

4 PPNow Reflections  
Angela Foster

10 What Misogyny?  
Michaela Chamberlain

12 Psychoanalysis  
On and Off the  
Couch  
Harvey Schwartz

16 Vaxx  
Andrea Sabbadini

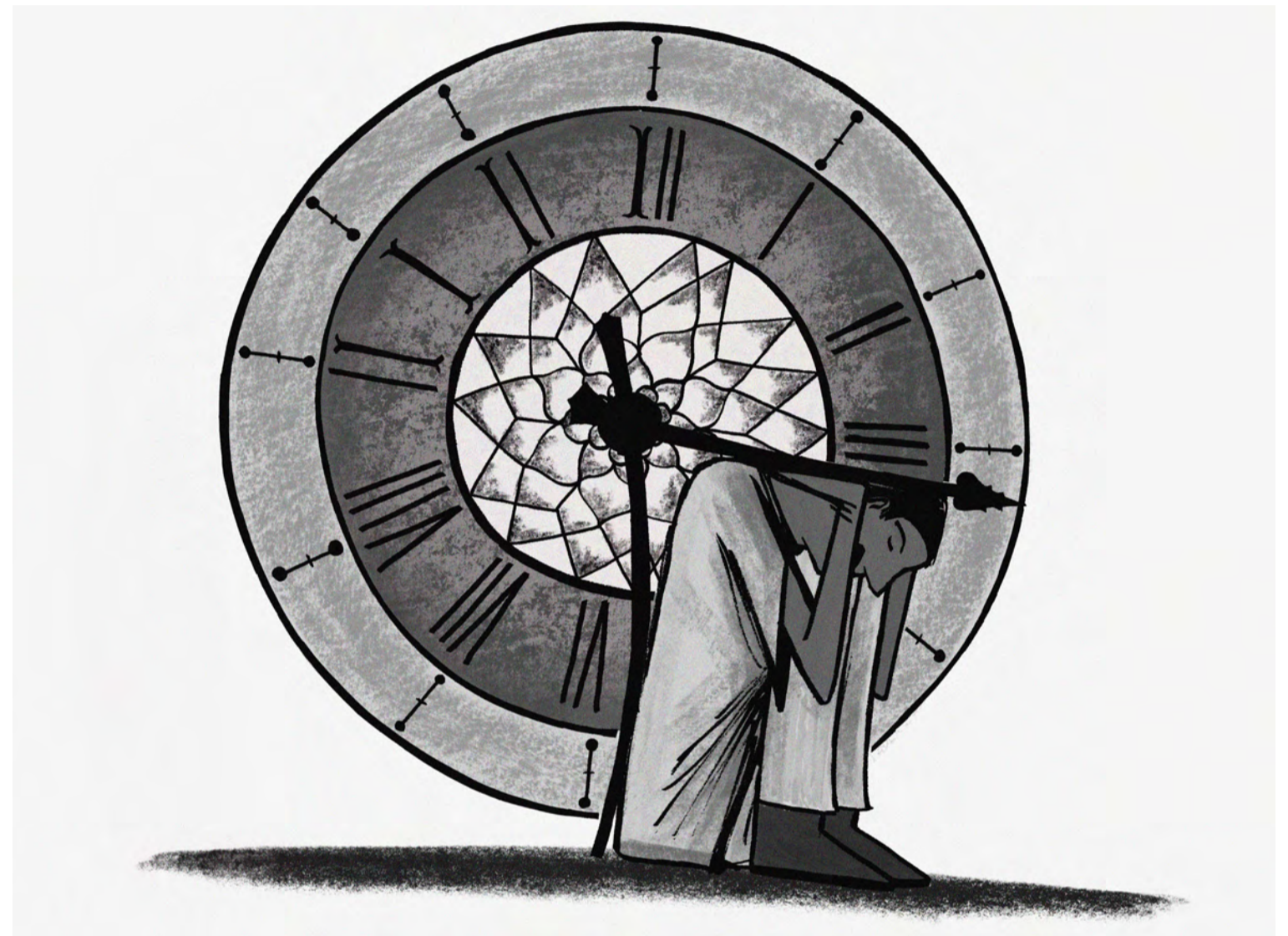
## On being with others 'now'

Lisa Baraitser

**I**n November 2022, the BPC held their annual *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Now* conference. I was struck by the “now” in the title: it suggests a reflection on the present state of things, but also carries a certain urgency, a call to action. Yet “now” actually appears in the title year after year, asking us to engage again and again with the pressing concerns of our patients, the profession, and the world around us. Some things go on being urgent, and the pressure to address them is chronic. This year’s conference theme, “Insiders and Outsiders: Navigating identities and divisions inside and outside the consulting room”, is a case in point. Identities and differences are not just navigated but socially and psychically produced, over and over, including within the institution and clinical practice of psychoanalysis itself. The so called “migrant crisis”, for instance, is produced deliberately, unnecessarily and malignantly by a hostile environment in the UK that drives people to make desperate and at times life-threatening decisions. It produces categories of people who are legible and considered legitimate “insiders”, and those who are marginalized, silenced, or more violently pushed out. Similarly, climate breakdown, war, and the cost of living crisis, all produce “insiders” whose lives are considered valuable and therefore “grievable”, to use Judith Butler’s term (Butler, 2010), and “outsiders” who go on paying for the “insiders” to remain cocooned in their worlds, as Mia Mottley, the prime minister of Barbados told COP27, in her blistering attack on the neocolonialism of climate injustice.

**“Some things go on being urgent, and the pressure to address them is chronic”**

Psychoanalytically, we might approach being “in” and pushing others “out” as a way of bringing temporary relief from the ongoing difficulties of being “with” others. Being “with” can evoke early terrors of engulfment, abandonment and deprivation. Tolerating anxieties about being invaded or pushed out by our internal objects (those internalized others) is a life-long psychic struggle, along with managing the guilt, loss and mourning that enables us to believe that being



“with” others has some value. There are also, however, some psychosocial perspectives on the chronic difficulties of being with others, that paradoxically have a relation to chronicity itself, involving a tolerance for the time that “withness” takes, a kind of “waiting with” that may also offer us a model of psychoanalytic care (Salisbury and Baraitser, 2020). This might help us understand what the “now” means, in “Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Now”.

In 2020, at the start of the global pandemic, Garrett Bradley’s documentary film, *Time*, was released. The film assembles clips from over 100 hours of home video footage belonging to its protagonist, Sibil Fox Richardson (known as “Fox Rich”). *Time* intersplices the home videos with Bradley’s own footage of Fox Rich in present time, as she waits to find out whether her husband Rob – serving a 60-year sentence without the possibility of parole – will get early release from Louisiana State Penitentiary. Through her prison abolitionist work, her day job that keeps their six children alive, and her capacity to endure in the face of a legal and state system designed to delay, waste and ultimately lock down the time of Black individuals into modern day slavery, we watch Fox Rich make

time flow through her commitment to go on waiting. As well as documenting the mundane everyday life of the family even whilst he is “inside”, she punctuates family time with emotionally meaningful events and ceremonies that mark the children’s achievements, inserting intimacy back into otherwise brutalized family relations to counter the attack on meaningful connection enacted by the prison industrial complex. “Outsider” time becomes the timepiece for “insider” time, the system’s dehumanizing indifference towards Black life, and the systematic violation of Black communities by the carceral state.

Fox Rich appears briefly in Bradley’s earlier 13-minute documentary, *Alone*, in which Aloné Watts, a young Black woman, debates whether to marry her incarcerated boyfriend. Rich says to Aloné, “This system breaks you apart [...]. It is designed just like slavery to tear you apart. And instead of using the whip, they use mother time.” (*Alone*, 2017). Rich’s analysis is that mother time – the enforcement of solitary motherhood through the excessive control and subjugation of Black life – weaponizes both maternal and erotic love. In *Time* we see Rich resisting by libidinizing maternal time, documenting the family’s life for

Rob to see, so that they do time together. Mother time or social reproductive labour time becomes literally a labour of love rather than a whip.

The pandemic, we could argue, pushed into consciousness the chronic crises of the now – crises of care and vulnerability produced through what the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitical practices”: “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead” (2003, p. 39–40). In his response to the pandemic, Mbembe wrote: “we must answer here and now for our life on Earth with others (including viruses) and our shared fate. Such is the injunction this pathogenic period addresses to humankind” (Mbembe, 2020).

To share vulnerabilities, to really acknowledge our interdependencies on one another and on more than human worlds, we need new ways, Mbembe argues, for the human to transcend humanism. These new conceptions would allow us to encounter “others” not as things to incarcerate, persecute, project into, fear, or control, but as living beings with whom to build a more just

world. This is a psychic developmental task, the precarious process of coming to experience the other as a subject in their own right, a “like subject”, as Jessica Benjamin would put it (1998), linked to the depressive position in Kleinian thinking. But it is also a social, political and ecological task.

How should we, as psychoanalytic practitioners, respond to Mbembe’s call to answer for our life on Earth with others? Does Fox Rich’s resistance of the carceral state through inserting mother-time back into time itself through the paradoxical work of waiting, offer us a way to answer? Mbembe’s injunction is to pay attention to two dimensions; the here and the now, the spatial and the temporal, if we are to respond to this pathogenic period. We must do so here, in the world we find ourselves in and not in some imagined utopia in which we are no longer dependent on others, a world of no violence, no difference, in which we have somehow freed ourselves from the burdens of sharing the earth with one another; and we must do so now. But when is now?

## “Yet those who cannot pay for psychotherapy continue to be effectively locked out of psychoanalytic time”

When Freud made his pledge of psychoanalytic time to the “poor man” in Budapest in 1918, it was for a time yet-to-come. He wrote that psychoanalytic time would be freely given “at some time or other”, a time supplementary to now, when “the conscience of society” would finally awake (Freud, 1918, p. 167). Yet those who cannot pay for psychotherapy continue to be effectively locked out of psychoanalytic time. As Martin Luther

King stated, when it comes to civil rights, “This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’” (King, 1964, pp. 94–95). Time is unequally distributed and always an issue of power. Some wait on others, wait for justice, or just wait, whilst others progress, develop, move, expand, grow. Being “synced” to the “progressive” time of Western modernity is a way of belonging, of being an insider, and those who don’t or can’t conform to this time fall out of time altogether. They show up in the social fabric as “antisocial”; “behind” the contemporary, “arrested” in their development (think of the homophobic history within psychoanalytic theorizing about arrested development), and anachronistic, in the “wrong” time. In particular, what the late political philosopher, Charles Mills calls “white time” sets the pace and tempo of modernity so that non-white time is always “wrong” (Mills, 2014, 2020). He shows how Black time is converted into White time under certain racial regimes through the exploitation of Black individuals’ time. Drawing on Jack Goody’s book, *The Theft of History*, Mills suggests that the White settler state assumes that before its arrival “no history has taken place, no real passage of time, since a time in which no history passes is a time that has not really itself passed” (Mills, 2014, p. 31). If humans are distinguished from animals by their ability to make history, to turn time to their own ends, Mills states, then the capacity to utilize time becomes racialized. This means the temporal norms that structure who gets to be “inside” of time reproduce western models of time that are naturalized by those whom they privilege. Psychoanalysis is deeply involved in this process.

There are other psychosocial accounts of time, however, that intervene in this static temporality of “white time”. Feminist and Black Womanist perspectives, for instance, recognize both embodiment and the repetitive labour of social reproduction as the condition that makes the future possible at all. If we take embodiment to mean the disruptive and

inchoate drives that animate the symbolic markers of difference, then a future that breaks free from the repetitions of more of the capitalist same, does so through listening again and again for the multiple times of the many bodies that western modernity suppresses. This form of embodied repetition enables both psychic and social emancipation.

