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**A PLUPERFECT ERRAND:
 A TURBULENT RETURN TO BEGINNINGS IN THE TRANSGENERATIONAL
 TRANSMISSION OF DESTRUCTIVE AGGRESSION**

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Abstract: In the unconscious transmission of destructive aggression from one generation to the next, an uncanny happening takes place. The present and the past become contemporaneous. The self that embodies an other's intentionality as though one were an object becomes the self-same subject that returns to oneself. This return to oneself is a topographical regression where a present state of mind and a past happening converge. *What happens now shall have already happened.* The return to oneself is also a structural adaptation since the infusion of the mandated project of an anterior other is driven by a change of function that acquires a secondary autonomy. Now the hitherto mandated project shall have become fixed, predictable and operates as if it were one's own. Repetition of endless returns begins to occur. The idea of a pluperfect errand illuminates how *an anterior other's secret* is unconsciously stored and deferred. The secret is ensconced in the subject's mental representation of the inside mother. That secret is cloistered in a psychic retreat; a claustrum, a compartment within the mental representation of the inside mother where one may seek protection and yet could potentially be endangered. The film can represent the pluperfect errand. It is the work of psychoanalysis that must reconfigure the errand within the analytic setting and design an exit from the claustrum. Film representation and the work of psychoanalysis may now be complementary projects that respectively depict and overturn the received toxic mandate.

Introduction: The operational format of the paper

We begin in Part A with the definition of unconscious transgenerational transmission of destruction aggression in psychoanalysis. The overdetermined meanings of the word 'errand' are infused with this account of transmission. The idea of an errand suggests that there is a subject that *urgently* transmits a toxic infusion and an object that *voluntarily* receives it. There is agency, to be sure, but what is the relation of subject to object? It is suggested that subject and object change places. A literary representation in the form of a film, *Incendies* (Denis Villeneuve,

Canada/France, 2010), is provided to contextualize this inquiry and to expand our understanding of the trajectory from self to other and then back to the self as that who returns to oneself or to representations of beginnings.

In Part B, a second literary representation in the form of a play, *Forests*, by the same author, Wadji Mouawad (2009b), is used to provide a symbolic reconfiguration and a suture for the gap in the transgenerational rupture.

In Part C, we recognize that while the idea that self returns to self is sufficiently represented there is something missing. What is conspicuous by its absence is that there are secrets that are injected by anterior or ancestral objects in the transmission of destructive aggression. These secrets are housed in the mental representation of the subject's inside mother and in particular compartments, compartments that both protect and can fatally confine the subject. A psychoanalytic account that discusses secrets and sincerity and the descent of the subject that carries secrets into the deeper recesses of our minds must be added to the idea of the pluperfect errand. The work of the post-Kleinian 'phenomenologist' Donald Meltzer on the 'claustrum' (1992) is our best fit here.

Part A: Transgenerational transmission and deadly errands

I: Dreams of urgent voluntary errands

The phenomenon of transgenerational transmission of destructive aggression is increasingly receiving due attention from psychoanalysts (Abraham, 1988; Apprey, 1992, 1993, 2003, and 2006; Volkan, 2004; Faimberg, 2005). Abraham (1998) gave us the idea of the phantom as a metapsychological construct when he linked family secrets to *unconsciously embedded and entombed conflicts* in subsequent generations. Apprey (1992, 1993, 2003, and 2006) takes Freud's instinct theory and radicalizes that into a transgenerational object relations theory for understanding the residual impact of slavery as well as the implications for clinical psychoanalytic practice. Faimberg (2005) used Freud's view that 'the ego is not a master in its own house' (Freud, 1917: 143) to formulate her technique of listening to narcissistic links between generations. Volkan (2004) articulated his view of actualized unconscious fantasies that accrue from childhood traumas and associated ego restrictions that cause adults to experience or

repeat derivatives as though they were real in adult life. These and other accounts of transgenerational transmission are horizontal (sic) and not interchangeable. They are horizontal in the sense that they all give us different but related accounts of how sedimentations of history are reactivated and come to serve new and contemporary purposes (Apprey, 2006). In all my accounts of transgenerational transmission of destructive aggression (1991, 1992, 2006), I have emphasized that tension between urgently and unconsciously infused aggression from the external world, on the one hand, and unconsciously appropriated toxic intrusions that I have come to call *dreams of urgent voluntary errands*.

