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“The course taken by the illness in neuroses of repression is in general always the same: (1) the sexual experience which is traumatic and premature and is to be repressed. (2) Its repression on some later occasion which arouses a memory of it; at the same time the formation of a primary symptom. (3) A stage of successful defense, which is equivalent to health except for the existence of the primary symptom. (4) The stage in which the repressed ideas return, and in which, during the struggle between them and the ego, new symptoms are formed which are those of the illness proper.”

Freud, Draft K

Freud’s thoughts regarding the “return of the repressed” were drafted as early as 1896 in the Fliess Papers. In Freud’s proposal, one can witness the birth of the psychoanalytic subject and Freud’s new science. Psychoanalysis, the radical blow to humanity’s narcissism, circulates around a narrative logic of thinking, remembering, acting, and if lucky, working-through. This hermeneutic literally builds history – subjective scenes and collective scripts. First, there is an initial traumatic experience sealed in the nether regions, to only reappear later -with a mutative life of its own- as it starts voicing its existence as a symptom. Finally, the mutative self-part finds a home in the skin, affective economy, memory, fantasy or other cavity and starts to reproduce and repeat. This hermeneutic of suspicion is beyond Cartesian skepticism - Freud does not focus on the dictum “our senses trick us” – the reality principle itself is a socialized site and psychical space, not some derivative of an objective real. Freud offers – like Nietzsche and Marx – a new “destructive critique” which is a genealogical fort/da game between the explicit/manifest “consciousness of meaning,” supplemented with a suspicious gazing at meaning, which “decipher(s) its expression” through “guile” (Ricoeur, 1970). This is to lurk in an underworld where ‘truth’ is displaced and then rebuilt. Repression soon slides into oppression. Irigaray (1985) reminds us that the two cannot be separated because of our embodiment: the socioeconomic forces condition the body, the reproduction/repetition of historical memories and cultural narratives restore inequality, and finally, the power of
institution(s) hail and formulate our experiences of self. The return of the repressed is always linked to the return of the oppressed. This is the line that Neil Altman treads in his texts, The Analyst in the Inner City (2010) and Psychoanalysis in an Age of Accelerating Cultural Change (2015). Altman decodes a lingering symptom in the history, theory, culture, and practices of psychoanalysis: Most American versions of psychoanalysis, given their social-historical compromises, have become estranged from cultural politics as they are embodied in our shared cultural worlds.

In response to this estrangement, Altman offers two main (re)constructions to battle the repressed/oppressed in psychoanalysis: 1) Altman’s social-historical account of psychoanalysis, regarding its (im)migrations and reinforcement of the status quo; 2) Altman’s theoretical box informed by relational propositions and his concept of cultural 3rdness. The purpose of this essay is twofold. I wish to offer a general thematic exposition of Altman’s theoretical edifice while recognizing that this is only an introduction. Secondly, I will leave the position of a descriptor, and offer further thoughts regarding Altman’s procedures and recommendations. I will especially look at comparative theories found in social and cultural discourses.

Altman’s social-historical critique of Psychoanalysis

The initial scene of psychoanalysis before rupture and trauma is one of plenty, as most narratives are. Freud in 1919 had a vision of psychoanalysis as a social service, an applied science, with the hope of helping the poor, disadvantaged, and radically different (Altman, 2010). Altman stresses this point by elaborating Freud’s vision: There will be a bounty of material goods given the increase of production, and this is needed, so the work of psychoanalysis can begin as a social program – sufficient materiality must be attained, before psychic ramblings can begin. These political statements are odd to some, especially when poverty is seen as an individual conflict and not a systemic determinant - this is a later reversal in the social-political history of psychoanalysis – such a reversal, could only be formed in a cultural space of privilege. One can also appreciate Freud’s vision when one thinks about other early analysts who embodied a political zeal for socialism, anarchism, and other utopian socioeconomic theories. Freud’s echoes eventually led these early analysts in establishing clinics where the “most senior of analysts saw one-fifth of their patients for free” (2010, 34) as others started to write for the feminist movement and education reform. This bending of the rules – analytic codes of interaction – are well documented during Freud’s own analytic projects; when he performed Ferenczi’s analysis hiking through the mountains, or when he invited the wolf man over for dinner (Quinodoz, 2005). Altman is dragging something to light: Psychoanalysis was not always positioned and reproduced in an apolitical and a-ethical milieu. Neutrality is a dogmatic Freudian clinical technique, not a way of life. So, the questions arise: What happened? What changed? What were the traumatic event(s) which birthed this repressed/oppressed mutative voice found constructing American psychoanalytic practices, theories, and experiences?

