NewAssociations

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Breaking the Shell, Rescuing the Seed

Julian Manley and Wendy Hollway

This article seeks to understand what a series of virtual social dreaming matrices could bring to our thinking about living in a Covid/ post-Covid world.[1] In social dreaming, people gather to share their dreams to a 'matrix', a liminal space for the creation of new thinking where an individual's dream becomes a 'social dream' through association. New knowledge is co-created through images and their affects. The matrix-as-container seems to transfer to the online experience, albeit transformed.

One of us (JM) was recently invited to comment on the advantages and disadvantages of the pandemic. The question is part of the problem. We know what we are supposed to answer: 'We are flying less, leading to fewer carbon emissions'. Good! 'We are suffering massive unemployment unseen since the 1930s'. Bad! And so on.

No side 'wins' a 'yes and no' debate based on such oversimplifications. It resembles the 'nothing will come of nothing' retort of King Lear to his daughter's expression of authentic love that cannot be measured. How much of a reduction in plane journeys will make enough difference to toxic emissions? How many saved jobs rescue a national economy? The 'everything' of measurement cannot equate to Cordelia's love of her father. Neither can it solve the problems of the current crises. However, such complexity – such uncertainty – arouses anxiety and the 'pros and cons' attitude provides a defence.

'No side "wins" a "yes and no" debate based on such over-simplifications'

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Social dreaming preserves complexity of meaning through 'condensation', the quality dreams have, as described by Freud (1991 [1900]), of simultaneously placing multiple meanings, spaces and times into dream images. In social dreaming this effect is enhanced through combining a series of separate dreams and associations. The dream images and associations of the matrix combine into layered forms of meaning between the dreams and associations that go beyond the condensation effect of a single dream. Each participant receives the complexity of this process in her own way during the matrix and with others in a post-matrix discussion. So, bearing this in mind, what did we learn about Covid-19 through social dreaming?

'A similar feeling of abandon or freedom was expressed in several flying dreams'

In contrast to oversimplification, the online social dreaming sessions showed a willingness to confront the new reality of living with and in lockdown. Dreams created alternatives that tackled existential questions about social and personal identity, our place in nature and social systems. For example, an association to the dreams brought up the idea of going up a canal through a series of 'locks', making progress in lockdown, so to speak, but also how this human-created technology has to work in harmony with nature:

you have to go into this lock in the boat, like this kind of manmade area, and you wait, and you have to wait for the sea or the canal water to rush in…

The association was made in reference to several water dreams that spoke of abandon or freedom by swimming in water and different states of water, still and contained, as in the swimming pool, and wild and free, as in the open sea.[2]

A similar feeling of abandon or freedom was expressed in several flying dreams, and brought together in a single association describing being 'catapulted' from the back of a boat and the intense emotion of freedom experienced in the memory:

I went back on the boat and flew and was catapulted up and, talk about, you know, fear but then this elated but moreover, not so much the excitement, but when you reach high, high, high, high, high, it was so silent. And I remember I could hear some birds, that at one point, there was nothing. It was literally the one of the most intense silences I've ever felt, I've ever heard, I've ever sensed…

The technical term 'parasailing' does not matter here; rather what matters is the description of the affect of the association in the social dreaming matrix. This is an example of affect being prioritized over fact. In this description, in the social context of the pandemic, it is possible to share the emphasis and value given to being 'high, high, high, high, high', feeling the fear, and the 'intense silence' of the experience. For participants of the matrix at this moment, this is the important thing, and it's complex, unmeasurable: here the 'answer' of the matrix to the question of the lockdown and the pandemic is a re-evaluation of the importance of freedom and of how that sensation is exhilarating when combined with nature as symbolized by water and air. Once this is realised (far removed from current efforts to make people go back to the office for the sake of the high street), then ways can be sought to prioritize such affect.

The matrices also engaged participants in psychologically advanced contemplations of self and identity; they questioned their own identities and by implication their positioning in the world as human beings through the multiple images and associations brought about by dreams. For example, dreams of being located above and below tables demonstrated, through the interconnectivity of the matrix, a clear reference to a below-the-surface unconscious, and an above-the-surface consciousness. Another thread of dreams and associations related to clothes and costumes. The world in which participants had formed their self-awareness and identity appears to be on the verge of collapse. Old ways and systems do not appear to be guaranteed any more. New thinking is required, something beyond getting back to normal or even 'building back better'.

The following association to dreams of tables and alternative possibilities of perception illustrates this core challenge to identity:

There's a recurring theme of tables and then this talk about being covered up or seeing another reality brings to mind when I was a little boy I used to, I didn't hide, but I used to just go under the dining room table. I enjoyed being under the table and looking at the world from that perspective. My daughter now still has that table and it has my name written underneath it.

There is a suggestion here that 'under the table' the speaker's daughter can 'see' the father's youthful identity and that this may be more authentic and more useful in the current situation than any 'above table' adult façade. The speaker's reality and established identity is questioned, a

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reminder of the children's school strikes in protest against adults' climate inaction, personified by Greta Thunberg. In this way, the matrix looks for reactions to the current crises through an existential searching of the self, as opposed to returns to past norms and the identities associated with those norms. The risks of the creativity and newness required was expressed in the social dreaming sessions through an association to below-the-table images by a participant who remembered a traumatic event from childhood:

When I was nine, I was playing cards with my siblings and cousins and in Spain in the little, in the villages, we had a big tray where you would put embers to keep warm. There was no central heating when I was a child, so under the bed, under the table, you would put this tray with the embers and then we had the tablecloth over the table so we were playing cards and suddenly I started feeling this heat coming up my leg and I realised that my pijamas were on fire. So, some lower part of one of my legs was badly burnt and I had to be taken to hospital.

In this way, the matrix rejects the simple return to childhood identity. There is no feeling of a flight from adult reality in the matrices, or a regression into childhood. The sense of questioning our core identities is nevertheless present throughout. The image of the table was further developed in the matrices by the addition of the idea of a new choice of costumes below the table, as in the following dream:

I had a dream last night and it was in a friend's house we were having dinner but under the dinner table there was, I think it's called a rack, like the thing like the hangers that we have in stores and clothes are hanging there. So, the down part of table was that and you could touch if you like to those pieces of coats. And at some point during the dinner, very close friend of mine, she was sitting next to me, she said she needs to go out. And for that she needs my shirt. So, I took off my shirt. I gave it to her. She tries it, tries it on. And I think then she leaves.

'The feeling that a new costume, as yet untested, could be understood as a new identity was emphasized throughout the matrix by other contributions'

The feeling that a new costume, as yet untested, could be understood as a new identity was emphasized throughout the matrix by other contributions. Of the many possible meanings of these below-the-table costumes, we offer two. The linear logic of the dream as it is related here tells that the shirt is given from her back to a close friend, in order to go out beyond the safety of the indoors dinner table. An obvious association is to the saying 'I would give the shirt from off my back', alluding perhaps to the altruistic spirit of lockdown communities and the possibility of new levels of sharing. However, in a sense the shirt was plucked from under the table, from the rack, no longer a coat but something closer to the skin, to the self. This association was supported by the wider matrix data. For example, in the following dream different costumes are tried on and linked to the wearer through references to teeth, eyes and bones, in other words the essential durable parts of the body and the self, covered in a new identity, yet subject to mask wearing:

[they had] fantastic unusual costumes on and the one I can just give an example is that someone had like a sheet over their head. And their teeth were sewn into the sheet. So, you could see their mouth because they had sewn the teeth into the sheet. And then they had drawn like a skeleton head or a head-like skeleton on the sheet. And maybe they had cut open the eye holes.

This is directly linked to mask wearing during Covid 19 in the following association, so replete with potential associations that we can only offer it for reflection and pass on:

I was walking with two friends and there was this woman who had a mask on, but she had put on lipstick like a purse, pursed lips on the mask.

'... there is a sense of looking into complexity and a refusal to be satisfied with simple ways out of the crisis'

Through these examples from the matrices, there is a sense of looking into complexity and a refusal to be satisfied with simple ways out of the crisis. The way the matrices invent a new reality – a willingness to creatively imagine an alternative life that is new and vital, rather than a return to the old ways – can be a valuable addition to the need for a socio-economic transformation that many people might be aware of, but, in the sense of Bollas' 'unthought known' (1987), they can hardly articulate. There is a need to break open the shell of defence against the anxiety of the virus, and find the seed within.

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We welcome your ideas for articles, reviews and letters to the Editor. In particular we are looking for reviews of cultural events, books and films with psychoanalytic interest. If you would like to propose a topic for a longer article (up to 2,000 words), please contact Helen Morgan at helen.morgan@bpc.org.uk.

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Wendy Hollway is an Emeritus Professor in Psychology (Open University) and member of Climate Psychology Alliance.

Their recent joint paper: 'Climate Change, Social Dreaming and Art: Thinking the Unthinkable' *is published in Hoggett, P. (Ed.) (2019) Climate Psychology, Palgrave.*

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1. Ten online social dreaming matrices were held weekly, organised by Duke University (USA) and the Centre for Social Dreaming (UK), May-July 2020. The matrices included participants from all over the world and a range of nationalities. Some of the expressions in the transcripts are from speakers for whom English is not the first language.
2. Methodologically, it is important to note that the analysis of social dreaming data (some would refer to it as 'interpretation') always draws from a wider and more radically interconnected whole than is apparent from the extracts presented in necessarily linear fashion in the text. The significance of water dreams here is one instance; the same goes for treatment of later extracts.

From the Chair

Reflections from the Chair of BPC

Susanna Abse

Like the world around us, the BPC is dealing with radical changes. In the context of uncertainty and turbulence, the task of leadership is to ensure survival. Making the organisation strong and resilient with the capacity to survive changes and to see the opportunities that changes in the environment may open up is the task that the Board of Trustees, together with our dedicated staff, have set for themselves. I hope that, despite the turbulence, our institutions and our registrants feel we are continuing to provide useful support services and helpful challenge.