II: Errands

‘Errand’ here speaks to the idea that there is someone’s intentionality that will come or has come to be made one’s own. It is central to the understanding of the way the word ‘errand’ is used here that we look at the multiple implications of its meaning. Implicated here in the psychological use of the word ‘errand’ is a composite idea that there is a potential ‘error’, a ‘wandering away’, a ‘mistake’, and a ‘mandate’ to be carried out *by the subject for an internal object*. The result is the following ten-fold taxonomy.

1. Something is *injected* from an *anterior source*.
2. That hitherto injected pro-ject (sic) is *housed* in a hospitable place for storage for an indeterminate time.
3. That same something is now *suspended* and *its transfer is deferred*.
4. That something of a project that is stored in this time warp carries *a mandate for an errand* to be carried out.
5. The mandate is accommodated with an *urgent voluntary reception*.
6. The *subject awaits a suitable new object to reawaken the project so that the self-same project or a derivative project can return to a public space* away from the haunt, as it were.
7. By this time the *subject shall have lost sight of who originally sent whom*.
8. *Active and passive have by now become interchangeable*.

9. *A middle voice that is neither entirely active nor entirely passive speaks and yet it does so in an invisible and inaudible way.*
10. Through a middle-voiced happening the subject returns to itself or to some concrete presentation of beginnings.

Who is the subject that returns to itself or to concrete and unrepresented beginnings? In order to answer this question, let us turn to Claude Romano (2009), a recent French phenomenologist.

III: The return of the subject to oneself

Whereas the subject in psychoanalysis encounters multiple truths, the subject in Descartes (1909) is realized through its engagement with truth. Whereas in Husserl (1977), the father of phenomenology, the researcher describes and deepens that description of the phenomenon under study until that researcher shall have arrived at an intersubjective constitution for the subject whose phenomenal and experiential world is being interrogated, the subject in Claude Romano is one who comes to oneself (*advenant*). In Romano (2009), that return to oneself takes place in the middle space between self and other; and these events are reconfigured so that events become represented as middle voiced happenings. In the process of reconfiguring events into representations, events in Romano become what he calls *eventials* (*sic*). Parenthetically, I must add that he italicizes new words like ‘advenant’ and ‘evential’ for emphasis throughout his work so that we can grasp the decisive reconfiguration of the mental world that he is addressing.

Romano (2009), then, distinguishes between two types of events. When events happen they actualize a possibility that is already present in the world, like lightening. On the other hand, *events as evential* overturn existing possibilities and in so doing *reconfigure the world*. In Romano’s words, in the *evential reconfiguration* ‘the one who understands is strictly implicated in the very act of understanding: I can understand an event as being addressed to me only if I am myself in play in the possibilities it assigns to me [me destine] and through which it makes history by opening a destiny for me’ (2009: 30) In my view *there is a system of mutual implications between the event as fact for the one to whom the concrete event happens and the one who re-shapes what that event does to him or her and determines what that event means.*

In a bald summary of Romano's phenomenology of the *evential*, four shifts show themselves. I shall summarize these four shifts that give themselves.

1. During the reconfiguration of the subject's world, a *metamorphosis that is impossible to date* takes place. Once an event is brought about, *it is already too late*. We are therefore never contemporaries of the actualization of the event.
2. We can experience it *when an event has already taken place* and this is why, says Romano, *an event in the eventness happens only according to the secrets of its latency*.
3. Accordingly, an event is not the datable fact of the meeting of two beings but rather that which lies in reserve in this meeting *and which gives it its future loading*.
4. The subject therefore is *an advenant* that comes *back to oneself*. The subject that returns to a prior latency shall have come back to oneself after revealing *the secret that lies or has lain in reserve*.

How then are we to understand in a palpable way a metamorphosis of an event that is not datable? How are we to understand how we go back to secrets of human existence that both take us back and lie in wait for us?

