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2.19

A sketchbook for Analytic *Action*

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— 2018 Gradiva® Award for New Media —

Contributors 2.19

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Carolyn S. Ellman, PhD, is a fellow at IPTAR and co-editor of several books: *The Modern Freudians: Contemporary Psychoanalytic Technique* (Jason Aronson, 1998); *Omnipotent Fantasies and the Vulnerable Self: A New Freudian Synthesis* (Jason Aronson, 1997); and *A New Freudian Synthesis: Clinical Process in the Next Generation* (Karnac, 2011). She has also written extensively on envy, particularly among women.

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

Michelle Fine, PhD, is distinguished professor of critical psychology and gender/women's studies at the Graduate Center, CUNY; a founding member of the Public Science Project at the Graduate Center; and author of recent book *JUST Research in Contentious Times* (Teachers College Press, 2018).

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

Yitzi Katz, LCSW, maintains a private practice in Jerusalem, Israel, and treats survivors and perpetrators of sexual abuse at an agency in Israel. Prior to relocating to Israel, Yitzi had cofounded the Chicago Trauma Collective and worked extensively with survivors of trauma in the child welfare system in Chicago. Yitzi is a lecturer in the China American Psychoanalytic Alliance (CAPA) and a graduate of the Chicago Center for Psychoanalysis (CCP) program in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

Mohamad Kebbewar was born and raised in Aleppo. Immigrating to Canada at age 19, Kebbewar earned a degree in history from Concordia University before becoming a graphic designer. He recently published a chapbook with JackPine Press entitled *The Soap of Aleppo.* He is putting the final touches on his novel *The Bones of Aleppo.* His chapbook is available for purchase at jackpinepress.com.

Bandy X. Lee, MD, MDiv, is a forensic psychiatrist at Yale School of Medicine. She has consulted globally and nationally on violence prevention and prison reform. She has an extensive publication record, including opinion-editorials, peer-reviewed articles and chapters, and fifteen edited books including the *New York Times* bestseller *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President* (Macmillan, 2017). She has most recently authored the textbook *Violence* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019) and does clinical work in correctional and public-sector settings.

Eugene Mahon, MD, is a training and supervising psychoanalyst at Columbia Psychoanalytic Center for Training and Research. He has published three books —*A Psychoanalytic Odyssey, Rensal the Redbit, and Boneshop of the Heart*—and numerous articles on psychoanalysis. He practices in New York City.

Brent Matheny is a student at Kenyon College and will be graduating in the spring of 2019 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. He recently presented a research project on the possibility of and obligation for communication across the American political divide at the Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association. Currently, he is working on a thesis that expands this idea, thinking about it in the context of a Davidsonian theory of communication through the lens of a feminist ethic of care.

Natasha Kurchanova, PhD, is a candidate at IPTAR. Her doctorate is in art history. Apart from studying psychoanalysis and working as a clinician, she contributes reviews and interviews with artists for such publications as *Studio International, The Candidate Journal, The Burlington Magazine, CAA Reviews, Bomb Magazine, Art Journal,* and other publications. She is on the editorial board of *The Candidate Journal.*

Kerry Malawista, PhD, a training and supervising analyst at the Contemporary Freudian Society, with essays in *The New York Times, The Washington Post, Zone 3, Washingtonian Magazine, Intima, Huffington Post*, and

Account Magazine. She is co-author of *Wearing My Tutu to Analysis, The Therapist in Mourning,* and *Who's Behind the Couch?* She co-chairs the Washington Psychoanalytic Program, *New Directions in Writing.*

Dana Sinopoli, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalytic candidate in private practice in Philadelphia. She has been an outspoken critic of the current administration. She authored a letter in response to the zero-tolerance policy which, on behalf of the mental health community, was signed by over 21,000 people and 200 organizations and was delivered to the highest officials in all three branches of the US government.

Simon Western, PhD, is president of ISPSO, adjunct professor at University College Dublin, and CEO of Analytic-Network Coaching. His Advanced Coach Training program has a global footprint, using contemporary psychoanalytic methods to develop leaders and help them adapt to the digital age. He is the author of *Leadership: A Critical Text* (3rd ed., Sage, 2019), *Global Leadership Perspectives* (Sage, 2018), and *Coaching and Mentoring: A Critical Text* (Sage, 2017).

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

Mafe Izaguirre is a New York-based Venezuelan visual artist, a graphic designer with twenty years of experience developing brand platforms, and an educator. For the last seven years she has led the strategic advisory firm, Simple 7 Design Lab, managing marketing and outreach for brands. In 2016, Izaguirre moved to New York to pursue her research developing "machines that can feel" and to explore the creation of artifacts that mimic human senses and consciousness. She is currently an artist member of the Long Island City Artist Association (LICA), the Fat Cat Fab Lab, a tech mentor at Mouse Inc, and the Bronx based nonprofit DreamYard Project. In 2017, in collaboration with members of the IPTAR community, Izaguirre created ROOM. Website: www.mafeizaguirre.com Email: mafelandia@gmail.com

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ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action* was created in 2017 in response to a bewildering and frightening political reality. This virtual analytic space is dedicated to providing ongoing room for authentic and diverse thought. We welcome clinical, theoretical, political, and philosophical essays, as well as poetry, stories, artwork, photography, and announcements. Add your voice to **ROOM.**

6.19 Open Call Submission Deadline: MAY 3, 2019

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SERIOUSLY NOW

by Hattie Myers

Room 2.19 is about the powerful intrapsychic and geopolitical forces that threaten to hijack our minds, souls, and agency —and along with that, our communities and countries. The authors cross three generations, and their essays have arrived from all over the world. They are addressing boundaries lost and found, stretched and permeable; identities destabilized and reconstituted. And from different perspectives, each writer calls upon us to think carefully and act decisively because our future depends upon it.

In **Speaking Up about Trump: An Experience of a Lifetime**, Bandy X. Lee, editor of the book *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*, describes the price she has paid for daring to suggest that government officials and mental health professionals have an ethical responsibility to speak. Reading about the slander and death threats she endured, it was clear to all of us on the editorial board that, in another country, Lee would have been jailed. In this country, she is still free to tell what happened. Yitzi Katz also tells us what happened after he spoke up: nothing.

In **A Bathroom Without a Seat**, Katz interprets the psychoanalytic meaning and ethical implications of a clinic in Jerusalem willfully disconnected from the concrete needs of its clients. His story makes a larger point as he illustrates how universal aspects of care and healing are embedded in the particularities of physical space. In her essay **Woolf at the Door**, advocate Dana Sinopoli carries Katz's point from Israel to the US–Mexico border: "It is impossible to separate the physical spaces these children are kept in from the message that there is no room in this country for people like them." What Sinopoli, who is a candidate in psychoanalytic training, doesn't tell us is that six months ago, she authored a letter in response to the zero-tolerance policy, which was signed by over 21,000 people and 200 organizations and was delivered to all three branches of the US government. Thousands of children have taken a permanent place in her mind. These children must find room in all of our minds, she tells us, if they are to be able to find room in their own.

Simon Western and Coline Covington turn a close lens on ways shifting geopolitical forces affect our identities. In the **Making and Unmaking of Borders**, Western describes the large-scale and alarming consequences to communities and individuals as borders appear, disappear, and become porous with greater and greater frequency. In **My Country, My Self: Separation, Identity, and Dissonance,** Covington gives specific examples, from her life and from the lives of her patients, of the ways these kinds of dislocations rock our psychic world. "Only when there is a break in one's life," she writes, "does the question of identity and belonging arise."

In their essays, Natasha Kurchanova and Brent Matheny share dramatic breaks in their lives that precipitated questions of identity and belonging. "Falling in love with one of those foreign students and coming to the United States in the mid-1980s was not an accident," Natasha Kurchanova writes in **Coming to the West**, as she thinks about how her experience of having two countries has changed over the course of her life. In **A College Philosophy Lesson**, Brent Matheny describes how, after moving to a "space he knew he wanted to belong to and felt he had some space in," everything shifted the morning of November 6, 2016. Suddenly, Matheny was given to see something undreamt of in his philosophy. What he saw changed his life, and he is running with it.

In line with Matheny's epiphany, Elizabeth Evert, in her essay **In Good Faith**, forcefully addresses the ideological splits dividing our nation. To bridge these gaps, she suggests we imaginatively and courageously step outside our comfort zones

to find likeness in our differences. In **Imagining the Other,** Kerry Malawista is thrown out of her comfort zone when she is confronted with a horrible realization. The connection she forges with this shameful part of herself brings her to a finer understanding of that which threatens us all.

The threats to humanity that the authors in **Room 2.19** describe are as overt as the conspiracy theories Ellman explicates in **Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Soros, the Federal Reserve, and You** and as covert as Fine's descriptions of **White Lethality/White Legibility**. In these essays, Ellman and Fine show us how to imagine the unimaginable; they plead with us to stretch our minds to join them. "Serious daring," writes Eugene Mahon in **Playing for Real**, "requires serious thought."

Room 2.19 dares us to think seriously together. ∎

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Photograph by Alisdare Hickson.

SPEAKING UP
ABOUT
TRUMP

AN EXPERIENCE
OF A LIFETIME

by Bandy X. Lee

Being involved in global violence prevention and dealing with genocides, gender-based violence, civil wars, and suicides, the last thing on my mind was domestic partisan politics. Yet the issue invaded my world the morning after the 2016 presidential election, starting at 8:00 a.m., when my phone was ringing off the hook and emails were flooding in from civil society organizations, patient advocacy groups, lawyers, students, activists, civil servants, and documentary filmmakers — mostly those I had engaged with over prison reform in this country — all afraid of the violence that was to come.

And they were right. In the midst of answering those calls, I had to ask myself: If I have devoted my career to studying, predicting, and preventing violence, could I turn away now, in the face of potentially the greatest risk of violence we could ever confront?

At that time, a former colleague from Harvard, Dr. Judith Herman, had written to President Obama, along with two other brave women, Drs. Nanette Gartrell and Dee Mosbacher, asking that the president-elect undergo a neuro-psychiatric evaluation. I started composing letters myself, but those around me, while unanimously agreeing that the situation was dangerous, would not put their names to any letter. They were essentially afraid that they would spend the rest of their careers fighting for their licenses in light of a vindictive, litigious president, or that they may have to fear for their and their family's lives in light of his violence-prone followers. I thought to myself that this was not good, that we needed to break the ice, and perhaps a conference would do it. Therefore, I organized a town-hall-style discussion with a panel at my institution, the Yale School of Medicine.

Foremost on my mind was ethics—on what basis should we speak (or am I missing something?), and how can we speak ethically and responsibly? There was this ethical guideline we informally call "the Goldwater rule," which discourages psychiatrists from diagnosing public figures they have not personally examined and received authorization to do so. It is simply a repetition of good standards of practice: you don't diagnose anyone without a personal examination, and once you have a diagnosis, you keep it confidential. But what was alarming was the fact that the American Psychiatric Association, shortly after Donald Trump's inauguration, had expanded it far beyond just diagnosing to making any comment of any kind, be it on objectively observable behavior, speech, or affect—even in an emergency—elevating it to a status that no other ethical rule had held before. In other words, it was made into a gag order.

Never mind what history has shown us regarding the obvious results silencing relevant voices has under dangerous regimes. The question we addressed was, if there were a restriction on our speech about a public figure, like a patient (because a public figure isn't a patient), then shouldn't there be situations where there is a positive obligation to speak, as with a patient (since even confidentiality, as sacrosanct as it is in psychiatry, has exceptions)? To answer this question, I invited top members of my field, each of whom I had known for at least 15 years and could attest to their exemplary ethical stances from other dark times: Drs. Robert Jay Lifton, Judith Herman, James Gilligan, and lastly, a colleague from my division who was on the American Psychiatric Association's ethics committee, Dr. Charles Dike.

