Ghosts in the Consulting Room:
A Seminar on Repetitive (Re)Enactments

Course Description:
Ghosts are internalizations gone awry. They arise unbidden, haunting patient and analyst alike, in the form of repetitive, painful (re)enactments. In this way, ghosts of the past take possession of the present, resisting being “laid to rest as ancestors” (Loewald, 1960).

In this one-credit clinical seminar, we will explore ‘ghostly’ phenomena that manifest as underinternalizations, the compulsion to repeat, attachment to pain, and dissociated self-states. We will consider the emergence of these absent presences in the therapeutic relationship, and trace the nonlinear pathways that can help facilitate “laying ghosts to rest as ancestors.” On the clinical level, transforming “ghosts” into “ancestors” is more difficult than Loewald’s (1960) theoretical outline recognized. Ghosts live a shadow life in the unconscious and preconscious “enacted dimension” of the treatment (Katz, 2011), taking up residence within and between analyst and patient — surprising and unsettling both members of the dyad; inviting disturbing and uncanny (re)enactments; threatening impasse. Integration of these ghosts requires welcoming, or at least tolerating, their deeply unnerving presence — at intrapsychic, interpersonal, and interpsychic levels — and living through the profound and painful mourning process required to facilitate their integration.

Class meetings will be organized around the assigned weekly readings which will be integrated into presentations of clinical material, with an eye toward identifying, tracking, and making use of ghostly phenomena in the therapeutic relationship.

Overall Course Objectives:
At the end of this course, candidates will be able to (i) compare psychoanalytic theories on psychic ghostly phenomena, (ii) define the clinical as well as theoretical meaning and utility of the term ghosts, (iii) recognize and discuss specific ways that psychic ghosts manifest in the clinical setting, and (iv) be aware of ways to intervene clinically when ghosts are prominent in the consulting room.
Readings and Course Outline

Section I: Introduction

WEEK 1: What Are Ghosts? How Do We Recognize Them In The Clinical Setting?


**Read section IV, pp. 244-255. The earlier sections of the paper are optional recommended reading.**


Learning Objectives: At the end of this class, candidates will be able to describe the historical emergence of psychoanalytic conceptualizations of ghosts, and begin to recognize the presence of ghosts in the clinical setting.

Section II: What Drives Painful Repetitions/Reenactments? Comparative Theories & Their Clinical Implications

WEEK 2: Freud’s View and Ferenczi’s Modification


**Please note: you need to read only pages 3-23 - not the entire paper.**


WEEK 3: Kleinian and Relational Views on Pain


Learning Objectives: At the end of this two-week module, candidates will be able to compare and contrast comparative theories of ghostly phenomena, and their clinical implications, from Freudian, Ferenczian, Kleinian, and Relational/Interpersonal psychoanalytic perspectives.
SECTION III: Ghostly (Re)Enactments in Intrapsychic, Interpersonal, and Interpsychic Space

WEEK 4: Yours, Mine, & Ours: Patient Ghosts, Analyst Ghosts, & their Interpenetration


WEEK 5: Ghosts Interacting: Enactment


Learning Objectives: At the end of this two-week module, candidates will be able to (i) explain and assess the interpenetration of intrapsychic, interpersonal, intersubjective, and interpsychic processes on ghostly experiences in the clinical encounter, and (ii) describe how the ghosts of the analyst and the ghosts of the patient converge to create the clinical emergence of ghosts in the form of enactment, and (iii) evaluate and select clinical interventions with an eye toward eventually relieving the impact of ghosts in the consulting room and in the patient’s life.

SECTION IV: When Ghosts Hold Sway: Impasse

WEEK 6


Learning Objectives: the end of this class, candidates will be able to (i) grasp some of the difficulties and challenges involved in taming ghosts, and (ii) understand, explain, and evaluate the specific risks of clinical impasse that result from the dominant presence ghosts in the consulting room.
SECTION V: Turning Ghosts into Ancestors

WEEK 7: Identification, Internalization, and Mourning


Learning Objectives: At the end of this class, candidates will be able to (i) theoretically and clinically link the pivotal process of mourning to the laying of ghosts to rest as ancestors and (ii) clarify how, specifically, a mourning process facilitates laying ghosts to relative rest.

WEEK 8: Beyond Mourning: Repair and Forgiveness


Learning Objectives: At the end of this class, candidates will be able to (i) discuss the implications of mourning for the fate of ghosts, and (ii) describe the potentials and the limits of mourning, repair and forgiveness, in the context of their impact on ghosts.
Additional Suggested Readings


