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## Discussions

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### Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Comments on Cape Town Covers, Colonial Catwalks, and Getting Caught

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Not the return of the repressed but the return of the *ex* pressed: OCD, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

"Obsession" [*ob*, before + *sedere*, to sit], a 16th-century reference to laying siege, slipped instantly away from the military toward metaphor under the sway of witchtrials: in contradistinction to those inhabited or *possessed* by evil spirits who moved their victims from within, some poor souls were besieged or *obsessed* by evil spirits who manipulated them from without. A century later and beyond the jurisdiction of most witchhunts, obsession moved into the neutral territory of *l'idée fixe*, haunting but rarely demonic fixations on building a perpetual motion machine or believing oneself the rightful heir to a throne. *Possession* and *obsession* merged in 18th-century Gothic novels of horror and paranoia, where the one in pursuit was ever the one pursued. Later Romantic idylls of ennobling quest would internalize *obsession* just as psychiatrists, quit of obstreperous devils and intrusive deities, were objectifying *possession* in terms of ceremonial theater, ritual vertigo, hallucinatory drugs, communal pressure. *Obsession* soon became implicated in mental pathologies, *possession*

in primitive anthropologies.<sup>1</sup>

Insinuated then insulated completely within the person, obsession could be magnificent but it was also difficult to exorcise, since there were no longer any obvious handles, no demons to yank away. Obsession was not a result of illusion but the consequence of a flat-out cultural investment in illusions, themselves chief and profitable products of industrial modernity: technical feats of stage magic, photography, motion pictures, cartoons, synthetics, television, Walkmen (its disembodied voices following you everywhere), superrealism, appropriationism, computer graphics... How to disabuse people of obsession when society rewarded them for their tight purchase on, and gamboling with, illusions?

Obsession worked well for capital accumulation and the manufacture of profitable illusions, but by the mid-20th century we had need again of obsession's vanished twin, that evil force acting from without. In the aftermath of the Nazi collective, within the binary math of Cold War socialities, and across the divisive math of Viet Nam, North and West required a new anthropology, one that reasserted the meddling presence of external disturbing powers.

Wherefore the resort to "compulsion"—"to urge irresistibly, to constrain, oblige, force," as the *OED* tells us. Leon Salzman traced the contours of obsession and obsessive personality in 1968, summing up a century of therapeutic experience and exasperation with "obsessives" just as the war in Vietnam entered its most divisive stages, and in the same year, Erwin W.M. Straus's 1948

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study, *On Obsession: A Clinical and Methodological Study*, was reprinted. Nonetheless, the hyphenate disorder Obsessive-Compulsive became thoroughly conjoint only in the 1980s while Calvin Klein was introducing its own Obsession, "a blend of vanilla, amber, orange blossom, oak-moss, and other oriental spices" for women in 1985 and a "refreshing, oriental, woody fragrance . . . a blend of lavender, mandarin, clove, nutmeg, and amber" for men in 1986, both "for romantic wear." Despite—or due to—the introduction and success of the tricyclic antidepressant clomipramine (Anafranil) in Europe around 1980 and the United States in 1990, OCD was soon epidemic, or so one might gather from Ian Osborn's *Tormenting Thoughts and Secret Rituals: The Hidden Epidemic of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* (1998) or from taking a whiff of the Cicara Company knock-off of Obsession for men, called, oh yes, Compulsion.<sup>2</sup>

Compulsion and obsession are both engaged by Philip Jenkins, but the hyphenate disorder that arose concurrently with the specter of the serial murderer is surprisingly absent from his essay, as is also the idea of "copycat" crimes, a phrase new to the 20th century and more deeply etched in the 1990s in terms of copycat murder. If serial murder, "ultimate evil," was conceived as an absolutely antisocial impulse, thoroughly unresponsive to therapy and impossible to suppress, then copycat murder was its socialized twin, complexly mediated and dependent upon acknowledgment of verisimilitude or upon blatant confusion with the original. While serial murder has been terrifying because the ostensible mediocrity,

silence, and isolation of the murderers made their crimes, once uncovered, loom up out of a social nowhere, copycat murder was covered by news media as a normal outcome of publicity itself, and an unavoidable outcome of the attempt to resituate the murders and the murderer along a scale of sociability.<sup>3</sup>

One might explain the link between serial murder and copycat crime in the context of a resurgent Cold War that cinematically consolidated binary patterns of opposition and momentarily reestablished the eschatological tandem of two great matched powers, one good, one evil, each declaring the other an atavism, an artifact of history doomed to be subsumed. Such an explanation, however, is insufficient, since fears and images of serial murderers and morbid curiosities about copycat criminals survived the end of the Cold War, the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the end of Apartheid, the decline of the Hoover FBI, and iterations of political conservatism. To argue that "Once the serial murderer was invented . . . the concept developed its own momentum, since it possessed a kind of internal logic," is to endow it with an internal animating force (logic *possesses* it) and divorce the concept from its continuing context.