The onslaught of the pandemic has meant that some of our plans have had to change. We are sad that we couldn't run our long-planned conference with our psychoanalytic colleagues in UKCP (watch this space for further news) and very disappointed that we've had to postpone our conference on sexuality with Dr Jack Drescher until November 2021.

Nevertheless, we have been able to deliver some of our planned programme and in particular I'm very relieved that we've been able, despite the pandemic, to launch the new website. The website is a work in progress and we strongly encourage our registrants and our institutions to look carefully at the site and provide us with feedback. Registrants and MIs have the opportunity to showcase themselves, which can provide a better service for those registrants looking for referrals and, of course, potential patients looking for help.

I'm also excited to let you know that we will be running an online PPNow conference on 14 November. The title is Fear and Loathing in The Time of Covid: Family, Relationships and Society. Book here: www.bpc.org.uk/event/ppnow20/. The conference will look at the impact on families and relationships and consider whether we are seeing a turning point in our values, towards a more relational society. Once again, we have wonderful speakers. The writer Lisa Appignanesi will talk about loss and Susie Orbach will be in conversation with Michael Rosen, the award-winning children's author who was hospitalised with the illness. We will have small reflective groups and we are also very lucky to have the American psychoanalyst, Professor Salman Akhtar, zooming in from Philadelphia. Professor Akhtar will talk about the destabilisation of the human psyche in the context of the pandemic.

'... we will be running an online PPNow conference on 14 November'

The second iteration of the SCoPEd framework was disseminated in early summer and BPC, BACP and UKCP are currently gathering and analysing the responses. A move to widen participation to other regulatory bodies including the ACP and the National Counselling Society has begun. This work also involves the Professional Standards Authority, who are now taking a closer interest in the work. We continue to work closely with BACP and UKCP on a range of matters, including a joint campaign to maximise the role of counselling and psychotherapy in responding to the crisis in mental health brought on by the pandemic, through a petition and a range of events and roundtables with policy makers. We have also been co-ordinating our Covid-19 briefings and there is a recent update regarding the use of face masks in clinical practice.

As most of you will know, Gary Fereday, our CEO, left in July. Gary was with BPC for seven years and we are grateful for all he did for the organisation and wish him well for the future.

It is very uncertain how things in our society will unfold over the next months. The pandemic has been an enormous challenge to our profession – a challenge psychoanalytic clinicians have met with flexibility and resilience. Our focus in BPC is to support our registrants and institutions through this crisis and we are working hard to build a more responsive and creative organisation to deliver this regulatory and educational role.

PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY NOW 2020

FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE TIME OF COVID: FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIETY

This online event will examine the positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on relationships.

14 November 2020

Chair: **Susanna Abse**
Speakers: **Salman Akhtar / Lisa Appignanesi**
Susie Orbach and Michael Rosen

www.bpc.org.uk/ppnow20

#PPNow2020

Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter and its implications for psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in the UK

Maxine Dennis

In this brief paper, I comment on the Black Lives Matter campaign and consider it in relation to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. I leave you with a series of questions in terms of an ongoing dialogue. We need to test our capacity to continue thinking, to remain open at a time when the push is to become manic or to retreat and take cover, neither of which brings about any real shifts.

Introduction

The Black Lives Matters (BLM) campaign has again come to the fore, months after the tragic loss of George Floyd, with the recent attack on Jacob Blake, an unarmed African American shot in the back at point blank range seven times as he returned to his car, in which his children were sitting in the back seat. The BLM campaign was aimed at ending gun violence, noting the refusal to acknowledge the unique cultural contribution of black people, the perpetration of prejudice, deadly policing, racist legislation and interpersonal violence and has led to a global response. The founders, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, have noted how liberation movements in America have created space for black heterosexual and cisgender males and they have made an attempt to also put at the centre those at the margins – women, queer and transgender people – thus recognising that people have diverse identifications.

There are countless examples of the American police abusing their power against African Americans rather than de-escalating and defusing a situation, which would be the usual response to other groups. The issue of abusing power and control is repeatedly played out with black men, women and children being killed or maimed. There is understandable outrage and yet we find that it is repeated again. Clearly sectors of society are subject to a disproportionate level of this inhumane treatment in policing and the criminal justice system (Inquest, 2018; Motz et al., 2020).

As a response to the BLM, we have seen a flurry of statements from a wide range of psychoanalytic organisations and industries, including the British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC). Many of us with our liberal attitude feel comforted by this stance as a counterpoint to the fascist, reactionary or extreme positions, but this position alone cannot bring about institutional change.

In America, combating racial injustice requires not only electoral change but also fundamental societal transformation. But what are the implications for the UK? There has been a movement here requiring that different sectors of our institutions really do examine themselves. The risk is that there is a knee-jerk reaction, and that our hope for a magical wish fulfilment of a benign loving state or platitudes do not bring about significant change.

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Some would argue that psychoanalysis as it has developed in Europe and the US tends to reinforce the status quo. However, psychoanalytic understanding and political change can go hand in hand. Psychoanalysis not only uses insight to enable individual change but can inform essential social and political reform.

‘psychoanalytic understanding and political change can go hand in hand’

How do these killings, abhorrent as they are, focus our minds on racialization, ethnicity and culture and social injustice and its serious and creative implication for our work, the marginalization of sectors of society and a resistance to change within our mental health and professional institutions?

I propose that the themes from these events of hate are thought about in relation to you and your institution and I pose a series of questions to raise and think about with the aim of opening things up rather than closing things down:

How do we examine our own unconscious racism?

How does your institution make use of its power in this area?

We are aware that we all require work to attend to themes of racialization, bias and othering; these issues must be addressed regularly in training, reflective practice and supervision spaces. What have you found to be helpful and why?

How do you rehearse and repeat the status quo? Do we interrogate cultural issues and our own identities in society?

How can we tackle these issues within our training institutions?

What literature do you draw on that illustrates the thinking in this area?

What is your awareness of theories in relation to hatred and the implications for the other?

While we all need to consider the questions above, the following recommendations may be useful to consider:

- An integrated approach to this involves weaving these issues and concepts into every aspect of training and our thinking so this is not an afterthought.
- In teaching on diversity fostering an atmosphere of curiosity which Hart (2020) calls a radical openness aimed at opening things up rather than closing things down.
- An awareness of not locating this solely in Black, Asian or ethnically diverse members but highlighting that this is an area for us all to address. What examples do you have within a white dyad which also exemplifies thinking about culture, identity and ethnicity?
- How is the learning that is fostered seen as generalizable rather than specific and thus a ‘special interest’ only applicable to minority communities? Here our prejudices in terms of othering are at the fore.

What is hopeful is that a conversation has started within some of the member institutions which could lead to real shifts depending on the organization structurally recognizing that these issues are important, especially as we practise within ethnically diverse communities. MIs promoting and supporting change requires the willingness of all to be open to new developments (i.e. this entails not only the trainees, but the senior management.) Psychoanalysis at its heart is about facing what might feel to be unbearable, what generates resistance and leads to defensive manoeuvres. What role are you taking in terms of bringing about change?

For contemporary psychoanalysis to be relevant to the BLM movement it must be an accessible and applicable resource, enabling us to understand the roots of racial hatred, violence and segregation, to identify manifestations of this violence as it plays out in the clinical setting, and ultimately to enable individuals and organizations to recognize their institutionalized destructiveness and bias. This, in turn, can create change that has a ripple effect to the next generation. This position is counter to the repeated acts of racialized violence which can leave us all feeling wounded or deadened to change and reflects actual reform rather than solely statements of intention.

Maxine Dennis, Consultant Clinical Psychologist & Psychoanalyst, who works in Adult Complex Needs at the Tavistock & Portman Clinic NHS Trust. These are Maxine’s personal views rather than those of her employing institution.

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The Problem of Unconscious Bias and Racism Within Psychotherapy Training

Abi Canepa-Anson

Many psychotherapy training institutions fail to grasp and be sufficiently concerned with what it is like for a black person to be a client, a trainee or a practitioner in psychotherapy and counselling. As a Black British person of African descent I have lived in the UK since 1979. I have experienced racism and know its impact. From my experience as a trainee and now a trainer myself, I hope to highlight the struggles and challenges that face people of colour due to the unconscious bias and racism within our training institutions. The impact of racism; the historic legacy of slavery and colonisation; transgenerational transmission of trauma have consequences on the black person's learning and ability to feel liberated.

> **'Black people continue to be viewed through a Eurocentric theoretical lens which does not support their personal development or mirror their experience'**

Black people continue to be viewed through a Eurocentric theoretical lens which does not support their personal development or mirror their experience. This leaves black and other minority groups voiceless and marginalised. Fanon (1986) wrote: 'as blacks partake of the same collective unconscious as the European… the black has taken over all the archetypes belonging to the European'. This may not be a bad thing if they are accepted and treated equally in the white population, but people of colour are not. They therefore need to be supported to find their own voice and be provided with a forum to be heard, or the training becomes another way of recolonising the minds of the people we want to liberate. Black people need to speak of their experience of being black in a majority white world and white people need to be open and receptive.

In my professional career, I have been a seminar leader and taught difference and diversity in a therapy and training organisation. Sometimes white participants say they would struggle to work with black clients. This is honest and courageous, but the onus is on them to get in touch with their deep-seated racist impulses, overcome the feeling of guilt and shame and accept the many dimensions of what it is to be white and challenge why whiteness remains the benchmark by which others are judged.

For the black trainee, fear, anxiety and the powerful feelings linked to racism and the historic issue of colonisation can hinder the process of exploring, understanding and learning. This ought not to be the black person's problem but a shared concern.

I began my psychotherapy training by undertaking an MSc in the Psychodynamics of Human Development. There were few other black or ethnic minority people on the training. I wanted to get my qualification, so I went with what I had been told I needed to do, and passed the Masters training well, but it took sheer grit to get through.

I then began my clinical training. I vividly remember an occasion when I raised the issue of ethnicity and was shut down by my

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tutor who said what we were practising was psychotherapy based on Western ideas. No one else said anything. Feelings of shame left me isolated and powerless. How do you express your own cultural perspective, when you know there is no room for it?

