

10.19

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A sketchbook for Analytic Action



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A sketchbook for Analytic Action

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ROOM ISSUE 10.19  
NEW YORK, USA

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**Michael Diamond PhD**, is professor emeritus of public affairs and organization studies at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Since 2016, he has been a resident of NYC, an organizational consultant and author of *Discovering Organizational Identity* (2017), among other books and scholarly articles, and is currently a faculty and steering committee member of the Gould Center for Psychoanalytic Organizational Study and Consultation at IPTAR, where he is an honorary member. In 2019, Michael received the award of Distinguished Member of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations (ISPSO).

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**Isaac Tylim, PsyD, FIPA**, is an IPTAR Fellow, IPA training and supervising analyst, member of the Argentina Psychoanalytic Association, and a clinical professor, training analyst, and consultant at NYU's postdoctoral program in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, where he cofounded the Trauma and Disaster Specialization Program. For the last five years, he has been involved in the theatrical dramatization of Freud and Ferenczi's thirty-year correspondence, which is being presented internationally. He is a co-editor of *Reconsidering the Moveable Frame in Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2018) and maintains a multilingual private practice in New York City.

**Abraham Velazquez Jr.** is a youth worker at the Brotherhood/Sister Sol (Bro/Sis), an organization in Harlem that provides comprehensive, holistic, and long-term support services to youth who range in age from eight to twenty-two. He is also a cofounder of the Hip-Hop and poetry collective the Peace Poets, sharing art which responds to social and political crisis in over forty countries. Abraham earned his master of arts in educational theatre at New York University, where he studied theatre of the oppressed with Julian Boal, Barbara Santos, and Sanjoy Ganguly. In 2015, Abraham released his first solo album, *A South Bronx Tale*, engineered by Grammy Award recipient Mikaelin "Blue" Bluespruce.

**Patrick Webb** is a painter. His paintings since 1990 have depicted a singular version of the Italian clown Punchinello in contemporary narratives. His work has been exhibited in the United States, Europe, and Asia. He is a Guggenheim Fellow and a grantee from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, Art Matters, the NEA, and the PRATT Institute Faculty Development Program, where he is a professor. Webb is represented by the Ray Wiggs Gallery in Provincetown and will be exhibiting work at Jadite Gallery (November 19–30) and Leslie Lohman Project Space (February 14–16, 2020), both in Manhattan. His work is also on view at [patrick-webb.com](http://patrick-webb.com).

**Polly Weissman** is a mostly nonfiction writer who takes facts more seriously than is currently fashionable. She has published books for children and contributed to many textbooks. She is currently working on a novel about someone who keeps getting it wrong.

**Mafe Izaguirre** is a New York-based Venezuelan artist, graphic designer and educator. She leads the strategic advisory firm, Simple 7 Design Lab, specialized in brand management. In 2016, Izaguirre moved to New York to pursue her research on cybernetics and to explore the creation of "machines that can feel". She is currently an artist member of the Long Island City Artist Association (LICA), the Fat Cat Fab Lab, a tech mentor at Mouse Inc, and the Bronx based nonprofit DreamYard Project. In 2017, in collaboration with members of the IPTAR community, Izaguirre created ROOM. Website: [www.mafeizaguirre.com](http://www.mafeizaguirre.com) Email: [mafelandia@gmail.com](mailto:mafelandia@gmail.com)





# STAYING

# COURSE

We have lost our grip on any shared sense of reality. Post-Truth philosophers provide cold comfort, telling us we haven't really lost anything; we have, in fact, gained understanding that reality has never been there to grip.

And the deconstructivists tell us that the credibility of any source (and we can include the post-truth philosophers here) is up for grabs.

Any way you turn it, truth is subjective and personal.

Truth is what we agree upon. Truth is tribal. **ROOM 10.19** weaves together a few psychoanalytic truths. We do not hold these truths to be self-evident. Psychoanalytic truths are hard won.

"Psychoanalysis exists at the nexus of social and personal emancipation... and...through the study of the unconscious, it enables us to scientifically locate meaning in individual feelings and behaviors that other approaches can only see as irrational," writes Scott Graybow in *Neoliberal Gaslighting*, and he cannot be clearer about what is at stake. There are two "myths," Graybow tells us, that are eating away at psychoanalysis's power to address our most pressing social problems. The first myth claims that psychoanalytic theory and practice have nothing to say about the formative conditions of culture and race (and I think we might add gender to this), and the second is that psychoanalysis lacks scientific research that speaks to its clinical effectiveness.

Hattie Myers

The thing is, writes Charles Rizzuto in *Toxic Drip*, "When ideas and opinions are repeated forcefully over and over again, especially by persons in authority, their power to influence increases proportionately. When opposing voices are simultaneously denigrated, stifled, or demonized, that power can increase exponentially; ambient messages seep in to varying extents, on various levels, both conscious and unconscious." Those myths about the breadth of psychoanalysis's reach and its effectiveness have seeped into our universities and corroded our health care policies.

And while Graybow attends to the undermining effect of neoliberal sensibilities and Rizzuto turns his attention to the blanketing effect of conservative rhetoric, William W. Harris focuses on the facts. In *Still Here*, Harris recounts a mind-numbing parade of horrors, one anathema following the next, day after day — the caging of children, rigged elections, gun violence, an entire disregard of law, the tanking of earth's ecosystems — lest we get used to this.

"In the face of our own futility, detaching from the external reality may protect us from feeling overwhelmed," writes Isaac Tylim in *Hope Despair and Utopia*. "Psychoanalysts are exposed to the same 'radioactive' effect of sociopolitical forces that renders our patients impotent."

In Tylim's essay, he considers what place hope holds in psychoanalysis.

"The connection between hope and despair unveils an inherent paradox that defies the logic of secondary process... The logic of hope is propelled by a wish that points toward the future... [H]ope is more than survival instincts at work. Hope harbors resilience and courage to go on."

However despairing things get, "Our minds seek satisfaction in the face of our material conditions resulting from how societies are arranged," writes Graybow. We are all products of the marinade we have been cooked in. Daniel Benveniste concurs. In *National Histories and Identity*, he tells us that as an immigrant, he had the opportunity to experience Venezuela as an outsider and, at the same time, reflect upon the United States from outside its borders. Benveniste saw how "The history of any country leaves its marks on the lives of every individual and on the generations of every family." He saw up close how "personal wealth, education, access to power, and ethnic and religious privilege along with...solid institutions, a system of checks and balances, and the establishment of civil laws... create buffers between the hard edges of malignant social and governmental tendencies and the peaceful and dynamic development of growing children." Having lived under Chavez and Trump, Benveniste notes when bullies reevoke primal fears, we are left feeling powerlessness. Benveniste concludes his essay with a foundational psychoanalytic truth. "By remembering rather than repeating, we are able to act politically rather than be frozen in neurotic fear."

And then there is remembering the impact of large forces that can shape an entire nation's history. Reverend Jacob Smith gives us *An Evangelical's Perspective* in which he shows how the blurring of his religion with secular American values marked the beginning of a treacherous trajectory — for both the future of the United States and the future of evangelicalism. Aware that his essay might be hard to hear, Elizabeth Cutter Evert, in her essay *A Window In*, tries to bridge a chasm for those readers whose internal landscape (like Freud's) has little room for religion to be taken on its own terms.

While creating space to speak freely is a cornerstone of both democracy and psychoanalysis, Abraham Velazquez Jr. tells us that even more powerful than speech is the power that comes from being heard. Velazquez is a Hip-Hop artist born and bred in the congressional district that holds the distinction for having the highest rate of poverty in the United States. *So I Listen* is his story of being heard and *Sacred* is his poem of gratitude.

Paradoxically, Michael Diamond writes in *On Edge*, it is the difference between us — the borders that separate one individual from another, one country from another, and one truth from another — that make listening possible. From the position of an organizational psychologist, he recognizes the strength and leadership that is required to safeguard these boundaries.

With a priest, a Hip-Hop artist, and a fiction writer, **ROOM 10.19** is the most interdisciplinary iteration of **ROOM** published to date. Borders abound. Conversation is multifaceted. Hope remains. The authors and artists and activists in this issue are staying the course. ■





The term “analytic action” assumes new complexity when we use it to enhance meaningful discourse about our unsettling and turbulent political reality. It opens doors to the possibility of kindling a deeper connection to parts of our psychoanalytic heritage, such as Freud’s free clinic movement. It brings to mind concerns expressed by early psychoanalysts Otto Fenichel, Wilhelm Reich, and Erich Fromm about the way sick societies produce troubled minds. Most importantly, it introduces two pressing questions. First, what issues occurring outside the consulting room demand analytic action? Second, what renders “action” outside the consulting room “analytic”?

With that in mind, I would like to share some ideas and experiences I hope constitute one example of a form of analytic action that enriches, but in no way forecloses, other understandings and approaches. The analytic action I would like to discuss highlights both an intervention and the dilemma that necessitates it. I conceptualize this dilemma as a unique case of gaslighting geared specifically toward us and our patients. The dilemma I am referring to is the neoliberal phenomenon known as evidence-based therapy (EBT).

Let me assure you, I am not saying EBT’s stated goal of researching the effectiveness of mental health treatment is “fake news.” Nor am I implying that research demonstrating the benefits of non-psychoanalytic treatment should be dismissed as “alternative facts.” What is concerning is the way in which EBT has come to refer almost exclusively to short-term, symptom-focused, manualized treatments, such as cognitive behavioral therapy. This is the case despite the existence of a large body of scientific evidence demonstrating the clinical efficacy of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic treatment.<sup>1,2</sup>

This misrepresentation of research outcomes is only the beginning of the problem.

The problem becomes clearer when we examine EBT in the context of its political economy. This expanded lens reveals how EBT comfortably conforms with neoliberal standards of management, measurement, and efficiency. These standards state that truth is not true, science is not science, and what is counted does not count unless it can be measured using minimal resources to provide maximal return. This is readily apparent in clinics that serve poor patients while operating in a world where nothing, not even social services and mental health care, is exempt from free market definitions of progress and efficiency. In these settings, EBT’s clinical efforts cannot be separated from its role in reproducing the attitudes and goals of the society that produced it. Like budget cuts and

other neoliberal austerity measures, EBT means decreased access to relationship-based psychotherapy and the dominance of corporate buzzwords like “responsibility” and “motivation” among administrators and clinicians alike.

But how is this gaslighting?

Gaslighting puts pressure on its victims, driving a wedge between them and the truth, in the process putting the responsibility on them to prove they do not deserve such abuse in the first place. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, in a statement that has since gone viral, gives us a perfect example. In response to her attempts to move Congress toward a greater role in protecting the environment, she was accused of being elitist. She calls out the twisted irony of this accusation, describing how it results from her efforts to help her poor constituents by putting limits on the elite. She explains it is the poor who disproportionately suffer the effects of pollution, the existence of which is a byproduct of the industrial process that enriches the elite and enables them to provide campaign funding to the very Republican lawmakers who label her an elitist in an attempt to discredit her.

A similar dynamic plays out for us. Gaslighting through EBT puts us in a position where we must prove we can help as well as disprove the belief that we cause harm. Like Representative Ocasio-Cortez, we are tasked with not only conveying the truth but also disproving a lie.

This is particularly the case for those of us who work in the kind of clinical settings I mentioned earlier. In these places, EBT gaslighting rationalizes austerity using the language of empirical science. It infers clinicians who speak in favor of relationship-based therapy — not budget cuts, staff reductions, time-limited therapy, and increased caseload sizes — are the real barrier to care. What psychodynamic clinician who has worked in an agency has not heard the retort, “The patient is struggling! What do you mean you listened to him? Why aren’t you teaching him skills?!”

