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A sketchbook for Analytic Action®

SPECIAL EDITION



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room

A sketchbook for Analytic Action®

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Disordered: Conversations About Mental Health and Society

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Sheldon Bach, PhD, is an adjunct clinical professor of psychology at the New York University postdoctoral program for psychoanalysis, a training and supervising analyst at the Contemporary Freudian Society and the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, and a fellow of the International Psychoanalytical Association. He is the author of several books on psychoanalysis and of many papers, some of which have been collected in *Chimeras and Other Writings: Selected Papers of Sheldon Bach*. He is in private practice and teaches in New York City.

Catherine Baker-Pitts, PhD, grew up living feminism with her three sisters and activist parents. In private practice for twenty years, she is a graduate of New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis; lecturer at NYU School of Social Work; guest faculty at New Directions Writing Program; and co-director and faculty of a feminist relational therapy training program. Her work focuses on gender creativity, racial justice, and radical body acceptance.

Raquel Berman, PhD, is a founding member of MAPPTR and past president and training director of its Freud Institute. She is a foreign member of IPTAR. In 2016, in collaboration with INMUJERES (Government Agency for Women), she established a yearly prize in honoring "Women facing Adversity with Resilience." In 2019 the International Psychoanalytic Association awarded her psychoanalytic community interventions with groups of female adolescents living in violent contexts with a prize from its IPA community committee on violence.

Rachel Brown is an educator and interdisciplinary media artist. She is currently an adjunct professor at NYU and works for Mouse, a youth development nonprofit that believes in technology as a force for good. Since 2014, Rachel has been a member of The Illuminator, a political projection collective based in NYC. She has an MFA in integrated media arts from Hunter College (CUNY), and is an avid cyclist, yogi, and wanderer. Instagram: [@oikofugicrchl](https://www.instagram.com/oikofugicrchl) Email: info@wanderingarrow.com

Molly S. Castelloe, PhD, earned her doctorate in performance studies at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and is a candidate at the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis. She has a blog for psychologytoday.com on group psychology called "*The Me in We*" and garnered the Gradiva Award for her documentary film *Vamik's Room*, on the life and work of Vamik Volkan, www.vamiksroom.org

Elizabeth Cutter Evert, LCSW, is a psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City. She is on the clinical faculty of IPTAR and is a director of their Clinical Center. She is interested in questions of female development and in the overlap between secular and religious experience.

Karim G. Dajani, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice with a specialization in treating bicultural individuals. His research and writing include publications on psychological resilience and culture. More specifically, his work examines the role culture plays in determining an individual's role within a collective and on the experience of cultural dislocation.

Kate Daniels is the Edwin Mims Professor of English and director of creative writing at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of six collections of poetry, including *In the Months of My Son's Recovery* (May 2019). A graduate of the New Directions program at the Baltimore Washington Center for Psychoanalysis, she has been a member of the writing faculty there for a decade. She lives in Nashville. Website: www.katedanielspoetryandprose.com

Daniel Esparza, MA, is a Paul H. Klingenstein Fellow in the religion department at Columbia University, where he is developing his research on forgiveness as a PhD candidate.

Gala Garrido (Caracas, Venezuela, 1987) is a Venezuelan photographer. The central axes of her work are power and eroticism from the feminine. Garrido has exhibited her work at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo del Zulia (MACZUL); Sala Mendoza; Museo de Arte de Acarigua-Araure; Sala de Exposiciones Centro de Arte El Hatillo; Panorámica Arte emergente en Venezuela 2000-2012, Sala TAC Trasnocho Cultural; Espacio Mad Los Galpones; No Lugar Arte Contemporáneo (Quito, Ecuador); and Férocis International Photography Festival (Lyon, France), among others.

Jill Gentile, PhD, is a faculty member at NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, sits on several psychoanalytic journal editorial boards, and has published many scholarly essays, including "What Is Special about Speech?" which was awarded the 2017 Gradiva Award. She is the author, with Michael Macrone, of *Feminine Law: Freud, Free Speech, and the Voice of Desire* (Karnac Books, 2016) which explores the mutual resonances between psychoanalysis and democracy, through the lenses of free speech and the feminine. She maintains a clinical practice and leads study groups in New York City. <http://jillgentile.com/abstracts.html>

Joan Golden-Alexis, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and Jungian analyst practicing in New York. She is the former curriculum coordinator, as well as training analyst, supervisor, and faculty member at the New York Jungian Psychoanalytic Associations and the Philadelphia Association of Jungian Analysts. Her last two publications are "Amelia: Images of Mystery: The transformation of Shadow in Women" and "When Politics Invade the Personal: A New Mandate for Psychoanalysis in the Trump Era."

Richard Grose, PhD, is an associate member of IPTAR, where he serves as secretary on the board of directors and teaches in the respecialization program. He is a member of ROOM's editorial board and a co-chair of the Room Roundtable. He has a private practice in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in Manhattan.

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Frank W. Putnam, MD, is a professor psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a child and adolescent psychiatrist specializing in the psychological and biological effects of maltreatment on child development. He is the author of over 200 research papers and three books on the lifelong effects of child maltreatment. His most recent book, *The Way We Are: How States of Mind Influence our Identities, Personality and Potential for Change*, New York, IP Books, investigates the biological and psychological processes shared by radically disparate mental states ranging from meditation to catatonia.

Mireya Lozada, PhD, is the coordinator of the Political Psychology Research Unit in the Psychology Institute of the Central University of Venezuela (UCV). For the last twenty years, she has worked in peace-building programs and promoted psychosocial accompaniment programs with different sectors of the population affected by the impact of polarization and sociopolitical conflict.

Ellen Marakowitz, PhD, LP, is a psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City. She is a training analyst and fellow at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research (IPTAR) and is also a faculty member of the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University.

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Aneta Stojnić, PhD, is a candidate in IPTAR's Respecialization and CAP Programs and a theoretician, curator, artist, and professor of performance and media theory. She has published three books and numerous essays and academic papers. Her latest book is *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance: Danger, Im/mobility and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Sara Mansfield Taber is the author of *Born Under an Assumed Name: The Memoir of a Cold War Spy's Daughter*, the writer's guide *Chance Particulars: A Writer's Field Notebook*, and two books of literary journalism. Her poetry, essays, travel, and opinion pieces have appeared in literary magazines such as *The American Scholar* and newspapers such as the *Washington Post*. A psychologist and social worker, she has taught creative nonfiction writing for twenty years. More about her at: www.sarataber.com | www.sarataberwritingservices.com

José Vivenes, is a Venezuela-based painter. He graduated from the Armando Reverón University Institute of Advanced Plastic Arts Studies (Caracas, Venezuela). Vivenes earned honorable mention recognition in the 12+1 Edition of the prestigious Eugenio Mendoza Awards (Venezuela) for his series *Enough of False Heroes* (2015). Among the acknowledgments Vivenes has received are the Francisco de Miranda Stock Exchange, Exxon-Mobil Art Salon of Venezuela, Sacred Museum of Caracas, Eladio Alemán Sucre Award, 63rd Arturo Michelena Art Biennial, Mario Abreu XXVII and XXXIII Prize, Aragua National Art Salon, Museum of Contemporary Art of Maracay Mario Abreu. He currently resides and works in Caracas, Venezuela. <https://vivenescollages.blogspot.com> and <http://vivenespintura.blogspot.com>

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Mafe Izaguirre is a New York-based Venezuelan artist, graphic designer with twenty years of experience developing brand platforms, and educator. In 2017, in collaboration with members of the IPTAR community, Izaguirre created **ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action®**

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Democracy, psychoanalysis, and ROOM share a powerful connection. They were created to contain and facilitate the many voices that comprise (and conflict with) our polities, ourselves, and, in the case of ROOM, the space between ourselves and our societies. This is not coincidental. As Jill Gentile explains in her book *Feminine Law: Freud, Free Speech, and the Voice of Desire*, there is a resonance between the method of free association underlying the work of psychoanalysis and the right of free speech which is the bedrock of democracy. And how does ROOM fit in? Right in the middle. ROOM could not exist outside of a democracy in which free public speech was possible, nor would it exist without the analytic principle of free association that guides its submission process.

Even so, none of us anticipated the power of the essays, poetry, and art which would come to be contained in this issue. ROOM 6.19 cannot be read lightly. Download it. Go back to it. Go slowly. Each of these authors and artists demand close attention. They are not of one voice. They do not intend to be. But they form as cohesive and inclusive a whole as ROOM has ever published. And it is no coincidence that the center of this issue involves women.

ROOM 6.19 is a clarion call to mind the gap that exists between our conscious awareness and our unconscious being-in-the-world. In [The Culturing of Psychoanalysis](#), Karim Dajani reminds us of what Erikson and Freud knew: that it is culture that provides the human infant with a shared system of meaning-making that makes it possible for them to understand and be understood and take their place in civilization. But Dajani goes further and deeper. Culture, he writes, inserts itself into our souls. Culture shows us how to understand, use, and live in our bodies; it is the nucleus around which our bodies and theories and power structures are organized. If psychoanalysis ignores culture's primordial and constituent role in our theories, our bodies, our states of mind, and our nation-states, we will continue to remain unconsciously subject to the force of its impact.

In his essay [Presidential States of Mind: The Metapsychology of Trump's Tweets](#), Frank Putnam provides a terrifying statistical analysis of Trump's tweets over the last two years. The graphs oblige us to see what we have felt: there has been a devolution in the state of mind in the leader of our free world. This is the trajectory typically associated, Putnam tells us, with psychological decompensation and violence. Sheldon Bach, in his essay [Friendless in Palm Beach](#), adds that this particular kind of madness is suggestive of a hurricane with a void; "a fragmented, ahistorical, unprocessed view of the world...[is] dangerous in a politician who wields such power." "What is taking place is what occurs in any authoritarian regime," writes Jeri Isaacson in her essay [A Family Romance](#). "The unconscious world of the tyrant dictates the political agenda." Isaacson's work takes us straight to the heart of Trump's mother hatred, as she lays out how the "epic enactment of Trump's internal object world" has disastrous implications — most especially for women and children.

Citing Winnicott, Jill Gentile writes that misogyny goes hand in hand with authoritarianism and the cult of power. While psychoanalysis and democracy offered liberating safeguards to the perils of being human, both practices have also reiterated the patriarchal culture and absorbed its underlying misogyny. Democracies have enslaved, colonized, and subjugated the other — above all the feminine. In Gentile's sea-changing essay [Vaginal Veritas: Thoughts on Misogyny, Psychoanalysis, and Democracy](#), she revisits psychoanalysis's patriarchal origin story and reclaims for psychoanalysis a position of prominence for that which was once too threatening to be named. In [#Ustoo, Sigmund](#), Elizabeth Cutter Evert describes the damage done to a subset of women when theoretical orthodoxy dominates the psychoanalytic space. From a different angle, Baker-Pitts's edgy essay [The Feminist Future is Nonbinary](#) reminds us that the cis-woman's claim of gender oppression was built on the fight against patriarchy and so arises itself from a binary assumption whose corollary is the so-called matriarch. Baker-Pitts wants to help feminists move beyond a totalizing perspective of women and embrace an intersectional agenda that foregrounds justice for those most oppressed by white supremacy: poor, gay, trans, and gender nonconforming people of color. This requires a tolerance for anxieties that any of us is bound to encounter when we dig deep within our own race, classed, and gendered complexities and interface with another. In [A Lesbian Leans In](#), Ellen

DEMOCRACY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS:

MINDING THE GAP

by Hattie Myers

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Marakowitz deals with just such cultural anxieties as she lays out how heterosexuality itself can be understood as a cultural "norm" that plays into the gender/political system that is forced upon all women but particularly lesbians.

Aneta Stojnić's [Psychoanalysis and Performance Art: Go Figure](#) describes a feminist shift from the literal, hegemonic, logocentric, hierarchical mode of thinking toward a more open, fluid, networked form of producing and transmitting knowledge that psychoanalysis and performance art share. Nowhere is this perhaps more apparent perhaps than in Freud's understanding of dream work. In [Revisiting A Dream](#), Joan Golden-Alexis returns to Llama Khouri's dream ("[Buried Neck Deep](#)," Room 10.18) to illustrate how dreams, once embraced, can provide one way to return from a place of exile, homelessness, rootlessness, and powerlessness, and help reinstate the inalienable rights denied by a corrosive society.

Analysts in Mexico and Venezuela explain how this more "open and fluid way of producing and transmitting knowledge" carried into a larger cultural imagery can also have disastrous effects. Raquel Berman, an analyst practicing in Mexico City who has been studying the problem of femicide for decades, has come to believe that the cultural, sociological, political, and economic complexities that contribute to the killing of women are linked to the fundamental ideology of machismo. In [A Man Who Hates Women](#), she illustrates, through her seventeen-year analysis, the way a machismo culture takes root in one man's psyche. In [Venezuela: A Psychosocial Perspective](#), Mireya Lozada describes how the cultural imagery of mythology, religion, and political ideology initially contributed to a magical divination of her motherland before being used, over the course of the last two decades, to kill off the entire country.

Culture and history seep into our souls, but what happens to us when history changes under our feet, or even under the slow feats of generations before ours? The nostalgic pull to have time stand still can collapse into what Vamik Volkan has called petrified grief. Growing up in the American South, Molly Castelloe was acutely aware how an unmetabolized mourning made its way into everyday violence and heartbreak. In [Making Vamik's Room](#), Molly Castelloe tells us that creating a film of Vamik Volkan's life and work became a way to discover her own story. [Interviewing Vamik Volkan](#) for this issue of ROOM, Richard Grose realized that "external events and accidents" — the "exigencies of life" in Freud's words — played a huge part in making him the man he became.

The artists and poets featured in ROOM 6.19 are using the exigencies of culture and history to reimagine humanity. José Vivenes's [Enough of False Heroes](#) paintings re-present the collective symbols of Venezuelan heroes within a new social imaginary. Following the US 2016 elections, Rebecca Brown's insubordinate, collaborative work, [Disordered](#) used "unsanctioned" art in public spaces to resituate mental health in society. Gala Garrido's art is also unsanctioned and insubordinate. Responding to her personal experience with Venezuelan women convicted of crimes, her [Bacchae](#) explores the eruption of the irrational when civilization shifts toward tyranny, when we are "assaulted by unreason and every form of impunity has become normal." Garrido's work beckons us back to the horror of Euripides's tragedy — the outside place of female violence. In her poem [Clytemnestra](#), Sara Taber channels one of history's most famous female assassin's unrepentant sensibility with a pathos that brings us to our knees. Francesca Schwartz returns to ROOM's online art gallery with [City of Women](#): her meditative and penetrating encounter with how women's lives are defined by their bodies over time.

"I don't think my experiences are clarified or made beautiful for myself or anyone else; they are just there in whatever form I can find them," wrote the poet Frank O'Hara. In Kate Daniels's magnificent [Homage to Frank O'Hara: Fire Island Tea Dance, Summer '78](#), Kate, solitary, still, and female, remembers when "old paradigms fell apart, and new images churned to the surface."

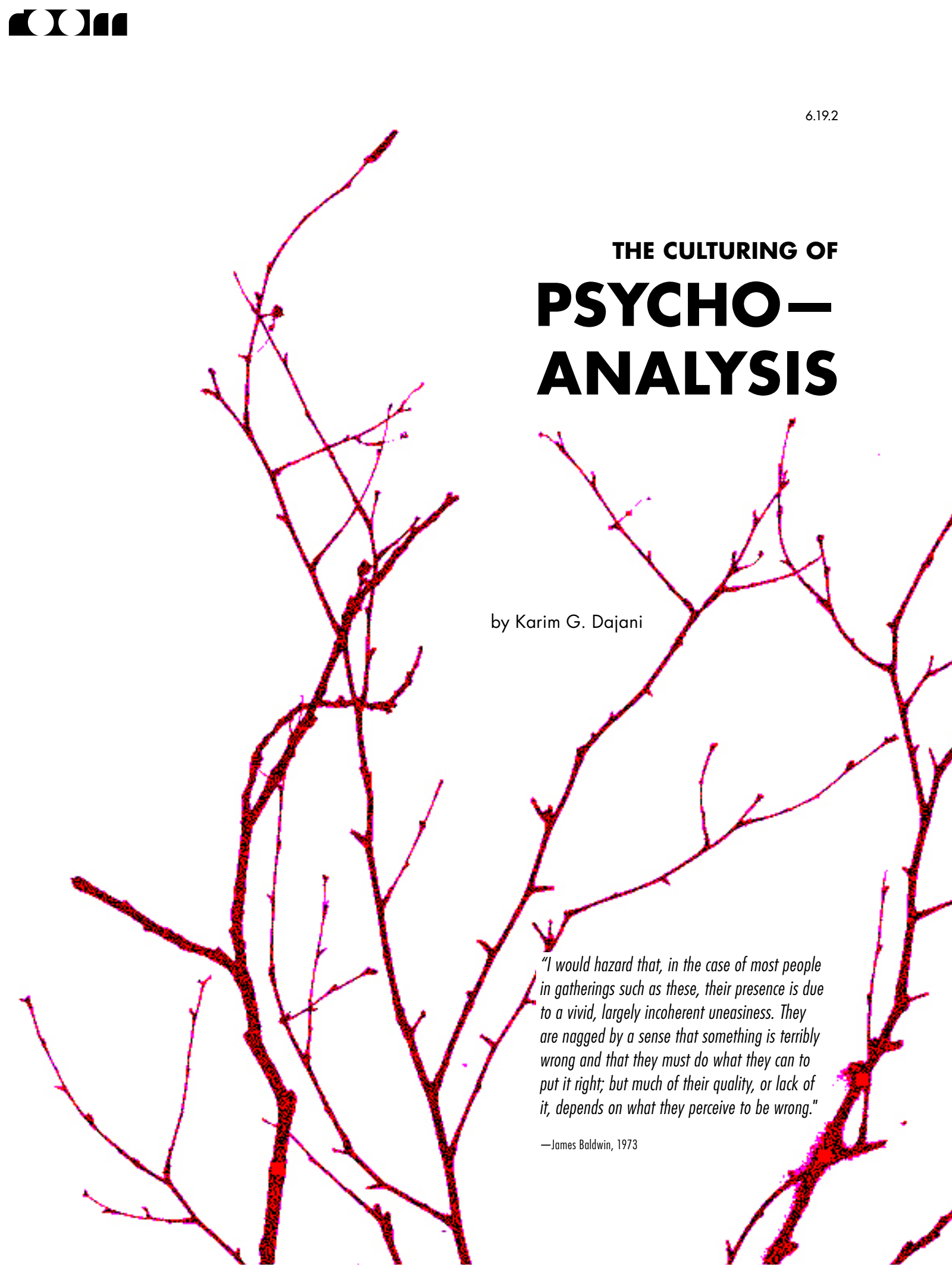
In the field of psychoanalysis and in our democracies, old paradigms are falling apart while new images are churning to the surface. Like democracy, ROOM is larger than the sum of its parts. Like psychoanalysis, Room opens new territory. Expansive and far-reaching and inclusive: Room 6.19 is a special issue. This one will take some time. ■

THE CULTURING OF PSYCHO— ANALYSIS

by Karim G. Dajani

"I would hazard that, in the case of most people in gatherings such as these, their presence is due to a vivid, largely incoherent uneasiness. They are nagged by a sense that something is terribly wrong and that they must do what they can to put it right; but much of their quality, or lack of it, depends on what they perceive to be wrong."