Altman does not diverge from other dominant accounts of the social-historical (im)migrations of psychoanalysis to America. The traumas were sequential WWI (death to all, nirvana for all) and later WWII (the horde and authoritarianism). For Altman, psychoanalysis, though entrenched in its own bitter debates about the nature of the psyche, did become a
force for social change in the European context. It wasn’t until the rise of the Third Reich that psychoanalysts fled from their European territories to the UK, New York City, and Chicago. Altman’s main claim regarding the dominant symptoms of the newly found American psychoanalytic community - given this historical background - can be found in its own will for self-preservation: Will we survive/thrive or perish given our new cultural milieu of American capitalism, and radical social and cultural economies of distinction (Bourdieu, 2010)? This historical construction is not meant to undermine such European cultural distinctions, but as Akhtar (1995) reminds the reader, such an ethnic-cultural (im)migration is ambiguous and highly ambivalent, until some form of integration can be achieved within the split psyche and new cultural landscape. Psychoanalysis itself was (im)migrating. Altman summarizes this self-preservation tactic:

“When the European analysts, fleeing the Nazis, relocated to North America, they found a comfortable and secure niche for themselves in the medical model/private practice system that was dominant, then, as now, in the United States... (it) came to serve a largely white, affluent clientele... Psychoanalysis came to be seen as less than relevant to people from nonmainstream cultural backgrounds, from lower or even middle socioeconomic status, and to those who were beset by poverty, prejudice, or other socioeconomic problems. Psychoanalysis removed itself, to a significant extent, from the social world”. (2015,7)

Altman further suggests that ego-psychology and other adaptationist (enlisting the help of Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm) branches of psychoanalysis only reinforced this new found normative model - the upholding of a “scientific” and class specific status quo. Psychoanalysis became a moral-orthopedic (Hook, 2007) and operated with severe social prejudice. Since Foucault, this is not just a simple matter of aligning with the elite, it is a matter of discipline, practice, and knowledge – the micro becomes aligned, straightened, and conformity becomes the prize (1994; 1995). Psychoanalysis broke from the politically polymorphous, and established a well policed episteme of privilege and exclusion.

This can be exemplified by examining concepts. At this historical turn, psychoanalysis becomes a quasi-Hegelian procedure; that is, the social, cultural, historical and economic conditions of particular life-worlds melt into universalism. It is as if the unconscious became the workings of some strange god, or a pre-discursive and pre-cultural machine. And, this machine became knowable by typical neo-Freudian equations: feces = babies; homosexuality is the failure to dis-identify with the maternal; the masculine-complex is the by-product of certain femininities and their overestimation to activity; at all points, psychoanalysts knew more about the analysand, then the analysand knew of themselves – this was not a mutual process. One is reminded of Deleuze and Guattari’s (2002) criticisms and knowledge-schema entitled “arborescent,” “Look there’s Oedipus! Wait, he is over there?! No, Oedipus is everywhere!” Enlisting universalism, psychoanalysts’ stood above - from a social and economic position of plenty, a by-product of the self-preservation compromise – and performed terrible blunders.

