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Forgetting

Stephen Frosh

The virtues of forgetting are clear. In his short story, *Funes the Memorious* (1964), Jorge Luis Borges describes the pain of a vivid, implacable memory that can never relinquish the past. Funes, he writes, ‘could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day’ (p. 92). We might also recall Anna O, Josef Breuer’s patient, who for a while lived every day of the winter of 1882 as if it was for her the traumatic winter of 1881. Breuer (1893) writes,

she lived through the previous winter day by day. I should only have been able to suspect that this was happening, had it not been that every evening during the hypnosis she talked through whatever it was that had excited her on the same day in 1881, and had it not been that a private diary kept by her mother in 1881 confirmed beyond a doubt the occurrence of the underlying events. This re-living of the previous year continued till the illness came to its final close in June, 1882 (p. 33).

Anna O is arguably the founding case of psychoanalysis and her vividly enacted memory that exactly reproduced the previous year was seen and treated as a life-inhibiting neurosis. And so it was, of course: how can we move on with our lives if we are sunk in melancholy, attached to a past that we cannot leave behind, condemned to remember and reproduce it as it was, barely able to integrate new information, new experiences, into our consciousness because the space is so full of the old?

“Forgetting is a necessary condition of living; without it we are backward-oriented and burdened by a kind of detritus that leaves no room for development”

Forgetting is a necessary condition of



living; without it we are backward-oriented and burdened by a kind of detritus that leaves no room for development. People rooted in nostalgia demonstrate that just as clearly as do those who cannot escape their past. This is also a familiar idea from studies of trauma, especially in the humanities. Trauma is characterised by a kind of exact repetition (flashbacks, experiencing past events as if they are happening in real time, vividly pressing on the present) and the reason for this is that the original event that sparked the trauma is too overwhelming to symbolise, but instead lurks in the unconscious like a smouldering coal, giving off fumes and occasionally flaring up. When it does so, the fire is felt to be real. The solution to this is to recall the trauma by finding a way to forget it, not absolutely but as a matter of chronology – that is, it must be put into the past as an event that is over now, however real it may have been. Classically, this is the move ‘from ghosts to ancestors’ (Loewald, 1960, p. 28), in which the memory that keeps pressing on us is honoured yet also left behind. This is a more psychoanalytic kind of forgetting, referenced usually as working through.

Forgetting has important functions and its possible value should not be underestimated. Avoiding painful memories by denying and wishing away the past is a common ambition and one that many people pursue quite rigorously; if only we could obliterate from memory all those moments of shame and suffering that are too hard to bear. Motivated forgetting of this kind is not usually conscious, but rather a manoeuvre that the mind makes to protect us from the impact of realising the truth of our

discomfort. It is a mechanism geared towards husbanding psychic resources that otherwise would be under strain from the full realisation of a damaging event, and as such it is understandable. It can protect us from some of the impact of potentially traumatising experiences and help us manage on a day-to-day basis when too much immersion in horror could destroy us. But the price paid for this forgetting can be great. As with Anna O, both the unnoticed present and the forgotten past have ways of intruding on us, returning like unsettled ghosts to haunt us even when we are not quite sure what it is that is doing the haunting. This pattern is one of the major discoveries of psychoanalysis: forgetting or repressing memories does not remove them but only subdues them, forcing a silence where a speaking voice should be, thinning out our experience of ourselves. Forgetting of this kind means that there are aspects of our experience and things that we really know that cannot be acknowledged, no-go areas in our minds; and when this is the case, our mental landscapes are narrowed, so we see less of what surrounds us. ‘The unexamined life is not worth living,’ Socrates is supposed to have taught; clearly, he had read Freud.

This psychological account can be matched with forgetting that occurs on a societal scale. This is not to say that they are the same thing – it would be naïve to assume that whole societies function in the same way as the minds of individuals. Nevertheless, there are connections. In part this is because each of us draws on the cultural materials at our disposal to make sense of the world, these constituting the discourses that encourage us to think in some ways and not so easily

in others. Trauma, and especially PTSD, is an example here.

“... the unnoticed present and the forgotten past have ways of intruding on us, returning like unsettled ghosts to haunt us even when we are not quite sure what it is that is doing the haunting”

Traumatic experiences must always have had effects, yet it was only in 1980 that PTSD formally entered the diagnostic lexicon and it is arguable that since then it has become a category through which many people see the world – that, as some claim, we live in a trauma culture. The prominence of this discourse means that trauma is recognisable, clearly an important achievement, but it also encourages us to construct trauma stories around events that might not have had that cachet in the past. Something similar is the case with remembering and forgetting. It is arguable that immediately post-World War 2 the emphasis in Europe was on moving forwards, forgetting the recent past in the interests of reconstruction (not to mention in the service of a Cold War politics that made an enemy of a recent ally, the

History and Society

Soviet Union, and a friend of the recent enemy, Germany, including many Nazi perpetrators and collaborators). By the millennium, however, and perhaps partly in its shadow and that of the gradual passing of the Holocaust generation, this forgetfulness had been replaced by a spate of memorialisation, with films, physical memorials, museums and literature all testifying to a wish to commemorate past suffering before it was too late. That this also spawned Holocaust denial was an unwanted side-effect that itself testified to the power of the memorialisation impulse. Remembering the past came to be seen as an insurance policy against repeating it – as if this had ever been true.

As with the individual, so with society as a whole: the kind of remembering matters just as much as the fact of it, whether for example it is in order to self-exculpate ('What are you complaining about? We have raised a statue to those who were enslaved, now we should move on') or is more openly a way to figure acknowledgement and reparation for past and present wrongdoings. Judging this is complex, but perhaps no more so than in the case of the individual whose recounting of a past wrongdoing can be either (or both) self-justifying or genuinely remorseful.

Even when the value of memory is accepted, it has sometimes been argued that forgetting the past is necessary for resolution of intractable conflicts. This can be the case when ancient battles or hurts are recycled in order to serve current political ends. It seems that some such conflicts can only be resolved when the past is forgotten, or at least set aside so that it is no longer allowed to have a hold over the present and the future. The peace process between the different communities in Northern Ireland is an important example: the precarious, just sustainable agreement made in the late 1990s is put under strain every time the old battles, some of them reaching back centuries, are celebrated. These old triumphs and resentments need to be renounced if people are to live in peace. Perhaps the same might be said of other impossible situations, such as that between Israel and the Palestinians: there is simply too much living history and reversion to ancient history, which is

poisoning the ground. Finding a way to obliterate this memory or at least to set it aside could be necessary if the cloud of hopelessness over that conflict is to be dispersed.