—James Baldwin, 1973



From my very first contact with psychoanalysis, a fascination in the theory and practice took hold of me. But becoming a psychoanalyst was a bit unimaginable. How would a lower-middle-class Palestinian immigrant navigate such a life goal? How could I possibly pay for years of analysis and navigate an environment I perceived as potentially hostile to me? I really did not know, but the calling did not subside.

My training was difficult, almost impossible. I knew psychoanalysis contained deep potential for understanding individuals and groups. Yet the version I was learning at the institute and the way I was being taught to apply it did not work for me personally, or for the patients I was treating. I became despondent. I could clearly see that neither me nor my patients were getting the transformative help we hoped for.

Looking for manifestations of Oedipal material and drive derivatives in my patients' transferences, particularly bicultural immigrants, was simply not working. I began to explore the notion that something was wrong, a key ingredient may have been missing from the approach I was being asked to adopt. *What about culture?* I thought. *How does culture impact how people think, feel, and behave, and how should we think about it analytically?*

I started talking about culture in my supervisions and classes. What is it exactly, and how does it work in the minds of individuals and in the coordination of large groups? Generally, the response was one of disinterest, as though I were speaking of something esoteric with little relevance to what we do. One of my supervisors referred me to Freud's work on culture and to E. Erikson's work on society. I found them lacking. Neither author gave me the conceptual tools I needed to understand what was going on with me and with some of my patients in our relationships to a collective organized by a totally different cultural system. Finally, in the context of treating a Palestinian woman, I insisted to my supervisor that her way of being cannot simply be understood in the language of trauma. Her "pathogenic sacrifices" of time and autonomy in relation to her husband and community may not be pathological. From her perspective, I suggested, she is acting properly by privileging the collective over her own individual needs and desires. After a long pause, my beloved supervisor told me that any baby from any culture will react similarly to frustration, overstimulation, neglect, and early exposure to their parents' sexuality (the primal scene). He emphasized that trauma is trauma; it works the same way everywhere and in everyone. He concluded: "Look, culture is not part of the unconscious, which is the scope and purview of psychoanalysis. In that sense, it is not central to what we do and will never be."

That comment solidified what I felt to be true. My professional collective does not seem willing to acknowledge the obvious— culture matters. They are doing it out of conviction, not malice. I recalled the social psychology experiment that showed how people who are absorbed in watching a basketball game will not see a man dressed in a gorilla suit running around the court.

Fortunately for me, my closest friend and colleague at the institute is an honest intellectual with a deep interest in history, culture, and hermeneutics. For years we kept talking and reading about the problem of culture and context in the theory we were being taught. We went

back and read *Totem and Taboo*, Freud's "anthropological" work, where he claims that the Oedipus complex is an inherited universal psychic structure passed on through some sort of quasi-biological process emanating from an original human crime. The Oedipus complex, for Freud, structures the minds of human beings in the same way everywhere. Unsatisfied with the treatise and its conclusions, I started to do my own research.

Readings in neighboring fields provided the necessary tools to reconceptualize a human being's relationship to his/her/their collective and world. Cultural anthropology (particularly the works of the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz and the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu), philosophy (Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and others), and neuroscience (McGilchrist and others) all seemed to point to the view that a human is not a formed entity of sorts that meets the world in a defining struggle but rather a largely empty vessel looking to be structured by a collective system of meaning-making, to become a being in the world. Geertz suggested that our defining feature as humans is how much we have to learn to become human. We are born with little to no guidance. To become human, an infant must inculcate a cultural system derived from their collective. Culture provides the human infant with a shared system of meaning-making that makes it possible for them understand and be understood by their collective.

I finally sat down (over a period of two years) to work it out for myself, an effort that resulted in two publications on the role culture plays in structuring the unconscious. Emerging ideas on culture in our field are giving us new ways to think about the relationship between individuals and collectives, new ways to think about trenchant social problems such as racism, cultural trauma, class inequality, misogyny, climate change, migration, and dislocation. Here are some of the key ideas that emerged from my research.

Freud's view of the individual as a sovereign entity that is largely organized by biological and inborn structures has been challenged from within and without the field. I discovered a long and rich history of scholarship in psychoanalysis (beginning as early as the 1920s) on the issue of culture and the relationship between individuals and collectives that has been continually marginalized and perpetually ignored. This vein of scholarship in psychoanalytic theory argues and in some cases demonstrates, that we are collective in nature, that our minds are essentially communal, that the unconscious is structured by culture (not quasi-biological universal structures like the Oedipus complex), and that what we are in essence is suggestible and radically open to being structured by an exogenous system of meaning-making or culture. Culture tells us how to understand, use, and live in our bodies, making it the nucleus around which the body is organized. To ignore the impact of culture at this primordial and constituent level is to mistake the part for the whole.

Part of the reason why this view has been ignored, frankly, is due to the dominant group's desire to hold on to their positions of power through the manipulation of complex social structures and dynamics that are largely unconscious. By suppressing the sociocultural perspective in our cannon, people have a much harder time seeing the primacy of culture and the social in determining

how things will be understood and done, and who will do what and how, including at our psychoanalytic institutions. This is done by naturalizing the positions of power or the ideas associated with positions of power. For example, notions such as the Oedipus complex, instincts, drives, the primacy of sexuality in human relations, the dynamic unconscious were naturalized, meaning they were presented as natural and universal phenomena. We were encouraged to mistake these models of reality for the reality of these models.

The sociocultural view stresses that we are involuntarily suggestible and radically open to taking in the world around us. The salient determinants of our experience are not only within the family and the body, but also in the ongoing interactions between the individual and the world around it. The social impacts us in a manner that is direct, involuntary, unconscious, but not repressed. To use a concept recently introduced into our literature, we are being interpellated by ideology and social structures at all times and in all ways. The impact of the social is not superficial, for it reaches into the deepest corners of the mind and into the most delicate and intimate of feelings.

The psychoanalysis that we need in order to deal with issues of race and culture is a psychoanalysis that is able to offer us a way of understanding the ongoing and irreducible impact of the social on our minds and collectives. Social structures compel individuals to see, feel, think, and behave in certain ways. Particular structures in the US derive from pathogenic social propositions that have been internalized into dispositions — unconscious norms by which to organize perception and direct thought. For example, the proposition that black people are inferior or that immigrants are intent on taking what does not belong to them are internalized to become racist dispositions — ways of seeing and thinking about people of color that are both inaccurate and demeaning. How we are perceived is consequential as being is being perceived.

The mistake I am describing — asserting that the social and cultural are not truly analytic — has been hurtful to us all, and to some more than others. This is one reason, we think, our composition as a community by and large has been monocultural and monochromatic. People on the margins found it difficult to train, not only because of money. Social determinants of their experience were not being adequately represented in our theory and practice, and at times they were flatly denied. This mistake has hurt us all, but it hurt people on the margins — homosexuals, women, immigrants, oppressed minorities — more. In that spirit, I would like to use words from James Baldwin to acknowledge the differential impact of this pernicious social reality:

“The future leaders of this country (in principle, anyway) do not impress me as being the intellectual equals of the most despised among us. I am not being vindictive when I say that, nor am I being sentimental or chauvinistic; and indeed the reason that this would be so is a very simple one. It is only very lately that white students, in the main, have had any reason to question the structure into which they were born; it is the very lateness of the hour, and their bewildered resentment — their sense of having been betrayed — which is responsible for their romantic excesses; and a young, white revolutionary remains, in general, far more romantic than a black one. For it is a very different matter, and results in a very different intelligence, to grow up under the necessity of questioning everything — everything, from the question of one’s identity to the literal, brutal question of how to save one’s life in order to begin to live it.” ■



Lee un libro.

TOTITI
COGLIONE!

can anyone,

YOU
PR

Taxation
is theft!

The United States of America is more important than you are. Also news isn't fake just because you don't like it!

Forgive him lord God, he knows not what fuckery he does

Don't resist, VOTE! could have had Rand vs. Bernie, DNC F'd up eh?

gonna
our job
im going
nke you-
for humanity
x0

LEAVE!
I'm going to
leave you
we're going
to leave you
we're going
to leave you

WE'VE LIAD IT WITH YOU
BETTER YOU ARE ENOUGH

You suck at Hugging
at Hugging
at Hugging
at Hugging

Kanye would be better... and that's saying a lot...

are an unplaceable woman soul with your own understanding of what it means to suffer

WUBBA LUBBA
DWB
DUB!!

Suck a bag of dicks
you of manifestation
that everything about is shitty
to human

nature
will
show
ANYWHERE

We are not afraid of you.

NEED
CLOSE
ATTN.

USING THIS NOTE AS TOILET PAPER HAS MORE VALUE THAN TRYING TO TALK SENSE WITH YOU.

Maybe if you had more friends

Stop
'doh' dummy
& Male 2
the Music of
the NATION

2317 316
PNC Need
Go Home
2317 316

Forgive him
Lord Por...
Oh Who an
Kidding...
GO TO Hell

Thank You
Your

My g
with you
to give me
And I hope
get it soon.

Photograph by Joe Flood: 500 Days of Trump

PRESIDENTIAL STATES OF MIND THE META-MESSAGE IN TRUMP'S TWEETS

by Frank Putnam

In addition to the political controversies that they ignite, the contents of presidential tweets are subject to diverse statistical analyses as evidenced by postings on the internet. As a form of do-it-yourself proof, empirically minded tweet investigators offer downloadable data sets and computer code. A public archive (<http://trumptwitterarchive.com>) containing tens of thousands of time-stamped Trump Tweets (TTs) is available. There, an obsessive bot monitoring the presidential Twitter account updates the archive minute by minute.

As a result of linguistic and sensitivity analyses, we know that in terms of emotional content, TTs are most frequently classified as “negative” or as “attacks.” Statistically, Trump’s attacks on people and institutions most often focus on: 1) weakness (“light-weight,” “loser,” “poor,” “pathetic,” “weak”), 2) stupidity (“incompetent,” “moron,” “clueless”), 3) failures (“failing,” “failed,” “disaster”), 4) illegitimacy (“fake,” “false,” “hoax,” “witch hunt,” “unfair,” “discredited”), and 5) corruption (“crooked,” “liar,” “dishonest,” “illegal”). His all-time favorite word is “great” (some studies find that he uses “great” more often than his next several favorite words combined). His favorite insult is “fake.” His favorite pronoun, “I.”

Some investigators suggest that there are two distinct sources of TTs. The first group, a small minority of all TTs, are believed to be authored and posted by staff on behalf of the president. These tweets are noteworthy for their use of complete sentences, appropriate capitalization, minimum exclamation points, and logical coherence. They are frequently sent from an iPad or iPhone.

The second and major source, believed to be directly authored and posted by President Trump, typically come from an Android device. These tweets are characterized by incomplete sentences, recurrent single words or short phrases (e.g., “sad,” “bad,” “witch hunt,” “fake news,” “no collusion”), simplistic language, random capitalization,

all-caps words, misspellings, and bursts of exclamation points. Although a few suggest that the poor grammar, spelling errors, word misuses, and chaotic logic are a deliberate artifice intended to identify the president with his base, others point to rapid corrections of the worst mistakes or inadvertently humorous wordings as evidence that the errors are unintentional (e.g., the famously viral “unpresided” tweet of 12/17/16 was corrected within 90 minutes).

The president tweets at all hours, but statistically he is most active between 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and again around 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, he keeps up a steady barrage, peaking about midweek on average. On weekends, the tweet count falls, typically to about a quarter of an average weekday. However, some of his most virulent “tweetstorms” occur around weekends.

“Tweetstorms,” distinct episodes characterized by numerous, lengthy (often multi-part), rambling, emotional tweets composed of chaotic muddles of warnings, boasts, attacks, analyses/analogies, mocking insults, and shout-outs, are frequently observed following media reports that contradict or question the president’s version of a particular reality.

Trump’s tweets and tweetstorms have been subjected to numerous content analyses, usually in relation to events believed to have triggered them. Their longer term trajectory, however, has received less attention. A February 19 *New York Times* article¹ with accompanying graphics² revealed disturbing trends in the escalating pattern of TTs attacking the Russia investigation and associated individuals.

TTs reflect not only the president’s opinions; they also reflect his state of mind at the time they were composed and posted. I have not found good descriptions of presidential demeanor during a tweetstorm. Indeed, some discussions propose that his tweetstorms occur most frequently while alone and unfettered by staff. Thus, in addition

to their content and organization, one must draw on examples of Trump’s demeanor in roughly analogous circumstances to inform inferences about his state of mind during tweetstorms (see below).

By “state of mind” I mean a recurring, discrete, cognitive, emotional, and physiological condition of being in which an individual perceives, thinks, responds, and relates in a distinctive manner for a finite period. Frequent observers often have shorthand ways to describe a person’s recurring problematic states of mind — e.g., “he’s having another one of his hissy fits.”

The power of certain states of mind to profoundly shape an individual’s salient associations and responses to sensitive stimuli or emotive contexts is most apparent when the person’s state of mind is extreme, e.g., blind rage, or is suddenly radically different from an immediately preceding state of mind, e.g., a sudden-onset panic attack. But waking, sleeping, working, playing, loving, or even comatose, we are always in some state of mind.

Typically, mental states cycle naturally in accordance with daily tasks and familiar contexts influencing how we think, feel, and act largely out of our awareness. It is only when the “normal” flow of mental states is derailed that we witness how painful, dysfunctional, hyperemotional, or traumatic states of mind (e.g., deep depression, explosive anger, traumatic grief, blind terror) globally influence perception, thinking, and behavior.

The clinical study of unusual mental states (e.g., fugue, hypnosis, catatonia, and abreactions) was a major focus of early psychiatry and psychology.³ Modern research on different types of mental states (e.g., sleep, hypnosis, panic attacks, catatonia, depression, mania, intoxication, psychedelics, meditation, dissociation, daydreaming, flashbacks, coma) identify variables that can be used to operationally define the mental and physical dimensions of “stateness.”⁴

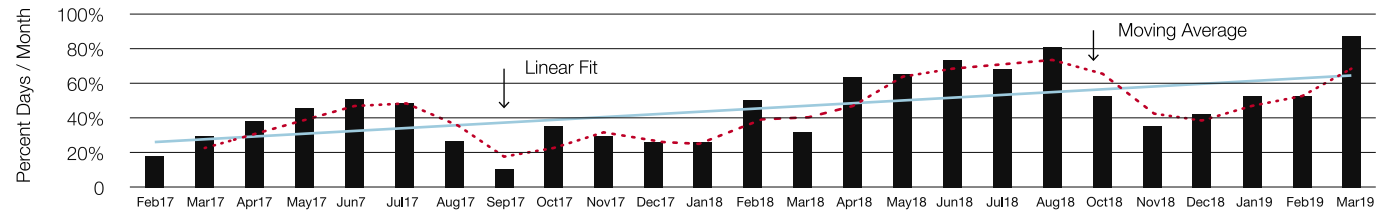
These include physiological measures such as heart rate, vagal tone, and other cardiac measures, galvanic skin response, hormone levels, and electrical, magnetic, and metabolic brain activation patterns. Psychological dimensions include level of arousal, affect, access to specific memories or learned skills, degree of self-awareness, reality testing, and attentional focus.

A key feature of discrete states of mind is their “state-dependency” (i.e., the selective compartmentalization of memories, cognitive associations, specific affects, and distinctive behaviors associated with a particular mental state). In general, the more extreme the mental state, the more complete the degree of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral compartmentalization. The more frequently a certain mental state reoccurs, the more easily it is re-elicited by situations and cues reminiscent of past triggers. In the same way that repeated bouts of bipolar mood swings progressively sensitize or “kindle” an individual reducing the threshold for future episodes, recurring tweetstorm increase the likelihood of more frequent and more intense tweetstorms in response to ever lower thresholds of provocation.