At the end of the conference, our conclusion was that we had a duty to warn and that the dangers were too great: the public was in the process of believing that the new president was finally "settling in" and about to "pivot" to normalcy. Meanwhile, even though we had held the conference in a large auditorium, the

audience did not exceed two dozen—but hundreds tuned in online, confirming that the sparsely populated auditorium was because of fear, rather than lack of interest — and as the meeting received national and international attention, eventually thousands of mental health professionals got in touch with me. I realized that this was unprecedented, that we had a medical consensus not only among those of the same specialty but among mental health professionals globally, and from that arose the National Coalition of Concerned Mental Health Experts, now the World Mental Health Coalition.

Meanwhile, various Congress members began to get in touch with me, and I initially consulted with them privately over the phone. One influential former Majority and Minority Leader said he would like to arrange for me to testify before all of Congress and proposed early September, when Congress would have just returned to session. For various political and other reasons, this did not happen, and both September and October passed.

Immediately after the conference, the publishing house Macmillan had contacted me, when we put the proceedings of the conference into a trade book. When it was released in early October, it became an instant *New York Times* bestseller—unusual for a multi-authored book of specialized knowledge. It spoke to the public's hunger for understanding. In the book, *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*, we warned that his condition was more serious than people assumed, that it would grow worse with actual power, and that he would eventually become uncontainable. By the end, it was on the bestseller list for seven weeks and the *Washington Post* dubbed it "the Most Courageous Book of the Year."

By November, when Special Counsel Robert Mueller's first indictments were released, the president began to show signs of deterioration. Two White House officials got in touch with me about their concerns over his "unraveling," but with so few mental health professionals speaking up, I did not wish to be confined by confidentiality rules. Hence, I referred them to the emergency room, hoping that this might lead to the recruitment of another psychiatrist. I was unable to obtain information afterward, however, and nothing came of the incident.

In early December 2017, impatient to hear of no movement regarding my congressional testimony, former Assistant US Attorney Sheila Nielsen arranged for me to meet with a dozen Democratic Congress members from her own contacts. I asked Dr. James Gilligan, a foremost violence expert, to join me, and we found that the lawmakers were eager beyond expectation: one senator even stated that it was his most awaited meeting in eleven years! Overall, I was impressed that our country had such seemingly capable and concerned leaders; I was immensely humbled when one of them called me his "hero." Nevertheless, they said that, while they shared our concerns, they did not feel they could do anything, being in the minority party, but rather looked to us. They stated that they knew of Republican lawmakers who were also very concerned but doubted they would act on those concerns. But even fears that the president would trigger "World War III," as one Republican senator put it, did not prevent them from rallying behind him when it came time to pass tax legislation.

This is why, in January 2018, when the president tweeted that his "Nuclear Button…is a much bigger & more powerful one" than North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un's, I gave up on waiting for Republican Congress members to consult with me and took on an educative role for the public. I revealed to the press my meeting with the Congress members, and from then on, for several days, I was interviewing for fourteen hours a day without a break, barely having time to go to the bathroom, and having my first meal of the day at 10:00 p.m. But I put aside all other tasks to attend to this national need, while mental health issues were in the news every day.

However, just as after the release of the book, when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) issued a public statement that there was no "duty to warn" applicable outside of a preexisting relationship with a patient, it now issued a public statement obviously directed at me alone, stating that "armchair psychiatry" and "politicizing psychiatry" were not allowed—even though I did not diagnose but was commenting on public health and was consulting with Congress members according to their own guidelines for public service.

Other outrageous things happened: A former president of the APA, whose words the APA's public statement seemed to echo, seized all the cable news opportunities I myself turned down to keep the discussion nuanced and blatantly misrepresented the book to accuse it of saying the opposite of its actual content. (He obviously had not read the book.) I had resigned from the APA over ten years ago due to its excessive ties to the pharmaceutical industry, but I was dismayed to find, together with this past president, that it was promulgating misconceptions and plunging the public into further ignorance. Later, a high-ranking officer admitted that it modified the Goldwater rule in order not to lose federal funding. By this time, numerous other members had resigned from the APA in protest of this modification.

As a psychiatrist, I believe there is no greater oppression than the hijacking of the mind. While this has been occurring for at least a couple decades through state-sanctioned propaganda masquerading as "news" (e.g., Fox News), the APA's control of the flow of information in the name of "ethics," precisely at a time when mental health professionals are most needed to address a national mental health crisis, attests to the importance of our voice. Thought reform works through the process of "milieu control," or the control of information and communication in the environment. This is the reason why the mind is considered tyranny's battleground.

I was inundated with hostile attacks and death threats via Twitter, email, and phone, on some days numbering over a thousand. Like Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, who went into hiding after her testimony against Brett Kavanaugh's appointment to the US Supreme Court, I too went into hiding for a month, unable to get to my office or to step outside without a disguise. I lost half my hair and gained twenty pounds from the stress. During these times, I drew courage from the asylum seekers that my students at Yale Law School represented; many of them endured watching their family members killed before them, being imprisoned, tortured, and gang-raped — all for speaking up or for being perceived as a political threat. Suddenly, all this was a bit closer than before.

When the threats stopped, however, it was an even greater letdown; it was a sign that our voices had become irrelevant and the powers that be had won. The media continued to cover only the after-effects of the dangers — such as the extraordinary "pipe bomber" who sent sixteen explosives to prominent Democrats and critics of the president, or the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in US history that occurred in relation to conspiracy theories directly traceable to the president—while only worsening the problem for all the fixation on Donald Trump.

Now, a year since I was interviewing with the media every day, I have not earned an income for twelve consecutive months and have depleted all my savings, took off two hours for Christmas and ten minutes for the New Year, and my six-year-old niece and four-year-old nephew have grown so much I barely recognize them. Yet the APA has not transitioned to taking a more responsible leadership role, and a multilateral chorus of mental health professionals has not formed as I had hoped would happen, while the psychological dangers continue to escalate into geopolitical ones.

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In the midst of this, the camaraderie and mutual support among many of the authors, the National Coalition, and the public have been indispensable. I will not forget how, when I returned to my office after that month of hiding, I found waiting for me a mountain of letters, thank-you cards, pictures of children, books, chocolate, poems, jokes, stories, and words of encouragement—all from the general public who had heard of the threats I'd received and far more heartfelt than intimidation could ever be. It served as a reminder to me that *this* is the true voice of the people and is why this work is so important. I hope you will join me in it. ∎

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Photograph by Yitzi Katz.

A BATHROOM WITHOUT A SEAT

by Yitzi Katz

I work at an agency in a central city in Israel that focuses on treating children who are survivors and perpetrators of sexual violence. The office has one bathroom with two private toilet rooms: a toilet without a toilet seat for men and a women's bathroom. The neglected toilet seat has been on the floor for approximately three or four months; no one has fixed it. This has prompted me to draw some conclusions about how an agency's physical space may be encumbered by signs that re-evoke trauma for patients. The neglect of physical spaces within sexual trauma treatment, especially in public agency settings, can potentially thwart treatment and harm a patient's attempt at healing, sense of agency, and reentering community.

For many years, the agency I work in has been known as a center that specializes in treating child/adolescent survivors and perpetrators of sexual abuse, incest, and trauma. Many clinicians across Israel know of this organization and speak highly of it. Prominent Israeli psychoanalysts and clinicians have either worked here or supervised here in one form or another. This agency is known for its psychoanalytic leanings and receives many referrals from municipal welfare departments who, by Israeli law, must refer children and adolescents to funded treatment after being recognized as victims.

The agency office used to be situated in an established, well-to-do neighborhood. Due to financial limitations, the agency had to move offices and relocated to a different neighborhood, which is dominated by car mechanics, garages, and auto repair shops. During the day, the area is bustling with a high percentage of men primarily working these very physical jobs entailing much strain and effort. The sounds in this neighborhood are important data: drilling, metallic sounds, men yelling, scooters speeding, hammers banging against metal objects. The visual images, equally relevant, are mainly men immersed in physical labor, working on machines with greasy hands and tools, surrounded by clouds of cigarette smoke, and loudly speaking different languages. The pervasive aromas are those carried on the smoke of the local Middle Eastern steakhouses.

Upon beginning my part-time work in this agency, I did not make much of the location. This changed one day when I was walking toward the office and saw a young adolescent girl riding an electric scooter on the street outside the office building. I noticed several men staring at her and did not make much of it other than a momentary reminder that unfortunately it is permissible for men to stare at women, of any age, in a sexualized manner. When I arrived at the agency waiting room, I saw this girl in the waiting room it dawned on me how problematic the location of this office might be.

I did not say anything at the time, kept this to myself, but thus began my journey of giving much thought to how the children I work with make their way to sessions and what they experience in that environment.

In time, I learned the agency is in debt and has high attrition in its longstanding staff. At the time of writing, I am still here doing my work and treating patients. It was not long ago when I noticed the toilet seat in the men's room was broken. One week went by, and it was not fixed. Two weeks went by, and it still was not fixed. It is now four months without a men's toilet seat. Four whole months. Last week, the toilet paper ran out. I debated what to do and then sent a text message to a group that included the CEO and every employee at every location of the agency across Israel: "Hi. I am updating there is no toilet paper in the bathroom and the men's seat in the bathroom has been broken for months. Is there anything to be done about this? With thanks, Yitzi."

A few hours later, a patient of mine, a young boy who had been sexually abused by a male friend, yelled from the bathroom, "Yitzi. There's no toilet paper!"

Within a day, a higher-ranking employee responded to everyone on the group message: "Taken care of." Upon arrival, I noticed a few rolls of toilet paper but still no toilet seat.

Regardless of this agency's future, this story raises several questions pertaining to the agency's capacity to contain and treat violence and horror. The implicit message to young boys seeing a toilet without a seat is there's no space for them to rid themselves of negative experiences and maintain a gestative equilibrium, which coincides with their internal states and their treatment. If they want to externalize, defecate, or urinate something out of their mind or body, it will not be permitted in a clean or respectful setting. When they return the following week to use the bathroom and see nothing has changed with the seat on the floor, they will know adults are present — there are witnesses. There are always witnesses in one form or another as individuals — or an agency — act against safety, privacy, and opportunities of healing.

Even if a child decided to use the men's room in this condition, we can assume he infers a sense of inadequacy and self-loathing. Female victims will also be entangled in this implicit organizational enactment; they can also assume potentially negative feelings related to the "seat" and infer the females get the "good stuff," and take on an attitude of not respecting men who are forced to relieve themselves in a hole that lacks a seat.

These small occurrences do not seem insignificant when viewed with the serious ramifications they could potentially have. This lack of empathy toward survivors and perpetrators is a potential glimpse into public agencies treating children and adolescents who have been sexually abused or have abused others. It illustrates the difficult task of managing not only the inner space of trauma treatment, but also the significance of the physical space.

I have not fixed this toilet seat yet. Every week when I am in the office, I transition between utter disappointment the toilet seat is still on the floor and amazement that it is still there. I grapple with the idea of fixing it myself. I convince myself I am just a therapist in the agency and work a very part-time, limited position. Why would this be my responsibility? Who is responsible for this? On a broader level, who watches the watchmen?

If an agency cannot be diligent about digesting horrors, the horrors will find a nesting zone. Obviously, none of the above can be directly correlated to the mismanagement of this agency or alternatively to its claim of specializing in sexual violence. Nevertheless, I think this sequence of events poses as an opportunity to question the physical spaces we partake in as part of the clinical work we practice. We all leave settings and remain in others. We shape and design specific spaces and disregard others. Sense memories are abbreviated into our internal grasp of spaces we have held, partaken in, and absolved ourselves from.

