century versions, psychoanalysis still deals with individuals at odds with society, so what can we gain from turning psychoanalytic concepts based on individuals into social concepts? How can we balance the social and the psyche to develop concepts that articulate the relationality and link between the two? My hope is that this book implicitly answers these questions by developing social psychoanalytic concepts of alienation, melancholy, shame, affect, sublimation, idealization, and forgiveness starting from the subjectivity of those othered and by analyzing the colonization of psychic space. Although the text that follows provides the flesh and fluidity of the answers to these questions, something can be gained from addressing them head-on at the outset.

There are two primary facets of psychoanalysis that make it crucial for social theory: the centrality of the notion of the unconscious and the importance of sublimation as an alternative to repression. Both facets come to bear in important ways on the fact that all of our relationships are mediated by meaning, that we are beings who mean. As beings who mean, our experiences are both bodily and mental, and unconscious drive force operates between soma and psyche, and unites them. Our being is

brought into the realm of meaning through drive force and its affective representations.

The psychoanalytic concept most appropriate to this discussion is sublimation. Although the notion remains underdeveloped in Freud's writings (Freud supposedly burned his only paper on sublimation, thus subjecting it to literal sublimation by fire),¹⁴ and it has been used without much further development since, it is central to social theory, especially to a social theory of oppression.¹⁵ We need a theory that explains how we articulate or otherwise express our bodies, experiences, and affects, all of which are fluid and energetic, in some form of meaningful signification so that we can communicate. Oppression and domination undermine the ability to sublimate by withholding or foreclosing the possibility of articulating and thereby discharging bodily drives and affects. The bodies and affects of those othered have already been excluded as abject from the realm of proper society.

This project is an exploration of sublimation and how oppression undermines it. Not only do I develop a sustained analysis of sublimation, something much needed in psychoanalytic literature, but, more important, I develop a social theory of sublimation. I reject Freud's notion that sublimation is the result of redirecting sexual drives in particular and his notion that the drives originate within one body. Rather, I propose that all forms of signification presuppose the sublimation of drives and their affective representations into the realm of meaning. Unlike Freud, I focus on the affective representations of drives as the link between drives and signification. My conception of drive is much more fluid than that of traditional psychoanalytic theory, in that rather than employ specific drives—anal, oral, sexual, death, life, etc.—I prefer to talk about drives as bodily impulses that cannot be so easily categorized. If it is true, as Freud suggests, that affects are representations of drives, then it is also true that our greatest access to drives should be through the affective realm. In fact, if drives remain unconscious until brought to analysis and subjected to interpretation, it makes sense to focus on affects in order to begin to understand our bodily impulses and experiences. This is why here I focus on the affects of oppression rather than on drives in particular.

In addition, I maintain that drives and affects do not originate in one body or one psyche but rather are relational and transitory—they can move from one body to another. Indeed, following Frantz Fanon, I suggest that the negative affects of the oppressors are “deposited into the bones” of the oppressed. Affects move between bodies; colonization and oppression operate through depositing the unwanted affects of the dominant group onto those othered by that group in order to sustain its privileged position.

Diagnosing the colonization of psychic space demands a close analysis of the affects of oppression and how those affects are produced within particular social situations.

Sublimation is the linchpin of what I propose as psychoanalytic social theory, for it is sublimation that makes idealization possible. And without idealization we can neither conceptualize our experience nor set goals for ourselves; without the ability to idealize, we cannot imagine our situation otherwise, that is, without idealization we cannot resist domination. Sublimation and idealization are necessary not only for psychic life but also for transformative and restorative resistance to oppression. Sublimation and idealization are the cornerstones of our mental life, yet they have their sources in bodies, bodies interacting with each other. It is through the social relationality of bodies that sublimation is possible. But in an oppressive culture that abjects, excludes, or marginalizes certain groups or types of bodies, sublimation and idealization can become the privilege of dominant groups, and idealization can become a cruel, judging superego. Here, I redefine the psychoanalytic notions of sublimation and idealization as fundamentally social concepts necessary to subjectivity and its concomitant sense of agency. Sublimation is necessary for beings to enter the realm of meaning. The first acts of meaning are available through the sublimation of bodily impulses into forms of communication. Moreover, sublimation allows us to connect and communicate with others by making our bodies and experiences meaningful; we become beings who mean by sublimating our bodily drives and affects. Sublimation, then, is necessary for both subjectivity or individuality and community or sociality.