## “Time is unequally distributed and always an issue of power”

\*Kwame Yonatan describes the work of the Margens Clinicas (Clinical Margins) group, a collective of 10 psychoanalysts and psychologists in Brazil, as dedicated to thinking about the interfaces of psychological suffering with the pathologies of social structure, using what he calls “clinical listening” to confront state violence so as to restore the value of a life that has been the object of such violence (Yonatan, 2023). Clinical listening approaches the ego as a border that is open to both violence and repair. It entails waiting in the known contexts of state violence while the ego attempts to deal both with the vicissitudes of its own hate and that of others. Waiting for something specific to happen is suspended in the name of waiting with. Psychoanalytic care, in this account, functions through a form of prolonged waiting “with”.

Fox Rich offers us a figuration of the waiting that I am suggesting is necessary to break open “white time”, both in psychoanalysis and beyond. It’s not that she is outside historical time, or that she can possibly shift the workings of the prison industrial complex single-handedly. But in insisting that social reproductive labour is literally a labour of love rather than a whip, she makes a pocket of time that flows within the otherwise static temporal horizons of permanent crisis in which we are all, albeit differentially, waiting.

*Lisa Baraitser is Professor of Psychosocial Theory, Birkbeck, University of London. She is author of Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption (Routledge) and Enduring Time (Bloomsbury) and has written widely on motherhood, ethics, temporality and care. She is co-principal investigator of Waiting Times, a Wellcome Trust funded project on time and healthcare, and is a psychoanalyst and member of the British Psychoanalytical Society.*

\*An earlier version of this discussion appeared in Baraitser (2022).

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

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## Editorial

# Tapping the Barometer

Helen Morgan

As is customary, the Spring edition of *New Associations* refers to presentations that were given at the BPC Autumn conference on *Insiders and Outsiders: Navigating identities and divisions inside and outside the consulting room*. Alongside Angela Foster's helpful overview of the whole conference, we have contributions from Noreen Giffney on teaching psychoanalytic theory, a discussion between members of the panel on racism and the profession and an intriguing article from Lisa Baraitser who suggests a disruption of a white, patriarchal notion of time through a consideration of "maternal time" offering a different take on what it means to wait. We are delighted that Romalyn Ante has given permission to print the very moving poems she read at the conference. We plan to include an interview with Anghi Mukerjee on her book about her work with the "urban poor" in the summer edition.

**“an intriguing article... suggests a disruption of a white, patriarchal notion of time through a consideration of ‘maternal time’ offering a different take on what it means to wait”**

Coincidentally, alongside those from the conference speakers, a number of articles – including our two arts reviews – consider the problem of misogyny in modern society. I find it interesting that so many articles offered to the magazine this time are addressing such a key theme from the zeitgeist. We are experiencing backlash on a number of fronts of the progressive movement and there are many targets for that backlash, and many oppressions. But I suggest that how women are regarded by society is an effective barometer of the state our culture's health. Whether we are thinking of Iran or Afghanistan, the challenge to abortion rights in the US, the appalling attacks on women in our emergency services such as police and fire, or the rise of the Incel movement generally, this assertion of a form of toxic masculinity hostile to women (hostile to the "feminine"?) is deeply concerning. It doesn't help when progressive causes get entangled in disputes around gender and sexuality where debates become polarised and highly charged. The psychoanalytic profession should have much to contribute here but a pervasive anxiety is silencing, and many of us are lost between intransigent oppositions in a sort of muddled middle. All the controversies around the now disbanded Gender Identity Department at the Tavistock, the government "anti-woke" rhetoric and the extreme reactions expressed in the media don't help, but these are crucial discussions and we need to find a way through them without silencing each other. Accordingly, we intend to focus the Autumn edition of *New Associations* around forces stifling open debate and we invite those interested to offer contributions. If you are interested in submitting a piece on this or any other relevant theme please do contact me at [helen.morgan@bpc.org.uk](mailto:helen.morgan@bpc.org.uk)

**“I suggest that how women are regarded by society is an effective barometer of the state our culture's health”**

On more internal matters, we recently invited people to apply to join the Editorial Board of *New Associations* and I am pleased that we received considerable interest from a number of able applicants. After much discussion we decided to offer the appointments to the following three individuals:

Chris Scanlon is an independent Psychosocial researcher, Consultant Adult and Forensic Psychotherapist, and Training Group Analyst at the Institute of Group Analysis (UK) and the Irish Group Analytic Society. He is a systems-psychodynamic and group-relations consultant, professional associate at the Tavistock Institute and associate lecturer in Psycho-social and Organisational Studies, Tavistock Centre/University of Essex. He is a Founder member of the Association for Psychosocial Studies (APS), has published widely in the field and his most recent book (with John Adlam) *Psycho-social Explorations on Trauma, Exclusion and Violence: Un-housed Minds and Inhospitable Environment* was published by Routledge in 2022.

Emmanuelle Smith is a psychodynamic psychotherapist working in private practice and in NHS secondary services as part of South London and Maudsley Trust. She is also a writer and journalist

and previously worked at the Financial Times and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. Emmanuelle is a BPC registrant and her areas of interest include gender, cultural identity, and multilingualism. Emmanuelle will be taking over from Johnathan Sunley as Reviews Editor.

Debbie Wright, is a psychotherapist in private practice and an Academic, Lecturer, and Programme Director of the Clinical Professional Doctorate Programs in the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies at The University of Essex, as well as an Artist, Printmaker, and Illustrator. Her academic and art works explore humans' relationships with spaces, places and rooms, and her book, *The Physical and Virtual Space of the Consulting Room: Room-object spaces* explores Room-object spaces and spatialisation.

Each brings experience, considerable expertise and an enthusiasm for the project and I very much look forward to working with the new team.

**“I very much look forward to working with the new team”**

Sadly, alongside these new arrivals, the BPC Communications Manager Richard English is leaving the organisation. Part of Richard's remit has been to support *New Associations* so he and I have worked together for all the time he has been on the staff. Besides attending and minuting our regular Editorial Board meetings, Richard has managed all the essential work required to ensure the final version lands on your doorstep in good shape. Once all the content is decided and the copy is in Richard liaises with Sue Rentoul the designer, Matthew Lumley the proof reader and the illustrator Allen Fatimaharan. When all their work is done and the edition is good to go, Richard sends it all to the printers and the mailing house and then to you.

Richard and I have worked together now for the four years he has been in the BPC and I am very grateful for all his support and help over this time. He leaves to develop his private practice as a psychotherapist and I wish him well.



PPNow 2022

## Insiders and Outsiders: Navigating identities and divisions inside and outside the consulting room

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2022

# Thoughts on Saturday 12 November 2022

Angela Foster

The focus of the conference was on divisions between the “internal” and the “external”, and how we might take more of a psychosocial and intersectional perspective in psychoanalytic work. 104 delegates attended and, over the course of the day, a further 111 delegates joined online – another inside/outside division which might have been usefully explored, especially as this experience has become commonplace in all of our lives since the pandemic. Delegates attending in person were also treated to the excellent conference facilities and catering within County Hall.

**“104 delegates attended and, over the course of the day, a further 111 delegates joined online”**

Themes of race, ethnicity, and identity were explored throughout the conference, beginning on Friday evening with a lecture from Dr Noreen Giffney. Her premise that thoughts can sometimes exist in the absence of a capacity for thinking was a valuable starting point for the whole conference.

Saturday began with Professor Lisa Baraitser: *On being with others ‘now’*. This powerful presentation was packed with information and analysis. Focusing on time, its meaning and the ways in which we use and abuse it, Baraitser argued that the “global temporalities of the present...patriarchal, colonial, ableist, and heteronormative...marginalize those who fail to conform,” and “Those whose lives do not fit...appear in the social fabric as ‘antisocial’, ‘behind’ the contemporary, ‘arrested’, ‘backwards’, and stuck.”

We were then invited to consider how we note the passing of time and the valuing of it in our personal lives through the experiences of people who are separated because one of them is “doing time”, illustrated with Fox Rich’s use of home videos that she created for her husband when she was “outside”, raising the couple’s six children, and he was “inside”. I was delighted that Baraitser

bought examples of how we create insiders and outsiders both physically and psychologically. (There is an opening here for forensic psychotherapists to make more of a contribution in the future.) To summarise, we need to take time to listen and find the links between the external and the internal whatever the situation. While it could be argued that this has always been the focus of psychoanalysis, the argument here is that because psychoanalysis is so rooted in Western, middle class, white experience, we fail to look at and analyse the links between external oppression and internal reality and remain blind to this. For example, we were asked to “Think of the in-between state that those seeking asylum in the UK are held in for years”.

The discussion centred round various examples of exclusion, an obvious one being the discrimination that exists based on the cost of training and how this impacts on the profession – maintaining separation of the internal us and the excluded others. Just one example of how the status quo is maintained.

**“we need to take time to find the links between the internal and the external whatever the situation”**

In the following presentation, entitled *The Green Clinic: Sohbet in St. Mary’s Secret Garden*, Professor Ankhi Mukherjee described a community gardening project with a group of impoverished, unemployed Turkish and Kurdish “outsiders” living in Hackney. I would have welcomed more analysis of what made it so successful. For example, the focus on a creative activity, in this case gardening, worked on two levels – the functional and the psychotherapeutic. While growing something with which they could feed their families, these people were growing emotionally, learning to understand and speak English, make friends and develop their self-esteem, feeling happier as a result. Projects like this could be taken up and spread much more widely at very

little cost. In fact, when we were told the funding had run out, I wondered why it couldn’t be continued on a voluntary basis? As much as I commend this project, I would have appreciated some reference to the history of gardening as a therapeutic activity both in the community and in psychiatric hospitals, therapeutic communities, day centres and prisons, together with reference to the development of Eco-psychotherapy.

Delegates to this conference were also treated to very moving and beautifully delivered poems by the writer Romalyn Ante from her book *Antiemetic for Homesickness*. I’m sorry I can’t say more about this. I think we were all spellbound by the presentation and I doubt anybody made much in the way of notes.

The programme most importantly included a panel discussion on *The Question of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Institutional Racism* with Maxine Dennis and Helen Morgan, chaired by Fakhry Davids. Morgan, speaking on whiteness, stated that racism must be explored in therapy and Davids warned us against locating in our institutions that which belongs to us. Dennis, in a moving presentation stated that, “When your skin is seen as a dangerous weapon you are never unarmed,” and “You can only mourn something that has ended.” I sincerely hope that we will all have the opportunity to read their individual contributions in full.

**“When your skin is seen as a dangerous weapon you are never unarmed...”**

Institutional racism within psychoanalytic psychotherapy has been raised many times before in our institutions and conferences. Surely now is the time when we really must focus on action. A continual concern of mine is that, while we may express a desire for change and go into some detail about the what and the how of the change that is necessary, there is very little follow up. Unless we identify people who are going to take this forward, troubleshooting where progress

is proving difficult by offering support and consultation, very little will happen and we risk being accused of mere tokenism.

**“we are a community that can discuss and think together: a community that can name and face the challenges”**

A particularly enjoyable aspect of this conference was the feeling that we are a community that can discuss and think together: a community that can name and face the challenges. Hopefully we can also consider more practical ways in which psychoanalysis can be exported from the consulting room and become available to a much wider population. This together with a consideration of the ways our various institutions can invite “outsiders” in by improving access through outreach and introductory courses. Failure to do this would highlight a regrettable stuckness within our profession.