In psychoanalysis we know the story of Oedipus. There is however, an equally powerful modern day Sophoclean story, written by Wadji Mouawad, an award winning Canadian playwright a director. His film *Incendies* (2010) was nominated for an Oscar in 2010 and has won other prestigious awards. It was translated into English by Linda Gaboriau as *Scorched* (2009a). This is one powerful story that ought to get the attention of every psychoanalyst. I shall use it to launch the term *pluperfect errand of the unconscious in transgenerational haunting*. It is an errand because it lies in reserve waiting to happen. We have here an exquisite representation of *a pluperfect errand, a parental project that has already happened but was only lying in wait for its messenger(s)*, in Wadji Mouawad's *Incendies*.

IV: *Incendies* and deadly errands

Nawal Marwal gives birth to her twins, Jeanne and Simon. Upon her death her now grown up twins attend a reading of *their mother's will*. In her last testament, Jeanne must deliver a letter to

her father. In this context, a will is both a testament and a demand; a witnessing and a project. Simon must deliver a letter to *a* lost brother of whom the twins had been unaware. Trails provide incremental details until each sibling discovers the person each had been sent to find. Now we must pause to either watch the film, *Incendies* (2010) or read the book, *Scorched* (2009a), and/or proceed with my rendition.

I shall now use four movements, albeit arbitrarily chosen to illustrate what I mean by *the pluperfect latency of the unconscious* in transgenerational haunting. I shall use four rubrics to indicate the movements: (i) the *reception* of the deadly errand; (ii) the *aggressive incursion* into the mental world of the twins, (iii) the *appropriation* of the errand; and (iv) the tumultuous return to oneself; a restitution of a kind.

(i) *The reception of the errand*

To Janine, her mother mandates the following: “this envelope is for ...your father and Simon’s. Find him and give him this envelope” (p.8). As disturbing as the errand is for each offspring, the mandate has a suitable home. *They feel obligated to carry out a wish they may not refuse*. It feels *urgent*. How does the urgent mandate become *voluntary*?

(ii) *The aggressive incursion of the mandate to render it voluntary*

The mother’s errand is soon appropriated. Janine says to her brother: “*I am going to find this father of ours, and if I find him, if he is alive, I’ll give him the envelope. I’m not doing it for her; I am doing it for myself*. And for you. For the future” (p.69; italics added). Once their mother’s *urgent* errand is appropriated it becomes *voluntary*, and in effect, it becomes a new errand to find “Mama.” Accordingly, Janine says to Simon: “We have to find her past, her life during all those years she hid from us...The hole I am about to tumble into, the hole I am already slipping into, is that of her silence” (p.69).

(iii) *The aggressive injection*

The brother that Simon is looking for is *already* looking for his mother. The father Janine is looking for is *already* looking for his mother. How is he looking for his mother? In wartime, a turbulent time telecast as the Lebanese civil war in *Incendies*, the child

looking for his mother is orphaned, lost. When civil war strikes the orphanage that houses the lost child is decimated. But he falls into the hands of the enemy that blows up the orphanage. He is spared because the enemy sees something in him. The enemies revel in his marksmanship and keep him and treat him as one of their own. He swears in his turn that the world will come to know him for his marksmanship. That capability of becoming the most accomplished marksman is how his mother will come to hear of him and thereby to know him. On his mother's part she assassinates a nationalist leader and is jailed but her life is spared. Who becomes her jail guard? Her own son, unbeknownst to her.

As Romano tells us, eventials are not datable. Their secrets lie in reserve. Mother and jailor son look for each other. *Their search has already happened. They have already found each other.* In jail, in the domain of aggression “no one ever spoke her name. She was simply the woman who sings, number seventy two ... The woman who assassinated the paramilitary leader ... All her friends were captured and killed. Only the one who sings survived” (p.92). How does she survive? Her son has a new identity, Abou Tarek. He handles her in jail. “The night when Abou Tarek raped her, *we could not tell their voices apart* ... And inevitably she got pregnant ... He searched for his mother; he found her but did not recognize her. She searched for her son, she soon found him, and didn't recognize him. He didn't kill her, because she sang, and he liked her voice” (p. 99; italics added). A system of mutual implications follows: “Abou Tarek tortured [his] mother, and [his] mother was tortured by her son and the son raped his mother. The son is the father of his brother and sister.” (p.99)

(iv) Restitution as a tumultuous return to oneself

Nawal speaks to her daughter and son, Janine and Simon, in a way that is haunting and does point to restitution as a tumultuous return to oneself as follows: “Where does your story begin? At your birth? Then it begins in horror. At your father's birth? Then it is a beautiful love story. Perhaps we will discover that *his love story has roots in violence and rape.* And in turn, *the brute and the rapist had his origin in love*” (p.134, italics added).