In my second year of training, I decided to give a talk on race and racism to my peers. It was a giant leap for me and I was nervous. I was the only black person on the training and desperately needed an ally. It didn't matter what colour, they just needed to engage, be curious; a bonus would be that they had been working on their internalised racism. It didn't go well. I was met with resistance and having to justify that colour was indeed a significant consideration between a white therapist and a black client. A colleague commented that they had black friends and colour wasn't a problem for them, which I took to mean this was my problem. The status quo was reinstated.

I have found some comfort in the training, however. The body of the psychoanalytic world is often a home where one can be contained, and the fact that we're all 'wounded soldiers' gives a feeling of comradeship.

I could have had such a different learning experience if my training had been able to enter into discussion about race issues. The silence within our profession concerning racism, which can also develop in the consulting room, is a dangerous silence as it hampers learning and awareness.

> **'I could have had such a different learning experience if my training had been able to enter into discussion about race issues'**

Sixteen years after I started training I undertook a supervision training and realised that the problems I had experienced in my training were still rife within our profession. We had been in what is called a Meridian group when one of my colleagues said something along the lines that it must be difficult for me being the only black group member. He may have been trying to help, but I felt he was laying the race problem firmly in me. No one else said anything and I felt singled out. I wasn't prepared to carry the baton so I pushed for engagement and was told I had a 'chip on my shoulder' and that I needed to drop the race card as I was taking up too much time. Another group member said he didn't see my colour. When I tried to pursue the effects on me of my colleague's statement, I was met with silence and dismissal and what DiAngelo (2011) refers to as 'white fragility' – a state in which a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable. This experience confirmed how much more there is to be done.

These events were the cause of significant pain for me as well as a loss of potential learning for us all. If there is this level of silence within a training group, I wonder what the silence is like in the consulting room. We cannot continue to hide behind these defences for it is detrimental to the mental health of those we wish to help.

Abi Canepa-Anson is a psychodynamic psychotherapist and supervisor in private practice and has worked in therapy training organisations as a seminar lead on issues of difference and diversity.

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The Pandemic of Lies

Farhad Dalal

Our world is under attack on two fronts, from the coronavirus and the lie. Both are pandemics, both are infections. But of the two it is the lie that is more lethal. Whilst the virus infects our bodies, the lie eats away at our minds and souls. The lie spreads more readily than the actual virus by 'going viral' in cyber space.

The capacity to lie is as old as humanity itself. But over the last few decades it has mutated to become a much more dangerous infection. The capacity has been instrumentalized and industrialized and spawned a profession whose entire purpose is the manufacture of lies to bewilder and mystify the citizen. As Hannah Arendt says, the world has been *defactualized.*

It is shocking to discover how much of the scaffolding of our daily lives is constituted by lies. We cannot rely on the authorities whose task is to protect us, because as regulators get befriended and co-opted by the industries that they are supposed to regulate, they come to side with the interests of the industry rather than that of the public ('regulatory capture' as it called in socio-economic theory). For example, Andrew Wheeler, the head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, had previously been a lobbyist for the coal industry and had also worked for the climate change denier James Inhoffe; Sajid Javid and Nick Clegg have joined JP Morgan and Facebook, respectively.

'Now, there was no such effort; blatant lies were shamelessly being assigned the same status as truths.'

We need not tarry over long with the fact that Donald Trump has uttered over 20,000 blatant lies during his term as President, starting with the claim that the sun shone all through his inauguration speech (it rained), and the cheering crowd that greeted him was the biggest ever (it was not). Nor with Boris Johnson's numerous deliberate falsifications, the most invidious being the one that featured on his Brexit bus which helped drive the UK off the Brexit cliff: 'Let's give our NHS the £350 million the EU takes every week'.

For me, it was the moment when Kellyanne Conway first used the extraordinary phrase 'alternative facts' that the world shifted on its axis. In this moment, the pandemic of lies, which had been hiding in plain sight all the while, came into the open. This was the 'not-so-new-normal' that Orwell's 1984 had warned us about. What was shocking was the ruthless use of the lie, and the fact that there was no attempt to disguise it. In the 'good old days', when the authorities lied to us, they at least tried to dress up lies as truths. Now, there was no such effort; blatant lies were shamelessly being assigned the same status as truths. How and why has this come about? And why are we so accepting of their normalization in everyday life?

One place to start the story of the lie (but it is not the start of the story, nor is it the only place to start the story) is the early 1950s when the tobacco industry initiated a sophisticated global campaign to undermine the credibility of the science that had already established the link between smoking and cancer. Because they could not dispute the facts, they set about creating doubt. As one executive said:

> 'doubt is our product, since it is the best means of competing with the "body of fact" that exists in the minds of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy' (internal memo cited in Oreskes & Conway, p.34).

The campaign was fronted by two prestigious physicists, Singer and Seltz, who had previously worked on the bomb. They had their own ideological anti-Communist reasons for being willing to help the tobacco industry. They thought that *all* state regulation was dangerous, because it was the start of the slippery slope to Communism. They joined the tobacco industry's fight to stall *all* regulation by any means necessary. They intimidated and smeared genuine researchers with being biased and faking

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results (destroying many a career in the process), and crushed dissent by the use of libel laws. They utilized the Fairness Doctrine (which requires journalists to be balanced when reporting controversial matters), to insist that their 'side' was given as much airtime as the other 'side'. The campaign of disinformation was spectacularly successful for over 50 years. The industry was finally charged in 2006 under the RICO (Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations) Act because it became evident that the industry had known about the lethal consequences of smoking all along.

Singer, Seltz and others went on to use the same game plan to disable the efforts of regulatory authorities trying to deal with the ozone layer, acid rain, nuclear threat, greenhouse gases, pesticides, austerity and global warming. The disinformation campaigns are funded by a mix of right-wing foundations furthering their ideological agenda and by industries that want to protect their commercial interests at all costs. All this is detailed in Oreskes and Conway's chilling book *Merchants of Doubt* (2010). Closer to home, the pharmacological industry as well as that of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy have mobilised the same corrupted scientific procedures to authenticate and legitimate their claims (Dalal, 2018; Goldacre, 2012).

Hannah Arendt says: 'Men who… feel themselves to be the masters of their own futures, will forever be tempted to make themselves masters of the past as well' (1971, p.4). And so, they restructure the past. Two examples: Dominic Cummings adding to his March 2019 blog to make it seem that he had anticipated the virus a full year before it emerged; the ethno centric Hinduvata ruling party in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party, rewriting official school history books in which Indian history is rendered Hindu history, glorifying fundamentalist Hinduism and vilifying Muslims (Traub, 2018). Astonishingly, some of these 'history' books also valorise Hitler and tacitly equate 'Aryan Germans' with Hindus, and Jews with Muslims, to fuel ethnic violence such as the state sponsored massacre of 2,000 Muslims in 2002 in the State of Gujarat (Cockburn 2007, IIJG 2003, pp35-51). Ironically, the BJP love affair with the Nazis does not seem to have interfered with that between Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu.

Arendt refers to the frightening confidence that totalitarian rulers have 'in the power of lying – in their ability… to rewrite history again and again to adapt the past to the "political line of the present moment"'. (1971, p.2). The UK government is untroubled by their changing sequence of lies *that have been exposed as lies* over the last year; each lie moulded to adapt to the 'political line of the present moment'. For example, the ever-changing story about the EU Ventilator Scheme: the UK had joined the scheme, the UK could not join the scheme because the UK was no longer a part of the EU, that the email inviting the UK to join the scheme had not been received, then the Permanent Undersecretary reported that 'it was a political decision' not to join the scheme, a statement which the Undersecretary later withdrew.

'One reason for the disavowal is shame'

A recent study has found that the Conservative Party used 'overt disinformation' with 'new levels of impunity' in the recent election, doctoring a video of Keir Starmer and rebranding their twitter account as a fact checker during a TV debate (Colley, Granelli and Althuis, 2020). The study shows that the UK government 'wants citizens to believe the message that it is "succeeding" in controlling the epidemic, despite its recent electoral record of using disinformation tactics *and admitting it unapologetically*' (Ibid., p.122).

What are the psychological consequences for citizens living within a regime of ideologically informed lies that are being used to impose the austerity agenda and to legitimate the dismantling and privatization of the welfare state and its public institutions of care?

The relational psychoanalyst Lynne Layton starts with Freud's understanding of perversion as a turning away from truth. When infants are traumatized because of the failure of their nurturing environments, they cope by denial: 'I don't need you; I'm self-sufficient'. Something similar is the case for the citizen in the social context. As the containers of care that constitute the welfare state are progressively dismantled and sold off by the neoliberal state, the increasingly exposed and vulnerable citizen is effectively traumatized. The citizen disavows the source of the trauma by retreating into two fantasies, 'a fantasy of self-sufficient omnipotence and a fantasy that we will be totally taken care of without any effort on our part' (Layton, 2010, p.306). These fantasies of disavowal constitute perversions because they are ways of looking away from truth.

One reason for the disavowal is shame. In a culture that venerates the autonomous individual, those with overt dependency needs (disabled, unemployed) are vilified and publicly shamed. The human tendency

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when feeling shame is to hide the source of shame from public view and oneself, and instead buoy oneself up with pride in one form or another.

The fact that shaming leads to withdrawal from the public eye is the cause of a further fragmentation of society, into what the sociologist John Rodger has called 'amoral familism', where individuals act in ways that foster the short-term interests of their immediate family and become indifferent to the goings on in the public sphere and so become apolitical. Here, Layton reprimands her psychoanalytic profession saying 'that the clinic, in its general exclusion of any social realm beyond the family, tends to encourage [amoral familism]' (p.312).

The unlinking from the social has been given a new and powerful impetus by the arrival of the coronavirus, which has required humanity to retreat into isolation. Now, all things in the outside world are treated with suspicion as potential harbingers of danger and death. This fearful and suspicious sensibility is helped by the declamations of despotic leaders to move from the virus to various Others – foreigners, Blacks, refugees, Muslims.