*Angela Foster is a psychiatric social worker, psychoanalytic psychotherapist and organisational consultant currently providing team reflective practice and individual supervision.*

PPNow 2022

# How Do We Teach Psychoanalytic Theory?

**Noreen Giffney**

**PSYCHOANALYTIC  
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**P**sychoanalysis is a praxis; a clinical practice that is underpinned, framed and facilitated by theory. Trainings emphasise the content of theories and their importance for practice; the “what” and the “why”. This is because the theories we are introduced to during our training will have long-term implications for practice, due to psychoanalytic traditions being grounded in and bounded by theory; it is one of the things that differentiates them from one another. There is little attention paid to how we come to take in, consciously and unconsciously, the psychoanalytic theories that are presented to us however, or how the teaching experience can facilitate or inhibit what we take in. I invite us to reflect on “how” we teach psychoanalytic theory.

## “the importance of framing and contextualising theoretical ideas”

I will begin with two examples from my experience as a student. I initially encountered psychoanalysis as a first-year undergraduate. Freud’s (1933[1932]) lecture, *Femininity*, was assigned as part of a literary theory module. There was little context provided and Freud’s assertions appeared bizarre. I was appalled by what I perceived to be its gauche misogyny, with the result that I did not read any further pieces by Freud

for the duration of my degree. I found my way back to Freud’s works through writers – Luce Irigaray, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose – while doing my PhD. It was through their writings, which provided context to Freud’s ideas in the process of articulating their own, that I came to read Freud’s (1915) essay, *The Unconscious*, and appreciated its nuance and complexity.

My reactions stayed with me and left me interested in reading theory as an experience that happens alongside the pursuit of content. My initial experience of reading Freud’s work has influenced how I teach psychoanalytic theory. It has taught me the importance of framing and contextualising theoretical ideas, particularly when they are new and might be challenging. It has highlighted that while psychoanalysis is something we read about, theory and how we encounter it is also something we might introject, identify with, metabolise and make use of psychically. It is equally something we might split off, project and evacuate. Thus, it can function as an object in the service of symbolisation or concretisation. Theory can be used unconsciously for the purpose of opening up a space for thinking or to defend against experiencing aspects of the self that might evoke emotional turbulence. How theory is taught has an impact.

How do we introduce theory through how we teach – in the texts we choose, the way we talk about concepts, the activities we invite trainees to engage in? Do we consider the ways in which theory can function as an external and an internal

object simultaneously when planning our classes? Do we operationalise the experience of teaching theory as part of the facilitating environment in the same way that we do for other experiential aspects of training? Trainings introduce theory in a variety of ways: Trainees are directed to read, discuss and write about psychoanalytic concepts. Theory is introduced, less directly but arguably more powerfully, in the framing and encountering of experiential processes, such as personal analysis, supervision, infant observation and reflective groups. Part of the journey of becoming a practitioner is being able to integrate all these different experiences.

I have spent over a decade developing the cultural encounters case study method, a new theoretical-experiential psychoanalytic pedagogy for teaching clinical concepts to trainees (Giffney 2021). This method brings together psychoanalytic concepts and, what I term, “non-clinical case studies” and “non-clinical case vignettes”, to facilitate trainees developing knowledge, skills and capacities needed for practice through learning from experience. These non-clinical case studies and vignettes are cultural objects; objects emerging from the applied arts of literature, film, art and music. They provide creative sites for navigating the transitional space between identifying with and using an object; in this instance the experience of encountering and taking in psychoanalytic concepts.

The method triangulates trainees’ experience of theory by presenting

concepts together with cultural objects. While we explore psychoanalytic concepts, I make use of art to facilitate trainees allowing themselves to have an experience; literature to enable them to tune into experiences that come to us in words; film to hone their aptitude for sensing how the patient might be experiencing the world; and music to attune themselves to experiences that come to us outside of words. Trainees’ encounter with theory is thus mediated by their engagement with a cultural object. This offers them distance from the theory, as space is necessary if they are to take the experience in psychically; trainees are likely to reject theory if they feel they are being force fed content in a concrete way. Experience is central to the method, which is delivered by means of a reflexive matrix or group experience; multiple minds thinking together to help individuals to develop their capacity to take in.

The method also gives trainees an opportunity to have a sensuous experience with the cultural object, so they become aware of associations and have space to reflect upon them, applying concepts to enable them to perceive themselves in more precise ways. Designed as a process, the method facilitates trainees to develop observation, analytical and interpretive skills, as well as a capacity for self-awareness and self-reflectivity for their work. Above all, it aims to enhance trainees’ experience with theory so their engagement with it bypasses the intellectual. It is designed to stimulate trainees’ capacity for playfulness and psychical flexibility – integral to symbolisation. This, in turn, enhances their ability to register and reflect upon the countertransference experience, which is a cornerstone of clinical technique.

*Noreen Giffney is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and a psychosocial theorist. She specialises in teaching psychoanalytic and psychosocial theories at Ulster University, Belfast: n.giffney@ulster.ac.uk*

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PPNow 2022

# The Question of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Institutional Racism

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## Discussion following the Panel at the PPNOW Conference November 2022

**Fakhry Davids:** It says a lot about our profession that we are still so uncomfortable thinking our way through the area of racism. Mostly this produces either a kind of paralysis or political correctness. Between these lies avoidance of the issue. When I qualified I realised that this is a much neglected topic (in an overwhelmingly white profession) and as a person of colour I felt motivated to try and open up an inquiry into this avoidance. When one begins a journey like this one is hopeful that the work will make a difference. But I have to say, 30 years later, I feel quite despondent on this front, because what I was saying about our paralysis – our awkwardness about opening up this conversation – remains so widespread. We still tend to avoid going there. And for me that's the index of our lack of progress on that front.

**Helen Morgan:** I know all institutions have a problem with racism, but do you think there is something particularly problematic within the psychoanalytic profession?

**FD:** I don't think our struggles are different from what occurs elsewhere. The symptoms – paralysis, political correctness, polite niceness – are the same everywhere. These are steps to try and make things “better”, but they avoid the deeper and more difficult levels. That may be acceptable in other professions, but in ours opening up and looking at difficult and complicated matters is meant to be our business.

**“The symptoms – paralysis, political correctness, polite niceness – are the same everywhere”**

**Maxine Dennis:** The point about it being our business feels very significant. I think there is a big question about whether it is seen as our business or not. There still seems to be a dichotomy

between what is considered “real” psychoanalysis and what are seen as areas that are peculiar to some individuals as their particular interest, rather than the body of the work. Much of that traces back to the compromise that Freud made in terms of getting a discipline to be taken seriously. The subsequent effect on the followers was that these issues to do with “racialisation” were not integrated into our work but split off and kept somewhere else. I think it is an ongoing issue, because, quite often, when individuals come up against this there is a feeling that you go totally to one's personal experience and then explain racism in terms of that. So whether you have a black friend or whether you know people from X or Y community becomes key. However, the experience differs via racialisation, how some people are “whitened/lightened” and others are “denigrated”. The need to interrogate this process and to integrate a range of developed theory (Internal racism) and developing theory into psychanalytic trainings becomes essential.

**HM:** My concern is that, amongst “whitened” people, this superficial look at ourselves leads to the strengthening of a defence of complacency. People often talk to me about their credentials: that they have black friends and/or patients, or that they lived in Africa etc., as if there is nothing more to explore – it's other people who have the problem. It's a way of saying there's nothing more to understand, and it builds a defence against actually being exposed to not knowing.

**FD:** Yes, exactly, such superficiality occurring in our discipline is breathtaking since we are known for bringing depth to just about everything else we touch. On most topics we are thoughtful, creative and curious, yet as far as racism is concerned we still encounter responses such as “some of my best friends are black...”, or “I was in an Indian restaurant, the flavours are so marvellous and the smells out of this world”, which are meant to reassure the listener that we are “on side” with multiculturalism and diversity, without any curiosity as to what lies beneath that. This is not the way we, psychoanalysts or psychotherapists,

usually think – we are curious about what goes on deep in our minds. Indeed, this is necessary for us to do our work properly.

**MD:** I wonder whether that links in a way to some of the original theory production, because if we look at something like *Totem and Taboo*, it draws on “armchair anthropology”, and not something that clearly reflected these communities' experience. You can see how you might translate that way of “peering at” and that that gives you some insight, not that you might need to interrogate what that means and what impact such an approach has on formulating theory production.

**“On most topics we are thoughtful, creative and curious, yet as far as racism is concerned we still encounter responses such as “some of my best friends are black...””**

**HM:** I look back to my training and I still feel quite shocked that I didn't question the whole idea of the “primitive” and the “primal horde” as described in *Totem and Taboo* (and Jung's writings on race are even worse). It just seemed to confirm a way of thinking about the individual psyche and its development. Where was my curiosity then? It was certainly there about women, but it's not easy to be curious when what is being said confirms you are superior.

**FD:** I'm not surprised to hear that Helen. Those papers are beautiful and Freud's argument persuasive. They are not actually about prejudice against black people but instead describe how certain features of the mind came to be universal. “Primitive” mostly refers to

what happened eons ago, in our common human ancestry, and this pulls us all in. I read these papers in my third year at university in *apartheid* South Africa when, alongside my fascination, I was also sensitised to white authorities slipping in notions of white superiority. So when first Freud mentions “primitive” tribes, I spotted immediately the shift from “our common ancestors eons ago” to our fellow citizens in another part of the world, who are now being seen as less civilised without any evidence for such a position. My gut response was, “He's talking about us, people from not-Europe”. And I was so disgusted and shocked that I turned away from psychoanalysis as I had no room for a discourse infused by white racism masquerading as science. Many persons of colour report the same response to these texts. Of course it can't affect you, Helen, in that way – why would you have that gut reaction?

**MD:** But there are writers that do draw our attention to it. Outside of the main course of our discipline, there have always been writers – Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Christine Sharpe, Achille Mbembe, to name a few. And that is why it is so important to have a broad theory base. There are bits of psychoanalytic theory production that draws on literature, but it is seen as mainstream literature, for instance the Oedipus complex drawn from Sophocles. This is in contrast to non-mainstream literature, the value is questioned because it is seen as not being on the same platform.

**FD:** When our colleagues read those authors I think they are doing “literature”. This operates in a different category and is not connected up with the task of equipping ourselves to become better clinicians in a multi-cultural context. It is inconceivable to me that one could be equipped to become a psychoanalytic clinician in a multi-ethnic society without finding one's way through these issues. But the mainstream assumes this is not necessary because deep down, beneath the skin, “we're all human”, “all the same” and this common humanity is the focus of our work. Such

PPNow 2022

# The Question of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Institutional Racism

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2022

## Discussion following the Panel at the PPNOW Conference November 2022

are the defences that place the race dimension beyond our conversation: “It is superficial; we go deeper”; “It’s political, not psychological”; “It is interpersonal; we focus on the intrapsychic”. These all militate against taking racial difference and racism seriously.

**“It is inconceivable to me that one could be equipped to become a psychoanalytic clinician in a multi-ethnic society without finding one’s way through these issues”**

**MD:** I do not think we should stamp on the curiosity and the developmental work that is there, because I know colleagues who are curious and who are doing work, so I would not want to come across as negating that. We have an approach that recognises that things are conflictual. So that conflict I think is important to acknowledge, as well as the work that is happening to interrogate it. I want to hang onto Eros and not just be subsumed with Thanatos. Whilst recognising the seriousness of this endeavour.

**FD:** What you say is true. But there is also a mainstream orthodoxy that is very,

very conservative. It doesn’t actively oppose change – change just simply doesn’t happen; one encounters a sort of inertia. Maybe it is a British way of doing things?

**MD:** Maintaining the status quo is a form of racialisation. It can operate as a kind of oppressive system.

**HM:** I’ve have heard a number of Black trainees say they have no place to take their concerns about race and racism, because what they meet in their analysis and in their supervision, is that there is no problem: “We’re about the inner world, not race.” Then they become pathologized as having a problem because they raise the topic themselves. I am concerned that a gap is now growing between the younger trainees, who’ve got a different mindset about these issues on the whole, and their senior trainers, their supervisors and analysts.