Subjectivity develops through sublimation, through elevating bodily drives and their affective representations to a new level of meaning and signification. In addition, sublimation always and only takes place in relation to others and the Other that is the meaning into which each individual is born. Sublimation in the constitution of subjectivity is analogous to sublimation in chemistry, which is defined as the conversion of a solid substance by means of heat into a vapor, which resolidifies upon cooling. Sublimation transforms bodily drives and affects that seem solid and intractable into a dynamic vapor that liberates the drives and affects from repression (specifically, the repression inherent in oppression) and discharges them into signifying systems that then resolidify them. This process continues from birth to death. Because we can never fully “speak our bodies” or our experiences, we continue to try. We continue to attempt communication precisely because we never succeed, which is not to say that we completely fail. On the contrary, we not only fill our own lives with meaning through sublimation but also make communication with others

possible, if always tenuous. The process must continue because the bodily drives and affects are fluid and like vapors, dynamic and volatile; therefore, they cannot be fixed or resolidified in signification without a remainder or excess. But this excess is not an alienating lack; rather, it is precisely what motivates us to continue to communicate and commune. This excess is the unconscious itself, that which can never be fully brought to consciousness, that is, the singularity of each individual. And, as I show, the continual attempt to express this singular excess presupposes forgiveness.

Without accounting for the unconscious processes inherent in sublimation and thereby necessary to becoming beings who mean, we risk falling into the all too popular discourse of autonomous self-governed individuals that covers over how that sense of autonomy, self-governance, and individuality was formed. This discourse erases the unconscious processes by virtue of which we become subjects with a sense of agency. We are not born with feelings of autonomy and self-governance. Rather, they are the effects of sublimation and idealization. Autonomy, sovereignty, and individuality are effects—or by-products—and not causes of becoming a being who means, of becoming subjectivity.

No one, including neuroscientists and anthropologists, can say how we originally became beings who mean—when and how did we acquire language? No one can fully understand how our meaning systems work, or how or where meaning might be located in the body. Is the mind the brain? Can desires and affects be reduced to chemical processes in bodies? If they can, we aren't even close to understanding how. As advanced as they might seem, modern science and medicine barely understand the workings of the body, particularly the brain. Yet most scientists and physicians recognize the existence of psychosomatic symptoms. Today in popular culture and in medicine, many physical problems are attributed to “stress,” which is conceived of as a mental state. Indeed, Freud's theory of the unconscious has made its way into popular culture so that we often talk of Freudian slips and ulterior motives. Certainly, the advertising industry believes in the unconscious or at least in the subliminal effect of images and sounds that go unnoticed even as they affect the recipient's behavior and desires. Influenced by Freud, popular (Western) culture believes in the unconscious, not fully realizing the implications of this belief.

If we analyze the social merely in terms of bodies and behaviors without accounting for the unconscious, we cannot fully explain the contradictory effects of oppression. To explain the bodies and the behaviors of those oppressed, not to mention their oppressors, we need to account for the unconscious effects of oppression. We need to understand how oppression causes alienation, depression, shame, and anger. But only a theory that

incorporates an account of the unconscious can explain the dynamic operations of the affects of oppression. To understand the relationship between oppression or social context and affect, we need to postulate the existence of the unconscious. Without this postulation, we become complicit with those who would blame the victims, so to speak, for their own negative affects. Even if sociological or psychological studies demonstrate a higher incidence of depression, shame, or anger in particular groups, this information cannot be interpreted outside a social context and without considering subject position and subject formation. Certainly, affective life is caught up in one's sense of oneself as a subject and an agent. And oppression and the affects of oppression undermine subjectivity and agency such that even those very affects become interpreted as signs of inferiority or weakness rather than symptoms of oppression. In other words, only by postulating the unconscious can we explain why many people who are in some way excluded, oppressed, or marginalized at some level blame themselves for their condition. In general, our culture blames individuals rather than social institutions for negative "personality traits" and "flaws." The psychoanalytic notion of the superego is useful in diagnosing how and why those othered internalize the very values that abject and oppress them. Without the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious, we could not adequately explain the conflicting, especially self-destructive, desires of those othered. Even the Marxist notion of false consciousness implies not only that we are not transparent to ourselves but also that there are parts of our mental lives that we repress or cannot access without intervention. There is a complicated relationship between cultural values and our sense of ourselves as agents; this relationship goes beyond the internalization of abject images.

In the end, I argue that ethics—or, making politics ethical—requires accounting for the unconscious. Only when we believe that we are not transparent to ourselves will we also believe that our bodies and behaviors demand incessant interpretation. If there is part of ourselves that always remains inaccessible and to a greater or lesser extent resists any one interpretation, then we will be compelled to continually question our own motives and desires. And only when we engage in this continual self-interrogation is there hope that we can become an ethical society; only then is there hope for anything approximating justice.