Meanwhile, the agency portrays itself not as the bearer of bad news but the protector of its needy and disadvantaged patients, who can rest assured they will have access to only the most evidence-based care. Clinicians who say even the poor can afford to explore the unconscious are the real elitists, evidence of which is their privileged ability to casually disregard the fast and sure relief provided by EBT.

It is this dilemma that I believe requires analytic action.

I say analytic action is required because only psychoanalysis offers a means to understand and work with

the final piece of EBT gaslighting — by this I mean the part of the dilemma that is personal and seemingly irrational. For example, at a conference I attended, a speaker who practices EBT told us a patient of his was terminating in order to pursue treatment with another clinician. He explained this was not a big deal because the patient could get the exact same treatment anywhere from anyone. He was quite content with this state of affairs in which his work is considered effective due to it being devoid of any qualities unique to him.

Analytic action becomes necessary when sociological or economic theories fail to account for the contradictions that frequently define the lived experience of social problems. For example, Marxism enables us to identify and study the dialectical tension between EBT’s reliance on objective scientific methods and its origin in and contribution to neoliberal efforts to ration access to care. Through the concept of alienation, Marxism even offers ideas about the psychological consequences of rendering people’s labor devoid of opportunities to develop their individual uniqueness. What it does not do is help us understand why, at times, the exploitation that accompanies a social problem is in fact a source of pleasure and purpose. This is the case, for example, when exploited workers find satisfaction not by striking but by reporting to work, or poor voters experience a feeling of strength when they cast their ballot for the candidate whose goal is to cut taxes for the rich. While material conditions can often explain these behaviors (threats of retaliation for striking, lack of information necessary to make an informed vote), they cannot account for the pleasurable emotions involved — Marxism sheds light on why the speaker at the conference is alienated, but it cannot account for how he is content with his alienation.

Psychoanalysis can.

Psychoanalysis exists at the nexus of social and personal emancipation. Of course, phenomena like EBT, a strike, or an election cannot be analyzed. What psychoanalysis can do is put us on the road toward understanding why individuals engaged with these phenomena relate to them in ways that are inexplicable from a purely economic or sociological perspective. Through the study of the unconscious, it enables us to scientifically locate meaning in individual feelings and behaviors that other approaches can only see as irrational.

The “analytic” in “analytic action” is acknowledgment of the psychodynamic process that occurs as the mind seeks satisfaction in the face of material conditions resulting from the way in which society is arranged. Regarding EBT gaslighting, it means appreciat-

ing the role of the unconscious in helping us find satisfaction as we attempt to function within a mental health industry that privileges research and practices grounded in the assumption that empirical truth and neoliberal subjectivity are one and the same. It is action that promotes the knowledge that we can be victims of our environment and of ourselves. Not only are we at risk of becoming prisoners to EBT gaslighting in our clinics, but we are also at risk of becoming prisoners to it in our minds.

I found this to be the case during my outreach work with graduate students on behalf of an organization promoting psychoanalysis in clinical social work. Some students I met were clearly bothered by the state of mental health care and eagerly shared their feelings about EBT’s contradictions. These students expressed pain about supervisors telling them not to document that they listened to patients because listening is not part of evidence-based care. They described feeling alienated in classrooms where failure to report that their fieldwork with patients consists of measurement tools and treatment manuals can result in a lower participation grade. Other students had never given such things any thought or felt bothered by them. They came to the outreach session because they were curious to hear about my claim that psychoanalysis — which they understood to be an indulgence for the privileged — is, in fact, relevant to poor social work clients and the services they receive from social workers like themselves.

We talked, listened to one another, and along the way, opportunities arose for facts to be shared. What facts did I share with these students? First, facts disproving the myth that psychoanalysis lacks scientific research speaking to its clinical effectiveness. Second, facts disproving the myth that psychoanalytic theory and practice have nothing to say about the formative role of material conditions or topics like culture and race.

I hope this short description of my efforts to help graduate students face EBT gaslighting inspires you to connect with your version of analytic action! What I am proposing is nothing new. There is literature about the inaccuracies of the EBT label<sup>3</sup>, about EBT’s overlap with neoliberal austerity measures<sup>4</sup>, and about how psychoanalysis expands the practical and theoretical possibilities of important social change theories.<sup>5, 6, 7</sup> What I have attempted to do is bring these knowledge areas into conversation so we might better respond to a pressing social problem. Along the way, I have hopefully provided a useful way of thinking about this magazine’s primary focus: analytic action outside the consulting room. ■

<sup>(1)</sup> Jonathan Shelder, *The Efficacy of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy*

<sup>(2)</sup> Mark Solms, *The Scientific Standing of Psychoanalysis*

<sup>(3)</sup> Jonathan Shelder, *Where’s the Evidence for “Evidence-Based” Therapy*

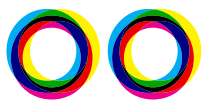
<sup>(4)</sup> Farhad Dalal, *The Cognitive Behavioral Tsunami: Managerialism, Politics, and the Corruptions of Science*

<sup>(5)</sup> Otto Fenichel, *Psychoanalysis as the Nucleus of a Dialectical-Materialistic Psychology*

<sup>(6)</sup> Wilhelm Reich, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*

<sup>(7)</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx, and Social Psychology*





# CATCALLS OF NYC SUBVERTING PATRIARCHAL POWER STRUCTURES IN PUBLIC SPACE

BY SOPHIE  
SANDBERG

Catcalls of NYC is a grassroots initiative and collective that uses public chalk art to raise awareness about gender-based street harassment. We solicit stories of harassment and their locations in New York City. Then, we go to those locations, write out the comments word-for-word in sidewalk chalk alongside the hashtag #stopstreetharassment, and post the images on social media. The goal is to provide a space for story sharing, spur dialogue on the streets and online, and ultimately promote cultural change.

I started this project in 2016 because I believed that writing these comments on the streets where they happened would draw public attention to street harassment — a behavior that was often ignored and belittled as “just words.” I wanted passersby to face these colorful words and understand their impact. Moreover, I hoped to build a space where people could speak openly about their experiences without shame. In this political environment, stories of sexual harassment being heard and believed is powerful and should not be taken for granted. Violence against women and the regulation of our bodies is a critical cultural issue that has taken on new urgency in the age of Trump. This project gives many a space to fight back and reclaim agency.

[Click Here to Visit the Online Gallery](#)







# TOXIC DRIP

Charles Rizzuto

**Think back**, if you will, to the halcyon days of the Reagan regime, with the Great Communicator's elaborate economic agenda he called "trickle-down economics." The alleged benefits never trickled down to most of us, and we know now that the whole thing was little more than a hoax disguising further wealth distribution upward. (We'll put aside, for now, the fact that the current administration has once again duped the nation and resurrected this bogus plan with its recent tax cuts and other deep discounts for the wealthy and superwealthy.)

Now, wealth might not be "trickle down" as the GOP claimed, but the locution is quite applicable to some other situations, and we are now almost daily experiencing the effects of a steady toxic drip onto our lives and the lives of our neighbors across the country. Turns out, there are some things that really do trickle down, things that are even less tangible than wealth. When people or organizations in roles of prominence and/or authority speak out, many people hear them. Some people listen. Some even take in and espouse what they hear as important, true, useful, sometimes even inspiring or motivating. In other words, ambient messages seep in to varying extents, on various levels, both conscious and unconscious. When ideas and opinions are repeated forcefully over and over again, especially by persons in authority, their power to influence increases proportionately. When opposing voices are simultaneously denigrated, stifled, or demonized, that power can increase exponentially. (We're speaking metaphorically here, not as statisticians; this is not rocket science.)

Case in point: The president pontificates about the criminality of immigrant populations; tacitly defends white supremacists as holders of some kind of legitimate opposing view to those who fight inequality and oppression; models disrespect, intolerance, othering, victim blaming, impulsivity, vindictiveness, reactivity, cruelty, lawlessness, and elected ignorance as acceptable ways of being with others in a civilized society and of conducting the government's business. Well, guess what? This all trickles down and empowers others to espouse the same views, and some among these individuals to actually act them out in their own families and communities. Seems like common sense, no?

We may well deplore — and should — both the disgraceful lack of comprehensive mental health services nationwide and the corrupt legislative insanity that makes our nation the best armed and most violent "civilized" nation in the Western world. These are certainly issues that urgently need to be addressed now. But the degree to which people with emotional issues are being scapegoated by government agents is itself an immorality, all the more so given the concerted assault on social service systems spearheaded by the Republican Party at every turn.

Similarly, it is appropriate to look at entertainment platforms and question the types of violence routinely encountered in video games and many films.

We need to do a better job all around at mitigating the influence of these things on young minds. But we also need to come to grips with the extent to which the current focus on online/on-screen violence — like the current administration's focus on mental illness as *the* common thread in civilian gun violence — often amounts to scapegoating. Its purpose is to dilute the response to larger issues that are even more charged. The current administration is externalizing blame when it should be taking a sober look at itself. The hate rhetoric and the modeling thereof must stop first. Legislation comes next, but the trickling down — which now feels like a torrent — must stop for the sake of everyone in this nation and our government.

And while we're at it, it is fine to be repeating over and over again that we must get rid of this gang in 2020. Yes, of course. No argument there. But we cannot wait for the next election to somehow miraculously turn things around. We are reaching a critical point in this country in the assault on our system by forces seeking to turn back decades of progress that has benefited everyone and served as a model for the rest of the world. We all need to vote, yes, but we also need to make our voices heard NOW. We cannot be a silent majority — forgive me for using that term — lest we end up a *silenced majority*. And we cannot expect human decency to trickle up, not with this gang. We all have to demand it clearly, forcefully, and continuously, so the coming election will truly mean something. We need to make our voices heard now — and then, vote the bums out! ■





Photograph by Nick Bolton

0426

# STILL HERE

William W. Harris

Photography by Mate Izaguirre | Long Island City, a clock counting down the time left in President Donald Trump's first term.

Email: [billywh@me.com](mailto:billywh@me.com)

Well, it has been a little over a year, and he's still here. I have stopped binge-watching TV, but he is still infecting my life. How can I ignore the Greenland saga or tune out the furious tears in response to the caged children or the empty chair at the G7 climate session? People are now talking openly about eco-anxiety, tying together ecology and anxiety. It's here — and all around us.

Did we really skip over Trump a n x i e t y?

There are TED Talks — one about a young woman who reported that other young women were choosing not to have babies because of climate change. [Yet for him, climate change is still a hoax.]

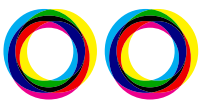
First, there was hand-wringing and an apparent loss of agency among policymakers. Then came the Resistance, the mobilization for voting, and personal agency seemed to be recovered. WE WON THE HOUSE! At last, we had the power to convene and subpoena — NOW WE HAD HIM! — Or did we?

He has stonewalled on subpoenaed witnesses appearing before committees. William Barr has chosen to be an extension of the Trump administration. Emoluments! So what? We are facing lawsuits with no end .