**“I am concerned that a gap is now growing between the younger trainees, who’ve got a different mindset about these issues on the whole, and their senior trainers, their supervisors and analysts”**

**FD:** The survey currently being conducted in the US by the Holmes Commission is finding that younger analysts are more impatient for change, and more critical of the small steps that are being taken to address the problem of societal racism and how they may manifest in our psychoanalytic world. For instance, in response to the murder of George Floyd many psychoanalytic institutes put on lectures – sometimes series of lectures and seminars – on the topic, but then interest fizzles out. Younger trainees and qualified analysts are impatient with such responses to so ingrained and persistent a problem and are beginning to insist that this doesn’t take the problem seriously enough and more must be done.

For me the most depressing thing is how much remains to be done. When we start off shining a light on these things there is hope that our hard work may make it easier for the next generation, both black and white, who are affected in different ways. And then when you realise how big the task is and how little inroads have been made, you realise that the next generation are probably going to face the same struggles. That is a most depressing realisation.

**MD:** I think with each generation there is a pushing something forward, there is an opposition to the kind of “colouring within the designated lines”, instead there is a striving for change.

**HM:** I agree with that, but I also think that then brings backlash. And I think that’s why those who see themselves on the liberal end of the spectrum can’t afford not to do the work.

**FD:** There was a very interesting experience of a backlash within the Holmes Commission itself, alerted us to its inevitability. Working with this was therefore a very important part of the learning, namely that it is impossible to create an enclave where one is immune to a backlash. Working towards understanding what was going on, without avoiding the heat generated, opened up enormous pain and consequent rage, which had to be contained in order to keep the project on track. So maybe that’s a very important point, since I think we don’t appreciate how inevitable these backlashes are, yet that it is possible to navigate them rather than retreat from the whole project in fear.

*Fakhry Davids is a Fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society and current Chair of its Scientific Committee. He is an experienced Training Analyst (Institute of Psychoanalysis) and lectures, teaches and supervises widely. He is author of Internal Racism: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Race and Difference (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).*

*Maxine Dennis is a Psychoanalyst (a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society) and Clinical Psychologist who is involved in teaching and training in the UK and abroad.*

*Helen Morgan is a Fellow of the British Psychotherapy Foundation and is a training analyst and supervisor for the Jungian Analytic Association within the BPF. Her book, ‘The Work of Whiteness. A Psychoanalytic Perspective’ was published in 2021 by Routledge.*

### Do you need a proofreader specialising in psychoanalytic writing?

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PPNow 2022

# Romalyn Ante: Antiemetic for Homesickness

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2022



## The Making of a Smuggler

Wherever we travel, we carry  
the whole country with us –

our rice terraces are folded garments,  
we have pillars of trees, a rainforest

on a hairbrush. We dig *alimasag* crabs  
out of sand and use them as tabs

to zip our bags. We immigrants  
are experts in packing. It's in our genes.

If the Border Officer stops us,  
let him dive into our belongings

Like a man trying to fish in an ocean  
ruled by sharp corals, stinging anemones.

Let the smell of old socks swirl up like bats.  
He can squeeze the yellow packet harder

And not know it is pig's blood. He won't  
hear the squeal as he chucks it aside –

He wasn't there, mud-soaked in a pen,  
chasing after the erratic swine.

The officer might ask, *No sauce?*  
*No chicken feet?* with a broken accent

As if it would be easier for us to understand  
but he can't smell my hands, see the sediments

Under my nails – fermented fish and all  
we dip in it. He can't cup his ear

With my palm and hear the surfs  
of Siargao beach. He can't follow me

Through the gate, even with his gaze.  
He'll miss the gleam of a red quill

in my lug sole, as when he didn't hear  
my uncle's knife grind back and forth

on a whetstone, or how he slit the neck  
of my rooster to teach my about survival.

The officer did not feel the pot  
of hot water getting lighter

when I poured it over the carcass.  
He wasn't there, at that moment –

where I ripped out the feathers  
I once used to caress.

## Names

*'We are nameless, and all our names are ours.'*  
- EMMANUEL LACABA

My mother's name is Rosana, but when she left,  
I had other mothers. Rowena, Jimboy, Alma.

I was named after  
the first syllables of my parents;  
I will always have them with me.

My mother says not all names have meaning –  
Riverside. Manila. London. Kurba.

And someday I will forget  
all the commands I did not heed –  
like the time I did not spin the plate clockwise  
before my father left for work  
even if it would deliver him from accidents.

Not all destinations are found  
in the junctions of your palm lines.  
Say better life, say better life.

And God knows I am repenting.

Say airbus-something, say one-way ticket,  
keep following the sunset. Clouds  
are the closest things to my mother.

Say United Kingdom, say queen, NHS.  
Does winter always mean – ?

Listen – can you hear it? The loneliness  
of stretchers along A&E corridors.

And the strongest part of me  
is the scar I hide underneath my fringe.

My mother  
hides in the staff toilet  
to make long-distance calls.

Someday I will realise  
the woman lonely in her mansion  
is not my mother  
but a future version of myself.  
I will chop bitter gourds  
on the galaxy-glimmer  
of her worktop.

*Shall we shorten your name on your nametag  
so it's easier to remember?* Say Yes please, sister.

Say Please, Sister, can I take this call?

Say Arnold, Marcus, Harold. Say septicaemia, alcohol  
poisoning, hernia.

Say Jason, Darius, Vernon. Say cancer, myocardial  
infarction, query schizophrenia.

Hides in the toilet.

And I have the first syllables  
of my parents' names,  
that is why I am not scared.

A boy sticks out his tongue  
and says I do not have a mother.

I punch him in the face. The sanctity of blood.

I am not scared.

Because my mother has followed the sunset,  
because she has burnt her lips on mash and gravy  
in a three-minute lunch break.

Because she calls me *Anak* – my child, my baby.  
She asks, What do you want for Christmas? for your  
birthday?

1990 remains stuck on the other line.  
Say Please, Sister, can I take this call?

My breasts blossom,  
she can call me only by my name.

I have the first syllables of my parents' names,  
that is why I am not scared.

I can trek the mountain of Makulot,  
my father's rifle hanging from my back.

I can carry myself  
not how someone carries  
a cytotoxic drug  
but how my mother hooks  
with her finger, a drain bottle  
with blood clots the weights  
of gemstones.

## Notes Inside a Balikbayan Box

Dear son,  
In my place, here is a Balikbayan box.  
Here are the LeBron James rubber shoes (size 9)  
and the video game tapes to replace all the palm cakes  
I owe you for every *Simbang Gabi* and PTA meeting  
I could not attend. I promise I'll be there for Christmas.  
I know I've been saying this for a decade now.

Find the E45 cream for your grandma's tissue-dry skin,  
a stack of incontinence pads and tubes of barrier balm.  
Between you and me: every time I roll old people  
onto their sides and lift their knees to their chests  
for suppositories, I ask myself, *Who does this for her?*

Tell Tita to leave her husband. Her school *sweetheart*  
whose mistresses are *mah-jong* and *sabong*. Tell her  
not to bear the stink of his armpits. In the box  
find the Gucci Bloom perfume and scar creams. Tell her  
I haven't forgotten our vows when we were young  
and our fingers smelled of *li hing mui* candies.  
Our *Walang Iwanan* oath to never leave each other.

Dear son,  
In my place, here is a Balikbayan Box.  
Rip all the packaging tape – every gift inside is yours.  
Work your hands hard until there's nothing left.  
Learn that to survive we must have strong arms.  
To carry a tray full of medicine and not let one  
drop, to push a hyperventilating woman (with speed  
and care) to the Maternity Wing, to lift and sit  
a skin-and-bone man down on his chemo chair,  
to gauge the weight of a rose before you lay it  
onto a coffin. Take this box inside our house –  
that is all I ask you to carry, for now, my son.



PPNow 2022

# PPNow Award Winners

**PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2022**

## Innovative Excellence - 10 Windsor Walk



### 10 Windsor Walk

*This award celebrates a striking example of ground-breaking work. The innovative nature of the work can be in terms of clinical practice, research, or socially inclusive practice, such as working with sections of the community who may traditionally find access to therapeutic treatment difficult.*

10WW was founded in 2018 by a small group of psychoanalysts who witnessed a concerning reduction in long term mental health treatment in the NHS. The key aim of 10WW is to provide low-to-no cost mental health support and awareness for the most vulnerable and isolated people in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark in South London. 10WW is located in a Georgian townhouse renovated into consulting rooms and a space for seminars, groups, and events. Between October 2018 and March 2020 (when Covid 19 restrictions began), 10W reached around 500 people in local and psychoanalytic communities through cultural events, talks and therapeutic support.

One example of 10WW's outreach work is the Therapeutic Playgroup for Refugee and Asylum Seeking Families. The playgroup is a unique service that enables the emotional needs of displaced families to be met and builds a community-led support network. It aims to forge a sense of belonging for the members who have experienced profound loss and trauma. It has had a particularly positive impact on local parents and children living through the tumultuous experience of seeking asylum.

## Outstanding Professional Leadership - Fiona Ballentine Dykes



*This award recognises an individual in a position of leadership who has developed their role to make a significant and outstanding contribution to*

*developing the position and/or influence of psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychotherapy in the wider world.*

This nomination is in recognition of Fiona's expert and excellent leadership as Chair of the SCoPEd technical group, and as part of other groups who have been working for years to agree core competencies and training standards across the psychotherapy and counselling profession. Fiona has shown outstanding leadership in this role. Its success and the collegiate collaboration which has enabled it to progress is in large part thanks to Fiona's care and skill as chair. In particular, she has facilitated and supported the central inclusion of the BPC psychoanalytic voice. Although Fiona is not BPC Registrant, she identifies her clinical work as incorporating psychoanalytic ideas, and can be counted as part of the wider psychoanalytic community.

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## Bernard Ratigan Award for Psychoanalysis and Diversity - Julian Harrison



*This award applauds an individual or organisation that has significantly improved and/or developed inclusivity in matters of diversity such as ethnicity,*

*sexual orientation, class, disability etc. in psychoanalytic practice and/or therapeutic treatment.*

Julian is an Expert by Experience on the SCoPEd project. He is an equality and diversity consultant and gives his time voluntarily to the project to make sure that issues of equality and diversity are integrated into every aspect of competencies and training standards. Julian is part of the wider psychoanalytic community, having derived much benefit from personal psychoanalytic work and being a positive supporter of the BPC perspective in SCoPEd.

## Diversity in Training - Jay Barlow

*This award focuses on training and supervision that gives substantive and considered attention to thinking about diversity (in its broad definition to include race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender etc). This may include, for example, novel curriculum developments, projects to address inclusivity in supervision and training, programmes that address barriers to accessing training.*

Jay Barlow is a Supervising Analyst at the Society of Analytical Psychology (SAP) and is the Society's Director of Training. Jay has developed a rich and expansive EDI programme that runs throughout the core of all SAP's professional training.

Jay's EDI programme has had a profound impact on the work of the SAP and has helped drive forward their commitment to working towards a more inclusive and diverse approach to psychoanalytic thinking and training and, indeed, the recruitment into our training, education and CPD programmes.

By introducing a challenging and innovative EDI programme, with influential and stellar speakers, he has set a very high and inspirational bar for those wishing to offer the very best standard of professional practice within the psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic community.