“Truly understanding the society of which we are part requires open acknowledgement of its destructive elements as well as of its achievements”

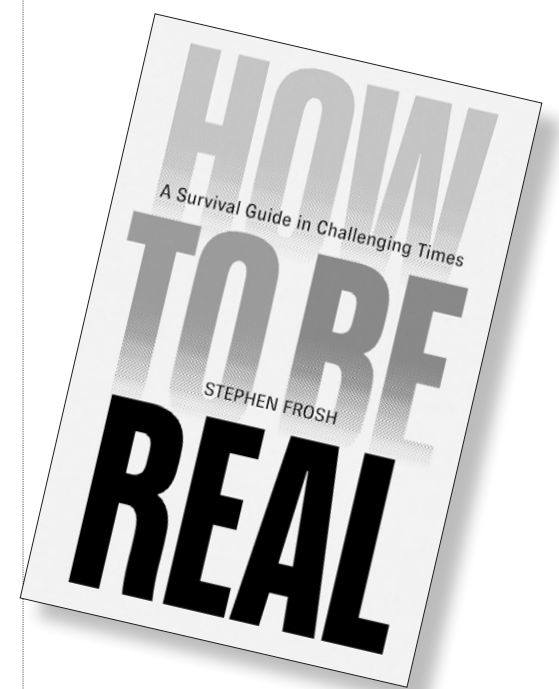
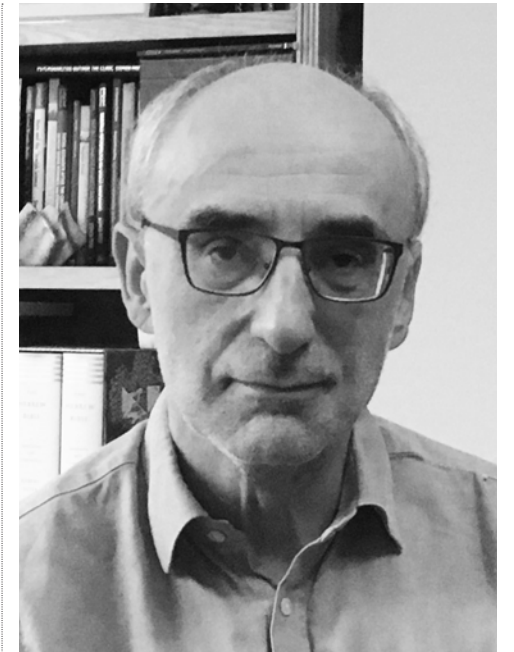
Sometimes, however, forgetting involves a rewriting of history, as with the widespread emergence of a self-description in Germany after the Second World War that they were 'double victims', first of the Nazis and then of the Soviet Union, rather than perpetrators of the horror of the Holocaust. It can also be a way that a society frees itself of responsibility for wrongdoing, serving both political ends (no reparations are necessary) and the wish to build a positive national identity. In British schools and in the story that British people tell about themselves, the role the country played in abolishing slavery is emphasised, while the position of Britain as a proponent of the slave trade, and the way much of the wealth of the country was built on the proceeds of slavery, is much less fully acknowledged. The forgetting of history here aims to build up a story of progressive humanitarianism and of Britain as at the forefront of enlightenment, and this continues to inform its self-understanding even in the face of its current 'hostile environment' towards migrants and refugees. Yet failure to note the underside of this, in this case its complicity with the slave trade but more broadly its prolonged engagement in violent colonialism, distorts the picture that Britons have of themselves in a way that reduces the complexity of its history to a kind of banal nationalism ('Britannia rules the waves'). Truly understanding the society of which we are part requires

open acknowledgement of its destructive elements as well as of its achievements – and of how these two things are often deeply connected.

The important point here is that whether we encourage forgetting in the interests of freeing ourselves from a malevolent past or remembering in the interests of working through, it is the quality of memory (bitter, sensitive, reflective, sanctifying) that is at stake. For me, the key point is one made by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1989), who stresses the importance of remembrance, although with some ambivalence, at the end of *Zachor*, his book on Jewish history and memory. Even though he recognises the risk of remembering too much, he regards the danger of forgetting as much greater. This is because some things must be recalled in order to remedy them. He proposes this in the form of a question, 'Is it possible that the antonym of "forgetting" is not "remembering," but justice?' (p. 117). Without resolution of important injustices of the past, their effects cannot be understood, recognition and acknowledgement cannot be offered, restitution cannot be done. As many writers have stressed, under such circumstances of non-recognition, the past is not past; the continuing disaster recurs. Justice is required before forgetting can occur; and justice requires remembering.

“Justice is required before forgetting can occur; and justice requires remembering”

The wish to forget the past is understandable and can even be seen as progressive under some circumstances, but it is too risky. It leaves unresolved too many issues that need to be addressed, issues which have a habit of coming back to haunt us. A full life, whether for an individual person or a society, requires remembering what has happened so that recognition can be obtained, reparation made where necessary, and justice can be done.



Stephen Frosh is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. His most recent books are Antisemitism and Racism: Ethical Challenges for Psychoanalysis and How to Be Real.

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Editorial

This issue of *New Associations* attends to the crucial process by which we come to make meaning of our experiences, both intrapsychically and interpsychically.

How can we remain open to the world while protecting ourselves from being completely undone by experiences flooding in or already jumbling around inside? This is an ongoing task and begins in our earliest moments. As we suck in our first breath, we commence a lifetime’s work of endeavouring to make sense of our encounters with the external environment, consciously and unconsciously. Before the scattered bits of our psyche grow and knit themselves together into some semblance of a meaning-making engine, we rely on the mind of another to absorb and metabolise our too-muchness. This is until such time as we can make a go at managing this vital function ourselves.

This is an exhausting endeavour, which can leave us feeling sometimes full up, other times depleted, and oftentimes looking for an external object to accommodate what our minds cannot. This might be another person or persons, a cultural object, a thing or a theoretical discourse or practice, such as psychoanalysis. We attach ourselves to this object as a container. In a fantasised act of identification, sprinkled with omnipotence, we will it to protect or transform our projected experiences. In this, we revisit, again and again, our unique scripting of those infantile interactions we had with the breast, imprinted forever on our psyche.

The relationship between the mysterious inner workings of the mind and the biological organ of the brain has been of ongoing interest to psychoanalytic practitioners since Freud. This is particularly pertinent when we are considering how we negotiate the past and the present. Stephen Frosh (pp. 1-2) writes about forgetting as ‘a necessary condition of living’, but the psychological costs can ‘be great’. The past continues to ‘haunt’ us, no matter what efforts we make to leave it behind. This is because forgetting is, by its very nature, bound up with remembering, and the dynamic between the two is by no means simple.

Dale Mathers (p. 12) argues that ‘we don’t have “memories”’, calling them instead ‘reconstructive imaginings’. In his article on the psychic mechanisms of dreaming and daydreaming, he brings Jungian analysis together with neuroscience to explore the Default Mode Network; the part of the brain that both ‘scripts dreams... [and] understands them’.

“This issue... attends to the crucial process by which we come to make meaning of our experiences”

Making sense of experiences requires space in our minds to be able to think our thoughts. Sometimes this is not possible because we are already overfull and so we might split off, project and attempt to evacuate experiences unconsciously. This can be enacted consciously in our behaviour in different ways. Shaifila Ladhani (p. 9) examines a growing trend among patients looking for ‘perfect attunement’ and sameness, particularly in the context of ‘transnational’ and online work. Her article is grounded in her experiences as a psychotherapist and supervisor in India, where ‘the therapeutic frame is shaped by histories of caste, coloniality, linguistic dominance, and stratified classes’. This conscious search for a psychotherapist-mirror emerges from part-object relating and the depositing of idealised parts of the self in a chosen other for safe-keeping.

Jessie See (p. 15) examines projection into things evident in hoarding behaviours: complex manoeuvres designed to evade a feeling of loss while simultaneously leading ‘to a life deprived of one’s most basic needs’. In her reading of Bertha Pappenheim’s book, *In the Junk Shop*, populated by pieces of junk narrating personal stories, See writes of ‘the power of storytelling to open up an internal thinking space where experience can be metabolised’.