The *NYT* graphics² plot the number of attacks by Trump each month on different institutions (e.g., DOJ, intelligence agencies, news media), individuals (e.g., Comey, Clinton) and investigations (Russia). Simple inspection of the *NYT* graphs reveals an escalating pattern of attacks across the board with notable jumps in certain topics proximal to salient events (e.g., Flynn pleads guilty, Comey’s book published, Manafort convicted).

Drawing on data in the *NYT* articles, the figure below plots the percentage of days in each month that the president tweeted one or more attacks on the Russia investigation.

ACCELERATING PATTERN OF TRUMP TWEET ATTACKS ON RUSSIA INVESTIGATION



The solid straight line is a linear fit and the dotted curved line is a moving average. The linear fit documents the progressive escalation of attacks on the Russia investigation over two years.

The moving average reveals an accelerating pattern of periodic multi-month clusters of increased attacks.

The differences between 2017 and 2018 are striking. Only once prior to January 2018 did the president tweet attacks on 50% or more days of a month (June 2017). After January 2018, he tweeted attacks on 50% or more days in most months (8/12). More telling are the number of times in which tweet attacks continued for five or more consecutive days. Again, only once in 2017 did he tweet attacks on the Russia investigation for five or more consecutive days (July 22–27, 2017). In 2018, however, there were 13 occasions in which he attacked the Russia investigation for five or more days running. The longest sequence was 18 consecutive days from August 9 to August 26, 2018.

Accelerating Pattern of Trump Tweet Attacks on Russia Investigation

Although presidential states of mind and demeanor during tweetstorms are not well documented, an analogous venue of presidential mass communication, rallies, and speeches is observable. In both venues, Trump's intended audiences include the same people.

Trump's two-plus-hour speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) (3/2/2019) is an example of tweet-related presidential states of mind on display. The single longest presidential speech of modern times, it was described by commentators as "bizarre," "unhinged," "crazy," and evidence that he was not psychologically fit for office. Noting earlier in the speech that he was going "totally off script," Trump shows a glimmer of insight observing later, "I'm going to regret this speech."

The CPAC speech largely reprises the collective content of TTs, reaching all the way back to inaugural crowd size. The live audience's boisterous appreciation of old tropes embedded in a fragmented, rambling, emotional narrative no doubt changed some of the psychological dynamics. But the reality distortion, ubiquitous outright lies, paranoia, threats, illogic, tangential leaps, inappropriate anecdotes, and dearth of empathy characteristic of presidential tweetstorms is also central to his live communications, reflecting similar states of mind.

Temporal analyses of TTs shows that over the past two years these disturbed states of mind are occurring ever more frequently.

So where does this go from here? What does 2019 hold? The two-year trends predict that the attacks and tweetstorms are going to continue to increase, probably even more rapidly than before. Research on predictors of psychological decompensation (often

using violence as an outcome) finds that an accelerating pattern of emotional lability is a very concerning sign.⁴ There is good reason to believe that the stressors responsible for the 2018 surge in tweet attacks will only intensify, further compounded by new investigations that now threaten his family and business. Recently Trump tweeted his most overt threat of violence yet, implying that his supporters in the police, military, and Bikers for Trump could be "tough" on his foes (tweet was later deleted but is in the archive). This accelerating pattern of TTs traces an ominous psychological trajectory, one often associated with psychological decompensation and violence. The walls are closing in — what happens when Trump can't take it any longer? ■

^[1] Mark Mazzetti, Maggie Haberman, Nicholas Fandos and Michael S. Schmidt. "Inside Trump's Two-Year War on the Investigations Encircling Him," *New York Times*, Feb 19, 2019.

^[2] Larry Buchanan and Karen Yourish. "Trump has Publicly Attacked the Russia Investigation More Than 1,100 Times," *New York Times*, Feb, 19, 2019.

^[3] Henri F. Ellenberger (1970). *The Discovery of The Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. Basic Books, New York.

^[4] Putnam, Frank (2016). *The Way We Are: How States of Mind Influence Our Identities, Personality and Potential for Change*. IPBooks, New York.

6.19.4

FRIENDLESS

in Palm Beach

by Sheldon Bach

Two years ago, an article in the *New York Times*¹ about Donald Trump's "friends" made me want to collect the little we know about such friendships, some or all of which may apply to Trump himself.

In the article, Trump, speaking to a crowd in New Hampshire, is quoted as saying: "I have no friends, as far as I'm concerned," he said. "You know who my friends are? You're my friends."

Trump's disavowal of friends, which to others might seem like a pathetic admission of failure or deficiency, seems to him like a proof of his superiority. In his grandiosity, he is above having friends; he does not need specific friends the way inferior people do — himself and his money are all that he needs. If he makes friends, it is only because he needs their votes — a purely shallow, functional, and fungible friendship.

Richard LeFrak, a fellow real-estate tycoon who has known Mr. Trump for more than forty years, is quoted as saying: "He's very gregarious and has lots of acquaintances. But people that he's close to? Not so many."

"He doesn't really have a lot of friends," said Billy Procida, a financier from New Jersey who served for years as one of Mr. Trump's top lieutenants. "Pretty much all he does is work and play golf."

Trump named Richard LeFrak as one of his best friends. "If we're both in Florida, Donald might call and say, 'Come have dinner at Mar-a-Lago,'" Mr. LeFrak said, referring to Mr. Trump's palace in Palm Beach. "But if I tell him, 'Why don't you come down to Miami?' he might say yes, but he probably won't do it. He's very much a creature of habit. He doesn't like to leave his own environment."

Abe Wallach, who once served as head of acquisitions for the Trump Organization, said he was always surprised when Mr. Trump would ask him and his husband to join him for the weekend with Marla Maples, his wife at the time. "Donald would call and say, 'Abe, what are you doing? Marla and I are flying down to Atlantic City. You and David want to come?' I always thought: 'Why me? I work with him all week. Isn't there someone else?'"

Joe Scarborough, who described himself as being "a casual friend," said: "After I was accused of being too close to him, I started going, 'Wait a second. I've known this guy for a decade and I've never once had lunch with him alone?' But that's what Trump does," Mr. Scarborough added. "It's always at an event or at a function. He's shaking hands, slapping backs — it's very on the surface. That's just who he is."

The Reverend Al Sharpton said: "Out of all the political and business and entertainment circles that we've moved in together over the years, I never really met anyone who was Trump's good friend. In fact, I've never even met anyone who claimed to be his good friend."

Abe Wallach said: "Deep down, he's a very nice guy, but he can't let go and just be nice because he fears that people will take advantage of him. Donald is actually the most insecure man I've ever met. He has this constant need to fill a void inside. He used to do it with deals and sex. Now he does it with publicity."

And, finally, Richard LeFrak said: "He's the kind of guy who likes throwing hand grenades in the room. There's a lot of intensity and energy, a lot of publicity and other stuff. Being friends with Trump is like being friends with a hurricane."

But a hurricane with a void inside. In fact, the hurricane, the intensity, the constantly being on the move, is employed precisely to cover the emptiness. Were he to stop being constantly overstimulated and on the move, he would succumb to some variety of boredom or anomie covering a potential paralyzing depression, suicidal ideation, or annihilation anxiety, depending on the level of regression. Thus his dysregulation traps him between two terrifying extremes: to slow down and die or to speed up and explode.

His overinflation covers a more basic underinflation or depletion, correlated exactly with his paucity of friendships and shallowness of object relations, remarked on even by Trump's own "friends." A person of this type does not have strong internalized objects, sometimes not even any objects, to whom he can turn and who will support his capacity to be alone, to be quiet, or to be self-reflective.

On the contrary, self-reflectiveness, quietness, and solitude present dangers that bring the threat of falling into emptiness, vacuity, and existential despair. So any slowing down, any loss of motion, any invitation to thoughtfulness and mindfulness is experienced as a danger situation threatening traumatic understimulation, a danger situation that must be avoided by throwing hand grenades and causing tumult to restore the necessary overstimulation and chaos. In his personal life, Trump has lived uneasily in the wake of divorces, bankruptcies, and scandals. But the dangers of placing a whole nation in the hands of someone who needs excitement and disruption in order to feel alive are beyond calculation.

Such a person is in many ways incapable of learning from experience. To learn from experience requires, first, the capacity to admit that one doesn't know everything and, second, a continuity of experience, the ability to make a continuous logical story out of what has happened and then to process it in a self-reflective way.

Overinflated people do not experience continuity of being or existence; they do not experience their lives as being a coherent story with a past, present, and future. They live digitally, from moment to moment, each moment separated from the one before and the one after with no living thread, no continuity to connect them. They have been cumulatively traumatized as children and may be thought of as existing in a modified post-traumatic state. The apparent dishonesty of such people is not primarily due to lacunae in their superego, but instead to lacunae in their continuity of existence. When they tell you something in the morning and the opposite in the evening, they are not lying, for lying is a developmental achievement that requires a continuous, cohesive self. Rather, like young children, they cannot connect today with yesterday or tomorrow, and so they are telling you the truth as they feel it at the moment, which is the only time they know and the time in which they live.

This immediate, fragmented, ahistorical, unprocessed view of the world can become, as we have seen, very dangerous in a politician who wields great power. ■



¹ For Donald Trump, Friends in Few Places. Alan Feuer, *New York Times*, March 11, 2016.



A FAMILY

ROMANCE

In mythology, in fairy tales, and in psychoanalysis, losing one's sight often indicates that a disaster has occurred, an event so unbearable that it is no longer possible to look at it. Yet in the ongoing scourge that is the Trump administration, Trump cannot bear that we look away from the disaster. Even as he hopes to hide from us what he does not wish us to see, he must always create a spectacle that will turn our gaze toward him. With the spectacle of stealing babies from their mothers at the US–Mexico border, Trump has invoked the power of ancient myth and old tales to focus our attention, showing us how he can break primal bonds. He has tipped his hand, letting us glimpse the workings of his psyche, the deep-rooted misogyny and matricidal wishes that mirror his internal world.

I was canvassing to get out the vote during the recent midterm elections while the cruel policies of family separation played out in the background. A blond woman with hard blue eyes answered her door. Flatly, she warned me that she supported Trump. She was about to close her door when she seemed to change her mind. Turning back to me, she lowered her voice. “Of course,” she said, referring to the children being taken from their parents at the border, “some of the things being done are terrible. But they have to be done.” I was disturbed by what she said, but I was puzzled by the way she lowered her voice. She sounded almost excited, as if the pain of these other mothers gave her satisfaction. It seemed to me that this woman lowered her voice to hide her sadism, though she was not able to help herself from wanting to display it to me, as if it were a kind of triumph.

How had this woman become enlisted in enforcing cruelty toward other women? Somehow she must have understood that a line had already been drawn between women, dividing them into those who would be granted motherhood and those who would not. The spectacle of family separation seemed to put forth a primal dilemma. I was reminded of an old fairy tale about a stolen baby and an envious woman. In the queen's garden, behind a wall, an abundance of the leafy green vegetable called rape, or rampion, grew. Rapunzel's mother hungered for these simple greens, craving them in the way that pregnant women do. Finally, her husband climbed the wall into the garden to steal some of the vegetable for his wife. When the queen discovered him, she demanded that he give her the baby in return for his life. Thus, long before she began her Oedipal journey, Rapunzel was stolen from her real mother by a powerful queen, who was herself barren. This early parable about mothers and border walls lays out a psychic road map: women will be

cruel to women in a patriarchy, because whoever controls the resources determines who will get to be a mother — and access to power determines who controls the resources.

Now, a modern version of this old fairy tale is being played out on the border. There is ample precedent for the practice of family separation in this country, including the well-known history of stealing children from Native American and African families. This racist practice has always relied on the collaboration of some women for enforcement. These women serve to blur perception, obscuring the abject cruelty of family separation by using motherhood to justify racist policy. During the civil rights movement, for example, white Southern women were mobilized through their churches and schools as mothers who would “protect” their children from racial integration, just as in Nazi Germany, women were assigned to fulfill the role of motherhood by ensuring the “racial purity” of their society. Thus, in a white supremacist patriarchy, the role of motherhood and the practice of family separation can become inextricably entwined.

For those women whose mothering enforces the rules of the state, motherhood is a conduit to power. In the Trump administration, Sarah Huckabee Sanders uses motherhood as a tool with which to suppress dissent. When reporters demanded answers about the “family separation” policies she told them to “settle down,” as if the briefing room were a nursery. “I know how to say no,” she says, referring to the fact that she has young children. In the Trump family, children are enlisted by their mothers to play their part in supporting the goals of the administration. Ivanka's young daughter performed in Mandarin for the president of China. Later, Ivanka sent out a photo of herself eating noodles with her daughter to mark her daughter's birthday. She tagged the photo with a comment that eating noodles on one's birthday was a Chinese tradition. The president of China was pleased; trademarks were awarded; her father's power was enhanced.

At the height of the hue and cry following the release of media images of children being wrenched from their mothers at the border, Ivanka released a photo of herself holding her toddler son. The immediate outcry at her insensitivity was a sad misreading of her intent. As propaganda, the photo is an idealized portrayal of white motherhood. She and her son are dressed in pale colors, posed as if looking into each others' eyes. The image is drenched with light, its discreet sepia tones hinting at nostalgia.

The image highlights its own difference from the images of desperate, exhausted mothers holding their dark-eyed children at the border. The photo was also a warning shot, timed as it was to remind white women of the power they can access if they collude to enforce Trump's policies. It reinforced the barriers between women, a virtual wall.

Yet despite appearances, we know that mothering that does not have the needs of the children at its heart is not real mothering. Ivanka's image of herself as a mother is ersatz. The only mothering that survives in this administration revolves around the father. This was elucidated even at the recent State of the Union address, where children were separated from their parents and used to support the Trump agenda. Forced to sit through a long nighttime speech next to a pretend mother, Melania, their real parents went unacknowledged and were nowhere in sight. In the Trump administration, mothers are eliminated. Family separation policy pervades the entire apparatus. What is taking place is what occurs in any authoritarian regime. The unconscious world of the tyrant dictates the political agenda.

We can see this by looking at the Trump family tableau. At its dangerous center, father and daughter preside as the couple in a motherless world. Each, in their own way, believe themselves to be Oedipal victors. The powerful fantasy of having eliminated their rival is something they both share. Their mutual triumph fuses them together in a bond of shared cruelty toward the mother and, by extension, toward women. In this way, their relationship models a path to power for women. By fusing with their cruelty, women can have access to the power that may protect them from the violence toward women that they are watching as it is acted out in plain sight at the border. In this epic enactment of Trump's internal object world, the stakes for women are high.

In a recent scene shown in the media, Trump and his daughter Ivanka are sitting together at the head of a table before an audience. She is dressed in pale pink. The orange in his hair has been toned down, so they share the same shade of platinum hair now. "Thank you, Mr. President," she breathes, turning, sloe-eyed, toward her father. The moment evokes Marilyn Monroe singing to another president. Trump places both hands around his daughter's hand. Almost crooning, he thanks her in return. He calls her "honey." The people in the room burst into applause at the spectacle. Trump and Ivanka sit, preening. The feeling in the air is so heated that he becomes rattled, confusing the name of the famous person sitting next to him.

Trump has been forthright about his wish to be sexual with his daughter. Ivanka doesn't object.

The message to men that they can lust after their daughters means that sexual assault is implicit policy; it trickles down from the top. The bond of cruelty that Trump and Ivanka share is a sexual one, albeit perhaps unconscious. The display of sexuality between father and daughter fuels the fantasy that Oedipal desire need never be outgrown, straining the very structure of society, disrupting even as it excites. This makes them reckless. They do not fear the chaos they spark. On the contrary, they believe that the chaos will provide them with an opportunity to take control of all society, revealing their true mania. Men and women are being encouraged to fuse with their fantasies of father and daughter and then to play them out in an ongoing spectacle.

There is a backstory to this, as there usually is. In a motherless family, children lose their mothers just as mothers lose their children. Rapunzel's mother was lost to her, existing only as something forgotten, a prologue to the Oedipal story that followed. Most of these stolen babies will not see their mothers again. Ivanka's story, too, has a prologue. In the photos of her as a young girl, we look at something that perhaps has been forgotten. Her father stands behind her, grabbing each of her arms. She is only nine, but she belongs to him already, dressed in gold lamé and draped in golden chains, her hair streaked with platinum. Her face is empty. She watches him as he leers at other women. Later, at fifteen, she is sitting on his lap at a concert, moving to the music. In another photo, she is again on his lap, his hands placed on each of her hips, as in foreplay. She has always been an object of his sexual gaze and a witness to his sexual predation. With no mother to protect her, she must have been afraid, like any girl, and she must have been angry. But she no longer remembers the disaster that took place.

