



PSYCHOENERGETICS

A BODY-MIND APPROACH TO DEPTH WORK AND PROCESS FACILITATION

~ **Haunted** ~

Bill Cornell

Lecture Notes

By Michael Mervosh

From

Self-Examination in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy: Counter-Transference and Subjectivity in Clinical Practice

Chapter 6

We can come across clients who have disabling depressions that are relatively unresponsive to medications.

Depression can fill us with debilitating anxiety and self-loathing.

(Bill speaks in detail about fathers who have been rendered 'absent' due to the debilitating post-traumatic effects of war.)

They can be encased in an anguished silence, that nonetheless gets passed along to their children. Bill's father's silence was neither punitive nor angry.

His client, Ben, had internalized the loathing and contempt that his father had showered upon him as a boy. Now a man himself, he woke up every morning haunted by what was now his own self-contempt, and a relentless self-criticism.

Andre Green's essay (1986) on 'The Dead Mother'

- *The mother is not actually dead, but psychically dead to her children. This results in a kind of psychic or soul murder of the internal lives of both parent and child.*
- *The children of the 'dead' parent grow up embedded in the experience of parental absence rather than presence.*

The deadness of the parent is conveyed through the lived experience of a parent's look, tone of voice, smell, and touch, such that the child comes to dissociate their mind from body.

It is as though *'she had been buried alive, but her tomb itself had disappeared. The hole that gaped in its place made solitude dreadful'*. (Green)

In therapeutic work, we seek, we welcome, and we need our histories.

As therapists, we build our understanding and our compassion for our clients in part through our learning of their histories.

- *There is often a deep and unconscious hunger in our clients for their parents to have known or have come to know them better.*
- *At the same time, there is often an equal hunger to know more about their parents and grandparents, to come to know them better as real people.*

But so often, this is not to be.

There is a richness and an authenticity that comes alive internally, when we come to accept the genuine limitations of our parents.

Many parents are unable to provide what they had hoped to give to their children.

Transgenerational Haunting

The silences between generations, meant to be protective, have endured and have inevitably fractured and crushed the possibility of familial memory and intimacy. Instead, these silences have been passed on in a social fabric immersed in transgenerational haunting.

Forgetting happens on social and cultural levels, as well as on personal levels.

Two types of forgetting have particular relevance to transgenerational haunting – *repressive erasure and humiliated silence*.

Repressive erasure is characteristic of totalitarian regimes whose determined efforts are to eliminate any evidence and reference to the earlier political and social order.

It is a kind of *'coerced amnesia'*, which is described as one of the most malignant features of 20th century civilization, that can wipe out any recall of a previous generation of people.

Forgetting as humiliated silence is more personal, covert, unmarked, and unacknowledged.

The impact of massive silence can permeate a nation and an entire generation, bound together in a collective sense of shame and powerlessness. This silence creates a pressure to not know, to look away, and ultimately to actually forget.

We come to forget that we were trying to forget – remembering is simply ‘vanished’ from consciousness. (The Vietnam War experience for veterans returning home.

There is a fundamental, unconscious paradox created by transgenerational transmissions, in which there is something that has been found to be unbearable that then seeks to be known, and yet at the same time, must not be known.

- *The shadows and the phantoms of these previous generation’s tragedies remain registered in the unconscious of the future generations who are possessed by these voice and events still waiting to be known and heard. These tragedies remain alive in the unconscious, like desperate shards cutting into a person’s psyche.*

These psychic shards create pressure for recognition and mourning, even after years of being disavowed and sealed away.

But to bring them into the light of life can feel like a betrayal of a secret, like a violation of a parental (or grandparental) unconscious.

The very effort to finally uncover what has been so long disavowed can feel like a violent, hostile transgression of the pride and privacy of previous generations. It can feel that it is an act of cruelty towards one’s ancestors to want to cross this gap, to break a silence, to want them to know the emotional truths of their lives and suffering.

- *These lies and silences hide the epidemic of the traumatic losses of parents and grandparents.*

While it may appear that you are alone with your client in the privacy of your office, you are never in fact alone. There will be the presence of those members of the family whose lives and voices have been disenfranchised. They, unlike your client, may not welcome your presence, and may not like what you have to say.

But at the very same time, they, like your client, are waiting to be heard. *We must listen to these unspoken voices.*

The Muddle of Working Through Projections That Create Internal Conflict

On the one hand, we can be absolutely convinced that our perception of what others are feeling towards us is completely accurate, while at the same time we can wonder and worry that our perception might just be intense projections and distortions of what others actually feel.

As the therapist, we have to hold the possibility of there being truth in both positions, and we need to hold the tension between the two positions.

When we begin to undo the projections that a client has carried for a long time, it can feel like something important is being taken away from them. They can feel like their feelings and their reality, which have been so important to them, are being set aside.

As therapists, we have to help our clients live into the anxieties created by such internal conflicts, and not simply strive to eliminate the anxiety. Together, you both have to feel them, live with them, get to know them, and wonder what they have to reveal – rather than judge them, or dismiss them through reassurance or being ‘reasonable’.

For example, we will come up against a deep belief and feeling being carried by a client that they do not really matter at all. This must be explored and untangled, not corrected.

Themes of feeling unwanted, rejected, and unimportant permeate and resonate throughout meaningful depth work. By living with them, a client can learn to slowly differentiate relationships that actively generate rejection from others in which the client can see they are projecting their fears onto the relationships. This is the hard work of therapy.

Eventually, our clients can risk giving voice to their anxieties while in relationship, and they can learn to speak more directly to their hopes and fears in the relationship.

To say directly what we want from another can feel very exposing and embarrassing. And yet, saying nothing causes us to feel invisible and undesirable. (The anxiety-producing inner conflict or bind.)

Therapist As Active Witness

We must learn to listen not just with our ears, but with our whole body.

We must be able to sit in an active, receptive and reflective silence, allowing what he hear to move through us, to awaken our minds our bodies.

As the haunted spaces that lived inside our parents and grandparents begin to come more consciously alive within us, the meanings of our anxieties and vulnerabilities begin to surface, and begin to take on new meaning.

We come to appreciate why we feel so anxious or vulnerable, as we recognize how we have inherited and re-enacted our ancestors’ un-lived or unprocessed pasts.

This allows to consider our histories as well as our present challenges and issued from multiple perspectives. They are less likely to be automatically stamped and defined as sure signs of others’ disinterest in us, or as others who want to reject us, which we feel have to be endured in shamed silence.

- *Essential to working through anxieties and inner conflicts is the ability to call one's thinking and perspective into question.*

It is important to have the ability to see and feel our own histories from multiple perspectives. We need to have a healthy respect for the unbearable aspects of our parents lives that they have had to ward off at all costs. We need to have a regard for the frailties of being human, and for the almost inevitable falling short that parents do, with their children.

- *There is a profound intimacy and freedom to be had when we can recognize the realities, including the limitations and frailties, of another human being and of the generations that have proceeded us.*
- *A vital self is a self that can bear the disappointments and limitations of those we need, love and desire, while continuing to care about them, and while continuing to move towards the world and those around us.*
- *A vital self is a self that is willing to create and sustain a life in the world, in spite of, and in the midst of, ongoing frustration, opposition and uncertainty, that life inevitably holds in store for each of us along the way.*