Here, I argue that it is a social process of forgiveness without sovereignty, forgiveness beyond recognition, that creates the effects of autonomy and individuality important to acting as an agent. The unconscious processes that create the sovereignty effect cannot be governed by the self but rather produce the self and its sense of self-governance. Popular Western

notions of the individual and individualism cover over this process and fix the subject as self-contained and opposed to others and society. This fixed notion of the individual denies the unconscious processes that sustain it and by virtue of which it exists. And by so denying the unconscious, this individual denies what motivates its actions and relationships behind the scenes of conscious life. This individual lives with the illusion that it is (or can become) transparent to itself and self-governing, in control of itself and therefore in control of others and its world. This illusion, however, can be dangerous insofar as it can lead to a sense of entitlement and privilege that comes from the confidence of one's own boundaries, a confidence that covers over the fears and ambiguities that haunt those boundaries, fears and ambiguities that are disavowed to maintain the illusion of self-control. This unforgiving illusion of entitlement and privilege leads to self-righteous killing in the name of justice, democracy, and freedom, which requires disavowal of not only conscious ulterior motives related to political economy and maintaining domination but also unconscious motives related to repressed fears and desires. We need to critically examine not only our conscious motives and reasons for our actions and values but also our unconscious drives and affects that affect, even govern if not determine, those very actions and values. Without such self-examination and questioning, without continually interpreting and reinterpreting the meaning of our own actions and values, we risk the solidity that prevents fluid, living sublimation and idealization and leaves us with empty and meaningless principles in whose name we kill off otherness and those others who embody it for us. This is the burden placed on those othered by privileged subjects who believe their illusions of independence and entitlement.

To imagine what Derrida calls a justice "worthy of its name," we need to take responsibility not only for our actions and values but also for our unconscious desires and fears. We need to go beyond traditional moral theory that holds individuals responsible for their actions within the limits of their reason, beyond even an existential ethics that holds individuals responsible not only for their actions but also for their beliefs, desires, and values, beyond a Levinasian ethics that holds the subject responsible for the other's response, to a truly hyperbolic ethics (borrowing from Derrida) that holds us all responsible not only for our actions, beliefs, desires, values, and the other's response but also for our unconscious bodily drives and affects. We are responsible for the effects of our affects on others. We are responsible for what we do not and cannot ever completely know about ourselves. This is radical ethics, an ethics that demands an endless responsibility so that we might imagine response-ability itself as constitutive of subjectivity, so that we might imagine our indebtedness to otherness and

others whose provocation and responsiveness give birth to subjectivity and the singularity of each individual. Only by acknowledging this singularity beyond recognition, beyond conscious reasons, beyond and yet constitutive of bodies and actions can we hope to overcome oppression. This acknowledgment is an endless task, which is why we continue to live, to speak, to act. This task, the task of acknowledging the unrecognizable singularity of each individual, a singularity beyond individual rights or the law, is what gives meaning to our lives and to our relationships with others. We do not know or understand ourselves. We do not know or understand others, perhaps most especially those closest to us. Once we fall under the illusion that we do, that we understand ourselves and others, then we lose the possibility of communication, of communion, of love, of the forgiveness that makes it possible to continue to be beings who mean. Acknowledging that we don't understand or know, and moreover that we can never fully understand or know, provides the impulse for interpretation. Because we cannot know, we interpret. Because we cannot know, we mean. Because we cannot know, we are beings who mean. And through endless interpretation, our lives become meaning full.¹⁶

Part I

Alienation and Its Double

Some contemporary cultural theorists maintain that forms of psychic domination are not unique to oppression but affect all human beings; or, oppression is the fate of all of us. Some have even suggested that alienation is inherent in the human condition and that oppression and violence are just repetitions of the founding violence at the core of subjectivity, nationality, and humanity.¹ If this is the case, then resistance to domination is futile. As I have argued elsewhere, to delineate the psychic and physical affects of oppression, it is crucial to distinguish constitutive violence inherent in subjectivity and human society from the violence of oppression, domination, and colonization, which may be necessary to the lifestyles of their beneficiaries but are not necessary to life itself.² Indeed, I have tried to show that domination and subjection are not necessary to subjectivity but, to the contrary, undermine it.