Arendt (1978) says: 'If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer'. The minds of citizens, bewildered by multiple contradictory lies, unable to trust those who should be trustworthy, become vulnerable to the narratives being pressed upon them. Arendt continues: 'a people that no longer can believe anything cannot make up its mind. It is deprived not only of its capacity to act but also of its capacity to think and to judge. And with such a people you can then do what you please'. The bewildered and terrified citizen drowning in a sea of lies will grasp at any straw that is offered to them. The straw in this case is objects to *hate* in the form of uppity women, refugees, Muslims, and so on. These objects to *hate* also serve another function: they allow the citizen to further disavow their dependency needs by projecting them onto these 'needy' Others, whom they then despise.

Power differentials between the elites and the rest of humanity have become so wide, that in the eyes of the elites 'the people' are of little consequence. It is the case that one only feels shame in the presence of those one looks up to (Elias, 1994); which is why elites feel no shame whilst they lie, nor when the lie is found out. The casual use of the lie reveals the contempt of the elites towards the rest of humanity. And if it is not contempt, then surely it is utter indifference.

This then is the troubling 'new normal': *we expect to be lied to* on all fronts, by the spokespersons of industries of all kinds, politicians and the authorities generally. We have forgotten that to lie is wrong. Truth tellers are labelled traitorous whistle blowers and punished.

'Power differentials between the elites and the rest of humanity have become so wide, that in the eyes of the elites 'the people' are of little consequence'

When there is no one to trust, there is nothing to hold on to; as the ground falls away, we too fall, dizzied by ethical vertigo.

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Editorial

Lifting the Veil

Helen Morgan

In his address to the United Nations 75th general assembly in September 2020, the Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated that, alongside the global pandemic, there were four horsemen in our midst, four looming threats that endanger 21st century progress and imperil 21st century possibilities. These he described as:

1. Surging epic geopolitical tensions
2. Existential climate crisis and environmental damage
3. Global mistrust and social unrest
4. The dark side of the digital world

The term ‘apocalypse’ comes from the Greek work ‘Apokalypsis’ meaning the ‘lifting of the veil’ or ‘revelation’ whereby something hidden is disclosed in an era dominated by falsehood and misconception. The term ‘ignorance’ has within it the more active verb ‘to ignore’ implying that the defence structures of denial and disavowal have been built over generations. If healing is to take place, those processes which have been working in the undergrowth determining our affairs and distorting our relationships with each other and our environment need to come into the light and be made visible.

> **‘The environmental crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement have illuminated deep social and economic injustices in our culture’**

The environmental crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement have illuminated deep social and economic injustices in our culture, many of which have been underlined by the pandemic. A veil is being lifted revealing social and political dynamics with long histories that have done untold damage to individuals, populations and the planet. Throughout the globe we are hearing the roar of ‘Enough!’. We know how we humans cling to the familiar and resist disclosure, for revelation brings pain and the memories of trauma. Yet patients arrive at our consulting rooms from a sense of trouble and dis-ease with the status quo. Change does not happen from a place of comfort.

In this edition of *New Associations*, a variety of psychoanalytic lenses are brought to bear on facets of the situation in which we find ourselves today. In different ways they attempt to tease out something of what might lie beneath these complex and worrying times as represented in our dreams, our imagery, our mythology and our behaviour. These offer glimpses and a mosaic of ideas that we hope will stimulate imagination and thought. As Julian Manley and Wendy Hollway state in their opening article, the complexity of meaning must be honoured and cannot be simplified or reduced if we are to stay close to the truth of our world.

The Buddhist Philosopher, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi once posed the following koan: ‘Right now, if nothing you do is of any avail, what will you do?’ This is a conundrum familiar to anyone working analytically who, from time to time, will find ourselves in just such a paradox. Without the option of giving advice or setting tasks, we are left to develop the art of sitting within despair and fear of failure. Facing the very limits of our competence and our capacity for concern, where nothing we do is of any avail, we learn ways of hope-free waiting, of struggling to keep turned towards the other rather than turning away.

> **“‘Right now, if nothing you do is of any avail, what will you do?’”**

I suggest it is this capacity, this holding of tensions and uncertainty whilst continuing to think that is much needed at present if action is to be creatively rooted in thought and imagination. We hope this collection of articles comprises a helpful contribution to that work.

Helen Morgan, Editor, New Associations

A Plea from Pan? Coronavirus and the Unconscious

Johnathan Sunley

Does it not strike you that there is something slightly mad in the way the world is handling the pandemic?

Covid-19 is certainly a dangerous and highly contagious virus. To date, it has been linked to and in many cases been the direct cause of a million deaths across the globe. Hopes of finding a vaccine that would provide protection against the virus still appear to be as much wishful thinking as anything else.

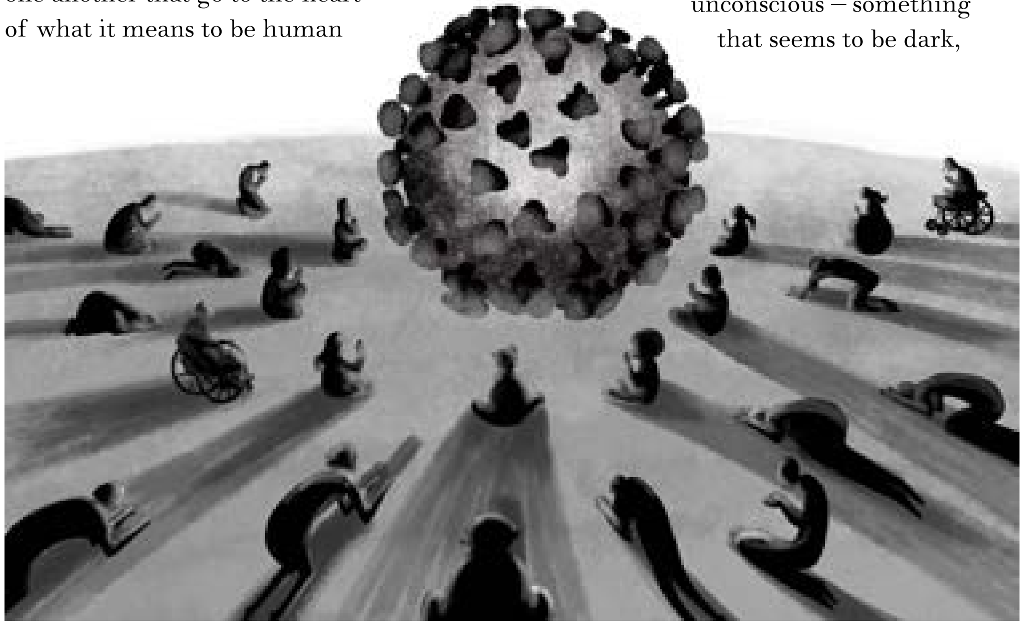
But this figure is many times lower than the almost apocalyptic forecasts we were presented with earlier in the year, at a time when the infection fatality rate of Covid-19 was being set by some experts as high as 3.4% – rather than the 0.1-0.3% it is now believed to be and which makes it no more lethal than many other viruses including some strains of flu.

It can be argued that back in March there was very little we did know about Covid-19, other than that it was spreading from country to country at an alarming rate. Therefore governments were right to act cautiously and to implement lockdowns of one kind or another.

Viewing events from a more analytic perspective, I would argue that what actually happened was that onto the blank screen of a new and suspiciously alien virus (coming from China only made it seem more hostile to us) we projected some of our darkest fantasies, turning a moderately threatening pathogen into the modern-day equivalent of the Bubonic Plague. Far from reacting rationally, both governments and populations panicked, leading to the introduction of measures – many of them still in place – the consequences of which will prove at least as destructive as the virus itself. I am thinking here of the surge in deaths due to other conditions for which treatment was suspended, of an economic recession which is likely to prove catastrophic, of the curtailment of civil liberties and of an assault on the norms we have for living with and alongside one another that go to the heart of what it means to be human and which until a few months ago would have been regarded as inviolable.

The question is why? What made us so terrified of Covid-19 that in our response to it we have effectively turned the world upside down? Why haven't we been able to cope with this virus by simply mitigating its harms rather than seeking to eradicate it? That is what we did during the no less severe global flu pandemics of the 1950s and 1960s.

I think we cannot answer this question without taking into account what might be stirring in the collective unconscious – something that seems to be dark,



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disturbing and even malignant but that is crying out for understanding. Only when we have done this will we be cured of the nightmarish psychosomatic illness that is Coronaphobia.

> **'What made us so terrified of Covid-19 that in our response to it we have effectively turned the world upside down?'**

A good place to start is with the word 'pandemic' itself, and with the panic and pandemonium that in my opinion are the chief characteristics of the one we are currently grappling with. It is hard to see these words without being reminded of Pan, the ancient Greek god of nature and instinct who lived in the mountains of Arcadia. Having spent the morning tending his flocks, Pan loved nothing better than to fall asleep in the afternoon and would wreak terrible revenge on anyone who disturbed him. He did this by creeping up on them and scaring his victims with a shout so loud and unexpected that they would lose their wits.

Is there then a sense in which we may have offended Pan? In his book *Pan and the Nightmare*, the Jungian writer James Hillman argues that one way we have done this is by depriving him of his natural habitat. 'A question from Pan might ask us: "Why are you civilized people who profess compassionate Christianity so hard on the environment? Why do you blast, bulldoze and flatten so many acres of scrub woodlands and hillsides? Why are there fewer and fewer lonely places where people may hide in nature and nature hide from people? Are you trying to eradicate my haunts?"'

But Pan does not just live in the wilds. He is partly wild himself, as denoted by the goat's hindquarters and horns that give him such a distinctive appearance. If these are taken as symbolizing the less rational parts of the psyche, then a second way in which it could be said we have caused offence to Pan is through becoming increasingly reliant on modes of thinking exemplified by science and technology that despise the irrational and intuitive – much as the other Olympian gods despised Pan for his ugliness.

