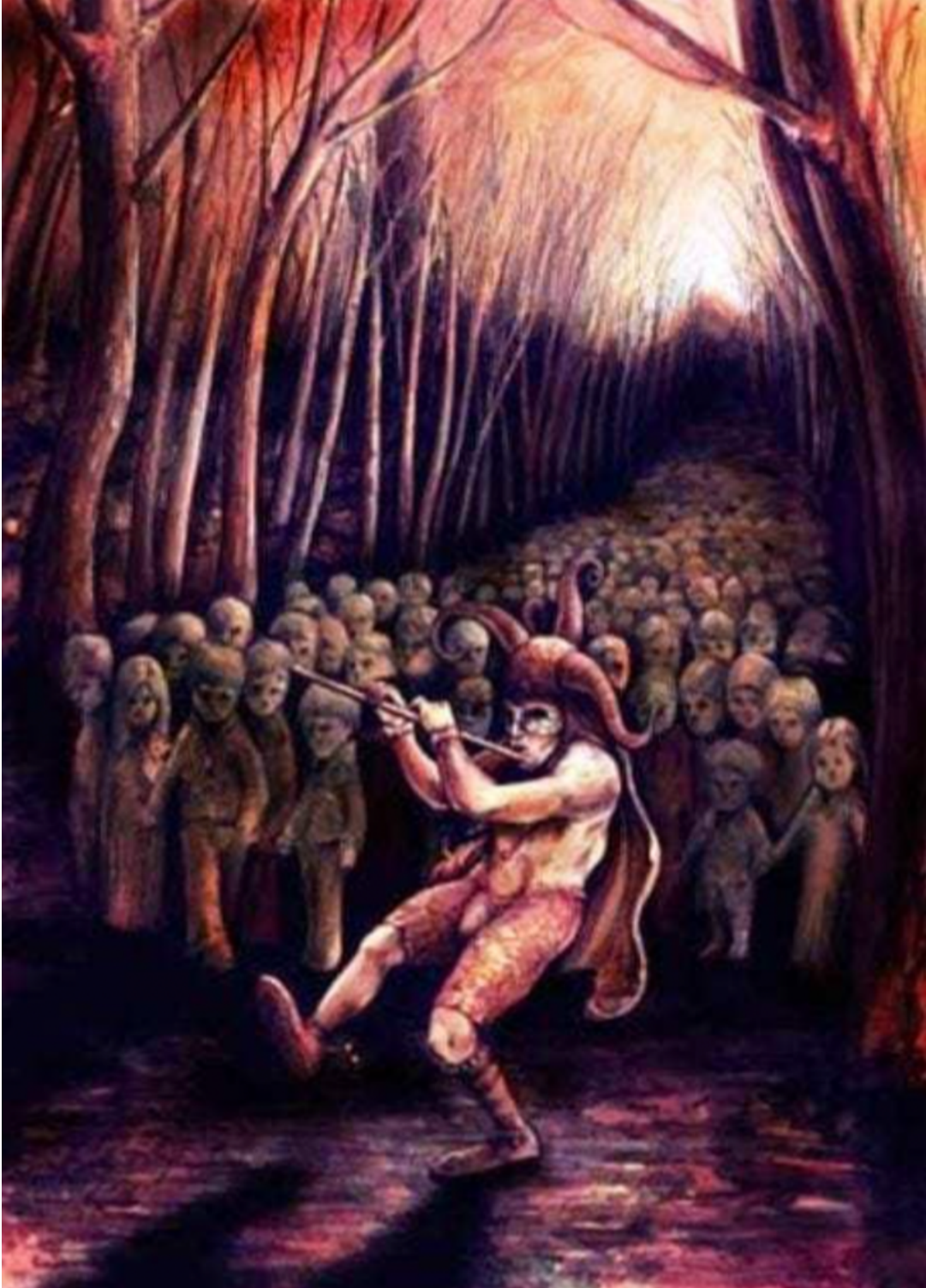


# Phantomatic forces in our political and institutional life

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*The Pied Piper of Hamelin from the German Middle Ages*

“If we dare look beyond our willed innocence. If we look around unflinchingly, then we can step forward to our larger darkness as human beings”.

James Baldwin

There are many expressions of phantomatic forces in our political and institutional life: sociocultural forces such as Nationalism, National identity, intergroup conflicts, mass psychology, immigration, persecution, authoritarianism, psychological needs for underlying fascist systems of thought as well as conspiracy theories and their ideological underpinnings. These are all unconscious expressions of phantomatic group forces. Today I will focus on the phantomatic forces expressed in racialized phenomena and what the pandemic helps us to see about race. My presentation is in three parts:

1. A brief presentation of the theory of cultural complexes and phantom narratives as phantomatic forces.
2. Two examples of phantom narratives expressed as phantomatic forces recently in American cultural life.
3. And summary and implications.

