

# room 10.20

A Sketchbook for Analytic Action



- C. Jama Adams
- Aremu Adams Adebisi
- Rocío Barcellona • Daisy Bassen
- Marcia Black • Eric Chasalow
- Paula Coomer • Daniel Derderian
- Fang Duan • Linda Emanuel
- Richard Grose • Gabriel Heller
- Mohamad Kebbewar • Omer Leshem
- Joshua Maserow • Dinah Mendes
- Maryam Omidi • Margarita Serafimova
- Lara Sheehi • Shreya Varma
- Caroline Volel

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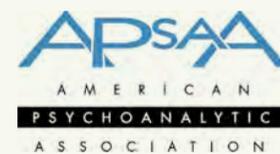
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**C. Jama Adams**, PhD, is an associate professor in the department of Africana studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY). His most recent book, *Africana Peoples in China: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration Experiences, Identity, and Precarious Employment*, was published by Routledge in 2018.

**Rocío Barcellona**, PsyD, works in a maximum-security prison. As a clinician, she seeks to make space, to encourage autonomy, and to facilitate self-discovery, believing that the more we know ourselves, the less damage we do to ourselves and others. She doesn't go to work to "fix," change, or judge anyone. She doesn't know what is best for people and cannot keep anyone safe or alive. She can only listen and promise not to run away.

**Marcia Black**, PhD, is a psychologist in private practice for over twenty-five years in Massachusetts. She has been active as a volunteer at the intersection of domestic violence, the criminal justice system, and social change for many decades. Currently, she provides pro bono affidavits for asylum-seekers who are fleeing situations of extreme abuse or torture, through Health Right International.

**Fang Duan**, PhD, LMSW, is a Chinese-Canadian living in the United States, and a psychoanalyst in training at IPTAR. Working with a diverse population from various social-cultural backgrounds, she is interested in exploring, both clinically and theoretically, the implications of psychoanalytic thinking for individual and societal development.

**Linda Emanuel**, MD, is an academic physician focused on palliative and end-of-life care. More than a decade ago, she began training as a psychoanalyst. She is now professor emerita at Northwestern and in private practice as a psychoanalyst, still with a focus on people and those with family members facing life-shortening illness. She is a faculty member of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute and a member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society & Institute.

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

**Gabriel Heller** is a candidate in the adult program in psychoanalysis at IPTAR and teaches writing at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. His stories and essays have appeared in The Best American Nonrequired Reading, Crazyhorse, The Sun, War Literature & the Arts, Witness, and other literary publications.

**Mohamad Kebbewar** was born and raised in Aleppo. Immigrating to Canada at age nineteen, Kebbewar earned a degree in history from Concordia University before becoming a graphic designer. He recently published a chapbook with Phafours press entitled *Evacuate*. He is putting the final touches on his novel *The Bones of Aleppo*.

**Omer Leshem** is a clinical psychology PhD student at the New School for Social Research. His research examines the role of emotion, empathy, and interpersonal interaction in shaping musical experience.

**Joshua Maserow** is a clinical psychology PhD student at the New School for Social Research. His scholarly interests include comparative psychoanalysis and psychotherapy research.

**Dinah Mendes**, PhD, is a member of IPTAR and a psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice in NYC. Her article "Psychological Transformation: Convergent Themes in Jewish and Psychoanalytic Thinking" will be published in the December 2020 issue of *Psychoanalytic Review*.

**Maryam Omid** is a clinical psychology PhD student at the New School for Social Research. Her research looks at the intersections of race, ethnicity, social justice, and mental health. She is the author of *Holidays in Soviet Sanatoriums*.

**Lara Sheehi**, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist and faculty member at the George Washington University. She is currently co-authoring a book with Stephen Sheehi, *Psychoanalysis Under Occupation: Practicing Resistance in Palestine* (Routledge). Lara is on the advisory board to the USA-Palestine Mental Health Network and to Psychoanalysis for Pride.

**Shreya Varma**, MPhil, is a clinical psychologist in New Delhi and a professional life member of the Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists. She has an interest in studying the relationship between works of literature and perversions. She works with adults in her private practice.

**Caroline Volel**, MD, MPH, is a second-year psychoanalytic candidate at the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy and the Harlem Family Psychoanalytic Institute. She is trained in pediatrics and preventive medicine and is on the faculty of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, Department of Population & Family Health.

## Artists

**Eric Chasalow**, PhD, is the dean of the Graduate School, Irving G. Fine Professor of Music, and director of BEAMS, the Brandeis Electro-Acoustic Music Studio at Brandeis University, where he has taught since 1990. He is especially well known for works that combine instruments with electronic sound but has collaborated with other musicians and artists to create a wide range of projects. The Eric Chasalow collection in the Library of Congress was established in 2009.

**Daniel Derderian** is a French fine artist, born in 1962 in Marseille to parents of Armenian origin. He is the third generation after the genocide. A former dancer at the National Ballet of Marseille directed by Roland Petit and the Het Nationale Ballet in Amsterdam, he now teaches classical dance in the conservatories of Paris. He began his work as a fine artist in 2008. His early works were X-ray collages - a clinical material that objectively shows the interior of a body and with which he explores his origins, cultural and social influences, and education. He exhibited them in 2008 and 2009 at the VIP Marseille Gallery. In 2013 he switched to paper and canvas. This work is mainly figurative, most often portraits of subjects that are lost on a solid background. He projects on them his loneliness and his fantasies. To date, he has made around a thousand drawings and canvases, which he is beginning to share and to exhibit.

## Poets

**Aremu Adams Adebisi** is a North-Central Nigerian writer and economist. In 2019, he was nominated for Best of the Net, a Pushcart Prize, and the 2019 Philadelphia Fringe Festival. His work of poetry, "Force Mechanism," was adapted into *Lucent Dreaming's* first theatrical performance in Wales. He has works published in *Newfound Magazine*, *Lucky Jefferson*, and elsewhere. He served as a mentor for SprinNG Fellowship and a panelist for the Gloria Anzaldua Prize. He edits poetry for *ARTmosterrific*, facilitates Transcendence Poetry Masterclass, and curates the newsletter *Poetry Weekly* on Substack.

**Daisy Bassen** is a poet and practicing psychiatrist who graduated from Princeton University's creative writing program and completed her medical training at the University of Rochester and Brown. Her work has been published in *Oberon*, *McSweeney's*, *The Sow's Ear*, and *[PANK]* as well as multiple other journals. She was the winner of the So to Speak 2019 Poetry Contest, the 2019 ILDS White Mice Contest, and the 2020 Beullah Rose Poetry Prize. She was doubly nominated for the 2019 Best of the Net anthology and for a 2019 Pushcart Prize. She lives in Rhode Island with her family.

**Paula Coomer** spent most of her childhood in the industrial Ohio River town of New Albany, Indiana. The daughter of more than two hundred years of Kentucky Appalachian farmers, she moved to the Pacific Northwest in 1978. She has been a migrant farm laborer, a waitress, a bean sorter in a cannery, a cosmetics saleswoman, a federal officer, a nurse, and a university writing instructor. Her essays, short fiction, and poetry have appeared in *Gargoyle*, *Ascent*, and *The Raven Chronicles*, among others. Books include the novels *Jagged Edge of the Sky*, *Dove Creek*, *Summer of Government Cheese*, the Blue Moon health and wellness series, and two poetry collections, *Nurses Who Love English* and *Devil at the Crossroads*. Ms. Coomer was nominated for the Pulitzer, the Pushcart, and other awards. Her newest book, a collection of short fiction, *Somebody Should Have Scolded the Girl*, is a BuzzFeed-recommended title. She lives in eastern Washington State, where she teaches and promotes writing in the community.

**Margarita Serafimova** is the winner of the 2020 Tony Quagliano International Poetry Award and a 2020 Pushcart nominee. She has four collections in Bulgarian and a chapbook, *A Surgery of A Star* (Staring Problem Press). Her chapbook, *En Tim (Wilderness)* (San Francisco University Poetry Center), and a full-length collection, *A White Boat and Foam* (Interstellar Flight Press), are forthcoming. Her work appears widely, including in the *Nashville Review*, *LIT*, *Agenda Poetry*, *Poetry South*, *Botticelli*, *London Grip*, *Steam Ticket Literary Journal*, *Waxwing*, *A-Minor*, *Trafika Europe*, *Noble/ Gas Qtrly*, *Obra/Artifact*, *great weather for Media*, *Origins*, and *Nixes Mate Review*.

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The day was departing,  
the darkened air was releasing  
all living creatures on the earth from their toils;  
and I alone  
prepared myself to undergo the war  
both the journey and the pity,  
which memory, unerring, will depict.

—Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 11 (1-6)

## RE-VISION

For Freud, nearing the end of his life, the fateful question for the human species came down to whether and to what extent our cultural development would succeed in mastering the disturbance our aggressive and self-destructive instincts inflict upon our communal life.

“Men,” he wrote in the last sentences of *Civilization and its Discontents*, “have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty exterminating one another to the last man. They know this and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness, and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two ‘heavenly powers,’ eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary.” Eros’s immortal adversary, Thanatos, was life’s somber and inexorable drive toward death. Two years later, in 1931 as Hitler ascended to power, Freud went back to this paragraph and added one last line, “But who can foresee with what success and with what result?”

Now as then, no one can foresee what will happen next.

With over a million souls dead from COVID, with droughts, fires, and floods rendering the earth uninhabitable; with the hatred and fear we train toward each other engendering new ruthless alliances; and with the US presidential election in just few days determining the fate of its democracy, if our “cultural development” is to succeed in assuring our survival, it must step in quickly. The analysts, poets, and artists featured in ROOM 10.20 are seizing this darkness as an occasion to illuminate a new beginning.

From the heart of a maximum security prison Rocío Barcellona bears witness to the depths our society has sunk to. In “Collective Disappearance,” she finds no hope. “I became aware,” she writes in the midst of the COVID epidemic, “of

the spaces we inhabit between person and disappearance, marching toward and against erasure with our inmates. At times our presence is the only witness to their presence... Who will hold on to us as we fight to hold on to them, as we fight to convince them to hold on to themselves in a world that does not care if they let go?” Barcellona poses a question that is a touchstone in ROOM 10.20. “How do we treat ourselves and others like human beings...? How do we remain human?”

“The image of human life so violently, and yet lightly, canceled in the name of law and order, state and authority, was deeply imbedded in the innermost recess of my psyche,” writes Fang Duan in her heart-stopping essay, “From an Other Perspective.” In the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the Black Lives Matter movement, Fang Duan reveals a radical understanding she has come to about “otherness” in light of her own family’s blood-chilling history. In “Ancestral Spaces,” Marcia Black looks beyond and beneath what she calls “trauma’s rubble.” “As we find ways out of the imprisoned minds and disconnected/devitalized bodies created through colonization,” Black imagines that “...we might discover the guidance of ancestors who exist within us and whose ways of knowing carry wisdom waiting to be unlocked and opened.”

Would that we could find the key to unlock that ancient wisdom. In the meantime, Gabriel Heller in his essay “Between the Lines,” and Maserow, Leshem, and Omid in their essay “Fire and Ice in Portland” get in closer to try to see better. Struck by “white people (who are) in a rush to prove their wokeness,” Heller wonders, “what to make of the disparity between our knowing language of concepts and analysis and the unknowing, ceaseless, subterranean language of fantasies and feelings?” “Fire and Ice in Portland” parses the deadly linguistic conflation of viral racism. “Doubling down on nationalistic and nativist values becomes a way of creating order out of and finding personal meaning in existential chaos. Dividing the world into all good and all bad provides people with a chimeric sense of mastery which dilutes death anxiety.”

As a former geriatrician and palliative care physician, Linda Emmanuel comes to psychoanalysis knowing full well how facing death and digesting loss must come to be “bounded by reality” rather than this kind of chimeric sense of mastery. She has named this developmental achievement “existential maturity.” And in “Learning from Chickens,” she illustrates that what is required to face the stark reality of our finitude comes not with age but through care—it comes with an internal sense of being held.