An impeachment inquiry is under way, but who knows where that will go? There are lots of Democratic candidates for president, but no consensus on a new unifying leader. Mitch McConnell is dug in. Yes, more conservative judges have been confirmed, but election protection? ~~Bleeked.~~ Gun safety? ~~Bleeked.~~ House-backed bills? ~~Bleeked.~~

Our challenge: How are we to maintain/reclaim our agency and enthusiasm before the 2020 elections? We were unified and motivated before the 2018 elections, and as a result, we exercised our combined agency to vote and took back the House. But 2020 is different. The Senate will be difficult to win back. The presidency could also be difficult to win, and the House has a significant number of seats up for election in districts won by Trump. Will we have sufficient motivation to organize and vote to defeat Trumpism? Will we turn out the vote? We are exhausted from Trump overload, his mean-spiritedness and apparent total lack of empathy. We loathe his behavior and say, "Well, he'll soon be gone." But will he? Will he even leave if he's defeated? Will he claim that the election was rigged and supported by a fake media? Will he continue to deny the role that Russians and other countries play that skew election results? Will our left wing stay home if one of its champions does not lead the ticket? The administration is willfully dismantling the programs that help people, that save lives, and replacing them with policies that are intended to hurt people. Is this the leadership of a cruel man or a symptom of a person who is psychologically damaged, or both? Does it matter? A question arises: Do the cruel policies coming from him reflect a choice he has made to promulgate them, or is he unable to control his cruel instincts? He is still a clear and present danger to the United States. Perhaps it is time to revisit the question of the 25th Amendment and hold congressional hearings about his fitness for office.





Photography by Adrian. Edited by Mafe Izaguirre.

#### POWER FAILURE

They are pulling babies from their mothers  
At our borders in the name of god  
And country. They believe that blaming others  
Will absolve them of their crimes. How odd:  
Were their mothers cruel to them? Does that  
Explain the disavowed cruelty,  
The smug retreat behind the furtive format  
Of civility and walls and fences. He  
That believes or falls for that is a fool. No  
Fools are more loving: they tease their Lears  
But deep down they love the infant glow  
On the old man's face as they wipe the tears  
Away. It is we who pull the children from the breast  
It is we who build the cages where they rest.

Eugene Mahon





# SO LIS- TEN

Abraham Velazquez, Jr.

**I remember** my first time being at The Brotherhood/Sister Sol (Bro/Sis) and participating in their writing program, The Lyrical Circle. It was held in the space where we would be sharing and creating art for years to come. We met in a small room on the second floor of a beautiful brownstone in the Hamilton Heights neighborhood of Harlem. The walls were radiant with bright yellows, and beautiful West African art decorated the room.

Bro/Sis created The Lyrical Circle with two youth poets who told facilitators that they wanted a space where they could write and share poetry.

Based on my friend's description of Bro/Sis, mixed with my Hip-Hop fantasies, I expected to find myself in something out of a Wu-Tang Clan video: a house full of rappers, protecting notebooks that armed them with battle raps, who were ready at the drop of a beat to jump into a rap cipher and compete to determine who was the best emcee.

This image was fueled by my fascination with Hip-Hop, a wild imagination, and actual rap battles that I had participated in on street corners, schools, pizza and fried chicken spots, and anywhere folks would gather in the Bronx to share and compare rap verses or bet money on who had the best bars (measures of rap phrases). Though I constantly felt fear and danger, it was normal for me to walk through the borough exploring new neighborhoods and finding new people to have rap battles with. All I wanted at that time was to have someone to share my lyrics with and to feel heard, even if at times, I unknowingly put myself in harm's way in search of this.

To transmit a bit of what the Bronx felt like during my childhood, I reflect on when my mom was finally able to buy us a house in the South Bronx. I was eleven years old at the time, and I knew that we were finally moving on up!

Although I was a "good church boy," I already knew at that age that they sold crack cocaine in the small blue house to the immediate right of our new home and that there was a huge abandoned lot in front of us that served as a junkyard — and our new playground.

At least weekly, folks would bring stolen vehicles, stripped of parts, and orchestrate a spectacular show for the block, where they would light the cars on fire in the junkyard to burn away as much evidence as possible before the fire department intervened. During the day, heroin users would quietly shoot up in concealed corners. My father once found someone who passed away from an overdose in broad daylight. This was a normal day in the Bronx. This was home.

It was the place that birthed Hip-Hop, and for over half a century, it has been the home of the congressional district with the highest rate of economic poverty

in the United States. I carried all of this Bronx with me to what would be my new home in Harlem.

The first evening that we gathered at Bro/Sis to "spit" (reading or reciting creative works aloud), we all shuffled uncomfortably as we wondered who had the courage to share first. I don't remember who began the cypher that evening, but I do recall the nervousness I felt when it was my turn to share from my notebook. After sharing, I received loving affirmations from everyone in the circle.

Our facilitator told me how great my writing and performance skills were but, she explained, that there were three words that Bro/Sis considered "taboo" and were not allowed in the space because they were considered offensive to different oppressed groups who also form part of our Bro/Sis family. I had used a handful of them in my lyrics.

As a young person, this was an eye-opening moment. I knew that I shouldn't swear (at least not in front of some adults), but this was a specific request to understand the power of my words and the unforgiving history behind some of my word choices. My mentor offered me understanding that I could grow from, which wasn't atypical in my life. What was unique about this interaction was that she spoke to me lovingly, respectfully, and as an equal who was completely capable of understanding what she offered. Many of the young people I work with today resonate with the experience of adults and authorities not meeting them with love or mutual respect, and it is my — and our — job to hear them better. To understand and heal.

Our conversation was focused on transformation, instead of shame or blame. I did not feel spoken down to, but spoken with and acknowledged in a way where I felt empowered to take on this challenge of being and doing better, of honoring my craft, our ancestors' struggle for liberation, and being more loyal to my written and spoken words.

That moment of clarity might not appear to be particularly meaningful, but as a teenager, I received the message and felt the love. Feeling heard made me feel like I actually mattered, like I belonged with this community, and like they were accepting me for who I was. I felt like I had something valuable to contribute and that I was in a community of my peers, where folks understood, supported, and inspired each other.

Our weekly Friday ritual was composed of a check in, sharing (what we called spitting), and closing out.

During check-in, we would go around the circle and take turns speaking about how we were doing and feeling, while everyone else intently listened. We shared some of the challenges and highlights





of our week, and other times folks shared urgent situations that our families might have been facing. We organically built a great deal of trust, love, and compassion for one another as we learned to understand ourselves more deeply.

We would be particularly moved when our peers tapped into their capacity to be vulnerable and shared from a space of authenticity and honesty. Vulnerability quickly became contagious among us.

As we listened more intently to each other, we learned it took a lot of courage to speak our truths aloud and that there was power in controlling our narratives. We realized the huge privilege and responsibility there was in the sacred ritual of holding space and fully listening to one another, the importance of presence and trust.

This contradicted the message at home, in the Bronx, which promoted and conflated ideas of manhood and strength with having a tough exterior, being cold and emotionless, and reacting with aggression and violence. The kinds of messages we were used to hearing and seeing with consistency through various media outlets said that vulnerability was equivalent to weakness and masculinity synonymous with domination. Bro/Sis, however, was a space where we were able to learn and ground ourselves in knowing that our strength was intimately tied to our capacity to be vulnerable.

After check-in, we would get to spitting, which was one of the most exciting parts of our sessions, when we would share lyrics and creative works that we had composed throughout the week. We would then end our sessions with a close out that included two to three assignments for the next week. These assignments were random titles, events, or words that members could interpret in any way to craft a creative piece that was unique.

We did not know at the time that while a handful of these assignments were random, our facilitators had taken great thought and intention in assigning us themes like Araminta, which was the name that Harriet Tubman was born with, or Peters World Map, a map with a more accurate projection of the world, as opposed to most maps, which shows developed countries literally larger, and the implications of countries being portrayed as smaller - or even nonexistent. Not only did these kinds of assignments make us analyze our world critically, but they became the source and content that would inform our creative expression and activism.

Although we did not have the language for it at the time, part of what drove our writing and creativity was our thirst for healing ourselves and our communities. We would jokingly comment that our poetry notebooks were our form of therapy. In her book, *Journey Through Trauma: A Trail Guide to the 5-Phase Cycle of Healing Repeated Trauma*, Gretchen L. Schmelzer states:

Surviving repeated trauma does not give you the feeling of safety. It gives you the feeling of survival: an ever-present readiness to jump

and run. A wariness about everything and everybody. Fear as your constant companion. I'm not knocking survival: it beats the alternative. Survival can give you confidence. But survival is constant vigilance. Survival is exhausting. Safety is the ability to rest, to settle in, to breathe easily. Safety is the ability to focus on something else besides danger or death.

My peers and I found our safety in our notebooks and in our community at Bro/Sis. In most other spaces, we were faced with surviving.

The lived realities of our young people in public schools is not a story that is unique to Harlem or NYC.

In the United States, youth suicide rates have risen over 70 percent in the past decade. Black girls are nine times more likely to be suspended than their white peers for horseplay, vulgar language, and insubordination. There are fourteen million students in public schools who do not have access to one counselor, therapist, or mental health support staff but are patrolled by security or police officers, frequently armed to enforce and ensure students' "safety." Seventy-two percent of youth have experienced at least one major stressor, including witnessing violence or abuse, or have been impacted by the loss of a loved one.

The aforementioned statistics are a reflection of how the United States has failed to guarantee the right and promise of a quality public education to every American citizen. It is not a failure that should be attributed to our children, although the national trend shows blame and violence directed in particular toward Black girls, youth of color, and youth with physical or mental disabilities.

This nation's public school practices criminalize our young people before they even step foot into the classroom. It is a practice that pushes them out into the prison industrial complex, neglecting their universal right to an education. This approach does not serve our young people and ignores those who are clearly in distress and exhibiting signs of needing mental health support.

**We can and we must better dignify our young people.** We must demand the defunding of security and armed police in schools. We must demand funding for counselors, therapists, social workers, and psychologists as well as the construction of wellness centers in high schools. We must train staff in restorative justice and violence de-escalation practices. And we must listen deeply to the needs of our young people and guide them in developing their agency to create the lives they deserve.

I don't roam the Bronx searching for rap battles so much these days, although a freestyle is always irresistible, but I do reflect on the four tenets of Hip-Hop culture: peace, love, unity, and having fun. The poem "Sacred" is a reminder, from The Lyrical Circle, of my vocation as a lyricist and a leader. Being a youth worker at Bro/Sis is the most Hip-Hop thing that I could ever be a part of. Bro/Sis is home. ■

"CHILDREN  
HAVEN NEVER BEEN  
VERY GOOD  
AT LISTENING  
TO THEIR ELDERS,  
BUT THEY HAVE  
NEVER FAILED  
TO IMITATE  
THEM."

—James Baldwin





# Sacred

Five years ago, as an adult, I sat with my mentor and they said,  
 "When I'm with a young person, I do three things.  
 First, I listen.  
 Then, I listen.

And then, I listen some more."  
 I chuckled at memories of at times appearingly awkward silences with my mentor  
 As they intently listened to me.

Because as a youth,

I was the teacher's pet--  
 Until I became a nerd gone gangster  
 Back when home didn't feel safe, and I was full of anger,  
 Bronx bullies taught me the answers,  
 How to toughen up and fight,  
 How to never smile, or ever shine my light,  
 Because being soft around 125, gets you more taken advantage of  
 Then unlimited metrocard swipes,  
 Eh-yo \$2, \$2, I got that swipe, \$2!

A nerd- gone gangster,  
 That was right around the time I became a youth member at The Brotherhood/ Sister Sol.  
 I was disruptive several times during sessions  
 Trying to navigate and understand my calls for attention,  
 One day my mentor asked me if we could meet to check in for just a second  
 17 years later, those 15 - 20 minutes forever changed the destiny I now walk.

It was the first time, I was able to confide in an adult,  
 The years of living in fear because of my father who'd resort  
 To sniffing heroin while my uncles pumped through an open pulse,  
 Watching their heads nodding to the realities of my uncle  
 Almost dying and barely surviving an overdose, before I was 15 years old.