We can better appreciate the context of serial murder and its complement, copycat murder, through the more pervasive, persuasive cultural construct of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, whose key symptoms echo behavior both serial and copycat: a rigorous sequentiality of personal rituals; constant, exact, anxious repetition; awkwardness with the Many; desires always to be in control and con-

comitant fears of losing control, hence extreme discomfort, à la Jack Nicholson in *As Good As It Gets* (1998), with the unpredictable, the unscheduled, the animal, the spontaneous, the unique.

I am reluctant to maintain that the relatively sudden conjoining of obsessive and compulsive prompted the cultural construction either of serial or of copycat murder, but I do maintain that obsessive-compulsiveness was sufficiently powerful a mythopoetic figure that it could propel both well beyond Reagan's America. The hyphenate disorder arrived on the scene in sync with personal computers, laser copiers, satellite dishes, and compact disks, none of which has left the stage or become senile, and all of which make the world ever-more quickly serial and irresponsibly reproducible. The hyphenate disorder helps us understand how a serial murderer could be seen to have an "absolute lack of self-control" yet conduct the "repeated premeditation" crucial to committing murders that sternly replicate format, victim, and situation. OCD may even help us understand why the serial murderer is supposed usually to be male: an obsessive woman has more approved or conventional gender-biased outlets in arenas of finicky detail (housecleaning, hygiene, cosmetics, food/dieting rituals, sewing) than does a man, whose obsessions may go unrewarded and unacknowledged until more drastic action is taken, but for such action to be sanctionable, the more stolid man must feel that he is yielding to a force not his own. Culturally integral to obsessiveness in men is therefore (?) a compulsiveness that releases one from guilt even as it

encourages what Jenkins neatly terms "serial confession." The social construction of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder answers nicely to the social construction of serial murder.

Readers may see where I am going: obsessive-compulsiveness is richly expressive of our culture of the copy, where to be in control is to be able freely to repeat (owning syndication rights or committing copycat crimes ranging from piracy to murder); where to be out of control is to be compelled to repeat (assembly-line work, interrogation in emergency rooms, or serial murder) or to lose track of all pattern; and where uniqueness puts everything in quadruple jeopardy—isolation and exposure, absolute value and absolute insignificance. Conjoining obsessive and compulsive, our era has moved beyond Lacan's joking Freud and criticism's literary Lacan, beyond a core individual who, experiencing alack a loss, must express itself in order to make itself known *per se* and viable *extra se*. Underlying the taxonomy by which there has come to be this hyphenate disorder is a revised psychological anthropology grounded not in loss but in plethora and indeterminateness.

That last is no typo: for several decades we have been working ourselves into a stage of confusion about originality and causality in which indeterminateness has become a subset of something vaguely larger, like the Ness of Loch Ness. Here I must move on from seriality, murder, and monsters to obvious intersections with a "Colonial Catwalk." Peter Shand's essay, elegant, piercing, and Peircian, suffers—as perhaps we all

henceforth must—from indeterminatenessness. It seems that we are, as upright human beings, obliged to honor the wholeness and aesthetic integrity of a culture out of which comes a visual devise (to be eventually confused with a device) that closely resembles devises characteristic of other distant, distinct cultures. At the same time, then, that commercial appropriation by foreigners or estranged descendants may act as a blood thinner, reducing and redistributing the protein of the *koru* symbol more globally, it also paradoxically strengthens the connection between *koru* and Maori culture by referring the devise regularly and exclusively to that originating context by which the *koru* "seems to speak of a specific, though non-ethnocentric, collective identity, of contemporary nationhood for New Zealand" and not to those in Egypt, Greece, China, or Peru who may have created and integrated a visually similar devise or motif.

What is a "specific, though non-ethnocentric, collective identity"? As Shand himself demonstrates, the *koru* is no isolated or hegemonic visual element but something woven, with other devises, through Maori language, architecture, and habits of mind. It draws its power from the weave, an open weave with room for many new maneuvers. To the degree that the *koru* is woven determinedly but indeterminately through the weave, to that degree it is Maori.