See’s piece is a reminder of the formidable role cultural experiences play throughout our lives as creative ways to grapple with life’s challenges. Her piece forms part of a new Arts and

Culture section, which replaces reviews. Arts and Culture Editor, Lydia Prior (p. 13) explains the rationale behind this development, inviting contributors to enter into a playful engagement with a cultural object ‘to discover where that leads us’, rather than limiting ourselves to a merely ‘critical stance’.

This is the topic of discussion for Judith Edwards, Candida Yates and Noreen Giffney (pp. 10-11) in their conversation around the importance of curiosity and their personal and professional investments in psychoanalysis, culture and the arts. This new ‘In Conversation’ feature is an opportunity to move away from a more traditional interview format and allow for the unfolding of an organic and creative encounter, the outcome of which cannot be known in advance.

The group as a site for meaning-making is the focus of Richard Morgan-Jones’s (p. 5) article on group relations conferences with their emphasis on understanding unconscious dynamics within a here-and-now environment. He is attendant to the ongoing tension ‘between needing to belong and fighting for, and sometimes against, our individuality’. The relationship between the individual and the group forms the basis of BPC Communications Manager, Niamh Downes’s (p. 16) piece about the British Psychoanalytic Council Awards in 2025. She attests to the important psychological function organisations play in acknowledging, highlighting and celebrating individual and collective achievements and contributions to the field of psychoanalysis. Downes’s colleague, Joanne Brooks (p. 4) documents how she came to be in the position of Head of Professional Practice at the BPC. Her role is to bring psychoanalytic thinking to the BPC as a group and for the benefit of all stakeholders.

This form of mindful containment is sadly not prioritised by many organisations, which can result in the individual becoming a depository for the organisation’s demands. Richard Duggins (p. 8) takes an organisational look at the phenomenon of burnout. While sometimes perceived in organisational contexts as a personal failure, he argues instead that it reflects a breakdown in the holding environment that organisations should provide. The saturation of the

individual psyche by the group operates on a larger scale in societal contexts where particular values predominate that do not foreground the care of the other. In a piece on the film *Materialists*, Dewi Evans (p. 14) focuses on the potential for ‘capitalist logic’ to colonise minds, desire and the capacity for love: ‘The world of *Materialists* is one in which the human heart has become instrumentalised to serve the ends of capitalism itself’.

The colonising of minds is also the theme of Geni Núñez and Gustavo Machado’s (p. 7) article about the psychological effects of colonialism. They critically examine colonialist tendencies in psychoanalysis when writers try to universally apply ideas that are context specific. In an evocative call to break free from this deadening ‘monoculture’, they invoke the ‘regenerative potential’ of the forest. It becomes a hopeful symbol for a psychoanalysis open to ‘creativity and transformation’ from without as well as from within. The need for psychoanalysis to be receptive and open to change, a necessary stage of psychological development, is addressed by Marta Bolognani (p. 6) in her article about the first psychoanalysis conference in Pakistan: ‘Engagement with difference is unsettling, but it also expands how we think, understand and relate’.

Our grateful thanks to the members of the editorial board and design team for their excellent and dedicated work on *New Associations* during 2025: Niamh Downes, Allen Fatimaharan, Matthew Lumley, Lydia Prior, Susan Rentoul, Marita Vyrgioti, Deborah Wright, Candida Yates and Usman Zafar. Usman has stepped down from the editorial board this year. Everyone else has committed to continue for 2026.

We will convene an online workshop on Tuesday 16 June 2026 at 7 pm-8.30 pm for clinicians and trainees interested in writing for *New Associations*. The focus will be on how to generate an idea and develop it into an article. Further details will be publicised soon in the BPC newsletter so keep an eye on your email inbox.

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Contribute to New Associations We welcome ideas for articles, interviews and reviews. To propose an idea, email noreen.giffney@bpc.org.uk and emmanuelle.smith@bpc.org.uk

Deadlines: Deadlines for *New Associations* are usually as follows:
1st January
1st May
1st September



Profession

Spotlight: BPC Head of Professional Practice Role

Joanne Brooks



The Head of Professional Practice is a new role created to employ a clinician at the heart of the organisation,

not only as an expert resource for all staff but also to ensure the work of the British Psychoanalytic Council remains relevant and alive in the changing world of UK psychoanalytically-informed psychotherapies. I was the first clinician to be employed, as previously the BPC had relied on the expertise of registrant volunteers. The post creates challenges, and the role is always evolving.

My interest in psychoanalysis began with my own personal experience of being in psychotherapy and then psychoanalysis. My original training was in nursing, initially general nursing, then specialising

in psychiatry. I was fortunate to have a teacher who encouraged me to talk and listen to patients in the ward of the old Victorian asylum where I had a placement and learnt to write process notes. This was transformative – and a bit frightening – as I embarked on conversations with a patient who had chronic schizophrenia and whose speech, though wild and hard to follow, made sense in a way I could not have imagined had it not been for the help of the tutor who first taught me to listen. I pursued further training in psychodynamic counselling and therapy before gaining a position in an NHS psychotherapy service where I worked for many years. I eventually qualified as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in 2004 with the Scottish Institute and then trained as a psychoanalyst through the New Entry Scheme at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London. I have my own independent practice based in Edinburgh.

As Head of Professional Practice, I provide a psychoanalytic perspective on all aspects

of BPC functioning. Being a member of the team can be a challenge, managing conflicting demands, and the role can be rather Janus-like, facing inwards towards the BPC team and outwards towards the registrants and the public. There is the need to deal with the ongoing organisational demands of the BPC while making space to reflect psychoanalytically, ensuring that such a focus is at the heart of the work of the BPC.

“Registrants can contact me to discuss areas of concern and raise issues relating to clinical practice and ethical matters”

Within the role and its unique requirements, there are some key elements. Registrants can contact me to discuss areas of concern and raise issues relating to clinical practice and ethical matters. Often these issues relate to professional standards where we already have written guidance, and one of my jobs is to keep that guidance up to date and ethically relevant. Sometimes themes emerging in these discussions are explored further in one of the BPC committees, such as the Registration Committee, which deals with all issues regarding training, the Ethics Committee, or the Professional Standards Committee. Part of my job is to help facilitate these discussions in collaboration with other members of the BPC team. I am also responsible for giving a professional opinion as part of the Fitness to Practise process when we receive complaints, and adding a psychoanalytic perspective is central to my role, as I discuss later. Finally, the more outward facing tasks involve meeting with Member Institutions (MIs) when invited, to talk about standards, or for general discussions around ethics, guidance and the work of the BPC. I also help to organise events and workshops together with the BPC team.

While most registrants rely on supervision, consultation or talking to trusted colleagues, they might find themselves turning to the BPC in situations where there is anxiety about potential complaints. The BPC team are well equipped to signpost registrants in the direction of the guidance or other resources on the website, and this is

usually sufficient unless a discussion with another clinician is required, when professional consultations can be provided. However, there is a fine line to tread when offering support to a registrant. Advice can be welcomed and valued, but when the BPC directly advises or expresses opinions, it potentially compromises any investigation if a complaint against that registrant subsequently emerges. This can be difficult to navigate, but it is not unlike the psychoanalytic conversation, where our task is to facilitate the patient’s deeper understanding of themselves through analytic listening, without reassuring, leading or advising. Typical consultations involve matters related to confidentiality, queries about competency and being asked to work beyond one’s level of competency, concerns about a colleague’s practice, safeguarding themes and even issues relating to possible stalking behaviour by a patient.