All that anger was bottled up into shots I started taking at 14,  
 Building Jericho walls around my heart and whoever came in between  
 It was not the 1st time I had put weed to lips to smoke away my problems  
 Or knife to chest as the solution to resolve them,  
 Alcoholic before 18, stressed and living with anxiety,  
 But my grades were good enough for NYU to be eyeing me  
 So everybody thought I was alright,  
 And there was nothing wrong with me.

So as a mentor today, I pause to scope the scrolls  
 Our little sisters and brothers write as their chapters unfold  
 As they compose the compounds to break out the mold  
 That we've taught them to internalize and hold  
 Like our alleged concern for the environment in our old speech  
 When we practice putting handcuffs on roses for growing out the concrete,  
 It's not your fault you were raised between a hard place and asphalt  
 We see you, we hear you, and we believe you,  
 And we don't expect you to "break the cycle" or achieve alone,  
 But to teach us how to continue walking home  
 As we lift and climb, and grow.

And we will listen- because I know- before you get to class  
 They don't even know where your head is,  
 Walking through metal detectors with armed police  
 Waving wands in your face before you even had breakfast  
 So let me ask you how you doing and wait for a response other than "good" or "fine"  
 And I will listen, when 72% of our nation's youth have faced at least one major stressor  
 Including witnessing violence or abuse, or having a loved one missing,  
 I will listen because I understand when your dad actually IS at home, but isn't present,  
 When your mom bears depression while cooking, cleaning,  
 And juggling alcoholic interventions,

I will listen,  
 When over the past decade youth suicide rates have risen over 70%  
 And instead of psychologist that could help intervene or prevent,  
 We have 14 million students without a counselor or therapist,  
 We are paying heavily to have our children handcuffed, sprayed, and tased,  
 In the place they're supposed to learn and feel safe,

So I will listen,  
 When Black girls are 9x more likely to be suspended than their white peers,  
 For horseplay, vulgar language, or insubordination,  
 We must listen, we must continue advocating,  
 We must remember we are more precious than gold  
 Despite the violence and insults you face at home,  
 We must remember that we are beautiful because OF our skin tones  
 And that despite the different shapes and forms of our bodies  
 Chose for us at birth - they should not be the determining factors of our worth.

So I will listen to how you're feeling and how you're doing,  
 To how you're watching that show on Netflix  
 About yogurt aliens from Ohio  
 Scheming to make the US a greener place  
 Before China beats us to it.  
 I will listen to you. Intently.  
 To how you lost your patience, or broke up,  
 Or don't know how you'll ever make it with your grades,  
 I'll listen, because a whole village did the same for me.  
 Silvia, Jaques, DaMond, and LC (Lyrical Circle),  
 Thank you for listening, listening, and listening to me.  
 Because although listening didn't not stop the domestic violence at home,  
 Your support, and just hearing my poems,  
 Made me feel not alone, and kept me on point as I journey down a new road,

A Lakota elder told me that the Lakota nation  
 Never rears or hit their children because they believe that children are sacred beings  
 Here to bless us with their divine purpose,  
 And we are here to listen- because we are in need of healing,  
 Because we don't believe in giving voice to the voiceless,  
 That's just teaching people to repeat memorized noises,  
 We see your agency amidst struggle and enjoyment  
 And we uplift everything you've lived and celebrate your future's choices.

Abraham Velazquez, Jr.



Scan to listen online

<http://www.analytic-room.com/poems/sacred-abraham-velazquez/>





# BRO/SIS

## SUPPORT SERVICE TO YOUTH

Founded in 1995, **The Brotherhood/Sister Sol** provides comprehensive, holistic, and long-term support services to youth who range in age from eight to twenty-two. Bro/Sis offers wrap around evidence-based programming.

The organization focuses on issues such as leadership development and educational achievement, sexual responsibility, sexism and misogyny, political education and social justice, Pan-African and Latino history, and global awareness. Bro/Sis provides four- to six-year rites of passage programming, thorough five day a week after school care, school and home counseling, summer camps, job training and employment, college preparation, community organizing training, and international study programs to Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Bro/Sis is unique in that we are locally based, yet with a national reach we are: an evidence-based program that serves young people from economically poor communities and are seen as a model for the nation; we organize and advocate for social change; and we publish curricula and educate and train educators across the nation on our model.

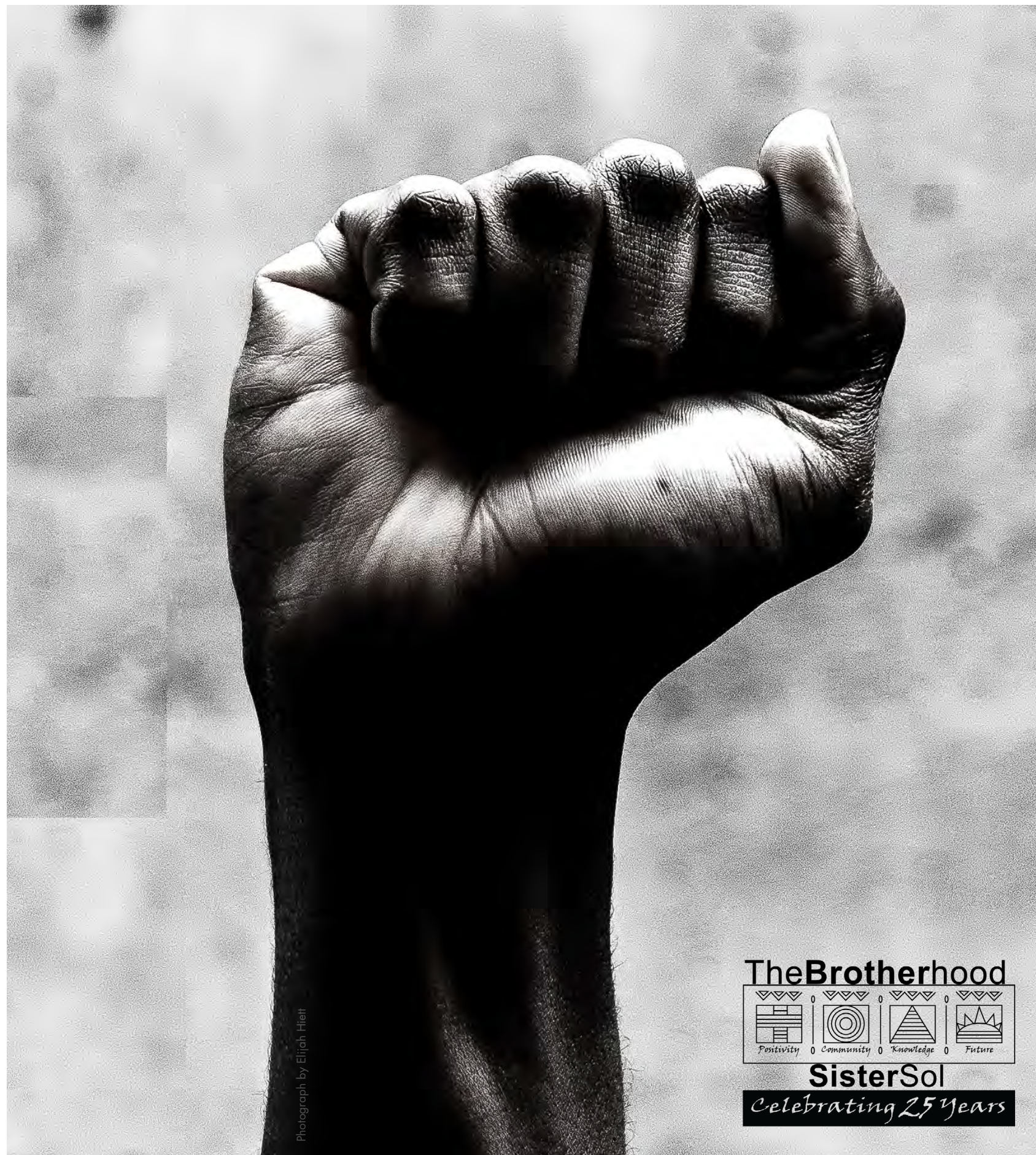
Our theory of change is to provide multi layered support, guidance, education, and love to our membership, to teach them to have self-discipline and form order in their lives, and then to offer opportunities and access so that they may develop agency.



**We rely heavily on the generosity of individuals and organizations to sustain our innovative programming.**

<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/support/donate/>

brotherhood-sistersol.org  
fundraising@brotherhood-sistersol.org



Photography by Oladimeji Odunsi

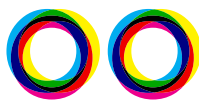
Photograph by Elijah Hiett

**TheBrotherhood**



**SisterSol**

*Celebrating 25 Years*







Michael A. Diamond

**All of us** work at the boundary. In fact, we work and live at multiple boundaries. We belong to numerous systems and relational networks. The idea of *boundary* is a metaphor for where and when we come into contact with each other as human subjects and objects — what Thomas Ogden calls “the primitive edge of experience.”

The idea and concept of boundaries are fundamental to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theories of object relations, individual psychology, group psychology, organizational psychology, and psycho-geography, as in large groups such as national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and racial identity groups — what Vamik Volkan calls “large group identity.” More precisely, boundaries signify the location and demarcation of our collective sense of self in relation to others and, in groups, to leadership.

**Having psychological and infantile origins**, boundaries are experienced in development by way of attachment, separation, and loss. And boundaries between self and other are navigated through states of emotional dependence and, later, relative independence and autonomy.

**Psychological boundaries** are signifiers of our essential paradox — what it means to be human. For example, boundaries are located between one’s self and others, me and not-me, self and group, self and organization, self and body politic, subject and object, past and present, fantasy and reality, negative and positive, idealizing and loathing — what psychoanalysts call transferences and countertransferences of shared emotion. Boundaries are frequently experienced as filled with tension and opposition, possibly loaded with potential danger and conflict. With “good enough” caregiving and nurturing early on, boundaries and our experience of them come to signify a sense of we-ness. Such mutuality is a requisite for empathic organizational leadership and organizational culture, as opposed to that of narcissism stuck in ego and self-aggrandizement. In parallel with good enough parenting, such leadership supports an individual’s capacity to approach boundaries consciously, reflectively, and with sufficient curiosity. We are able to see differences between ourselves and others and accept these distinctions as real, as a fact of life in an organizational and global world of diverse cultures and nationalities.

**Organizational boundaries** are integral to social, political, professional, and cultural borders. Such boundaries delineate leaders and followers, superordinate and subordinate, horizontal and vertical structures, divisional and integrative processes, divisions of specialization and labor. Thus, social and psychological structures bump into each other. Boundaries denote the paradoxical nature of membership and separation, belonging and independence, differentiation and sameness, power and dependency, in groups and organizations. Thus, boundaries are discovered and experienced internally and externally, inside and outside groups and organizations, as chock-full of tension and conflict.

The survival, maturation, and healthy striving of humankind depends upon its capacity to engage diversity and, consequently, to traverse and negotiate boundaries in everyday life. We work and play, imagine and create at the boundary (or the space in-between us) — what Winnicott calls “the transitional and potential space.” The transitional space that exists between nurturing mothers and developing children, reality and fantasy, conscious and unconscious thinking and feeling, is the in-between space where culture, music, art, literature, poetry, compassion, and empathy are discovered. Yet in adult life as lived in groups and organizations, boundaries are frequently experienced as barriers and impediments to engaging each other or as walls that divide and separate.

**The silo mentality is a frozen metaphor**, a signifier of resistance to mutuality and adaptive change. The psychological need to defend organizational boundaries is more typical than atypical. Much like the anticipated resistance to change, boundary maintenance itself is also necessary

to organizational life. However, when boundaries (divisions, departments, etc.) become impassable and defensively rigid and where those dwelling in their silos withhold information and resist collaboration, we are faced with the challenge of attending to the emergence of *us and them* social structures, whose origins are in primitive, preverbal, surface-to-surface feelings. Thomas Ogden’s autistic-contiguous mode of experience captures this well. Here, vulnerability, paranoia, and anxiety coincide with Manichean and absolutarian thinking, transforming simple human group and organizational divisions into fragmented, polarized, and conflicted relations.