Real mothers are there to protect their children, as the incest taboo protects the species, as the earth needs protection if it is to provide the resources we all must have if we are to survive. The queen's envy and rage blinded her to the fact that locking Rapunzel in a tower would perpetuate life. It would only end life. The queen will not know what it is to be a real mother. No matter what we allow ourselves to see, reality intervenes. The destruction of the mother in the Trump family is a signifier of the larger message. The Trump administration is enlisting women as collaborators in Trump's goal of making society into a reflection of his internal world. He is using motherhood as a weapon against women in his endeavor. In his desire for revenge, in his perpetual state of rage and unconscious envy, Trump will stop at nothing, not even the destruction of life itself, in order to get us to watch him as he plows disastrously into the most basic norms of civilization. ■

by Jeri Isaacson

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Clytemnestra

Thus a woman speaks among you. Shall men deign to understand? -Aeschylus

I remember the castle,
its stone's obsidian, the sea slapping the moat,
the wall against my shoulder a frigid obscenity,
wind screaming

Sometimes I fret that I could be wrong-
the crowds' scowls are murderous,
but there is a razor within my bosom, its ferocity
so sharp it can't but slice true meat

The day after I did it-
regretless, delivered you by blade-stroke
'til your stunk breath stopped blurring,
my heart was a bird soaring above the jeers
I was not a woman sloshing through ocean
my gown ushering me under
I was a commander standing at the head of the drawbridge

Naught but a herd blind to your butchery,
all spit my name
proclaiming me regicide
to be hanged or bull-dragged to oblivion
but I am a daughter-phile, a furie, glorying

I once had a dream of a woman with
a basket of snakes and apples
striding up a treachery
she was nearing the summit

Sometimes I wonder if a daughter is not
a mother's jeweled egg

Agamemnon, vile husband, you always used to say
as if you walked hand in hand with Zeus
"A man's ship is his soul," but my womb throbbing knows
to war flank to flank with naked, flame-kissed men is your elixir

Too, my ears know: bellowing from Hades
you will quick dispatch our tender-blooming
blood-doomed son to cut me down

Tomorrow I will climb down to Iphigenia's pyre
and there, at the sea,
I will wet my bare toes

But now it's dusk
the black sky rent by cherry streams
I will eat the strand of hair I snatched from her pillow



[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN THE POEM](#)



Sara Mansfield Taber

VAGINAL VERITAS

THOUGHTS ON MISOGYNY, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND DEMOCRACY

In a recent interview¹, Adam Phillips ventured the hypothesis that psychoanalysis was invented to address the problem of misogyny. This was a bold and unusual statement, and though we've long been initiated into Phillips's refreshing, even scandalous, takes on often otherwise mundane or familiar assumptions, this seemed, at least to me, an astonishing statement, striking not because it was outlandish, but because it was utterly, perceptively true.

Of course, psychoanalysis generally presents a different picture of itself, a picture of progressive self-knowledge, even liberation. Such is also the picture commonly painted of the democratic project, or at least of democracy as theory. In practice, democracy has inevitably reiterated patriarchy and has absorbed its underlying misogyny. Since the days of Pericles, democracies have preached equality and inclusiveness while in practice merely establishing new sorts of invidious hierarchies. Democracies have enslaved; they have colonized; they have subjugated the "other" — the taboo, the strange, the marginal, and, above all, the feminine. But the degradation of women, as noted by psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, is fundamentally anti-democratic. Misogyny (which he traced to the fear of being indebted to and subjugated by mother) goes hand in hand with authoritarianism, with the cult of power. He thus anticipated our contemporary global-flirtation crisis with autocracy, fascism, and pseudo-masculinist discourses.

It is a commonplace of psychoanalysis that our own founding father, Sigmund Freud, injected his own misogyny into our theories, lacing psychoanalysis's origin story with a foundational violence that similarly amplified the voice of patriarchy, even as he contrarily appealed to the voice of Eros, the voice of desire. The feminine was degraded, and the vagina in particular bore the brunt of the injury, being cast as inferior, as a wound, a mark of castration. Other groups, such as homosexuals and borderline personalities, feminine proxies perhaps, were deemed marginal and unfit for treatment. Our aspirationally democratizing practice — a talking cure between speaker and hearer

— became a tool of privilege that re-created its own class system of haves and have-nots, divided by gender, sexual orientation, diagnosis, and, of course, economic conditions. Thus psychoanalysis, which leverages the human symbolic capacity for its curative effects, exploited the raw ingredients of the human psyche to sign and to signal and to speak desire, for the claiming by some and for the disenfranchisement of others.

So it is all the more remarkable that our framers of democracy and of psychoanalysis — patriarchs all — intuited the tenets of what I call "Feminine Law" (Gentile with Macrone, 2016). In the First Amendment and in the Fundamental Rule, they established foundational if also paradoxical commitments to freedom of thought and speech in conjunction with a practice of physical assembly. Their laws were unbinding and permissive, laws of "no law" and of no one's law, the very antithesis of totemic prohibitive laws of "no." Minimalistic and abstract blueprints enshrined a law of desire, a potential space enabled by constraint for candid, truthful speech, for social and political enfranchisement, for self-determination beyond conditions of servility, for a disordered desire and an erotic agency that might not only disrupt dogma and tyranny, but actually resuscitate and guide life, including collective and political life.

Feminine law — desire's law — stands to wreak havoc with the order of patriarchy. It stands no exclusions, no colonization. It is not the repudiation of the feminine that is so threatening to us, as Freud claimed when he declared such repudiation psychic "bedrock." Rather, it is the claiming of the feminine — really a reclaiming of our most familiar and strange encounters with the feminine from our earliest dependence — that we fear and yet desire. It is here that anatomical difference, so pivotal to psychoanalytic formulations, becomes key, because the vaginal figures the spatial contours, the enshrined ambiguity — the gaps — of our fundamental rules. The gaps in speech, the gaps that interrupt us, dislocate us — these gaps are evocations of the originary gap of the female genital.

by Jill Gentile

If psychoanalysis's mission (at least in part) is to treat people's terror of their own misogyny, we must name the gap and thereby gain a symbol not only of equality with the phallic symbol but one with its own unique character, bridging the symbolic with the realm of what lies in excess of symbolization. The vaginal is the paradoxical gateway not only to life itself, but also to symbolic life.

But historically, psychoanalysis has maintained the rule of free association while erasing its ancestral, elemental femininity. It marked the vagina as inferior, when it was marked at all, mostly relegating it and the feminine to the unnameable register of the traumatic real, the unsymbolizable. What we lose by this strategy, what is lost when democracies wield a monopolistic phallus, are the obscured, marginalized truths and voices revealed only in the gaps. The vaginal signifies what is ineluctably real; it serves as a metaphor for what is at once accessible and inaccessible, both forever subject to phallic efforts at colonization and seizure, but as the conduit to the feminine, the marker of what exceeds such control.

It is not accidental that the Trump era is characterized by a preoccupation with borders, immigrants, walls, reproductive surveillance, and a general fear of feminine space. And in the context of escalating polarizations and inequities — red and blue, white and nonwhite — we are witnessing the devastating consequences of the erasure of the feminine, which also functions as a proxy for other marginalized, excluded, colonized peoples. Though we speak of widening gaps, it is actually the juxtapositions of opposites, of polarities, that reveal what is missing: the (feminine) gap itself is subject to excision — a traumatic excision, for it is this very gap, this reverberant gap, that births desire.

Eve Ensler, activist and author of *The Vagina Monologues*, puts it starkly: "Vagina is the most terrifying word, the most threatening word, in any language of any country I have ever been to.... It is more reviled and feared than words like *plutonium*, *genocide*, and *starvation*. In many countries, the word for

female genitalia is so derogatory or disgusting it cannot be spoken in public. In a few places, there is no word in the language for vagina at all."

We live in a time of calamitous fallout from our callous and cavalier degradation of the bodily Earth, which mirrors the patriarchal surveillance and brute violations of the female body. The flow of fluid (feminine) migrants crossing borders is countered by another migratory border crossing: a rising number of terrorists — of jihadists, white nationalists, and incel terrorists. While only the latter are vocal and explicitly motivated by misogyny, the rise of the Islamic State, like that of Western alt-right and neo-Nazi groups, has been linked to masculine vulnerability and shame. What if we recognize that shame as an exclusion from the feminine, an experience of being foreclosed from — in perceived exile from — the vaginal? How dare others be let in, exiles themselves?

Consider these recent statistics: there is an estimated gap of 70 million between the populations of males and females in China and India, a legacy of systematic misogyny. If the vaginal functions as I suggest it does, we will soon (as this population reaches puberty and sexual maturity in the years to come) need to reckon with the global and likely socially cataclysmic consequences of unprecedented vaginal scarcity.

If, as Phillips suggests, psychoanalysis — and, I would add, democracy — are inventions to address misogyny, their interventions are urgently needed. Their fundamental rules are promissory commitments to what their practices might be, stripped bare of patriarchy. They dare to recognize that the freedom of speech, the very freedom to desire and of desire, pivots on the feminine — that desire's law is prefigured by a spatializing, democratizing vaginal. Though the vaginal remains forever prone to predation and usurpation and patriarchal surveillance, the feminine eludes capture, as does freedom. As the symbol of what is inappropriately free, as the gateway between what is accessible and what lies in excess of what we know and master and domesticate, we need the vaginal symbolic to be available to all. ■

^[1] "Politics in the Consulting Room: Adam Phillips in conversation with Deborah Baum," *Granta*, no. 146 (Winter 2019). Available behind a paywall at <https://granta.com/politics-in-the-consulting-room/>

^[2] Eve Ensler, "Nothing Short of a Sexual Revolution," *Huffington Post*, December 2, 2010. Available at <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nothing-short-of-a-sexual-b-791303>

07_The_Last_Supper

The Feminization of Violence

by Elizabeth Marín Hernández

Translated by Daniel Esparza

From time immemorial, there have been crimes committed by women who were driven to pursue their own power. These transgressive crimes center on the tearing down of established systems. They make it possible for us to reflect upon the meaning of the offenders, sacrifice in Euripides's *Bacchae*: offenders who, beyond their frantic alienation, rise, as Medea did, through a reflective process that leads to a destruction that does not horrify them and that few of them repent.

As in Euripides's *Medea* and *Bacchae*, women today are at the bottom of a justice system that is overwhelmed by evidence of gender violence. Calling this violence "femicide" brings it home in a way that continues to root it in an idea of female "otherness." In the language used by contemporary criminologists, gender violence, in all its range of meaning, can erroneously

lead to the oppression of all humans. Offenders are transformed into the victims of patriarchal systems who are deceived and abandoned. Transformed into victims, the offenders become absolved of all responsibility for their actions. They illustrate a perspective of femininity in its poorest and most precarious state.

Reflecting upon this clearly ambiguous situation leads us to think about the "feminization of crime" with greater conceptual complexity than victims or offenders, control or lack of control, or patriarchy or feminization might suggest. The empowerment of women over the last hundred years has led to a dilution of these kind of limits — but these limits were already being exposed and denounced over a thousand years ago. The control of an otherness that comes out of itself and is attributed to femininity is evident in the Greek tragedies of *Bacchae* and *Medea*.

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#USTOO, SIGMUND

by Elizabeth Cutter Evert

I am writing in the spirit of #MeToo to bear witness to damage that has been done to a subset of women I have known personally in my thirty years of practice as a psychoanalyst, who felt pressured by the value placed on sexuality in the cultural milieu of the 1960s and, 70s and in the psychoanalytic circles they came to for help. I am also writing because I think these women's stories offer a window into ways the mid-to-late-twentieth-century sexual revolution was experienced differently in various parts of the United States. This inquiry is part of a larger project, where I have been exploring ways to bridge cultural divides that block collaboration on a humanitarian political agenda.

In the 1950s mainstream psychoanalytic theory held that we resolve issues with dependency early, so as to be able to emerge capable of autonomy and sexual pleasure. The healthiest patients were seen as those who struggled with derivatives of Oedipal conflict; others might or might not be analyzable. In this cultural and therapeutic milieu, women who functioned well in a number of areas but who struggled with sexual arousal often believed that their erotic difficulties were causing their emotional problems. Where sexual experience and freedom were privileged over attachment and other emotional needs, these women found themselves confused and alienated from themselves — both sexually and, sometimes, in terms of a basic sense of self.

At the turn of the century, Freud saw the inhibition of sexual outlets as the primary cause of neurosis, the overvaluation of sexual acts, and the failure to recognize the importance of human interconnection, which became out of line when Freud abandoned his seduction theory. The early Freudian view does not fit with our contemporary understanding of physio-emotional needs and with what we now know about how sexuality works. Nevertheless, the notion of sexual inhibition as the root of psychiatric difficulty had entered the popular imagination, and for decades psychoanalysis lent medical authority to this cultural strand. People who only knew psychoanalysis from the movies were likely to think of it as involving a couch and a scintillating emphasis on a link between erotic and psychological issues. Psychoanalytic ideas about the importance of freeing our sexual experience continued to permeate through the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. (Zaretsky) In many circles, prevailing psychoanalytic theory held that we that resolve pre-Oedipal issues early, so as to be able to emerge capable of freedom and sexual pleasure.

For a subset of women struggling with a sense of self, this kind of therapeutic situation became more damaging. I am speaking of those who often do relatively well in the world but feel empty or like they are "going through the motions." In a core way, they may not know who they are. When someone in a state like this came to a therapist for help

and the main interpretive line had to do with sexuality, they sometimes doubted themselves further. Feeling hazy to begin with, some sensitized themselves to the sexual, while going underground with their loneliness and doubt. Others may have developed an almost Stockholm-syndrome-like cycle, where they intensified their bond to the therapist, tried harder to “do analysis right,” and became further alienated from themselves. Perhaps the memory of these early analyses should be an #UsToo moment for psychoanalysis, even where explicit boundary violations did not occur.

Where most contemporary analysts combine object relational, intersubjective, and other theories with classical analytic understanding, it would be comfortable to turn the page on this chapter of our history. But women and men who feel unsure of themselves as they worry about sexuality are very much with us today. Loneliness is prevalent; even preteens scan the internet for porn they hope will prepare them to be adequate as they mature. In an age of global interconnectivity, individuals around the world wrestle with sexual values that clash with deeply held cultural and spiritual beliefs.

Neuropsychology, Narcissism, and Sexuality

We know that children need secure attachments to their primary caregivers to develop the capacity for curiosity and imaginative play. Without it, they spend their energy coping with feelings of fear, anger, and abandonment, as Bessel van der Kolk describes in *The Body Keeps the Score*, his 2014 compilation of research on the neuropsychological results of trauma and the spectrum of childhood abuse and neglect. Bowlby saw a need for attachment figures throughout life. Van der Kolk describes that while “our culture teaches us to focus on personal uniqueness, at a deeper level we barely exist as individual organisms. Our brains are built to help us function as members of a tribe.” (80)

Van der Kolk looks at individuals for whom a sense of self is missing from a neuropsychological point of view. He describes that, most of the time, we live in a state of “background functioning,” where we integrate what we experience in our bodies, our minds, and in the world. We are capable of empathy, thought, creativity, and a resonant sense of

self. Infant observation teaches us that this background interconnection develops in early dyadic exchanges with the mother and other caregivers. In emergencies, though, this background functioning shuts down, and we enter fight, flight, and freeze modalities. As we know from descriptions from people who have experienced rape or other trauma, it is common to dissociate and to experience being outside of oneself, watching what is transpiring from above.

In PTSD, and for many survivors of childhood abuse and neglect, seemingly insignificant events, thoughts, or feelings trigger emergency reactions, which seem to exist on a spectrum of severity. It is possible for people who grow up in relatively stable homes where there is significant ambivalence about attachment needs or where there are chronic situations of mild but confusing overstimulation to bounce between rage, avoidance, and hazy or unreal shut-down states. Their capacity to feel a background sense of who they are can be minimal. It seems understandable that, for these women, intense involvement with a therapist who focused on sexual repression would be counterproductive.

From Emily Nagoski’s bestselling 2015 compilation of research on female sexuality, *Come As You Are*, we learn that it was also unlikely to improve their sexual functioning. She describes that, like problems with experiencing a sense of self, most difficulties in sexual arousal are connected to fight, flight, or freeze reactions, often set off by barely conscious emotional reactions. She writes of several sexually compatible couples where the woman found herself unable to be interested in sex once she was balancing work, childcare, and marriage. Experiencing herself as failing to keep up sexually, professionally, as a wife, or as a mother, she reflexively lashes out, withdraws, or shuts down. Lonely and worried about herself, the patterns become ingrained. If she were to go to a therapist likely to interpret a range of emotional problems in sexual terms, she may feel she does not know her mind or body, and the dissociation could grow more intense.

Nagoski also describes that, until the 1990s, much of our understanding of the female sexual response came from Masters and Johnson’s studies of women masturbating and having intercourse in a laboratory setting. We learned a lot about the stages of arousal. The psychoanalytic gold standard of vaginal orgasm was replaced by a fuller understanding of the importance of the clitoris. However, the bar for what is sexually normal for women was reset. Women began to worry about frigidity if enjoying sex in public or with strangers seemed out of reach.

Current research indicates that resonant sexual experience is connected with an individual's capacity to experience deep attachment comfortably. Sue Johnson writes about attachment style and both sexual motivation and satisfaction. She describes individuals with an avoidant attachment style as more likely to have what I term "sealed-off sex." The focus here is on one's own sensations. Sex is self-centered and self-affirming, a performance aimed at achieving climax and confirming one's own sexual skill. Those with more anxious attachment tend to have "solace sex", that is, to use sex as proof of how much they are loved. Sealed-off sex tends to be erotic but empty, while solace sex is soothing but unerotic. The most satisfying sex occurs when partners are securely attached.

It is important not to read the research as demonstrating the superiority of sexual experience in committed relationships. The studies Johnson quotes are about attachment style (avoidant, anxious, or secure) of the individuals involved, rather than the status of the liaison.