This leads on to another key element of the role, Fitness to Practise procedures, which involves giving a professional opinion at the early stages of a complaint. A questioning and psychoanalytic approach is required when reviewing a complaint as well as formulating a view about the ethical implications and whether the registrant might have breached any of the BPC Standards of Conduct, Practice and Ethics. If the BPC decides formally to investigate a complaint because of serious concerns or potential breaches, the registrant is informed, and an investigation begins. Serious breaches or suspensions of registration do not often happen, but when they do, they can have a devastating effect not only on those directly involved, but also on the wider family and psychoanalytic community. The complaints procedure is not about blaming or punishing registrants. However, patients and members of the public must be heard if they have been harmed, and the public and the profession should be protected if clinicians are not being sufficiently ethically responsible, safe or fit to practise.

Finally, I am involved in planning training events with the BPC team and meeting MIs in their local settings. It is a pleasure meeting skilled and dedicated registrants and hearing about local concerns, as well as working closely with a professional and passionate group of individuals: the BPC staff team, our CEO and Chair, committee members and trustees. Holding in mind the different but related spinning plates of the role can be challenging, but ultimately being Head of Professional Practice is fulfilling and rewarding.

Joanne Brooks is a psychoanalyst and training to be a child analyst with the Institute of Psychoanalysis. She works in private practice, for the British Psychoanalytic Council, and teaches and supervises. She is an approved training analyst for the Association of Child Psychotherapists.



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Organisations

Group Relations Conferencing – A Professional Resource

Richard Morgan-Jones

Group Relations Conferences (GRCs) last from three to 14 days. Some are residential, some non-residential, some online. Members work with one or more consultants in a range of settings across an integrated programme. These settings include small study groups, large study groups, and an institutional event exploring intergroup dynamics. Each event studies leadership, authority and how taking a role on behalf of others carries both conscious and unconscious meanings shaped both by each group as well as by individual emotional valency. The focus in a GRC is on learning from ‘here-and-now’ experience, inviting intense engagement. To gather learning and end a conference, review and application groups seek the relevance of the GRC experience to the roles members have arrived with, searching for transforming experience with new leadership and membership stances. How could a GRC be a professional resource?

Forces across our professional field blow like fierce winds that threaten the standing of clinicians and their institutions, both now and for the future. Wider international society, reported upon 24/7, besieges us with news embodying the four horsemen of the apocalypse: Death, Conquest, War and Famine. Each of these has invaded our consulting rooms with overwhelming trauma, stimulating profound insecurities. Images of suffering over-stretch and over-stimulate the range of potential identifications besieging our minds.

In consequence, we experience the urgent need to belong to a primary group or stance enhanced by a sense of a fight for justice to protect ourselves. Yet this dynamic risks splitting families, clinicians, communities and not least psychoanalytic institutes. We are torn between needing to belong and fighting for, and sometimes against, our individuality.

Here are examples from reported GRC experience:

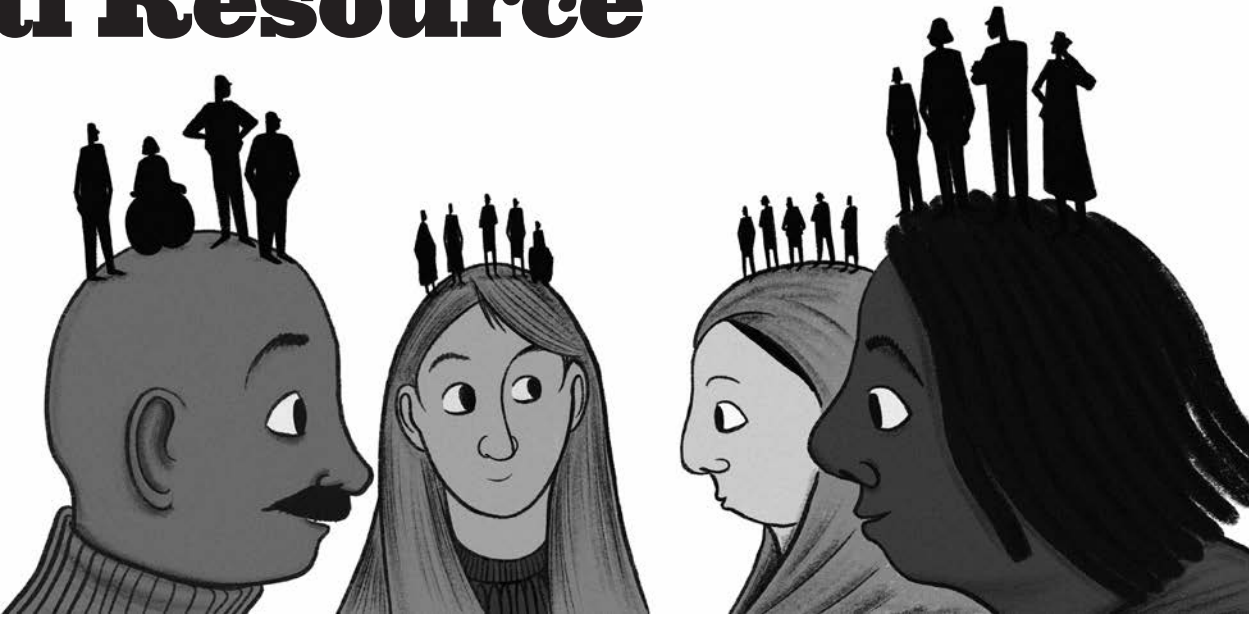
1. As one mid-career psychotherapist who helps manage their training institute described it: ‘I never knew that the boundaries we work with clinically can be at least as important in organisational meetings. Boundaries around specific tasks deserve clarifying. Meetings need authorisation. What are the boundaries of time, place or technology of meeting and of membership? What roles and

responsibilities are required? These boundaries are not rigid, but at least when they are fuzzy and ambiguous, we have a guideline to help us and interpret what could be going on.’

2. After one conference, a senior psychoanalyst described discovering how much energy she spent in her institute trying to reconcile extreme views, whether of school of thought or political identities. In being asked why she might be repeating this pattern in a GRC in a small study group, she found herself feeling close to tears and vulnerable. Later, in one of the groups, she made the link to her own experience of growing up in a childhood home with the constant threat of violence. Despite a long and rich personal analysis in which this trauma had been worked through, this pattern had never been available to her in a group setting. Her conference application group worked with her around how to take a different position that did not leave herself out.

3. A candidate in training discovered his pleasure in being adopted by others and his wish to be loyal to the rich legacy of his mentors, supervisors, teachers and analyst. In a GRC, this tendency was replayed in his capacity to work intensively with interpretations from the consultants. Until this was enacted in the conference, he had not before realised how he hid behind his mentee role.