Altman constantly calls attention to this compromise and its sequential blunders. American psychoanalysis not only divorced itself from the cultural politics of its early pioneers, but by doing so, became an estranged theory and practice in its later mutations and repetitions. Altman points his finger at typical discursive defenses found in Freudianism; for Altman, one
and two person psychologies are deficient to their core (though there is hope in Sullivan’s interpersonal theory). Two examples should be sufficient: 1) The normative matrix of analyzability, ego-strength, and verbalization; 2) “Conversion Hysteria” in different cultural scenes. These two examples do not disclaim psychoanalytic theory, but place psychoanalysis on the cultural couch, which is riddled by social-economic and historical maneuvers of inclusion and exclusion.

What does it mean to be analyzable? Most would suggest that the analysand has sufficient ego-strength to verbalize X. It does not matter what X is. The important thing is that the “thing” and the “word” are combined in such a matter that a shared arbitrary sociolinguistic experience is constructed and consumed through the analytic process. If sharing is not possible, then we must enter into the “primitive” (the negative connotation should be obvious). Whose experiences are we eluding too? Whose language is being acquired? And, in what context are these people talking? Is this assimilation? These follow-up questions are exactly what Altman wants the reader to think about, given psychoanalysis’ self-preservation instinct and compromise in America. The shared language becomes cultural, class, ethnic, and gendered. Who is on top? The hierarchal level of the analytic “dialogue” if it can be called that, is preconditioned by certain social distinctions and stratifications, which are induced by concepts like, ‘analyzable,’ ‘ego-strength,’ and ‘verbalization.’ Who can talk? Altman is very clear about his answer: The white, formally educated bourgeoisie of American society, who are well-off. Who cannot verbalize? Answer: The rest of America (and the rest of the world, think only of Frantz Fanon) that consists of radical others who don’t understand the psychoanalytic mission. In many ways, Altman declares: If you can talk like an educated Anglophone, then analysis can proceed without hindrance. It is clear that the privileges and biases of psychoanalysis are built not only in its language, contexts, and communities, but ultimately, such privileges set the boundaries of the clinical scene. This is a true invisible hand, a hand that can cripple without the analyst’s or analysand’s recognition.

Altman is fond of India. These narrative tales are throughout both books, however, there are two versions of Altman. The first version is a young proactive and hyper man, who decides to go to India in his youth to help the locals. This younger version of Altman is soon overshadowed by the realities of doing good for others in the world; such a brokenness, is due to the pragmatic American fantasy of helping others. Altman is thrown from his position of comfort and altruist zeal, in the face of India’s cultures, values, and vitality. As he spends more and more time in India, he becomes accustomed, he becomes acculturated, to certain Indian ways of thinking, living, feeling, and ultimately being - “India had gotten inside me” (2010, 166). This transitional phase - the space of recognizing culture and the non-self Other - left a lasting mark on Altman (Winnicott, 2010). As he returns to India, Altman is a professor teaching graduate students. His goal is to bring psychoanalysis into communities stricken by absolute poverty. It is at this juncture, one finds Altman enacting a critical, cultural psychoanalytic approach to psychopathology; namely, he becomes interested in the intersectional knowledge between religion, community, psychoanalysis, modernity, and conversion hysteria.

On one Thursday evening, the eve of Jumm’ah prayers in New Delhi, Altman with fellow faculty members and students went to the Nizamuddin Mosque. This mosque supports members and families of the local community who are struggling with “sickness,” “mental illness,” or “possession.” Then Altman witnessed:
“As prayers were ending...A man was led up to us; he soon began running from side to side of a narrow space...and screaming. As his screams rang out, other people in the vicinity started screaming...I was reminded of a visit...to a mental hospital years before the advent of major tranquilizers...the man began taking running somersaults, landing with a boom on the wet stone floor, sliding along, and then jumping up to take one...Run, jump, tumble, boom slide, run, jump, tumble boom, slide. The man did not seem in any way out of control...after ten or fifteen minutes of this, another man put his body in the way, and the somersaulting ended.” (2015, 31)