Conclusion: The Body Politic

Fortunately, #UsToo does not have to be the end of the story. Therapist and patient can come to understand times where emotional needs and cultural assumptions have woven together to create emotional cycles in the therapeutic dyad. Van der Kolk, Nagoski, and Johnson write about the possibility of building new neurological pathways. Attachment styles are mutable. There are a myriad of therapeutic, artistic, social, spiritual, and body-based ways to change the balance between emergency and background functioning. Both sexuality and a sense of self seem to regenerate when we feel grounded in our bodies and in our worlds.

Both globally and in this country, as we navigate our fractured cultural terrains, it seems important to approach each other with curiosity, caution, and respect. When theoretical orthodoxy has dominated the psychoanalytic space, people have suffered. Perhaps there is some hope in the possibility of drawing on the appreciation of depth and dignity that is foundational for a range of psychoanalytic, humanist, and religious traditions. ■

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Francesca Schwartz

City of Women

City of Women is an encounter with the confusion about what happens to a woman's body over her lifetime. We become divided subjects from the beginning — separated from the womb and ourselves in birth. Then the divided mind, now we become both subject and object, observer and the observed.

The female body is a mystery, as is the psyche. The house is the body and the body is the house. A woman's life is defined by her seasonality and whether she will be able to move forward as her body and life change. Women rely on each other; sometimes they are bound together in sisterhood, sometimes weighed down by responsibility, indebtedness, enslavement. They can travel in isolation; sometimes they move together. Their bodies are inscribed with markings; there is surrender to the fate of the body, destiny, death.

A woman's body is a meditation.

To read more visit: analytic-room.com/francesca-schwartz-city-of-woman



Homage to Frank O'Hara: Fire Island Tea Dance, Summer '78

by Kate Daniels

*To be idiomatic in a vacuum,
it is a shining thing!*

Frank O'Hara

i

This was back when sex was still mainly personal,
something reliable enough to transform random
moments, exciting as an uncapped glass of gasoline
in one hand and a lit match flickering in the other,
bumbling drunk down a rocky path in the dark . . .

It was the end time
of old time, old school, uncomplicated sex before
sex became political, before it was a "choice,"
before it was renamed "safe" and "unsafe,"
before it had starved itself down to late night
exercise for staving off boredom, before it
wrapped itself up as a goodbye gift to a long-
term partner, before it was as casual as saying
ciao, or who the hell *are* you, anyway,
or a pick-me-up for one's own pitiful self,
struggling through a tough patch at the office,
or moving, all but narcoleptic, through the endless
dooms of an aged parent's diminishing . . .

All those decades ago, you would have said,
it was spiritual. *Sex is spiritual. (Yes, that was you
back then.)* And thought of looking straight into a pair
of eyes at the all-important moment of climax
as the thrilling pinnacle of making love. Really, though,
all you could have meant, unleavened as you were,
was something mathematical, an uninformed
rave-up of randomness, two bodies coincidentally
colliding instead of sliding right past each other
in the vast nothingness you learned in "Existentialism
101" to call the Zero at the Center of It All.

Pretentious girl . . . How stubbornly you clung
to your English major's *cri de coeur*: that meaning
inherited in the tight forms straining in the heat of every
coupling was something you insisted on back then,
buttressing your argument with bawdy passages
from Whitman, and lines of Rilke. *Every angel
is terrifying*. So when your lover pushed you
roughly down on the floor of his parents' den,
and thrust himself inside you, uninvited, and covered
your cries with his hand, obliterating your plea
in the soft crush of a sofa cushion, afterwards you
cleaned up the blood, and rifled through your repertoire
of limited reactions and chose something "poetic."

The new soreness (*you told yourself*) was a wonder . . .

ii

Crossing over on the ferry to Fire Island Pines, the engines
thrum so hard up your thighs the raw tufts of your week-old
bikini wax tremble in their nest of tender skin, and you can feel
the new wound throbbing. It is calming somehow to pull out
the already dog-eared, thumb-up copy of Frank O'Hara's
Selected Poems, still almost new, and to run your fingers
along the pages' greasy selvage. Now *there* was a person
who understood sex, and had practiced his knowledge
on the island pattering into view. A long fringe of frilly
pines appears, wind-ruffled, like cut-off bangs, smearing
the clear space of a woman's forehead. You press yourself
back in the last seat on the top deck, shielding your eyes
with your hand because it's too bright, really, too bright
to see and because maybe, after all, you don't want to see—

The engine roars in reverse, then the ferry backs up weakly
paralleling the dock. You glimpse yourself: sole woman
in a clan of men. Not quailing, but shy, like a girl
who hides herself behind her thumb or hair.
Or a tensed-up coed, over conscious of her monthly
smell. Thus marked, you disembark in the narrow
weirdness of all one gender, and walk, zipped inside
that conformity, side by side but out of sync with your brothers,
tapping along the wooden planks to find your path.

iii

The plan was to lie naked on the beach—for the first
Time ever—researching the Male Gaze, establishing

The conditions necessary for stepping out
Of the loathsome self-awareness of the female

Gender. You hypothesized it might be as
Liberating as undoing a long-stuck zipper, freed

By lubricant, embracing the exuberant
Gushing as it rushes down, spilling open to

Occupy a space where there are no thieves . . .

*Is that even
possible?*

iv

Out there, on the ocean's shore, the hour of exposure
slouched round.

You had polished your jewels, and carefully curated
the exhibition. So you stepped down onto the beach,
and drew out the terry cloth towel, and flapped it
sharply in the air and spread it flat on hot sand.
As tenderly as if you were your own first lover,
you removed your clothes and lay down flat
to display yourself beneath the sun, plied open,
gritty bits of hot sand drifting deep inside
your magical crevices and your salty clefts,

waiting . . .

And nothing happened but the hot burning of sun
on exposed skin that had never felt a direct ray,
or been cooled by the salt spray of ocean waves
that infiltrated the hot air, relieving it slightly.

All around you, naked men
moved, rubbing lotions into each other, cupping
their hands to rearrange sweaty piles of male loins
uncomfortably swollen in the heat. How irrelevant
your own loins felt. How impersonal to be extracted,
excised from the mainstream text, then put back down,
sidelined in the margins of an encyclopedic volume
you'd never even read . . .

As if it were an outdoor laboratory dedicated
to the study of gender identity, or an open air
museum's solo show on the female self as some
old man's Muse: the beach obliterated received ideas.
The sun was impassive and objective. Purely scientific,
it sharpened its focus until it brought you into view
as the object of desire for no one but your Self—a thought
so radical you almost choked. Then old paradigms
fell apart, and new images churned to the surface:
Mind: a genderless cloud. *Body*: a rickety pile
of anthropomorphic sticks that's carried you about
all these years not caring if it wears a penis or vagina.

Enclosed in the bell jar of new blank space, go ahead
and claim for yourself a sand angel's queerness,
naked on the hot beach, winging both arms
to carve new boundaries—

v

The afternoon tea dance in the open air pavilion
is semi-raging when you enter—still solitary, still
female. Casual gazes greet you, then move on
quickly, neither dismissive nor predatory—nothing
more than one person taking casual note of another.

vi

Postscript: Dear Frank,
Thanks to you, *I am breathing the pure
Sphere* of freedom from The Gaze,
Here in the place where you perished
Authentic and queer to the very end.

THE FEMINIST FUTURE IS NONBINARY

“I should comment on your appearance but I don’t have the time.”

—Gloria Steinem to journalist Bill Beutel, *Eyewitness News*, 1971

by Catherine Baker-Pitts

I’m taken aback when Gloria Steinem, the “face of feminism,” announces on the *Today* show that she’s had “a little fat removed from above my eyes so I didn’t look like Mao Zedong.” Steinem is referring to the puffy-faced Chinese revolutionary who died in 1976, around the time when her model-thin figure was featured on a Manhattan billboard, erected by antagonists intent on reducing Steinem to her body.

With Steinem’s nod to Western capitalist culture, does she fear that the US feminist movement she’s represented will falter and become irrelevant if she shows her age? Or does she believe that talking openly about cosmetic surgery will make her more relatable to the masses? Backed by her so-called choice, her message is clear: masking serious acumen and political heft — “womanliness as a masquerade” (Riviere 1929) — is key to this feminist icon’s cultural viability. Steinem’s endorsement of a surgical lift — especially if it can “buy you twenty years in the public eye” — rattles me. As I step out my front door, I feel like I’ve lost a feminist compass. I’m instantly less confident in both my body and my feminist role model.

And then I consider how I’ve really been let down by Gloria Steinem. She insists that feminists grow more radical with age, and yet she’s been slow to embrace gender diversity. In a keynote address in 2015, Steinem erringly called attention to the “male privilege” of trans women who had lived at least part of their lives in their natal sexed bodies and assigned genders.

Steinem’s transphobic perspective, echoing one strand of a multivocal feminism (Enke 2018), rings of a violent, exclusionary his-

torical politic that perceives trans women as interlopers; this view also entirely misses the cumulative gender trauma of nonrecognition. Terri Fierce, a black thirty-four-year-old trans woman I interviewed in New York City, explains, “For many years, not being seen by my mother left a void and I cried. I was depressed because I’m thinking, ‘I need my mother’s love and affection. But she can’t even see who I am. If she could just erase me, she would.’” Terri was clear about her gender identity before she was out of diapers but felt misunderstood by a society intent on coupling her genitals with her gender. “I knew that I was just a person who was assigned the wrong gender at birth. My body isn’t wrong. I wasn’t born in the wrong body. It’s just the labels put on my genitalia. Nobody should ask me if I was born a male, because I’ve always known who I am. I am female.” As a child, Terri was treated as a girly boy; she didn’t feel any sense of male privilege.

An aura of skepticism around gender creativity and transition highlights an enduring double standard: so long as a surgical intervention enhances a cisgender body, it is deemed normative and even superficial, but when a transgender subject is involved, the body is contested, the intervention is viewed as major, and the psyche undergoes scrutiny. Regarding transgender surgery, Steinem’s position that society’s conceptions of gender should change, not the actual body, expects trans women to shun body interventions or justify them as a cure for dysphoria, while cis women parade their invasive beauty practices as a form of self-improvement. Embracing femininity is not simply oppressive or trivial to cis or trans women, trans-bi writer Julia Serano (2013) asserts, but can be a vital part

of self-expression. A surgical transition can be an essential, therapeutic, even corrective and life-saving medical intervention. It can also afford necessary protection against violence perpetrated on transgender and gender nonbinary people.

Fierce explains,

What is considered feminine is so restrictive for everyone, but when people are staring at your big hands or facial hair—and assume those are male traits—you learn to be “on point.” To be a woman is expensive, because you’ve got the makeup, the clothes, the hair and nails, the boobs. I’ve got to look feminine all the time because trans women are getting murdered. I’m really unhappy with people who are half stepping, meaning if you are not going to go all the way in your grooming, then don’t go halfway, because society is always looking. It’s a full-time job dealing with the harassment of people trying to sort me.

A transfeminist lens prompts critical questions, such as how do any of us explore our multigendered selves in a climate hostile to gender-nonconforming bodies? What’s required emotionally to step outside of a gender binary, to uglify as well as to beautify, to subvert rather than comply with restrictive categories and gender expectations? How do the politics of access influence surgical consumption? Whose business are the emotional outcomes of body-altering pursuits, and is happiness even the point? (Chu 2018) If a fuller spectrum of gender expressions, queer embodiments, illegible identities, and body sizes were recognized as legitimate, how might conceptions of cosmetic surgery — and beauty — change?

Many of my fortysomething cisgender contemporaries don’t question any part of elective surgery. On the hunt for Botox bargains, they regard negativity about cosmetic surgery as crunchy, and the idea of growing old gracefully and with wrinkles as old-fashioned, if not an oxymoron. They’ve adopted a brand of female empowerment endorsed by the perennially young actress Susan Sarandon who, in 2016, a decade after she had eye work done, shared her thoughts on cosmetic surgery: “I think women should do whatever they want to do.” With these peers, I feel clear boundaries around choices and a total freedom from judgment, as though each of us is only responsible for our own neoliberal selves and not each other. Choice and self-determination around reproduction and parenting, careers, gender identity, and body interventions are regarded as inherited rights. They fight for financial independence and fierce autonomy, but their stylized bodies convey a spirit of conformity with bourgeois society, uncritical as they are to intersecting systems of white, cis, and economic privilege. (Layton 2004)

Maggie Collins is one of these peers who welcomed me on her makeover journey. At dinner one night, I notice bright red marks across the tops of Maggie’s delicate hands, the effect of intentional burning by a laser that will “rejuvenate” her hands, she tells me. When I’m with Maggie, I do not dwell comfortably in my own skin. I feel far more aware of my physical imperfections and the interventions available to me for “fixing” them. She is what Andi Zeisler (2016) calls a “marketplace feminist,” someone invested in the illusion of free choice, who seeks individual solutions to personal uplift, often in the form of purchases.

On a recent crisp day, as I study the fine wrinkles on the sunlit face of my sixty-eight-year-old friend, I feel a sort of calm inspiration to do nothing, to grieve losses and disappointments, and to accept my declining body. I appreciate that living from within my body and the expansiveness of my gender are achievements that can shift sharply depending on the face I’m peering into. My feminist elders’ objections to cosmetic surgery are not only deeply held beliefs from within; they feel obligated to one another to protest elective self-cuts, which they see as an extreme point on a continuum of social control and gendered violence. The potential for social transformation, in their view, is contingent on feminist solidarity — not on individual empowerment through bodywork. This generation of feminism, however, is stymied to the extent that it does not fully support change and transition, including the trans movement.

Feminism is not a blueprint for personal conduct, Susan Bordo (2009) cautions. The old, prized standard of “authenticity” no longer distinguishes feminists from non-feminists; minds are not isolated, biology is not sacrosanct, and the culture always seeps in. I won’t be donning Katy Perry’s pink stilettos, even if they were named after Hillary Clinton, but I applaud feminism’s aesthetic range. If a movement for gender parity evolves so that it is not a crumbling empire, like communism in China, feminists need to be freed from a police state of body monitoring. Patriarchy is perpetuated by divisions among people who most need social change, after all.

And feminists need to move beyond a totalizing perspective of women as a class denied inherent rights and subjectivity and get behind an intersectional agenda that is less invested in the category of woman and instead foregrounds justice for the people most oppressed by white supremacy: poor, gay, trans, and gender nonconforming people of color. The trans movement threatens the cis woman’s claim of gender oppression, built on the fight against patriarchy, which rests on a binary assumption, whose corollary is the so-called matriarch.

As nationalism lurks, the insistence on “pure” gendered bathrooms has as much to do with the projection of despised or feared parts of oneself onto the hated other as it does with the deep insecurity and identity crisis fostered by the disposability of not only older women with wrinkles, but of anyone who has failed at the American Dream and feels displaced. The virtue of purity — whether regarding sex, gender, or a body untouched by cosmetic surgery — is accepted as anachronistic outside of biological determinism, and yet this moralism still undergirds feminist attacks and defenses. An embrace of multiplicity, contradiction, flexibility, and curiosity, more than a striving for commonality, requires a tolerance for anxieties that any of us is bound to encounter when we dig deep within our own raced, classed, gendered complexities and interface with an other, whether a Gloria, a Terri, or a Maggie.

After I absorb the initial punch I felt at Gloria’s disclosure of cosmetic surgery, I appreciate that cosmetic compliance does not preclude fighting against transphobia and gender hierarchies. Modern-day feminists insist that how we live in our bodies and experience gender is as idiosyncratic as it is political. (Stryker, 2017) Decades ago, trans pioneer Sandy Stone referred to the engaged life as one marked by continual transformation. Changing with the times is progressive; Jane Fonda (who once shared that she wishes she’d been “brave” enough to opt out of cosmetic work) affirms: “Any healthy country, like any healthy individual, should be in perpetual revolution, perpetual change.”

To the extent that we are all always already entrapped in a power system, Gloria Steinem’s eye lift signals a willingness to flex with a culture in transition, but her elective surgery is also a concession based on a limited view of femininity. With so much reworking of the social body still to do, to focus on Gloria Steinem’s cosmetic work is surely a distraction and, as she asserted long ago, a waste of time. ■

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A LESBIAN

LEANS IN

by Ellen Marakowitz

At the 2019 Oscars, *Period. End of Sentence* won the Oscar for Best Documentary Short. The film, about fighting stigma against menstruation in rural India, marked the first time a film about menstruation made it to the Oscars stage.

Menstruation had taken the stage, front and center.

For at least an instant, Oscar viewers were faced with the reality of girls, and women's bodies — bodies that bleed and, concurrent with that, bodies that can become pregnant and produce children.

This led me to think about heterosexuality and reproduction and how these two things, marked as normative and natural, and legible and conscious, have not been sufficiently and steadily problematized in terms of understanding why heterosexuality is the dominant paradigm. Even with powerful movement in the LGBTQ and trans communities, there is still an assumption that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are the baseline through which other sexualities are compared. In particular, I believe that lesbian sexuality and reproduction are often invisible.

Women reside in the frame of heterosexuality in several ways. They are understood to be the object of men's desire and as such need to project a femininity that is alluring and attractive but not threatening. Cultural norms, even in the multitude of different iterations across cultures, reflect this view through different prisms. Women's bodies also produce and bear children; this messy process may be valorized or condemned depending on the social context and nationalist neonatal policies. Gender injustices have been taken up by feminist movements, in various eras and across the world. Women have been at the forefront of the struggle for reproductive rights — the ability to choose when and if to have children, although clearly these rights/freedoms are not equally available to women because of disparities in access to healthcare due to class, race, and other factors.