Another important strand in the mythology surrounding Pan is that he is the only Greek god who actually dies. This is supposed to have happened in the first century AD and Christian theologians would later argue that Pan's death had been brought about by the birth of Christ. Two thousand years later it is Christianity that, at least in the ultra-secularised West, looks to be fading fast. The result of this is that we no longer have available to us any of the symbols and rituals through which cultures with a sense of the sacred have always been able to approach and bind the energies of the unconscious. Does this explain why we have begun to find the contents of our minds so terrifying?

> **'... though the pandemic is presented as a medical emergency, what it really exposes is a spiritual crisis that can no longer be ignored.'**

This is what Jung was getting at when he said 'the gods have become diseases'. We may think we have progressed beyond religion. But what the pandemic shows is that forces we once looked up to in the skies now possess us from within in the form of overwhelming fears and anxieties. Given the way Coronavirus now rules almost every aspect of our lives, we might also reverse Jung's statement and note with astonishment how a disease has practically been made into a god. With corona being the Latin for 'crown', perhaps it is the very name of the virus we feel overawed by.

In short, though the pandemic is presented as a medical emergency, what it really exposes is a spiritual crisis that can no longer be ignored. If Pan, understood either as a divine presence or as one of the archetypes of the psyche, is partly to blame for what is happening, he is also telling us how we can escape our current predicament. Let us reconsider our relationship with nature, with the irrational and with the sacred – and Pan will return to his slumbers.

Johnathan Sunley is a psychodynamic psychotherapist in private practice in London.

Feeling the Future: Transmissive Selves and Pandemic Imaginaries

Lynn Froggett

In 2017, with my colleague Lizzie Muller[1], I was researching future imaginaries through audience responses to an exhibition, *Human + Future of the Species*, at Singapore's ArtScience Museum. The first Covid-19 infection was still three years away and pandemics were not much on the public's mind. The last truly global pandemic had been a century previously, HIV could now be lived with, Ebola had been contained on a distant continent, SARS had been stopped in its tracks. The exhibition featured artist responses to the machinic and bio-engineered future of humankind and explored technologies whose full potentials were yet to unfold: the ravages of automation on creative work, substitution of robots for human care, prosthetic super-humans, body adaptation for a denuded, heating planet. We recruited roboticists and bio-engineers to the visual matrix groups in our study[2] and we found, in the main, that the prospect of being overwhelmed by viruses and other micro-organisms outweighed any threats from technology. Robots and cyborgs were seen as old tech that would die with us, while viral and bacterial life would flourish – the nemesis of humanity, unleashed by Nature out of kilter, but ultimately resurgent. What do we make of the fact that anxieties triggered in an exhibition dominated by machines revolved around disease? Could it have been that fear of contagion was already circulating unconsciously in the cultural imaginary – and, if so, might this help to explain the rapidity and ease with which the privations of lockdown were accepted?

> **'We are now inclined to think that the arrival of the pandemic was less of a shock than we might have expected'**

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We are now inclined to think that the arrival of the pandemic was less of a shock than we might have expected. In a sense, people had already 'seen it coming'. As the ArtScience Museum now thinks, we 'feel the future'[3] before it takes shape in our minds and in reality. If this is right then Covid-19 will have been the materialisation of a threat already widely sensed and unconsciously experienced. If we had already affectively and imaginatively anticipated the arrival of a pandemic, this might offer an additional explanation for the lassitude with which (in the cultural context of the UK) it was initially met. In the last issue of *New Associations*, Julian Lousada referred to the 'wait and see' frame of mind whereby inaction seemed safer than an acknowledgement of helplessness – and so despite calls for immediate response, it was easier to submit to the delusion that time was on our side. Rather than reacting we adapted to an overturning of habitual ways of life unparalleled in modern times, except in war.

There are good reasons to believe that we are now culturally primed to sense contagion. After all, 'going viral' - social contagion mediated by communication technology – has become a familiar trope. In ordinary digital times many of us live in an 'always on' state of 'fevered' anticipation that our boundaries will be breached and our computers (essentially prosthetic devices) will be 'infected'. Dissociation – or 'turning off'– offers the only means of relief. One of our participants in Singapore referred to 'the dissociation in that whole exhibition hall'. Language in use is permeated with viral risk (software infected, files corrupted, anti-viral defences overwhelmed) but also the manic pleasures of unhindered and infinite connectivity (friction-free networks, uninhibited sharing). 'Identity theft' depends on this invasion – a perfected psychological torture and radical inconvenience of the digital age. Christopher Bollas (2018) has written of the 'transmissive' selves that are formed when these experiences become an everyday mode of living and relating. The transmissive self is unable to defend against the abrasions of digital culture because they/we have become the corporeal hosts of its propagation – it is not that we strategically decide to glance at our phones in a social gathering, or our email in a meeting, but that our attention is irresistibly claimed by the information systems we now serve.

The transmissive self has become a permeable medium rather than a presence or co-presence, and hence the familiar sense that parties to social interactions – in personal encounters and professional settings like the lecture theatre, or consulting room – are only 'half-there'; that distraction has been naturalised between part-real/part-virtual selves who are always available to intrusion. Gillian Isaacs Russell (2020) asks what happens to the capacity to free associate when intrusion becomes normalised? We might also ask what happens to the collective cultural capacity to experience loss and react to it, rather than simply adapt to what we 'knew' was coming.

> **'Rather than reacting we adapted to an overturning of habitual ways of life unparalleled in modern times, except in war.'**

In Singapore our technologists dissociated from their creations – the robots – speaking of them with irony, cynicism and disdain. The pandemic imagination, once aroused, brought a moment of recognition and real fear. The mood in the matrix changed as they gave voice to these anxieties and acknowledged both human helplessness and the limits of transmissive technologies (and by implication selves) before the intractable Other of Nature. This surrender of omnipotence in the face of impending catastrophe came as something of a relief.

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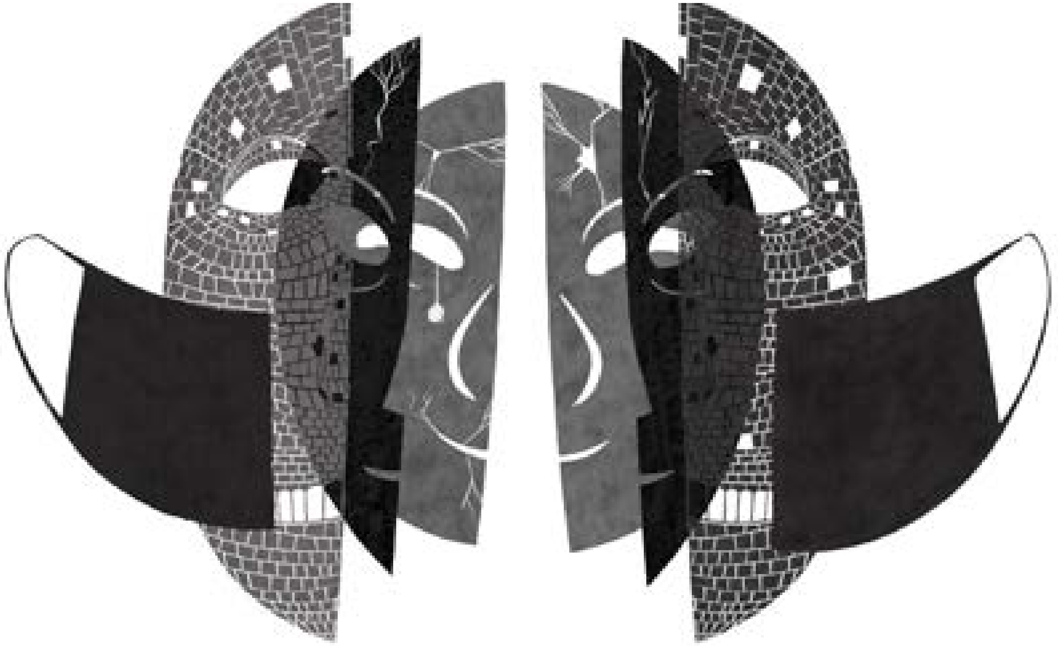
Isaacs Russell, G. (2020) Remote Working During the Pandemic: a Q &A with Gillian Isaacs Russell, *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 36, 364-374. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/bjp.12581

1. Curating Third Space Research Programme, Jill Bennett, Lizzie Muller, Lynn Froggett, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2015-2019.
2. Visual matrix methodology takes inspiration from social dreaming but adapts it for empirical research problems. Participant groups associate to a visual/sensory third (the exhibition in this case) expressing what it produces in them rather than what they think about it.
3. 'Feeling the Future' is now the title of a series of talks the ArtScience Museum has hosted on YouTube.

Pandemic

Masks, Handwashing and Zoom: The Way We Lack Now

Clint Burnham



When the novel coronavirus went global in early 2020, among the early commentators were psychoanalysts and cultural critics working in the Lacanian tradition. Indeed, the perfect storm of pandemic, Lacanian analysis and online commentary seems to suggest a repetition of that famous scene with Freud and Jung on their America-headed ocean liner in 1909, and Freud's declaration: 'They don't realize we're bringing them the plague.' The perhaps-apocryphal utterance was reported by Lacan in his 1955 talk in Vienna, The Freudian Thing. But the remark prompts the question of how Lacanian analysis can help us to understand the present-day moment. I want to suggest here that we can think about Covid-19 in three different ways: first of all, the significance of such everyday manifestations of the pandemic as masks and handwashing second, the significance of the growth of Zoom and other video conferencing systems – including for the analytic session; third, more general comments on how we are now, more than ever, connecting via our digital devices.

There are two, inter-related, ways in which Lacan speaks to what masks mean for us today: the split subject, and lack. One of the fundamental aspects of Lacanian theories is that we are, as human beings, split – not simply in terms of having an unconscious, but in terms of our relation to language. There is much that we disavow, that we do not know or cannot know, that we repress: this much is standard Freudian theory, of course. But for Lacan language is paramount here. He borrows his thinking, via Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson, from the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and the distinction between the signifier and the signified. More accurately, for Lacan it is the bar (or barre) between the word and its meaning that is also a cut in our psyche.