During class the next day, his students educated him by describing this man’s actions as “‘peshi,” which means, in a generic way, to “present oneself” (2015, 31). The mosque’s layout and interpersonal relationships, reminded Altman of the implicit goal in psychoanalytic space: A space that promotes a situation in which part-selves can appear without reprisal. Psychoanalysis, like the Nizamuddin Mosque, offered a space of freedom, with boundaries. Just like the analytic contract and the space it creates, the man running, jumping, and sliding, knew when he had to stop. Both spaces support the free-associative method, but it is only in psychoanalysis that there is a transcendental and ethnocentric value on verbalization. Should the West prize action or speaking? And when the West is positioned on the peripheral, should the traveler enact these moral presuppositions?

The value of ‘verbalization’ is a symptom of the Western world’s “maturational” crisis. This crisis of maturation stems from Modernity’s preoccupation between rationality and irrationality (Altman, 2015). What makes a verbalization rational? Is “primitivity” the same as the pre-oedipal constellation or is this “primitive” Other working with a different cultural code of signification (Levi-Strauss, 1969)? Are white western children on the same level as the “savage” or “babbling barbarians” (Brickman, 2003)? Where do “we” start and they “end?” And, more to the point: How do we make sense of religion and the “irrational?” Is the neurotic religious maneuver pointing to an earlier conflict found on the phylogenetic timeline (Freud, 1987)? ‘Verbalization’ becomes a nodal point in this debate, since the concept itself is crippled by the unsolvable, but most desirable Modern ideals of hope, reason, self-control, and progress. These riddles plague the discourse of psychoanalysis and its own rules of engagement. That is, the ‘rational’ and the ‘irrational’ are plagued by a dual division of mind, which infects our own biases and conceptualizations up to this day (Altman, 2015).

Does psychoanalysis stand at the crossroads between shamanism, and scientific empirical validation? Altman proceeds with an uncanny declaration: Psychoanalysts are priests, shamans, soothsayers, and modern fortunetellers. This metonymic sliding exercise is of great importance for Altman, since, wondering in the cultural nether regions will help psychoanalysts understand their theory and practices as a craft of interstitial space (Bhabha, 1994). Altman equates psychoanalysis with the “primitive,” but also supersedes the dogmatic impulse of any self-righteous religious community. The psychoanalyst becomes: one who excises ghosts; the one who becomes a great wounded physician; the priest in the confession; the reader of dreams; and the one who can help a subject align with their specific social bond. Altman does not wish to discredit a living organ of society, like the Nizamuddin Mosque, he wishes to convey a message of inclusion and interpretation, “Rather, the medical and supernatural and religious
framework coexist fluidly in a way that leaves open the possibility that they could be ultimately subsumed into a larger, inclusive interpretative framework” (48, 2015). Conversion hysteria depends on the larger interpretive codes, known as culture (Altman, 2010). The man jumping and sliding is not exhibiting conversion hysteria, but is entrenched in the work of culture (Obeyesekere, 1990). Psychoanalysis is positioned on the borderlands between the rational and irrational, and it is in this sense, psychoanalysis offers a possible reconciliation to the West’s “maturational” crisis and its own rules of engagement.

Altman’s social-historical critique is impressive. Altman’s narrative is not a tale of simple description, but one of criticism, and of consciousness-raising (Altman, 2010; 2015). He examines the social-historical forces that have shaped the lexicon, structures, and practices of psychoanalysis. This critique leaves many unanswered questions and riddles, but Altman does wish to provide a new ground for American psychoanalysis. How does one redirect the repetitive, mutative discourses of psychoanalysis which deny cultural-psychic liminality? Altman’s answer is to conceptualize and map a cultural 3rdness in psychoanalytic theory. Is this third purely hermeneutical? Is this third the syntax of language itself, the langue? What is the location of this cultural 3rdness that Altman seizes upon and elaborates?