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## Misogyny and Psychoanalysis

# What Misogyny?

**Michaela Chamberlain**

The beginning of 2023 saw an outpouring of horror, disgust and amongst other things a concretizing of fear as the extent of misogyny in UK's London Metropolitan Police force (known as the Met) became clear. The details of serving police officer John Carrick's violent sexual crimes against women became public. Sadly, the misogyny was not new but having such a back catalogue of evidence of a culture that permitted such hatred against women was. His case added to the outrage caused by the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by Met police officer Wayne Couzens and the Met officers sharing of photos of the dead bodies of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallwood. Carrick felt like a final confirming exposé of the institutionalised misogyny in the force that serves the paternal function of Law and Order in society.

After years of women voicing their distress and anger with the police at poor treatment following reporting incidents of sexual abuse, rape and domestic violence, the guilty verdicts for each of these police officers felt like an admission that women have indeed been gaslit by the institution whose primary function was to ensure protection, fairness and justice. The misogyny was so institutionalised that there was not even felt to be a need to question if the institution was being misogynistic, misogyny was the only viewpoint.

**“felt like an admission that women have indeed been gaslit by the institution whose primary function was to ensure protection, fairness and justice”**

Carrick's case violently highlighted the extremes of the continuum of institutionalised misogyny when it is left unchecked and becomes the “norm”. There is however the other end of the continuum, where the “norm” is the more mundane, subtle and insidious misogyny of everyday life. The end which is perhaps much more pertinent to all institutions.

Sixty years after the founding of the Met police, another institution with a patriarch at its head with a desire to protect and defend, in this case psychoanalysis, was

being formed by Freud. For Freud it was “inconsequential” if women were involved or not, but women were involved from the early days of psychoanalysis. But it would be misleading to presume that the presence of women meant that there was a true presence of female experience or that that experience was given equal weighting – Freud by his own admission did not have as much of an understanding of women as he did of men, but he brushed that to one side to push his theories forward. The main problem with this strategy was that he also sidelined or indeed banished the women who could have given female subjectivity equal weighting and enrich his theories. Margarete Hilferding, the first woman admitted into the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, in 1911 presented her first and only paper speaking about women not just as caregivers but also sexual beings and spoke of the physical impact of childbirth to Freud's group, but this was discarded with little if no consideration. Karen Horney directly challenged Freud on his view of female development and was dismissed from the Psychoanalytic Institute in New York. Instead, Freud firmly enshrined a male psychoanalytic gaze and a privileging of male experience.

Terhaar argues that psychoanalysis is “founded on a view of human nature that is masculine” and that “psychoanalytic theories have espoused white, heterosexual, male experience, without it being recognised as a particular perspective” (2020, p502).

With the backdrop of growing awareness of misogyny, it is curious that psychoanalysis has not put itself on the couch to question its own unconscious misogyny. Despite the variety and multitude of conferences, seminars and training courses offered within the psychoanalytic field, there is a notable absence of those addressing misogyny. It felt ground-breaking that a psychoanalytic conference was held in London last year entitled *The Roots of Misogyny*, yet the conference addressed misogyny in society, not psychoanalysis. Perhaps what is needed is one to examine the long reaching branches that extend into psychoanalytic practice, one where the reality of women's lived experience is not foregrounded, but has a history of being pathologized, and that this can be acknowledged.

As a cis gendered woman, I am acutely aware of the fear spikes in myself and other women I talk to following coverage of cases such as Carrick's; the cracking and disintegration of the foundations of the given patriarchal authority



become palpable and I reflect on the authority figures and history of my own professional institution. I am also aware of the multiplicity of layers that these cases evoke for all people, especially those identifying as men and the sense of precarity, fragility and guilt that bubbles up when givens of authority are taken away and internalised misogyny has a light shone on it. I also become aware of my own internalised misogyny and prejudices about women, the misogynistic thoughts, responses, attitudes that I have unconsciously absorbed through the culture I live in. I wonder how much internalised misogyny has impacted on the members of the psychoanalytic community and been enacted through the history the predominance of men being appointed to senior positions. I think about what it means for me to work therapeutically, what it means for me as a woman to receive a referral from a man I have never met before and am now meeting by myself in a consulting room.

In some ways it is not the headline grabbing misogyny that needs to be attended to, though it should. The priority should be the much more pernicious impact of misogyny being left unchallenged in dark corners – especially in psychoanalysis, where women's everyday lived experiences are not discussed as a fundamental part of training courses. I wonder how many psychoanalytic trainings actively discuss basic physical changes such as menarche, menstruation, menopause that are stereotypical features of female development. I wonder how much these developments are understood/ misunderstood even further for those experiencing these stereotypical features of female development but who do not identify as female. This becomes even

more relevant when recent research has linked early breast development in teenage girls with increased anxiety and depression due to sexual harassment. It is not so much that there should be a sort of checklist of what needs to be included when a person identifying as a woman is in therapy, it is that the absence of thought about even basic differences between male and female identities are ignored. This act perpetuates the male gaze so that in therapy, women are again retraumatized by being seen as an object in the one space where their subjectivity should be fully seen. Equally for women studying psychoanalysis, unless attention is given to the previous traumas inflicted by the male gaze in psychoanalytic theory and practice, the repetition of these theories retraumatize and implicitly remind women of what is being foregrounded, thereby diminishing female subjectivity.

Thankfully we do not see the misogynistic extremes in Psychoanalytic Organisations as those in the Met, but we should not mistake that for an absence of need for concern about the corrosive, traumatising damage of the more nuanced, pervasive currents of misogyny.

*Michaela Chamberlain is an Attachment Based Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist, Training Therapist, Supervisor and lecturer. She is a former Chair of The Bowlby Centre, where she taught the Freud seminars for several years. She is currently researching the enigmatic signifier of gendered blood in psychoanalytic writing and Live Art at Roehampton University. Her book Misogyny in Psychoanalysis (Phoenix, London) was published last year.*

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## Social Media

# Social Media and the Deadly Drive of Negative Narcissism: The Case of Andrew Tate

Jacob Johanssen and Steffen Krüger

**A** long scholarly tradition, dating back to the 1960s, has been exploring media forms psychoanalytically: from film and television to social media, videogames and artificial intelligence. In our recently published book *Media and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Introduction* (Karnac, 2022), we provide an overview of this growing field of psychoanalytic media studies, introducing key traditions and concepts as well as important developments of the past decades. Here we briefly unpack a recent media event to illustrate key aspects of our argument.

In December 2022, the influencer and social media personality Andrew Tate addressed the climate activist Greta Thunberg in a tweet:

Hello @GretaThunberg  
I have 33 cars.  
My Bugatti has a w16 8.0L quad turbo.  
My TWO Ferrari 812 competizione have 6.5L v12s.  
This is just the start.  
Please provide your email address so I can send a complete list of my car collection and their respective enormous emissions.

The tweet came with a photo of Tate next to an orange Bugatti, looking very seriously at the camera. Thunberg replied: “yes, please do enlighten me. email me at [smalldickenergy@getalife.com](mailto:smalldickenergy@getalife.com).”

Triggering a typical dynamic between “new” and “old” media, this exchange made it from Twitter into traditional newspapers so that many readers there learned for the first time about Tate – although, as the papers informed them, he had been notorious for his misogyny and violence against women for some years. Among other ventures, Tate has run the website “Hustler University”, where he promises young men to become instructed by “a select network of experts in freelancing, crypto, investing, and business.” With an aggregate of more than 11 billion clicks on social media services, kids and teenagers know him; their parents had often never heard of him at all.

The story moved quickly from there. Tate posted another tweet to Thunberg, accompanied by a video with him in an expensive dressing gown, smoking a big cigar – only to be arrested by police in Romania shortly afterwards for allegedly running a human trafficking ring. A box from a Romanian pizza chain, visible in Tate’s video, was thought to have given away his location to the authorities. “[T]

his is what happens when you don’t recycle your pizza boxes,” Thunberg tweeted after the arrest was made public. And while it turned out that it had not been the pizza box after all – Tate had been under tight surveillance since April already – the whole saga had by then “gone viral”, as the saying goes.

In its virality, this saga is symptomatic of many of the (psycho)dynamics that we discuss in our book: widespread trolling, sexism, misogyny, and hatred online, performances of a masculinity that aim at being toxic, as well as questions of authority and punishment in relation to others which always remain chimera-like. Furthermore, the exchange between Thunberg and Tate epitomises the question to what extent any media use and representation leads to *recognition or objectification*.

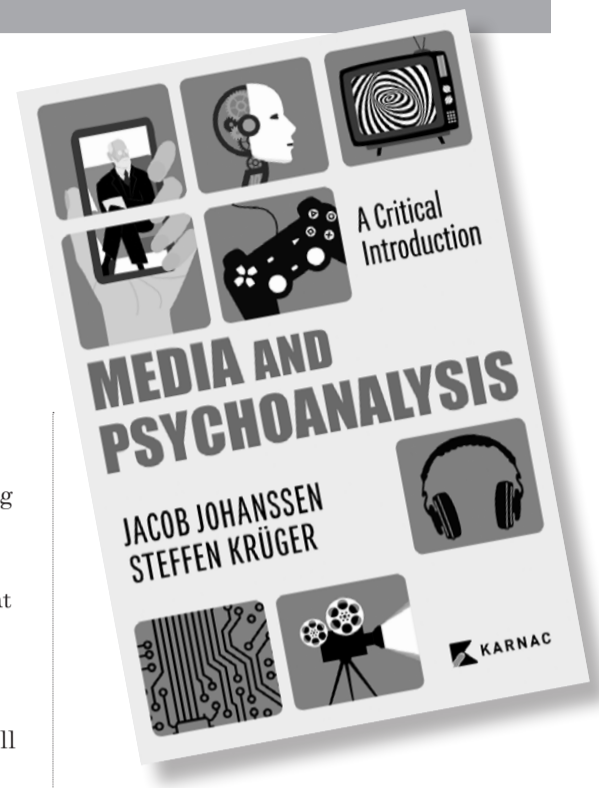
In her reworking of intersubjective psychodynamics beyond the Oedipus complex, Jessica Benjamin (2018) foregrounds the notion of recognition as a foundational moment of a relational ethics between baby and caregiver(s). Beyond physical forms of nurture, caregivers provide recognition that their infants need and desire and also return. Benjamin emphasises that this recognition is not fusion, but an acknowledgment of the similarities and differences between subjects that ideally remains in place throughout life. In stark contrast to this ethical ideal, Tate champions a regressive return to “doer and done to” as Benjamin would call it: a demand for recognition grounded in the need for total submission of the woman to the man. Only if this is given to Tate will he “reward” this sadistic kind of recognition by allowing the woman to be by his side and accepting her as his companion.

Tate’s excessive performances of phallic masculinity are thus symptomatic of a desire for acknowledgment that has taken on a negative narcissistic form, and, worryingly, it is this very negativity that is central to his appeal, especially for young men who feel inadequate or left behind. André Green’s notion of “death narcissism” allows us to unpack this further. Green describes it as “a culture of void, emptiness, self-contempt, destructive withdrawal, and permanent self-depreciation with a predominant masochistic quality: tears, tears, tears” (2002, p. 645). Accordingly, Tate’s media performances must be seen as manic defences against this masochistic core, with Thunberg’s response of “smalldickenergy@getalife.

com” pointing right at the heart of the matter. And indeed, it is this challenge of “getting a life,” at which many young men frequently fail, that makes Tate’s intense fantasies of domination and total power over women attractive. What they anticipate in unconscious form is not the success of this “shtick,” but for the collusive couple to ultimately and dramatically blow up and perish in a ball of fire.