Even with the issue of rape, the idea that it is most typically a "heterosexual" act (of course not all is) just gets lost in the discussion. Rape is often described as belonging to the realm of violence and aggression — sexual in nature

absolutely, but the aspect of rape as a sexual act becomes elided as the focus turns to the violence. Particularly when weaponized in the context of war, the pregnancies

that may result from the rape produce long-term pain for impacted women but are still somehow undertheorized.

Why, though, do we not take a step back and ask *How is it that we don't question how rape came to be "normalized" as a weapon?*

To be sure, there have been those who have questioned the "naturalness" of heterosexuality, but their arguments and essays have often been regarded as part of a dangerous, radical, separatist lesbian attack. I suspect that this may be part of the reason that questioning the naturalness of heterosexuality has not always had staying power. In fact, in a certain way, even the framing of the LGBTQ and trans movements as part of an individual expression of self is less politically radical than challenging heterosexuality as part of a larger system of women's oppression. A look at some of the attempts to investigate this are illustrative.

In 1980, Adrienne Rich published an essay on what she termed "compulsory heterosexuality." Rich argued that heterosexuality was a political institution that disempowers women.

The very nature of the heterosexual bond included various forms of control over women, including economic dependence, forced heterosexual sex, and control over women's reproductive freedom. She countered the assumption that heterosexuality is always a women's preference by arguing that the reason men had to use these controls was that it was the only way to guarantee that women would actually be available to them. Heterosexuality had to be, in effect, mandated and forced.

This left readers with the fearful possibility that lesbianism was, in fact, the more natural choice for women, involving sexuality as well as emotional and psychological attachments.

Taking on the question of the naturalness of heterosexuality from another perspective, Gayle Rubin, a social anthropologist, wrote a piece exploring how biological sexuality gets transformed through a social system of male dominance. (1979)

Rubin considers the implications of Levi-Strass's work that argued that the exchange of women as gifts in kinship systems was necessary for the political-economic system to work. The gift of a daughter to another man allowed for, among other things, the formation of kinship ties (including children) and the transfer of "sexual access." This was a guarantee for the men, not a choice of the women.

Kinship systems require a division of the sexes in a system where the female holds less power.

Compulsory heterosexuality
is the product of kinship.
Rubin provides more evidence
of the compulsory nature
of heterosexuality through a consideration
of Freud's articulation of the Oedipal phase,
wherein a division of the sexes
(with women the less powerful) is necessary
as a way to create heterosexual desire.

In both Rubin and Rich,
we see the radical case being made
that heterosexuality as the "norm"
has only become such through
a gender/political system that forces
it upon women. The truly radical nature
of this argument,
where at the very least being a lesbian
was possible — in direct opposition
to the prevalence of male power —
became erased through the dismissal
of radical lesbianism and the disparagement
of "women who hated men."

In addition, there was another fear
that lesbians would not be fulfilling
women's roles as reproducers.
On a side note, this sense of the inability
of lesbians to reproduce was pointed
out to me in a very funny way
when I was very noticeably pregnant over
twenty years ago and out as a lesbian.
I had more than a few people ask me,
"So, who is the mother?" When I said,
"I am," they would ask again,
"No, really, who is the mother?" I repeated,
"It's me." Finally, in exasperation, the person
would say, "I mean, who is the biological
mother?" Finally, when I said, "It's me,"
they got it. It was not within the realm
of imagination. I was tempted to write
an article, "Lesbians don't have ovaries
— but somehow they reproduce."

In particular, lesbians who do not ascribe
to notions of femininity — even within
the lesbian community there is not much
room anymore for butch dykes —
get thought of less as disruptors
of the system and more like outsiders to it.
It is a much more comfortable position
to view lesbianism as one form
of sexuality, rather than a radical challenge
to heterosexuality. Although there
is still an *L* in LGBTQ, the use of *queer*
to include different forms of sexuality
(sometimes even heterosexually identified
individuals) serves to erase,
on some level, the frightening argument
that, for women, compulsory heterosexuality
is part of a larger system that assures
that women are in a less powerful position. ■



Photograph by Elyssa Fahndrich

In my academic, artistic, as well as curatorial practices, I have explored the question of how we produce and transmit knowledge across different, often unexpected, media. In this short essay, I will share my observations of similarities between psychoanalysis and artistic practices that move away for logocentric to performative knowledge, from truth as form to truth as event. I would suggest that psychoanalysis, like art, breaks from the hegemonic, hierarchical model of knowledge based on the patriarchal/masculine and moves toward more open, fluid, and networked forms of thinking, as well as producing and transmitting knowledge and meaning. We can position this model of thinking as feminine — in a wide understanding of femininity that goes beyond simple binary distinctions. Here, performativity is key: how certain concepts, feelings, and desires around identities are enacted and what effects these enactments produce in the world.

Namely, for centuries, we have been taught to decouple body from thought in what we can call a “masculine patriarchal model of thinking.” In modern times, colonialism connected the concepts of knowledge and science with the authority of power and race by establishing the hegemony of a Western (Eurocentric) model of knowledge as the only valid one. This hegemony has survived the historic colonialism and maintained till present day.

In the Western academic tradition, knowledge has been historically connected to literacy and the medium of the written word. Logocentric thought depends on technologies of books, chairs, and desks. Rodin’s *The Thinker* offers a figure of the *vita contemplativa*, the life of contemplating abstract, frozen ideas. But what if the thinker were to stand up, walk, run, dance, and lounge around? And what if this figure were a female thinker?

For too long, positions of knowledge and power have been dominated by men. Despite improvements over the last century, women still struggle to take their place at lecterns

occupied by men. Connected to this problem is another one: Why is the Western hegemonic model the model that we recognize as legitimate knowledge? What about other knowledge and other epistemologies? In contrast with the rational, universal, and objective traditionally associated with the masculine, both the feminine and non-Western have been historically linked to the sensual and experiential, to the occult, magical, and spiritual.

What about other knowledge and other epistemologies that have been subjugated to the West’s colonial epistemic violence, leaving embodied knowledge and entire lifeworlds pushed aside by the knowledge and power of logocentrism? With such questions in mind, the female thinker as Other appears not only as a new actor/agent, but also as a carrier of the different kind of knowledge.

Her knowledge is situated knowledge: the content is inseparable from the agency of knowledge producer. It is the knowledge of performance, art, and, as I have come to realize, psychoanalysis.

This paradigm shift in the ways we communicate knowledge can be understood as a shift from literal to figural. In my artistic and academic practice, I’ve found that one great way to perform and articulate this shift is through THOUGHT ACTION FIGURES (TAFs)¹. TAFs are figures of thought as well as concrete objects that allow us to transform and perform ideas, concepts, and knowledge across different media and in variety of forms. They are not limited to human figures: animals, plants, machines, processes, materialities, ideal entities are all becoming TAFfy, which are sticky networks of concrete associations formed by chance and necessity

in order to gather and disperse thoughts and actions at specific times and places. TAFs are always created in relation, and they always produce meaning: that is what distinguishes them from simple objects. These relations are multiple, fluid, networked, transversal, and always in motion.

They are often instrumental in activist² and especially activist movements. For example, pussy hats emerged as a collective critical-co-creative act in January 2017, when they were created and worn by tens of thousands of protesters at Women’s Marches across America — women, men, children, cops, and even a Donald Trump bobblehead wore them. Like all TAFs, pussy hats are overdetermined and serve many functions; they are symbols against sexual abuse and violence, against Trump, and against the underlying patriarchy and phallogentrism. As important:

6.19.10

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE ART: GO FIGURE!

by Aneta Stojnić

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pussy hats are displays of feminine power and collectivism. They make the personal political and the political personal by making pussies visible and audible. The hats’ bright color connects pink pussies to the pink triangles of ACT UP activists and gays in Nazi concentration camps. Their name and very shape queers the stereotype of “catty women,” of women who exhibit subtle or outright aggression to others. As knitted garments, pussy hats also gather threads from recent theorizations of female genitalia as figures of postphallic thought. Julia Kristeva recast *chora*, the Greek nonspace, as vagina. Luce Irigaray theorized the “two lips” that touch each other in feminine ecriture. And Jacques Derrida posed the hymen as an alternative to castration. Then there’s the cliteracy of conceptual artist Sophia Wallace, with its TAF affirming their own self-difference and alterity. They thus violate Aristotle’s principle of identity: X may or may not be equal to X. Figures can be criticized, but they make such critique part of their figuration.

Another example of feminine TAF is a mash-up of freedom fighters, great apes, and feminist artists: the Guerrilla Girls, whose performances, books, and posters have targeted sexism and racism in the art world. Wearing their trademark masks, the Guerrilla Girls embody TAFs in many ways, especially their use of research, collaboration, anonymity, and pointed humor. As they say on one of their gift bags sold in museum gift shops: “You won’t believe what comes out of your mouth when you’re wearing a gorilla mask!”

Put differently: Why couldn’t thinking become pinking?

When I stepped from art into psychoanalysis, it became clear to me that [these two practices connect on the level of performance](#). Like art but unlike academic disciplines, psychoanalysis escapes the logocentric, hierarchical model of thinking, and fosters more inclusive, horizontal, and feminine forms of thought. Here, performance occurs in nonverbal communication, unconscious communica-

tion, transference enactments, as well as processes of symbolization. Such performance is obviously present in play therapy through the use of toys, objects, and living bodies that figure different elements of psychic reality. Such figuration also occurs in art therapy, psychodrama, and related techniques. In all these performances, from the classical analytic situation to less traditional formats, thought is put into action. In the exchange between analyst and analysand, TAFs (visible or imagined) come to life.

French philosopher Jean François Lyotard — influenced by and in response to Jacques Lacan — distinguished between discourse (related to text) and figure (related to sensual experiences, such as seeing). By connecting the figural to psychoanalysis and art, Lyotard opened up the possibility of thinking the figural as that which transcends and escapes the textual in a wider sense. The sensual figure does not dominate the logocentric text; rather, they must necessarily supplement one another if we want to escape the logocentric paradigm. Lyotard’s understanding of figuration directly emerges from Freud’s theory of libido. He argues that libidinal energy (which is for Lyotard figural) can be used as “theoretical fiction” to explain political, social, and cultural phenomena in the world.

In psychoanalytic terms, one way to understand TAFs is as the figures of the unconscious. This means that they are symbolic carriers of meaning, vehicles through the unspeakable become visible. Like TAFs, the unconscious is timeless; it knows no contractions and no negation; it is only guided by pleasure principle. Its contents are drive representatives that seek to discharge their cathexis through primary psychic processes: condensation and displacement. It was Freud who articulated those processes:

“By the process of displacement, one idea may surrender to another its whole quota of cathexis; by the process of condensation, it may appropriate the whole cathexis of several other ideas.”

Let’s see what happens if we try this again, but in a figural way:

“By the process of displacement, one thought action figure may surrender to another its whole quota of cathexis; by the process of condensation, it may appropriate the whole cathexis of several other thought action figures.”

We can also understand the analytic couch as a TAF, one that generates other TAFs. Such a couch functions as a reclined matrix for accessing unconscious thoughts and generating utterances comprehensible to the conscious. Being on the couch and working through figures of thought is the ultimate way to access the psyche’s unknown depths. There is something profoundly performative about “the frame”: analyst is sitting behind a couch, visual field is canceled, the only rule is to say everything that comes to mind. Freud’s “talking cure” may sound logocentric, but the interpretation machine is not so simple. In the frame, the analyst herself becomes a thought-action figure; in the transference that unfolds in the room, she can become everything and anything — everyone and anyone. Rather than the old metaphor of a neutral screen, the analyst becomes an interface, a shamanic figure that walks with you through the cosmogony of your many personal thought actions. This form of “figuring out” moves toward transversality and trans-mediation of thought, free from the fictionalized binary strictures in psychoanalysis that approaches a (highly structured) form of art. ■

¹TAF’s is an original concept developed by McKenzie Stojnić (Jon McKenzie and Aneta Stojnić) in a series of lecture-performances, comics, videos, talks, publications, workshops etc.

²Activism is a concept that combines art and activism e.i. describes forms of political art that directly engaged with the social and cultural context in which they are performed.

of both conscious and unconscious processes, available through our dreams, that offers a space of reflection born of an understanding of the images that flow from the unconscious.

Currently trauma is defined less in terms of the personal (the individual) and more in terms of the collective (the social-political) with its potentially insidious soul-destroying qualities. This is Maria Root's concept of everyday or "insidious trauma." Root here is referring to the "traumatogenic effects of oppression," racism, marginalization, and hegemony. These are the psychological assaults (micro- and macro-abrasions) which "are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at a given moment, but rather do violence to the soul and spirit."¹

Presently, psychoanalysts recognize the resulting condition of psychic paralysis that exists in an individual exposed to collective psychic trauma. Such individuals are said to have a psyche colonized by collective and colonial imperatives, including the internalized attitudes of cultural inferiority.² This internalization often entails "the loss of an unnamable domain...which one might... mistake for constitutional exile."³

Constitutional exile (the feeling of being set adrift, disoriented, and disconnected from oneself) produces one of the most damaging aspects of psychic trauma. This is the loss of a connection to one's interiority and access to a creative unconscious that can provide the psychic space for the reparation and reconstitution of internal processes impacted by trauma. The result is a devastating inhibition in the growth of awareness of the extent of the psychic injury and, above all, a loss of a linking to one's autonomy and agency that could provide the psychic space for repair.

In addition to advocating for social change, many schools of psychoanalysis emphasize the power of the unconscious in the healing of a socially traumatized psyche. Some point to dreams for bringing a more detailed map of the psychic territory impacted by the trauma and exposing the linkages to other vulnerable places within the individual. In this context, Jung offers what he terms "the Spirit of the Depths,"⁴ an aspect of psyche composed

of this force, according to Jung, that offers the vision to unshackle both an individual life and also provides the symbols that offer recovery from the impact of a culture that may be tumultuous, disorienting, and assaultive to its members' autonomy. These kinds of dreams can prove fertile for the personality, enabling it to move creatively forward, reacquiring or transforming inadvertently overlooked parts of the self, and linking them to those encapsulated by the trauma.

It follows that our dreams, once embraced, can provide one way that we can return from a place of exile, homelessness, rootlessness, and powerlessness, and help reinstate the inalienable rights denied by a corrosive society. Our dreams can offer us entrance into the psychic space that we can call home — a home that offers acquaintance with what is essentially ours, initiating autonomy from what has been destructively imposed. Freedom, redemption, depth of feeling, and understanding of the world around us, and ourselves, are intimately connected to keeping the door ajar to this psychic space.

6.19.11

REVISITING A DREAM

by Joan Golden-Alexis

There are some dreams that appear to be specifically commenting on the “Spirit of the Times” — the impact of the social context — the collective — and at the same time seem to be commenting on the personal. These dreams offer the special gift of shedding light on the distinction between the personal and the political (and their juncture), giving insight to their linkage, and their impact on each other.

I have termed this type of dream “dreams at the interface.” Although not all dreams prompt a feeling that they are commenting on the “Spirit of the Times” as well as personal complexes and issues of the individual dreamer, Lama Z. Khouri, in her poignant essay “Buried Neck Deep” in *Room 10.18.5*⁵ offers just such a dream and gives us the opportunity to study the link between the personal and political in some detail.

As we explore Khouri’s dream, we will see how the personal and political have interacted to produce her current experience. The dream itself, with its message understood, can help her restore generativity and choice in her psyche, a psyche that she describes as impacted through her identification as a Palestinian (a people both colonized and abandoned by other Arab countries, their plight overlooked) and having a profound emotional connection to and understanding of the people of a village in Gaza symbolically (and literally) described by her as an “open-air prison.”

It is almost impossible not to pause as one attempts to absorb the catastrophic and emotive power of the image, which is center stage in Khouri’s dream, dreamed twelve years ago, when her son was age four, and now again is rising to consciousness. It seems that such an image can only emerge from a psyche that has had the primary experience of, and in addition been a primary witness to, the insidious traumatogenic power of oppression. The dream imagery carries forward to her consciousness and ours the soul-destroying aspects of collective trauma.

However, it is important to note that dreams rarely restate what the dreamer already knows; their gift is always to be our most informing friend, constantly surprising, urging us to notice shadow aspects of our psyche, existing in the darkened areas of our psyche. Focusing on these areas clarifies linkages and assumptions that may give us the capacity to unlock doors to internally and externally constructed prisons.

It is this aspect of Khouri’s dream that we look to for the vision to unshackle her personal complexes and issues that have arisen in relationship to her collective experience of trauma. These personal issues can be just as catastrophic and immobilizing left unnoticed as the original collective psychic trauma. In addition, when the collective and personal aspects of the trauma are not sorted, their interaction can dramatically intensify psychic pain.

In addition, when such a powerful dream image rises to the surface of consciousness yet a second time, it carries the suggestion that there must be something important that Khouri needs to notice. Perhaps it might possess the quality of the “unthought known” of Christopher Bollas⁶, a “thought” that is existent in one’s psyche, but its poignant and transformational power makes it impossible to process.

Khouri writes:

lately, a dream I had twelve years ago has been coming back to me. I dreamt that my four-year-old son (he’s sixteen now) was buried neck deep in the middle of a neighborhood and surrounded by modest houses. **Passersby would kick his face, but he remained silent, as if the kicks were part of life and not to be contested — as if, to survive, he needed to keep his mouth shut.**

She explains:

This dream has had many meanings for me. Twelve years ago, I thought my four-year-old son in the dream was me: buried in a failed marriage with nowhere to go. Of late, my son in the dream has become the Palestinian people: **“You either capitulate or we will continue to beat you to the ground.”** Their struggle for freedom is terrorism, children throwing rocks are arrested or killed, many young adults have no hope.