Here, I would like to take these arguments further by demonstrating that the European notion of an alienation inherent in subjectivity actually covers over a more treacherous form of alienation, the alienation unique to oppression. Existentialist and psychoanalytic notions of alienation as inherent in all subjectivity are constructed against a dark and invisible underside, the alienation of domination, slavery, and colonization. The

unconscious bodily drive force and affect. When the subject protects its individuality at the expense of its singularity and that of others, when it pits its individuality against that of others, when it asserts that its right to exist depends on denying that right to others, then it has forgotten its obligation to its founding possibility and its indebtedness to those others. Echoing Simone de Beauvoir, not one is free until all are free.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Ethics of Psychoanalysis; or, Forgiveness as an Alternative to Alienation

It is telling that Frantz Fanon (1968a, 41) describes a "craving for forgiveness" among colonized peoples, a craving satisfied only by a "state of grace" when they rediscover the value in themselves and their culture. Exclusion from the realm of meaning as those incapable of making meaning, as those who do not belong, produces shame and alienation even more painful and treacherous than that imagined by the philosophers of alienation as inherent in becoming a being who means. Those excluded are made ashamed for what is deemed their abject difference; and their "evil" cannot be forgiven because it supposedly contaminates the purity of humanity. Their exclusion denies the forgiveness that should enable the individual to rejoin the social as one who belongs even after the trespass through which it asserts its singular individuality. But, in a racist or sexist society, if part of one's singular individuality is to be a man of color or a woman, this becomes a "trespass" that is not forgiven. And the absence of forgiveness becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy whereby those othered and dispossessed by the social order are affected at the level of subjectivity such that sublimation becomes doubly difficult and meaning—not just referential meaning but, more important, the meaning of life—is abjected. Escaping this void requires trespass that transforms the very law

that it breaks, revolt that opens the law onto otherness and transforms it from cruel superego into forgiveness, which in turn enables the transformation of shame into agency.

Forgiveness supports questioning the authority of our communities even as it enables their existence. The absence of forgiveness, on the other hand, undermines the possibility of both a sense of individuality and a sense of community. Exclusion and oppression turn on foreclosing the agency of forgiveness and making the judging superego absolute to the point of cruelty. Those excluded individuals or groups are subject to harsh judgment without the possibility of forgiveness. They are excised by law that claims an absolute authority without appeal, an authority that these individuals and groups are not allowed to assimilate or sublimate through revolt. Without the presupposition of forgiveness, revolt against this authority becomes a mammoth undertaking difficult to imagine.

Rather than forgive and support the transgression or revolt essential to subjectivity and psychic life, those excluded through oppression are punished for their attempts to individuate by assimilating the authority of the social. Whereas the heirs to law and authority are allowed to revolt and assimilate the power of the law because their forgiveness is presupposed, those othered by the law are excluded by the foreclosure of revolt and forgiveness. Subjectivity requires revolt and transgression to become a singular individual, but it also presupposes forgiveness to belong to the social. Rather than lead to sublimation, creativity, and belonging, the revolt of those excluded from the dominant values and social institutions—if they pull it off—is seen as uppityness, perversion, or terrorism.

For example, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, blacks who occupied or tried to occupy positions traditionally held by whites were considered “uppity” at best (and aberrations of nature at worst) by racist ideologies. Feminist studies in linguistics have demonstrated that the same language used by men and women is interpreted differently: men who assert themselves and their authority are seen as strong and articulate, while women who do the same are seen as out of line or worse as screaming “bitches” (see Cameron 1985, 1992; Lakoff 1975). Even today, homosexuality and bisexuality are still considered perversions by various social institutions, including law, and much of mainstream culture. Only since 2003 has the Supreme Court finally recognized that gay people have the right to privacy, and their right to marry is still considered a heresy against the supposed sanctity of marriage by most lawmakers. And the rhetoric of terrorism can be used to describe anyone engaging in resistance to dominant ideology; for example, “ecoterrorism,” “virtual terrorism,” “economic terrorism.” Moreover, the covert killing practices of the

West are rationalized as necessary to protect freedom, while the same kinds of practices by our “enemies” are considered terrorism and barbarism. The United States can colonize Iraq, kill thousands of people, destroy their cities, in the name of freedom, or, worse, in the name of justice as vengeance against the perpetrators of September 11. When the United States destroys buildings and kills people it is called “freedom fighting,” but when our “enemies” do the same it is called “evil.”