When I return to this setting, there probably will be a toilet seat on the floor of the men's room. A room with a toilet and a door. I am not sure what I will do next, but it will continue to cause discomfort, unease, and angst. If we cannot feel a level of freedom to act upon our discomfort in clinical settings, I would argue that our clinical work will be constricted and inhibited. Therefore, despite my current employment in the agency, I decided to write this essay. It is crucial we find the inner and communal stamina to advocate on behalf of our patients. Advocacy is reporting misdemeanors in the consulting room, hallways, waiting rooms, and neighborhoods. I do believe that despite such transgressions in the external world, I will reenter sessions with children and parents knowing I have advocated for them inside and outside the room. That, in and of itself, is a crucial step toward healing. ∎

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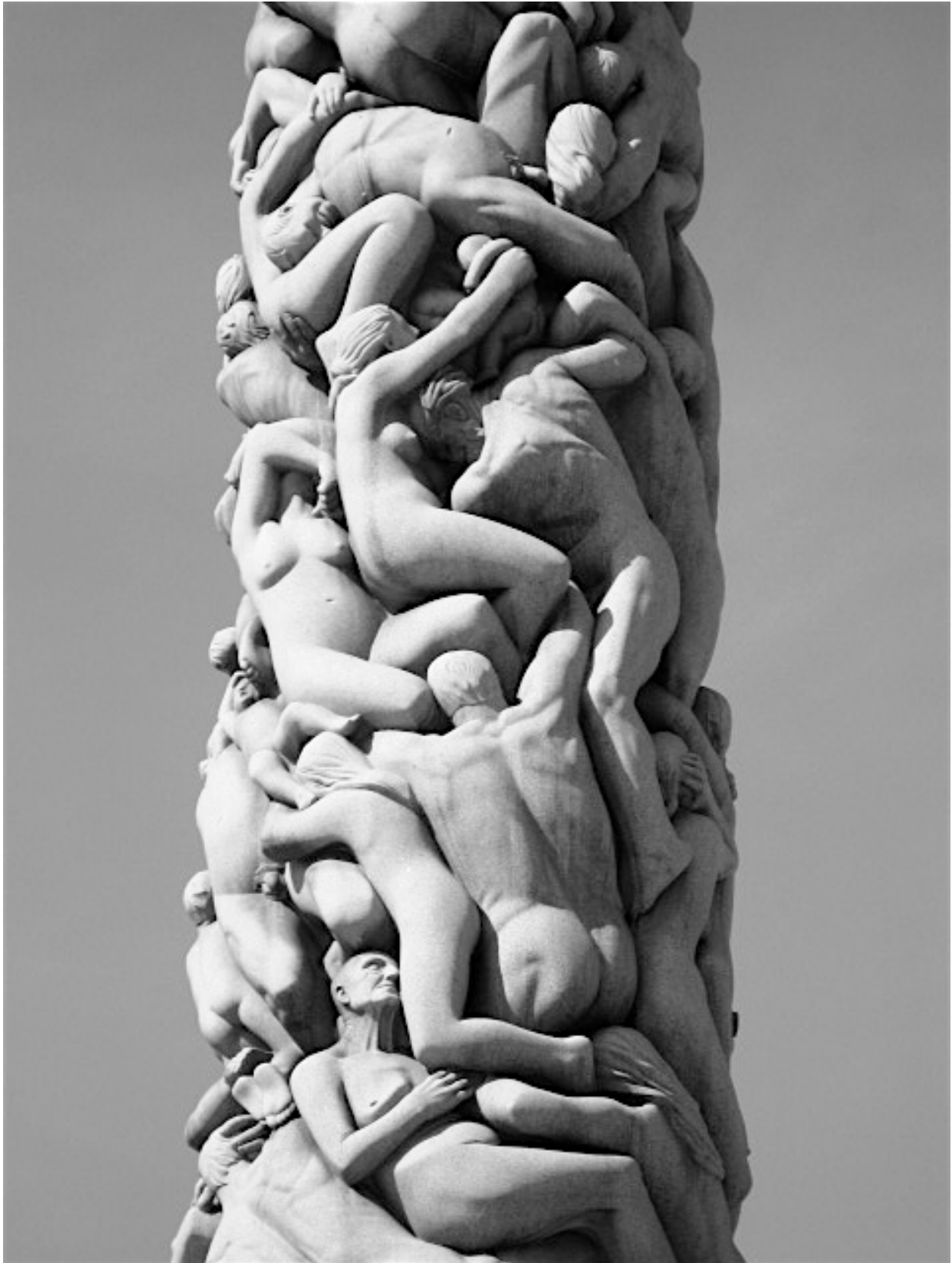
Photograph by Simon Western.
The Monolith, Vigeland installation in Frogner Park
by sculptor Gustav Vigeland, Oslo. Norway.

2.19

THE MAKING AND UN-MAKING
OF BORDERS

by Simon Western

We live in a world of borders. Territorial, political, juridical, and economic borders of all kinds quite literally define every aspect of life in the twenty-first century. (Nail, 2016)

Crossing borders in the recent past was probably less confusing and demanding than it is now. Institutions, social norms, and rituals made borders more rigid, and prior to the digital revolution and hyperglobalization, borders were more stable. They were never fixed but were less fluid than in today's disruptive world. We live in confusing times, where more borders are appearing all of the time and where many borders are disappearing or becoming more porous.

Individual and social anxieties are rising in response to borders being made and unmade at a phenomenal pace in the past few years. The phrase "crossing borders" unleashes a chain of associations and meanings in society today. When we think of crossing borders, national boundaries, immigrants, and passport control may immediately come to mind. Walls, fences, security barriers, and checkpoints are all associated with borders, yet many other borders exist that we have to cross multiple times each day. As borders become unstable and more fluid, individuals can become anxious and threatened. The unmaking of borders and the dismantling and loosening of border regimes remove obstacles and create radical new possibilities and opportunities for some, while threatening others. The making of new borders and the tightening of border regimes create hardship and marginalization for some and a feeling of security for others.

Borders and movement

A border controls flows of movement. (Nail, 2016) It can act as a barrier, re-turning a flow of movement back on itself, or as a filter that allows some things to pass and others not. A border may also be a boundary or an edge; it can be man-made or naturally occur in the environment, such as the Himalayan mountains creating the border between India and China. Borders are not only material manifestations, but are also found all over the virtual world, and borders also inhabit the space between physical and virtual spaces, controlling the flow of accessibility to the virtual world, via passwords for example. Borders also occur within us and between us. Emotions, affects, and thoughts flow, crossing internal borders within each of us, and also flow between us as relational phenomenon.

Border regimes within us

In my work as a coach, therapist, and consultant, I am constantly crossing the borderlands between the conscious and unconscious worlds. When exploring a client's unconscious, psychoanalysis teaches us that something important is at stake when the clients' defense mechanisms kick in, and they offer resistance. The psychoanalytic concepts *defenses* and *resistance* echo military language; for example when a force encounters an enemy's border, they too meet defenses and resistance. This mirroring of language reveals how closely our internal borders relate to external borders. Our internal worlds impact and shape the external world.

"I saw that beautiful barbed wire going up."

President Trump, November 3, 2018

US President Donald Trump and his followers export their internal fearful mind-sets, that see "the other" as a dangerous invader, through their rally cries and Trump's promise to "build the wall." Interestingly, the other chant at Trump's election rallies — "lock her up" (referencing Hillary Clinton) — is also about

walls and borders, in this case the walls of a prison. The demand to build walls and lock people up signifies the internal desire for punitive security borders to be inflicted on the "bad other," so the self can feel safe and secure at both physical- and emotional-identity levels. Psychoanalysis teaches us that when we create a "bad other" in our minds, it usually represents a split-off part of ourselves, an unwanted aspect of ourselves that we cannot consciously tolerate, so we evacuate the bad or disliked part of ourselves and project it onto others.

We create internal security borders, behind which our repressed anxieties and dormant fears lie. As with most borders, however, they are never 100 percent secure, and leaks occur. In this case, our unconscious life seeps into our consciousness, often in displaced ways. Making new borders and reenforcing existing border regimes are simplified solutions politicians use to mobilize popular support, claiming it will protect the "good/us" from the "bad/them." The Brexit cry of "take back control" is another example. Taking back control means to many the remaking of a lost border to prevent the free flow of people. The conscious and unconscious borders within us, and the relational borders between us, constantly regulate our libidinal flows. Our emotions and affects, our drive and psychic energy are regulated by border regimes within us, between us, and external to us.

Internal mind-sets produce external realities. Internal anxieties and fears produce nationalist politicians, external walls, scapegoats, and repressive laws. This also happens in reverse. Our internal worlds are shaped by external realities; when physical borders impose themselves on us each day — for example the Berlin Wall during communism or the Israeli security wall or apartheid wall (depending on which side you live on) or the gated communities of Johannesburg where high walls, razor wire and security guards dominate the landscape — an unconscious internalization process takes place. We internalize the walls and border regimes, and they create normative mind-sets that limit and shape how we live. Internalizing restrictive border walls creates defensive and fearful mind-sets.

Luxurious Prisons

When the powerful build border walls to defend themselves against an undesirable other, the wall impacts both sides. The gated community in a city acts as a defense against the poor, but it also encloses the rich in a (luxurious) prison, and both sides internalize the impact of this. A border controls both the flow in and out. While walking in Johannesburg's wealthy districts, I experienced the dystopian future that is becoming normal in other cities: high walls, razor wire, security gates, security guards, and nobody walking or cycling, just people locked in their houses and cars. What mind-sets and cultures are internalized when we live with border regimes that are so pervasive, defensive, and also aesthetically destructive?

Digital Border Regimes

This internalization of border regimes also occurs in our encounters within the virtual and financial world. In recent years, we find ourselves constantly crossing virtual borders, signing in and using security passwords. Each time we shop, buy something online, visit a website, we cross a border, each with its own way to control and restrict the flow of movement. We internalize the experience of being constantly monitored by these digital border regimes, checking we are human and not robots, and expelling us from places beyond our reach. These new online border regimes are a dominant feature of our daily existence, and we can internalize a sense of the world being a place of borders. The constant boundary crossing, the warnings of dangerous viruses and cyber attacks; the fears of being shut out or discriminated against; and the frustration at not able to cross the border create new anxieties, frustrations, and even rage in the digital age. Yet the paradox is that IT, the internet, social media, and mobile communications can also

erase borders, making connections possible that were once impossible. Techno-utopians still dream of new radical democracies and open societies modeled on open-source technology and new possibilities of the commons. Knowledge and information that once required difficult border crossings and were only available to elites are now freely accessible at the click of a mouse. We live in times where huge, new potential exists and vast open spaces appear, while at the same time more borders exist than we could have possibly imagined in the past.

Shifting Borders

> Despite the celebration of globalization and the increasing necessity of global mobility, there are more types of borders today than ever before in history. In the last twenty years, but particularly since 9/11, hundreds of new borders have emerged around the world: miles of new razor-wire fences, tons of new concrete security walls, numerous offshore detention centers, biometric passport databases, and security checkpoints of all kinds in schools, airports, and long various roadways across the world.

> (Nail, 2016:1)

Borders are both being made, and unmade, at an unprecedented rate. This relationship between the making and unmaking of borders is symbiotic, each force impacting the other. As borders are unmade, new anxieties are unleashed that create a drive to make more borders. As borders are made, activists strive to open up new spaces and loosen border regimes.

Here are three examples revealing how contemporary borders are being made and unmade.

1. Trade Borders

> Globalization, neoliberal free trade, mass air travel, and the EU's four free-doms of movement (finance, people, goods, and services) are examples of a radical unmaking of borders in recent times. Neoliberal capitalism offered a vision, at least on the surface, of open trade and free markets (although many would claim that elites created hidden borders under this rhetoric of freedom excluding many from accessing a share of the wealth that was created). There is currently a counterrevolution against these globalizing forces to create new borders that protect national trade and the movement of labor (e.g., Brexit and economic nationalism elsewhere).