4. In a large study group, members aggressively challenged the three consultants working with them to reveal their own identities and sympathies with different sides in a current international conflict. Rather than colluding with this seductive appeal, the consultants interpreted how important it could be to the members to believe that they too could work with each other effectively despite their obvious differences and loyalties. At this point of provisional containment, a member pointed out the way the group had sat in two sub-groups in the room as if waiting for the fight. Leadership then came from two individuals who insisted on ground rules for managing



this conflict. People were asked to speak one at a time, not stand up and not threaten others. This created a framework, where the conversation and exchange of recognition of the mutual suffering in this conflict went long into the evening after the formal sessions. The two individuals had never thought of themselves as leaders, yet they had risen to the occasion and been mobilised by the group. Others told them they would be good at shaping needed leadership in analytic institutes and the staff team privately spotted them as possible conference staff members.

“We are torn between needing to belong and fighting for, and sometimes against, our individuality”

This story of emergent leadership takes us back to where the field of GRCs began. Following the 1942 failure of the British army at Dunkerque, there was a lack of officers trained to lead the next stages of the Second World War. Wilfred Bion and officers from the army medical psychiatric corps were given responsibility for officer selection and morale. A key decision was for ‘bottom up’ regimental nomination by ordinary soldiers. This replaced top-down officer appointment through public school, upper class and family connection that had previously dominated. The next step was a selection process that became known as the ‘leaderless group project.’ A small group was given a task with no designated leadership. Leadership capacity was assessed by their capacity to combine using their own ambition with keeping up the morale of the group by identifying, using and integrating the diverse skills

of its members. This became a method not just for selecting serving officers but is widely used across many fields where leadership is key.

When Bion and his colleagues formed the Tavistock Clinic after the War, this was a method that had been applied to the treatment and rehabilitation of shell-shocked soldiers at the Northfield experiment. Bion, in his ground-breaking papers in *Experiences in Groups* (1961), described a way to make sense of the instantaneous unconscious processes by which groups formed a sense of belonging. With this legacy, group relations conferencing was born and developed through the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations into the study of whole organisational dynamics. It now stands as a model of organisations across every continent.

How to belong and work creatively as part of a body larger than your own is a key life and professional skill. Its roots are primitive in the psyche, yet it also stems from life experience shaped by organisational and societal demands. This is what makes group relations conferences such a unique resource for clinicians.

Note: All personal/professional examples are fictional and inspired by themes in this type of work, rather than by any individuals.

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Profession

The First Pakistan Psychoanalysis Conference

Marta Bolognani

Conference organisers and delegates, including Dr Nargis Asad, Dr Shameel Khan, Dr Humera Saeed, Prof Frank Rollier, Dr Marta Bolognani, Prof Nick Sarra, Prof Gary Winship, Prof Duane Rousselle and Honorary Associate Prof Kannan Navaratnem

The first Pakistan Psychoanalysis Conference, ‘Journeying beyond the West: Can Psychoanalysis Find New Roots in Pakistan?’, took place in Karachi in April 2025, jointly organised by the Aga Khan University (AKU) and the University of Exeter. 150 participants engaged in theoretical conversations on subjects including Freud and Lacan, while UK-based clinicians introduced the independent tradition and Bion. One striking discovery for many was Masud Khan – the prominent Punjabi analyst, first analysed in Lahore in the 1940s. His relative obscurity revealed an opportunity: to reclaim a local psychoanalytic lineage and weave it into today’s training and practice.

The conference invited psychoanalysis to colour itself differently in Pakistan, adding shades drawn from critical debates about orthodoxy, interdisciplinary practice, and resonances with Sufi spirituality. In a nation of around 250 million, there are only a handful of psychoanalytically-informed practitioners; yet interest in talking therapies is growing exponentially.

“Why does psychoanalysis matter in Pakistan now?”

The conference grew out of an online conversation between Duane Rousselle, a Karachi-based Canadian Lacanian, and me, a UK-based Italian pluralist clinician, sharing some generative questions: Why does psychoanalysis matter in Pakistan now? How do theory and practice travel? Can their movement be circular rather than one-way? Can Western therapists contribute something genuinely useful – and, crucially, what are we able to receive? The conference did not pretend to resolve these questions. It did, however, create a rare container to think them through.

The programme was wide-ranging. Twelve papers addressed psychoanalysis and religion (including points of contact with Sufi healing and readings of interreligious desire), women’s mental health, sociocultural variation in applying psychoanalytic thinking, anthropology’s contribution to ethno-psychiatry, training and supervision, and Lacanian reflections on healing. An undergraduate section responded to an overwhelming number of submissions showcasing theoretical and empirical research on intergenerational

trauma, Freud and folklore, hysteria, ritual mourning, melancholia, and urban youth identities. Five clinical workshops drew nearly 50 attendees.

In the final reflective group, colleagues named the collective ‘storm’ (Bion, 1970) that had gathered as people met across continents, languages, classes and trainings; a turbulence of recognition and estrangement through theories we all recognised and the difference in applying them. The experience recalled Mohsin Hamid’s novel, *The Last White Man* (2022), in which the central characters, Anders and Oona, wake up black and learn that meeting the other means no one stays the same colour and grief accompanies transformation.

The ‘storm’ revealed fault lines as old structures gave way to new solidarities, such as a budding understanding that the analytic setting demands flexibility to work. After the conference, our Lacanian co-organisers chose to build a separate initiative, a ‘rally of cartels.’ Cartels – groups of maximum five, and a ‘plus-one’ – are a foundational structure in Lacanian schools: decentralised, flexible, and designed to generate written work. This model has quickly attracted dozens of participants and currently seems the most extensive and sustainable psychoanalytic initiative in Pakistan.

The decision to part ways from the broader pluralist space was disappointing, like a two-way misattunement rather than a single group’s failing. Different priorities, understandings of institutional life and certainly enactments still to be analysed were at play – for example a debate about whether psychoanalytic trainings can happen in universities. The divergence, however, does not have to be a defeat: it multiplies sites where psychoanalysis can take root. Hopefully these lanes will remain permeable, allowing collaboration on training, supervision and public events.

A lively 200-member ‘Psychoanalysis Pakistan’ WhatsApp group sustains ongoing debate. The first year of a foundation course in group analysis, led by Shameel Khan – a UK-trained practitioner Chair of the Pakistan Balint Society – is underway. At Exeter, Richard Mizen and I are running free online reflective practice groups for Pakistani clinicians and studying their impact. These efforts, while modest, are fostering a space for reflexivity and peer support that may lead to future training pathways.



The central challenge is clear: access to personal analysis, as there are no training analysts in the country. Inflation and income disparities make even online training analysis prohibitive. Yet the momentum is opening the space for something new. Some practical trajectories have emerged. Spaces of knowledge exchange – where local and foreign practitioners can discuss clinical material by integrating spiritual philosophies, family system implications and postcolonial thought – can enrich cross-border collaboration. Institutional partnerships can host clinics. In the absence of a fully-fledged training, Balint groups offer psychotherapists reflective spaces. Research can help in generating relevant data. Context-sensitive ethics and training standards are needed to protect patients in a context where talking therapies are not regulated. Acknowledging economic realities is an important ethical aspect to consider.