Further, at certain crucial moments in his development of this theory (in the 1950s especially, as collected in the *Écrits* of 1966), he refers to Indigenous masks as described by Lévi-Strauss, masks which themselves would split open to reveal another beneath. So, Lacan reminds us, to 'point out the persona is a mask is not to indulge in a simple etymological game'. This is to say that we are already wearing masks, and not simply in a matter of a public presentation of ourselves, but as a manifestation of our lack. This is why, according to Todd McGowan (in one of his public YouTube lectures [July 26, 2020] that are another happy, unintended consequence of the plague), those on the right are so hesitant to wear masks. First,

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McGowan argues, ‘the mask covers the face, which functions as a fetish.’ That is, the face is more of a mask than the mask proper, for, as fetish, it covers up our lack. Then, he continues, the mask is a sign of collectivity, since when we wear a mask we explicitly signal our concerns for others: ‘I can no longer think of myself in isolation once I recognize the necessity of wearing the mask.’

‘… the mask is a sign of collectivity, since when we wear a mask we explicitly signal our concerns for others… ’

But what of the various ways masks – wearers carry out this practice – the mask pushed down onto one’s chin, with a slit for a straw, as an eye covering, hanging off an ear? (Or as a wit on the internet put it when Robert Pattison contracted Covid during the filming of a *Batman* movie – of course, that mask covers all the wrong parts of the face!) Here perhaps the split in the mask is even more evident, as Lacan noted when he said, in an essay on Gide, ‘Must I, in order to awaken their attention, show them how to handle a mask that unmasks the face it represents only by splitting in two and that represents this face only by remasking it? And then explain to them that it is when the mask is closed that it composes this face, and when it is open that it splits it?”’ The split in our subjectivity is perhaps most evident when we mangle the mask protocols.

If Covid-19 masks make evident our split subjectivities, what about handwashing? Here we might want to consider first the obsessional-neurotic aspects of the practice, and then their more social meaning. One of the most remarkable early signs of the pandemic, and of course I mean signs in their actual meaning, was the proliferation of instructions on how to wash our hands, not only on WHO posters that suddenly appeared in public restrooms, but in memes and other social media that adapted pop song lyrics to handwashing diagrams. Does this mean that obsessives were right all along, and we should all wash our hands until they are raw?

Here we might want to think of a ‘Lacanian proposition’ that Žižek is fond of repeating (it first appears in *The Sublime Object*), regarding ‘the pathologically jealous husband: even if all the facts he quotes in support of his jealousy are true, even if his wife really is sleeping around with other men, this does not change one bit the fact that his jealousy is a pathological, paranoid construction’.

In the same way, once the obsessive subject enters into the Covid-19 era, their exuberant handwashing is still an obsessive act. Jamieson Webster, in a *New York Review* article on psychoanalysis during the plague, tells of ‘a startling moment: a patient who has for years said she wants to die is working harder than anyone to keep herself safe.’

But of course handwashing also has a public or social meaning that shows up not only in the Bible and *Macbeth*, a way of declaring our innocence. This history is invoked by Lacan when, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, he says: ‘The important thing is not that the unconscious determines neurosis – of that one Freud can quite happily, like Pontius Pilate, wash his hands’. Handwashing, of course, early on in the pandemic, was suddenly an ethical imperative, a care-of-the-self, which not only made the obsessive neurotic the subjectivity *du jour*, but also meant that we now noticed such moments, whether scenes from pop culture (in *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or *Jackie Brown*) or in pandemic-adjacent texts like *The Magic Mountain* (five handwashing scenes in the first hundred pages!).

So covering our face, and worrying about the cleanliness of our hands, are new (for some) practices of the Covid era. But consider the accelerated uses of digital technology. Now, our relation to the digital is already one of many neuroses and fetishes (I cover this in more depth in my 2018 book *Does the Internet have an Unconscious?*; see also my argument that ‘all texting is sexting’ and a discussion of ‘clickbait in a Hegelian context’). But let us look specifically at the turn to Zoom as the new hegemonic video conferencing system. We are told that this metastasizing of Zoom is disastrous for clinical practices: ‘The virtual does not replace the presence,’ José R. Ubieto warns us in *Lacanian Review Online*, and he recommends turning off the camera sometimes so one is only in the presence of the voice (a classic Lacanian technique), for ‘the current crisis should not make us forget that the virtual can complement, but not replace, the face-to-face meeting, the presence of the bodies in the flesh.’

But this new symptom or disorder, ‘Zoom fatigue,’ can sometimes lead to or be ‘diagnosed’ with dubious evolutionary arguments about the shape or visibility (‘sclera’) of our eyes. More interesting, to me, is to combine what Lacan has said over the years about ‘the wall of language’ (or the basic Freudian idea that language is less a form of communication than the site for mistakes, slips and miscommunication) and how he talks about the gaze. This last concept, it is important to note, is not what is often thought of as a form of power

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(à la the 'male gaze' of feminist film theory), but, as Todd McGowan argues in *The Real Gaze*, a matter of lack, of castration: 'In Lacan's conception of desire, the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision. It is a blank spot in the subject's look, a blank spot that threatens the subject's sense of mastery in looking because the subject cannot see it directly or successfully integrate it into the rest of its visual field. This is because, as Lacan points out, the gaze is "what is lacking, is non-specular, is not graspable in the image." Even when the subject sees a complete image, something remains obscure: the subject cannot see how its own desire distorts what it sees. The gaze of the object includes the subject in what the subject sees, but this gaze is not present in the field of the visible.'

For Lacan, then, the gaze is not about seeing, or being seen: it is about not seeing and not being seen. It is about the condition of Zoom, I argue. Lacan illustrates our current moment (nearly) in a famous anecdote about being out in a fishing boat and seeing a sardine can floating in the water. 'Do you see that can?' a fisherman asks him – 'Well, it doesn't see you!' The young Lacan, not seen by the sardine can, is the prototypical Zoom user. Here it is important to remember that the visual for Lacan is not about reciprocity. To lay 'Zoom fatigue' at the feet of the technology is to avoid thinking about how many hours we are suddenly sitting in front of the computer (sitting is the new smoking: a bad habit), and it is also to fall into the humanist fallacy of thinking face-to-face communication and reciprocity is a guarantee of social equality and meaningful communication.

'… the current crisis should not make us forget that the virtual can complement, but not replace, the face-to-face meeting, the presence of the bodies in the flesh'

Rather, in an antinomic moment, we encounter, with this 'wall of screens,' the very lack of visual power at the very moment we witness the ease with which technology makes the world, and other subjects (our clients or friends or students on Zoom) visible to us. Sitting in front of the Zoom interface, we engage in a hyper-gaze, our eyes dart from the light by our webcam (so we appear to be looking directly at our interlocutors), to the person or persons we are speaking to, and then also perhaps to our own image (or perhaps I am the only one so narcissistic). Encountering the synchronicity of lens, screen and mirror, we are experiencing the anamorphic, or distorted, quality of what it is to exist in the field of vision. We see that we are unseen, but we don't see that we are seen. We are experiencing, that is, the gaze as what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*, the gaze as the Real.

'… we encounter, with this "wall of screens," the very lack of visual power.'

Here is what I have been arguing we can learn from the intersection of the pandemic, psychoanalysis and technology. First of all, our feelings and anxieties about masks and mask wearing are symptomatic of coming into awareness of the fragile nature of our being, our split subjectivity – we are but what, in Moby Dick, Melville called 'pasteboard masks.' Then, handwashing itself – not least in the way we were infantilized with instructions ad nauseam, is still a neurotic practice even if called for by all the proper authorities (and pop bands?!). Finally, Zoom fatigue is a neoliberal fantasy, papering over the anxiety that this technology, like masks, like handwashing, brings us face-to-face with. We might conclude with a butchering of a Žižek title: Enjoy your Zoom call!

Clint Burnham is professor and chair of graduate English at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada. He is a founding member of the Lacan Salon, and author of many books of criticism, poetry and fiction, including most recently, Does the Internet have an Unconscious? Slavoj Žižek and Digital Culture *(Bloomsbury, 2018) and* Fredric Jameson and The Wolf of Wall Street *(Bloomsbury, 2016).*

Recommended reading, viewing and listening

Notable for commentary, resources, and Zoom-enabled events are such (English-language) websites/organizations as Owen Hewitson's LacanOnline.com (see its March 2020 newsletter in particular for a survey of events that were made more accessible), the *Lacanian Review Online*, the Lacan Salon, New Zealand's Centre for Lacanian Analysis, the Lacan Circle of Australia, Todd McGowan and Ryan Engley's 'Why Theory' and new kid on the block 'Žižek and So On'.

Grief in the Time of Coronavirus

Malcolm Allen

Peace, my heart,

let the time for the parting be sweet.

Let it not be a death

but completeness.

Let love melt into memory

and pain into songs.

Rabindranath Tagore (1913)

The business of grieving and mourning is not unique to us as a species. Many will have seen the moving footage from a wildlife orphanage in Zambia showing a group of chimpanzees quietly gathering round the dead body of one of their number. Visibly upset, they gently touch and sniff his body while an older female chimp tenderly attempts to clean his teeth with a stem of grass.

Where humans differ is in our structured and culturally patterned response to death. Mortuary traditions in humans are almost certainly as old as our Neanderthal ‘kindred’ (as Rebecca Wragg Sykes’s captivating new book describes them) and may even stretch back to our last common ancestor. From Malinowski to Mandelbaum, the giants of anthropology have depicted the rituals of mourning and body disposal throughout the world. Funerary practices in modern industrialised societies may have lost much of the sacramental potency of these rituals but, if nothing else, they have certainly proliferated in their form and style.

> **‘... surprisingly little work and thinking has been done on the relationship between grieving and the ritual of a funeral ceremony’**

Ever since the flamboyant eccentric William Price cremated his son on an open pyre in a field at Llantrisant, Wales in 1884, cremation has grown into the most popular form of body disposal in the UK. But whether cremation or burial, the forms of ceremony associated with them have become increasingly personalised and secularised. The Aids epidemic popularised a more affirmative ‘celebration of life’ approach, ‘including the popular songs that have now become a near ubiquitous component of contemporary funerals.