What kept the mother from telling her story before?

“*There are truths that can only be revealed when they have been discovered*” (p. 134; emphasis added).

V: The pluperfect errand that lies waiting to be discovered

When truths can only be told or revealed, when they have *already* been discovered, we are in the realm of *a pluperfect latency*. It is quite apt to use Wadji Mouawad’s own words in his own introduction to his next play *Forests* (2009b) to put an exclamation mark on a pluperfect latency as a phenomenal idea that shapes how stories come to him, how he receives what gives itself as a story to him, how a narrative spots him so that he does not have to invent it. He writes: ‘Events often catch us unaware. They have been determined; *they have already come and gone by the time we realize it*. We can no longer see them or study them, because time has taken us forward’ (Mouawad, 2009b: iii; emphasis added). What is left after the events’ phenomenal appearance? ‘All that is left is the shock of their appearance, their entrance into the visible. Our visible’ (Mouawad, 2009b: iii).

Part B: Transgenerational transmission and the reconfiguration of pluperfect errands

The film *Incendies* (2010) and its play, *Scorched* (2009a) have given us a return of the subject to oneself, the subject that Romano calls *advenant*. In a restitutive move each twin in *Scorched* has now come to experience a return to beginnings and what I would like to call the tumultuous return to oneself; but *an expanded orbit of oneself*. Who inhabits that orbit? Each self is *self as child of one’s mother*, to be sure. Each son or daughter has a sibling for a father. Now Janine must accommodate that incest which has already taken place. To reiterate, she is a product of incest; she is a brother to her father. Simon must likewise add a new structure of experience to his representational word. He is his brother’s son. Their discoveries or rediscoveries constitute a dead end; an aporia. An aporetic return hitherto created by the peremptory, instinctual, or Sophoclean Oedipal return must now be overturned. In *Forests* (2009b) we have the representation of an answer to the aporia.

Forest and an artistic and symbolic transformation

If *Incendies* masterfully depicts a deadly pluperfect errand, the play *Forests* provides a symbolic depiction of the interruption of deadliness and a possibility for transformation of transgenerationally transmitted toxic mandates. Earlier, we used four movements to indicate (i) the reception of the deadly errand; (ii) the aggressive injection; (iii) the appropriation and (iv) the disturbing return to oneself. Now we can use the text of *Forest* to give us a literary representation of the trajectory of the pluperfect errand and its interruption. First, a pluperfect latency that lies in reserve, waiting to happen is depicted. Secondly, an *aporia*, a dead end is depicted. Thirdly, the wound caused by the *aporia* undergoes a *suture*. Finally, *generativity is restored* so that a new generation may not repeat the mandate to destroy itself or future generations to follow.

Forest and the text of the pluperfect latency that lies in reserve, waiting to happen

Alexandre, a father, along with his second wife Mathilde, tells his son, Albert, that he wants him to keep his and Mathilde's assets and in turn pass them on to the next generation of children and their grandchildren. Albert is not impressed. He observes his father's ardent wish to make him into a man that resembles him and speaks to the panic that follows his father's demand inside him as a son of his father. Albert, as son, notices furthermore that every son wants to climb up to his father 'but some fathers climb to such unimaginable heights for fear of being equalled, while continuing to insist upon it' (2009b: 79). Albert wants to shatter his father's hopes, shatter his father's name, honour and reputation 'without disappearing, without ceasing to exist' (79). Accordingly he wants to announce to his father that he intends to get married to Odette against his father's will, and does. He makes his announcement and does marry her in order to free himself from his father. The problem is that his father Alexandre has *already* met Odette. Alexandre has already impregnated Odette. It is *already* too late for Albert, the son, to build a new life free of his father's influence. *Incest has already con-fused (sic) the generations*. Albert's wife, Odette will deliver twins after a vain effort to kill the children in her womb. Now Albert's son, Jérémie, will be his brother, Albert's daughter Héléne, will be his sister. Jérémie and Héléne, twins and the product of incest repeat the pluperfect latency that lies in reserve, waiting to happen. Anxious to break out of it, Jérémie tells his twin sister that he cannot