Along the lines of a fetishist structure, Tate *knows-and-yet-doesn’t-know* that his desires are outdated and unsustainable and are thus pleasures-toward-death. This makes his gaze, which is likewise viciously male, so dangerous. Not only does it objectify women and deny them any proper recognition, but it also tacitly tells them that any liaison with him and his kind will unlock a deadly sadistic dimension. “You have to understand that once you’re mine, you’ll be mine for ever,” he reportedly wrote to a woman who would enter into a relationship with him, “A woman never leaves her man. I will be the last man in your life.”

This sexualised thanatotic orientation, this erotic alliance with death, so widespread in markedly male spaces online, makes Tate, like many similar figures, feverishly admired and passionately hated. The paranoid-schizoid ways in which not only his fans, but also those resisting him tend to interact with him, pushes all of us toward states of splitting, and this includes the authors of this text, too. As much as the two of us admire Thunberg’s shattering of Tate’s phallic fantasy, this admiration, if left unchecked, inevitably feeds into an ongoing, repetition-compulsive tribalisation in which all that is bad is disowned and projected elsewhere. Worse still, Tate already fashions himself as such a projective foil; Thunberg is only one prominent person who, in our stead, is invited to “seal this deal.” And whereas digital platforms, by helping people embrace such forms



of splitting, are merely part of the social, political, and economic problems underlying this trend toward losing “the other,” the responsibility for facilitating less paranoid ways of reengaging with them also lies with them.

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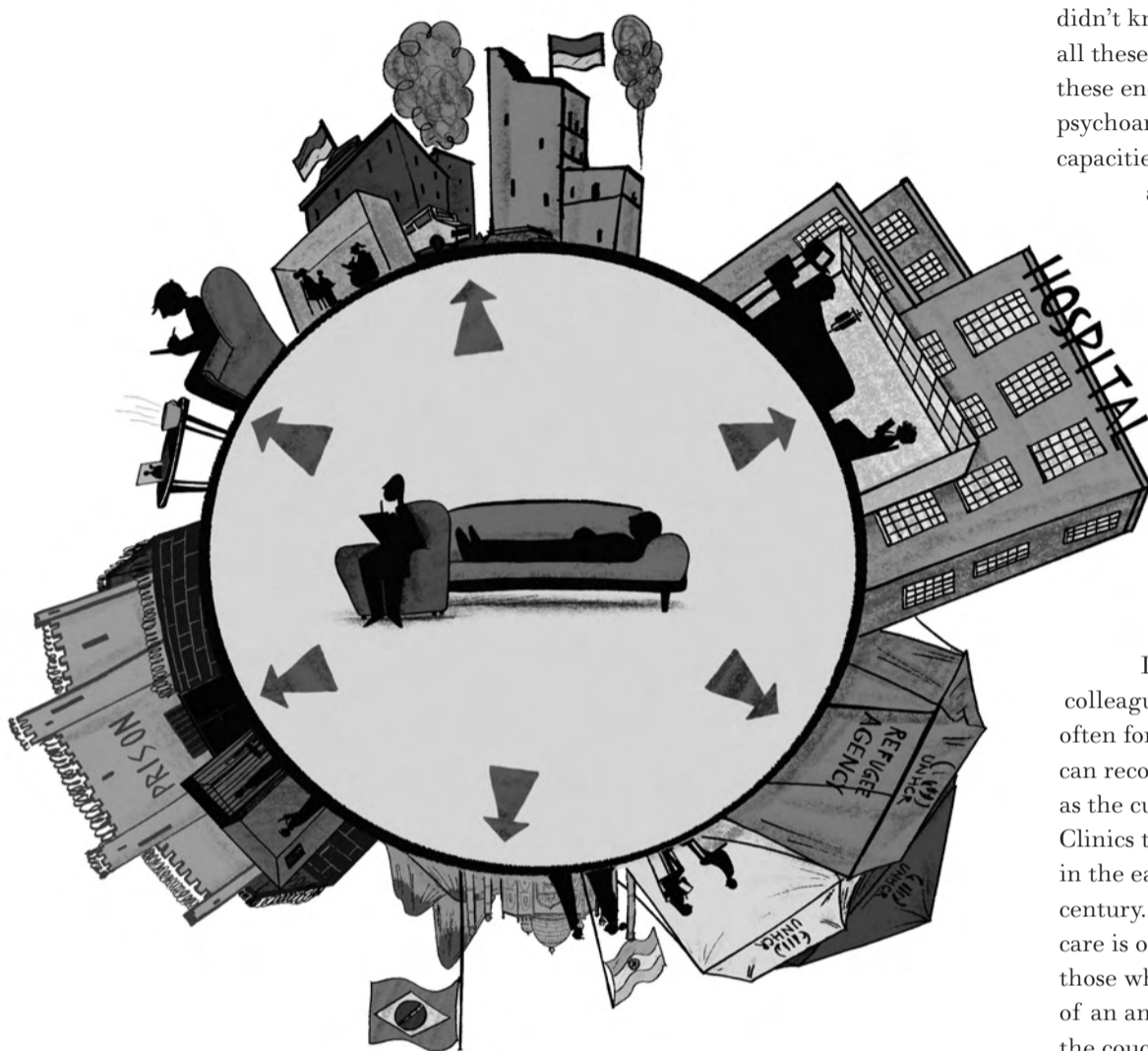
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## On the Ground

# Psychoanalysis On and Off the Couch

Harvey Schwartz



The International Psychoanalytical Association podcast, *Psychoanalysis On and Off the Couch*, introduces us to colleagues worldwide who bring their analytic skills to venues outside their consulting rooms. It began in April 2019 and was designed to bring the world's attention to the many therapeutic involvements that our colleagues have outside the consulting room, now characterised as “off the couch”. We meet analysts who work in hospitals and

refugee centres, prisons and orphanages. We learn from those who run dialysis units, work with police departments and utilise psychedelics in treatment. We hear from others who work with teachers in underserved classrooms as well as with business leaders in board rooms. The spirit of this work is to locate the essence of the dynamic understanding of the mind and allow it to inform engagements that are other than traditionally therapeutic.

In reaction to these conversations, I often hear from colleagues and candidates: “I

didn't know that analysts worked in all these areas”. The message from these encounters is how versatile psychoanalytic skills are. Analytic capacities are essential on the couch and equally vital off the couch. These conversations serve as career counselling for those considering psychoanalytic training. They demonstrate that in addition to the depths that such analytic attitudes enable in the consulting room, they also offer unique benefits to those seen in non-traditional settings.

In meeting with these colleagues who have been working often for decades beneath the radar, we can recognise that they are functioning as the current day version of the Free Clinics that were common in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century. As before, psychoanalytic care is once again being provided to those who would never see the inside of an analyst's office. In all these “off the couch” settings, psychoanalytic listening is reaching large numbers of struggling individuals and families.

## “I didn't know that analysts worked in all these areas”

There has been a need to discover and build theory about those aspects of this “outside the office” work that are essentially psychoanalytic. This would enable us to codify this version of our skillset and put it into teachable form. Towards that end there is currently a curriculum in Community Psychoanalysis that has been organised using the expertise of our colleagues as revealed in their podcast conversations. These analysts carry the oral tradition of this work and represent the basic science of “off the couch” psychoanalysis.

In addition to these conversations, during the pandemic we reached out to colleagues worldwide to learn and to share how each of our IPA communities were coping with this crisis. We spoke with analysts in India, South Africa, Poland, Israel, Iran, Portugal, Brazil, to name just a few. We encountered both similarities and uniquenesses in how we all managed the transition to online care and our encounter with the symmetry of shared danger. I have also had conversations with

analysts in Iran as well as Ukraine who are facing the violence surrounding them.

We learn as well from psychoanalytic “elders” who enlighten us with their perspectives on this moment in history, as well as their long view of our profession's evolution. I have been moved by the feedback I have received about these conversations. It has been a privilege for me to meet so many fine analysts from around the world. I count many now as friends. I have also learned from considering the question, “What is it that we as analysts uniquely bring to these ‘off the couch’ settings?” Some respond with, “We listen differently.” Some say, “We can tolerate strong affects.” Others focus on our ability to identify projections and engage with attentive empathy. It is a question for us all – what it is about our internal analytic frame that enables us to engage with and contribute to these atypical venues?

In closing, I would like to share a bittersweet piece of feedback that was sent to me. I have been told by many that they feel that bringing attention to these activities has “humanized psychoanalysis”. On the one hand, I am pleased that this is a takeaway from this project. These conversations do in fact demonstrate our capacity to listen in the language of the speaker. However, I was chagrined to learn from this that for many, our core work on the couch is not being appreciated for the deeply humanitarian endeavour that it is. After all, to analytically facilitate an individual coming to know themselves with profound authenticity is as human a dedication as there is. Let us together recognise all that we have to offer. Let us together let the world know how committed we are to deepening the human experience, both on and off the couch.

*Harvey Schwartz MD is a Training and Supervising Analyst in the Psychoanalytic Association of New York and Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia. He is co-chair of the IPA in Health committee. His two most recent edited books are The Jewish Thought and Psychoanalysis Lectures and Applying Psychoanalysis to Medical Care. He is the host of the International Psychoanalytical Association podcast, Psychoanalysis On and Off the Couch' (<http://ipaoffthecouch.org/>), and for a general audience, 'The Mind, Body and Soul in Healing' podcast (<https://harveyschwartzmd.com/>). Email [HarveySchwartz@comcast.net](mailto:HarveySchwartz@comcast.net)*

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## Play

# Defended states of play: What the toy story teaches us about inclusion in the digital age

**Karen Cross**

**S**peaking of play as involving defence may appear somewhat strange, for play is associated with all that is thought to be life-giving and good. “Good” in the sense of giving the freedom to create according to one’s own sense of the world. Play suggests an authentic and healthful relationship to life.

As readers here know, play also forms a crucial component of the therapeutic encounter, with Winnicott having described psychoanalysis as having developed as “a highly specialised form of play” (1971, p. 41).

Although it was not treated as a significant topic by Freud, play makes appearances at important turning points in his thinking (Lenormand, 2019). For instance, observations made in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of the child’s use of the cotton reel permitted a new understanding of destructive thoughts in the anxiety situation.

Leading on from this is Melanie Klein’s understanding of (pre-)oedipal life that reveals how play offers an outlet for the performances of certain defences, including splitting, idealised unconscious states, and blocks to mourning and loss, resulting in a “denial of psychic reality” (1935, p. 262).

**“play offers an outlet for the performances of certain defences”**

Later still is the connection that Winnicott makes between play and culture through the notion of an “inherited tradition” (1971, p. 99). Culture, he thinks, is to be defined as “something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*”.

The latter part of this statement (italicised by him for emphasis) is indicative of Winnicott’s thinking about the opportunities for psychoanalysis to make a meaningful contribution to society. Play is above all about the shaping of the environment that sustains and supports the internal world. Having

“somewhere” to “put” things (not necessarily what we are given, rather that which we “find”) evokes the idea of a container for ideas and concepts.

Thoughts may not always be positive, and the receptacle may need to be able to bear potentially destructive content. It is the safety and survival of the holding object that is vital here, and it is then on these grounds we may wish to cultivate, if not defend, play. But what visions of play are currently permitted in our culture? What visions of play can be screened?

As I discuss in my book, *Toy Story and the Inner World of the Child*, there is now an inherited tradition of the toy story that reveals the importance of the unconscious in culture. Toy stories often depict the narratives that preoccupy children in their play that, in turn, relate to the fears and anxieties of a society processing cultural and technological change.

Adaptations of the toy story across children’s literature through to the arrival of film and cinema tell us much about the potency of psychoanalysis within visual media and how the inner world of the child and children’s play becomes an important focal point for technological experimentation.

Very early on in the history of cinema, toys and other play technologies were used to animate that which may otherwise remain the stuff of dreams (e.g. Melbourne Cooper’s 1908 *Dreams of Toyland*). Here, the child at play allowed for the mediation of the anxieties harboured within the modern psyche, including the fears of an increasingly technologised world.