### **Brief Theory**

My use of the term phantomatic is a continuation and elaboration of my work on the concept of cultural complexes and phantom narratives. Cultural complexes are expressed at the level of the group. This approach is my attempt to

offer to analytical psychology a unifying concept with which to explore the cultural unconscious more systematically. Thinking of unconscious cultural assumptions and behaviors as based in the theory of complexes reconfigures the opposition between the personal and the archetypal levels of psychological functioning in three ways:

First, this shift provides a dynamic approach to “factors” that operate at the level of the group that are manifested as cultural processes such as rituals, memorials and of course politics.

Secondly, this shift in attitude allows for an understanding of specific aspects of group life in terms which show how culture processes are transmitted both for better and worse in the unconscious of both individuals and groups.

Three, group life itself is independent of the various ways in which sociopolitical processes are manifested.

My way of thinking about these “factors” is to understand them as psychic forces operating at the level of the cultural unconscious, structured by cultural complexes and expressing archetypal story formation or phantom narratives in our individual, institutional, and sociocultural life.

When activated, cultural complexes, expressed through phantom narratives, already indicate that emotional processes have been transmuted into group assumptions that are structuring our fears and anxieties around differences and similarities. Also, it is at this point that we find collective shadow processes being expressed.

To quote Jung, “the mere act of enlightenment may have destroyed the spirits of nature, but not the psychic factors that correspond to them, such as

suggestibility, lack of criticism, fearfulness, propensity to superstition and prejudice---in short, all those qualities which make possession possible (Jung, vol. 10, para., 431, pp. 211, ). Possession is a key term in Jung's quote which I connect to phantomatic forces.

Seeing psychic processes as phantomatic allows for an attitude that may open us up to recognize both our subjective responses to broader social situations and the power of group forces that we both express through our personal responses relative to our place, role, identifications. We are both a part of and a participant, implicated, co-conspirators in the phantom narratives we inherit from past generations and in their manifestation in our contemporary times. Phantom narratives show how cultural libido is being channeled as a narrative (ideologies) that has powerful and at times compulsive influences on our attitudes and behavior, thoughts and the symbols and images that reflect our responses.

Though Jung was very concerned about the "modern person" losing his or her individuality in a mass society, I feel that best support for individuality is for us to learn how to take on and work with group processes in an effort to become more conscious. We need to take on the psychological potential of becoming conscious of how to hold and work with group tensions and processes. as we are deeply in need of psychological ways to deal with group life.

### **Racialized Complexes and Covid as Phantomatic Forces**

'All men are created equally and endowed with inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is an expression of America's aspirational goals. Those

goals have not been met. We continue to struggle with how to make these ideals real for people of color and other minorities.

As a country, we Americans have not dealt with the original sin of slavery. The problem of slavery, says Cornel West, is like the “a black serpent wrapped around the legs of the table upon which our Declaration of Independence was signed by our founding fathers-many of whom were slave owners.” Their legacy is our uncompleted work. We can see this contradiction in the image of the black serpent through the lens of four hundred years of white terrorism on black and brown citizens from slavery through Jim Crow period to the present day shooting of unarmed young black and brown citizens and the genocidal destruction of Native peoples. In contrast to the aspirational goals of the Declaration of independence, for many people of color,

“We don’t see any American dream,” Malcolm X said in 1964. “We’ve experienced only the American nightmare.”

“A nightmare is essentially a horror story of danger, but it is not wholly a horror story. Black people experience joy, love, peace, safety. But as in any horror story, those unforgettable moments of toil, terror, and trauma have made danger essential to the black experience in racist America. Black Americans are constantly stepping into the souls of the dead. Because they know; They could have been them; they are them.” Ibram X. Kendi, *The Atlantic* (June 2020). This is a description of affective experiences of an intergenerational trauma.

President Lincoln said "A house divided against itself cannot stand" in a speech around the slavery issue given on June 16, 1858. Looking at our sociopolitical situation today, we can see that not only is our national house divided, but fragmented.

All this happening as the world struggles with Covid-19 and structural racism.

Today, virus is the signifier for both structural racism and Covid.

Though these two viruses are invisible their effects are very real and deadly.

Covid has exposed from its own vantage point the health care disparities in terms of who gets infected and who dies from it. In addition, social media, from the White House to the daily news are viral super spreaders that disseminate disinformation and stokes our fears and vulnerabilities influencing as it reveals the unmet health needs and income disparities that make access to health care difficult or impossible for many. Both viruses spread through physical contact and psychic contagion (psyche to psyche). Because of the group phenomena, e.g., we are all vulnerable and to that extent we are in this together. In addition, our groupishness of being together generates its own collective anxiety: fears of being swallowed up by the group or separated from the group, losing one's identity in the group, the fear of catching the virus and/or contacting the other as shadow. Covid, political forces, global warming, economic devastation, unemployment, conspiracy theories have generated apocalyptic fears about the coming end of the world or the wish and hope that finally we'll see the light and come together into some kind of cultural transformation that affirms our interdependency bringing together individual and cultural transformation.

In putting these two viruses, Covid which threatens bodily death and systemic racism which threatens our cultural and political body through social deaths, we arrive at a third force: the reality of the psyche. The reality of the psyche is a Jungian way of describing the common and irreducibility of turning outer and inner events into experiences. It is an autonomous process, just as what is seen by the eye is turned into a something by the brain that can then be labeled, studied and potentially understood.