Is it useful to worry over "a dislocation of the source from its initial cultural context" (Shand, on a painting by Gordon Walters)? Too much anxiety and we would be forced to entertain so weak a

theory of the power of symbols to transfer meaning that Peirce himself would shudder at the untoward outcome, in which communication is paralyzed because no two exactly share life experiences; or barbed and barricaded, because no two want to share what they have seen or felt or learned, for fear of being exploited, abused, mistaken; or trademarked and commercialized, because each of us deserves to be rewarded for any insight, invention, and cultural production to which we are privy. A successful defense of proprietary (notions of) devises plays into the grasping hands of multinational monopoly capitalism, which prefers to localize, objectify, legalize, brand, sterilize, and then market for profit.

Indeterminateness is one tactic for avoiding that subtly circular coercion through which self-defense tightens into self-definition, self-definition locks down into proprietary restrictions, and proprietary restrictions sanction more secure self-defense. An indigenous group may choose not to enter into this tightening noose by ignoring or denying the cultural particularity or dominance of any and all devises others may happen upon, but this does not assure that it will escape all market devices, some of which are quite effective at restrictively defining groups who want rather to be left alone and indeterminate. What, these days (would that Shand had posed this question more explicitly), given the economic and legal systems under which we labor, is "self-determination"? What can it possibly be?

Indeterminatenessness is the atmo-

sphere in which one no longer knows whether the diffusion (and consequent diffuseness) of an object, symbol, idea, or identity is morally and politically for the better or worse. Is it better that Maori institutions define and restrict the use of the *koru* and other Maori devices, so that at least the Maori profit from their uses and control their contexts, though in so doing they isolate and make proprietary what before was woven through and shared among them? Or is it better for the sake of human relations and global intercourse that an international language of shared symbols develops that may eventually subvert its current vehicle, multinational proprietary capitalism?

Art to be sure has an unusual if not unique role here. Once detached from other cultural activities either by the market or in defense against or exploitation of that market, artmaking shifts from the obsessive to the obsessive-compulsive. That is, it moves from a paramount concern with materials, craft tradition, intricate detail, and inherent *mana* (a word long misappropriated from another set of Pacific islanders), to a concern with forces beyond oneself that are disturbingly seductive. To be blunt, in a world that suddenly desires *koru*, why not make what you have always made, with your individual flair, for a greater profit than you had ever expected, and make it again and again, sometimes under deadline, sometimes in entirely new environments? How can you *not* do this? How can you not see this as an opportunity to give others a sense of your own tradition, your own values? How can the request not also be taken as a command?

How can you resist?

Paul Carter, in response, has introduced and expanded upon the notion of *The Sound In-Between* (1992). His work is most relevant here because his inquiry into the peculiar historical processes of "first contact" and auditory transmission is equally attentive to aboriginal and European sound systems, aboriginal and European notions of landedness, causality, and time. Carter presumes that, at least in the beginning, strangers are eager to communicate with each other. In their eagerness they listen hard and always mis-hear the sounds of the other. From these mishearings they build a soundscape and collaborate in the invention of sounds foreign to both sides, words and pidgin tongues by which to make themselves intermittently knowable to each other, however misconstrued. The misunderstandings are mutual and often mutually innovative as they ravel themselves into new acoustic structures, names, phrases, lexicons, and songs. Indeterminateness need not lead to indeterminateness but to unanticipated forms of expression that work imperfectly but impressively across many levels (Carter 1992).

Carter's writings are curiously absent from Shand's bibliography, but Shand and the Maori do struggle with "in-betweenness," mostly with regard to time. Fundamental to Shand's legal discussion is the commonplace oxymoron of a "dynamic tradition" and the battle to protect what has been one's patrimony even as one continues to invent toward the future. Modernism and capitalism are grand at the latter, so long as the future is indeterminately short-term. How can

moral beings, let alone "tradition" in its wider senses, survive modern and postmodern worlds of highlights, digests, episodes, and repeats? How can time be reconfigured so that the future is not discounted even as the past is burped and usurped? Can one arrange a slow future to accommodate a thoughtful past? Or is this notion of the past too romantic, given the violent changes, social upheavals, and power realignments that have been elemental to Maori "traditions" as to many others well before the flood of Europeans and their entrepreneurial economies?