**My experience as an academic psychoanalytic scholar-practitioner and organizational consultant** with *us and them* social structures in academics, medicine, government, and corporate cultures has taught me the urgent need for transformational, self-conscious, emotionally attuned, reflective organizational leaders and cultures. In the face of past anxiety, mistrust, and paranoia, these reparative organizational leaders come to support greater collaboration across divisions, specializations, and disciplinary boundaries. More reflective and less narcissistic, these leaders redefine their formal roles and associated responsibilities as supporting and facilitating, working at the boundaries between groups, specializations, and cultures, enabling two-way communication, information sharing, and cross-functional and interdisciplinary activities. This requires dismantling silos and the silo mentality in organizations, getting rid of what might be called “social defenses” and replacing them with greater human contact, reflective learning, and a change in the status quo.

Winnicott and Ogden refer to this essential in-between area of the intersubjectivity as potential and transitional space I am describing as the “mental and psycho-geographic space between individuals, groups, organizations, and political associations.” Future leaders require emotional maturity and the capacity for containment and what Keats and Bion called “negative capability.” Global political forces and organizations necessitate leaders who are emotionally aware and appropriately self-conscious, reflective, and deep listeners, rather than loquacious self-aggrandizers and malignant narcissists. Twenty-first-century leaders must be able to assume personal responsibility for reparations between individuals, groups, and organizations. Leadership means working and playing on the edge, facilitating mutually validating work between diverse groups and between the borders of our nation-state. Here, psychoanalysis has a vital role to play beyond the consulting room. ■





## PATRICK WEBB INTIMACIES

[Click here to listen to Anna Fishzon interview with Patrick Webb](#)

Anna Fishzon navigates one of the most recent groups of work by Patrick Webb: *Intimacies*. Placing us in the hands of PUNCHINELLO — the main character in Webb's scenes — Fishzon guides the conversation through the communion of two souls: the artist's and his alter ego's.

PUNCHINELLO cautiously becomes the thread linking the evolution of two worlds, neither absolute nor separate, between the realities of the artist and his character. Through the artist's vision, the body takes on a transformative function that is simultaneously aesthetic and political.

Webb's earlier work shows us the emotional body he inhabited at the time when the AIDS epidemic became a crisis. His art is a statement: he survived. Webb lets us see, in the smoothness of his men's curves, that aspect of contemporary civilization that has subjected bodies and sexuality to censorship. It also explores Aristophanes' myth of Androgyne, found in Plato's *Symposium*, and how the double spirit of men has now been left to starve to death in sorrow. Webb's art is a revolutionary breaking point with modern tradition. His men are open, soft, and able to reveal their intimacy and vulnerability in a world that often stigmatizes them. Their spirits rise in an ode to the subtleties of human nature that becomes art.

PUNCHINELLO's individual body is also a social body that, reflecting back, enlightens the collective. Webb presents this otherness through desire, filling the void with the continuity of his characters' presence (even when his characters are expressed through their objects). A true change of state transports the viewer from the turmoil of the men's identities to the symbols by which they are united within a critical society.

We witness PUNCHINELLO as he interacts with various others in various locations, always dwelling in dense, vivid events that draw their power from Webb's own life.

The forms that emerge from space to define the limits of PUNCHINELLO's universe reflect the limits of Webb's own language. The many memories that Webb draws from his own life bring us closer to his reasons for painting. In contrast to the classical contemplative approach to represent the world, Webb has a genuine interest born from

his need — or in Webb's words, "the itch" — to find a personal symbolic system he can use directly to confront life itself. On the empty canvases, his effort to overcome the void of existence breaks through the superficial with layers of meaning and generates a profound male scene full of malleability and ambiguity. This is not just in the form and the use of space but also in his format — "big formats to express big emotions" — as we encounter in his older series of paintings, which can be viewed on his website.

He survived. And here he gives us his testimony. His work is a storytelling of all the elements carefully placed onto any scene of his choosing, with intentional gestures, creating an extraordinary polysemic complexity that demands great sensitivity from the spectators. From the direction of the dildos (their flaccidity or erection), to the tangential appearance of mothers and sisters, Webb builds a glance into his men's world through a completed man's soul. PUNCHINELLO becomes man's other half.

PUNCHINELLO has the ability to reflect back to the viewer, physically and symbolically, the complexity of Webb's path in his discovery of his human experience as a gay man.

Webb's PUNCHINELLO appeared in 1990 and is still developing. The artist and his character are deeply connected to the hero's journey. Patrick Webb's work is an invitation to intimacy, the intimacy of all men through his creation of PUNCHINELLO, who frees us — and contemporary art — from the repression of the penises and the demonization of gays. Webb's work embraces a melancholic iconography that addresses our gender fluidity.

**We invite you to listen to the audio interview that Anna Fishzon does with Patrick Webb within the frame of his exhibition at IPTAR: A controversial show that brought to the surface an interesting tension of prejudices on the physical, human, and political landscape.**

—Mafe Izaguirre



[Click Here to Visit the Online Gallery](#)





# NATIONAL HISTORIES AND IDENTITY

Daniel S. Benveniste

From 1999 through 2010, I lived in Caracas, Venezuela. I arrived just after Hugo Chávez began his presidency, so I saw a rather vibrant Venezuela for several years before its subsequent deterioration under Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution. As an immigrant, I saw Venezuela as an outsider, and at the same time, I could reflect on the United States from outside its borders.

In the United States, many people work extraordinarily long hours. Our Puritan work ethic has become hypertrophied in a culture of alienation, postmodernity, and high technology. People in the United States are productive, creative, and generous. In Venezuela, on the other hand, the work-life balance leans heavily in the direction of life and leisure. Businesses are struggling and workers are hungry, but many shops don't open on time and are closed for two hours at midday. Efficiency is almost a foreign concept, and vacations come around faster than the months. People work to live, not the other way around. Weekends are spent at the beach enjoying the sun with family and friends. Late-night parties are frequent in Venezuela, even in the middle of the week. The country's work-life balance is something about which the United States could definitely learn.

Many North American visitors are impressed with the emphasis Venezuelans place on family and friends. With time, however, one discovers that this emphasis stems partly from a cultural tradition and partly because the government and business sectors do not function efficiently, so people need their family and friends (their connections) just to survive. In contrast, one finds that in the modern metropolitan areas of the United States, services function so well that it is really quite easy to live alone independently — a rugged individualist. You can do it yourself, do your own thing, be your own person, be free, individuate, self-actualize, sit in your own apartment, and sink into a magnificent pit of loneliness and alienation — all on your own terms!

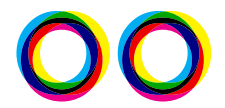
Venezuelans don't suffer the isolation and alienation that North Americans have been suffering for the last hundred years, nor do they suffer postmodern angst. They are too involved with the pleasures of life. Their troubles are more characterized by emotional entanglements, family enmeshment, and the constricting expectations of family and friends.

The United States is a well-oiled machine with rules and laws for everything. In Venezuela, on the other hand, the party at 8:00 p.m. doesn't start until 10:30 p.m. The photocopies promised for tomorrow will not be ready tomorrow and the red traffic light is actually a little greenish. For a North American accustomed to rules determining everything, I found Venezuela somewhat frustrating but also thoroughly enchanting. Over the next decade, however, the loose relation between the word and what it signified made room for lying, corruption, violence, the breakdown of institutions, and eventually the destruction of the very fabric of society.

Governments determine the laws by which racial, ethnic, or religious groups will be rejected or protected. As a multicultural experiment, the United States has struggled to come to terms with multiculturalism throughout its history. Genocide, slavery, and segregation are just three of the most obvious institutions with hard edges of influence over the lives of millions of families and their children for generations. While there are more races, religions, and ethnic groups in the United States than in Venezuela, the fact is that in Venezuela, the races have been freely mixing for hundreds of years, while the United States had laws against interracial marriages up until the 1960s. The sharp lines between the races in the United States are actually blurred in Venezuela, and the sharp lines between the classes in Venezuela are blurred in the United States.

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Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement focused on bringing social injustices to consciousness, challenging racist laws, and securing voting rights for the disenfranchised. These are the levers that change society and change the lives of families. Are taxes collected? Do the taxes get to social programs? Do children have health care? Is primary and secondary education compulsory? What are the laws regarding corporal punishment and child abuse? What are the laws regarding homosexual families? Is birth control legal and available? Is abortion legal? Is military service a requirement? Are there child labor laws?

In 2006, under the Chávez regime, a new law was proposed to make any comments critical of the government — even those spoken in private — illegal. It caused an uproar and, though it was not passed, let the Venezuelan people know that their freedom of speech was no longer a right to be taken for granted. It could be withdrawn at any time. This threat helps us to see that psychoanalysis can only exist in a society with democratic freedoms. It is impossible to free-associate on a couch if there is no free speech in the street. Is the patient a government spy testing the analyst's loyalty to the regime? Is the analyst reporting the opinions of the patient to the government?

During Venezuela's national strike of December 2002 and January 2003, I had a number of patients who experienced a collapse of analytic space when their intrapsychic fears were confirmed by political realities. Totalitarian governments oppress the psychoanalytic enterprise whenever they move to silence people. They are threatened by the subversive nature of psychoanalysis and have squashed it in many countries throughout history.

The United States is not under totalitarian rule, but its history is stained by shameful policies we need to remember in order to not repeat. These include the genocide of North American indigenous people, the enslavement of Africans, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the establishment of racist laws, the Red Scare of the 1950s, the ill-considered war in Vietnam, its interventionist policies in Latin America, and more. In the 1970s, Daniel Ellsberg, a military analyst for the Pentagon, presented classified information to the public concerning the United States' failed policy in Vietnam. In September 1971, the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding, was broken into at the direction of the White House. The US government was looking for confidential information in order to discredit Ellsberg.

How is a young person supposed to develop a benign superego when there is state-sponsored violence and a corrupt judicial system? How will a person's anxieties be understood when he/she is literally being watched and under attack?

The history of any country leaves its marks on the lives of every individual and on the generations of every family. A ninety-five-year-old in the United States remembers the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and the fear of Communism. A sixty-five-year-old lived through the Cold War, the death of Kennedy and King, the civil rights movement, and the counter-culture. A forty-five-year-old grew up in relative peace until the fall of the Twin Towers. A twenty-five-year-old is a changeling raised on the new high technologies, grave threats to the human species, and an unimaginable future on the horizon. Add class,

race, religion, gender, and changing politics to the equation, and it is clear to see that we all wear our national history on our skin and in our family heritage. The hard edge of government control influences child development by determining the parameters of personal, familial, and social life.

There are factors that protect some groups, families, and individuals from the hard edges of governmental influence, and these include personal wealth, education, access to power, and ethnic and religious privilege. Beyond these factors, governments can establish laws that further protect vulnerable individuals and groups from the hard edges of social and governmental imposition. These include solid institutions, a system of checks and balances, and the establishment of civil laws that protect the rights of citizens. These laws defend the freedom of religion, freedom from slavery, the right to own property and an independent judiciary, equal rights before the law and due process, freedom of the press, and more. These governmental factors create buffers between the hard edges of malignant social and governmental tendencies and the peaceful and dynamic development of growing children.

During the course of my life, I have seen a great deal of turmoil in the United States, but it almost always resulted in moves toward expanding freedoms: freedom of speech and political protest, civil rights, women's rights, rights of the disabled, rights for gays and lesbians, labor laws, legal protections from dangerous products, and protections for the environment.