So what happens when what once held gives way: to a sudden catastrophe; to creeping pollution and political collapse; to war and pandemic? What morning can melt the darkness of this night?

In “Grief Suspended in Explosion,” following 190 deaths, 6,500 injuries, and over 300,000 people left homeless in Beirut, Lara Sheehi writes, “I can’t hold on to the space... The Romanticism of my soul, my longing, my desires are quelled, suspended alongside my grief.”

In “Pollution: The Case of India,” Varma writes to us from New Delhi, “My panic-stricken and recurring thoughts about the state of my country, my home, (are) haunting me like a waking nightmare.”

In “War and Pandemic in Aleppo,” Kebbewar writes, “During the epidemic, a simple handshake is more disturbing than a missile launcher near our home. The invisible danger is what makes the virus lethal... In war, even artillery needs to take a break...”

But amidst the grief, and terror, and horror for these authors, something is illuminated. For Varma it comes in the knowledge that she is not alone. “The feeling of terror that haunts me pervasively haunts every home in India today... Scared that I (was) alone, I stayed shut. Maybe we are engaged in a joint pathology as we rummage through and piece together our lives around these many horrific events.” Lara Sheehi understands that a new inner stability can come to be found in movement. “I am in a holding pattern — working to find a place for my Lebanese siblings... alongside a global solidarity struggle that feels more aligned ...with every other liberation struggle to which my heart, body, and soul belong.” And from Syria, Mohamad Kebbewar finds unexpected possibility. “We no longer hear the sound of bombs... the sky is cleaner, and our minds are calmer. The virus made us aware of nature, climate, and the world around us. We don’t know how the world will resume its wars and lives. I hope it will be different...”

And what in our “cultural development” might support us as we totter on the edge of this cliff? In her essay “Psychoanalysis in the Community,” Caroline Volel, offers just this: “psychoanalytic compassion.” She writes, “It transcends race. It transcends class. It transcends disposition as long as one is willing to accept the mind-blowing concept that we are all, on some level, the same. The adopted lens of psychoanalytic compassion changes my outlook from ‘this is not’ me to ‘this is also me,’ in order to contextualize whatever is happening with whatever piece of myself that can understand it.”

But that is by no means all Volel has to say. As a pediatrician who has worked for decades as a civil servant for underserved and marginalized populations, she has been forced, she says, to think both largely and collectively. She argues that “psychoanalysis is a powerful tool that has been kept within exclusive circles. We have a responsibility to learn how to bring it to a larger community that has not had ready access to deep psychodynamic work.” She is not wrong, nor is she done. “We can examine collectively who we have othered if we ask our questions with both a critical eye and deep analytic honesty.”

C. Jama Adams and Dinah Mendes could not agree more. For both of them, change begins at home. In “Times of Rage and Opportunity: Thirteen Tasks for Analytic Institutes,” Adams moves between registers—challenging the trifecta of culture, organization, and self, while simultaneously offering a recipe to operationalize transformation in the psychoanalytic motherhood of analytic training—the institute. Dinah Mendes takes psychoanalysis itself to task in “Fault Lines, Blind Spots, & Otherness.” Parsing two hushed-up problems brought to the surface by COVID and by the Black Lives Matter movement, Mendes talks about the financial access to psychoanalytic treatment, and the long-overdue need to identify racial otherness and othering within psychoanalytic theory and practice. She notes that “Pressures from within and without threaten the future of psychoanalysis, and it seems more important than ever to resist fracture and splitting and to seek common ground, and unifying belief, and commitment.”

James Baldwin wrote that “the loss of an empire implies a radical revision of individual identity.” Siding with Eros, the authors in ROOM 10.20 are saying radical revision is possible. It’s down to us. ■

# P R O T E S T A T I O N

As much as I like to believe in the multiverse,  
 This is the world we've got, though we've folded it  
 With novels and poems, creasing it like a brain.  
 Misery nestles against beauty, the hopeless desire  
 To be good to you, to have been good and not needed  
 To have been told, anger and sleep and the necessity of waking;  
 It isn't something else that pulls you from dreams,  
 It's your mind, a collection of fireflies in a jar,  
 Garish on a PET scan. Restless. Everything is true  
 And false at once, everything is right and wrong,  
 Sky reflected in a pond's still surface still the sky,  
 Still frilled with rich green scum. I'd like to put myself  
 Away like a doll on a shelf, but I know how malevolent  
 A doll's real face is, how every domino moment  
 Presses against you, the ascendant, inevitable fear  
 It will begin to move, its throatless voice always your own.

# From an Other P E R S P E C T I V E

At first, I did not know why I was weeping inconsolably upon seeing the image of George Floyd's naked face as his neck was crushed by the knee of a man fully armed with police gear and, more strikingly, a look of total nonchalance. I did not know why I could not bear watching the video of one human, so unmoved, with such ease, squeezing the life out of another human being who was squirming, pleading, begging, calling for his momma.

Then it dawned on me that the image of human life so violently, and yet lightly, canceled in the name of law and order, state and authority, was deeply imbedded in the innermost recess of my psyche.

As a Chinese Canadian migrating to the US to study psychoanalysis, I myself am an outsider, an *other*, and I am no stranger to violence and destruction done to people who are conveniently grouped as "others," often by those in power who are perceived to be "good."

Indeed, in life and in work, I am baffled by this intriguing phenomenon of "othering." Here, the *other* conveys negative meanings; difference and distinction are perceived as inherently threatening and dangerous. *Self* and *other* stand in opposition and hostility to each other. Just as the toddler's first gesture of autonomy is often a loud no, certain bodies, individual and national, seek to forge homogeneity and sameness in a paranoid-schizoid way, perhaps unconsciously to salvage a clean, clear sense of self or identity. For fear of contamination, what is *other* must be obliterated, every trace of it. In the process, people are *othered* to death, both physically and symbolically—alienated, dis-identified, disregarded, and annihilated.

However, if we consult any dictionary, or even just Google, for the meaning of *other*, we will find another meaning: *further, additional, alternate, what is left, remaining*, etc. For me, psychoanalysis, starting from Freud's concept of the unconscious, has been teaching this additional or supplemental—rather than oppositional or adversarial—view of otherness. In psychoanalysis the concept of otherness comes to the fore, and points toward an infinitely, interminable "other," that is ultimately unknown and unknowable, in ourselves and in others.

Otherness first hit home fifteen years ago, soon after I moved to Toronto from China. During the difficult transitional time when I was trying to get used to a more relaxed mode of functioning, my beloved older sister in China had her first full-blown psychotic breakdown. This sister, who had been like a mother to me when I was a child, was suddenly talking about death and creating earthquakes during our weekly phone calls. Overwhelmed and terrified, I did not know what to do except gaze at the same page of the same book in the same corner of the university library for months.

It was then that I decided I want to become a clinician and work with the people whom a much-revered family elder called "undeserving"; mental health patients were largely shunned as the other, unclean and untouchable, disgrace of the family and beyond, in China fifteen years ago and now.

In her madness, my sister not only wanted to shake the earth by creating earthquakes; she also rode trains and took planes to the Tian'anmen Square, China's central political arena, the place where Mao Zedong announced to the world on October 1, 1949 that the Chinese people had stood up.

Using a loudspeaker and a roaring loud voice, my sister accused the Chinese Government of killing people and demanded accountability. Perhaps because of her apparently erratic behavior, my sister got a hearing. The police learned that she was referring to the many family tragedies throughout the generations, from our great-great-grandpa's decapitation in feudal China's last reformation, great-grandpa's murder during the Red Army's Long March, to grandpa's death by starvation in China's Great Leap Forward movement, to one aunt's killing in the strict enforcement of one-child policy, and more. The list could go on and on.

Looking back, in her almost divine madness, my sister was telling the truth of the "other," another part of recent Chinese history buried in the grand narrative of national resurrection: the violence, cruelty, destruction, madness. Indeed, not one man in my family's five generations died what could be called a natural death, a good death, a death one would like to die. Treated as a madwoman rather than a political agitator, my sister was counseled by kind officials

to take a brighter view of things rather than dwelling in the family's past misery: "Look, what a world's difference we've made from the past! What kind of life your family is having now; what opportunities you and your sisters had, education, jobs, and money-wise! Your sister lives in Canada; you are riding bullet trains and taking airplanes to come to Tian'anmen to say bad things about the government when nobody is harming you!"

Five times, my sister went to protest; five times, she was ushered back to our hometown in Sichuan, which was her registered place of residence, and thrown into the local psychiatric hospital. Then, two years ago, after she was discharged from hospital for the last time, she was put under a sort of house arrest, with monthly allowance and free medical services, so she could not create more trouble. Two months later, together with my father, my sister died at the age of forty-seven. They drowned at our family house in a flood caused by the collapse of an ill-advised dam built to tame a river that runs through the area. Would she still be alive had her mobility not been taken away and had the river been treated with more reverence and care?

I still do not know if my sister's Tian'anmen protest in the midst of a psychotic breakdown is the return of the repressed/oppressed, as my psychoanalytic training seems to indicate. I do not know if my sister was reenacting another trauma sedimented into the unconscious of generations of my family.

In another public square of Beijing, on September 28, 1898, one year before Freud published *Interpretation of Dreams* on the other side of the earth, our great-great-grandpa, Yang Rui, a hapless young scholar, was publicly executed. He was one of the four ministers newly appointed by the emperor to take charge of feudal China's last reformation, historically known as Wuxu Reformation. As a patriot, he had joined the moderate school of reformers after the Qing Dynasty suffered a series of humiliating losses when confronting the Western powers at its door since the Opium War in 1839. He only wanted China to learn from the West, the "other," to become great again.

Yang Rui was arrested and put to immediate execution without trial. History books said he was a gentleman to the very last breath. He bowed and knelt as was required by the royal executioner. He asked a naïve question, politely and persistently: "What exactly is my crime?" No answer. Blood spurted three meters into the sky while he was being killed. He was butchered like an animal, with a rusted sword, and the butchering lasted for two hours. He was then forty-one years old.

In studying psychoanalysis, I have been learning about the infinitely multiple other possible determinants underlying my otherwise competent, autonomous self, and my soon-to-be-not-so-neat identity of a Chinese Canadian American psychoanalyst. I know I do not want to live and die like my sister or my great-great-grandfather, who, in madness and sanity, both acknowledged the existence of others.

I cannot help feeling fear and dread when friends in China tell me how they have to report time spent studying party policies and leaders' speeches on a weekly basis; their children's history and geography classes were recently replaced by classes in politics and morality. I cannot help feeling fear and dread when I heard the current US president's vicious attack against outsiders and immigrants. It seems that the mere existence of the other has become an offence and the evidence of otherness has to be removed from inside to outside.

I feel compelled to wonder: For each of these entities, what about the self has become so unbearable that it has to be disposed of along with "others"? What paranoia could be underlying this aggressive stiffening of defense against "others"? Is this approach of canceling/obliterating really helpful in restoring one's greatness or good feelings about being oneself?

Freud proposed the inevitable return of the repressed/oppressed either in broad daylight or the individual's private dream: "In waking life, the suppressed material in the mind is prevented from finding expression and is cut off from internal perception owing to the fact that the contradictions present in it are eliminated...; but during the night, under the sway of an impetus toward the construction of compromises, this suppressed material finds methods and means of forcing its way into consciousness." Simply put, repression/suppression/oppression does not mean we can erase the "other." The "other" will always come back, one way or another, sometimes with a vengeance, if not properly acknowledged. At this moment here in the US, many people, outsiders or not, are marching and speaking out, are challenging the nation to face an "other," darker side of its glorious history of dominance and superiority after George Floyd's gruesome murdering. In addition, in the US as well as in China, at this moment, mountains and rivers—parts of the unknown and unknowable nature—are raging and flooding, as if in protest of violence against and/or in demand of recognition of the Other. ■



# ANCESTRAL Spaces

What if our patients who “feel too much” aren’t just poorly regulated but are sensing something more that needs to be told? What if our patients who have been called “too sensitive” really are resonating with a more collective grief than their own? What if they have capacities and sensitivities that overwhelm them because no one has believed them and trained them how to use them? What if they feel “different” from others, not just because of trauma, or neuropsychological differences, but because they are carriers of old truths, of memories from before their time?