2. The Digital Age

> The digital age unmakes borders in ways we couldn't imagine in the last decade, unleashing new possibilities, huge opportunities, and also unfore-seen consequences. As discussed earlier, there is also a rapid proliferation of borders in the virtual world. Microsoft is a good example of a company that managed to exploit the virtual world of border-making to create vast profits. Through the licensing of their software (Word, Excel, etc.) and creating restrictive borders that prevented open use, they created their vast business empire.

3. Identity Borders

> Another unmaking of borders comes about through a radical changing of legal and emotional identity borders. Same-sex marriage and transgender rights are examples of the unmaking of border regimes both legal and cultural, which defined identity norms for past decades. The unmaking of these borders is hugely liberating for many and threatens the identity of others. The speed of this change is phenomenal. For example, in Ireland,

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a conservative Catholic country, recently voted in a gay Taoiseach (prime minister) and held a referendum that allowed same-sex marriage. These changing border regimes are part of what some call the "culture wars" taking place in the United States and other places in the West, some fighting for more borders, some for less. Interestingly, those who fight for fewer borders for marginalized people to gain rights (such as transgender rights) are seen by others to be imposing new border regimes that restrict free speech and thinking. Borders are not straightforward; they are complex and enmeshed in power relations.

For better or worse, our individual and collective identities are at stake when borders change. Accommodating fast-changing border regimes requires sensitivity and maturity. It also requires us to reflect on how these border regimes impact on our intimate as well as political and social lives. ∎

[1] Nail T. (2016) *Theory of the Border.* Oxford University Press

[2] Western S. (2015) *Political Correctness and Political Incorrectness, A Psychoanalytic Study of New Authoritarians.*

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WOOLF
AT THE DOOR

by Dana Sinopoli

I am sitting in my office, thinking about rooms.

Writing for **Room** has prompted this state of reverie, during which one of my favorite works, *A Room of One's Own*, passes through my mind. In her essay, Virginia Woolf writes of the necessity for women to have money and a room of their own in order to write fiction. What is most salient for me about Woolf's piece at this moment, as I think about the thousands of children who remain locked in immigration detention centers, is not her actual argument but the title — what it means for one to have a room that is safe and secure and familiar.

Inside my consulting room, I have the privilege of existing in this state of uninterrupted thinking. I have a door and am in control over who comes and goes and when I do the same. I am sitting in a chair that is comfortable; I can sit quietly to think and write. I have windows to look out of and that let the sun in, and I imagine Virginia Woolf would argue that it is largely *because* of all of these things that I am free to engage in this uninterrupted thinking.

It is no easy task to think about what space we, as psychoanalytic psychologists, occupy in the fight against this policy of inhumanity and trauma. And certainly each of us will feel differently about the room we permit this to take up in our minds, not to mention how we are reconciling or dissociating the reality that — regardless of who has control of the House or who is elected in 2020 or the outcome of the Mueller investigation — the impact of the rooms these children are kept in will outlast administration changes in the rooms of the White House. The reality we know is that the rooms in which these children are kept will affect their internal worlds and their interactions with the world around them.

Woolf's recognition that the freedom of our minds is interwoven with the rooms we occupy and the spaces we are permitted, or not permitted, into seems particularly salient as thousands of human beings, children no less, are intentionally and knowingly left in junk rooms with no guarantee of safety or comfort or basic human rights. And on December 18, 2018, US Customs and Border Protection stated that "the processing system has hit capacity." Essentially, there is no more room in our country for asylum seekers.

As of December 2018, almost 15,000 children remain in detention centers. Of the more than 2,600 babies and children who were separated from their parents due to the zero-tolerance policy, 140 (who we know of) are still not reunited. One hundred and seventeen of these 140 separated children have parents who have already been deported, while they themselves remain detained. The shelter in Tornillo, Texas, still holds 1,500 children with 59 days the average length of their stay. It has been expanded from its original capacity of 450 to now being able to hold 3,800 children ages thirteen to seventeen.

Toward the end of her essay, Woolf observes, "All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded." Which reminds me of all the children whose names we won't know and stories we won't hear. And it is impossible to separate the physical spaces these children are kept in from the message that there is no room in this country for people like them. I am calling on us to continue sounding the alarm regarding the reality of these children's lives and to hold them in mind with as much room as we can. ∎

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MY COUNTRY MY SELF

SEPARATION, IDENTITY, AND DISSONANCE

by Coline Covington

> "It is the symbolic codes of our first language and culture which provide the first scaffolding for the self and our first existential maps — ways of perceiving and organizing human and social experience through which, or within which, we can feel and think."

Eva Hoffman, from "The Hubert Butler Annual Lecture," 2017, Kilkenny, Ireland.

A young man came to see me suffering from what he described as an "identity crisis." He felt lost and didn't know who he was or what he wanted. His family had fled from their country of origin during a time of war and could no longer return without the threat of imprisonment or death. The country continued to be a dangerous place for foreigners or former citizens to return to. The young man had been born in the UK and had never set foot in the country where his family came from. He described the strange feeling he had when he was asked where he was from and could only answer that he was from the country of his family but had never been there. At the age of five, when his British teacher asked where he was born, he replied, "In a British Airways airplane." This aptly portrayed his state of dislocation, of being neither here nor there, but truly in a no man's land.

Masha Gessen, a Russian journalist now living in the United States, writing about her parents' decision to leave Moscow for America when she was thirteen, describes the "syncope of emigration" as "the difference between discovering who I was... and discovering who I could be. ... It was a moment of choice and, thanks to the 'break in my destiny,' I was aware of it." (Gessen, 2018) Only when there is a break in one's life does the question of identity and belonging arise. At these moments, we are faced with a choice — not only between past and present, between membership in one group or another, between geographically staying and leaving, but also a more fundamental choice that concerns our identity: who we see ourselves as being, what is it we believe in, and how we are perceived by others. The implicit defining relation between place, belief system, and identity is suddenly laid bare. This caesura creates a mental space within which we become acutely aware of how much our identity is linked to a complex network of loyalties, beliefs, and communities and the traumatic impact of losing these ties, leaving us in a state of diaspora, while opening up the possibility of redefining our identity.

A few years ago, I decided to revoke my US citizenship — a decision I felt I had to make for tax reasons, knowing I wasn't going to return to live in the United States. I had been warned by a friend to expect an interrogation as to my reasons for wanting to revoke my citizenship based on the idea that I was betraying my country. As I walked up the steps to the embassy, I nervously rehearsed my reasons. Inside the embassy, at the administrative counter, I was asked to swear an oath on the Bible or by my word that no one had forced me to revoke my citizenship. I began swearing on my word, and as soon as I had finished, to my complete surprise, I burst into tears. As I left the embassy, a young receptionist, seeing how upset I was, beckoned me over to him and whispered, "You know, they say you can't, but if you change your mind, you can come back."

This moment vividly brought home to me the deep importance of what the country of my birth and my childhood means to me and how very painful it was to give up my entitlement to belong. Although I was rationally clear about why I had made this decision, emotionally, it made no sense to me. I was grief stricken and angry. I also felt I was betraying an intrinsic part of my identity, along with the values that I had held so dearly throughout my life. While many of us take our country of origin and what it means to us for granted, my act of effectively disowning my country made me powerfully aware that we all have some kind of national identity, whether we acknowledge it or not, and that this deeply affects not only our personal identity, but also how we see the rest of the world.

The experience of dislocation is obviously quite different for people who have had to renounce or flee their country of origin. For those in exile, the rupture with the past can be an overwhelming loss from which there can only be a partial recovery at best. Economic refugees, fleeing their country in order to survive and to create a better life, retain the possibility of future return or reunion, notwithstanding the reality. Political refugees, however, face permanent exile; they can never return to their country unless there is radical regime change.

But there is another form of rupture far more commonly experienced and more mundane and, therefore, less visible. It is the experience of political dissonance when one's country's ideology or ideals — the ideals one has identified with as self-defining and signifying national identity — become overtaken and denigrated by a new set of ideals. This happens at moments of political and social upheaval, when there is an emergence of radical change in the culture, a rupture with the past and its norms and expectations, whether conservative or liberal, regressive or progressive. Modern-day examples of this can be seen in the rise of the Third Reich, the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the thawing of the Cold War and the fall of communism in East Germany in 1989, the recent wave of populism and isolationism in the United States, the rise of fascism in different parts of Europe, and the move toward the nation-state in reaction to globalization.

Although these political ruptures do not affect the geographical location or dislocation of where people live, they can profoundly affect their sense of belonging and their actual identity. The loss or attack on a set of beliefs that has formed the basis for people's ideals and behavior provokes depression, alienation, and ultimately anomie within the group that has lost power. As one American psychoanalyst wrote, protesting against the US detention and separation of children from their illegal immigrant parents, "Today, I no longer recognize the country we live in." ([quoted in "Children on the Border," Phyllis Beren] US House of Representatives 115th Congress, 2nd Session) This sentiment is widely expressed by the so-called liberal elite in the United States against Trump's authoritarian leadership and the overturning of American principles of justice and equality for all, freedom of speech, and the separation of powers. As populist and nationalist movements gain strength not only in the United States but in the UK and across Europe, large segments of the populations of these countries have become estranged, experiencing a kind of existential shock at the radical change occurring in belief systems and the denigration of democratic principles. Ironically, the backlash against the ruling "liberal elites" was fueled by a similar sense of alienation among the population who felt that their America had been taken over and altered by interlopers. Trump's battle cry, "Make America Great Again," voiced precisely this estrangement from an idealized image of America that many felt had been lost. The experience of estrangement is not unique to the polarization of political parties in the West.

The difficulty of leaving totalitarian regimes is often attributed to the difficulty of living within a system in which total care (or something approaching that) is provided in exchange for complete, unquestioning loyalty and adherence to higher authority. This seemingly alleviates the need to be responsible for one's own life or thoughts. The Polish journalist Witold Szablowski, writing about the fall of communism, compares people's experiences of their newfound freedom to the enforced release of the dancing bears of the Bulgarian Gypsies that also occurred at this time. He writes:

> I learned that for every retired dancing bear, the moment comes when freedom starts to cause it pain. What does it do then? It gets up on its hind legs and starts to dance. It repeats the very thing the park employees are trying their best to get it to unlearn: the behavior of the captive. As if it would prefer its keeper to come back and take responsibility for its

life again. "Let him beat me, let him treat me badly, but let him relieve me of this goddamned need to deal with my own life," the bear seems to be saying.

Dancing Bears: True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life Under Tyranny, Penguin Books, 2018

Freedom is interpreted as overwhelming and frightening, with the mantle of individual responsibility too much to bear. Is this, however, a convincing argument for the bear's reversion to old behavior patterns or the nostalgia experienced by people whose life under communism has ended? Is the rupture of an original attachment, whether it is to the Gypsy bear keeper or the state regime, not more a complex loss that is very hard to mourn and separate from? It is perhaps comparable to the extreme separation anxiety and guilt that is apparent with patients who have had ambivalent early attachments. If the original love object is wholly cruel and frightening, there is relatively little problem in rejecting it. However, even in extremely abusive relationships, there is more often than not some element of attachment that is experienced as life-giving and, therefore, necessary. In this context, rejecting the relationship can be experienced as not only life-threatening but, perhaps just as powerfully, as threatening one's identity — an identity that has been founded on this particular kind of relationship. Any rupture in this relationship is, therefore, a rupture in how one sees and defines oneself, as well as how we imagine we are seen by others. This is not the same level of discourse as what it means to be free; it cannot be reduced to an experience of responsibility over oneself because "freedom" in this context requires the loss of a system of beliefs that have shaped and guided our sense of ourselves within the group we belong to. The Russian journalist Svetlana Alexievich, in her numerous interviews of Russian citizens witnessing the collapse of the USSR, depicts the terrible loss of meaning and consequent angst experienced by so many people whose dreams of the future and vision of life had been so inextricably tied to the powerful ideologies of Leninist and Stalinist Russia.