What are the psychological issues that act as obstacles for us taking up these complicated issues? Generally, when we think of psychological issues with regards to race and pandemics, we think of individuals or politics, economics and policies. Though these are very important, I make the case that in addition, to these approaches a psychological approach is needed in order to work with the emotional dimensions of our failed American experiment with democracy.

This is primarily because the unresolved, unacknowledged violence and terror that has been background for white Americans and foreground for people of color in America have generally been thought about through the lens of political, economic and sociological lens. From these points of view, we continue to reproduce structures that privilege whites and exploit black and brown bodies. Even psychoanalysis as a Eurocentric import did not until more recently begin to deal with cultural and psychological context created by slavery and its ongoing impact on mental health and more seriously its creation of social death. The psychic structures of self and other are deeply impacted by societal power structures based on a racial hierarchy.

Psychologically, both cultural complexes and phantasmatic narratives are activated at the level of the cultural unconscious. Phantom narratives as a hybrid term is my way of linking personal and social activity through unconscious story formation (images) that show the psychic's ways of narrating its relationship to the group, through the expressions of cultural, social, and political issues. Phantom narratives are the psyche stories that help us to see what personal and collective story we're in and living out. I suggest, this is a basis for a psychological approach to our cultural problems.



We analytical psychologists think in terms of a psyche which as Jung described it is as an autonomous self-regulating set of processes that seek emotional and spiritual balance in individuals and in groups. I hope this concept will help us to think psychologically about the issue of race.

**An example:**

Hopefully, this example will help open up spaces for our imagination to work on issues around race through the lens of phantom narratives. This situation is the light side of a dark cultural complex that could have easily gone deadly. A white woman, Amy Cooper, was walking her dog off leash in Central Park. She was asked by a black man to leash her dog, since dogs were not permitted to be off leash in that area. Instead of doing that, she called the police saying that she was in imminent danger from an African American man, becoming more hysterical as she talked with dispatch. Thus, Amy weaponized her tears and placed the man in danger by pulling out a cultural complex that included the psychic awareness that the responding officer(s) would side with her perception of the dangerous black man. What was the unconscious thinking expressed in this situation? She assumed that the police would be racially biased to take her side—a black man attacking a white woman. Since she was an urban, educated, well-employed woman likely she saw herself as race free i.e., consciously she would not think of herself as racist. I assume that she would see herself as not racist. However, she was acting on her moral credentials i.e., the right kinds of beliefs “I am not a racist”. But structural racism permits this action and the belief that I am not a racist because these set of thoughts cover over a set of unexamined white privileges. This is an example of racism without being a racist.

The point of this example is to show how complicated are the racial waters that we swim in most of which are unconscious for us. The cultural complex as the psyche's response to racialized situations allow us to examine both our group level identification (structural racism} and our individual implicit biases and the meaning for us individually.

### **Implications of working with phantom narratives around racialized Cultural Complexes**

America's original sin of slavery must be acknowledged along with its historical consequences of domestic terrorism against people of color. Unless this happens, we cannot begin to look at and acknowledge the role of the belief in white supremacy in perpetuating the violence and inhumanity. We are haunted by ghosts of the past that need our recognition in order that we may begin to do the work of transforming our present. Hans Loewald, a psychoanalyst stated "Those who know ghosts, "tell us that they long to be released from their ghost life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow life'. And finally, there has to be some reparation. Not necessarily, materially, but taking responsibility collectively and personally for what has happened and what is happening today.

In Jungian psychology we call this confronting the collective shadow. The collective shadow constitutes the unacknowledged, unrecognized, denied aspects of our cultural history. They are the repressed elements that are inconsistent with our ideals but this whole process is denied.

I will close with this guttural voice of the poet: Leslé Honoré (August 2020)

America come get your children  
The ones you are so proud of  
The ones wearing Stars and Stripes  
Buying guns like candy  
The ones dripping with  
White privilege  
That you created with  
Red blood from brown skin  
America come get your children  
Come get your kids  
The ones flying flags of defeat  
Of history long dead  
Of a life they wish they had  
Of superiority they believe they have  
The lies you whispered in their ears  
As you rocked them to sleep  
“Look away look away look away Dixie land”  
America come get your children  
The ones terrorizing this country  
The ones terrorizing the world  
The ones never called a terrorist  
Come get  
Your rapist  
Your misogynistic  
Your appropriating  
Hating  
Bigoted  
Offspring  
You know...

the apples that didn't fall far from the tree  
America come get your children  
The ones running the country  
The ones too cowardly to speak up  
The ones that shoot into protests  
Churches  
Light torches  
Run cars into peace  
Come get your diseased infants  
Entitled children in men's bodies  
Jealous girls screaming in women's voices  
Come get this disgusting basket of  
Deplorables  
That you nurtured on  
Manifest destiny  
The pale pink faces  
In utter disbelief  
That even though you put your knee  
On every Brown and Black neck you saw  
We have fought back and risen  
Casting shadows on your children  
And they rage when they learn  
That being a white mediocre man  
Is no longer enough  
America come get your children  
Before they burn this stolen land down  
And you with it.

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