What if we are only seeing through a very narrowed aperture of possibilities? What are we missing? What if the closed-off portions of the psyche-soma don’t just contain trauma’s rubble, but beneath this rubble, deeper still, are miraculously preserved remnants of knowledge from other times, other spaces, other species, other dimensions of knowing? What if something else altogether is arising?

What if, as we find ways out of the imprisoned minds and disconnected/devitalized bodies created through colonization, we also bring ourselves and our patients into another experience of being? A space where we validate and participate and discover something else altogether? A way of being that recognizes not just the haunting of ghosts who carry the closed luggage of transgenerational trauma, but also the guidance of ancestors who exist within us and whose ways of knowing carry wisdom waiting to be unlocked and opened?

I have heard from Cherokee, Tibetan, and Jewish teachers that wisdom teachings have been hidden in undisclosed places and dimensions, melodies and alphabets, boulders and birdsong, by those who came before us. I am certain that this same understanding of hiddenness can be found in all wisdom and healing traditions around the globe, including psychoanalysis and transformational bodywork. These hidden teachings will become available to us when we, as humans, are ready to receive.

This kind of understanding is usually dismissed as “mystical” or “primitive” or “nonsense.” But what if this dismissal is a colonialist lie? What if we do carry remembrances of what it was like to be human before we were colonized? When we still lived in extended families, instead of the lonely isolation

of destined-to-fail nuclear families? When we still lived our lives in concentric, radiating circles of support, rather than in fragmented pieces of a hierarchical structure? When we still lived close to the earth, full of awe?

What if this time is one where more revelations/teachings are becoming available? Not only because this is a time of increased global suffering, but also a time when we have learned how to hear and hold? Through decades of protests, anti-oppression critical thinking, activism and pedagogy, and spiritual practices, we now have many more skills and capacities. We know the importance of creating circles of support. We have a much more cohesive understanding of the interlocking pieces of oppression, and so can create better methods to dismantle the lies. We know how to go down into the deep earth, bring back those who have been eviscerated or even murdered, and make a usable space here for their spirits to sing to us, inform us, and find some rest.

What if remembrance can never be completely eradicated from our hearts, minds, and bodies but arises spontaneously in that vulnerable gaze that expands the possible? What if these teachings—and this gaze—catalyze something new as people gather at refugee camps, activist trainings, fire-pits, kitchen tables, shelters, food banks, and psychotherapy offices? We learn how to link this with that with this, hold each other’s hands, go into reverie, dream fertile dreams, wipe each other’s tears, imagine boldly... until a new constellation lights up the night sky and holds the shared globe of our being.

The urge to connect and see with fresh eyes is older than time. ■

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

We can all—or most of us—agree on the existence of a thing called structural racism. But can structures have a life of their own, independent of the people inside them?

One premise of a democracy is that there is an active line of connection between the whole and the part, that society and psyche shape each other in a meaningful way.

In the wake of George Floyd's killing, it seems many white people are in a rush to prove their wokeness. To show they're on the right side of history. Maybe some good can come of that.

But what to make of the disparity between our knowing language of concepts and analysis and the unknowing, ceaseless, subterranean language of fantasies and feelings?

A paradoxical question: In my way of using language, what gets lost to conscious examination?

More and more, I find myself aware of how speech can function as a smoke screen, motivated by a need to disavow my own embeddedness. More and more, it's that problem of embeddedness that I keep coming back to—how my own mind is intimately bound up in the fabric of this American sickness.

What is the line that connects me to the lynching of George Floyd on a Minneapolis street? How is the flow of my most private thought and emotion, fear and desire related to a systemic pathology that is so easy to decry, and yet so seemingly impervious to our knowing discourse?

The forces of power, the forces that perpetuate inequality, that deny access, circumscribe difference, contain it as one might seek to contain a threat, are not outside us.

White supremacy, among other things, is a costly defense structure. It is designed to protect power and ward off fear. But the defense is full of cracks and always has been. The various forms of economic, cultural, and social segregation that are intended to guard against the eruption of white anxiety only deepen anxiety, as they deepen black despair and black rage.

Before I was eight years old, I'd been at school with almost all white kids. Then, for the first time, I was in school with black kids. I didn't know anyone at my new school, and I was very anxious. My heart beat fast on the playground.

There was a boy named Earl whom I admired and wanted to be like. I liked how he carried himself. His body seemed to contain a power that I wished I had. I liked how he talked, and I tried to bend and modulate my voice to sound like his.

No matter what I did, there was still a gulf between us. A wide, charged space that filled with fantasy.



# Learning from chickens

It had been an unseasonably hot day in July. The news said—improbably, I felt—that it didn't break a record. The fifteen chickens in the coop next to me panted through their open beaks, spread their wings to create shade, or moved within the stingy shadows, one pecking the neck of another to get a place to scratch down to cooler earth.

They didn't seem to pay attention to the corpse of their sixteenth member. But the little boy did. His parents were boxing it up before taking it to the woods. There, the carion birds and earthy creatures would dine, performing their life-culling moves on the dead.

The little boy mostly paid attention to the box. It was his first sentient encounter with death; they were still fairly new to the little farm. He seemed to take it in like the many other big parameters of life he was learning. "Why?" he'd ask, and he'd get an answer. So, he'd think: *That is what it is. There's a bird who is sweet and funny and lays eggs. Then a limp body. It goes to the woods in a box. It gets eaten. I wonder where she is for a while; there's an empty feeling; she comes to mind at story time. After a bit, another one arrives—a fluffy baby bird. She gets a name too.*

*Lucky boy, I thought. He'll need that experience for all the years of his life.*

My mind turns to talking with a colleague the week before; we had chatted about what maturity is. The ability to feel deeply without being unmoored, we agreed. I ponder again something not orthodox: children can be so much more mature than adults. Especially when it comes to death. And I don't think it's simply a lack of understanding.

Letting old lines of thought drop, I re-explored the idea. Maybe maturity is not so much related to chronological development. Or to experience. Or age. Or even proximity to death. Maybe it's more related to our "internal objects" (those we carry around inside us, the people who formed us, living or deceased). Maybe it's also a little related to our "external objects" (those we live our lives with).



I settle in, abandoned to the whim of the reverie. The chickens make gentle sounds.

So, maybe he's a lucky boy because of his internal and external objects. The avian turn in nature's scavenger life cycle brought him an experience that primed an ability he will need. But that priming and emerging ability could happen only within his relationships. His thoughtful and loving family makes him mature in the sense that he can feel deeply without being unmoored.

All that would make some sense of what my colleagues in pediatric palliative care seem to agree on: children have an ability easily as great as, if not greater than, their adult counterparts to face their own demise with an open heart, with loving relationships, and with equanimity. (Loss of a family member, not so much. But that's for another time.)

While that equanimity among dying children is accepted as common knowledge in pediatric palliative care, it's not so much accepted elsewhere. So, I review in my mind: What does it take for adults to find maturity about mortality? Well, that's a silly question. I check myself: wait, we often don't. But creatures have been dying, grieving, and moving on since the beginning of time, and we must have learned something. Some people have some maturity about mortality.

This is what I think I know, partly from (adult) palliative care and partly from psychoanalysis.

First, I know it takes a holding environment. Dying people find what they need to when they feel emotionally supported by people who care about them. Not that those people can fix everything, but that they are there, they get it, and they care.

Sometimes, those people who are holding are physically present, sometimes not. Sometimes, they are dead, but if so, they are one of those internal objects. Apparently, it still works. Maybe that's what those daydreams are about that people near death have—the comforting ones where a long-deceased person is there talking with the dying person. We really shouldn't call them hallucinations.

I go back to my checklist: What else do I think I know? Inside that holding environment, people can do certain things. They can face reality. The stark reality of our finitude seems easier to face when with others. (I feel glad for the bird.) Maybe mortality is modulated by the sense of continuity that is engendered by care and by love—even by the

connections that come with aggression. A holding environment created by people who avoid reality undermines things. But a kindly, validating common perception makes even harsh reality more readily faced.

Digesting reality is the next thing people can do better when in a holding environment. Figuring a way to live with the tough, unalterable reality is possible with—and near impossible without—such an environment. So many little and big things need corroboration: “Who will take my things...the kids; OK, good,” “Life ends for me and goes on for others—for a while.”

This digesting seems to entail having a way of thinking about the harsh reality—a way that works for us. The little boy will have a way of thinking about death, about how, one day, a feathered creature is moving about, squawking and waddling, and the next day, it is motionless with glassy eyes; about how nature takes care of the body; about the empty feeling and memories; about new life. He has that way of thinking because it happened where he did not fear being left without love or guidance; he watched it; he participated in it. It touched him but didn't wound him. Not all adults have that in their past; they have to create it late in their days. It's hard for them, oftentimes.

That stuff the little boy got, as we learn from Wilfred Bion and others, is where thinking begins. We perceive something; there's a feeling we don't know what to do with (why is she on her side, still?). A caring figure takes that feeling and helps us understand it (bewilderment, fear). We get back from the caring figure a way of thinking (we all die; it's OK) and feeling (we care for the dying) that seems to work. And then we can move on. We can build some more ways of thinking and feeling about more experiences. I think it's harder for adults to learn to think about something they didn't think about when they were young.

This little boy learned early how to think about and feel mortal loss. A loss not too small (he did love that bird) and not too large. Now he'll be able to think and feel bigger losses if and when they arise for him. He'll be able to grieve the loss of others when he has to. Hopefully, he will be well underway with understanding he, too, is finite; he won't have to grieve his immortality too much, because whatever fantasy of immortality he may have had has already been bounded by reality.

My mind wanders on, and I reflect on how, when adults do arrive at a way of thinking about our own death or that of our loved ones, we often start to do something interesting: we start changing our relationships. If we are young and healthy, we start living our relationships with an eye to them being their best possible, as if we might die tomorrow—because, of course, we might. And we discover the vitality that comes from living that way. If we are sick or old, we start repairing our relationships; we start getting our beloveds ready to live without our warm body and our wherewithal next to them. We invest in relationships, in legacy-making. We start seeming awfully mature. Kinda like the little boy.

All that from having a way to think about mortality's reality. All that from having someone there for us. All that from knowing our finiteness. What a wonderful thing. No wonder kids can be mature.

The shadows are lengthening. The chickens are moving toward their roosting spots. All the terrible things in the frightening, rapidly changing world around us feel more manageable. Like I can think about them. It will be what it will be; I'll know where I am, where I belong, where my loved ones are. Even when we die, I'll be with them and they with me, inside or outside. Does finiteness make love necessary? Is it a condition of love? I wonder. If I had a choice of love or immortality... well, I'd choose love. That wasn't hard. ■



**Scan to Listen:** IPA Off the Couch Podcast

*Episode 51: COVID-19 and Treatment: Moments of Existential Maturation with Linda Emanuel, MD*

URL: <http://ipaoffthecouch.org/2020/05/10/episode-51-covid-19-and-treatment-moments-of-existential-maturation-with-linda-emmanuel-md/>



Photo by Annie Spratt

# Pollution: The Case of India

Early in January 2020, while anxiously speaking to a colleague, I was thinking about how I have become dysfunctional. I obsessively read everything. My panic-stricken and recurring thoughts about the state of my country, my home, were haunting me like a waking nightmare. My colleague at the time responded and said, “That’s how everyone is. Panic and dysfunction are not a pathology of the individual anymore. You are not alone.”

In that moment, I felt relief. The feeling of terror that haunts me pervasively occupies every home in India today. I am left speechless watching this terror expand its many wings over every city. I sit back in fear, not even able to join any protest, in paranoia that I can be attacked. But I am not crazy to feel shocked and afraid. Everyone is going through this!

I am a clinical psychologist working in New Delhi. Earlier this year, everything was florid and magnified here. Every day, my patients would share how the events in our country are impacting them. Every day, I would listen to their feelings of shock, helplessness, hopelessness, panic, anger, and sadness.