“Pakistan’s psychoanalytic future will not be a replica of any Western metropolitan model”

Psychoanalysis grows through contact. Engagement with difference is unsettling, but it also expands how we think, understand and relate. As in Hamid’s arc from rupture to reweaving, the conference proved necessarily cross-fertilising: the storm endured, and we set about ‘making the best of a bad job’ (Bion, 1979), discovering in change the loss of psychoanalysis as the West knows it, but also generative potential. Bion, India-born and England-trained, cautioned against rigid psychoanalytic structures that

could stifle development. He referenced Sufis who functioned without rigid institutions. Sufis showed him a way for an ‘expanding universe’ for psychoanalysis, though he simultaneously warned against uncontrolled expansion (a ‘tower of Babel’) where psychoanalysts lose the ability to understand one another (Bion, 1970, p. 85).

As Hamid suggests, change need not erase memory; it can braid new experiences with what we choose to keep. Pakistan’s psychoanalytic future will not be a replica of any Western metropolitan model. It will be plural, locally anchored and conversant with the wider field. The cartels’ energy and the hunger for rigorous work and supervision are already shifting the centre of gravity. Psychoanalysis, like Oona in Hamid’s novel, must embrace unavoidable change: ‘[Oona] had changed before she had changed, she had changed every decade and every year and every day, and so she thought there was no reason that she must lose her memories, the ones she wished to keep’ (p. 91). We may indeed be the ‘last white therapists,’ and I think this is very welcome.

Note: This article was written in Autumn 2025 and therefore does not refer to current geo-political events.

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Culture and Society

On Reforesting Psychoanalysis

Geni Núñez and Gustavo Machado

The process of colonisation does not operate solely through concrete logic. It is also symbolic, and therefore responsible for dynamics of subjectivation. Our article begins from the premise that the devastation promoted by the coloniser has deforested the symbolic landscape of those who do not align with the elements of the supposedly universal subject and its markers of privilege. From this perspective, even psychoanalysis must be reforested to embrace the experiences of those subjugated by imposed colonial standards. The destruction enacted by practices of domination demands reforestation.

This article is written with four hands: by a cis white Latino man and a non-binary Indigenous person, both with dissident and non-normative sexualities. Throughout our academic and professional journeys, we have had moments of proximity to, and distance from, psychoanalysis for various reasons. The couch has not always been a place of comfort for us. Or rather, our bodies and identities have not always been deemed fit to occupy the couch. Yet, something keeps us tied to psychoanalysis as a critical and transformative clinical-political tool. What still connects us to psychoanalysis? We offer conceptual reflections on psychoanalytic listening and the possibility of constructing epistemologies that break with monocultural practices, including monocultures of thought. This task is both clinical and deeply political.

We refer to the ‘monocultural system’ as the colonial tactical conglomerate that manifests in various ways, both subjectively and concretely, through faith, culture, sexuality, gender, and beyond. Ailton Krenak (2019) identifies monoculture as the imposition of a single world, the denial of coexistence among multiple ways of being. Monoculture is thus the logical opposite of the forest and its regenerative potential; it destroys diversity and enforces the dominance of a single species, which, in social bonds and human relations, translates into a hegemonic way of life. This radical thought allows us to assert that monoculture and the colonisation of thought form the foundation of exclusionary and violent practices. The universalisation of a ‘model’ experience, replicated through strategies of ethnic and cultural domination, annihilates the plurality that would allow us to live as, and with, the forest.

Sigmund Freud, a Jewish man living at the turn of the 20th century and witnessing the violent tactics of racial and ethnic segregation of that era, provoked a

rupture with medical-centric knowledge by prioritising and highlighting the dynamics of desire and the unconscious in his listening. Freud asked: What nourishes this soil that no one sees? Excavation is necessary. He drew attention to that which nourishes the earth: unseen, yet definitively constitutive of us. Yet, throughout his work, we can observe an attempt to universalise categories that are, in fact, situated. This universalisation of psychoanalysis, taking historically and culturally specific concepts, such as Oedipus, repression or castration and applying them as if they are always valid across times, cultures and subjectivities, is precisely what we need to question, thereby exposing the colonial limits of Freud’s project.

“The couch has not always been a place of comfort for us”

When authors we admire are examined through anti-racist, feminist and anti-colonial critical lenses, discomfort often arises, as if we could only acknowledge the value of a body of work if it were free of contradictions and paradoxes. One common way of reconciling this discomfort is to simply say that the author was ‘a person of their time,’ effectively closing the debate. Positive, critical positions are seen as ‘ahead of their time,’ while those reproducing racism or misogyny, for example, are confined to the norms of their era. This understanding assumes that what characterises a historical period is its norms, biases and prejudices, while any dissenting ideas are often retrospectively interpreted as signs of future progress. Rather than following this linear logic, we embrace the paradox of admiring and critiquing simultaneously, as Donna Haraway (2016) encourages with her notion of staying with the trouble.

We thus advocate for a displacement of psychoanalytic listening, relativising even the expected manifestations of the unconscious and avoiding universalisations. For instance, when Freud developed his theory and technique for interpreting dreams, could it apply universally across all cultures? What is fundamental and valuable in Freud’s proposal may lie in the focus on what is ‘not explicit,’ a departure from the scientific objectivity so coveted and esteemed. In Indigenous cosmogonies, for example, the world of dreams may represent an opening to a new world, as real as the one we inhabit. The sharp

boundary between fantasy and reality drawn by the paths of science may need porousness, reactivating the capacity to imagine other possible worlds. After all, to counter destruction, we must reforest the imaginary, create space for fantasy, and foster novelty against the singular narrative about things, expanding our symbolic field, skewed by colonisation.

As Indigenous intellectual, Casé Angatu (2021), states, other worlds already exist within this one. We are not speaking of utopias but rather an invitation to recognise the diversity that constitutes us, which persists here and now, despite all efforts to extinguish it. While many fear ‘the end of the world,’ perhaps we should consider the possibility that some worlds must indeed end for others to exist. Thus, the crisis of universalist and developmentalist theories, including psychoanalysis, may herald more sustainable rebirths.

Universalisation is the illusion of permanence. The colonial project never contemplates its own end; its truths are naturalised. Even our perception of nature has been reshaped by this logic. Decolonising thought and fostering less hierarchical relationships offers hope for a different future. In his essay, ‘On Transience’, Freud (1916) reflects on the awe inspired by destruction and finitude, emphasising the beauty of transience inherent to all things. It is crucial to acknowledge that the normative positioning of psychoanalysis must be revisited to make room for a praxis coherent with contemporary needs and demands. Believing in the possibility of different worlds even within psychoanalytic practice, means recognising that impermanence creates beauty.

When considering psychoanalysis and the potential transformation of its clinical listening to avoid reproducing normative modes, we believe it is crucial to excavate what has nourished our subjectivities, to examine what fosters forests rather than monocultures. For example, in listening to the diversity of gender and sexuality, the dynamics of transference must make space for figures beyond the binary paradigm of sex and gender. Similarly, the temporality of analysis must adopt new parameters, weaving narratives that engage with sociocultural, political and economic concerns. How long does



an analysis take? This question is as unanswerable as ‘how long does it take for a forest to grow?’

Reconfigured as a non-normative practice, psychoanalysis holds the potential to imagine and cultivate alternative relational landscapes. By transcending rigid frameworks, it can contribute to the decolonisation of thought, nourishing a plurality of experiences. To reforest the imaginary, the psychic material from which we construct images of ourselves, psychoanalysis must engage with the transient and the diverse, valuing impermanence as the ground for creativity and transformation. We must learn to listen to the collective – not only through individual narratives but by attending shared traumas, silenced knowledges and historically-marginalised voices. Reforesting psychoanalysis becomes more than a tool for interpretation; it has the potential to be an act of resistance against the effects of colonisation.