Fanon’s (1965, 24) insight regarding this differential in the context of the Algerian occupation couldn’t be more relevant today: “The European nation that practices torture is a blighted nation, unfaithful to its history. The underdeveloped nation that practices torture thereby confirms its nature, plays the role of an underdeveloped people. If it does not wish to be morally condemned by the ‘Western nations,’ an underdeveloped nation is obligated to practice fair play, even while its adversary ventures, with a clear conscience, into the unlimited exploration of new means of terror.” The same is true for those oppressed within Western cultures and those exploited and oppressed by Western cultures: they must “practice fair play,” wherein “fair play” is determined by the dominant group, government, or culture; if they don’t, then they confirm their “nature” as cheaters and criminals or, worse, terrorists and monsters. Their revolt is not forgiven. Rather, the social support necessary for revolt is withheld, which necessarily leads to the affects of oppression, depression, shame, or anger—sometimes an anger that expresses itself as violence to be heard, if not also recognized as a form of resistance to domination. This withholding, or foreclosure, is an essential part of domination and oppression, which operate through the colonization of psychic space precisely by denying the possibility of sublimation, revolt, and forgiveness. Even as forgiveness supports the trespass that is singularity, it also enables sublimation of violent impulses and thereby prevents more deadly trespass.

In sum, forgiveness and acceptance, not alienation, define the human condition and subjectivity. We do not become beings who mean by virtue of alienation from being but rather by virtue of continually overcoming that alienation through signification. Through the sublimation of bodily drives and affects into signification, we regain, if only provisionally, our being as animals, that which we supposedly lose and mourn to become human. Signification and meaning become a way of working through that mourning. It is not, however, the mourning but the process of working through the mourning that makes us human. Alienation and melancholy are not definitive of subjectivity; rather, they undermine the very conditions of possibility of subjectivity and agency. The conditions of possibility of subjectivity and agency are social acceptance and forgiveness, not

alienation from the social. Becoming a singular individual is not determined by alienation from the social. Rather, the trespass or revolt against the social necessary to assert one's singular individuality ends in alienation only when that individual's singularity has been erased in favor of some group characteristic that is used to justify the individual's exclusion from the social realm. When the trespass or revolt necessary to assert singularity and authorize individuality is forgiven, then the result is not alienation but a sense of belonging and an affirmation of agency, which are as essential to psychic life as they are part of the precarious and continuous process of becoming subjectivity.

Within the framework of psychoanalytic social forgiveness, however, the subject and the humanity at stake are not the same subject and humanity marinated in the economy of property presupposed by some of the philosophers of alienation. Rather, the subject is beyond the economy of property that makes subjects opposed to their objects, which can be owned and exploited; and humanity is beyond the economy of property that makes human beings sovereign over all other beings, which can be owned and exploited. The psychoanalytic notions of the unconscious—melancholy, sublimation, and idealization—can be transformed into social concepts that uncouple the subject and the human from sovereignty and thereby begin to move us outside the economy of property and ownership that ultimately justifies colonization, exploitation, slavery, and domination. By engaging the unconscious as that element of our psychic life that is outside time, linear logic, rationalization, and consciousness, we begin to conceive of forgiveness outside the economy of ownership and propriety. Only then can morality and moralizing give way to ethics.

Morality works through an economy of propriety and ideals of the good that are necessarily exclusionary insofar as they work by virtue of oppositions that divide people and actions into proper/improper, pure/contaminated, good/evil. Colonization and oppression operate through the imposition of these values on others until those others become "infected" with the dominant values, values that mark them as contaminated and evil. The colonization of psychic space is the result of this infection, an infection that leads to alienation, shame, and melancholy. Colonization and oppression justify themselves using morality, morality that covers over the fundamentally ethical structure of subjectivity. The privileged subject disavows the fact that it depends on others for its privileged sense of itself as a subject; it disavows the fact that its own subjectivity is necessarily a response to others and to the Other that is meaning into which it is born. Rather than acknowledge its primary and fundamental indebtedness

to others and meaning, the subject enslaves and oppresses those others and uses the realm of meaning through rationalizations to justify itself.

Ethics as conceived here, unlike morality, is not a set of codes that divide people into good and evil, dominant and subordinate. Ethics is the acknowledgment that we are by virtue of response from others and by virtue of response from meaning through which we become beings who mean. Subjectivity, then, is inherently ethical. We are subjects or subjectivity only through our relations with others, and ultimately with otherness. But we can articulate an ethics and a politics of otherness or difference only by accounting for the unconscious. To make responsibility radical enough, that is, ethical enough, we need a notion of the unconscious, which makes us responsible even for motives, desires, and fears unknown to us. The fundamental imperative of hyperbolic ethics is that we should never be content with ourselves. It is an imperative to be self-critical, especially with our responses to others, most especially because there are those others whom we may not even recognize. We can never stop interrogating and interpreting our notions of justice, democracy, and freedom, which means that we can never stop asking ourselves why we do what we do, why we value what we value, why we desire what we desire, and why we fear what we fear. Yet, without engaging the unconscious, our self-interrogation and self-interpretations will never be vigilant enough. Only by postulating the existence of the unconscious as that which resists consciousness and rational thought will we be humble enough to continue to question our own motives, fears, and desires.