Last year, I attended a conference about mourning and loss and their relationship with mania, depression, and creativity. A senior psychoanalytic psychotherapist who was curious about my practice in India asked me if the pollution in New Delhi was unsettling. I told him it is quite troubling, and in fact, every year around Diwali, I develop a cough. He asked me if my patients talk about it. I told him some of them do and even more so around Diwali; this festival falls around the month of November, and this is also when the pollution levels rise in the city. It always comes up in the sessions.

“Do you bring the fact of pollution up with them?” he asked me. “You know, if people are talking about the pollution, are they really talking about the pollution, or are they talking about the pollution of their inner states, their minds?”

As he continued to speak, I began thinking about this innate need to theorize as a defense against an extreme vulnerability. He continued, “If climate change is real and if a patient speaks of it, how can we know if this is symbolic of an inner climate change, or if the fact of the matter is that this is an external true event that they speak of? You know, during the Holocaust when people would speak of the holocaust, it was a reality.”

I knew what he was saying. I stayed silent.

Soon after I came back, boom! Everybody in Delhi was speaking about the newly amended Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and the police brutality meted out to students in universities like Jamia Millia Islamia University. Delhi saw great violence in February against its minorities. All these events formed a crux of the clinical material from my patients.

CAA is an act which, for the first time, offers citizenship based on religion. It offers citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. This act extends to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, and Jains, leaving Muslims out. NRC is an official record of everyone who is a legal Indian citizen. It would include individuals who qualify as citizens of India also as per the newly amended CAA. The CAA combined with the NRC are posing a threat to the secular nature of our constitution. In early 2020, there was growing dissent against this act, which led to many demonstrations. The state challenged these demonstrations by sending the police to barge into university spaces and attack students. After I came back from the conference in December, for a long time, my patients spoke to me about these events and how they felt impacted.

Knotted in between all of this are my own tumultuous and perplexing feelings about my own home. When my patients speak of these events, they are not speaking of an

inner political pollution. These feelings that our country now faces are so magnified that we're all feeling shock, helplessness, and anger together. It is true, as Benveniste wrote in Room 6.19, that at one point of our lives, we have all lived through these feelings as helpless infants, and we are all being reminded of the terror we have already survived. (<http://www.analytic-room.com/essays/national-histories-identity-daniel-benveniste/>)

But now, these feelings are so magnified that one can't notice anything but the magnitude of these feelings. We all sit in our homes, panicking. Can our conversations get us in trouble? Have I said something which could be seen as dissent? Hush. Shh! Silence.

I have silenced my own voice around this for long...from fear, from paranoia. Silently, I have felt numb and dislocated and confused about everything. It all feels so disjointed and fragmented, all the bits and pieces, all the news, all of what we read, all the truths that we are comfortably holding on to. Scared that I am alone feeling these things, I stayed shut. Perhaps we are engaged in a joint pathology as we rummage through and piece together our lives around these many horrific events. It is quite tragic that this has become a part of our everyday, ordinary life, that this has become a part of our normal inner discourse, that watching violence has become a part of my every day.

I cannot help but think about how a cluster of fictional stories—*The Crucible*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *1984*—were about the McCarthy Era. The witch hunts and trials, the burning of books, the rewriting of historical records, the gaping memory holes—we are living through this dystopia. In parts, it is because we are suffering from our own unique kind of McCarthyism. We are hunted for being our own kinds of witches in the times we live in, for being “urban naxals.” Our own spaces where we store books are being attacked. Facts are being fictionally created and history books are being written over. In parts, we are living through a kind of a memory hole.

In part, yes, maybe this is about an entire world order and how we are failing, and about how people who dissent are being attacked. Perhaps this is about figuring out what is right (and what is left). But I think it is also in part about our own historical memories. While I was in a conversation with another friend, she said, “Doesn't this all feel like a partition hangover to you?” All of us that were there talking to each other, letting the different, disintegrated voices in, agreed.

Many years ago, I read an editorial article in *The Tribune* written by Haider Warraich about “Pakistan going to a psychoanalyst.” The piece personified the country of Pakistan, who was lying down on the couch, delving into secrets of his own historical life. (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/213755/the-psycho-analysis-of-pakistan/>)

What would India personified and going to a therapist now look like? “India refused to acknowledge any blood relationship with his twin brother, claiming to be an entirely separate identity from him... India was struggling with this cashmere sweater, tearing it... India refused to confront his own tormented childhood... India refused to acknowledge what he had lost... India refused to acknowledge his siblings...”

India was called in for an interview.

India looked like he had a normal body build, though he was not appropriately dressed. India was wearing bright-colored clothes. India looked disheveled and appeared agitated.

His attitude towards the interviewer was cooperative, and rapport was easily established.

Psychomotor activity was increased. India was constantly on the move.

India didn't elicit an ability to understand things at a conceptual level; abstract thinking was at a functional level.

Attention was aroused but was difficult to sustain.

The pitch of his voice was loud. The patient's speech had an increased productivity and a decreased reaction time. The patient's speech was not goal-directed. The patient was speaking rapidly, jumping from one idea to the other, spontaneously answering.

In the disorder of content of thought, ideas of helplessness were found.

The patient was found to have grandiose delusions. The patient felt he was rich and had immense physical power. The patient also reported and said, “मेरा दिमाग बहुत तेज़ है, पूरी दुनिया में अपना नाम रोशन करवाऊंगा।” (My brain is very sharp; I'll have my name recognized the world over.)

India had ideas of persecution. The patient felt very unsafe about his family members.

Mood was subjectively reported as “मन्न अजीब लगता है” (My mind feels strange) and objectively seen as labile, at times irritable and inappropriate to thought content.

Personal, social, and test judgment were not intact. The patient was exercising poor judgment with finances.

Insight was found to be at Grade 1; India said, “यह मानसिक बीमारी नहीं है” (This is not a mental illness).

Caught between this red scare (McCarthy era) and this collective refusal of confronting our childhood—“information obtained from the history, the examination of the mental status and clinical observations indicate that India is currently suffering from a manic episode with psychotic symptoms”—and so we now burn books, rewrite facts, hunt witches, all while we live through an unbearable memory hole. ■

I quote Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

“रात का गर्म लहू और भी बह जाने दो  
यही तारीकी तो है गाज़ा-ए-रुखसार-ए-सहर  
सुबह होने ही को है, ऐ दिल-ए-बेताब-ठैहर.”

“Let the warm blood of the night flow at will,  
This darkness is the colour which lends to the dawn,  
It will be daylight soon, impatient heart, be still.”  
—translated by Sarvat Rehman

# in Grief Suspended Explosion

Karachi is underwater. They say the flooding is devastating. They speak as though it is constitutive of the people of Karachi to suffer, that they just can't imagine another way of being: hardship, plight, poverty. 1948 is all that comes to mind. Partition. Colonialism. But nineteen years and counting: Afghanistan, that is how Pakistan exists to them, a mere association.

1948. Gaza is without power, ten days and counting. Israeli warplanes, drones all day. They speak of "terrorist balloons." Balloons. *All your might and power, you clowns, you're scared of balloons. The balloon, so symbolic of all that your imperious ego cannot control. The wind is also your enemy now.*

Oh, wait. This is about Libnan—Lebanon. The explosion happened twenty-seven days ago. August 4. My mama's birthday. After living through fifteen years of war and multiple Israeli invasions, she says it's the worst birthday she has ever had, even though she loved the flowers we sent her through the coronaverse.

## **I can't hold on to the space.**

Being Lebanese—at least, being an antinationalist, anti-sectarian, radical leftist Lebanese—means being in a perpetual state of non-grief, suspended. No space to hold for Lebanon as it catapults into the limelight of the white "Western" gaze as an emblem of progressiveness in a swamp of "shithole [Muslim] countries." Any space I hold for Lebanon is poisoned by the Orientalism, the racism, the xenophobia, and Eurocentric onanistic fantasies of what Lebanon is, should be, would be, will be.

Any space I hold for Lebanon is space that contends with the *kafala* system, holding countless domestic workers from Ethiopia, Phillipines, Sri Lanka and more, as modern-day slaves in the homes of their benevolent, and sometimes outright malevolent, "owners." Any space I hold for Lebanon is space that contends with Zionist aggression, pitting our Palestinian siblings against us



(and one another), as though they are/were the harbingers of a decrepit feudal-turned-necrocapitalist system. Any space I hold for Lebanon contends with the crushing weight of American imperialism and its decimation of Syria to uphold its lies of freedom on others' soil. Any space I hold for Lebanon contends with French colonialism and its mission civilisatrice, Mother France suspiciously boots-on-the-ground within twenty-four hours, and the internalized racism from Lebanese, who would see themselves as Phoenician beneficiaries of notre Maman.

I hear them on the news, on the radio, in print, online, in my head: "Lebanon's people suffer so much, when will it end, they have suffered so much." We cry for the Paris of the Middle East, I hear them say. East of *what* and *whom*? No word of the seventy-two years of Palestinians in camps, no electricity, no water, no Lebanese citizenship, no jobs, no ownership always, always their fault. No word of the demands of the IMF, the World Bank, the covetous and lascivious glares of capital waiting for Libnan to "modernize."

Countless emails and tweets of how to help, what to do, will the money be stolen, "Lara do you trust...?" Do you trust? Your Orientalism is showing, habibi. Cover up, do up, do over, maybe send to Red Cross International vs. Lebanese Red Cross; I hear they are reputable. *Haiti is laughing at your racism*. Emails from worried students, sweet, loving souls, working against the crush of American exceptionalism to take in the magnitude of global suffering, even as their people suffer at the hands of the State, of murderous cops, of a white supremacist country that is *no better than our shithole countries*, but with the power, reach, destruction, and ego of a cartoon villain. Any space I hold for Lebanon contends with the recognition that the United States imperial carceral machine is not a cartoon, though. It's a living vortex of centuries-old disavowed settler colonial aggression, and it cannot be split off from my internal process on Lebanon.

"I forgot you had family in Lebanon." I am Arab. A Lebanese Arab. Not diasporic. Not transnational. I am Lebanese Arab. Born-and-raised-in-Lebanon Lebanese Arab. My-entire-family-living-in-Lebanon Lebanese Arab. Go-to-Lebanon-

two-flimsy-weeks-a-year-to-see-family Lebanese Arab. Get-my-qahweh-z'atar-kishk-zeitoun-snoubar-baharat-and-zbeeb-from-Lebanon Lebanese Arab. Jeej and I discuss mourning through WhatsApp voice messages. It is an intellectual exercise. Grief is officially suspended. How does one grieve something that demands your dissociated affect as a balm for dislocation? Grief combusts against xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, racism, confessionalism, settler colonialism. What good is grief anyway without a sustained solidarity movement that names and shames colonialism and white supremacy as responsible for the destruction of the global south? Grief is perpetually suspended.

I am used to the banal tragedies of Libnan, I tell Jeej. No electricity? Candles are sexier, anyway; tell the stories of our childhood adventures against the warm glow. No hot water? Cold water does the body good, especially the kind bought for \$50 a gallon by the truckful. No trash pickup? Fuck it. *طلعت ريجتكم*. But not famine. Three hundred thousand homeless overnight. *What of the already homeless, Syrian, Palestinian, Kurdish, Bedouin?*

My partner and I walk around numb. He listens to me sob-rage, loving me through brimming eyes that betray the sting of his own displacement and recovery, itself infinitely complicated by the brutal racialization of Arab men, especially, in the United States. He asks: Where are the Lebanese in your tears, the working class, your comrades in the streets? *Bella Hadid is Instagramming for them*.

I am in a holding pattern—working to find a place for my Lebanese siblings and suspending my grief pending accountability for violence wrought in the name of Lebanese nationalism, anti-Palestinianism, anti-Arabness. The romanticism of my soul, my longing, my desires are quelled, suspended alongside my grief. They find a place alongside a global solidarity struggle that feels more aligned, less compromising, more self-determined than the burning eyes of those who see Lebanon as special, as different, as outside every other liberation struggle to which my heart, body, and soul belong. ▪



EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid | On 4 August 2020, deadly explosions hit the seaport of Beirut, Lebanon.