stand the thought of their father touching her; she is his sister. He wants them to leave. ‘We’ve been living in this forest since we were born and we are slowly going crazy, nuts, insane, loony, and raving mad. His dream is devouring us. It’s *his dream* Hélène, *not ours*’ (2009b: 108; emphasis added). The problem is that Albert’s dream to multiply across generations has *already* happened. Albert has *already* confused the generations. Albert has already seduced Hélène. Hélène is his daughter by social convention, his sister biologically. Outraged by Albert’s seduction of Hélène, Jérémie kills Albert and, in rage and outrage, drives ‘his sex into his sister’s body’ (117). Whose child would be the product of Albert’s and now Jérémie’s sexual and assaultive intrusion? We are left with a secret. Léonie and an unnamed son are now born into confusion.

What is critical under the rubric of a pluperfect latency that lies in reserve is that in *Forests every new generation that tries to free itself from its forebears finds itself ambushed into a prior latency that cannot be reversed*. An aporia ensues.

Textual depiction of aporia and the textual depiction of suture

Léonie, another product of violent incest, gives birth to Ludivine. This time, Ludivine is a hermaphrodite who cannot conceive a child. A condition of hermaphroditism comes to represent the aporia of a dead end for the generations. How would the dead end be reconfigured so that growth through subsequent generations may not be foreclosed?

Ludivine cannot bear a child. Her friendship with a Jewish woman Sarah Cohen opens the door for the textual representation of a suture. Under persecution Sarah Cohen faces the threat of death during the Jewish holocaust. Ludivine *exchanges* her name and identity with Sarah Cohen’s. Why? ‘You can bring children into the world, but all I can do is give my life, and who would I rather give it up for than you?’ (2009b: 146). Ludivine, taken away as though she were Sarah Cohen, had her skull crushed with the blows of a hammer. The friendship between Sarah Cohen and Ludivine is deep enough that Sarah Cohen’s child, Luce, believes she is Ludivine’s daughter: ‘A life saved, a life lost, a life given...’ (147). The suture that links the generations operates at two levels: a material and a functional level.

At the *material* level, Mouawad’s account of the continuation of the generations occurs in the following way. Two generations later, Ludivine mysteriously leaves a trace of herself in the

body of Sarah's descendants: 'a bone floating in the middle of a mind' (151), in the mind of Luce's daughter, Aimee. At the *functional* level, a deep friendship makes Luce as much the daughter of Ludivine's as she is Sarah Cohen's. Materially, a remnant of Ludivine's crushed skull, a skull crushed by the Nazi's now lies in Luce's daughter's mind. Functionally, friendship makes the generativity of the generations possible.

Restoration of generativity

Ludivine and Sarah Cohen represent a combined figure of a mother for Luce. Luce's daughter, Aimée, inhabits a piece of bone that lodges just as much in her mind as it does in Ludivine's mind. Aimée gives birth to Loup. Loup grows up initially believing that the thread of the past condemns her and all that came before. Upon her mother's death and upon grasping the meaning of generational continuity and, in particular, the impact of the suturing effect of friendship, Loup has this to say: 'I used to believe I was bound by blood to my ancestor's. I have discovered that I am bound by my promises, to the promises you made to each other, promises you kept. A life saved, a life lost, a life given' (155).

To operationalize her grasp of the tie that binds, she will repeat the name of the women that came before her – 'Odette, Hélène, Léonie, Ludivine, Sarah, Luce, Aimée, and Loup like a promise kept forever' (155). To the next generation 'I will repeat it in turn to the girl who will come after me yet to be born...' (156).

Ludivine was the last to be born to the Keller name – Alexandre, Albert and Odette, Jérémie and Hélène and Léonie, and finally, Ludivine. Then there was a rupture. Ludivine as a hermaphrodite cannot bear children. The Cohen's followed. The coming together of the two names Keller and Cohen speaks to deeper possibilities for a generational continuity that transcends the limits of biology.