Only the notion of the unconscious gives us an ethics of responsibility without sovereignty. We are responsible for what we cannot and do not control, for our unconscious fears and desires and their affective representations. In addition, we are responsible for the effects of those fears, desires, and affects on others. As Levinas says, we are responsible for the other's response. This infinite responsibility entails the imperative to question ourselves and constantly engage in self-critical hermeneutics. It is this critical interpretation that also gives meaning to our lives and allows for the sublimation of bodily drives and affects.

Responsible ethics and politics requires that we account for the unconscious. Without doing so, we risk self-righteously adhering to deadly principles in the name of freedom and justice, which can then become the justification for war, imprisonment, and imperialism—all in the name of freedom and justice. Without interrogating our motives—conscious and unconscious—we risk making justice, democracy, and freedom into empty but dangerous clichés that we use to justify killing. We risk taking the

defensive posture of individualism that protects itself by attacking others, becoming absolutely unforgiving. We risk denying the fundamental ethical relationality that is subjectivity. We risk a defensive, unforgiving posture that denies, even fears, singularity, the singularity that is the unconscious, a posture that maintains control by denying the existence of the unconscious or unconscious motives, desires, and fears. Yet only by acknowledging our unconscious fears, phobias, and desires can we hope to be self-reflective enough to contemplate an ethical response to others. And that reflection and acknowledgment presupposes forgiveness, that we will be forgiven for articulating, interrogating, and interpreting our own death drive and its concomitant phobias and desires. Perhaps by continually acknowledging the death drive within ourselves and being forgiven, we can begin to prevent killing and find an alternative to either murder or suicide. Only then can we begin to imagine forgiveness transforming alienation into a way of belonging to the social as singular.

NOTES

Introduction

Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis has influenced so much work in so many disciplines that it would be impossible to fully situate my project within these ongoing debates and discourses. So, for the sake of this introduction, I can only sketch the scene on which I hope to intervene and give the reader a sense of what my project contributes to psychoanalytic theory, social theory, and the emerging field of psychoanalytic social theory.

1. Most of the essays in Christopher Lane's 1998 collection *The Psychoanalysis of Race* are good examples of insightful applications of psychoanalytic concepts that for the most part either leave those concepts intact or criticize them without developing new concepts.

2. For example, Anne Anlin Cheng in *The Melancholy of Race* (2001) uses Freud's theory of melancholy to diagnose Asian Americans' relations to American culture by interpreting and applying the concept of melancholy to various literary and artistic productions. David Eng and Shinhee Han combine Freud's theory of melancholia with Melanie Klein's theory of good and bad objects to diagnose the depressive position of Asian Americans within American culture. Eng and Han (2000, 667) argue that "processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialization are neither pathological nor permanent, but involve the fluid negotiation between mourning and melancholia." So, while they critically employ and combine psychoanalytic concepts in creative ways, for the most part they accept those concepts wholesale. Judith Butler (1991, 1993, 1997) also uses the concept of melancholy in a similar way when she argues that the separation between mourning and melancholy is not as clear-cut as Freud makes it out in order to diagnose the melancholy of homosexual desire. She also uses Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection in her discussion of lesbian desire in *Gender Trouble* (1991). And although Butler employs these concepts with imagination and to ends significantly different than either Freud's or Kristeva's, she does not so much revise the concepts as use them. Like Butler, and also Elizabeth Grosz, Teresa de Lauretis critically deploys Freud's notions of disavowal and castration to theorize lesbian desire. All three theorists present

novel theories of lesbian desire, but for the most part they do so by taking on Freud's (and Lacan's) concepts and showing how these concepts do or do not apply to what they are developing as lesbian desire or, in Butler's case, as the lesbian phallus (Butler 1993; Grosz 1995; de Lauretis 1994). In one sense, their theories are original in that they take Freudian and Lacanian concepts to their logical limits, but that leaves those psychoanalytic concepts intact.