# perhaps

perhaps is who i see myself, see?  
 something open to doubt unfurling  
 something biting into desire fortissimo  
 between truth & lies, there is something  
 that excuses another for benefits.  
 in the inconsistencies, something wishes  
 to stable me. in misgiving, something  
 languishes my certitude. lives me  
 to what is left of me. what remains  
 of my past smudges my clarity.  
 i hear them, their songs sound like  
 ghosts & perhaps, bunched into tears  
 of black slaves emptied in the sea.  
*why, truth is the only lie that equates  
 itself with pleasure? why, progress is the  
 only evil that chisels itself to consent?*  
 what good have you done to me, oh sea-  
 water-flames? essence is deciduous.  
 perhaps i'll die knowing what to unknow,  
 my sense of self lost on such carrying.  
 perhaps i'll write with grief & without,  
 not knowing what it means. *how, tell me,  
 am i entitled to the art of naming? or to  
 the philosophy of ownership?* i exist  
 in a named country, live on a named skin,  
 speak in a named tongue, & perhaps,  
 freedom is all we talk about now? in-  
 stead, what wounds me; who annihilates  
 us? between the wind & the windpipe,  
 which is intolerant? in lands of the free,  
 crows fly with wadded wings. i harbour white  
 deception to be trustworthy. plug by clog  
 by clutter, the household no longer holds;  
 an evil thing has happened to the walls!

# othering

someone sings crows to doves. upstairs,  
 someone holds a butterfly with coal & snow  
 wings to fly & dare the sky. the sky, a raven  
 ripped off of cloud feathers. in a dim garden,  
 someone places a black beauty pansy beside  
 a white lily before the northern mockingbirds  
 come to separate them. someone holds his  
 vaping in tinderboxes, says between here &  
 there, he prefers the othering. the othering of  
 the centre, of colours, sifting thru the fence.  
 what would someone say when he finds his  
 mother a phonograph someone else forgot  
 on a ghost beach? i am the new chimney boy  
 sweeping under the moonlight. salt stars &  
 bats gather to nurture me. i am the thunder  
 sprawled under a sycamore. i am the ashes  
 of silver. someone calls me a sloe, i call my-  
 self the breast of a gull beyond the sea's  
 sacrifice. my face moors into a foaming. i  
 hold such carriage of splits. someone in  
 a cassock walks by to say 'hello', he wields  
 his blackness like a shroud. someone opens  
 an album before me, flips thru until the last  
 image is a dove grinding a crow to dust.

## In Times of Rage and Opportunity

### *Thirteen Tasks for Analytic Institutes*

So, what happens when an analytic institute invites in a galaxy of Black analysts? How will the very structures that kept them out change to allow these folks to facilitate the needed and desired transformation...if that was the intent?

Or will their impact be ephemeral? Will they adjust to the resistance and create fleeting and mild perturbances? Freud with a dash of chocolate and brown sugar, which is not what we need?

The substantive record of the psychoanalytic institutes leaves much to be desired—it consists of a lot of aspirational talk flavored with the liberal exhortations of the moment. But when you look at their institutional outcomes, such as the diversity of membership, the innovativeness of curricula, or their equitable partnerships with BIPOC communities, it's far from impressive or even satisfactory.

Psychoanalysis is a field started largely by immigrants and other Others, then bequeathed to their offspring, who are unfortunately immobilized by the capitalist gaze, the fear of death, and the forgotten-ness that comes with that.

Psychoanalysts are so quietly desperate to speak about the ideological fires of their youth, while being quite silent, however, about the conservatism and blocking actions of their waning years. They limit themselves to good micro-evolutionary moves and adroitly enforce the sameness that presages institutional decline and demise.

We need leadership that is imaginative and democratic.

As a Black, European-born, Caribbean-raised, American psychologist and educator, I invite you, the reader, to join me in thinking about change. Instead of looking at the past as dangerous, let us tolerate looking at it together, from the perspective of possibilities for progress. **This requires friction—but let that happen.** If we do that, we stand to create tension, innovation, and a reimagining of the individual, institution, and culture.



There are good reasons to feel and think that 2020 is different. Perhaps the core evidence is the combination of *always existing but often ignored factors* that have come into *urgent awareness*. This is happening at the levels of culture, organization, and self.

This moment now presents us with a challenge to change longstanding structures and ways of thinking that have prevented diversity and inclusion.

#### CULTURE

We are aware that culture includes “nature” and the biological, and that it is increasingly costly to think we have complete dominion over those forces.

We are aware of the costs of our materialistic lifestyles in terms of environmental destruction, structural inequalities, morbidity, and social conflict.

**WHAT IS NEW:** There is a vigorous defense of cultural reflection. We are increasingly aware of our cultural histories. Such reflective work facilitates humility as we realize the daunting tasks we face. It also fuels hope and innovation when we take the long view.

#### ORGANIZATION

We are inherently social and hubristic creatures. Organizations are crucial for facilitating our living “good enough” lives. We are painfully aware that many organizations lack the capacity and often the interest to facilitate our acting in an ethically informed manner. The organizational ethos is often not in the service of its members’ well-being.

All too often, organizational leadership is a defense against its inevitable decline and death. Leaders seek immortality through stasis and a defense of the status quo. They deny the

inevitability of change that, if thoughtfully embraced, will secure the future but will also result in their gradual irrelevance and death.

**WHAT IS NEW:** Organizations are crucial for their members’ well-being. They cultivate and sustain an organizational culture that nurtures and protects. They see the past as a launching pad to the future. The structures and initiatives that they create are healthily promiscuous. They are not fatally tied to intellectual fetishizing, but instead engage in relentless but thoughtful bricolage. Ethics, dialogue, and humility buffer them against the risks of organizational ossification and decline.

#### SELF

The self continues its eons-old struggle to maintain its integrity. Each generation faces longstanding challenges presented in a way unique to that time. The rise of smart technologies and the marginalization of the humanities in favor of a market ethos are two contemporary challenges to contemporary, healthy self-making.

Self-work can be quite daunting, given the increased monetization of our social interactions. This often results in so many of these exchanges becoming shallow and impersonal transactions.

**WHAT IS NEW:** There is an increasing recommitment to the inherent worth and dignity of the individual. That, in turn, leads to rethinking the role of institutions, a reimagining of their missions, structures, and administration. ▀

#### Thirteen Tasks for Analytic Institutes in a Time of Loss, Rage, and Opportunity:

1. Uphold dignity.
2. Acknowledge your power and be a thoughtful steward of that power.
3. Recommit to foundational principles and then be innovative in how they inform action.
4. Keep a tight rein on theoretical and clinical fetishizing.
5. Pursue possibility.
6. Embrace mutuality over hierarchy.
7. Reflect on commonalities.
8. Reimagine the possibility of friction.
9. Draw on the past for permission, not prohibition.
10. Commit to the local.
11. Make governance and administration transparent and efficient.
12. Recognize entangled systems as sources of creative tension and innovation.
13. Generate experience, individuality, and memory as buffers against the generic, the superficial, and forgetting.

LET MEMORY, BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE, INVIGORATE THE FUTURE.

## Fault Lines, Blind Spots, & Otherness

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been seismic in its exposure of systemic cracks and flaws across the spectrum. Assumptions about what once felt relatively predictable in terms of health and economic safety, job and educational security, and expectations for the future have been upended by the destructive course of the virus. And at the national level, in the equally unpredictable convergence of events that determine historical moments, the fault lines of foundational and transgenerational racism that undergird our country have been highlighted.

Roused by widespread support for Black Lives Matter, institutions of every kind, psychoanalytic institutes among them, have decried institutional racism and the myopia of white privilege, and pledged to address them. Psychoanalytic institutes have taken steps to welcome Black faculty and fellows and to intensify diversity awareness and training. But overdue and critical as this focus on racial bias and blindness within institutional psychoanalysis undoubtedly is, might it also be obscuring other longstanding fault lines in the contemporary psychoanalytic system that intersect with it and may be equally difficult to reckon with? For a large number of clinicians, the private practice of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy is dependent on a supply of high-income patients, a reality that reflects the prevailing and established steep socioeconomic divide and system of wealth inequity. The luxury status of private practice treatment affects patients of color disproportionately, and Black patients in particular, many of whom lack insurance coverage and are unable to pay moderate or even low out-of-pocket fees or copays. The racial problem is equally a socioeconomic one and accounts in no small measure for the paucity of Black patients in psychoanalytic clinics, as well as in private practice.

From its inception, psychoanalytic treatment was inflected with class privilege and opportunity, notable as early as *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), in which Freud's compelling case histories are women who come from upper middle class or wealthy families (including a baroness). The exceptions are the brief treatment of a governess in a wealthy family and a mountaintop consultation with Katharina, the innkeeper's daughter who served Freud a meal. Although Freud's treatments were short in duration relative to the protracted analyses we are familiar with, they were conducted six days a week, and the luxury of disposable income and time was necessary even then. In her book *Freud's Free Clinics:*

*Psychoanalysis and Social Justice, 1918-1938*, Danto has recorded the exceptional history of psychoanalytic social activism Between the Wars that spurred the establishment of clinics offering free psychoanalytic treatment to working class and poor patients. But the post-World War II model of psychoanalytic treatment in the United States has been one of private practice.

Although candidates in psychoanalytic institutes regularly offer low fees to attract control cases necessary for their training, this option is often no longer available once the candidates have graduated and are operating their own private practices. Many psychoanalysts and psychotherapists can't afford to accept insurance because the remuneration is so much lower than the standard out-of-pocket fee. But separate from the question of necessary income, there is a tacit, unspoken consensus within psychoanalytic culture that private, fee-paying patients are the mark of the successful or A-list therapist, and even prospective patients will sometimes question the competence of a therapist who accepts their insurance.

The money factor, a subject often acknowledged to be more taboo than sex, affects not only the *accessibility* of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy, but also the definition and nature of psychoanalytic treatment in contemporary life. In a high-cost-of-living city like New York, where established psychotherapists and psychoanalysts commonly charge between \$250 and \$400 a session, treatment more than once a week may not be an option, even for financially advantaged patients. And while the original, classical Freudian model has spawned many outgrowths and divergent schools, what they have in common is an adherence to the belief that psychoanalysis is a depth psychology that gains access to unconscious mental life via free association, regression, lifting of defenses, and transference development. Every candidate in a psychoanalytic institute learns firsthand, through training analysis and control work, that the facilitating of these processes requires regularity and frequency of sessions. From a different perspective, beginning therapists and candidates unfailingly report a dramatic shift in therapeutic potential when their psychotherapy patients increase their frequency from one session a week to two, while experienced clinicians attest to the difficulty of achieving sustained psychotherapeutic change without more intensive and higher-frequency treatment.



Perhaps the “pure gold” of psychoanalysis has become the preserve of the training institute, lamentable in itself, but to what degree can psychoanalysis be watered down as a treatment without forfeiting its meaning and therapeutic efficacy? The terms *psychoanalysis* and *psychoanalyst* have become ever more elastic in our contemporary world, but is it merely hair-splitting semantics to question the broad application of the term *psychoanalysis* to all psychological therapies, even though the practitioners may have trained as psychoanalysts? These considerations bear directly on questions about the meaning and practice of psychoanalysis in the Black community, issues that can't be addressed solely by developing sensitivity to and conveying more information about diversity. There is a large gap between psychoanalytic training within the institute and practice outside its walls. Thinking in terms of provision of effective treatment, should there be a place in the psychoanalytic curriculum for the distillation of psychoanalytic concepts and technique into the practice of short-term and low-frequency psychotherapy? This is what so many clinicians end up working out for themselves anyway, but why not recognize and validate the reality? In a related vein, a social justice incentive, promoted by the psychoanalytic institute and perhaps even included in the curriculum, might enhance its perceived professional value for both candidates and members and help create bridges between the mostly white world of therapists and patients of color.