In the last three years, President Donald J. Trump has awakened the beasts of misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, religious hatred, classism, big-business greed, ignorant hostility, xenophobia, white nationalism, conspiracy theories, and more. I am proud to say Trump is being resisted like no president in US history, and yet a real threat exists as he is attacking civil rights laws and eroding the institutions of democracy, first with the destruction of the Republican Party, attacks on the free press, the erosion of confidence in the justice department, the distortion of the truth, the warping of the very principles of critical thinking, the abandonment of common decency, and the replacement of scientific knowledge with baseless beliefs, often of a conspiratorial nature.

Trump, like Chávez before him, is a demagogue, a strongman bully, a thugocrat, and his effect on people is like that of an angry father — while some identify with him and enjoy the way he unleashes his uncivilized impulses, others are frightened and feel overwhelmed and powerless. As I wondered about my feelings of fear and powerlessness, I immediately linked them to my experience of Chávez in Venezuela. I realized the terror and powerlessness evoked by the bully is an experience we all know. It is the terror and powerlessness of the infant in the face of an external world beyond its control and unjustly imposing itself. When faced with the bully one needs to feel that terror and powerlessness, link it to similar experiences one has known throughout life, and then remember that as infants we were helpless. Now, we are not. Now we are grown up, we have education, experience, and have acquired bases of power. By remembering rather than repeating, we are able to act politically rather than be frozen in neurotic fear. We can join with others; we can push back—and we must push back. ■



Photography by Richard Jaimes. Edited by Mafe Izaguirre.





Elizabeth C. Evert

# A WINDOW IN

As a magazine at the intersection of the psychological and the political, Room has published a number of articles that aim to explore the cultural divides in the US and beyond. In this vein, Jacob Smith has written a piece about being an Evangelical Christian in 2019, who cares deeply about humanitarian as well as spiritual issues. (*Who are the Evangelicals* Room 10.18) He is the pastor at Calvary-St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City, which is home to a racially and politically diverse congregation.

Parts of the essay, however, could function more as a wall than a window for secular readers with little familiarity with Christianity as it can function in the life of a religious person. He speaks of central tenets of his faith. But talk about Jesus can be alienating, if one's associations are to the Crusades or to the Holocaust, or if one assumes believers to be concrete and incapable of what we think of as symbolic processing. It is a problem we are familiar with in psychoanalysis: Therapists can't talk about transference resolution or pre-Oedipal conflict with a new patient. The terms are jargon until they are lived.

I grew up in a mostly secular intellectual family. My adolescent anxiety took the form of religious dread. These concerns eventually led me to study the phenomenology of religion. In the years between college and starting training to become a psychoanalyst, I lived in a Christian community that worked with emotionally disturbed children. As an analyst, and as a person aiming to grow over the course of a lifetime, I find myself drawing on a range of sources that explore the human condition. I am drawn to play with translations between literature, religion, neuroscience, and many schools of psychoanalysis. Many are possible; reasonable people can disagree about which ones work.

I have always been struck by resonance between Christian and Kleinian models. In the Judeo-Christian universe, Adam and Eve start out in Eden but are banned after tasting the fruit of the tree of knowledge, from which they were excluded. Klein describes universal expulsion from the paradise of the good baby at the good breast as a result of Oedipal and Pre-Oedipal rage and envy at feeling helpless and shut out. In the Christian crucifixion/resurrection/redemption arc, Jesus's followers were all either responsible or complicit in having him killed. Despite this betrayal, they discover he has risen and are themselves filled with the Holy Spirit. As analysts, do we swim in thematically similar waters when we interpret our destructiveness in the paranoid/schizoid position but recognize that, despite the sometimes irreparable harm we cause each other, the capacity for sorrow, love and awe return in each of us? Freud looked at sacred stories from many cultures through his Oedipal lens, but perhaps the translation can go in either direction.

As psychoanalysts, and in our own treatments, we are familiar with the transformative power of discovering our needs, destructiveness, and capacity for concern, day by day in the context of an intense and supportive relationship. Many of us are less aware that, in many faiths, the religious process functions similarly. Often being unfamiliar with our ideological cousins in the human quest for transformation of the human soul, we have tended to stereotype each other. My hope in writing is that in recognizing our kinship, we will be more able either to collaborate or to fight from a position of mutual respect. ■

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Photography by Sean Mungur

Jacob Andrew Smith

# AN EVAN — GELICAL'S PERSPECTIVE

As we approach another long election cycle in the United States, news outlets will be reporting on the political trends of evangelicals. It is often reported that 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in 2016, and they continue to remain faithful to him almost three years into the completion of his first term in office. As a result, many approach those who identify as an evangelical with suspicion. In many circles, the word has become a pejorative — a Christian religious fanatic who uses the means of politics to push their moral agenda. This has caused many Christians who have traditionally identified as evangelical to either drop the descriptor or preface it with statements like, “Yeah but I am not like *that*.”

My wife and I have experienced this suspicion firsthand. One evening, she was gathering with some women for an evening out. While waiting at her friend’s apartment for the rest of the group to arrive, a news story aired about American evangelicals’ continued support for Donald Trump. The story featured notable evangelical pastors such as Robert Jeffress, Jerry Falwell Jr., and President Trump’s top spiritual advisor, Paula White. Knowing that I am a pastor and one who identifies himself as an evangelical, my wife’s friend leaned over and asked, “So, is your husband one of those?”

Evangelicals are not, nor have they ever been, a homogenous group in America. The word *evangelical* finds its roots in the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “gospel” or “good news.” This term was originally used by the Roman Empire to convey that a conquered nation had now been brought within the boundaries of its civilization. The first Christians, living within the empire, used this word to herald the central tenet of the Christian faith: that Jesus Christ by his death has forgiven humanity’s shortcomings, also known as sin, and, by his resurrection and ascension, conquered death so that an individual now stands innocent of any past transgressions as a child before the one just and holy God of Israel.

In a world where at least 40 percent of the population was enslaved and the pantheon of Roman, Greek, and Assyrian gods were associated with power and empire, this *euangelion* that God — in his son, Jesus — had made slaves his children was profound. That good news spread like wildfire across the empire and beyond. Early in the history of the church, the word *evangelical* was transformed from not only a noun but into the verb *evangelize*: to share this good news with a world that needs to hear it. The point being that the word *evangelical* historically has not been used to identify a sect of Christianity. Rather, it’s meaning describes a core part of the Christian faith.

The first time *evangelical* was used as a descriptive for a certain group of Christians was in the 1500s, during the Protestant Reformation. Rome labeled clergy and nobility who were supportive of the doctrines that came from the Protestant Reformation as evangelical. Rome’s criticism was the only thing this group ever emphasizes is the Gospel — the *euangelion* — over and above the tradition of the church and acts of penance and piety. Around this time, the term *evangelical* became associated with Protestants across Europe. In many places today, like Germany, a Protestant Church is still referred to as the Evangelical Church.

In each place Protestantism took root, cultural contexts shaped it. In the United States, denominationalism played an important role in shaping Protestantism. Denominations sprang up out of ethnic and pioneering enclaves, giving evangelicalism in this country a real sense of diversity. Nevertheless, evangelicals were bound together across denominational lines by a common commitment to the supremacy of the Bible in regard to life and doctrine, the reality of human sinfulness and its total corruption, and therefore, the importance of the person and divinity of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. It is important to note that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, evangelicals across Protestant denominations, especially in England

Photography by Sean Mungur





and the United States, were on the front line of key social justice movements, such as the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements. For evangelicals, the Bible was clear that these injustices were blatant violations of God's command to love one's neighbor.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the great exodus of people from New England and Virginia to the frontiers of the Midwest and the West, hoping to "manifest destiny" their ways into new lives created a new evangelicalism tempered by the values of rugged individualism. The vastness of the country also made it difficult for new converts, who felt called to ministry, to receive formal seminary training and education, which helped breed a form of anti-intellectualism in some parts of evangelicalism. "Just Me and My Bible" and "Deeds Over Creeds," although antithetical to the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, became working slogans for many American evangelicals.

In the twentieth century, as a result of two world wars and America's central role in them, many evangelicals embraced a providential understanding of world history and America's role in it. For example, in 1948, when the State of Israel was established, many American evangelicals saw this as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and became infatuated with eschatology and the imminent return of Jesus Christ. American freedom and folklore became blurred with scripture and Biblical figures, particularly within evangelical circles not connected to a larger denomination. Something different had emerged among these evangelicals: a new religion of the American State whose gospel was not the atoning work of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world, but an American Jesus who upheld (and was the means of achieving) the values of white middle-class 1950s America.

So what was happening to evangelicalism? The best illustration I have to offer comes from the 1956 science-fiction movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. While on the surface a typical science-fiction flick, *Body Snatchers* provides insight into McCarthy-era America. The movie's story involves alien spores that have fallen to earth. These spores grew into pods that hatched aliens who looked like humans, talked like humans, but most certainly were not humans. At first, the invasion was written off as a delusion or misunderstanding — until it was too late.

Something similar happened within evangelicalism in America. In 1979, this religion became one of the most influential and driving forces in American politics. It really began to surface publicly when self-professed evangelical Christian and Baptist Sunday school teacher President Jimmy Carter lost his bid for reelection. Under the leadership of the Reverend Jerry Falwell, this new religion, with the misleading label of "evangelical," mobilized into one of the most powerful political lobbies in American history.

For Falwell and his group, the meaning of *evangelical* had shifted from its origin of *euangelion* to a new and distinctly American morality. Many evangelicals rightly looked upon Falwell and his coalition with great suspicion, seeing them forcing an unwanted form of morality upon the nation. Nevertheless, in one year's time, Falwell and his sympathizers had politically mobilized in almost every state, held significant influence in many of the largest churches in America, and had drowned out or co-opted any alternative evangelical voice.

The Reverend Falwell and his movement, known as the "Moral Majority," opposed what they saw as the secularizing agenda of the Democratic Party, over and above the moral values of the Christian faith, which they believed was the very foundation of our nation. Their political and social ideology was rooted in the idea of an American theocracy. Their platform was essentially the cultivation of America's moral salvation, which included strong ties to the state of Israel, censorship of all major media outlets, and opposition to the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1978. In many ways, this new politicized religion embodied a complete reversal of many of the social justice movements that historically defined evangelicalism. It backed Ronald Reagan, a Republican with tangential ties to mainline Presbyterianism, and whose wife regularly consulted psychics and astrologers (clear no-no's in the Bible).

The question must be asked of evangelicals: What were the spores that fell from space and created these "pod people"? What directs a moral compass that condemns President Bill Clinton for his sexual misconduct, argues that the immoral character of our public figures leads to the lawlessness of our nation, only to condone, endorse, and defend another man with a history of three marriages and multiple allegations of sexual misconduct? A man who has said things that run contrary to classical evangelical theology such as, "I like to be good. I don't like to have to ask for forgiveness. And I am good. I don't do a lot of things that are bad. I try to do nothing that is bad."

In his recent *Time* magazine article, "Evangelicals Are Supporting Trump Out of Fear, Not Faith," David French rightly argues that the spores are *fear*.

Talk to engaged evangelicals, and fear is all too often a dominant theme of their political life. The church is under siege from a hostile culture. Religious institutions are under legal attack from progressives. The left wants nuns to facilitate access to abortifacients and contraceptives, it wants Christian adoption agencies to compromise their conscience or close, and it even casts into doubt the tax exemptions of religious education institutions if they adhere to traditional Christian sexual ethics.