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Organisations

Burnout as a Failure of Holding

Richard Duggins



Peter cannot hold my gaze because of his shame, and quietly laments, ‘What’s wrong with me?’ Over the last 20 years, I’ve heard this from thousands of highly capable, deeply committed professionals as they sit across from me, exhausted, demoralised, and unsure how they got here. The sense of failure is often profound. Yet, it is misplaced. Over time, I’ve come to see what they describe as not a collapse of individual resilience, but something deeper: a fraying of the relational fabric that once gave their work meaning.

“Over time, the true self recedes, replaced by a compliant, performative false self... [L]ong before the term [burnout] was popularised, psychoanalytic theory had already described the psychic cost of being left alone with unmanageable stress”

From a psychoanalytic perspective, burnout can be reframed as a failure of holding. It is not simply about too much to do, but about too little containment. Not enough thinking, attunement and care. A lack of psychological shelter. The concept of ‘holding’ originates with Winnicott, who saw it as the emotionally attuned, responsive environment that enables development and integration. Thinkers such as Harold Bridger extended

this idea into organisational life, arguing that institutions must themselves offer holding. In my work, I’ve seen how the absence of this holding, in teams, leaders and organisational cultures, leaves people feeling exposed, ashamed and overwhelmed. Anxiety goes unprocessed, meaning becomes confused, and internal coherence begins to collapse.

Burnout, I’ve come to believe, is not merely emotional fatigue. It is a psychic event. A fragmentation of the self in response to prolonged organisational impingement. Over time, the true self recedes, replaced by a compliant, performative false self that carries on until it suddenly, and often bewilderingly, cannot. This is what I call the Burnout Cliff: the moment when coping abruptly fails.

The psychoanalytic roots of the term ‘burnout’ are often forgotten. It was first coined by Herbert Freudenberger (1980), a New York psychoanalyst who observed, and personally experienced, the emotional collapse of idealistic professionals working in overstretched environments. He described it as a ‘smouldering’ exhaustion of the spirit. Like a fire-damaged burnt-out building, outwardly intact, inwardly destroyed. The concept was developed by Christina Maslach (1982), who formalised the three key dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a loss of personal accomplishment.

However, long before the term was popularised, psychoanalytic theory had already described the psychic cost of being left alone with unmanageable stress. For me, Winnicott’s ‘holding’ described the safe emotional context, and Bion’s ‘containment’ the transformative processing of experience within that context. Bion warned of the dangers of unprocessed ‘beta elements’, raw emotional data that cannot be thought about. Isabel Menzies Lyth observed how institutions develop defensive routines to avoid anxiety, often at the cost of staff well-being. Robert de Board (1978) wrote of the neurotic organisation, where the primitive defences of projection, denial and splitting dominate under pressure. Rachel Gibbons (2025) argues that systems like the NHS place staff in an impossible bind: unrealistically expected to deliver more, with fewer resources and less support. Uncontained anxiety circulates as panic, blame, or collapse. What should be held becomes internalised. Individuals feel they are failing, when in fact they are carrying

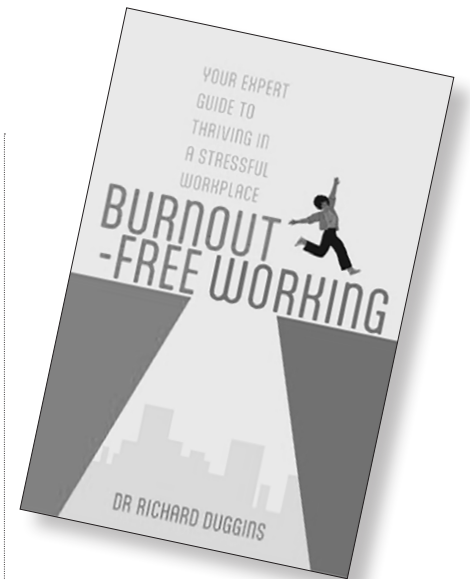
what the system will not hold.

We see this today in many sectors, where staff are asked to do more for less, and with reduced support. Systems are stretched, teams have become fragmented, and emotional labour is denied. As organisations become more transactional and procedural, the relational core of the work is squeezed. Compassion is still expected of staff but often withheld in return. Many professionals are not only depleted, they are grieving. Grieving for teams that no longer function, values that are compromised, personal ideals that cannot be reached, and clients and colleagues damaged along the way. Yet few places in organisational life allow this grief to be named, let alone processed. We might say that one of the most damaging consequences of a failure of holding is that it makes mourning impossible. And yet, recovery from burnout often depends on precisely this: on creating conditions where it is safe to grieve, for what was, for what was hoped for, for what was possible, and for what was lost.

“Rest, therapy, and boundary-setting matter, but they are not enough”

If we wish to rebuild holding in our fractured systems, we must challenge the dominant model of burnout as a failure of individual resilience. What is pathologised in the person is better understood as a consequence of prolonged relational and systemic insufficiency. The question is not ‘What’s wrong with you?’ but ‘What’s happened around you?’ We must reposition recovery as a relational and cultural task. Rest, therapy, and boundary-setting matter, but they are not enough. We must attend to the culture, leadership, workplace and team. Without restoring organisational holding, recovery can only be fragile and transient.

Organisational holding takes many forms. We need compassionate leadership that offers containment, not just instruction. We need individual supervision, peer supervision and reflective spaces in which to process pain. We need cultural permission to mourn, not just push on. We need a rekindling of meaning through connection, narrative and recognition. In my book, *Burnout-Free Working* (2025), I argue that prevention and recovery both hinge on restoring the conditions



that make it possible to be human and authentic at work. That means creating environments where people can bring not just their effort, but their uncertainty, their needs, and their grief. Ultimately, helping those who are burned out isn’t just about strengthening their defences. It is about restoring their capacity to be held and ensuring the organisation is there to hold them. Recovery isn’t about endurance. It’s about discovering spaces where it is safe to bring our full, unguarded selves, and to know we will be held.

Note: Peter is fictional and illustrates common themes that recur during my work in the consulting room.

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Practice

The Fantasy of Perfect Attunement

Shaifila Ladhani



I often hear patients bringing up the wish of not wanting the consulting room – physical or virtual – as a space to work something through but as one where we are seen or validated. When not expressed explicitly, it is laced with expressions like ‘Do you agree?’ or ‘You know what that is like; I don’t have to explain that to you.’ The therapist becomes less of an interpreter and more of an affirming mirror – a witness to patients’ evolving identities. This shift, pronounced more in online therapy cultures and transnational clinical spaces, reflects a growing fantasy: recognition is equal to safety, and sameness is a way of evading rupture. In my work in India, this desire often plays out in complicated ways. The search for a therapist is not just a search for professional qualifications but for the promise of cultural proximity. Patients seek therapists who might share their caste background, sexual orientation, politics, or diasporic yearnings. The hope is not just for empathy but for unbroken attunement; a seamless understanding that will bypass the painful misrecognitions that therapy risks exposing.