Entering the psychoanalytic world via academic discourse, Otherness has become an organizing concept for conscious and unconscious biases that reflect the primacy and authority of the white gaze in relation to non-white Otherness. But psychoanalysis also has a unique perspective on Otherness, derived from its own evolution and history, which may contribute to the ongoing conversation and help guide its future. The phenomenology of Otherness, from the beginning, infused both the essence and creation of psychoanalysis. Its Jewish founder, an Other/outsider in Viennese Europe, was determined that psychoanalysis not become designated a “Jewish science,” which would impart to it a racial/religious particularity rather than the universality, which was Freud's aim. And in his formulation of the Unconscious or Id, Freud identified the powerful and mysterious Other that exists in us all, excluded from conscious awareness and self-perception. His dictum “Where id was,

there ego shall be” might be read as an injunction to incorporate and integrate this universal psychic split or Otherness.

Even though Freud's self-imposed mission was the unmasking of our most safeguarded blind spots and secrets, the evolving body of psychoanalytic theory proved to be riddled with its own blind spots, unsurprisingly. Freud constructed a monovision developmental theory, imagined entirely from the perspective of the little boy, in contrast to which female development was viewed not only as Other but also as deficient and inferior. A robust psychoanalytic theory of female development and psychology has emerged only in the last forty-five years. And until just a few decades ago, the presumption of universal, normative heterosexuality versus the deviance and pathology of a homosexual outcome prevailed in psychoanalytic orthodoxy. Here, too, outside social and political currents and cultural changes were the catalysts for radical adjustments to the psychoanalytic lens.

Freud's biases (his antipathy to religion might be numbered among them), no less than his genius, have cast a long shadow in the history of psychoanalysis. As a system of theory and technique, however, psychoanalysis has gradually risen to the challenge of confronting its own errors and blind spots without sacrificing the power of its true and lasting contributions and insights. The identification of racial Otherness and Othering within psychoanalysis is both overdue and pressing, but will it be possible to incorporate the fruits of this exploration into the existing system of psychoanalysis without succumbing to politicization, polarization, and divisions along identity lines, trends in the culture at large that also infiltrate psychoanalytic culture? Pressures from within and without threaten the future of psychoanalysis, and it seems more important than ever to resist fracture and splitting and to seek common ground and unifying belief and commitment. ■

Artwork by Franzi/Shutterstock.com



# Psychoanalysis

I am not yet an analyst. I am a pediatrician for urban public schools and state-regulated behavioral health facilities. In my current capacity, I address the medical needs of hundreds of minority kids and families who are excluded from traditional psychoanalytic culture but who could deeply benefit from this healing art. Every day, I witness both the need for psychodynamic applications on a programmatic scale and imagine possibilities for public health partnerships to enable this process.

Working as a civil servant for underserved populations forces me to think largely and collectively. The resources are limited, and the racial/cultural/ethnic disparities are painfully present. The mental distress can be as immense as the socioeconomic obstacles are formidable. Every encounter, every patient, every family represents thousands more in the system. Though the details may be personal, the needs are the same and can be multiplied exponentially. All are seeking a way toward a better future. This recognition of shared humanity is the basis for developing compassion.

Compassion lets me feel for other human beings. And empathy allows me to identify with their distress. These allow deep human connection. My supervisor describes the connection as a bidirectional effort, requiring investment from the analyst as much as the analysand to sustain the healed reality that can be co-created with this model. It transcends all our perceived differences. It allows us to truly see who sits before us.

As an analyst in training, I discuss these perceived differences of race, class, disparity, and economics and the role they play in making psychoanalysis inaccessible to the larger Black and Brown culture. The conversations revolve around privilege and identification—my patients do not have the means to engage in psychoanalysis, and its private-practice system at large is not set up to accommodate them. And there are cultural divides that are bidirectional barriers to care beyond the monetary issues. Yet I understand the benefit of this treatment modality, both in my work with patients and through my own training analysis. I wonder how this compassionate healing space can expand beyond our private offices and be made accessible to the wider underserved community. With COVID-19, telemedicine has already brought mental health services into nontraditional spaces, so we can begin to consider how psychoanalysis might seize this momentum for greater equity. But are we prepared to do

the work needed to ensure a culturally informed, welcoming environment for anyone who would need to access what psychoanalysis has to offer?

The how is the hard part.

Recently, I sat through a series of talks aimed at cultivating compassion for the self. In these stressful times of pandemic isolation, economic and political uncertainty, and deep racial division, learning to also be compassionate toward the self is a necessary survival skill. The notion that we could build up our personal reserve of compassion so much that eventually we have enough to turn this compassion and empathy outward was my takeaway. If we focus on doing the inner work, the compassion and empathy can radiate toward the Other.

*Other* in psychoanalytic terms generally implies something or someone that is “not me.” Often, the other is assigned all the qualities that we do not wish to see in ourselves. *Othring* can explain how we view those of different races, social classes, or ideological perspectives. It is the opposite of compassion, the antithesis of empathy. Othering strips the humanity from the patient before us until we no longer see them as we see ourselves.

But othering is a construct, in part, of our internal reality; it does not really make the other different. It has taken me half a lifetime to understand this. I remember the exact moment a colleague introduced me to this concept so many years ago. After a particularly contentious and difficult encounter with a patient, she came into the office smiling and left me something on my desk. The reward for my frustration? On a small scrap of paper, she had scribbled:

*Remember, you are everyone you meet.*

It is fair to say that my entire career has been spent in the service of marginalized populations and the socioeconomically disenfranchised. When I work with Black and Brown patients and their families, we reflect each other. Perhaps this is because I am a Black clinician. Perhaps this is because I am, in many ways, other too. Somehow, we know each other without knowing. And often, late at night when responding to episodes of crisis, we share the bond of our mutually lived experience as persons of color, navigating the world of mental health services on both sides—me as provider, they as patients, wondering how we all got here. I recognize in these encounters that there is no true other. I must apply my inner compassion outwardly and with empathy. I define these aha

# in the Community

moments of connection, when othering is flipped and I am fully engaged, as “psychoanalytic compassion.” This can be applied to any patient. It transcends race. It transcends class. It transcends disposition so long as one is willing to accept and practice the mind-blowing concept that we are all, on some level, the same. The adopted lens of psychoanalytic compassion changes my outlook from “this is not me” to “this is also me,” in order to contextualize whatever is happening with whatever piece of myself that can understand it.

There has always been a fear on my part of diving in too deeply with patients and ending up in a place where we are both lost. But perhaps my year of psychoanalytic training or the turbulent times we are living in are compelling me to notice more, process what I observe, reflect in the space that this psychodynamic outlook opens. Finding a place in the patient’s story where there is familiarity and commonality allows the tensions to ease. In the depths of anger, of spewing rage, I now listen for rich, unconscious, useful content. Perhaps in those immediate minutes, I cannot be effective. But sometimes, later, when the moment allows, we revisit. We go deeper. We discuss. We connect.

## Compassion to counter othering

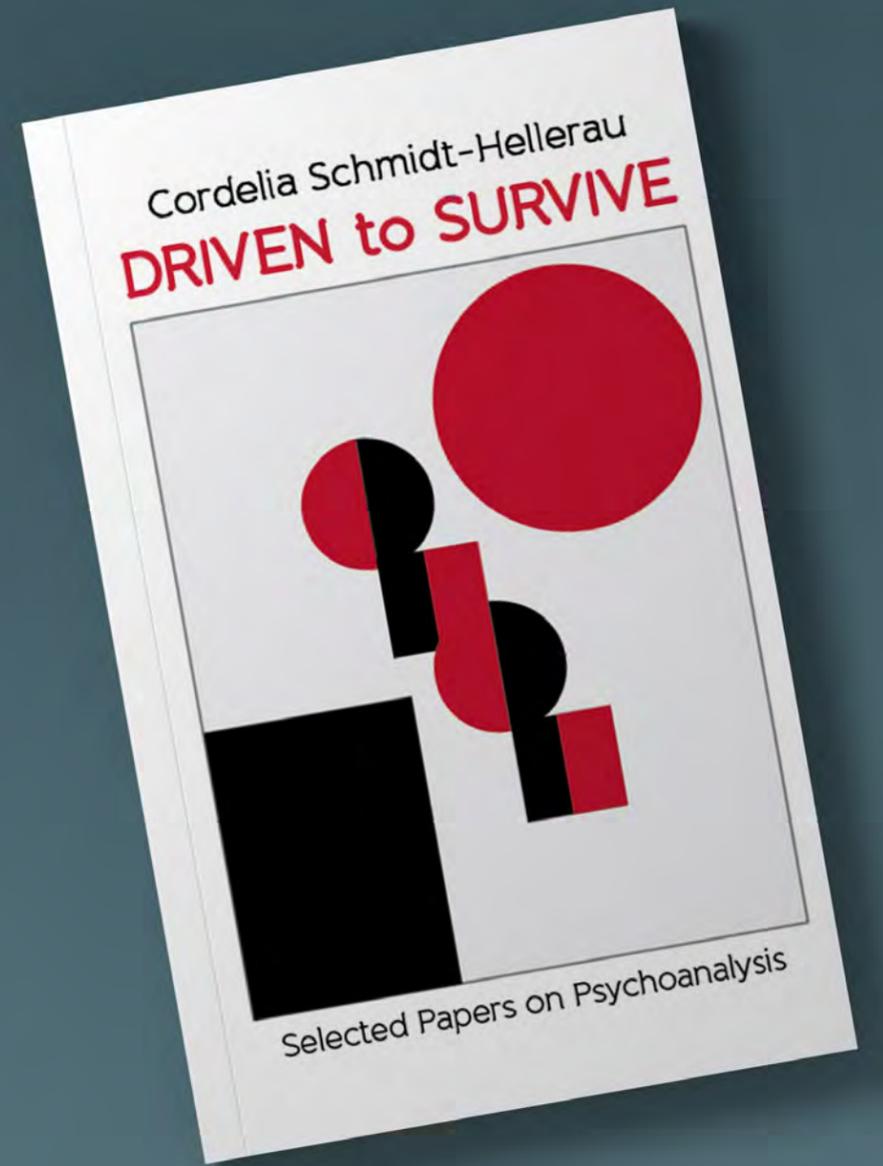
We all have particular populations and persons we are uniquely skilled and trained to work with. And we all have room for growth and expansion. Just as my public health and clinical work are now informed by psychodynamic practice, so too can psychoanalysts consider how to apply the healing value and principles to the larger population. What I would hope is that we would all consider how to extend our talents to whatever groups can benefit from what we have to offer. But we must also ensure we have cultivated compassion within ourselves in order to begin to see ourselves reflected in the other of all our patients, however they present.

We are at a crossroads in history. Every mental health provider is needed to deliver services as the weight of current times levies its effect on the general public. We are also in a space of collective professional self-reflection. As members of a discipline that is examining the individual and collective thought processes that have led us to this moment of social change, we have a responsibility to share the results of our painful but necessary and honest self-analysis. And this applies to all of us. We all have “others” we view differently.

The countless roundtables, discussions, and conferences I have attended over the past months show that we are exploring the psychoanalytic field to expose our own resistances, our own blind spots, our own defenses and rationalizations that have allowed us to partake in the larger racialized system—an example of the othering we wish to expose and address. We can offer solutions once we have thoroughly done our own internal work. We can examine collectively who we have othered if we ask our questions with both a critical eye and with deep analytic honesty. And as we rectify, we can direct efforts outward to include the communities we have not reached.

I argue that psychoanalysis is a powerful tool that has been kept within exclusive circles. We have a responsibility to learn how to bring it to a larger community that has not had ready access to deep psychodynamic work. As a discipline, we can turn our compassion outward and export this knowledge, skill, and training. Let us name this outward expression and inclusive application of these principles toward needy communities the “psychoanalytic compassion model.” Let us commit our psychodynamic expertise to the communities that have thus far been omitted.