It is no coincidence that the toy story reappears at crucial turning points in the history of technological advancement. Making a distinction between being creative and the act of making an artwork, as Winnicott does, we can also delineate the possibilities available in any given cultural moment.

The differences between using toys to create pure illusion as we see in early cinema are to be distinguished from Pixar’s later more overt depictions of the unconscious phantasy of the child in the films of *Toy Story*. In this context, the toy story has evolved in line with post-modernity’s subversion of modernist tropes and the unravelling of archetypes

suggesting new creative possibilities are afoot within digital culture.

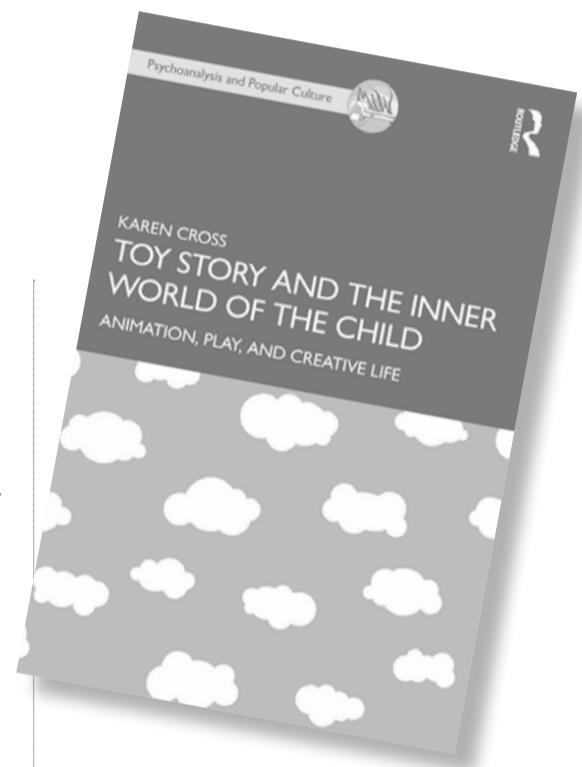
However, challenging questions remain about the very way in which epitaphs to the past—the cowboy and the space ranger—are permitted to remain in view. It has been suggested that Pixar’s *Toy Story* still favours outdated masculine forms of identification. Destructive phantasies on display also suggest the defended nature of the playroom and the border work leading to the evacuating “bad” objects and envious attacks that eventually dissipate to allow for harmony and friendship. There is a persistent and worrying fear of girls’ play here, and feminised objects are feared even when the toys are eventually gifted to the little girl who becomes their charge.

**“There is a persistent and worrying fear of girls’ play here, and feminised objects are feared”**

Loss is prevented in more ways than one. *Toy Story* highlights the problems of modernity and the impending doom of climate catastrophe too. Through its protectionist outlook, it prohibits the loss of tradition by insistently enacting the recuperation of origin stories. It repetitively seeks to return attention to white masculine trauma (now marked by a failure to perform) through its memorialising lens.

Forgotten again are the stories that lay amid the ruins, still waiting to be told, and which cannot find expression in the current frame—for instance, those of the long-lost returned love and the female sheriff who are constantly being absented by old-timer toys. Mourning is constantly being courted but ultimately curtailed in the new toy story, and there is little chance for the new story to emerge.

Just because film and animation focus on psychic processes—projection, illusion, animation, play and creativity—does not mean they do so therapeutically. Further work is needed to invite psychoanalysis into the frame of cultural mediation and



into the lives of individuals, organisations, and institutions that have the power to reshape the cultural environment in ways that might be potentially liberating and productive.

Psychoanalysis might take root within and use media to help create new situations of narrative self-expression and enquiry that move beyond the norms of culture as they currently stand. Doing so may broaden the creative field and make it more inclusive. In this way, the powers of psychoanalysis to keep the focus on the transformative and consciousness-raising nature of media will come to the fore, and new toy stories may, in the future, be brought to light.

*Dr Karen Cross is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Roehampton. She is a founding scholar of the BPC, a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts, and the founder of Healing Media, a research organisation focusing on transformations in the media and technology industries. Her book, Toy Story and the Inner World of the Child: Animation, Play and Creative Life, was published in the Psychoanalysis and Popular Culture series with Routledge in 2023.*

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## Review

# Masquerading as Marilyn

Lorena Muñoz-Alonso

*A bold new biopic about the Hollywood star makes for challenging viewing.*

The sense of anticipation generated by the announcement that filmmaker Andrew Dominik would be adapting *Blonde*, Joyce Carol Oates's acclaimed fictional biography of Marilyn Monroe, was palpable when it first hit the news. Yet, as soon as the film was released by Netflix it attracted a fierce media backlash, with accusations of it promoting an almost sadistic enjoyment of the actor's miseries as well as of betraying her legacy with inaccurate factual details (forgetting that this is a work of fiction, and not a traditional biopic). The strong emotions the film has elicited attest to how the hunger for images of Marilyn remains insatiable 60 years after her death. And based on the hostility with which it was received, there would seem to be only one version of Marilyn, heroic and empowered, which people deem fit for consumption.

**“Blonde does not deliver that more palatable version of the actor, refusing to re-write her as an idealised feminist symbol”**

*Blonde* does not deliver that more palatable version of the actor, refusing to re-write her as an idealised feminist symbol. Instead, it stares into the abyss of Norma Jeane Baker's traumatized life, positing the birth of Marilyn the sexy, sassy icon as a desperate survival strategy that enabled her to cope with an extremely difficult childhood full of neglect. The result is a stunning, artistically daring film that succeeds in being both hypnotic and difficult to watch. Its aesthetically-beguiling veneer — complete with beautiful images, stylish editing, brave central performance by Ana de Armas, and elegiac soundtrack by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis — is seductive, and as viewers we coast easily through its 167 minutes despite the cascade of painful themes that include abuse, loss, addiction and suicide.

**“Norma Jeane is only permitted a quick tantalising peek at her alleged father. But no touching, no closeness and no knowledge are allowed”**

In the film's first scene we see six-year-old Norma Jeane being led by her mother, Gladys Pearl Monroe, towards a birthday surprise. The so-called gift, however, fails to materialise in more ways than one: it consists of allowing the little girl to look at a framed photo hanging over the parental bed of a dashing man her mother identifies as her absent father, whom she's never met. When the child, curious, makes an attempt to touch the frame being presented to her, her mother snatches it away with a stern “no”. Norma Jeane is only permitted a quick tantalising peek at her alleged father. But no touching, no closeness and no knowledge are allowed, setting in motion the Oedipal struggle that will haunt her all through the film. In another excruciating scene, we see her mother — her mind now edging towards disintegration — attempting to drown Norma Jeane in a scalding bath as she accuses her of being the cause of her father abandoning them. “Because no one could love a child so accursed”, says Marilyn's voiceover, as she internalises her mother's distorted logic as her own.

We next see Marilyn the adult bombshell emerging virtually unscathed from a childhood spent in a series of orphanages and foster homes. The film's narrative is structured around the re-enactment of the actor's most iconic images, recreated with extraordinary attention to detail. Her transformation from child to woman is shown with a montage of her early days as a pin-up, posing for magazines and calendars with a warm, ingratiating smile and to the sound of her famous song *Every Baby Needs A Da-Da-Daddy*. Maturity has brought her some reprieve, and a triumph too. While her mother, who had worked in Hollywood studios as a film negative cutter, ends up institutionalised in a psychiatric hospital diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia (“a syndrome

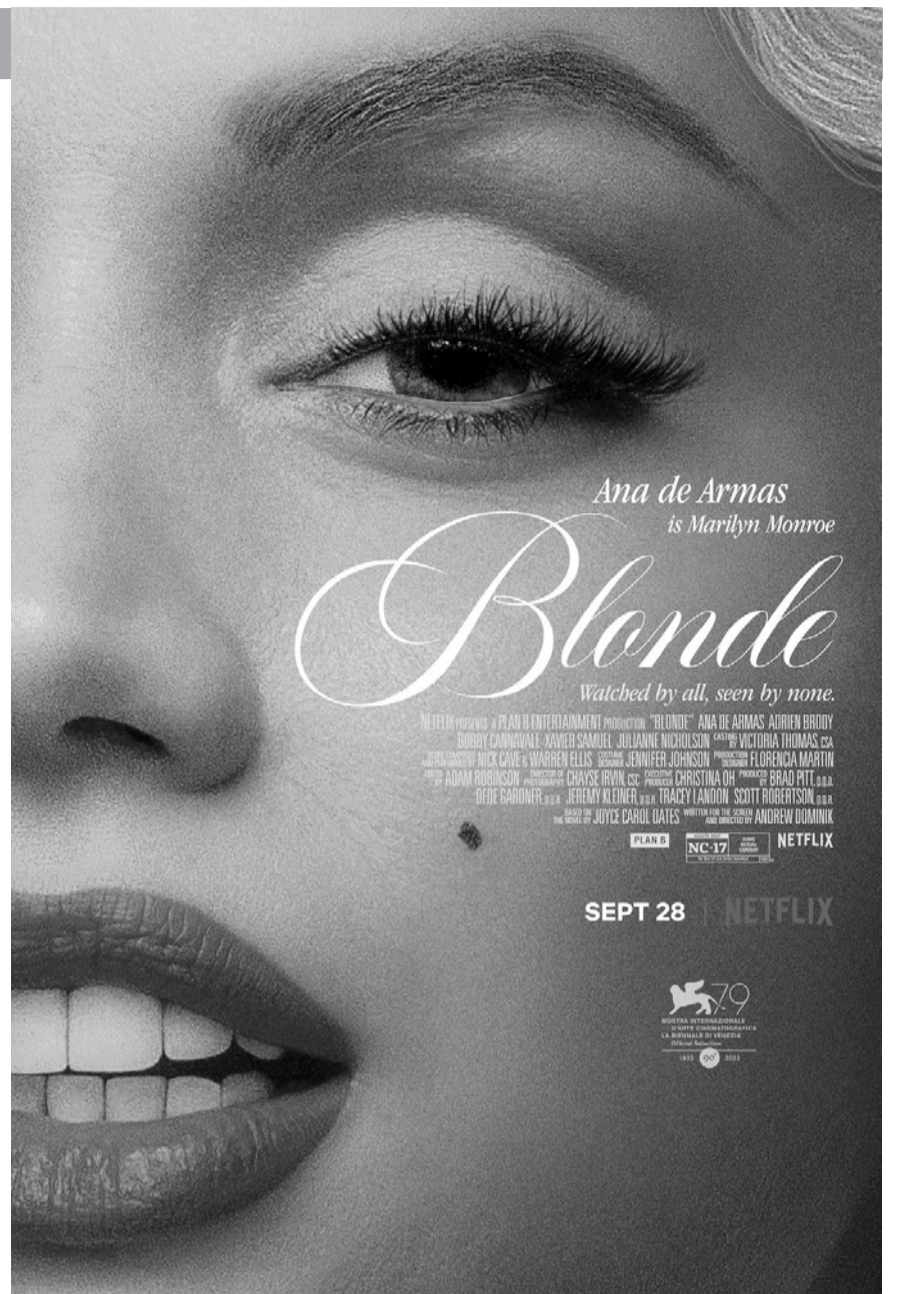
of symptoms” says a doctor, gnomically), Marilyn goes on to achieve film stardom and global fame. But the triumph is fraught, set on fragile psychic ground. This can be seen in some significant decisions she makes, from working in the same industry her mother did, to choosing her mother's maiden name, Monroe, as her artistic moniker — both of these pointing to a pathological identification with her internal mad and unstable mother, with whom she's fated to fight for the attentions of the man that rejected them both.