Altman’s Notion of Relationality and Cultural Thirdness

Altman states his position clearly, when he summarizes a relationship of discontent between psychoanalysis and culture:

“Traditionally, culture was considered to lie outside the domain of psychoanalysis...Culture belonged to sociology, anthropology, and social psychology. At most, psychoanalysts might allow that internal objects have a cultural flavor, or that a cultural factor might interfere with analytic work, or that there are distinctly cultural patterns of drive and defense...culture was reduced to its shaping effect on the internal world...It remained for three-person psychologies to make room for contextual forces, such as social structure, language, and meaning systems, as they shape the individual and interpersonal relationships.” (2015, 13)

What are the implications of such a statement? First, culture was considered off limits to psychoanalysis; this barrier is yet another symptom of enclosing the analysand on the couch, with the hidden hope of upholding Modern dreams of “objectivity.” Secondly, when psychoanalysts started to think about culture, it only supported preexisting metapsychological frameworks; that is, an internal object is only culturally important as long as it relates to the intrapsychic economy. Thirdly, psychoanalytic dialogues including cultural issues were deemed as a hindrance or worst-off, a resistance (‘Resistance’ must be the most powerful and magical word-tool in psychoanalysis) to the goal of proper verbalization and free-association. Lastly, culture simply helps mold the mechanical drives; hence, the technicality of tension, pain, pleasure, and repetition are only important – tracking the flows of energy without cultural content. The common theme in this critique is a delegitimization of culture – as a shared system/code of meaning – in favor of the metapsychological principles rooted in one-person psychology. Though Altman is fond of Sullivan’s interpersonal infant, he also finds that this method and theory is limited to a small, tightknit family unit – the transference can only be interpreted by reconstructing the early affective channels found lingering in the adult’s mind. For Altman, psychoanalysis as a relational practice and theory, must take into consideration the
wider cultural fields of meaning making, structures, and contexts – Altman constantly applies this criticism to psychoanalysis itself, since, it creates its own culture(s). Cultural meaning systems are not only individual and interpersonal, but lodged in every cavity of experience. Altman wishes to work-through these cavities, not to limit their productive and destructive aspects, but to release their mutative repetitions by acknowledging the omnipresent function and hermeneutics found operating in culture fields. As quoted above, “they (culture) shape the individual and interpersonal relationships.”

How does one understand the thirdness that Altman is dragging into light? For Altman, thirdness is not only a theoretical-metaphorical space as it relates to the transference-countertransference matrix or reflective functioning, it is much more. Gadamar’s “fusion of horizons” (2012) is important for Altman, but this is not simply a dual process – a reading informed by two-person psychologies - but becomes generalized, to account for the complexities and multiple contexts of sociocultural life. Altman’s thirdness is not confined to the Lacanian unconscious either; that is, Altman recognizes the importance of language and it’s Saussurean social import of binding a community of subjects, but does not become a miner of deep linguistic structures. The structures Altman is opening to psychoanalysis are more complementary of structuration (Giddens, 1986) or dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990) – A fine line between reflexivity, social reproduction, and power-relations, as active forces in identity and narrative formation – a 3rdness found between subjective experiences and objective social worlds of meaning production and power. What are these third structures between the analyst and analysand which construct and constrain the transference-countertransference matrix?

Here one will find the contexts and cultural codes of race; neocolonialism; neoliberalism and global capitalism; commodification in psychoanalysis, and in broader cultural spaces; gender; sexuality; ethnicity; and class – all are in full operation in the psychoanalytic drama (Altman, 2010; 2015). In short: The realities of cultural politics, socioeconomic inequalities, and other cultural “horizons,” become actualities, not defenses, found circulating over the couch and in our greater shared social worlds. It is important to stress that these structurations and dispositions inform the psychoanalytic drama; they are not simply an intellectual playground for the analyst to think about, to only later regurgitate back to the analysand. Interpretations are still needed, but to dislodge these sociocultural actualities into defenses or fantasies would be to “miss the mark.” This does not throw fantasy and defenses out, but re-positions them within the wider social and cultural fabrics as they relate to our personal experiences and group affiliations; one being the transference-countertransference encounter. In fact, Altman elaborates his concept of relational psychoanalysis and cultural 3rdness using much of Klein’s language of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions (Klein, 1975; Altman, 2010). These positions and their correlative defenses are used to accommodate the rapid and culturally fueled forces shaping the transference-countertransference matrix; with the ultimate goal of raising-consciousness to a higher level of integration. The conditions of life – the social conditions which shape psychoanalysis, desire, language, affect and conflicts – are places where the analyst and analysand must work together. This is a battle of holding; the analysts must hold the intrapsychic, intersubjective, and the world at large, to understand the dialogue being
constructed in the room. This is the heart of Altman’s conceptual and methodological approach to psychoanalysis.