I continue to look for and often find myself in everyone. It is a rather elementary yet useful paradigm that informs my work and helps me cope. I must look for myself in the face of every patient to do this, to not other—perhaps to like, perhaps only to tolerate. This takes compassion for the patient and self-love to overcome my own ability to exclude, to other. Twenty years of practice have shown me that it is both that simple and that complicated. ■



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This is a sharp, courageous, innovative and highly documented exploration of one of the most problematic, unsolved, and disputed areas inside Freud's theory: preservative drives, in between life and death drives.

Cordelia Schmidt-Hellerau develops here a revolutionary approach to the topic, involving an unexpected, substantive metapsychological revision, a subsequent remarkable change of clinical perspective, and a further reconsideration of many cultural assumptions which are connected with this new vision.

A convincing proposal about a theoretical "shibboleth" that played for decades and still plays a divisive role in the psychoanalytic community.

—Stefano Bolognini, IPA Past President

## C o l l e c t i v e

## D i s a p p e a r a n c e

“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

—Fyodor Dostoevsky

“You scare me,” he says.

“I scare you?” I reply, half-offended, half-confused, that I, a five-foot-tall woman, could scare my level IV inmate who lives in a maximum-security prison rife with violence.

“Where did you come from?” he asks.

“You lost me,” I say. “What are we talking about?”

He starts to tear up. “I can’t remember the last time someone treated me like a person. It scares me.”

I feel as if I’ve been punched in the throat. Being treated like a person is scary here. One must then recognize that one is indeed a person, which then makes one aware of the inhumane realities of this place. I thought I understood then. But as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, I got an even better understanding.

At first, we continued with business as usual despite reality indicating to us that we were deluded for doing so. Finally, some modifications were made to programming, but none really made sense. Some groups were allowed to run with fewer participants, until it was finally understood that they should not be running at all. High-risk inmates (who were designated as high-risk due to preexisting health conditions or age) were assigned to a “well quarantine,” which meant that they were to stay in their cells. This would have made sense if they were not, at times, housed with non-quarantined cell mates. Of course, this infuriated many inmates, who understood that this precaution was laughable at best. In addition, they were to “stay in their cells” but could go places, such as to the shower, the day room, the phone, none of which was consistently sanitized in between uses. Some of those inmates have even been allowed to continue working their jobs.

Essential workers continued to come in and were given little to no protective gear. Headquarters repeatedly sent us emails reminding us to clean but provided no supplies for us to do so. Initial instructions noted that protective equipment was “optional,” which I assumed to be a euphemism for “not consistently available.” At times, it has felt like a scavenger hunt, as workers look for clues about where protective equipment may be located and go on a journey to find gloves, masks, and any cleaning supplies available. “It’s funny,” I say to my friend, “how much the state has mastered the art of telling you that you are ‘essential’ and that ‘you don’t matter’ simultaneously.” My friend laughs. In here, we use humor to cope.

I bring up in a team meeting that if our inmates become infected, many will likely die. “You think so?” asks a supervisor in a nonchalant manner.

“We have over a thousand inmates considered to be at high risk. And I’m sure we ain’t got a single respirator!” I fire back.

She says, “I don’t know; you’re scaring me.”

I scream inside my head: *You really haven't thought about this?* The truth is no one thinks about this. Prisons are built to be “out of sight, out of mind” places. As a society, we don't want to see them, to think about them. Being confronted with the reality of our own humanity, or lack thereof, is too painful. Who wants to become aware of the fact that we lock thousands, millions of humans away in places where diseases can run rampant? Who wants to know that we provide inmates with little or no resources to mitigate this, to protect themselves? Who wants to admit that they think that prisoners deserve this?

As I talk to people on the outside, many argue for lifting the quarantine. “People can't be stuck inside for that long. They go crazy,” someone tells me.

I can't help but laugh. “Really?” I say. I want to ask them to repeat this statement out loud as many times as needed until they see the irony of making such a statement to me. I work in a place where, per the estimates I've heard, approximately eighty-five percent of people are serving life sentences. I am often struck, though no longer surprised, when confronted with how little people think about this. And when they do, they either don't think of inmates as people or think inmates deserve these conditions. People are having a hard time staying in their homes, with their food and their comforts and their internet and their families...but, as a society, they have no problem sentencing someone to spend their life in captivity and deprivation. Am I the only one who's angry? How many people will come out of this quarantine with the desire to change the conditions within corrections? To change the realities of life sentences? It's a good thing I don't run on hope.

As a psychologist, I become aware of the spaces we inhabit, between person and disappearance, marching toward and against erasure with our inmates. At times, our presence is the only witness to their presence. Watching that from outside makes me feel like a witness, a voyeur, and an invader. What a privilege it is to be a witness to the pain of existence in a place that seeks to strip you of your ability to be a being. How tragic it is to be a witness to our collective disappearance. The more they disappear, the more we disappear, the more they disappear. Who will hold on to us as we fight to hold on to them, as we fight to convince them to hold on to themselves in a world that does not care if they let go? How do we, the “essential workers,” hold on to our humanity and theirs in the face of such apathy? How do we continue to treat ourselves and others like human beings in places meant to dehumanize and break down people? How do we remain human? And most importantly, are we even human? ■



Photo by Tim Mossholder

We the people carry in our pulses  
the pact we made with ourselves  
the moment we sucked air, before we  
even hungered for the tit. Our urge  
is toward life burgeoned and outsized  
flitting pulsing with what we might do  
with the time we have left. The power  
is we, I, our, me, and us right now to change  
the next. The old vanished anyway. What if  
we keep shopping only biweekly? What if  
we keep doing Zumba and tai chi and yoga  
on the streets of our neighborhoods? What if  
we keep singing from balconies and howling  
like wolves at eight in the evening? What if  
we keep cooking our own meals, but because  
we love our local restaurateurs what if  
we keep picking up takeout once a week  
to share with our neighbors in the driveway  
six feet apart? What if we keep wearing  
our hair long? What if we do not keep eating  
factory animals? What if we grow vegetables  
and fruit and gave extras to our neighbors?  
You grow the peas, and I grow the pears. What if  
we pluck eggs from our own hens? What if  
we keep our offices at home, stroking the cat  
as we work, turn our day jobs into creating  
arts we trade and share for joy, not money? What if  
I make the table and you make the chairs? If  
we did drink the Kool-Aid, what if  
we like it? What if  
we like it a lot? What  
do you imagine for yourself  
in your next perfect world?



## War and Pandemic in Aleppo

Danger during the war in Aleppo was marked with sound and smoke. During the pandemic, danger is boundless. It can be everywhere and anywhere. The most fashionable and well-off person can carry the virus and pass it on to me, while on the other hand, an armed person walking next to me on the sidewalk could be harmless. The invisible danger is what makes the virus lethal. In war, if the sound is far away, then I can assume I am safe. That means I could go anywhere without even worrying. Sometimes, the odds of being safe to being in danger would shift rapidly when the bombing came closer—the crushing sound of steel over buildings, cars, and streets, where we shook inside our homes like sunflowers before the wind.

One day I met a friend for coffee and *shisha*. The sun was tracing the edges of the city; men and women were in small groups enjoying each other's company. Minutes after we sat down in the coffee shops, the shelling intensified. It was the battle of Alzahra in western Aleppo, the last hold of the rebel groups in our city. Within thirty minutes, the building started to shake and the coffee cups rattled over the glass table. We decided to cut our visit short. I heard a very loud explosion—it sounded like columns of steel were dropped not too far from where we were.

During the epidemic, a simple handshake is more disturbing than the missile launcher near our home. People start to panic about handshakes and practice physical distancing vigilantly, in some cases avoiding unnecessary visits altogether. In wartime, danger was more visible. We were able to sense it, we were able to see it, and we were able to hear it. If the sound of artillery didn't startle us, that meant there was nothing to worry about. The virus made us panic more because we can't sense it, and we don't know when we need to take precautions.

In war, even the artillery needs to take a break. There were hours of quiet and, if we were lucky, sometimes days of quiet. These breaks allowed people to go about their business or lounge in coffee shops and restaurants. Social

life was medicine to our worn-out psyche and struggling mental health. Visiting friends or family at home, public parks, and for long walks was soothing to the soul. Now, under the pandemic, we lost a lot of that. During the war, my brother visited us every Friday for dinner with his family. We were always happy to see him, of course, but also excited to see his kids. He has two girls and two boys. I love my nephews and nieces. Okay, sometimes it was noisy, but it was great to see them play and see their smiles. Business was doing all right during the war, at least for some industries, like anything related to food or medicine. We had the opportunity to make money; whether we made it or not, that is an entirely different story.

As the panic about the coronavirus spread, my brother limited his visits for fear of his family getting sick. The lockdown did bring families together at least, those living under one roof. Family members learned to spend more time together instead of going to meet friends or going to the market. We no longer hear the sound of bombs; the news of the pandemic replaced the news about the war. The sky is cleaner, and our minds are calmer. The virus made us aware of nature, climate, and the world around us. Studies started to surface of how the Venice canals are now cleaner and the air quality is better across the globe. It made us see how our lifestyle of consumption is in constant need for oil and how much we were polluting the planet. Ironically, the oil industry suffered the most, and oil carriers were used as storage for unsold oil at major ports. I hope the virus makes us see how costly trade and military wars are to our lives—and to the world. We don't know how the world will resume its wars and lives. I hope it will be different and take the human and environmental cost into account. ■

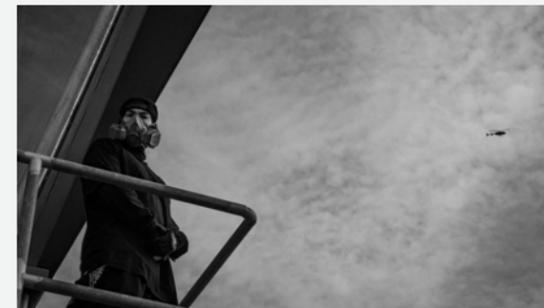


Photo by Matthew Roth | For the seventh night in a row, thousands of people marched in Portland, Oregon, to protest the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others at the hands of police.

## FIRE and ICE in Portland

Portland protesters armed with leaf blowers and cardboard signs face off with masked federal agents sporting fatigues and riot gear—guns, truncheons, and shields. Orange tear-gas clouds plume up from the tarmac as the agents grab protesters and hurl them into unmarked cars. These are images typically associated with far-off, war-torn countries ruled by authoritarian regimes—not democratic governments. But in less than six months, some of the most toxic elements of the US national psyche have risen to the surface, denuded by the global pandemic and bull-horned across the country by the divisive and belligerent rhetoric of the White House. One such characteristic is the systemic racial violence that protesters in Portland continue demonstrating against in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Daniel Prude.

Many agents deployed to Portland were from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a giant state apparatus created in the wake of the 9/11 attacks to address the new specter of terrorism that loomed over America. Specifically, they were from Customs and Border Patrol or Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), two militarized units who ordinarily make headlines for their heavy-handed approach to immigrants. In Portland, however, these agents were not squaring off against America's usual lineup of bogeymen—the bearded Islamic fundamentalists or “criminal” immigrants that inhabit the American imagination—but against US citizens; many were white Americans. Trump wasted no time in describing the protesters as a “beehive of terrorists,” justifying the violence, punishment, and detention that ensued. In one tweet, he declared that the DHS would not leave Portland “until local police complete cleanup of Anarchists and Agitators!” conjuring up images of far-left terrorists while also inflaming COVID-tinged anxieties related to infection and disease. By inducing fear of “anti-American” pathogens within the US body politic, the Trump administration substituted the invisible virus with a more concrete image of a threat penetrating our borders, one that can be physically fought. The fantasy of eradicating the “real virus” renders the coronavirus a secondary threat and shifts attention away from Trump's colossal failure to manage the virus responsibly.



<sup>1</sup> Photo by Tito Texidor | Protester wearing an “I can't breathe” sweater in front of a wall with George Floyd's name painted in graffiti at the Black Lives Matter protest in Portland, Oregon, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Photo by Matthew Roth | Man with a gas mask looking down from the top of a building while a helicopter flies on the sky at the march in Portland to protest the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others at the hands of police.