We all have multiple experiences of belonging to various groups at different levels. Our first awareness of belonging is as a child in relation to a parent and then as a member of a family, however that is comprised. We also belong to local communities, towns, cities, and a nation, as well as having ethnic and religious affiliations. Someone may consider himself Muslim and American at the same time, and this may only become problematic, or even come into consciousness, when there is a conflict between belonging to these two large groups, as, for example, is evident in the rise of racism in the United States. But the reason why these conflicts are so disturbing and disorienting is that they touch the core of our identity; they split us not only externally, but they also create an internal psychic split and reveal to us how important these affiliations are to our sense of self and who we are. The split is not only between affiliations that come into conflict, but it is also, and more importantly, between the value systems and sets of beliefs that inform the individual's ego ideal. When these are at odds, an internal splitting occurs that is hard to reconcile and threatens to place the ego into exile.

The concept of national identity may be thought of as a relatively recent historical phenomenon linked to the rise of nationalism and the idea of the nation-state, originating in the seventeenth century with the Peace of Westphalia. From this point onward, the nation-state brought together the political and cultural entities of large groups and established national sovereignty. We can think of the developing differentiation between political and cultural territories as a reflection of or coinciding with the growing social importance attributed to the individual, along with citizens' rights and duties. Whereas prior to this, a part of one's individual identity may have been located in smaller groups or tribes, with the idea of one's country being more fluid and diverse, the concept of nationalism brought with it a more distinctive large group identity that melded with preexisting cultural values. This combination of cultural values tied to governance has shaped much of our current-day political thinking and behavior, and it has also formed the basis

for our large group identities to the extent that it ranks as a "primary identity." In describing national identity as "primary," I am not saying that it has supremacy over other group identifications but that it is one of the principal ways in which we define ourselves and our relation to others. Our individual identity with our country stems from our primary experience within our families as part of large group. For many of us who have grown up within the embrace of the nation-state, this provides the largest and perhaps most significant overarching group that shapes and determines our lives.

"My country" is indeed an integral part of who I am. If we accept this, is this a fundamental reason why the erosion of the nation-state we are witnessing with globalization is so threatening, not only to large group identities, but to our own individual identity? The reversion to nationalism that is sweeping across the world may be seen as a kind of global identity crisis, taking us back to the safety of borders that differentiate us from others and sustain large group identities of the past. Are we in fact experiencing a new kind of dissonance in which the nation-state is being superseded by international corporations and our large group identities are in flux or, as with my patient, born in midair?

Excerpt from Coline Covington's forthcoming book, *For Goodness Sake: Bravery, Patriotism and Identity*, **to be published in 2020 by Phoenix Publishing House.** ∎

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[1] I am using the term "national identity" to mean an aspect of individual identity that is founded on being a member of a "national state," i.e., a recognized large group occupying geographical territory and with its own system of governance and imbued with the cultural values and traditions of the country it encompasses.

[2] See, for example, Volkan, V.D. (2003). "Large-Group Identity: Border Psychology and Related Societal Processes." In *Mind and Human Interaction*, 13: 49-76.

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**When I Told My Friends in Vancouver
          that I was Going Back to Aleppo
               They were Astonished.**

Why would you go back, they said.
Is there another place that you can go to
that is less dangerous than Aleppo,
          they asked.

Four years ago Aleppo was deemed
          the most dangerous city on the planet.

I understood their worries but said
          I simply had to go.
          It is where my heart is.
                    Vancouver was a difficult place to create a community.
                    I didn't feel a sense of belonging there.
                    I felt guilty for enjoying the lush green landscape
                    and sipping fine espresso drinks
                              while my parents endured heavy artillery.

What was spared or destroyed?
I was scared to go back home.
          Home, the warmest place I can imagine was the most dangerous.

After spending few weeks in Aleppo
          I descended down from fear to relative safety.

A war never ends,
          every day I'm reminded of the horror of the war,
          I can't imagine what the people who stayed, endured.
          I felt guilty for abandoning my home during the war.

Equally surprised were my friends and family in Aleppo to see me back.
          What brought you here? one friend asked.
          I stabbed my heart with my index finger.

My love for Aleppo
          is what brought me here.

by Mohamad Kebbewar

Anne Sherwood Pundyk, "Being Blue," 2018, 90 x 100 inches, Latex, Acrylic, Colored Pencil, and Stitching on Canvas.

Painting as Theatre of Agency
by Anne Sherwood Pundyk

Each day brings the same urgent creative challenge: I anticipate that my actions will be blocked, interrupted, doubted, or ignored. Why? Because for much of my life they have been, sometimes by those close to me and more often by our patriarchal society's unrelenting devaluation of women's voices. One tactic I use to overcome my apprehension is to connect directly with my materials. Engaging in playful, audacious trial and error, I compose using water-based paints, canvas, paper, drawing tools, scissors and my sewing machine. Not surprisingly, my studio explorations are materially regressive. I do then see rather than see then do. My process is private. It is a full body undertaking and I am keenly aware of the cathartic and contemplative moments that happen as I interact with color, form, and texture. Through my open, abstract compositions and the work's immersive scale, the space in my paintings invites my audience to create their own experiential realities as opposed to adhering to the specifics of mine. In performance art where agency is enacted the necessity of the object is eliminated, but with my painting, I want an exacting, durable record of my story alongside its history of being veiled, obscured, or erased. Let me explicate my premise of "theatre of agency" from different points of entry: my experience of agency, my audience's experience of my work, relevant art critical precedents, and finally my painting process itself.

To read more, click here

COMING TO THE WEST

by Natasha Kurchanova

I had a safe childhood growing up in Brezhnev-era Soviet Russia. My family was a rather typical one, according to the principle formulated by Leo Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina*: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

I lived with a father, mother, younger brother, grandmother, and grandfather in a two-bedroom Khrushchyovka building on Vasilyevsky Island, Leningrad. To Americans, it may sound incredibly crowded and like poor living conditions, but I did not experience it as such. I felt loved and cared for; my kindergarten and school were around the corner from my apartment building. On weekends and during summers, we would either take a train or drive to the country house about 100 kilometers outside of Leningrad. We'd also have throngs of relatives visiting us, mostly on weekends. My grandparents had large families, and we had little respite from innumerable aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews, some of whom lived nearby in the city and some in other cities in Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia. A lot of the time, they would visit us; sometimes, we would visit them.

I remember the atmosphere of joy and the pleasure of seeing each other and being in each other's company; there was rarely bickering or quarrels. Reflecting on it, my extended family's joyfulness and a sense of cohesiveness appears almost unreal. Sometimes I wonder that the massive trauma of World War II, much of which was fought on Soviet Union territory, contributed to the family's sense of unity.

Everyone among my grandparents' and parents' generations was a World War II veteran or survivor; among my immediate family, my grandfather and his brothers fought in the war and were wounded multiple times; my grandmother and my mother survived the Blockade of Leningrad; my father was interred in camp as a young prisoner of war. Growing up, I heard many stories about the war, stories of struggle and survival. I wonder if the sheer joy of staying alive after several years of brutal slaughter made the older generations of my family want to appreciate life and enjoy it to the fullest. Whatever the cause, I remember growing up in a tightly knit, happy family.

As I was coming of age, it became clear that, regardless of how much my family benefited from our country's victory in the war politically, the Soviet Union had a problem. Only my grandfather was listening to the official decree announcements of the Communist Party with attention and awe; no one among my peers or even my parents' generation was taking them seriously.

People went to obligatory demonstrations on May 1 and October 17 only due to fear of retribution from their party bosses; they appeared to resent not only this obligation, but also any other task imposed on them by the party. Morale was low; any dissent was forcefully suppressed. Art and culture were regulated from above by party orders and decrees, and anyone who fell out of line was in danger of being sent the Gulag or a psychiatric asylum.

In the sphere of economics, the Soviet infrastructure was crumbling; there was no incentive for manufacturers to make things that would appeal to the public because there was no competition or free market — customers had no choice but to buy second-rate, shabby products manufactured in the USSR or in Eastern Bloc countries. Often, it was impossible to find toilet paper, forget about fashionable outfits or decent furniture. Even though travel to and communication with the West was restricted, glimpses of its material abundance were seeping through the cracks of Soviet censorship in the form of magazines brought by foreign students and classic French, Italian, and Hollywood films.

Falling in love with one of those foreign students and coming to the United States in the mid-1980s was not an accident. My American husband represented the "good" West, and I trusted him to teach me about life in his country, which was becoming my country as well. I left Russia when Chernenko was the General Secretary of the Party, a few months before Gorbachev's era. The fall of the Soviet Union happened without me in

the country, albeit I tried to talk with my family weekly. It was a difficult experience, as people I loved suffered through food shortages and a complete disintegration of the safety net around them. Even though Gorbachev tried to regulate the transition to free economy and preserve vestiges of Soviet power, the forces he set in motion were out of his control.

Yeltsin spearheaded the revolt against Gorbachev's government, and his defiant stance received wide support. Watching the rapid unfolding of revolutionary events from the outside was both exhilarating and confusing. Gorbachev appeared to be reasonable and trustworthy; Yeltsin seemed to have been adept at theatrical gestures and attracting popular support. Nonetheless, both sides were for reforms and looked to the West for assurance and support, giving Americans in particular an enormous power to influence Russian politics.

Something went wrong with the American support of the idea that democracy in Russia could be built solely through the emphasis on economic restructuring, by giving individuals hungry for money and power what they wanted, while turning a blind eye to due democratic process. As the events of the 1990s unfolded with the oligarchs and Putin forming a governing alliance, I caught myself thinking of the ironic incongruity of an apocalyptic beginning and the less-than-glorious end of the twentieth century in Russian history. It started off with a dream about building a better world for the lowest and poorest classes of the society, and it ended with a wealthy oligarchy taking the reins of power and turning an enormously creative and restless country into a bastion of nationalism and orthodoxy.

History shows that what happens in Russia politically is likely to affect the rest of the world. Unfortunately, the United States is living this experience in the moment, with its president admiring the Russian ruler and following in his footsteps to squelch democracy. ∎

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PROTOCOLS
OF THE ELDERS OF ZION, SOROS, THE FEDERAL RESERVE, AND YOU

by Carolyn Ellman

I can thank Donald Trump for one thing and one thing only: he got me to read things I never would have read before. As my anxiety about his rhetoric kept increasing, Jason Stanley's book *On How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* convinced me my fear of a fascist government takeover was not so far-fetched under the right conditions, so I had better pay even more close attention to politics and remain actively involved in what has come to be collectively called "the Resistance." I was struck by a feeling after reading Stanley's book that I better learn everything I can about the topic of how hateful conspiracies are spread, since they are one of the main tools used to frighten people, brainwash them, and lead them into passive surrender.

This is what I have learned. Conspiracy theories function to denigrate and delegitimize their victims by connecting them to all the bad things that are happening in a society. Conspiracy theories do not function like ordinary information; they are often so outlandish that they can hardly be expected to be literally believed. Their function is to raise general suspicion about the credibility and the decency of the object of the rumor, to make these people untrustworthy and dangerous to be around. Conspiracy theories are also a critical mechanism used to delegitimize the mainstream media.

Under this administration, conspiracy theories no longer reside just on the fringe. For example, last summer, one could hear right-wing nationalists, including the president and leaders of Congress like Senator Chuck Grassley, saying George Soros was paying the migrant caravan to come to the US border, that George Soros was paying the #MeToo movement protesters to splay out in the halls of Congress, and that George Soros was attempting to subvert democratic institutions in Hungary (leading to the Hungarian government passing a law specifically called the Stop Soros laws around making it illegal to shelter migrants). Breitbart News blamed Soros for sitting atop a worldwide conspiracy to make the world both Communist and Socialist.

On the far right and now within mainstream Republican circles, Soros is seen as a mastermind of chaos and an embodiment of liberal frenzied thought gone wrong. This has led to death threats against him and actual bombs being sent to his home. How could people believe all this?