The room and couch become packed with multiple self-parts from a variety of social and cultural contexts. One is reminded of James’ famous axiom regarding the fragmented, modern social self, “we may practically say that he has many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares” (1918, 294). These selves are Altman’s project. As James continues, feeling-states and imagoes are placed along the desire and social need for recognition. A subject cares about these social selves, wishes them to be recognized in their proper time and duration, as the affect of “discordant splitting” (1918, 294) becomes more pronounced. This may be applying too much of a therapeutic edge to the Humeian inspired philosopher, but I think, it is important in conceptualizing Altman’s crowded room and couch. The crowd is hard to handle, maintain, listen to, and finally talk to, but this strain induced by multiplicity becomes a battle ground of holding. This act of imagination – both clinical and cultural – also applies to the analyst. Adrienne Harris (1996; 2009) a clear ally of Altman’s, describes the psychic-turmoil found in this psychoanalytic project:

“If it is hard to work with all the powerful and frightening affects that a view of the patient’s and the analyst’s multiplicity entails, it is also hard to give up the security of singular identity. Core self may be our teddy-bear transitional object...it is not without anxiety that one imagines a form of psychoanalytic theory in which more questions are asked, more narratives worked and reworked, and determinacy remains unsolved.” (1996, 548)

As theoretical and experiential regulations become a desire for constructive anxiety found in differences and multiplicities, Altman wishes to pursue an analytic practice and theory of “Linear currents, Nonlinear dynamics” (2015). This is a mental exercise of suspending the psychoanalytic known – one and two person metapsychologies – for the unraveling, multiple, and if not, chaotic organization(s) of subjectivity and ever-moving currents of sociality. An analyst may use the known psychoanalytic canon of linear development, but should not guard against encroaching anxiety by denouncing the nonlinear dynamics of living in a globalized world of politics, difference, and power. Practicing the psychoanalytic art of recognition, as one traverses the fluidity of living in a sociocultural world of increasing speed and ever-dwindling social forms, becomes Altman’s metapsychological foreground and ethical concern.

Both texts have numerous cases which Altman interprets and analyzes, as he holds and relates to this intense space of cultural 3rdness. One case is Dan (2010). Dan and Altman’s relationship was saturated with homophobia, heteronormativity, different versions of masculinity, past and present religious affiliation, cultural biases regarding authority and submissiveness, and an uncanny family structure with similar early affect patterns. In the course of analysis, Altman demanded Dan to be more “spontaneous” and Dan complied. From this intervention of “pushiness,” Altman and Dan start to unravel the cultural codes which they both were inducing in each other, as they reflected on their own personal narratives - Altman realized his countertransference, and Dan was able to say “fuck you.” By talking-through these “cultural perspectives” Dan and Altman created a different transference-countertransference matrix and were able to integrate these partial-selves into a working analytic perspective. Another case illustration is Elena. Altman writes of Elena, when he is thinking about the cultural construct of whiteness in contemporary American society. The surprising aspect of this case is that both Altman and Elena are white. Altman then depicts the cultural conflicts
regarding whiteness as not only the cultural phenotypical classification – inherited by Social Darwinists’ biological racism – but as a prevalent hidden code of success in America, the dream of professionalism. The code being: All subjects should strive for the white American middle-class imaginary of upper mobility, gradual progress, and greater wealth. Elena comes from a working-class background, and was currently working in a middle-management job to make ends meet. Given her lack of financial income, Altman offered Elena and “off hour” slot and rate, inducing Elena to feel like a “second class citizen.” Being regulated to the “off hour” because of real economic burden, stirred “her working-class self” to appear. Through this appearance Elena’s strain, conflict, guilt, and loyalty to her roots became a project for her and Altman. As analysis continues, Altman sees both of them working-through this ideological field together. Altman then relates his “blind spots” to the all-powerful ideological dictum, found in their mutual never-ending fight for financial attainment, personal responsibilities to family, class distinctions, and the general “pursuit of liberty and happiness.” This wish is both active for Altman and Elena. Altman is also burdened by securing a better life for his family: the hope to give enough support to his children, so they can “choose employment that was meaningful to them;” provide an “elite education;” and other “aspirations toward whiteness, in terms of privilege and freedom.” These hidden cultural imperatives offered dispositions for Altman and Elena as they worked-through their own “personal roots” and the “pursuits” referred to “as whiteness” (2010).