Meanwhile, psychoanalysts and others have attempted to understand the process of grieving and mourning: from Freud and Jung’s work, through modelling morphologies of grief (with three ‘stages’, later four, proposed by Bowlby; five by Kübler-Ross) to the more recent rise of ‘thanatology’.

But surprisingly little work and thinking has been done on the relationship between grieving and the ritual of a funeral ceremony; let alone how that relationship may have changed with the rise of these more personalised approaches, let alone with the impact of coronavirus on the whole undertaking of a funeral.

As a celebrant, I have reflected a great deal on this relationship, especially now facing this new context. Crematoria and cemeteries have allowed funerals to go ahead but with restricted numbers, and of course without the rituals of touching and embracing. This has led some, such as the Labour MP and doctor Rosena Allin-Khan, to conclude: ‘This virus has stripped the humanity out of grieving.’ The loss in these respects is unquestionably real and can be deeply felt.

A specific dynamic often arises from the restriction on numbers, with a heightening of tensions as decisions are made around who is permitted to attend

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and who is 'authorised' to make these decisions. In many cases, decisions on the style and content of funerals have become more charged and more contested. Mandelbaum's identification of the five functions of a funeral include an affirmation of the extended kinship system where members of the larger family console the survivors. But this important dimension has been put under severe strain by these restrictions.

> **'A specific dynamic often arises from the restriction on numbers, with a heightening of tensions as decisions are made around who is permitted to attend'**

Here, digital technology can play a critical role. Live-streamed ceremonies enable a wider level of participation, although it can also reinforce the inner/outer circle divide. But totally digital ceremonies on Zoom or comparable platforms have proved to be much more inspiring and meaningful than anyone might previously have thought. They have the advantage of being fully inclusive and people have quickly learned to be highly creative in their use.

> **'Mandelbaum's identification of the five functions of a funeral include an affirmation of the extended kinship system where members of the larger family console the survivors'**

What are funerals for? What do funerals do? And what role do they play in the longer process of grief? This latter question is not susceptible to obvious answers, and most attempts to answer it have been conceptual and largely speculative. There is little solid empirical work to help us.

As a celebrant, I draw a clear boundary between my role and that of a therapist or bereavement counsellor. I have in truth little idea about the impact of the funeral on the later process of grief and mourning. However large or small the role of the funeral itself might be, it is just one component of the process. The whole organisation of the period around the funeral, not just the funeral itself, is important for processing the sense of loss. And then, typically, people engage in an array of post-funeral rituals, often for a long period, e.g. sorting out personal effects, listening to music, visiting the grave or where ashes have been scattered, retelling stories with friends and family.

> **'Funerals serve in part to acknowledge and mark the irreversibility of death while also gently giving voice to a sense of transformation, transition and continuity that are needed for recovery and renewal'**

Funerals serve in part to acknowledge and mark the irreversibility of death while also gently giving voice to a sense of transformation, transition and continuity that are needed for recovery and renewal. A key part of that is working with family and friends in the careful drawing up of a recognisable portrait of the person who has died. John Berger said that to tell the story of someone's life is to try and touch on its meaning. Of course, a life is inexhaustible in its meaning. But it is possible, I think, to do a sort of rough justice to the main contours of someone's life – their character, their achievements, their hopes and dreams, their vulnerabilities, their influence and legacy – for those attending a funeral to take a meaningful set of memories away. People can continue to look back on a funeral for a long time, even years. Berger said on another occasion that he is a storyteller because he is a listener. And the work of listening and engaging with families and friends to create meaning within a funeral ceremony is at the heart of what we do. It is to help begin the process of grief's work, of love's work, in Tagore's words, of letting pain melt into songs.

Malcolm Allen is former CEO of BPC, former Dean of Postgraduate Studies at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and currently works as a humanist celebrant.

Psychoanalysis and Homelessness in Philadelphia

Deborah Anna Luepnitz

In the 1980s, Philadelphia had one of the highest rates of homelessness in the US; now it has one of the lowest. Credit for the turnaround goes to two women: a nun named Mary Scullion, and her best friend, Joan Dawson McConnon. Outraged by the plight of the very poor in the world's wealthiest nation, and with no institutional backing, they simply invited 50 homeless men into an abandoned recreation centre. The results were so encouraging that the two women acquired government and private funds. Their fledgling effort has become a huge organization known as Project HOME, which consists of 17 fully-staffed apartment buildings all over the city that homeless people never have to leave. In 2005, I sat down with Sister Mary to talk about the mental health needs of her residents and asked permission to bring psychoanalysis to Project HOME. When she gave the green light, I began recruiting colleagues to a small, zero-budget group we call IFA (Insight For All).

IFA takes a three-pronged approach. We have one analyst-on-the-street who sees only people who have not yet come indoors, either because they are on a housing waiting list or because they prefer not to live inside. She sees some people occasionally, and others several times per week. Sessions are sometimes used to discuss housing, but also as ordinary analytic/therapeutic hours.

The second thing we do is run groups for residents and staff. The most remarkable of these was a group for the children of Project HOME, which ran four times per week for seven years, and provided the greatest containment of their young lives.

> **'Outraged by the plight of the very poor in the world's wealthiest nation, and with no institutional backing, they simply invited 50 homeless men into an abandoned recreation centre'**

What most IFA members do is to offer individual treatment, pro bono, for as long as the patient wishes. A Project HOME staff member simply calls with a referral, and I make a match within 48 hours so that the treatment can begin immediately. Early on, the patient was given a clinician's address, but that resulted in many no-shows. Leaving the protective skin of Project HOME for a stranger's office was not psychically worthwhile for many. We decided that the early sessions (i.e. a few weeks to several months) would occur onsite, in some vacant office. This places an extra burden on the therapist, but results in fewer no-shows. We wait until the patient says: 'Where is your office? Why can't we go there?' to make the change, which invariably results in a deepening of the transference. What we offer is not classical analysis. Typically there are one to two weekly meetings, sitting up, although perhaps 20% of formerly homeless patients prefer the analytic couch.

Most IFA members are steeped in British Middle Group thinking and/or American relational psychoanalysis, and there have been a few Lacanians. Winnicott's work has been essential, as well as that of contemporary writers who use it. The idea that the first home we inhabit is the mother's body (Campbell, 2006) is a starting point in understanding 'shelter resistance'. Ideally, the womb is a space where all needs are met. But what if the pregnant mother is hungry, psychotic or being punched in the stomach? For such infants, the intra-uterine environment is more like a chamber of horrors, and any future homes or enclosures will recall the original chaos and fear.

We at IFA have come to think of three psychological categories of homelessness. First, homelessness can be an expression of breakdown. This is the conventional

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view; it means that one's resources have been exhausted. Second, as Brown (2019) describes, it can be a defence against breakdown. To these we add a third possibility, following Winnicott (1963): homelessness can be an expression of the breakdown that occurred in infancy, but was not experienced. It would be an oversimplification to say that these three map onto the diagnostic categories of neurotic, borderline and psychotic. However, one can think of them as reflecting increasing levels of trauma and dysfunction. An example of the first would be Maria, an upper-middle-class woman who fled an abusive spouse to the safety of a friend's home. Until a divorce was settled and courts released her bank accounts, she found herself moving every few weeks, and ended up temporarily in a homeless shelter. This kind of situation –as well as natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina – reminds us that we are all one step away from being unhoused.

The second category would include Gavin, who walked out of his house because the family atmosphere was toxic. He referred to himself as 'homeless by choice.' Although he nearly ruined his health living on the street, he maintained it was the best decision possible. I believe that, had he stayed, a psychotic breakdown would have been likely. Unlike Maria who desperately wanted safety indoors, Gavin declined services for a year, and came inside only when physical injury required it. Seven years of treatment allowed him to process his traumas and live in supportive housing.

'This kind of situation –as well as natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina – reminds us that we are all one step away from being unhoused.'

In the third category is Lenore, whose mother suffered a post-partum psychosis when she was born. When she herself gave birth, she re-lived the trauma, and had a breakdown that led to giving up her own child. Events later in life triggered feelings for that child and, carrying a diagnosis of schizophrenia, she became street homeless. Her sense of self-exile was so strong that only an endless wandering was bearable. She would feel grateful spending one night in a warm shelter, yet be found the following night on a park bench, as her voices instructed. Treatment lasted less than one year, but close work in the transference allowed her to move in with a benign family member (Luepnitz, 2015).

'Although he nearly ruined his health living on the street, he maintained it was the best decision possible'

Working with those who are unhoused, both in body and mind, poses challenges of vicarious trauma for the analyst. We draw comfort from a reflection by Paul Daly on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, whose last line is: 'I can't go on, I'll go on.' This, as Daly points out, is the lived experience of both the unhoused and those of us who would care for them. It has never felt truer than in these days of the pandemic.