Admiring as I am of Shand's essay, I find it exemplary of other failed attempts to fend off the obsessive-compulsiveness and indeterminateness of monopoly (or oligopoly) capitalism by putting in question various "asymmetries." Flippantly, one might say that obsession with profit-no-matter-what in no-time-at-all compels people and groups on all sides of the global market to be obsessed with defending the proprietary nature of what they do and who they are, to so great an extent that eventually human rights become intemperately fused with property rights, including but not limited to so-called intellectual property rights. Less flippantly, one might observe that obsessive-compulsiveness, though mayhap a customary trait of the legal mind since the time of Sumer, has come to its current hyphenated fore precisely because who we are and what we do is increasingly defined by acts of repetition: constantly re-representing ourselves, or having ourselves willynilly re-presented, re-screened, re-recorded; doing over and over again what we do in order to demonstrate either our love of doing it, our

skill at doing it, or our need to continue doing it for the sake of our sense of ourselves or preservation of a vanishing way of life.

It occurs to me that the hyphenate disorder arose not only in conjunction with a host of new duplicating devices and electronic media but also in conjunction with a host of newly elaborated forms of investment banking, stock brokerage, accounting practices, and corporate profit-taking. These latter were inextricably bound to the former, for their success depended upon rapid massive calculations, instant replication, and cheap distribution—of initial prospectuses, of announcements of expected profits and future dividends, of repeated statements of confidence, of electronic encouragements to invest—all within a more hectic, "noisy" market for which sets of new, nonlinear algorithms were invoked. In economic, social, and psychological frames, obsessive-compulsiveness produces at best a paradise of fractal detail, obstinately repeating itself at each scale. Its complement is indeterminateness, for *in extremis* there is no end and no out to obsessive-compulsiveness; it demands constant vigilance and invention.

How might one escape? Carol Muller would no doubt talk about playfulness, about the many ways that "covering" songs and performances in postwar Cape Town facilitated a proximate subversion of White rules. The obsessiveness with which Sathima Bea Benjamin, Abdullah Ibrahim, and their peers listened repeatedly to American pop and jazz could have become what European

explorers since the Greeks have seen as the marvelous "apishness" of indigenous peoples, but instead (as usual in the Caribbean, in South America, in Oceania . . .), these acts of mime became transformative, helping the "Colo[u]red" population handle the anomalies and astonishing contradictions of Apartheid.

Their learning and their transformation would have been impossible without the plethora of sound recordings and films to which they were avid audience, whether on phonographs or "in the air," on radio. Too often, acts of obsessive cultural imitation have been explained sociologically and psychologically by pointing toward deprivation (lack), loss, fear, and emptiness, or socio-historically by the "understandable" desire to become modern and up-to-date. To her credit, Muller shows us how the enthusiastic working-class response to American jazz and popular music was conditioned far less by poverty or fear than by the "mixed" backgrounds of so many Cape "Colo[u]reds," who came to the music from such rich pathways that they had substantial recourse for recalling their own voice.

But Muller struggles to show us how their obsessive musical and stylistic imitation or the concomitant habits of mind—accuracy, patience, close listening—worked somehow to undermine Apartheid. Jimmy Adams and fellow jazz musicians were well aware, as Muller shows quite nicely, that they were working with "the sound in-between," hearing jazz as Cape musicians would hear it, not as African-Americans or Hollywood heard it, so they would eventu-

ally hold to their own voices after years of obsessive imitation. How did this perhaps contribute to resistance to Apartheid? Muller cites the work of Michael Taussig and looks toward "code-switching" as a significant form of alterity. It is true, code-switching could empower, but it was widespread long before jazz, and was not necessarily transformed by the "covering" of jazz or pop. Cape musicians could become superb exemplars of the process, but Muller does not show that the music or the obsessive imitation of the music did anything to change it.

I would suggest a more homeopathic, if still incomplete, explanation. The obsessiveness with which Cape musicians imitated Western jazz and pop music and singers was simultaneously an obverse expression of and an excellent inoculant against the increasing obsessiveness of the Apartheid regime in the 1950s. As the regime became not only obsessive but compulsive, insistent on obedience to a set of illogical, incommensurate, and administratively impossible categories of race and parentage, Cape musicians, singers, and jazz lovers were exploring the limits and consequences of obsessiveness.<sup>4</sup> Managing to avoid compulsiveness and retrieve their own voices, they had expertise in anticipating the deathliness (and musical deadness) of obsessiveness become compulsive. Experience with acts of obsessive copying across cultures and sounds enabled them to work their way around some of the traps of Apartheid and eventually, perhaps, to show up the regime's true disorder behind its compulsiveness: the return of the politically repressed by way of the obsessively expressed.

At this point, I should be upbraided for having granted an elevated reality to a social construction of the 1980s, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, which may not have had much more original grounding than the specter of serial murder tracked over the same years by Jenkins. Although laboratory evidence for OCD as a neurobiological disorder was soon developed, the diagnosis was earlier invoked in other contexts that predetermined the fold of symptoms, the shape of treatment, and agreeable prognoses. What then could justify my leap, first, from a social constructionist model of the hyphenate disorder to a mythopoeic mode, and next to claims for OCD not only as analogical but explanatory?