I dug deeper, and my reading led me to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and to the Federal Reserve.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion was an early-twentieth-century hoax. It was supposedly written as an instruction manual for Jews to engage in world domination. In point of fact, it was a story plagiarized from an early French work, author Maurice Joly's 1864 book *A Dialogue in Hell: Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, a political satire in which Montesquieu makes the case for liberalism and Machiavelli makes the case for tyranny. Machiavelli's arguments for tyranny were transformed into *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

According to the *Protocols*, Jews are at the center of a global conspiracy that dominates the most-respected mainstream media outlets and the global economic systems. In October 1919, *The Philadelphia Public Ledger* published excerpts of the *Protocols* as the "Red Bible," recasting the document as a Bolshevik manifesto. Henry Ford printed 500,000 copies and along with a series of articles called "The International Few: The World's Foremost Problem" that appeared in his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*. The articles were collected into a multivolume book that sold millions of copies throughout the world in the 1920s, including in the United States. Ford said, "the only statement I care to make about the *Protocols* is that they fit in with what is going on. They are sixteen years old, and they have fitted the world situation up to this time." Much of Hitler's 1922 *Mein Kampf* was based on the American Ford's anti-Jewish propaganda.

This is not ancient history. The *Protocols* are still being promulgated and disseminated on the far right and throughout the Nation of Islam, where longtime leader Minister Louis Farrakhan, a firm believer in Jewish conspiracies, quotes extensively from them. According to Farrakhan, "The Rothschilds financed both sides of all the European wars. They always wanted to get their hands on the central bank of America. And they finally did in 1913, when Congress passed into law the Federal Reserve Act."

Here is where the *Protocols of Zion* and the Federal Reserve begin to meet today. Ignoring his tariffs, his damaging trade war with China, and his 2017 tax cut to the wealthy, which has slowed the housing market and other sectors of the US economy, Donald Trump issued the claim that the only problem in the US economy was those who controlled the federal reserve.

In 1963, Omni Publications, a distributor of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, reprinted an attack on the Federal Reserve called *The Truth about the Slump* (1931) in which author A.N. Field asserted, "The money power that rules the world today is centered in the hands of individuals of a particular race and creed." Field labeled the founding of America's Federal Reserve as the moment "the United States was enslaved under this German-Jew engine of control." He argued that Paul Warburg, the German Jew who wrote the Federal Reserve Act; Emanuel Goldenweiser, the Russian Jew who supervised the details of Federal Reserve Board operations through its first thirty years; and Harry Dexter White, son of Lithuanian Jews, who set up the International Monetary Fund all had world domination in mind. This old idea that the Federal Reserve is controlled by conspiring Jews is being revived and amplified by Trump's base and being bolstered by Trump's recent fictions about the US economy.

Fascists start various conspiracy theories that terrify people and make them feel they have to find some strong group to protect them from those who are taking the "once upon a time" great country away from its citizens. Sometimes "those people" are at our borders: rapists, thieves, and Muslims who use children as shields. Sometimes the enemy is within the country itself. Fascists encourage people not to trust the media and news reports, since it is all "fake news" and controlled by our enemies, especially Jews.

Fascists imply that there are people who are good, righteous, hardworking, and true Americans who deserve to have their country back, while the others (people of color, Jews, gays, coastal elites) should be cast asunder and have their benefits cut. Fascists preach the real victims are the white middle class that has been pushed around for too long, while other nefarious types of people have been given plum opportunities, have gamed the system, and have unfairly sucked up resources. Fascists purport that there is a plot afoot by grand villains who intend to subvert democracy and freedom. The plot in America is said to be mastered by Democrats, protest groups, immigrants, and, as in centuries past, the international Jew, who controls the world's finances. Fascists feel justified to fight back with any means available, including restricting their rights or killing them.

The Stanley book I read details these fascist tactics, which the Republicans and Trump are using to sow hatred, fear, and envy in order to stay in power and destroy democratic principles and institutions. After reading it, I knew that, while thinking of Donald Trump as a buffoon, a narcissist, a "stupid" man, an out-of-control baby out of touch with reality might, on some level, be an accurate portrayal of his personality, it grossly underestimated and understated the threat he represents to world democracy. For a decade, people thought Hitler was a joke.

I will be happy when Trump is gone, but in the meantime, I want to know everything I can to help myself and others know what we are dealing with, so we can use not only our intellect, but also our background in the mental health field to grasp the fear that is being instilled in people. ∎

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Photograph by Alisdare Hickson.

2.19.10

Snake-oil Victim

**In the bewilderness
I found you**

**So sure of certain
truths untrue**

**So positive and
done and stern**

**You would not
bother to unlearn**

**Even if truth coiled
round the tree**

**And offered up the
fruit for free**

by Polly Weissman

Photograph by Kupono Kuwamura.

Collage by Leah Lipton.

WHITE LETHALITY / WHITE LEGIBILITY

by Michelle Fine

—

Two protestors stand side by side—one black, the other white. The black figure holds a sign that reads "I Can't Breathe"; the white figure holds a sign that reads "I Can't See."[1]

I am the youngest daughter of Jack (an orphan) and Rose Fine, who was the youngest of eighteen children, both Jewish refugees from Poland. My mother arrived in 1921 at the moment that Karen Brodkin Saks calls "when the Jews became white." My mother held the loss of immigration and struggle in her migraines, depression, and staying in bed, as my father burst out the front door to sell plumbing supplies and grab hold of the American dream. As their youngest, chubby baby girl, I watched with envy as my father left in the morning for America and with sweet loyalty as my mother remained in bed. I knew then that loss and progress, pain and optimism, sleep in the same bed.

With duality in mind, I want to think through how whiteness is enacted in the current political moment. I want us to think about two dimensions: *lethality*, from supremacist to banal, and *legibility*, from paranoid knowing to elaborate denial.

In this context, for a moment, let us consider white violence to be a public health epidemic enacted in two registers. There are the outbursts of white supremacy, which includes nationalists and Nazis, as well as white officers killing black men, women, and children. There are white women and men calling police on black children at swimming pools, shopping centers, and barbecues. And then there is the banality of whiteness — to contest Hannah Arendt — enacted through media, government, universities, and perhaps analytic institutes, normalized, where we are all complicit in domesticating and softening the spiked edges of whiteness. There is an odd splitting: we easily critique white men who bomb and carry torches on the streets and into churches, mosques, schools, malls, movie theatres, and synagogues. It seems we have a clumsy inability to talk through whiteness. When asked, or pressed, most of us embody and enunciate a defensive tightening stitched into a *sclerotic narrative*, self-stories of privilege, often spoken in a dialect that is brittle, nonreflective, and slightly paranoid.

To be clear: I am not homogenizing whiteness or white people. With a deep commitment to intersectionality, multiplicity, and fluidity, I nevertheless cannot ignore evidence that most of us do not recognize and have a hard time discussing how we participate in the reproduction of racialized dynamics. We dissociate from spectacular acts of violence perpetrated in our name, even as people of color and immigrants are not afforded such a privilege and are splattered with everyday enactments that seep under the skin. There is ample evidence of white banality that includes instantaneous erasure: few indictments, discarded absentee ballots, dropped charges, and brazen statements like "I didn't own slave" or "My grandparents suffered in the Holocaust" or "I didn't mean it that way."

In terms of the banal, I can only imagine that many of your offices, like mine, are littered with whiteness: the spidery, even relational white entanglements that hang loosely in the air, dangle on your couches, litter your books. Perhaps it creates a slightly toxic holding space in your office, where stories of banal whiteness seep into the carpet, without comment, the kind of stories that leave wounds on people of color and silence between whites. I wonder how we conspire a bit — maybe painfully — to take the guilty edge off acts, policies, and enactments of racialized violence. I wonder what can be done, how we can be part of a true anti-racist solidarity.

Maybe we can begin to think through this muddle of whiteness with the insights provoked by a disturbing essay by Mik Billig, "Freud and Dora: What Was Freud Repressing in His Repression Theory?" Commenting on the rich, uncontested discussions between Freud and Dora about Madonna and Christmas, Billig asks, How is it possible that Freud, in treatment with a Jewish patient discussing her deep admiration for Madonna, did not comment upon this dynamic? Billig suggests that together they were avoiding talk of anti-Semitism — that is, repressing their repressed identities in fragile and contentious times.

Maxine Greene, the brilliant existential philosopher — and my very dear mentor — would draw from John Dewey when she distinguished between *anesthetic* encounters which invite us to numb, fall asleep, and dissociate from pain and injustice, and *aesthetic* encounters which stir, provoke, and ignite a wide-awakeness.

And so I ask you to consider: Where are the spaces in analytic work for aesthetic encounters, for delicate and bold ruptures both intimate and public; in writing and speech; in performance or on blogs; in op-eds or popular education; in analysis, supervision, or continuing education; on your boards, hiring committees, curriculum conversations? If you can't/won't interrupt in session, might you host — at a library, community center, or bookstore — a conversation about everyday whiteness, about which you know so much?

I ask you, in these very desperate times, to speak what you know: How/where/with whom can we carve spaces, choreograph encounters, perform theatre from analytic seeds, to facilitate racial seeing, feeling, recognition, with deep attunement to the banality of whiteness. ∎

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Photography by Alisdare Hickson.

2.19.12

There are three things I remember from my metaphysics seminar;

> **i) platonic universals are untenable concepts;**
> **ii) time travel must have always already occurred; and**
> **iii) there are gaps in the experience of many coastal elites that has rendered them ill prepared to make sense of the 2016 presidential election.**

A COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY
LESSON

by Brent Matheny

In the fall semester of 2016, PHIL 410 met on Wednesdays, in the Campbell-Meeker seminar room, from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. It was my first upperclassman seminar, as well as my first course with Alexandra Bradner, who would later become my faculty advisor. As a sophomore, I was intimidated by the other students, primarily senior philosophy majors, who had a good two years on me in both their studies and their philosophical development. All of them were more experienced than I was in that delicate game of participating in a seminar — knowing when to speak, knowing how to draw out their reflections on texts with eloquence, knowing enough that they could connect the course's content with their own extracurricular reading. When our first class on Plato's *Phaedrus* included a fellow student quoting a lengthy sympathetic passage by the Persian poet Rumi from memory, I knew that I was in a foreign space — a space that I knew I wanted to belong to and felt I had some place in, but a foreign one nonetheless.

In my incoming class, if I remember correctly, out of around 500 students, nine of them were from Florida. Of those I had the chance of meeting, all were from south Florida, places like Miami, Tampa, and Saint Petersburg. Even within the student body at large, I am the only student I know of (besides a childhood friend who encouraged me to apply) from northeast Florida. This distribution of Floridian students is, to a degree, a microcosm of the student body at large. With the exception of a large number of students from Ohio, the next represented states are California and New York. My Florida is a far cry from the stereotypical image(s) of our most southern state. There's a saying in Florida that the more north you go, the more southern you get, and with this, I would agree. When asked where I'm from, I've learned to self-deprecate, preemptively dispelling any possibility of me living *in* Disney World (though admitting I'm from Florida is often a joke in itself among many I've met). "It's more like southern southern Georgia than north of Miami."

And like southern Georgia, northeast Florida, at least in my neck of the backwoods, leans (or perhaps runs) red politically and culturally. Public education is grossly underfunded and mismanaged (I still don't think I've ever had a proper history class), the churches are Baptist (was I baptized?), I was told in my honors biology class that "gay peoples' brains are broken" (thank God I had musical theater), and I can count on two fingers the number of independent restaurants in my town that have opened during my lifetime and have managed to stay open more than a year. Around 2013, there was a "race war" at my high school between "the black people" and "the rednecks" that the administration resolved by promising a pizza party if the groups' "leaders" shook hands in the cafetorium. I hear that now you need a resource officer to come with you if you want to leave class to use the restroom. One time, a patient of my dad's gifted him a racoon pot pie. All of this is to say I'm still not sure how I ended up at an elite liberal arts college in central Ohio, undeniably worlds away from where I grew up geographically, culturally, and psychically. But of course, in another sense, my transition here is entirely explainable. My father's job as a physician and a generous trust fund set aside specifically for education probably had something to do with it. Still, my brothers went to public universities in state, and I went private as far away as possible.