Deborah Anna Luepnitz, Ph.D. is on the faculty of the Institute for Relational Psychoanalysis of Philadelphia, and is the author of The Family Interpreted *(1988) and* Schopenhauer's Porcupines: Five Stories of Psychotherapy *(2002). She is a contributing author to the* Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, and her article, "Thinking in the Space Between Winnicott and Lacan" was published in 2009 in the* International Journal of Psychoanalysis. *Insight For All – her pro bono psychotherapy project for homeless adults and children – is now in its 15th year. She maintains a private practice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

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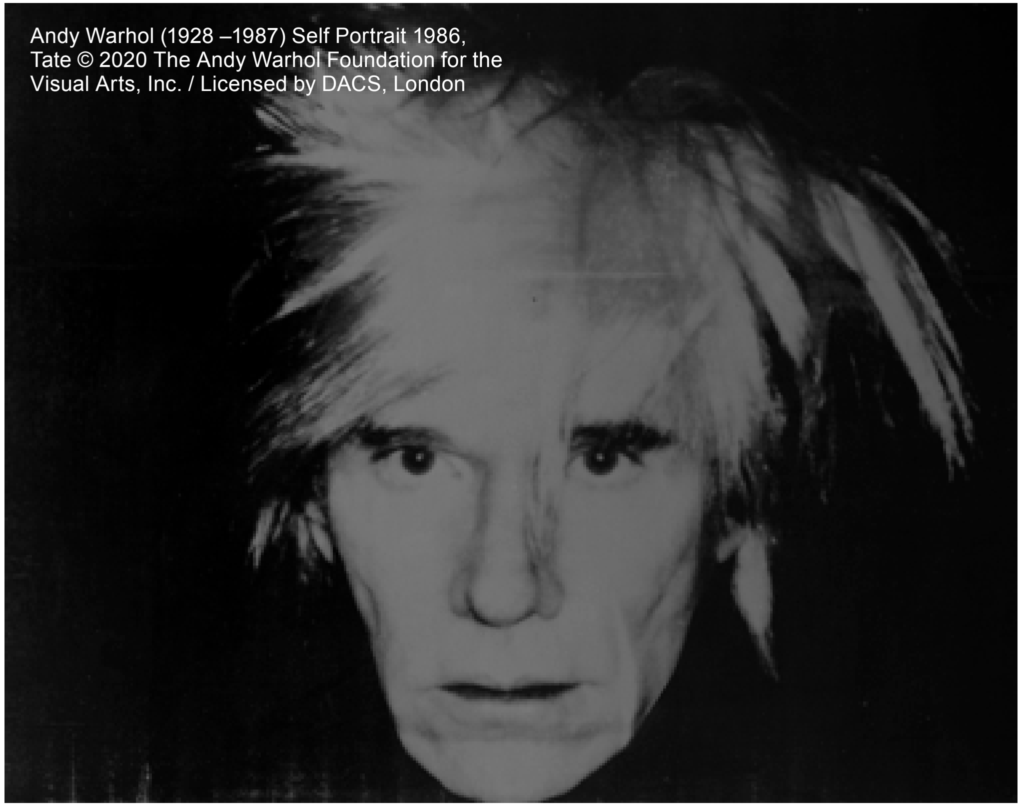
Review

Remote Experiencing: Art During Lockdown

Mary Thomas



Andy Warhol (1928 –1987) Self Portrait 1986, Tate © 2020 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by DACS, London

One of the deprivations of the lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic has been the closure of art galleries and museums. This may not be the top priority for some, but for those of us who feel nurtured, sustained and inspired by easy access to art, it has been a great loss indeed.

Many art galleries and museums have risen to the challenges posed by their closure by providing virtual tours to their collections and exhibitions. Although this has been a creative way of providing access to the general public to the riches within their walls, it has made me reflect on the effect of virtual viewing on the experiencing of art.

There are some parallels of course with the great upheaval and adaptation, practically overnight, in the psychotherapy profession, where we closed our doors, on government advice, to our patients, and offered them a more 'remote' or 'virtual' experience instead.

We are still processing this and reflecting on the meaning and impact of it on our thera-peutic relationships. The sudden and dramatic disruption of the physical setting goes against our well schooled beliefs that the psychotherapist should provide a consistent and reliable setting, with minimum disruptions to the frame. Now we find ourselves talking to our patients on the telephone or on video calling platforms. Even the Luddites among us have been catapulted into this new virtual reality, with some seeing it as a necessary means of continuing therapeutic work under exceptional, and temporary, circumstances, while others are embracing it more enthusiastically as a future way of working.

What does it do to the psychotherapy relationship when the therapist and patient are talking to each other from two different physical spaces? What effect does the lack of the physical, bodily presence of both therapist and patient have on their interaction? If you are not breathing the same air, in the same room, what impact does that have on the sense of connection? However useful the remote

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and virtual ways of communicating have been in enabling psychotherapeutic work to continue, it is also important to acknowledge the loss and the deprivation that the absence of the physical presence of both psychotherapist and patient in the room has meant.

In parallel, how does the virtual viewing of art affect the experiencing of an artwork? What does it do to the experience of the artwork when you are not physically in the same room, breathing the same air as the canvas/sculpture, or peering over the heads of the other onlookers to get a better view? To explore some of these questions I took a virtual tour of The Royal Academy's 'Picasso and Paper' exhibition, which I had been fortunate enough to see in reality before the lockdown started. Although I enjoyed seeing the artworks, and it reminded me of some of the works that I had particularly liked in the flesh, on the whole I found it a rather alienating experience. For one thing the galleries were completely empty. It can be frustrating sometimes when a show is very crowded but the lack of other people in the virtual tour made me aware that exhibitions are a social experience. Looking at art is about a relationship between the viewer and the artwork, and in fantasy, the artist. It is not just a passive consuming of an object.

'Although I enjoyed seeing the artworks, and it reminded me of some of the works that I had particularly liked in the flesh, on the whole I found it a rather alienating experience'

As I write this some of the major London galleries have opened up their doors to the public again, although looking at art is now a very different experience from pre-pandemic times. There are prescribed, one way routes, and the number of people attending at pre-booked times is strictly controlled.

One of the first exhibitions that I went to see was 'Andy Warhol' at Tate Modern. I approached it with some ambivalence as some of Warhol's imagery can seem over familiar and rather empty, concerned with surface rather than depth. Do I need to see another reproduction of a soup can or Marilyn Monroe? The show challenges feelings like these and and made me think about the paradox and complexities of Warhol, highlighting his exploration of identity, fame, celebrity, mass consumerism, to name but a few of his preoccupations. It also provides some helpful context for an understanding of his personal and artistic development.

'Looking at art is about a relationship between the viewer and the artwork… It is not just a passive consuming of an object'

In her exploration of loneliness, Olivia Laing looks beyond the surface preoccupations of Warhol's art and senses the vulnerable struggling human self that peers out from under his 'fright wig', the awkward little boy from an immigrant family who believed he didn't fit in and who found it difficult to communicate in speech. Warhol himself might disagree with this reading of his work. He stated that he wanted to remain a mystery, that his art was all about surface. 'If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it' (Tate Modern Exhibition catalogue).

The paradox of the celebrity visual artist with a huge following, hiding in plain sight, wanting to be known and yet not known, resonates with the core complex anxieties that many patients struggle with in psychotherapy. The desire for, and fear of engagement, meaning and relationship, versus the safety of concealment behind the mask. It remains to be seen how these core complex dynamics might play out as some therapists and patients take tentative steps towards working together in the consulting room again. How will the physically distancing, sanitising and mask wearing requirements, together with six months (or more) of 'remote' screen or telephone contact, impact on the therapeutic relationship? We are in uncharted territory. But to continue the parallel with the reopening of the art galleries, being in the physical presence of the artwork/the other can bring a renewed sense of engagement, just as the Warhol show brought the artist more alive for me.

Mary Thomas is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in private practice in central London and an artist.

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Letter

Letter in Response to 'Sexuality and Gender – where are we now?' by Juliet Newbigin and Leezah Hertzmann

Further to the article in the summer edition of *New Associations* by Juliet Newbigin and Leezah Hertzmann, I feel moved to make certain points.

There is, of course, much to say on these topics and thanks are due to Juliet and Leezah for raising them and for their work thereon. We know that the 'psy' professions have a fraught and shameful history in relation to sexual orientation and this legacy, understandably, leaves people feeling worried about repeating past mistakes. This could lead to a strong desire to make reparation.

However, the article is written in such a way as to couple issues of sexual attraction and 'gender' – indeed the title itself conflates the two issues. As somebody who has worked long and hard in these areas I think it is very important for members to know that interlinking issues of sexuality and gender is, in itself, freighted with all sorts of ideology. The issue of same-sex attraction is conceptually entirely separate from that of trans(genderism) and to associate them in this unchallenged way is misleading to those unfamiliar with the discourse and the debates therein. The idea and understanding of a 'gender identity' is far from settled.

'The idea and understanding of a "gender identity" is far from settled'

In relation to the GIDS at the Tavistock, it's critical that readers know that there is no consensus of opinion within the Service itself, and therefore Bernadette Wren's contributions are an expression of her own views honed from her own experience and understood through her clinical lens. The Service is entirely heterogenous, with other similarly experienced clinicians who think very differently about aetiology and what constitutes good treatment and a good outcome.

Equally the Memorandum of Understanding 2 is also the subject of some concern and dissent, with its addition of 'gender identity' alongside sexual orientation. It has not been signed by the Royal College of Psychiatrists or the Association of Child Psychotherapists. These are ongoing discussions, and again should not be considered settled.

As someone who has worked with scores and scores of patients contending with distress arising from their sexed bodies and their identities I am keenly aware of the many factors – both internal and external – bearing down upon them. There is simply too much to say on this matter to describe adequately the deeply concerning and high stakes at play when engaging therapeutically with CAYP and their families displaying symptoms of gender dysphoria, and in trying to ascertain, for example, who might, and, who might not, benefit from a medical pathway and the significant burden of care that entails. We are learning more about these from the testimonies of the increasing numbers of de-transitioners coming forward to tell us their stories.

Should the membership be interested in reading literature exploring these topics I am very happy to be in communication with them.

Yours,

Melissa Midgen
mail@mjmidgen.co.uk

Dr Melissa Midgen is an adult analyst trained at the Society of Analytical Psychology, and a child and adolescent psychotherapist trained at the Tavistock Centre. She works as a highly specialist child and adolescent psychotherapist within the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) based at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

We welcome letters concerning any of the articles published in *New Associations*. Those wishing to engage further in this particular debate are welcome to do so using the hashtag #NewAssociations on Twitter.

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Date and time: 12 December 2020, 10am–4pm.
Trainers: Mary Morgan and Catriona Wrottesley. **Fee:** £118.

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His writings continue to be hugely influential, and are drawn on by new generations of therapists. This conference will consider the ways in which his work is used in the consulting room, both in psychoanalytic work with individuals and with couples, and what it can teach us about relationships.

Date and time: 15 May 2021, 10am to 4.30pm.
Fee: Price £130 (£120 if paid for by 2 April 2021).
Speakers: Dr Judith Pickering, Chris Mawson, Francis Grier, Dr David Hewison, chaired by Andrew Balfour
Venue: Cavendish Conference Centre, London W1W 6JJ.

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