I have, I admit, built this commentary on a house of bards, in part because the subjects of the essays themselves—serial murder in North America, the *koru* in New Zealand, and jazz "covering" in Cape Town—all seem to beg for a mythopoeic exploration generally neglected by the three essayists, in part because the academic tone and stylistics of each essay apparently led each of them away from the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter in each case is not panic and complicity, copyright and co-optation, or performance and race, but likeness and how it works in a world so accustomed by its media, legal systems, economics, and technologies, to repeated instances of seriality, a plethora of knock-offs, and the indeterminatenesses of authenticity.

That's our job, I suspect, for the next decades of this new millennium: to re-

consider (and revamp?) the rhetoric of likeness by which so much is made monstrous (see Jenkins), so much is belittled (see Shand), and so much is lost only to be regained (see Muller). We will need to begin with sounds in-between (listen to Carter). From there, who knows—a new poetics? a new pedagogy of simile and metaphor? a wildly impulsive disorder?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All extrapolated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>2</sup> For works on OCD, see Yaryura-Tobias 1983; Jenike, Baer, and Minichiello 1986; Hendrix 1989; and Zohar, Insel, and Rasmussen 1991. The *OED* lists earlier uses of the phrase "obsessive-compulsive" in psychiatric (1927) and political contexts (1965 *New Statesman*, "Reagan has been associated with the obsessive-compulsive faction of the Republic right"). However, the major monographs cementing the hyphen do not appear until the 1980s—with Reagan and his "obsessive-compulsive faction" in office.

Some readers with a more historical bent may be surprised by my claim that Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder was fully constituted only in the 1980s, given the work of German E. Berrios, who has claimed in two articles (1989, 1995) that the current working definition was established a century earlier. The comprehensive nosology available for OCD in 1880s Europe did not however lend itself to any larger cultural or popular notions; for example, obsession is never

linked to compulsion in Poole's index of periodical literature for the 19th century. Instead, obsession was filtered through Freudian lenses of neuroses for another seventy-five years at least. Cultural expansions of OCD began only after World War II as the spectra of symptoms and severity were themselves gradually extended. See, e.g., Skoog and Skoog (1999), with a somewhat defensive commentary by Lawrence H. Price et al. (1999). See also Dai (1957) and Regner (1959). One index of the cultural expansion of OCD was the shift, not clear until the 1970s, from OCD as an "illness" or "neurosis" to OCD as a more generic and more widely applicable "disorder." Contrast Gutheil (1959) and Goepfert (1960) with Derogatis et al. (1974) and Moore (1974). We can observe the next stage, in which OCD, now fully culturally constituted, supports a popular notion of daily behaviors that are notably obsessive-compulsive but not necessarily malignant, in Searle (1981); cf. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) and Dulaney and Page (1994). Indeed, some of the possible malignancies of OCD were transferred over to new disorders, one of the 1980s (panic disorder) and one of the 1990s (stalking); see Angst (1998) and Lowney and Best (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Also surprisingly absent is reference to any of the works that use social constructionist theory to address parallel developments, as in the sudden escalation of rhetoric over kidnapped children, for which see Joel Best (1990), who also led an NEH Summer Seminar on Social Constructionist theories. On the copycat's history, see Freeman (1914) and Moran (1998). On copycat murder, see

esp. *Copycat* (1995) and Connelly (1995). Consider also "Murder by Numbers," performed by Sting/Police for the soundtrack of the motion picture *Copycat* (1995):

Once that you've decided on a killing,  
first you make a stone of your heart.

And if you find that your hands are still willing,  
then you can turn a murder into art.

There really isn't any need for bloodshed,  
you just do it with a little more finesse.

you can slip a tablet into someone's coffee,  
then it avoids an awful lot of mess.

chorus:

It's murder by numbers 1, 2, 3.

It's as easy to learn as your ABC.

Murder by numbers, 1, 2, 3.

It's as easy to learn as your ABCs.

If you have a taste for this experience,  
and you're flushed with your very first success,

then you must try a twosome or a threesome,  
and you'll find your conscience bothers you much less.

Because murder is like anything you take to,  
it's a habit-forming need for more and more.

You can bump off every member of your family,  
and anybody else you find a bore.

chorus, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Here it would be helpful to consult Bowker and Star (1999) on classification issues under Apartheid.

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