This fear is perpetuated by the heirs of the first generation of the Moral Majority, which includes Jerry Falwell's son, Jerry Falwell Jr., and the religion's prophets—the radio and television pundits. French points out that this fear was raised to a fever pitch by pundits when the very idea that Hillary Clinton, who was a devout Methodist and arguably more involved in church than Donald J. Trump, became the Democratic candidate for president. Quoting Christian writer Eric Metaxas, French makes his point:

[I]f Hillary won, America's chance to have a "Supreme Court that values the Constitution" will be "gone." "Not for four years, not for eight," he said, "but forever." That wasn't faith speaking. They were the words of fearful men grasping at fading influence by clinging to a man whose daily life mocks the very values that Christians seek to advance.

Unlike classic evangelicalism, this new religion has no savior, so it needs to hope that Donald Trump will save it, be it through backing the state of Israel or through the Supreme Court ending a woman's right to choose. This all runs counter to classic evangelicalism, which has sung the theme for centuries in their great hymns: "all my hope in God is founded." In acting as if Trump is their savior and blindly backing him at all cost, these evangelicals discredit the entirety of the evangelical movement. It makes one wonder if shunning the title and the group altogether might be a valid move.

Famed Christian thinker C. S. Lewis prophetically illustrates the ramifications of what we are experiencing in this country in the seventh and final book of his Chronicles of Narnia series, *The Last Battle*. In the book, an old ape named Shift devises a scheme to dress up his friend, a donkey named Puzzle, as the Christ figure, a lion named Aslan. They dupe many of the Narnians into believing that their bizarre demands are actually the will of Aslan. When the ruse is finally discovered, for many of the Narnians, the very name *Aslan* becomes a trigger, while others lose interest and actually begin to hate the real Aslan along with the goodness he actually represents. This, I fear, is the endgame of a politicized religion that has masked itself with the evangelical label.

A deeply polarized American populace has been presented primarily with a false version of evangelicalism for the past forty years, its current iteration being as a politicized religion, hatched by an old ape named Falwell and now embodied by a roaring donkey with a golden mane named Trump. "So, is your husband one of those?" Obviously not. When we move beyond this administration though, Christianity in general may find itself on the margins, among the outcasts, and along the fringes of our society. I believe this may be to the good: those outer places have often been where Christianity has been at its best. Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection are at the center of our message, was originally, and always will be, found on the fringes. In no way do I want to convey that Christians should not ever be in politics. Rather, my hope is to shine a spotlight on some of the historical factors that led to a perversion of evangelicalism in this country. Losing our prominence in the halls of power may enable us to rediscover our true voice, so that we can, in humility, working together with all people, of every faith and goodwill,

**"ACT JUSTLY, LOVE MERCY,  
AND ONCE AGAIN WALK  
HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD."**

(MICAH 6:8)





# HOPE, DESPAIR, AND UTOPIA

Isaac Tylim

The 9/11 terrorist attack punctured America's innocence, inflicting massive trauma on people across the country. Almost without delay, psychoanalysts felt compelled to shed their mantle of neutrality to better assist survivors, first responders, and those who were vicariously affected by the tragedy. The couch was taken onto the streets, and analysts engaged in the arduous task of processing what seemed impossible to do.<sup>1</sup>

Today, over eighteen years later, while the sequelae of 2001 continue to claim lives and souls, climate change, gender inequality and discrimination, human rights violations, social injustice, mass killings, and the 2016 presidential election are all adding to the feelings of doom and despair. Under the current state of affairs, hope seems to be eroding, and time seems to stand still with no redemption in sight.

In the consulting room, just as in 2001, analysts become witnesses who are themselves exposed to a "radioactive" effect (Gampel) of sociopolitical destructive forces. Both analyst and patient are rendered impotent to resist recurrent floods of intolerance and injustice. Facing the futility of protest, detachment from external reality may appear as a protective device against deregulated affect states. Detachment impedes the necessary work required to mourn lost ideals and desecrated values. Without mourning, unmovable resentment — and its corrosive outcome on the psyche — may dominate. Are analysts able to stand against despair, fight detachment, and reinforce hope? If so, how do analysts nurture hope when they themselves are as vulnerable to its demise?

The privacy of the consulting room has the potential to offer a unique opportunity to co-construct a safe transitional space where hope could be restored. Waiting might be viewed as a container that embraces disruptive affects and as a means of mobilizing agency. Without waiting, hope gets diluted in despair (Tylim 2007). The Spanish word for hope is *esperanza*; *esperar* is to wait. Waiting is hope, and there is hope in waiting.

The connection between hope and despair unveils an inherent paradox that defies the logic of secondary process. Hope highlights the power of wishes, that is to say the logic of primary process (Green 1986). The logic of hope is thus propelled by a wish that points toward the future.

Yet hope is more than survival instincts at work. Hope harbors resilience and courage to go on. Bloch (1988) wrote on a distinction between abstract hope and concrete hope. Abstract hope pertains to the realm of wishes. This version of hope propagates a romantic or optimistic view that fosters a rather passive position trusting the future will bring change.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to abstract hope, concrete hope is closer to the present in its participation and awareness of current obstacles. While abstract hope may be viewed as manic defenses, concrete hope embraces the limitations one experiences in the now. Thus, concrete hope partakes of the logic of primary and secondary process. Wishes are informed by the real; that means it is concrete in the sense that this form of hope acknowledges that which is felt lost or damaged, intimating the depressive position. Concrete hope aims at integration and reparation. It is about going forward despite disappointments, promoting activism while challenging passivity and detachment.

The therapeutic dyad may engage in exploring concrete hope under an umbrella of utopia (Munoz 2019). Utopia is a bedfellow of creativity. It opens roads to renewed hope and transformation of trauma. In utopia, a rejection of the traumatizing here and now leads to unfreezing cycles of resentment, which leads to opening vistas of change. Utopia delves into potentiality for a better world, integrating past, present, and future in fluid continuity. When hope fails and the dangers of the present threaten the therapeutic dyad with despair, turning to the utopian imaginary may offer a lifeboat to navigate turbulent waters. Utopia helps to survive the impossible present while charting the course for a new and different future via hope of the concrete variety. ■

<sup>1</sup> IPTAR's response can be found in "Terrorism and the Psychoanalytic Space International Perspectives from Ground Zero," edited by Joseph Cancelmo, Isaac Joan Tylim, Hoffenberg, and Hattie Myers. Pace Univ. Press 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers-Letson, Nyong'o, and Pellegrini in 2019 Jose Munoz *Cruising Utopia*, p.p. X.

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# TOOTHACHE

Joshua Maserow

**The Analyst** stares into the steam of his green tea. Some of the more proactive flakes escape a tear in the frail nylon sachet, wending to the surface, a morning Rorschach for no one to interpret.

The first of his five patients for the day is out in the waiting room, flicking through one of the old copies of the *LRB* fanned out on the scuffed coffee table with splintered legs.

After all, the Analyst wanted to make and maintain the right impression — *urbane*, *intellectual*, and *playful* were three adjectives he hoped crossed some folks' minds some of the time.

The Analyst should be revisiting his process notes. Instead, he is brooding. Since his midcareer burst of publications on posthumanism and psychoanalysis, he had been wondering whether he was a better therapist than person.

The idea skittles his viscera. Think of the sensation of ingesting a large pill on an empty stomach.

The notion was a parting gift from his second wife, a landscape architect with kind eyes. The day she uttered those freighted words, they separated. For several months, he had been urging her to seek psychodynamic treatment.

“Address the relational disturbance inherited from your deprecating parents.”

His formulation, not hers.

In the Analyst's mind, every one of her attempts to connect became instances of neurotic transference, unjustly projected. Really they were meant for her absent father. For weeks, he'd wake up in the early morning with molten tension in his legs, arms, and abdomen. He'd shake her from her sleep.

“Quit with the unending projective identification.”

These feelings were hers. Not his, he thought.

“Own them, metabolize them. Take the rocks hoarded in your childhood back; stop handing them to me.”

It only got worse when she began psychoanalysis with someone trained at an institute in the right part of town.

She started using all of the in-house terms.

His language, he thought.

Enactment, repetition compulsion, basic fault, regression, “as if” personality, splitting, moral masochism — together with a trove of other terms — became part of her idiolect.

For the next few months, every few nights, he'd wake up with a jolt and ask her to stop being so ocnophilic.

He said that.

“Find your own identity.”

“Quit with the relentless introjective identification.”

“Stop raiding my stash. Build up your own.”

“We're not one person, you know.”

She'd respond with sleep and red squalls of confusion in her widening eyes.

“What do you want from me?”

His response was always the same:

“You'll work it out. You'll figure it out.

Free your mind of the past.”

But she never did figure it out. Neither did he.

She left him on a bright spring morning.

“You gave up your goodness running after unconscious conflicts and magic-bullet insights.”

The words struck him. A volley of glossy charcoal pebbles.

As the door closed behind her, he shuffled into the kitchen and found her copy of Buber's *I and Thou* on the countertop. He opened it at random, settling on the word *vergegnung*: mismeeting, miscounter. Think of two wolves baring their teeth, circling each other before trotting off in opposite directions. He wept heavily. No tears fell.

A windy pain bore into his middle.

He snapped the book shut and put it outside

on the stoop for a stranger to pick up.

He found himself in a cold house that used to be their home.

He went upstairs to finish writing a paper. “Healing beyond words: On the co-creation of silent mutuality.”

He was the keynote speaker at a conference the next day.

“We'd all do well to remember the mutative potency of nonverbal recognition” — the final sentence of his address.

The Analyst's work received high praise from his colleagues.

They swiftly acknowledged him on their way to the makeshift food stand. Pastries and wine served by a phalanx of grad students hoping to be noticed by the right people.

He acknowledged his colleagues' ersatz good wishes with a thin, curling grin. More like a grimace.

The Analyst broke from his reverie and the ceiling in his office heaved. The ovoid light above leered at him. He sighed, lips billowing. Think of the tattered sails of a boat blown off course. The remains of a wrung-out rag.

He pulled a greasy page out from the desk drawer.

It contained a poem written by an estranged friend for a class in grad school they both attended. He locked in his new Apple earbuds, a gift from his daughter, and turned on Beving's “Kawakaari.” He began reading the poem, half hoping to discover something new in himself.

A monthly ritual for who knows how long.

## Thirteen Ways of Looking at Therapeutic Neutrality

I

Sat within the ochre expanse of Atacama,

The lone cactus slowly grows

Under the blanket of an aloof sky.

II

The elastic band

signs a covenant

with almost all the strangers and shapes

it meets.

III

The engine splutters,

A diapason of rust.

You can't go far in neutral.

IV

Are we to watch

With our father's binoculars

As Jakobshavn

Topples into the ocean?





## V

How do we address  
the attachment style

Of cats

Who turn their burning eyes  
From the invitation they seek?

## VI

The western meditator  
Travels East

To learn the Dharma.

There he hears nothing  
but

The torsions of his master's  
Bowels.

## VII

As the windswirls

With rage and unforgiveness

The supple reed

Bends headlong over the bellicose river  
but refuses to break.

## VIII

Standing over the supine man

Casting an inherited shadow,

The surgeon inserts

The stent

void of memory and desire.

## IX

The red in the twisting

Patterns of the analyst's rug

Bubble-hot

With the larva of unthought knowns.

## X

What are we to make of the mirror,  
Brocaded in thumb-smudged gold,  
Echoing the image of the onlooker,  
Before the cloudbursts sing their acid dirge?

## XI

Alone in the trattoria

The professor tamps

The crumbling focaccia

Down on the chipped porcelain plate

And wonders:

Does it really matter whether we mix –

in

The olive oil with the vinegar

Or

Vice versa?