A string of men walk in and out of Marilyn's life, most notably her two husbands: sportsman Joe DiMaggio and playwright Arthur Miller. They are portrayed as diametrically opposed characters, the former brutish and jealous, the later intellectual and sensitive. But for Marilyn, they both go by the unifying nickname of “daddy”, in what the film depicts as a quite concrete projection, not even tenuously symbolised. Marilyn pouts and baby talks to them while flaunting her beguiling beauty, constantly seeking both reassurance and absolution from these father figures in the kind of manoeuvres described by Joan Riviere in her famous 1929 paper *Womanliness as a Masquerade*. But when she fails to get a baby-as-penis from either of these daddies, either as a result of being forced to have an abortion or due to a tragic miscarriage, Marilyn starts to lose her capacity to deal with the pressures of reality, particularly of her existence as a symbol-for-others.

**“In private, she tells whoever will listen that Marilyn isn't her”**

In private, she tells whoever will listen that Marilyn isn't her. That Marilyn is just a figure on the silver screen she can barely recognise. She is Norma Jeane, still struggling to find a place in the world despite the accolades. This made me start to see this cinematic portrayal of Marilyn in terms of a Winnicottian false self, so successfully constructed that no one was able to see the seams coming apart. Norma Jeane, on the other hand, is the true self, the inner child kept alive, with much difficulty, by the sexy and pleasing carapace. As *Blonde* plunged towards its heart-breaking conclusion in a morass of loneliness and delusion, vividly conjured up by Dominik in a series of hallucinatory scenes and images, I felt the comments rejecting the representation of this Marilyn, falling to pieces rather than endlessly thriving, to be perpetuating in death the lack of containment she experienced in life. By saying we can't, or won't, bear witness to her suffering we continue to demand that she perform our wish-fulfilment fantasies, as opposed to giving her permission to feel and find herself.

*Lorena Muñoz-Alonso is an art critic and a trainee in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy for Adults at the British Psychotherapy Foundation.*



## Review

# Hunger Games

**Rebecca Davies**

*A young girl's fast is the starting point for a film that sensitively examines both her own history and that of nineteenth century Ireland.*

**T**he *Wonder* is just that: an emotionally intense and thematically rich film that tells many stories through its central character, an eleven-year-old girl called Anna. It moved me and thrilled me in equal measure. In writing this review I have tried to not give away any plot details that might spoil your own enjoyment of the film.

Based on Emma Donoghue's novel of the same name and set in the Irish midlands in 1862, just after the Great Famine, *The Wonder* introduces us to Anna who has not eaten for four months and is seemingly well. We learn that on her eleventh birthday she stopped eating and asked her parents not to make her eat. Housed in the attic room of her family's remote cottage Anna is treated with reverence and awe; the miracle of her existence without food has sanctified her. She prays and sleeps and receives visitors. She is regarded as a saint, her life is an act of piety and the mystery of how she stays alive is unquestioned.

The film opens on a modern-day film set – scaffolding, chairs, installations – and returns to it at the end. The narrator leads us to and from the set and also a ship. This theatrical device cleverly frames the tale being told, making it feel both contemporary and historical. I wondered whether this was a buffer against the brutality of the story or a necessary perspective to keep us thinking as well as feeling.

On board the ship is Mrs Elizabeth (Lib) Wright, a British nurse employed by the council of local dignitaries to watch over Anna and report her findings. Lib is partnered with a nun to share round the clock shifts observing Anna; they are forbidden by the all-male committee (doctor, publican, priest and police) from conversing with each other. I thought the nurse and nun partnership was interesting.

These are different versions of a certain type of womanhood and belong to a broader theme of polarised opposites – the sacred and the profane, the active and the passive, idealised and denigrated – that runs throughout the film.

Florence Pugh plays the part of Lib Wright and is magnificent. Forceful, restrained and defiant she exudes both sense and sensuality. Lib is empathic



towards the patient she is tasked with observing. But it is with the dispassion of a medic that she searches for hard facts among the possible fictions surrounding Anna's bodily functions. Eventually she is able to elicit the truth from Anna through the warmth and safety of the relationship and bond they form. Lib is a modern woman in this insular, traumatised religious community. She is economically independent, widowed and childless and she is the only woman in the story to have sex out of pure desire. Emma Donoghue said that her book is about 'trauma and how we process it' and Lib has a sorrow of her own that shadows Anna's fate.

This is a film of contrasts. Darkness pervades and sets the tone metaphorically for religious oppression, repressed family secrets and the famine of the 1840s. With Lib comes an element of light. Part Florence Nightingale and part mother of God (she always dresses in the blue one associates with the Virgin Mary), it is her curiosity and compassion that enable her to uncover the truth of Anna's fasting.

The wonder of the book and the film's title describes both a religious 'miracle' and the joy of childhood innocence. Anna knows the meaning of both. She doesn't eat in order to emulate Christ's sacrifice. But her family and community need this ideal or illusion because it conceals a terrible crime. Anna's story is based on real life cases of 'fasting girls' in the 19th and 20th centuries: the practice of fasting to be closer to God transformed these girls into both saints and medical experiments. This early presentation of unrecognised pathology in the form of anorexia and

self-harm felt powerful to me. Women's bodies bore the scars of Ireland's plight just as surely as the land.

Rural Ireland provides the stark setting for the impoverished and devout Catholic community in which Anna lives. The muted tones of the film's colours are beautiful but also convey a kind of foreboding. The family cottage, the village pub and the barren peat bogs – each has its own distinctive atmosphere. The bar room may be where people are at their least inhibited, swearing and drinking. But it is the privacy of the bedroom that truths are revealed. This is where Anna lets Lib know what she has actually undergone. It is also where Lib enacts her own grief. The story of both characters is touched by death and deprivation of all kinds.

**“The muted tones of the film's colours are beautiful but also convey a kind of foreboding”**

Director Sebastian Leilo has been variously described as a 'humanist' and a 'wizard of women's emotions' which feels about right with this film. Men are largely portrayed as pompous despite (but perhaps also because of) the participation of such heavyweight male actors as Toby Jones and Ciarán Hinds. The character of William Byrne played by Tom Burke

is the exception. He forms a forbidden alliance with Lib and Anna and is part of their cinematic future.

This film is loaded with motifs, symbols and parallel plots: bread, mothers, separation and appetites to name but a few. It is as full and rich as the best of therapies but not overloaded. You could argue that it is over ambitious and deals with too much grim historical material or too much unprocessed trauma, but its central appeal is that of a thriller. Evenly paced, the first half builds to a climax, skilfully unveiling the characters' secrets leaving the second half to administer its fate. The lives of Anna's parents and siblings are central to her story yet might have been tales in their own right. I was particularly interested in the story of Anna's sister, who is the film's narrator, and I sense that Donoghue's book might cover these untold narratives.

The ending for me carried the message that to change one's story, to live life in the light of one's own truth you must leave your past self behind. Survival is physical and psychological. New life through death? Salvation through rebirth? These are ideas as old as Christianity, if not older.

*Rebecca Davies is a psychodynamic psychotherapist in private practice in London.*

## Covid and anti-vaccination



## VAXX

Andrea Sabbadini

Viruses and vaccines are, of course, *real objects*, but in the inner worlds of those affected by their presence they are also *fantasy objects*. For each of us they subjectively represent something different from what they are objectively; they respond to unconscious defence mechanisms; are coloured by the repressed, or live, memories of previous experiences; are invested with symbolic meanings. Such fantasies may remain outside our consciousness but nevertheless play an important part in motivating the personal decisions of individuals and groups.

Instrumental in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic was the early availability of vaccines. A “game-changer” the success of which in limiting the spread and the severity of the virus and reducing hospitalizations and deaths was, for the majority of people, out of the question.

And yet... millions of people who have the opportunity to get vaccinated choose not to. They belong to a heterogeneous group and have come to their decision for disparate conscious and unconscious motives. For instance, some refuse vaccinations because they suffer from a phobia of needles, not because they are hostile to the vaccine. Some marginalized groups, such as some religious and ethnic minorities, mistrust the “experts” who recommend the vaccines and are therefore less likely to get vaccinated (Pertwee et al, 2022).

Some rely upon their religious faith that their destiny as individual human beings depends on their God’s inscrutable wisdom: if their lives have to be saved

from the pandemic infection, only He, not science, has the power to do so. Others assume that the pandemic must be God’s punishment for their sins.

Some people who hold moderate anti-vaxx beliefs claim that there is insufficient longitudinal data to demonstrate the vaccines’ efficacy or safety. They advocate for maintaining a cautious attitude and may eventually be open to what they might perceive to be valid – scientific, social, economic, moral – arguments.

These objections differ from those of people who profess a passionate, unshakeable anti-vaccine ideology, violently defended at times. They fear vaccinations as an instance of health dictatorship; a form of control by politicians and scientists; a conspiracy against their personal freedom; as capitalist exploitation by big pharmaceutical companies in alliance with governments. The master narrative underpinning the anti-vaccine ideology seems to consist of three basic beliefs: “Covid-19 isn’t dangerous; vaccines are dangerous; you can’t trust doctors or scientists” (Ahmed 2021, p. 366). There is plenty of scientific evidence that the external reality is quite different: Covid-19 can be very dangerous; vaccines are mostly safe; doctors and scientists are on the whole trustworthy. The mechanism of denial allows people who fear the health system more than the virus to ignore the results of scientific research and to dismiss the validity of the data available.

This also suggests that objections to getting

vaccinated express a need to rebel against the parental authority represented by the majority. Dissent seems to represent a defence of personal freedom against those perceived as advocates of sanitary arrogance. Given the evidence on the devastating impact of Covid-19, refusing to protect oneself from it and risking inflicting it on others may involve unconscious masochistic and sadistic attitudes.

Some people indulge in infantile omnipotent fantasies: “The virus may affect others, but not me”. Such fantasies seem to represent attempts to compensate for a sense of impotence in dealing with an enemy outside of one’s control. Others will flatly deny the existence of the pandemic.

Anti-vaxxers tend to see themselves as victims of a persecutory system rather than as potential victims of a dangerous disease. Through displacement they substitute the real “monster” (the deadly virus) with an invented one (the vaccine). No medical procedure is 100% safe, but anti-vaxxers seem unwilling to evaluate the balance of risks involved in getting vaccinated vs. getting infected with a potentially lethal virus.

Others who refuse to get vaccinated display a phobic attitude about the risk of getting poisoned, believing that they are being lied to about the chemicals which make up the vaccines and about the consequences such substances can have on their bodies – a scepticism leading to fear of side-effects, say of infertility. Many are convinced that vaccines would make them sick with Covid-19 rather than protecting them from it. A parallel can be brought here with what happens in the minds of those suffering from eating disorders who imagine that the food entering their bodies would damage them instead of nourishing

and keeping them alive.

Conspiracy theories promoted by anti-vaxxers include the claim that Covid-19 vaccines involve injecting people with microchips in order to track them; and the belief that vaccines are designed to change people’s DNA, turning them into genetically-modified organisms and hooking them up to an artificial intelligence interface. It must be noted, though, that “rumours and conspiracy theories about Covid-19 and vaccines [could also] be read as expressions of popular fears and anxieties. These narratives typically emerge in times of acute social uncertainty” (Pertwee et al. 2022).

The picture emerging from these examples suggests that viruses and vaccines have become the signifiers of deep-seated ghosts, the characters of improbable, yet familiar, scenarios of life and death, of journeys to unexplored lands, of victories and defeats, of dreams and nightmares. The pandemic, then, could be considered a world stage where many tragedies, and occasionally a few comedies, are being played out.

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