Although many of the assumptions and images in the dream may seem resonant to and even a result of living intimately connected to a colonized nation, it is important to note that there are many assumptions in the dream that are stated as “just so” aspects of life, and it may be those that the dream seems to be opening up for consideration and questioning. I have noted these in bold above.

Are kicks in the face part of life and not to be contested? The dream figure acts “as if” this is true. He acts **as if to survive, he needs to keep his mouth shut**. Is it true that, in order to survive, one must remain silent?

Khouri says, at first, she thought the dream image was her, buried in a failed marriage with no place to go. However, one can be buried in a failed marriage without being silenced and kicked in the face, and one can be in a failed marriage without being buried neck deep in the ground with no efficacy, no motility other than the voice.

She says later that she felt the dream image reflected the reality of the Palestinian people. However, one can be oppressed, harassed, socially imprisoned, and impacted by the Israelis’ abuse without assuming kicks are part of life and not to be contested, or without assuming that abuse is normal.

Most centrally, one can be in an oppressive marriage and/or oppressed by an aggressive nation and still not decide that, in order to survive, one must keep their mouth shut. The dream describes a certain conscious orientation to reality, certain assumptions about life, and what one needs to do in order to survive, and it shows the dream figure “buried up to the neck” in these assumptions, immobilized by them. It appears to me that it is these assumptions that allow the dream figure no wiggle room, and that it may be these assumptions, left unquestioned, that have accumulated to construct his open-air prison.

It appears that it is not the collective trauma itself that has destroyed the dream figure’s power and autonomy. Rather, it is these assumptions about life that has the dream figure catastrophically and hopelessly mired. The dream figure has no wiggle room in

relation to the assumption that abuse is a normal part of life, that there is a normal and natural connection between abuse and the inability to act, that the connection between abuse and silent acceptance is normal, and that silence and immobility are the only survival techniques. Above all, the dream appears to be attempting to bring to the consciousness of the dreamer a new option — the possibility of questioning the wholesale truth of the powerful phrase — “You either capitulate or we will beat you to the ground.” It appears that the dream is here now, as well as twelve years ago, and is remembered to continue its dialogue with her. The dream specifically throws light on these assumptions and opens them up to reflection.

Khouri concludes her essay with this thought:

It is not enough for me to hold and contain the client’s pain. I need to do what I can to change their sociopolitical environment.

Impacted by the powerful image in her dream, I would also add that Khouri may notice dream images of her clients or thoughts and associations that demonstrate personal vulnerabilities and narratives and that exist in their personal psyche in relationship to a larger collective trauma. Bringing these to consciousness, differentiating the power imposed from the outside, from the power given to the outside through internal personal assumptions and personal narratives, giving the link between the two heat, focus, and conscious reflection, may bring these “just so” assumptions to awareness and create a greater inner sense of personal choice for her clients. ■

⁽¹⁾ L.S. Brown, “Not outside the range: one feminist perspective on psychic trauma.” In C. Caruth (Ed.) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 1995) 107.

⁽²⁾ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2008).

⁽³⁾ Julia Kristeva, (Leon S. Roudiez, Trans.) *Powers of Horror; An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁽⁴⁾ Carl Jung, “Liber Primus,” *The Red Book* (New York and London, W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 241.

⁽⁵⁾ [ROOM 18.5: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action](#). (2018)

⁽⁶⁾ Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1987).



According to a [November 2017 United Nations Development Program Report](#), Latin America has the highest rate in the world of gender-based sexual violence against women, and in Central America two of every three women killed are victims of femicide, while the [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) found that on average twelve women are murdered a day across the region. The acceptance of violence against women is linked to the culture of machismo in Latin America; a [recent report](#) by Oxfam surveyed young people aged fifteen to twenty-five from eight Latin American and Caribbean countries and found that machismo is tolerated by many young people in the region, with 86% of the young people surveyed believing their friends would not intervene if a friend hit his girlfriend. This normalization of violence against women has grave consequences for women and girls.

As a psychoanalyst practicing in Mexico City, I have been thinking, writing and researching for decades about the unfathomable phenomenon of feminicide. The cultural, sociological, political, and economic complexities that have contributed to the killing of women are, I believe, intrinsically tied to the fundamental ideology of machismo.

The roots of my country’s machismo lie in the trauma of the sixteenth century Spanish conquest: the forced evangelization of the Indian population and the rape of indigenous women by the white-skinned conquerors who did not legitimize their mestizo children. An idealized female gender stereotype was patterned on the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico, whose legendary apparition and cult date from that time. The Virgin of Guadalupe represents the self-sacrificial, docile, sweet, understanding woman — a Madonna who unconditionally fulfills all the male’s needs and expectations.

Two contrasting and negative female images also date from the sixteenth century. One, Malinche, an Aztec woman sold into slavery, was Cortes’s “too willing” mistress, informant, and translator. She has come to symbolize the whore, the traitor, a sexual thing who must unconditionally satisfy male sexual needs. According to Octavio Paz, she is “la Chingada,” the raped mother “forcibly opened, violated, and deceived,” an enduring symbol of female physical and emotional vulnerability: she who bears children in a cloud of shame and sin.

A second symbol of female depravity is “La Llorona,” who, according to sixteenth-century legend, was abandoned by her lover and, grief stricken, murders her children. In contrast to the Madonna of Guadalupe, these women fail to fulfill the conventional roles of wife and mother.

Carlos Fuentes wrote that “the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe saves Mexican men from the fear of being sons of a whore and instead permits them to see themselves as the sons of a pure and enshrined mother.” Other authors have suggested that macho dominance is based on deep male distrust of the weak, treacherous mother and the son’s need to undo her deficiencies by henceforth controlling and dominating all the women in his life.

How can we, as analysts, wrap our minds and hearts around these contradictory and disturbing ideas? Perhaps I can add to the understanding of the aforementioned poets and writers by describing a seventeen-year-long analytic treatment I conducted with a man who hated women. We both felt, during this treatment, that we had gone through hell.

A single man in his thirties and the only child of an upper-class rich professional couple, my patient requested treatment because of passivity, lack of productivity, and feelings of inferiority when he compared himself to his peers. He was also unable to sustain an intimate relationship with a woman. But the central target of his frustration was his daughter, who failed to cater to him in a way that would parallel how he catered to his sexually invasive mother.

6.19.12

A MAN WHO HATES WOMEN

by Raquel Berman

Through her seduction, manipulation, and stimulation of the patient’s omnipotence, his mother had incited the feeling in him that she had no other in the world but him. She complained bitterly about her macho husband, the patient’s father, and her in-laws too, and if the patient did not agree with her, he felt he was a traitor. On the other hand, he was forbidden to openly defend his mother by voicing her complaints to father. Hiding what his mother told him made him, at the same time, a traitor to his father. By talking he could be instrumental to the parents’ fantasized divorce, which he felt would constitute a catastrophe for him. At the same time, since childhood, he had fantasized that, in the event of the parents’ divorce, he would wish to stay with his father and avoid his mother’s fragility.

Initially in treatment, the patient played the victim, someone with whom I should commiserate. At other times, he played my confidante, unconditionally

in agreement with me as if he were in charge of my well-being and had to protect me. He acted as if I were at risk of disintegrating. He was caught by contradictory feeling states, wishing to denounce me and fearing my revenge, while offering me slavish loyalty for which he expected to be repaid with eternal protection. He equated my punctuality with complete availability. Yet for years, he complained that I didn’t like him enough because there were no “signs of affection,” this referring to my lack of seductiveness toward him. In clarifying his demands and complaints toward me in the transference, it became possible to appreciate his unconscious invasive and incestuous proclivities toward his daughter.

He experienced our relationship like the reunion of two individuals hiding in a subterranean bunker, hidden from the perils of the outside world — a fantasy of total protection, exclusivity, and well-being. This blissful picture, he recognized over time, hid within it a picture of two mutually scared beings, panicked and fused together. Accompanying this were feelings of sterility, vulnerability, helplessness, and decay.

He experienced my interpretations as attacks. He compliantly listened to them, then undid them, forgot them, and never took them in. His intense contempt for me as a woman was covered up by the double-talk of an obedient, helpful, and seductive patient. His façade of a nice, friendly, socialized person was a mask he presented to the world. The world did not see his tantrums, rage, and hate.

As he became more conscious of his dependence on me, his fears of being at the mercy of the bad mother, feeling annulled by her devouring needs and demands and incapable of escape from her orbit were reactivated. He displaced these fears onto his female partner. Her sexual desire for him provoked a core conflict that evoked childhood and adolescent experiences with mother. He felt sexually attracted to his partner, yet angry because, according to him, she was imposing her will on and depleting him. He experienced his sexual response to her as an act of compliance and self-cancellation.

Sadomasochistic enactments, based on similar dynamics, also went on for years between the two of us in treatment. For example, due to

devaluations of the peso, I had to, from time to time, negotiate an increased fee. He felt impotent in such dealings with me yet demanded that I decide on the fee unilaterally, so he could submit to it without having to think about the matter.

When, in the middle phase of treatment, I told this patient that his life was organized around hate scenarios, he agreed fully and, for the first time in his life, began to talk in detail about them. They had always been conscious but had been suppressed and hidden behind a nice guy façade. For a long time, he enacted with his dog a series of sadistic acts in which he played both the victimized dog and the sadistic aggressor. When driving, he felt death wishes toward bypassers, other drivers, but especially women. In the sexual arena, the focus of his suffering shifted from premature ejaculation to anxiety-laden fantasies of being replaced by another man. His dreams were filled with fights and killings. He enjoyed and felt excited by movies with rape scenes and gang killings.

Working through some of the trauma he had experienced in relationship with his mother yielded to his experiencing me as someone distant, indifferent, disdainful, contemptuous, superior, and dominant. He fantasized being homosexually raped — penetrated and desired — but felt afraid of his desires. His love for his father had been diminished by the father’s demeaning and ridiculing attitude. Similarly, his capacity to identify with his father was tainted by envy of father’s power, autonomy, productivity, and the patient’s own certainty that he was a loser.

It was the aforementioned envy, displaced onto me, that partly accounted for the patient’s difficulty in making my interpretations his own and using them for his benefit. He found it useless to fight, oppose, protest, or express anger toward me because, in the end, he would lose to me as he always did to his father. This reinforced his passivity and low self-esteem. Analysis of these feelings toward me allowed him to begin to perceive me as someone who was helping him escape from mother’s intrapsychic orbit and deal more effectively with reality.

All his life, he had lived with death wishes toward both parents, displaced later onto other significant

objects. He fantasized his female partner dead, which he experienced as a liberating solution to all his problems. Many times he told me he had the personality of a killer of women. “What kept you from killing them in reality?” I asked. It was the fact that though his father was verbally and behaviorally very macho toward his mother, he had never mistreated her physically, he told me. So his father was the main deterrent to his violence, but not to his incestuous desires. Ultimately, he was able to verbalize a central intrapsychic dilemma that had entrapped him all his life: to be a heterosexual, he had to be a rapist, possessing his mother sadistically, or he would be the one raped by his father.

Working with a man who hates women inevitably requires the analyst’s getting in touch with and working out the hate that this kind of patient countertransferentially provokes, in order to find a way toward an empathic therapeutic focus. It requires conserving one’s own vitality and incorruptibility in the face of the patient’s seduction, inner stagnation, and chronic death wishes, both suicidal and homicidal. For his part, this patient had to own his hatred toward women. The analytic work required undoing denial, projections, and rationalizations, as well as understanding his pornographic addictions regarding the women in his life who had contributed to the fragile male identity he developed.

Not all clinicians want to work with patients such as these, and most male patients give up on therapeutic work. Why did this patient stay for such a long time? In the first phase of treatment, he found fusionary benefits that he both denied and enjoyed in his perverse attachment to me, the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal mother/analyst. I also represented an idealized, omnipotent father to whom he homosexually submitted. Though unwillingly enslaved to it, my patient got perverse satisfaction and secondary benefits from his pathology. It took years to give this up. ■

José Vivenes

Enough of False Heroes

An exploration of the Venezuelan historic, socio-political, and cultural symbols.

José Vivenes (Maturín, 1977) is a Venezuela-based painter. His work reconsiders the gaze given to collective references. Vivenes assumes painting as a means of communication to reflect on the complex circumstances that his country is going through. The visual fable that Vivenes presents shows a "contemporary savage" immersed in the consequences of its actions. The reality he builds works as a metaphor of a legacy — a new "social imaginary" — of the twenty-first century. One of the main symbols Vivenes dissects is Simón Bolívar (also known as the Liberator), one of the main leaders of the Venezuelan independence wars in the nineteenth century.

Vivenes explores the historic, sociopolitical, and cultural actors and their actions by impregnating aspects of instinctual human behavior with memories of found objects, belongings, and an absence of geographical context. The grotesque plays a fundamental role within his compositions, representing a "history of calumny" imbued with sarcasm, irony, and satire.

To read more visit: analytic-room.com/jose-vivenes



José Vivenes, Venezuela
2016

Santorar erigido, jamás imaginaron las barreras que podía traspasar el semidios.
(Sacred saint, they never imagined the barriers that the demigod could overcome)
Oil on canvas. 50 x 38 inches.

My country has sunk into a complex humanitarian crisis led by a corrupt autocracy. From the laments of the millions of migrants who comprise the Venezuelan exodus around the world, to country-wide demands for food, medicine, and basic services, to the denunciations of human rights violations and the cries of political prisoners, Venezuela is in grave decline.

Ever since Chávez attempted a first coup in 1992, the same questions have been posed from different perspectives and disciplinary fields: How did we get here? Why is Venezuela, praised for its conviviality, solidarity, and pacifism, now facing such conflicts? What are the socioeconomic and political roots and the sociocultural factors that have brought us to this state of crisis? How can the country with the biggest oil reserves in the world also register the highest poverty, inflation, violence, impunity, and insecurity indexes? When did the “paradigmatic” Venezuelan democracy lose its north? Is this the end of the democratic dream? In this essay, I intend to tackle these questions from a psychological perspective.

Explanations to our prolonged and exceptional crisis have revolved around economic variables, corruption, and impunity; around institutional frailty and the delegitimization of the party system; and around the transformation of the democratic State into a failed, Mafia-led one. Other analyses point at the fundamental role of what has been called the “Magical State” (Coronil, 2002). Just because Venezuela is sitting on the biggest oil reserves in the world, the fantasy has been that we only need to drill it out and distribute the income to create an ideal economy in an ideal democracy. It’s our magical solution.

Now, again, we face the developmental illusion of swift change and progress derived from this allegedly providential, “magical” oil-producing state. This time the illusion is translated into a populist promise that is unable to distinguish democracy from dictatorship. Now again, Venezuela is worshipping oil — the so-called devil’s excrement; mene, in native wayuunaiki — that oily bitumen flowing from the bowels of the earth, the almighty modern black gold which has configured and signified the Venezuelan way to do and undo. Just like in the Venezuelan northeast (one of the main oil-producing regions in the country) where people sing songs to Saint Benedict the Black (Saint Benedict of Palermo) asking him for health and prosperity, it can be argued that the whole country is faithfully hoping that the oil revenues — whether if mortgaged or sold to liberal and communist empires — will provide for all its needs. The fact is, Venezuelans often refer to the oil industry as “the oil-filled breast that nourishes the motherland” (la teta petrolera que sostiene la patria). Chávez simply embodied this very same all-solving, all-nourishing, magical,

divinized understanding of the state in his own charismatic caudillo figure.

So we can see that a complex amalgam of oil dependence and political personalism defines the axes on which Venezuelan politics revolve. The revolution, which was either backed up or questioned by local and global resistance groups, quickly assumed a media-fake-news-2.0-formatted spectacle. A new, unequal, and fragmented geometry of power was configured by concentrating the fundamental powers of the state, authoritarian preaching, and the intervention of economy and public opinion in the name of socialism.

For twenty years, against the background of this conflictual sociopolitical context, we have also experienced acute social polarization. This polarization has led to the silencing and the elimination of political adversaries. (Lozada, 2014) The fundamental differentiation between “us” and “them” has been used as an effective instrument of political and social control performed by groups politically at odds with each other: the pro-government “chavistas” and the opposition “antichavistas,” as well as a third group often referred to as “Ni-Ni”

6.19.13

VENEZUELA

A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

by Mireya Lozada

Translated by Daniel Esparza

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("neither-nor," "not with the government, nor with the opposition").

These three groups, so at odds with each other, emerged out of the same socially shared beliefs and values. The fact of their common psychosocial origins, however, seems to escape all notice. Instead, deeply held beliefs and values are employed as political instruments to legitimize new leaders in contexts of social exclusion. Of course, in these weaponized contexts, the democratic principles of equality, liberty, and justice — the very principles that guide the direction and empower social change — cannot be achieved.

Today there are new groups fighting for recognition, for equality, and for justice. In the midst of the progressive loss of basic human rights and the loss of individual and collective identities, these groups are trying to formulate new ethical standards that can be applied to politics and power and give some kind of direction to the country.

The collective cultural, historical, and common references — along with longstanding

institutions and basic community values — all play a vital part in what we can call, following Castoriadis, the "social imaginary." In Venezuela, the "social imaginary" sharply transformed after Chavez came to power.