Part C: A psychoanalytic turn

In *Incendies* (2010) and *Scorched* (2009a), we have a depiction of urgent voluntary errands. In *Forests* we have an account of destructive errands that are overturned and reconfigured into a creative project with a new agency from within rather than a repetition of an inherited project of

destructive aggression. Two sides of a pluperfect errand show themselves in *Incendies* (2010) and *Scorched* (2009a), on one side, and *Forests*, on the other. The former ends in a tumult, the latter in the transformation of a heart that promises to foster creative generativity and generosity.

It would seem that we could end here with the idea that the gaps in transgenerational haunting can be sutured and reconfigured in the external world by friendships, personal sacrifice in meaningful relationships and other non-clinical relationships. To consider the limits of friendships and other external fields of reference, let us turn to psychoanalysis. In his inaugural paper on transgenerational haunting, Nicolas Abraham (1988) indicated that the phantom associated with this phenomenon is an invention of the living. This invention, in his view, objectifies ‘the gap that the concealment of some loved one’s life produced in us’ (1988: 75). What haunts then are not the dead. Rather, what haunts are those gaps left within us by the secrets of others. In putting forward his theory of psychic retreats, John Steiner (1993) defined a psychic retreat within the context of a clinical relationship as follows: ‘an area of relative peace and protection from strain when meaningful contact with the analyst is experienced as threatening’ (1993: 1); a place where ‘they retreat behind a powerful system of defences which serve as a protective armour or hiding place, and it is sometimes possible to observe how they emerge with great caution like a snail coming out of its shell and retreat once more if contact leads to pain or anxiety’ (1993: 1). Steiner’s felicitous term is evocative of an epistemic place, a secret hide out, as it were and whose function is clearly to seek protection from mental pain. Donald Meltzer (1992) in the course of his investigation of claustrophobic phenomena and modes of entry into the internal mother published his work on *The Claustrium* when he masterfully depicted the geographical dimensions of the mental apparatus, the compartments of the inside mother and life within each compartment. The portals of entry, for Meltzer, into the claustrium may be (i) the head, breast, mouth configuration, (ii) the genital, or (iii) the anal. Baldly, the subject that inhabits the oral claustrium functions as though there is an illusion of clarity attached to its grandiose wishes. The subject that inhabits the genital claustrium functions as though one has to invariably scheme or counter scheme to oust others from expectation. The inhabitants of the anal compartment are threatened with expulsion, death, boundarylessness, merger, disappearance and other modes of non-existence. Survival is thus the only value.

A film discussion on secrets then has to make a distinction between secrecy, in se, and mystification of secrets where there is an elaborate mental scheme to lie to conceal a painful

secret or to mentalize external fields of reference so that one has to end up in a psychic retreat, or specifically in a particular compartment. The external fields of reference to secrets may be prescriptions or constraints attached to what it means to marry or conceive a child from another religion. Nawal Narwan, the protagonist in *Incendies* is one who defies the system of constraints and prescriptions of her family and religion and pays dearly for conceiving a child with a Muslim man. The family must hide the 'infamy'. The road to a tortured life inside and outside leads to brutality and incest. The withdrawal into silence is not so silent. It is a retreat into an anal claustrum where she must survive at all cost.

In place of a conclusion

A subject that is haunted in the process of transgenerational transmission of destructive aggression potentially carries a secret. She must undergo an errand. Unfortunately, the errand shall have already taken place. She may urgently carry out the mandate, even if it spells her own demise; and, she may voluntarily, choose her mode of self-destruction. The virulence of the mandate determines what retreat she organizes to protect herself from mental pain and what portal of entry for her ensconcement into the mental representation of the inside mother must follow.

A film presentation can depict life in the claustrum. Psychoanalytic treatment must facilitate the exit of the subject from the claustrum; the representation of the compartment of the inside mother where the subject retreats for safety but must not stay if she intends to survive and to prosper. These two projects, the artistic representation and the work of psychoanalysis, need each other. They cannot be antinomies. Rather, we must seek complementarities out of their convergent intentionalities.

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