These are but two cases, through which Altman highlights the overdetermined forces found operating in his cultural thirdness. The fields of meaning are multiple and overlapping. At one point, the analyst and analysand are pulled into the hailing functions found in cultural categorizations (e.g. homophobia; heteronormativity; class conflict), yet the pull continues as personal responsibilities and subjective histories are re-lived and re-organized, and finally, an interpretation is offered to help the analysand and analyst find their way through this murky and rough water. It should be noted, Altman is not offering an overtly abstract notion of cultural thirdness. There are other cases in which actual cultural stereotypes become the guiding part-selves in treatment, and other cases, in which Altman analyzes institutional transferences. One such example, can be found in Altman’s treatment regarding a case of Kernberg’s, in the context of a hospital. The dynamics of this institutionalized setting offer a deeper reading through the prism of Altman’s cultural thirdness: class, privilege, prestige, dominant clinical paradigms, interpersonal relations between psychiatrists, the wards staff and their training, family patterns, and “larger socioeconomic systems” (2010) are all worked-through without erasing the patient in favor of macro-dynamics, while simultaneously, re-positioning the patient and Kernberg in larger institutional system(s) at-hand.

Altman’s cultural thirdness is beyond the traditional Freudian metaphor of the fort/da game. The transference-countertransference matrix becomes open to all the cultural codes which offer subjects meaning and existential conflicts, without devaluing the personal and early affect patterns, which Psychoanalysts prize. Altman wishes to hold this theoretical and interdisciplinary tension by offering psychoanalysis his version of cultural 3rdness. This tension, this holding, are natural given Altman’s grand project, as he revitalizes the importance of
culture, politics, and socioeconomics; given psychoanalysis’ biased representation of a single-monadic person, laying on the couch.

The Analyst in the Inner City and Psychoanalysis in an Age of Accelerating Cultural Change offers many challenges to the discourses and institutions known as psychoanalysis. These problematics are revisited in both texts, as Altman constructs his kaleidoscopic theory and version of psychoanalysis. I have only focused on two general themes, but a reader from any background familiar with psychoanalysis, culture, philosophy or sociology, could easily find common or argumentative ground with Altman. His ideas and experiences are vast, yet practical. Altman’s dedication to write about, and practice psychoanalysis as described above is admirable; he never shuns from his personal feelings, history, desires, or social-economic positionality. In this respect, Altman’s texts are examples of the ethic he spins and wishes to depart. I will end on a personal note. I would recommend The Analyst in the Inner City due to its complex theoretical interrogations, rich case material, historical criticisms, and original academic force. The Analyst provides psychoanalysis as a discourse and discipline a well needed critique from within. It also provides the groundwork to alleviate serious faults still operating in psychoanalytic corners and cavities. It is a path worth walking with Altman, so the repetitive mutative symptoms of psychoanalysis can find integration, growth, and depressive solutions.

References