COVID-19 has changed the world as we know it. Under the heel of pandemic anxiety, uncertainty, and chaos—in a reality in which even loved ones may be vectors of viral death—the coronavirus drives all to think, consciously or unconsciously, about their own death. Doubling down on nationalistic and nativist values becomes a way of creating order out of and finding personal meaning in existential chaos. Dividing the world into all good and all bad provides people with a chimeric sense of mastery which dilutes death anxiety. Yet this binary perception undermines reality testing, the capacity to distinguish between reality, fantasy, delusion, and conspiracy. Desperation to understand and predict the reality we live in increases the vulnerability to endorse conspiracy theories. A case in point is QAnon, which, as a strain of Trumpism that has found its way into the mainstream media, touts pseudoscientific findings as inexorable truths. In a recent interview after the Republican National Convention, Trump conjured the idea that sinister and mysterious shadow forces are controlling Joe Biden.

The Trump administration's disowned racist and xenophobic aggression is projected onto the protestors through DHS and ICE, who portray them as barbaric and dangerous vandals. These accusations justify punitive "law and order" federal interventions to protect and serve "good" (i.e., white, suburban, traditional) Americans from invasion and destruction from "mysterious," "dark," "shadow" forces. ICE's militant attacks pull self-protective responses and expressions of pain and anger from the protestors, which are then framed as unsolicited violence and rioting. This, in turn, shores up the Trumpian fantasy of the protestors as a threat to national safety and security. To the many systemic inequities that contribute to racism and xenophobia, these unconscious dynamics are at play when undesirable and intolerable aspects of the white American self, which has not been brought face-to-face with its long legacy of racism and nativism, are split off and projected onto Black and immigrant Others.

In the Trump administration's callous and buck-passing responses to the coronavirus pandemic and community-organized action for social and racial justice, we are afforded

another glimpse into the primary psychic processes motivating Trump and his base. Prior to the 2018 primaries, President Trump met with high-ups in DHS and ICE to discuss a new "heat ray" weapon, called the "Active Denial System," to engender the sensation of burning skin in would-be trespassing immigrants who venture too close to the US border. In April this year, at a coronavirus briefing, President Trump suggested that "light and heat" applied internally to the body might cure it of the coronavirus. In the fear-ridden Trumpian internal world, *others* demanding to be included in the count of *who is human* threaten the safety and purity of the US with contamination, violence, and death. In this hellscape, both logic and metaphor contort and crumble into an elemental desire for decontamination through destructive rage: heat rays to burn wayward illegal immigrants, heat and light to incinerate the coronavirus, ice to freeze dissent. Undocumented immigrants, Muslims, dreamers, and international workers and students contaminate the American body politic, the coronavirus is infecting American bodies, and the fire in the belly of the movement against structural injustice must be iced. The cast of conspiring and menacing others fuse together into a terrifying and amorphous anarchic energy threatening the lifeblood of the United States. Immigrants, protestors, and the virus are one and must be destroyed by the fire and ice of the "Active Denial System." At his 2018 meeting with DHS and ICE, Trump also suggested shooting migrants in the legs, building moats populated with snakes and alligators, and erecting spikes on the border wall. Notwithstanding their unspeakable evil, these imagined deterrents are toned with the fabular contents of a mind in early childhood, one in which cackling goblins, fire-breathing dragons, and other magical creatures feel as real as anything else.

In July this year, the city council of Asheville, NC, joined Evanston, IL, by unanimously voting in favor of financial compensation for the descendants of enslaved people for losses due to slavery and Jim Crow. A willingness to negotiate complexity and ambiguity and the emergence of integration are the conditions for the possibility of responsibility and reparation. Anti-Black racism in the United

States is a projection of white society's intolerable badness, through subjugation and dehumanization, onto the Black community and racially marginalized others. This ongoing disavowal has thwarted relational progress and perpetuated deep social divisions along racial lines. The reparative position is a call: I must realize that I have aggressed against the other—and myself in the process—by maintaining a Manichean split between love and hate. From this vantage, the move toward reparation in Asheville and Evanston can be seen as the beginning of a process of historical redress for people, communities, and, indeed, a nation ravaged by racism. A newfound love for the other that emerges with the felt experience of responsibility and the will to repair paves the way for relationships that are built on caring and connectedness, and interrupts the decimating pathology of the current administration. The promise of Asheville and Evanston only has a chance to bloom if Trumpism is overcome at the polls on November 3. ■

*The authors' weekly discussions, through the summer of 2020, on the intersection and application of Object Relations Theory and Terror Management Theory to contemporary politics in the United States served as the backdrop to this piece.*

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<sup>3</sup> Photos by Tito Texidor | Two police officers at the Black Lives Matter protest in Portland, Oregon, USA.

<sup>4</sup> Protester throws tear gas canister back at police during the Black Lives Matter protest in Portland, Oregon, USA.

<sup>5</sup> Protester getting arrested during the Black Lives Matter protest in Portland, Oregon, USA.

The songs comprising my October 2020 release, *Ghosts of Our Former Selves*, including the two presented here, were deliberately composed in a confessional mode. They form a forty-minute sonic memoir that draws on everything I have spent my six-plus decades learning as a composer of contemporary classical music (especially computer music) with deep roots in jazz and popular music traditions. The vastly different musical worlds I present are not meant to be nostalgic, nor are they intended as recreations of music from our past. They are refracted musical memories, recombined in novel ways and witnessed at a distance, as I experience them now—all these years later.

The songs are my response to the deaths of my parents, followed by the death of my mentor, all converging with the arrival of what—with a bit of luck, given my not-so-distant serious illness—will be a few more decades of life. With “*Ghosts of Armageddon*,” I have added a generous helping of anger toward humankind’s inexplicable willingness to accept hate and to engage in an unwinnable game of chicken with mass extinction.

The project was composed over the past year, but as I was writing and producing the final songs, the pandemic hit, intensifying and reframing the entire project. Artists are always responding to world events in highly personal ways, and since the year 2020 is our apocalypse, how can we turn away? Apocalypse, it turns out, is ancient Greek for “an unveiling.” We know in our hearts, during this dark time full of despair, that unveiling must be the order of the day, that we must seek what is true and at the core of our practice. I am sharing this piece now with that recognition.

Composers cannot predict what it means to send music out into the world. But even in the most fraught times, send it out we must, in the hope that we just might be sharing a perspective that makes some small, meaningful contribution.

Ghosts of Armageddon

I waded deep into the river,  
I caught my finger on a sliver.  
The blood ran free,  
there's only so much anger, see  
I can't stop grieving.

The world is burning all around me.  
Your bullshit ceases to astound me.  
Five hundred million burned alive,  
there's no way anyone is watching.

Power-hungry ghosts of macho senators  
spew their toxic waste before our eyes.  
Self-important ghosts of so-called pastors  
cast their stones and pray for us to die.

Sometimes a golf club is a weapon  
and guns are never out of season.  
The evil bastards own them all,  
our kids keep running duck and cover.

I really shouldn't be so bitter,  
it's just a scratch he never hit her.  
What's wrong with you, what's wrong with me,  
another day, are we so stupid? Really?

The future's bleak and getting bleaker.  
The fucker's voice blares from the speaker.  
It doesn't matter where he sits,  
he's just a steaming piece of...

Power-hungry ghosts of macho presidents  
spew their toxic hate into our minds.  
Self-important priests and so-called saviors  
send their drones and pray for us...

Power-hungry ghosts of Armageddon  
spew their lies and call for us to die.  
Self-deluded evil politicians  
spread their fear and pray for us to die.



Scan to Listen on SoundCloud  
Or click to listen on [YouTube](#)

Photos by Patrick Perkins | San Francisco, CA, USA, after the Labor Day fires.



Ghosts of Our Former Selves

How the picture floats on by  
moving out of frame forever  
and dissolves before our eyes  
with an answer that means never.

There's a bit of blood and bone  
then the time we get together  
where you think that you have a home  
and a hardship that you can weather.

But somehow you can't get by  
and moving on is hard  
with so many tear-filled eyes  
and your kids out in the yard.

So you bury what is done  
find a place up on the shelf  
and reflect on what's to come  
with the ghosts of your former selves.



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## Denying Death: Living Madness

A Podcast Review by Richard Grose

Steven Reisner, a New York psychoanalyst known for leading the successful effort to get the American Psychological Association to stop having any connection with torture sessions, has come out with a podcast series called *Madness: The Podcast*. In episode six, “The Masque of the Black Death (Racism in the Time of Trump),” Reisner speaks to us in a voice that conveys the urgency of this moment when the nation seems to be hurtling toward what could be an explosive decision point regarding Trump. One feels throughout that, although Reisner is speaking during an emergency, he again and again is making trenchant points. Urgency informed by trenchant analysis is an achievement of psychoanalytic thinking.

He begins his discussion of racism by talking about the pandemic, which also serves as a metaphor for racism. He cites the short story by Edgar Allan Poe “The Masque of the Red Death,” first published in 1842, as an uncannily accurate description of the American response to COVID-19. That response, in his opinion, is characterized by denial (in Republicans) and terror (in Democrats), both being based on an “abject fear of death.” Then we are plunged into a stunning insight, and we immediately see why he has begun with the pandemic, when he quotes from James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*:

“[A]nd what white Americans do not face when they regard a Negro: reality—the fact that life is tragic. Life is tragic simply because the earth turns and the sun inexorably rises and sets, and one day, for each of us, the sun will go down for the last, last time.... But white Americans do not believe in death, and this is why the darkness of my skin so intimidates them.

The denial of death is at the bottom of both phenomena: the inability of United States to come to grips with the coronavirus and the power of white supremacy throughout American history. In pointing to the courage and determination of Black people taking to the streets to protest systemic racism, Reisner calls on his white, liberal listeners to join them, accepting with them the risk of the possibility of death.

The second area of interest here is Reisner’s discussion of Trump. The problem in dealing with him, Reisner says, is that both the hatred *with* him in his followers and the hatred *of* him in his opponents increase his power. First off, Reisner dismisses diagnoses of such mental illnesses as narcissism and sociopathy as having any import whatsoever. Indeed, “in America in 2020, narcissism and sociopathy are not illnesses. They are skills for success, skills that Trump has sharpened into high art and perfected in the crucible of our neoliberal culture.” Having dismissed diagnoses, he warns us that beneath the narcissism and sociopathy are “a lethal mix of psychotic volatility and unhinged cruelty,” and the task of a psychoanalytic understanding is to render an account of those underpinnings.

Reisner then describes the psychotic functioning of Trump’s mind not as a mental illness but as a mental organization that has “a chronic difficulty in holding on to the structure of things.” This organization can lead to severe illness but also to great creativity. Specifically, Reisner analyzes Trump’s “free associations to some scientific research on the effect of ultraviolet light on the coronavirus,” the famous “Drink Bleach” press briefing. Reisner disenchant the mind of Trump for us, robbing him of some of his power the way symptoms can be robbed of some of their power when they are frankly discussed in a session.

He shows in a few paragraphs how ill-advised, however well-meaning, the attempt to diagnose Trump was. A diagnosis conceals the social and political realities that allowed him to become president in the first place. It also conceals from us, through distancing, the processes of his mind, and through concealing those processes, we are more in his power.

Reisner urges us to take to the streets to save democracy and to support the Black people who are marching there. But he then makes his only misstep in seeming to dismiss the November election as potentially important in saving democracy. Discounting the possibility of a decisive election result is a mistake because ultimately the only force that can save democracy is the people. If a majority of the people want fascism, then there will be fascism. But in the absence of evidence that a majority of Americans want fascism, the ballot cannot and should not be dismissed. •



Scan to Listen: Madness:The Podcast

Season 1: *The Masque of the Black Death*  
(*Racism in the Time of Trump*)



Photo by Ryan Maggsino | The words 'Black Austin Matters' painted on Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas, USA.

## The Witnesses

We were observing ourselves colliding  
with ourselves as if in a dream,  
as if on a king's road,  
with horses, with dogs, with spears,  
the air tinted in red,  
the age-old branches between us and the hidden stars.  
We were keeping a record of proceedings.

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