## XII

Will the winter-tired man,

Alone in his apartment writing Amazon reviews,

Be forever haunted

By the broken umbrella

He tossed on the piss-stained stairs

Of his subway stop?

## XIII

Kant gave us the moral imperative

Levinas the cry of the Other

Stevens the estranging word.

Which path should we take

Without mocking the blackbird?





The Patient was new to analysis.

“You know, my mental troubles aren’t that pressing.

They’re not as bad as a toothache.”

He said this the first time they met.

The Analyst, embodying a seasoned pose of reserved kindness, beckoned him into the room.

The Patient sat down on the couch and turned his iPhone off, placed it on the dehydrated wooden footstool next to the antimacassar draped over the head of the couch. Then the watch and glasses came off.

The Analyst had noticed this careful procedure with curiosity without explicitly inviting it into their thrice weekly explorations. In their previous session, the Analyst, a psychiatrist from elsewhere, wrote the patient a prescription. The Patient hadn’t slept properly in weeks, waking up each night with gargoyles in his stomach and spiders in his bronchi.

“Have you taken a benzo before?”

“No.”

“That’s rare in this day and age.

How have you avoided them?”

“Well, I don’t usually get into relationships with people. That’s the trick.”

Their sessions usually began in thick silence, the Patient slowly feeling his way into his internal world. Today was different. As soon as he uncrossed his arms, laying them by his sides, he spoke.

“You have an accent. Where are you from?”

The Analyst froze in time. A blaze swept his hippocampus and amygdala, scorching through neglected neural circuits. Think of the cracked concrete floor of an abandoned courtyard, green life reaching for the sun from below.

The Analyst is four years old. He sees a figure, a widening presence appearing in the doorway. Light shoots in, a lucent ring of orange singeing the featureless shape moving toward him from outside. The presence is tall and ominous. Think of a baobab tree blotting out the lowering sun. A Jack Russell named Prince scampers between the baobab’s legs and knocks the Analyst over. He falls and cracks his chin on the edge of the staircase opposite the door.

*Outside: masked gunmen kill thirteen mourners attending the funeral of an activist.*

The Analyst cries. A puddle of blood unspools from the bottom of his face onto the first step. Prince sniffs at it, tongue lolling covetously. Think of fealty paid to a royal. The baobab steps in, chasing Prince away. The Analyst is deaf to consolation.

*Outside: hateful men with rags, vinegar, and rifles lay barbed wire on the door to freedom.*

The Analyst senses nothing but the spreading heat in his forearms and abdomen. Terror, anger, and loss tone his world. The baobab sings soothing words that don’t land. They float away through the gaps in its tangled branches. Think of a torn umbrella in the rain.

*Outside: the superstructure creaks, seeds of change blowing in from the future.*

Now the Analyst is in the alcove under the staircase. He is a year older. He is absorbed in play, building castles in the air. His figurines are knights on a quest to rescue a princess held captive by an evil sorcerer. Think of Grendel, think of Sauron. They run into myriad obstacles on the way. Most perish: lives snuffed out, valor intact. As the last two reach the sorcerer’s fortress, readying themselves for the final standoff, a voice dials in from another universe.

“Come meet your sister.”

The analyst puts down his toys and exits the alcove. Think of the feeling of waking up from a pleasurable dream before it ends. An aborted promise. The Analyst slowly ascends the staircase to the bedroom above. The baobab is leading the Analyst by the hand. They pass the queen-size bed, stripped of its sheets. Think of a polystyrene slab harried by pigeons with deformed feet. People glide by, scuttling off into the night. The Analyst squeezes through the crack in the sliding door. He enters the bathroom, hovering on the outskirts. Think of an evening sky before a thunderstorm. Dark and crimson.

*Outside: 46 people are massacred, peace talks stall.*

At the center of the rectangular bathroom, lined floor to ceiling with cold charcoal tiles, is an oblong tub. Water on the brink, almost overflowing.

The Mother washes life into the Newborn. Two entangled souls. The water darkens with blood. Think of beet soup, maybe borscht, with two dollops of sour cream, one subtending the other.

*Outside: a leader of the new dawn is shot dead in his driveway.*

The Analyst stares at this scene, something inside him heaves. He doesn’t know what. Intersubjective space curves in inarticulate vectors. The Mother speaks.

“This is your little sister. Come meet her.”

The analyst speaks.

“oh.”

He turns away, banging his left shoulder on the frame of the sliding door.

It stings.

He walks past the bare bed and down the staircase, back to his universe in the alcove under the staircase.

*Outside: rain pours down on the scorched ground of the interregnum; there is new hope.*

The Analyst tries to resume his quest but can’t. He breaks the plastic heads off his figurines. He bangs them against the sharp cast-iron balustrade of the staircase. Once the demolition is over, he lies down. The Analyst looks up into the dusty crevices canalizing

the cream surface of the ceiling above. There is usually a story to find up there. Think of clouds that congeal in the shape of a fox or the face of someone you know in profile. But the Analyst sees nothing. A box of unnameable feelings. The Analyst is much older. The baobab is now his Father. They are sitting at a small marble table. His grandmother sits across from them, clutching his Father’s hand.

*Outside: 44 strikers are massacred by the police on a hill.*

The Grandmother’s knuckles are coiled, her fingers bent. A topography of defamiliarizing angles. She stares vacantly out at the ocean, as the waves stampede the shore. Think of a pack of wild horses. Their hooves beating the hard earth.

*Outside: the blade runner fires his 9mm into a closed bathroom door.*

The Grandmother is trapped in the near present and the distant past. She eats a bagel, relishing each morsel. The Baobab looks on through pinched hazel eyes, with loving amusement and unmet needs.

*Outside: the father of the new nation dies, a respiratory infection.*

The Grandmother arrived there long ago. She stepped off a Baltic boat. It was named after a Spanish town haunted by the Inquisition. She never spoke about the crossing and its causes. The felt grammar of the past hoarded away, a living deadness. A bone in the mind. An interminable task to be spun out in different ways by her children. Think of a gap that cannot be filled in a game of Tetris.

*Outside: the president builds himself a fire pool with the public purse.*

The Grandmother has forgotten the Analyst’s name. She tells him she loved poetry as a little girl. She recites Dickinson’s “I dwell in Possibility – (466)” and Henley’s “Invictus.”

Then a nursery rhyme in her parents’ tongue which not she nor the Father nor the Analyst can comprehend. Five minutes later, she recites them again. And again. And again. A dream, recurring for the Analyst in his forties. He is driving a matte-black helmet-shaped car down the national highway into the pith of the city. To the left, a mountain climbs into the sky, draped in a cotton-wool pall of stringy clouds. To the right, a bay spangled with the burst of early morning sunshine extends into infinity. Inert cargo ships draw his gaze to the horizon. Beyond lies an Island circled by sea gulls with the smoke of past atrocity in their beating wings. The highway is empty, not another vehicle insight. The Analyst is not alone. Two figures sit in the back of the car, bodies with heads but no faces. Think of the strain too see in a dark room. That is what it is like trying to picture who they are. There are no cars, only pedestrians in single file.

They walk in the emergency lane, in the opposite direction. The Analyst is feverish, his breathing shallow. He feels his heart thudding in his fingers wrapped around the steering wheel. Wasps whirr through the subclavian artery in his left shoulder. The car is perilously close to the slow-walking caravan. Think of the rush of stale air as the train hurtles by. The Analyst takes the nearest off-ramp and stops at a bronze traffic light. The sky is a reddish brown, a convexity of dried blood. He turns his gaze to the left, catching his faceless companions in his peripheral vision. An old fort, wound tight in barricade tape, abuts the road. He exits the car and squints into the glinting sun. He joins the silent chain of travelers tilting onward. No questions asked, not a single word exchanged. The two faceless figures on the back seat sit still as statues. Then each extends a gloved hand into the chasm of the other’s blank face. The Analyst, momentarily immobilized, returns to his office. To his Patient, lying there. Looking upward. Wanting answers, craving respite.

A stranger, promising to revitalize the Analyst’s tiring curiosity. The Analyst loops back to the irruptive question. Think of the feeling stirred in your body by the atonal bark of a PA system in a government office of one kind or another.

“Well, I would like to give you an answer. I wonder, though, if we could explore where that question comes from first?” ■





## Transferences

When I met my mother  
at the west side docks -  
it was 67 years ago -

*Come on! I'm still there?*

Come on with me, I'm still  
there,

I met my mother  
at my doc's. Tall  
and graceful he  
leaned over toward me, ruthless  
at times, miraculously  
kind. Many more than one  
of a kind - a motherman,  
a bus driver, a skeleton floating  
just beneath the surface  
of the water, an ancient  
wooden dock.

*And now you, a woman  
in your radiant white  
blouses. An exquisite  
one today, embroidered with  
interlocking circles of silver,  
a chain of circles suggesting  
infinite danger,  
a thing that never ends.*

*You want to know about my mother?  
Death is her name a woman called Death  
I said as a child smiling shouting weeping -  
She's Dead, but Death is a prettier word -  
her name is Death. I'll call her Death -  
bitterness and hunger crossing paths.*

On the west coast I sailed across a sea  
where I saw the Queen Mary  
anchored and docked,  
too old to ride the waves





again - I was far  
 from the west side docks  
 where I shouted Good Morning  
 Mama! Look! My new white boots!  
 Ocean wind and rain drowned  
 out my small cry but she waved.  
 He wavered, I hoped,  
 between professional discipline  
 and uncontrollable love, shoot  
 counter transference to hell, death  
 to the discipline that saved me.

And he drove those buses for years  
 in my dreams - we were always lost.  
 Streetcars, my father  
 called old Philadelphia buses,  
 streetcars he learned to negotiate,  
 like me, longing to master  
 a new country.

A streetcar named  
 Desire. My son playing  
 Stanley. My father jumping  
 on board, in his hand  
 an orange, tasted for the first time,  
 I feel the succulent juices  
 seeping through his fingers.

I wanted to taste you, I may  
 have dared to say  
 in a hesitant whisper wanting/  
 not wanting to be heard - I  
 want to eat you take  
 you inside me as I was  
 once inside of her, of Death,  
 to be inside of you Fatherman  
 Doctorman.

Now you're dead like them,  
 and I'm afraid of wanting Death again.

Come back. Come on  
 with me. I'm there again  
 I never called her  
 Mama. Can only clumsily  
 write Mother. I write it now  
 hitting wrong keys.  
 Mama, you called her, Mama,  
 you persisted  
 insisting on the lost word,  
 the buried plea.

Always too dependent  
 on the kindness of strangers  
 I complied and  
 I lay down for you.

*Make no mistake, new woman guide,  
 I see those old sea-rivers of guilt and rage,  
 and I'm afraid of falling into shadows,  
 ancient creatures lurking in long rotting  
 dismantled wooden docks.  
 Good morning ancient creatures,  
 my old dead alive again  
 in this new death, lost, lost again.*

Come on, come on, come on  
 with me into shadows take  
 my hand this writing hand -

No, leave me be  
 too old to ride the seas again  
 the radiant white  
 silver striped  
 infinite seas.

But yes, come with me again,  
 boldly over ancient waving seas again,  
 I see it's ancient mourning time again.

Jane Lazarre





**There goes**

There goes  
another bald-faced lie  
and  
there goes the bald eagle  
and the shadow banking grows  
as the kids in cages die  
while the man who couldn't remember the name of  
his own department  
halts  
the money meant to halt  
nuclear waste  
from oozing toward the Colorado  
but with bravado haste  
the blame the blame the blame  
yanking the chains  
of schmoozing fellow puppeteers  
so everything is someone else's fault  
when the swamp shapeshifts instead of drains  
and there goes the Golem  
as the shadow of the pointing finger grows

Polly Weissman

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