I did not grow up in a city. I did not go to fine arts summer camps. My schools were 40 percent black. My parents do not have season tickets or memberships or are on the board of trustees. My parents voted Trump. And it is for reasons like these that my transition to college life has been one of constant reorientation and recognition. Though I, more or less, found myself to be materially equal to my peers, many of them possessed a cultural capital or wealth that was entirely inaccessible to someone of my own cultural and/or geographic background. Thrust out of one world and into another, it feels as if, every day, I am given cause to adjust my concept of the American social order, my place in it, and the stories that others tell themselves about their own. The gap between my peers and I was not merely academic, but experiential.

The night of November 8, 2016, was a long one at Kenyon College, as it was for many across the country and elsewhere. The celebratory drinks the evening began with became things quietly nursed as the results trickled in on the TVs in dorm common rooms. Those of us who stayed up to watch the end of the results were met shortly after with an email from the administration asking that we, please, despite the election, attend our regularly scheduled classes the coming day. And for the most part, people did.

But as the twelve of us filed into that oak-paneled seminar room the next evening, none of us were quite feeling up to talking about the paradoxes of things persisting through their changes. Our minds were directed collectively away from the intelligible, platonic heavens and down at the real political situation into which we'd found ourselves thrown. The world around us, changed overnight as it had (but did it persist through its change?), had become more unintelligible than those heady forms we had come together to think about. From what I've heard from other students, our seminar that evening went like many of the others on campus — realizing the historical import of the present moment, students and professors suspended studies in favor of a first attempt at processing the meaning of the election, its trauma, and its implications for us both as budding philosophers and for the United States as a whole.

As the evening progressed, it felt as though the conversation we were having kept coming back to the same, singular point: How could anyone possibly have voted for Trump? Even more than that, there was an essential inconceivability about taking conservative values (or really anything right of mainline center-left liberalism) seriously and, therefore, of taking those who identified with those values seriously *as persons*. It seemed that in the eyes of my peers, it wasn't the case that a conservative was a bad *person* but a malevolent convergence of force rendered unintelligible as an agent, unintelligible as a moral actor.

Because of this block, the other students quickly ran up against a wall in their attempts to uncover any sort of etiology for Trump voters that did not reduce them to a sort of inherent moral defect or bigotry. This is in no way to condone the bigotry, bad faith, selfishness, or cruelty of those on the right, but at the same time, to view them and their moral transgressions as black boxes, with no causal explanations, no reasons for their actions, would be to relegate them beyond the realm of the human and hence beyond the possibility of empathy, confirmation, or moral (re)education.

Sitting there, in that seminar room, the gap was again forced into sharp relief. This time though, it seemed to me that it was my peers who were lacking. Their inability to conceive the conservative other as a person with reasons spoke more about their own subjectivity than it did the subjectivity of the disdained. It voiced that they had never lived in a town where the mill is the largest employer. It voiced that their cultural practices and norms had never been a comedic stand-in for "lower class than I am." It voiced that they had never hung out in a Walmart parking lot because there really wasn't anything better to do on a Friday night. It voiced that their urbanite experience had become naturalized to them, slipping itself into that space where ideology lies, right between the eyes and the world: always seen through, never seen. ∎

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Thought-action figures (TAFs) are to digitality what ideas were to literacy: an emerging mode of thinking and acting. Thought-action figures are not limited to human figures: animals, plants, machines, processes, materialities, ideal entities—all are becoming TAFfy, sticky networks formed by chance and necessity that gather and disperse events throughout the multiverse.

McKenzie Stojnić is an NYC-based media performance group composed of Jon McKenzie and Aneta Stojnić. Their work operates at the intersections of art/life, theory/practice, and episteme/doxa through talks, lecture performances, comics, videos, texts, and workshops. https://www.mckenziestojnic.org

2.19.13

IN GOOD FAITH

by Elizabeth Cutter Evert

Yes, there was a blue wave in November 2018, but many of the races were achingly close. Even factoring in the distortions of gerrymandering, the country is torn. As a liberal New York psychoanalyst who has spent time in Christian — including Evangelical — circles, I think we on the left have difficulty understanding how frequently we are seen as hypocritical in the moral sphere. If we are expecting Republicans to stand up to Trump and if we want to build coalitions, it may be useful to try to see ourselves as those on the religious right may see us.

There is a history in this country of religious people being marginalized by secular groups. In psychoanalytic circles, we are practiced at trying to empathize with those who find themselves outside the mainstream. In writing, my hope is that we can listen and find ways to work cooperatively — or at least to fight constructively.

As we hope to build our ranks, it might help to consider that some people may have voted for Trump because of what they experienced viscerally as liberal hypocrisy in espousing humanitarian ideas while rising above corporate amorality. In the last issue of **Room**, Caroline Ellman spoke of a shame, that many of us share, at not having recognized how far the Democratic party has drifted from the values we have thought of it as holding.

In the United States, we think of ourselves as committed to the idea that all are created equal. Despite our treatment of Native Americans and our history of slavery, we hold fast to democratic ideals. Over the last fifty years, many have been particularly proud of the progress of the Civil Rights, Women's, and LGBTQ Movements. Most Democrats and many Republicans are appalled by Donald Trump's betrayal of what we see as shared American values. He seems to use the presidency for financial and narcissistic gain. It appears that he is uninterested in the kind of conscientious understanding that would make it possible to lead the country responsibly.

Here is the thing — I find the lengths that many Evangelicals have gone to to fight abortion to be unconscionable. I think they have made a devil's bargain, where they are supporting Trump in the hopes he will make abortion illegal. Many seem to ignore their consciences on all but this single issue. The Republicans have been using the Evangelical position on abortion for decades as cover for their trickle-down economic agenda and neoconservative foreign policy. Trump continues the tradition, though his motivation may be even more cynical. I am very concerned with what Trump and the Republicans are doing. No matter how deeply held the Evangelicals' motivations for collaborating may be, I feel a responsibility to oppose anyone who is enabling this administration. However, I think nothing comes from a failure to try to understand the Christian conservative perspective.

Here is a thought experiment: let us look at ourselves through the red lens of a group of pro-life Trump supporters. (It's a tall order. I know.)

Many people I have met see the pro-choice movement as quintessentially hypocritical. If we say we value every life, how can we be so adamant that it is fine to terminate a pregnancy? Who can know when human life begins? Isn't thinking of its starting at conception more logical than deciding on a date at some point between conception and birth? Those who are pro-choice say they can accept someone thinking that they would never choose abortion but object to people attempting to control others' actions. But the argument for those who hold the conviction that society's duty to preserve life begins at conception is that there are many laws we enact that curtail freedom to prevent harm. If a person finds abortion equivalent to infanticide, how can we expect them not to strive to prevent it?

The Evangelical movement is not monolithic. Over the last two years, a number of groups have formed within it to recommit themselves to values of compassion and respect, and to challenge the alliance with Trump. They have fought against the separation of parents and children at the border and have stood for environmental concerns. Groups like <u>Vote Common Good</u>, who campaigned tirelessly to defeat Republicans in 2018, want to "invite and help voters of faith, our brothers and sisters in so called 'red districts,' to rise up and vote the heart of our shared faith — faith in our spiritual traditions, our country, and one another."

They believe that "kindness and compassion are foundational American values and that to vote for the needs of our neighbor, even when it means letting go of some our wants, is a deeply patriotic act."

They make the point that it will take courage for Evangelicals to move beyond familiar alliances.

On the left, it is also difficult to step outside what is comfortable. If you followed the thought experiment described above, try explaining it to someone else. I have not found this to be an easy task.

I have never been particularly interested in thinking about abortion, but I care deeply about the question as to how marginalizing people affects democracy. When individuals or groups feel that their core values are unacceptable, they tend to withdraw into tribalism. Fight-or-flight responses replace the capacity to think collaboratively.

In 2019, we have entered a dark new era of increasing instability. With the shutdown, the movement in the Mueller investigation, Brexit, and mounting tensions in the Middle East, we cannot know how badly things may go. While it is unlikely that we will all agree on the subject of abortion, perhaps it is still possible that people of conscience from a range of backgrounds can collaborate on other parts of a humanitarian agenda. ∎

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Photography by James McNellis. March for Life, Washington, DC.

2.19

2.19.14

IMAGINING
THE OTHER

by Kerry Leddy Malawista

In all obvious ways, I am not an outsider. I am not isolated from the majority by dint of my sexual orientation, skin color, class, religion, disability, or appearance — all the notable and painful ways one can become marginalized.

Yet, when thought about more broadly, we are all covered in a sheath of difference that is sometimes visible, sometimes not. Even in a world where one feels mostly accepted, we can at times feel alone and excluded, removed from others whose lives we perceive as more whole, more fulfilling, better. When viewed through such a prism, outsiderness is an inevitable condition of being human and is intrinsic to us all.

More difficult to accept are the ways we do the excluding, the way the other becomes stained with our unwanted parts.

I remember vividly one such moment: I had just given birth to our second daughter. My husband and I were watching the news, and there was a report on a nearby tragedy: a couple, both doctors, had lost their two young children when the ice broke while they were skating. Hearing this story, I gasped, gripped by the horror of losing both children. *This could be us*, I thought. In that moment, the unimaginable was imagined. Then, a photo, taken months earlier, of that beautiful, intact family appeared on the screen, and I was relieved. Their skin was darker than mine. We were safe: *This could not happen to us.*

By erecting a barrier (us — them), I had magically separated myself from the possibility of this tragedy. They were different than me — we were safe. Freud referred to this maneuver as the "narcissism of minor differences." While Freud understood it as a need to project one's aggressive impulses onto an enemy (them), I saw my reaction as self-preserving, which allowed me to feel detached and, therefore, protected. Or possibly, it was driven by an even more fundamental, urgent need — an instinctive imperative for survival.

This leaves me thinking about the social consequences of our internal conflicts about otherness. Although humans are more the same than different, we continue to focus on what distinguishes us. And, while the differences may be minor, the psychological role they play is major, as are the potential repercussions. Daily, we see the horrors committed in the face of perceived differences: racism, violence, genocide, and, more recently, in the separation of children from their parents at the US–Mexico border. The myth of the other is perpetuated when we forge no connection, offer no empathy, and don't take the time to imagine who that other is. Claudia Rankine, in her prose poetry book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, speaks to this danger. She writes: "Because white men can't / police their imagination / black men are dying."

Each of us knows outsiderness. Those wounds should inform and preclude the ways we inflict those same wounds onto others. In these polarizing times, we must work to hold the other in mind. ∎

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Photograph by Alisdare Hickson.

PLAYING
FOR REAL

by Eugene Mahon

Room's definition of itself as a "sketchbook of psychoanalytic action" got me thinking: What is psychoanalytic action? Is it action informed by considerable analysis of all its components and determinants? Is this what Freud had in mind when he said "thought is trial action"? In "Playing and Working Through,"[1] I suggested that if thought is trial action, could play perhaps be thought of as trial thought? I was imagining a child full of unruly instincts and stimulating thoughts needing an experimental theatre in which to explore his fantasies before acting on them. I argued that *play*, by definition, was such an exploratory space. Freud had defined *play* as being synonymous with fantasy except that play needed concrete playthings that the child must manipulate as s/he experimented with the extravaganzas of fantasy. To Freud's definition of play as "fantasy and its playthings," I added, or at least stressed, the component of action, since while intrapsychic fantasy is devoid of action, the action component of play is prominent and defining.