Many cultural critics and feminists have used Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to analyze the gaze and desire. For example, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000) brilliantly argues that whiteness operates like the Lacanian phallus as an ideal against which we all fall short. Although she substitutes the concept of whiteness for the Lacanian phallus, she is still working squarely within the Lacanian framework and applying Lacanian concepts to literature and film. Rey Chow (e.g., 1998) provocatively uses Lacanian concepts to analyze various kinds of cultural productions; but once again she applies the concepts rather than transforms them. Of course, Laura Mulvey (1975) is famous for her use of Lacan's concept of the gaze when she argues that the cinematic gaze is male. Mulvey also uses Freud's notion of the Oedipal complex in her latest work (1996), but she takes on these concepts rather than transform them. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) uses Lacanian concepts to analyze race and desire, but again he does not transform those concepts by so doing. Of course, there are many more cultural theorists who employ concepts from psychoanalytic theory to diagnose and analyze cultural productions and institutions. Still, most of these theorists use psychoanalytic concepts critically, rather than turn psychoanalytic theory into social theory. One of the most successful attempts to use Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to develop a social theory is Teresa Brennan's *History after Lacan* (1993), wherein she provocatively diagnoses modern culture in terms of the time of the psyche. And Drucilla Cornell's (1995, 1998) introduction of what she calls "the imaginary domain" into legal and social theory is one of the singular most important recent contributions to developing a psychoanalytic social theory.

3. The Frankfurt school philosophers are well known for their attempts to meld Freud's theory of the individual with Marx's theory of political economy. But most of these theorists, and their contemporary followers (e.g., Jürgen Habermas and Alex Honneth), begin with psychoanalytic notions based on individuals and either extrapolate to the social or argue that the social and the psychic realms are analogous, even related, but essentially in conflict. While the Frankfurt school attempted to extrapolate some psychoanalytic concepts to the social (particularly, Herbert Marcuse, who used Freud's notions of repression and sublimation to critically diagnose capitalism), contemporary critical theorists following Habermas are more likely to see psychoanalysis and social theory as analogous but distinct; for example, Honneth (1991, 239) sums up the relation within Habermasian theory as one of analogy: "Just as psychoanalysis analyzes the individual process of will-formation from the perspective of an emancipatory cognitive interest in order to free a subject from the force of unrecognized constraints upon action, so a critical social theory correspondingly analyzes the process of species will-formation in order to free it from the force of uncomprehended dependencies."

Rather than turn to Marx for social theory, many post-structuralist theorists turn to Foucault. Perhaps Butler and de Lauretis come closest to transforming psychoanalytic theory in their attempts to merge Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Foucauldian social theory. Making Freud and Foucault work together does not, however, result in a psychoanalytic social theory in which the very concepts of psychoanalysis are transformed into social concepts. Like the attempts to mix Marx and Freud, the attempts to mix Foucault and Freud do not alter the basic ingredients. For examples of theorists who use Freud together with Foucault, see Butler (1997), de Lauretis (1998), Shepherdson (1995), Restuccia (2000), Lane (2000), and Trigo (2002).

4. Even as theorists like Butler and de Lauretis stretch the meanings of psychoanalytic terms to construct productive theories of lesbian desire or homosexual melancholy, those terms still operate within a discourse that takes over traditional psychoanalytic notions of the individual at odds with the social; like traditional psychoanalysis, the focus is often on the psyche rather than on the social. Even when Butler and de Lauretis focus on the social conditions that produce the psyche, they often fall back into some version of a family romance, even if it is a negative version, à la de Lauretis.

5. For example, this is true of Nancy Chodorow's early work in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), where ultimately she proposes that patriarchal gender roles are perpetuated by the fact that mothers and most caregivers are women. This is also true of Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking early work (1982) that began what is called care ethics now so prominent in analytic feminists' debates. Gilligan's thesis that men and women are socialized differently and therefore develop different moral attitudes, like Chodorow's theory, is heavily reliant on the fact that most caregivers are women.

6. See Oliver 2001 for criticisms of Derrida, Kristeva, Honneth, and Butler along these lines.

7. In the Frankfurt school, Marcuse is best known for his sustained engagement with psychoanalysis. He transforms the notion of desire, or eros, by arguing that it is constituted by capital and a second-order repression that he calls "surplus repression" (1955). Surplus repression is added onto Freudian repression and is determined by capitalism and a repressive political economy. He also proposes that to liberate eros from capital it is necessary to make it possible for workers to sublimate through the high arts and culture. He emphasizes the necessity of sublimation for psychic life, with which I heartily agree, but he conceives of sublimation in a traditional Freudian framework that limits it to individuals and high culture, and in important ways excludes women. And as provocative and critical as his use of psychoanalysis is, he still begins with the Freudian individual ego and extrapolates the concept of repression from the individual level to the social level.

More recently, feminists have used what has become known as object relations theory, a revision of Freudian theory that concentrates on the objects of drives rather than the subject. Jessica Benjamin and Nancy Chodorow are probably the best-known proponents of feminist object relations psychology. I differ from Benjamin

(1988, 1995) in resisting a Hegelian master-slave model of primary relationships and the notion that autonomy and individuality are won through struggle with others. I differ from Chodorow (1978) in focusing on the relationship between the psyche and the social as interactive rather than determinative. Sometimes Chodorow's work makes it difficult to imagine how changing gender roles is possible without convincing men to switch gender roles, especially in relation to mothering, which would be a radical social change. Cynthia Willett, among others, has also pointed out that object relations theorists continue rather than break down the dichotomy between affect and reason, between autonomy and connection, and ultimately, it seems, between the psyche and the social. I hope to undermine these dichotomies rather than reinforce them.