In a famous essay called "From the Goof Motherland to Bolivarian Theology" ("De la Patria boba a la teología Bolivariana") the Venezuelan lawyer, philosopher, and essayist Luis Castro Leiva explained how, before Chavez, Bolivarianism was the religion of the motherland. Simón Bolívar, one of the main leaders of the Venezuelan independence wars in the nineteenth century, was revered along with our Lady of Coromoto — the Catholic patroness of the country — and Marcos Pérez Jiménez — the military dictator who turned Venezuela from a mainly rural country into a modern, urban country. These three figures comprised the classic Venezuelan trinity.

Chavez perverted this classical social imaginary. Calling his take over of Venezuela the "Bolivarian revolution," Chavez positioned himself the new Perez Jimenez.

I would like to think about historical psyche from a psychosocial perspective. As mental professionals, perhaps we can rethink these discourses and their relationships with subjective elements that make democratic social life possible. From my point of view, as a psychologist, these questions grow exponentially: What is the role of imaginary and illusory components that seem to constitute an important part of our collective psyche, in the construction of our institutions? How

can we recognize this symbolic, magic, affective substrate in Venezuelan politics, and the social function it plays in processes of social control or liberation? What role does social polarization and unrest play in the construction of new, commonsensical social imaginaries built on a shared sense of direction? How can we dismantle our collective delusions, given our recent historical experience, avoiding the idealization of civilian and military leaders? How can we recognize the multiple divinities and myths populating our secularized society? How do we do this without imposing the rationality of an alleged logic that denies the role myths play in the structuring of historical memory and the social construction of reality?

Years and years of conflict have left Venezuelans thinking about the other only as a political enemy. Hence, the urgency of

allowing and facilitating the psychosocial process of a construction of a non-hostile alterity, in which the images of the other are constituted in a socially inclusive — and not antagonistic — representation.

The thread woven between the theological and the political, integrating the profane and the messianic, produces chieftain-like leaderships and political projects that undermine democracy.

It's not about demystifying or eliminating illusions and myths but rather about understanding the meaning mythical thought gives to the construction of social life and articulating what religion and ideologies bring to psychosocial and sociocultural processes. Perhaps by critically inquiring into our shadows and absences, we might also celebrate the forms of cultural resistance that allows us to collectively heal our country so heroes and saints can come to re-occupy their rightful place outside of politics.

This is the dream that encourages me. ■

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DISPATCHES



Photography by Ivan Fraga.

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Rachel Brown

DISORDERED

Conversations about mental health and society

Disordered was a collaborative, participatory street art project designed to destigmatize mental health challenges like depression and anxiety, and reframe health as a societal issue. The project took the form of conversations, stickers, signs, and a mural in public spaces around New York City. Through a combination of social practice and guerrilla strategies, *Disordered* intervened in public places, creating a space for personal interactions about the connections between mental health challenges and societal issues. It pushed ideas about how our history, culture, political, and economic systems affect our health in order to inspire personal, social, and political transformations.

Throughout this project, I used “mental health challenges.” rather than the medical terms “mental illness” or “mental disorders,” as a political statement. From the beginning, I wanted to draw a distinction between conventional ideas about “mental illnesses” and call into question how we think about health, illness, and disorder. Furthermore, I wanted to raise the questions “How do we define health?” and “What is disordered in our society?” and connect the answers. The name of the project, *Disordered*, emerged from this position, insisting on a collective challenge we all share.

To read more visit: analytic-room.com/rachael-brown



6.19.14

MAKING VAMIK'S ROOM

by Molly S. Castelloe

How did I come to make a film about Dr. Vamik Volkan? The project arose from my experiences being a woman of a particular family rooted in the southern United States. As D.W. Winnicott said, home is where we start from.

My family dispensed propaganda concerning the illusion of love. Our group of seven operated according to what Wilfred Bion called the “basic assumption of dependency.” Bion categorized small groups according to a handful of emotional dynamics, and this was one, written by him as “baD” (basic assumption Dependency). Dependency groups, he claimed, have a distorted relationship to time. Mine was no exception. My beloved kin speak with diphthong vowels as if sliding back in time through their double melodies of speech. Our small group was led in the most traditional way. We submitted to a beloved patriarch and to the biases of our geography. Our southern state lumbered under intergenerational guilt for African American slavery, and still does, while at the same time lamenting the loss of Confederate monuments.

There is a bronze confederate statue on the quad at the local college campus, UNC-Chapel Hill, commonly known as “Silent Sam.” This is ironic nomenclature considering the stories of shared trauma it holds. This young soldier, long the target of heated controversy, was pulled down by protestors last year. As it is said, time stood still in the south when Lee surrendered to Grant — a moment that crystalized its impotence and which we continually return to. Volkan calls this temporal regression “time collapse,” and his primary example is the Serbian loss of the Battle of Kosovo (1389), called up by Slobodan Milošević at a Kosovo rally in 1989. This is portrayed through a climactic scene in my film.

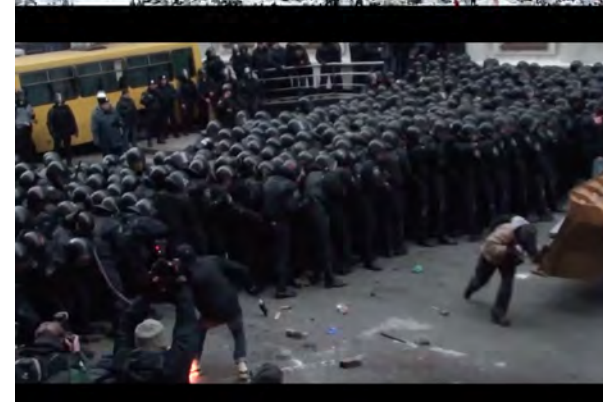
Time collapse is a sign of petrified grief or what Volkan describes as “complicated mourning.” Mourning is a major theme in his work. How does one get over loss? Studying

his work, I realized how the south suffers from nostalgia. This condition in large groups gives rise to swings of historical helplessness and totalitarian launches — as with the Nazi flags in Charlottesville (2017). I am reminded of another term Bion developed from his work with war veterans in small groups: “beta.” Beta elements are a person’s undigested facts and emotional experiences before they can be accessed, named through language, and thus converted to conscious thought. The southern states in this nation are the poorest. They own the most guns and the most Bibles. In other words, the south swims in beta.

Volkan’s work helped me see my childhood in a broader political, cultural, and historical context. Telling his life story was also a way of discovering mine — my roots in a southern region and how my personal identity is bound up with this. I have a memory of a black nanny who helped look after me as a child. I befriended her daughter and recall us playing together one day. She shared her bag of caramel candies while her father counseled me sternly from beneath his curved-bill cap: “Don’t take too many.” How many Sugar Babies is too many? Careful I don’t cannibalize a people. My aggression learned to move in labyrinthine ways.

Through blind luck, I landed in analysis and was like glass for the first time. I could see inside myself! I kept trying to put it into words, but the assertion “I am” remained thorny, sometimes shrouded in a thicket of emotion. My first two analysts died before termination, one from heart failure and the other from a pulmonary embolism as she was walking home from a concert. Their sudden deaths were lacerations through time, the silence inside me the weight of 1000 tons. I turned to aesthetics and memorializing Volkan’s work with its focus on grief. It was also perhaps my plain determination: by God, this analyst will stand. He will endure.

I do know this. Poetry can heal. It can help cure the sufferings of thought. Poets are



more powerful than kings. My task was to craft a structure for both affect and distance. One technique I drew from Brecht’s Epic Theater: *verfremdungseffekt*, the “alienation effect,” a knowing through distance. Bertolt Brecht, a German director and playwright of the avant-garde, endorsed alienated acting where the performer cites the character’s emotions rather than identifying with them. This distinction between character and actor engenders in the spectator a feeling self and an observing self. In Brecht’s words:

Suppose a sister is mourning her brother’s departure for the war... Are we to surrender to her sorrow completely? Or not at all? We must be able to surrender to her sorrow and at the same time not to. Our actual emotion will come from recognizing and feeling the incident’s double aspect. (Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht On Theatre*, ed. & trans. John Willett, NY: Hill and Wang, 1957)

This was for me a theory of containment: for the recognition of a dual experience, identification, and disidentification. *Verfremdungseffekt* makes the familiar strange. And strangeness creates breathing room, clearing space for something new.

I didn’t know what I was going to make or mourn when I asked Volkan and Jerry Fromm to do interviews at the Erik Erikson Institute for Education and Research many years ago now. But disentangling from familial history was somewhere in mind and negotiating the psychic terrain between me and not-me. These men understood that culture and history have a significant place in our emotional lives. They knew, too, that people in numbers are frequently savage. The consulting room is after all a very civilized place with its tissue boxes and tidy fifty-minute hour. Thankfully some Freudian disciples venture to the far side of clinical walls. Volkan writes recently of Turkey under the religious AK Parti (AKP) and the soul murder of citizens, those repelled by this authoritarian regime. He describes

a severe sociopolitical split, as in the United States, and a tide of destructive change in national identity. AK propaganda appeals to children by printing Spider-Man on prayer rugs. Adherents to the party talk on television of redacting the name “Charles Darwin” from schoolbooks and refer to women without progeny as “half-human.” This malady of the soul is the will of the group eviscerating personal identity.

But I am saved this fate.

In three of the refugee camps where Volkan worked, there was one poet who wrote the history of the people, helping internally displaced people rebuild self-esteem and integrity. Even in refugee camps, it seems, poetry has residency. It was in Tbilisi, Georgia, where Volkan’s interdisciplinary team from the *Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction* (1987–2002) worked the most intensely with one family who had escaped ethnic war in Abkhazia. The grand patriarch of this family was a philosopher and poet, Nodar Khundadze, who wrote one poem every day to be read aloud ritualistically over breakfast. (see below) Volkan, acting as participant-observer, helped members of this small group integrate the internal images of their life before and after exile. His purpose was much like that of the daily compositions of verse. Several years later, the family built a room in his name, but really a place for themselves: small, but with a fireplace and mantel on which was set the book of breakfast poems. My film about this makeshift room gave me a space of possibility and self-engenderment — a potential space — one I share with Georgian refugees. ■

When I see your hand begging
My dignity suffers.
I cannot give you my soul (suli)
Since it is impossible to give one's soul to someone.
But, I have nothing left except my soul.
I am pressing against prison bars.
If you need my life,
I can give it to you.

Nodar Khundadze

⁽¹⁾ *Killing in the Name of Identity: A Study of Bloody Conflicts*, Vamik Volkan, (Pitchstone, Charlottesville, VA: 2006)

6.19.15

VAMIK VOLKAN

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

by Richard Grosse

Vamik Volkan was born in 1932 in a Turkish family on Cyprus, received his medical education in Turkey, and trained in psychiatry and psychoanalysis in the United States. From a career in psychoanalysis in which he published many papers, he eventually found his way to creating a discipline in the application of psychoanalytic ideas to international conflict. Over the course of several decades, he has founded two institutions and a journal, met and often befriended world leaders, and, perhaps most importantly, developed a series of concepts that allow us to use psychoanalytic approaches to think about the large group processes that are so important in understanding conflicts among nations and groups.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Volkan for more than an hour recently, during which I received something of an introduction to his career and his thought. This is a brief summary of what I learned.

Dr. Volkan's distinguished career in mediating and understanding international disputes seems prefigured by — and perhaps can be seen as originating in — the fact that he was born on Cyprus, an island that has experienced ethnic tensions between its Turkish and Greek populations for centuries. It is striking that, being raised on a small island long wracked by conflict between two nationalities, after working in medicine, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis, Volkan made it his life's work helping world leaders understand the international tensions that they deal with and creating an intellectual discipline for understanding those tensions.

The sense of a man inexorably finding his way to his life's work is underlined by the fact that a series of external events and accidents played a large role in the beginning of his career. His interest in international relations had already won him a place on the Committee on Psychiatry and International Relations of the American Psychiatric Association, when Anwar Sadat stood the Middle East on its head in 1977 and, from the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, announced among other things that 70% of the difficulties between Arabs and Israelis were due to the "psychological wall" between them. Taking his statement seriously, the American government approached the aforementioned committee to investigate this "wall" that Sadat said was so important. Three years into the work of bringing Israelis and first Egyptians and then Palestinians together to talk about their differences, Volkan received a phone call in the middle of the night asking him to lead the work of the committee. To this day, he doesn't know what prompted that phone call, but it marked the beginning of his career as a diplomatic and cultural mediator and later a theorist of intergroup conflicts. In the next decade, he founded the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction, to pursue the work of mediating and understanding international disputes. When Reagan and Gorbachev began their negotiations in the 1980s, Volkan's Center became the primary institution for the exchange of psychologists and the investigation of the cultural tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In retrospect, Volkan's career can seem like the inevitable unfolding of a set of preoccupations, although each individual step at the time seemed like an accident or a response to external events.

His career has allowed him to observe closely the thinking and behavior of parties to the most difficult (and violent) international conflicts of our time: Arab—Israeli; Soviet Union—USA; Russia—Estonia, Georgia—South Ossetia, Serbia—Croatia, Turkey—Greece; Albania—Macedonia, to name a few. Through these years of observation and theory building, he developed the concept of *Large Group Identity* to describe the emotional ties that, he posits, all people have to the large group they identify with. Freud, he explained in our conversation, theorized the intrapsychic world to the neglect of the ties to the group, especially relations of members of one group to another group. Volkan sees Large Group Identity as being marked and, during conflicts, expressed by the "chosen traumas" and

“chosen glories” of a group, moments of group trauma (e.g., the fall of Constantinople in 1453 for Greeks), and group glory (e.g., the defeat of the Ottomans and the ending of the Ottoman siege of Vienna on September 12, 1683, for Austrians), events in the distant past that become important symbols of group identity.

As an example of the power of Large Group Identity to wreck terrible destruction, Volkan could have mentioned the enthusiastic reaction of the vast majority of Europeans, on all sides, to the outbreak of World War I, which even included for the first six months of the war Sigmund Freud. Germany’s defeat and the punitive Treaty of Versailles, then, even though contemporaneous, became a chosen trauma for Germans, which was skillfully exploited by Hitler. Thus Volkan has produced a concept that allows us to understand the passions that rule groups in moments of crisis.

This brief introduction will not make the slightest attempt to sketch the length and depth of Dr. Volkan’s résumé, except to point out that his creativity has extended to founding two institutions for the organized pursuit of helping disputing parties come into dialogue with each other, the aforementioned Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction (1987–2002), and the International Dialogue Initiative, which he founded in 2007. In addition, he founded the journal *Mind and Human Interaction*. He was also invited by Jimmy Carter to be a member of Carter’s International Negotiation Network (1989–2000). In all of this work, Volkan has made rich use of basic psychoanalytic concepts such as transference, regression, adding his own concept of Large Group Identity, which has begun to be taught in psychoanalytic institutes.

Finally, to illustrate the personal (i.e., psychoanalytic) nature of his work, there are the relationships that are depicted in the recent film *Vamik’s Room*, by Molly Castelloe, which I asked Dr. Volkan about in our conversation. The film concerns a set of relationships that he cultivated with the people in what was essentially a refugee camp. They were Georgians who had been displaced from their homes in Abkhazia, a part of Georgia, during a conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia, who were housed in a large apartment building that was formerly a Soviet resort for high officials, but which was now, as he describes it, largely a garbage dump since the demoralized 3000 refugees residing there could not take care of their surroundings. He began by locating the individuals who he thought were the leading members of the group and settled on a couple who possessed the only telephone in the building. He began visiting them regularly, during which times he would talk to them about mourning their losses.

After several years of regular visits, changes started to happen. The wife began meeting with groups of her neighbors, and she talked with them about mourning. The father of the husband, a former philosophy professor, began writing a poem every day and reading it to his assembled neighbors. These poems expressed his sense of mourning. Slowly, the residents of the building began to clean it up. Groups formed to revive their cultural practices, one dedicated to singing traditional songs. And representing the psychological reconstruction that was going on, the residents built and furnished a room for Dr. Volkan, so he could stay there during his visits.

In our conversation, Dr. Volkan agreed that there had been a powerful transference from this couple to him and that this transference had stimulated a sense of self-worth that had gone out from them into the group in a kind of positive ripple effect. The couple felt that Dr. Volkan cared about them — after all, he came to see them on a regular basis multiple times a year for some years — and feeling cared about by this important foreigner helped them to start caring about themselves, which prompted them to help others care about themselves. In addition, they were having conversations about mourning that allowed them to put their grief into words, symbolizing it. One can suppose that Dr. Volkan has not achieved results like this every time he meets with angry, frightened, disturbed, or traumatized people. But this moving example shows how he works with people, combining the intimacy of the psychoanalytic encounter with a sophisticated knowledge of group dynamics.

It also shows how psychoanalytic concepts can play out in group situations, here how a powerful transference within a demoralized refugee group became something life giving and culture renewing. Looking at the long list of situations into which he has been invited, as well as the prizes and awards he has been given, we should, I think, look on his success in this case as an indication of the power of Dr. Volkan’s use of psychoanalytic concepts and techniques as applied to groups, including groups suffering from severe pathologies. Vamik Volkan in this way has achieved an important extension of psychoanalytic ideas into the realm of large group conflict and thereby into history. ■

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDIES

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Working with traumatized refugees on the the Balkan route by Vladimir Jovic

Migration, Social Catastrophes and Traumas in Argentina Mental Health Interventions with Children and Adolescents by Clara Raznoszczyk Scheijtman and Susana Vinocur Fischbein

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