I have begun on a highly theoretical note rather than on a practical one: I could have begun by citing current courageous psychoanalytic actions that need no theory to prop them up at all, given how self-evident they are (e.g., when psychoanalysts take to the streets carrying placards saying "Shrinks for Sanity," they are decrying the long list of socially insane actions our government has taken in recent months and years). When psychoanalysts volunteer their services to help the families being mistreated and discriminated against at our borders, this is psychoanalytic action *in statu nascendi*. When one of Room's articles is read into the permanent record of the US House of Representatives, this is psychoanalytic action going center stage. All publications in Room to date could be cited as examples of serious, well-thought-out psychoanalytic action.

The word *serious* brings to mind Eudora Welty: "All serious daring starts from within," she said in her treatise on writing and one writer's origins. *Serious* is the key word in her description of courage, suggesting, as it does, that there might be nonserious, frivolous kinds of daring that are more show than substance. *Counterphobic* might well be the analytic word for such strutting but hollow displays of fear-ridden action. Trumpian tantrums would qualify as bluster masquerading as informed policy and action. Serious daring surely comes from serious thought, which brings us back to psychoanalytic thinking and its multiple determinants. To arrive at serious daring as quickly as possible would seem to be the essence of psychoanalytically informed action. As Shakespeare put it in *Hamlet*: "Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honor's at the stake." But this introduces the concepts of great *argument* and *honor*, two mental components that require explication in their own right. *Great argument* would seem to characterize the mind in productive conflict with itself, the very essence of being human perhaps. *Honor* is an altogether more unique concept, surely a component of human idealism at its best.

But lest we get bogged down in obsessional thought, Shakespeare helps us find a way out of such psychological clutter when he writes that action can be undone by "some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event, a thought that quartered hath but one part wisdom and ever three parts coward." Shakespeare — the first Freudian as I like to think of him — has masterfully exposed the craven obsessional scruples that masquerade as wisdom but whose purpose is to think things to death and never act at all, in fact, "lose the name of action" and wallow in passivity and inaction forever.

I mentioned play and working through earlier; I believe there is a neglected analogy between the two. In play, children are trying to formulate their conflicted thoughts and fantasies the better to act on them developmentally and adaptively. In working through, an analysand is trying to put insight into action by over-

coming the sluggishness, the psychological inertia called *resistance* that cripples action even when hard-won insights are clamoring for characterological change and decisive action. There is a critical moment when a man or woman who has never thought of herself or himself as an Aristotelian political animal must take to the streets and risk going to jail to expose and decry political corruption or fascism that demeans democracy.

Room's definition of itself as "A Sketchbook of Psychoanalytic Action" prompted these thoughts on play, thought, action, working through, wisdom, honor, serious daring, all of which register in conscious and unconscious ways as psychoanalytic action is being formulated and delivered into the receptive arms of a thoughtful democracy.

Room sprang into being a couple of years ago, when a group of thoughtful analysts began to ponder the philosophy and politics of action and inaction at a crucial moment in democracy. It seemed clear that a blueprint of psychoanalytic action needed to be drafted, so psychoanalysts would have a forum that could merge their considerable psycho-political energies into an instrument of moral definition that could not only expose unconscious resistance to change, but also to itemize how such passivity could be undone and worked through in the intellectual and social lives of an intelligent democracy. This is a challenging mandate to be sure, but there is no denying that a groundswell of passionate analytic thinking and serious daring have found a voice and that Room's sketchbook of psychoanalytic action has already mobilized the energies of analysts everywhere. Words that are purely ornamental and have lost all connection with action are not enough. Psychoanalytic action demands more of words than that. ∎

[1] Mahon, E.J. (2004). Playing and Working Through: A Neglected Analogy. Psychoanal Q., *73*(2):379-413.

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DISPATCHES

Mind of State is a new weekly podcast where politics and psychology meet. Each episode features lively commentary on current events, policymakers, and the body politic, and how we have arrived at this moment, as observed through both a political and psychological lens. Mind of State explores how "mind" impacts "state" — and vice versa.

Tune in, as co-hosts Betty Teng, a NYC psychoanalyst and trauma therapist, and Michael Epstein, an award-winning filmmaker, engage in nuanced conversation with distinguished experts from the worlds of politics and psychology, as well as others from related fields who have studied the complex dynamics between individual/group psychology and political processes.

Starting today, listeners can enjoy the first three episodes of Mind of State, described below:

Episode 01: We Are All Going to Die—Someday humans are uniquely aware of our own mortality. Someday, hopefully later rather than sooner, each of us is going to die. For our guest, Dr. Sheldon Solomon, recognition of our own death is the most important idea in human history. Sheldon argues, and he has the proof to back it up, that the awareness of our own death ("mortality salience" is his fancy term for it) influences all aspects of our lives, from religion, to art, to—and this where it gets really interesting for us—our politics. Sheldon calls it "Terror Management Theory," and he explains that this is what sits at the core of Donald Trump's appeal.

Episode 02: Delusions & Lies –The Mind of Donald Trump What's the difference between a lie and a delusional lie? It's a matter of perspective—especially when you're talking about Donald Trump. In this episode of Mind of State, we are joined by Dr. Michael Tansey, a psychoanalyst with a self-proclaimed obsession for Donald Trump. (How else can you explain starting every day by reading Trump's tweets?) Michael helps us better understand the nature of lying, something we all do to some degree, and why Trump's lies are so very different, even dangerous. With shout-outs to Oculus Rift and Wilt Chamberlin.

Episode 03: No, Lindsay, The Wall Is Not a Metaphor When is a wall not just a wall? When it's Donald Trump's Wall. Dr. Thomas Singer, a Jungian psychoanalyst, argues that the Wall needs to be recognized for the symbol it has become in the minds of Trump's most ardent supporters and harshest critics. Reason, facts, and well-argued positions don't matter when they come up against the powerful, visceral emotions of a symbol. Tom reminds us that symbols motivate, provoke, and drive us. That's what Trump has effectively done with his wall. Tom believes that the power of symbols is what lurked behind the longest government shutdown in US history and thus deserves our attention.

Mind of State is produced and recorded out of Hangar Studios in NYC, by Michael Epstein, Jonathan Kopp, Betty Teng, and Thomas Singer. New episodes released weekly on Tuesdays on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Stitcher, Spotify, Soundcloud, and via RSS feed.

Team Bios

Michael Epstein, Co-Host & Co-Producer Michael Epstein is an award-winning documentary filmmaker who has been nominated for an Academy Award and awarded two George Foster Peabody Awards, two Emmy Awards, a Writers Guild Award as well as other industry honors. Epstein teaches documentary journalism at the School of Visual Arts MFA program in documentary film.

Betty Teng, Co-Host & Co-Producer Betty P. Teng, LMSW, MFA, is a psychoanalyst and a trauma therapist who has worked with survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and childhood molestation at Mount Sinai Beth Israel's Victims Services Program in Manhattan. She is one of 27 contributors to the bestseller, *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*. Ms. Teng has also written for Vox, Slate, and Alternet. Ms. Teng sees patients in private practice and at the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy. She is also an award-winning screenwriter and editor whose credits include films by Ang Lee, Robert Altman, and Mike Nichols.

Jonathan Kopp, Co-Producer Jonathan Kopp is a strategic communications expert specializing in issue and positioning campaigns for candidates, causes, companies, and countries. He is a managing director at the Glover Park Group. Jonathan was a member of the Obama for America 2008 National Media Team, the Opposition Research & Rapid Response Team of the 1992 Clinton/Gore "War Room," and the Clinton Administration White House staff. He received the World Brand Congress 2011 Brand Leadership Award for Global Leadership in Digital & Social Media.

Thomas Singer, Co-Producer Thomas Singer, MD, is a psychiatrist and Jungian psychoanalyst. Tom is an expert on the relationships between myth, politics, and psyche in his studies of The Vision Thing and the Ancient Greece, Modern Psyche series. He is the editor of a series of books exploring cultural complexes, including *Placing Psyche, Listening to Latin America, Europe's Many Souls, The Cultural Complex*. He is president of the National ARAS, an archive of symbolic imagery that has created *The Book of Symbols*.

BOOK REVIEW

ENGAGING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE: PSYCHOANALYTIC AND INTERDISCI-PLINARY PERSPECTIVES

Edited by Sally Weintrobe,
London: Routledge, 2013.

Reviewed
by Richard B. Grose

Before I read this book, which I heard about not long after it was published in 2013, I thought it would turn out to be a worthy effort to apply psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary thinking to the nightmare subject of climate change. But it seemed that such a book would inevitably be doomed by the fact that no one who refused to "engage with climate change" would pick it up, much less buy it or read it carefully. And yet, who else would be the target audience for it? For this reason, I expected a reading experience of futility.

Then I read the book.

It consists of ten chapters, seven of them followed by brief commentaries. The chapters and the commentaries are written by psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, scholars in the social sciences, ethics, and philosophy; climate activists, a former advertising executive, and a climate scientist. One surprising pleasure of the book is to see psychoanalytic theory (here mainly Kleinian) used to such good effect on a subject of such importance, including by nonanalysts. Reading this book, one would hardly guess that psychoanalytic ideas had long since been relegated to the dustbin of Western intellectual life.

The level of writing and thinking in most of the chapters is very high. (The one chapter which is an exception to this overall high level is corrected by its two commentaries). The writing evocatively shows connections between intrapsychic dynamics and the brute facts of climate change denial and, beyond that, indicates the baseline cultural attitudes that make accepting climate science difficult for so many.

For example, Paul Hoggett, a professor of politics and a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, begins his chapter "Climate Change in a Perverse Culture" by citing Freud's late concept of disavowal to understand the fact that doubt about the urgent reality of climate change increases even as the evidence — in the form of ever more dire scientific reports — mounts. Disavowal, the state of simultaneously acknowledging and denying unpleasant facts, serves him (1) to add psychological depth to the account of climate change denialism and (2) to expand his view from the individual to the social plane. In his breathtaking chapter, he shows perverse states of disavowal to characterize not only the basic dynamic of denialism but also whole sectors of contemporary economy, culture, and governance. In one single paragraph, he cites both pedophilia and "trickle-down theory" as examples of perverse pleasure — "in which the subject confuses his individual pleasure with the other's good." (p. 61) Such connections between psychopathology and social pathology abound, and they are advanced on the basis of wide reading and close arguing.

They abound not only in this chapter but throughout the book. As one reads, one feels the book's power in the interpenetration of theories of individual psychodynamics and those of societies and cultures. Because this theoretical resonance builds in the course of the book, one feels its particular force in the penultimate chapter by Sally Weintrobe, which puts forward terms that link the inner and outer worlds. For example, she suggests the term "landscape" to denote "a place in the internal world of the psyche." (203) She argues for the term by saying, "Internal representations of landscapes have their roots in our physical world."

> Our landscapes are socially determined to a considerable extent and we express and also develop different aspects of our identity within the setting of these landscapes. We are already socially placed *within* landscapes, we *find* ourselves placed within landscapes, and we also find our *selves* in landscapes. Diversity of inner landscapes is vital to forming an identity sufficiently rich to promote well-being and feeling alive as a person. (p. 204)

In this passage, Weintrobe shows the interpenetration of psychic and ecological health, pointing to the dawning truth that neither can be truly understood without the other.

Where, then, does the power of this book take the reader? It seems to me that it can go in multiple directions. It can serve as a guidebook to those who are attempting to communicate with the public on the urgency of climate change. It contains hints for psychoanalytic writers on the powerful synergies of psychodynamic, social, and cultural theorizing. Perhaps most fundamentally, it offers the reader a powerful, multifaceted account of the psychic and social realities underlying the incommensurable nightmare we are entering. And as such, it stands in the service of self-knowledge, here understood as knowledge of the unconscious psychic forces in society that, as of the writing of this review, still have humanity in their grip. Whatever the eventual effect on other actors, this contribution to self-knowledge exemplifies the basic purpose of psychoanalysis even as it orients us outward, toward a world that desperately needs our determined efforts. ∎

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Photography by Ricardo Gómez Ángel

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