8. See, for example, Cynthia Willett's critical analysis (2001, 2002) of the shortcomings of Marcuse's attempts to make psychoanalysis into a social theory; Robyn Ferrell (2002) argues that Jessica Benjamin's theories in both *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1988) and *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (1995) do not go between psychoanalysis and feminism as she claims, but rather reduce the psyche to the social such that "the analysis she provides of the desire is exclusively in terms of power relations between subjects (pleasure is not the point), simplifying any intrapsychical dynamic to an implicitly Hegelian model of self-consciousness." For criticisms of Honneth's use of object relations psychoanalytic theory to develop his theory of subjects struggling for recognition, see Oliver 2001. In addition, many Hegelian critical theorists, including Benjamin and Honneth, premise their notions of subjectivity on recognition, a conception of subjectivity that I challenge as part of the very pathology of domination (Oliver, 2001).

9. For example, in *The Bonds of Love*, Jessica Benjamin suggests that the infant develops its individuality and autonomy in a Hegelian master-slave-type dialectic with its mother. Axel Honneth (1996), following Benjamin, also imagines relations with others as a constant struggle for recognition. And Judith Butler (1997) describes all subject formation as subjugation.

10. Of course, contemporary French philosophy (e.g., Foucault, Levinas, Deleuze, Derrida, Irigaray) has been an attempt to decenter the subject and move away from a subject-centered philosophy toward a relational, or other-centered, philosophy.

11. For an excellent analysis of how and why primary relationships are not intersubjective, see Cynthia Willett's *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities* (1995).

12. In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, I develop a notion of subjectivity as fundamentally responsive as an alternative to recognition models of subjectivity.

13. This is the central argument of my book *Witnessing*.

14. Ed Casey brought this to my attention, for which I am grateful.

15. Sublimation is central to Marcuse's analysis (1955) of the affects of capitalism on desire. But in the end, he follows Marx when he argues that the workers exploited by capitalism do not sublimate drives into higher pleasures, namely, high

culture and art, because they do not have the time, and their desires have been repressed by capitalism. His notion of sublimation is very traditional because it is based on transforming individual drives into high art; unlike what I do here, he neither develops a social theory of sublimation nor expands the notion of sublimation to include all forms of signification.

16. For summaries of the main arguments in *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression*, see the introductions to each of the four parts, along with chapter 6, "The Affects of Oppression," and the conclusion, "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis; or, Forgiveness as an Alternative to Alienation."

I. Alienation and Its Double

1. For my criticism of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler insofar as they advocate this position, see Oliver 1997 and 2001.

2. See Oliver 1997 and 2001.

1. Alienation as Perverse Privilege of the Modern Subject

1. Lewis Gordon (2000, 35–36) nicely interprets and summarizes Fanon's argument that Hegel's master-slave dialectic does not describe the situation of black slavery. See also Robert Bernasconi's "African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosophy" (1997) and Lou Turner's "On the Difference between the Hegelian and Fanonian Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage" (1996).

2. See Oliver 2001, chap. 1.

3. Unlike Hegel's scenario, this resistance may indeed require killing white others, we might say, to create whiteness as Other. As Fanon (1968b, 295) says in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "From the moment that you and your like are liquidated like so many dogs, you have no other resource but to use all and every means to regain your importance as a man. You must therefore weigh as heavily as you can upon the body of your torturer in order that his soul, lost in some byway, may finally find once more its universal dimension." Violent resistance restores the sense of agency or action lost through oppression.

4. Many English translations of Marx are not sensitive to this distinction.

5. It is possible that Marx shortchanges some of the more social animals.

6. After a detailed analysis of why Marx's notion of alienation does not explain black alienation, McGary, oddly enough, concludes that he doesn't believe that black alienation affects many people. He claims that black communities provide support against alienation for most black people.

7. For a useful account of the development of Sartre's notion of alienation throughout his work, see Thomas Busch's "Sartre and the Sense of Alienation" (1977).

8. Thanks to Cynthia Willett for this formulation of my argument in her constructive review of an earlier version of the manuscript.

9. See Oliver 2001, chap. 1.

10. As I argued in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*: "This reversal of the mirror stage is akin to Freud's, and later Lacan's, stage of secondary narcissism. But, rather