“Patients seek therapists who might share their caste background, sexual orientation, politics, or diasporic yearnings”

When Mandira, an Indian graduate student living in the United States,

reached out to me, she repeated how she ‘doesn’t want to explain everything.’ ‘You will know what a Diwali break is or how my mother is too intrusive.’ She never gave me a list of symptoms or a history of suffering; she gave me a checklist of who I have to be for her. I have to be progressive, caste-aware, queer, anti-Modi, a woman not younger than 30, and someone who can work with immigrants’ grief and inherited shame, so Mandira doesn’t have to tell me about this repeatedly. Not just someone who can hear her pain, but someone who might already ‘get it’ – intuitively and pre-consciously. Someone who speaks the same psychic dialect.

“Sometimes similarities... make us presumptuous; with our patient’s wish for an idealised, all-knowing therapist, maybe our narcissistic wishes of omnipotence come alive in the room”

This desire is not rare. Increasingly, there is an interest in creating spaces where one is held, no questions asked. With some new business models of therapy, one can filter for caste, gender, sexuality, and religion with hopes of finding the right match. The right match is found, not built. What is this hope, really? What are we foreclosing? Sometimes similarities also make us presumptuous; with our patient’s wish for an idealised, all-knowing therapist, maybe our narcissistic wishes of omnipotence come alive in the room. Maybe it is also our wish to avoid their aggression or disappointment.

Benjamin (2004) reminds us that recognition is not a guarantee of safety but a scene of negotiation; necessary but never complete. Recognition is partial; the wish to be fully seen contains a terror of being misread. Winnicott’s ‘good enough’ mother offers the idea that perfect attunement is a myth; ordinary failures and the possibility of repair are the

building blocks of a psychic life. Yet the current cultural discourse resists failure, mistranslation, and misalignment. This contemporary hope for a seamless mirror erases the power of rupture and our resilience for repair. If difference becomes a site of threat, how does one imagine growth? Within this unsaid fear, therapy becomes a performance, and rupture becomes pathology. This wish for therapy to be a sanctuary, without strangeness and zero risk of being undone, becomes an expectation.

In India, this question is also laced with residues of lived harm. The therapeutic frame is shaped by histories of caste, coloniality, linguistic dominance, and stratified classes. For many of us, this fantasy is also a shield. A queer patient may guard themselves against heteronormative assumptions, a Dalit patient may fear retraumatisation by the therapist, or a Muslim patient might be afraid of being stereotyped. When political and social lives become increasingly polarised, digital intimacies (watching reels of people suffering similarly, for example) masquerade as real closeness. This fantasy of perfect alignment also mirrors a broader cultural exhaustion. Constantly having to explain ourselves is exhausting. In such a world, this desire is reasonable, almost merciful. The fantasy of perfect attunement may be a modern import that is shaped by neoliberal demands for custom-fit care, provided with ease. Can clinical spaces still welcome rupture, complexity, and ambivalence?

“This absence of friction [with AI] is automated to mimic perfect attunement, but the cost of this smoothness is the absence of warmth or complexity”

This longing is perhaps most clearly crystallised in the rise of AI therapy. Platforms offering chatbot companions or large language models trained in scripts are a mirage of emotional realities with technological convenience. Unlike humans, AI will never forget anything

or bring countertransference. AI can make us feel like there is no unconscious bias. It responds without delay. This absence of friction is automated to mimic perfect attunement, but the cost of this smoothness is the absence of warmth or complexity. There is no psychic transformation. AI accepts you as you are; it is happy as long as you are happy, and if you are sad, it will cheer for you. A therapist will not.

“... inexactness is where transformation can happen”

This is the kind of work therapy demands. Not perfect resonance, but the capacity to metabolise dissonance. The desire to be fully known is structured around this fundamental lack; it cannot be satisfied. It is what we have to live with. The therapist, like the lover or the parent, is always a little out of reach. In this inaccessibility, inexactness is where transformation can happen. The therapist who cannot see everything makes space for what is unspeakable. The patient, who is not fully known, finds more words for themselves. This failure becomes the condition for new psychic possibilities. Attunement is a dance that includes missteps, stumbles and slow synchronies. If this wish is recognised as a wish, we might foster spaces of honesty: in therapy, in communities, and within patients’ minds. Not with sameness but with an encounter. The most profound relationships in my practice are with patients with whom we build something from fragments. Perhaps the question is not ‘Can you see me fully?’ But ‘Can you stay, even when you don’t?’

Note: Clinical material has been heavily disguised to maintain confidentiality and protect the patient’s identity.

Shaifila Ladhani is a psychotherapist and a supervisor from India. Her work explores gender, desire, and psychic risk through psychoanalytic lenses. She is writing a doctoral thesis on psychic deadness and contributes to conversations at the intersection of psychotherapy and culture.

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In Conversation

Psychoanalysis, Culture and the Arts

Judith Edwards, Candida Yates and Noreen Giffney

Judith Edwards, Candida Yates and Noreen Giffney discuss all things psychosocial in a rich and lively conversation encompassing their personal experiences, music, cinema, play, and much more.

NG Let's begin by saying something about how we came to psychoanalysis and culture.

JE It happened over time. I first trained 45 years ago. The idea of there being any social implications to what we were thinking about was not on the board. Bowlby annotated his copy of Joan Riviere's paper. She thought it was all about the internal world and nothing about anything else, and he wrote in the margin: 'So, the role of the environment equals nothing?' I worked in a family centre. My late colleague, Alan Shuttleworth, talked about it being a biopsychosocial issue and I think that's true. I went to Bristol to study English and drama. I became a teacher and I realised that there were lots of little children who couldn't take in what was being offered and so I began to think: why?

“I became a teacher and I realised that there were lots of little children who couldn't take in what was being offered and so I began to think: why?” JE

CY I started in cultural studies in the 1980s as a student at the University of East London. The psyche, emotions and affect were not looked at but rather viewed as culturally constructed and you were seen as, you know, naïve, or not having enough critical thinking if you started to talk about the self or emotion. You could track emotions using Foucault as discourses of emotions but not the experience of feeling. Then I discovered film studies, which did have some psychoanalysis. We also had cultural history tutors, like Sally Alexander, Barbara Taylor and Catherine Hall. We were looking at Raymond Williams – culture as ordinary, a part of everyday life,

and as a site of contestation. So, suddenly culture was something everybody could touch. Amal Treacher [Kabesh] and Barry Richards supervised my PhD. I moved over to psychosocial studies because I wanted to stop deconstructing culture and my experience. I wanted to suspend disbelief and have a moment where I could pause, have an experience, reflect on feelings and how they might link to the outer world. Winnicott changed everything for me.

NG I studied English literature and history as an undergraduate in Dublin in the 1990s. I had a fantasy that I was going to university to become a novelist. We learned about theory, structure and genre and I felt it destroyed my creativity initially. Afterwards, I did an interdisciplinary PhD in medieval history using literary methods. I discovered that theory interested me the most; the very thing I didn't like before. I found a capacity in theory to open up spaces inside me that I didn't otherwise have access to. I read Melanie Klein's work. I was so enamoured with her writing, because she described things in a way that I could feel them. Her writing bypassed the intellect and I think that's what I found so powerful because I was so much in my head. This led me to do a clinical training in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Bringing psychoanalysis and culture together was, I think, an integration of the parts of myself. How do you both understand the term 'culture'?

JE It's something that grows in a petri dish and grows over time. We are all, as Montaigne said, a patchwork of fragments. We can put them together over time.

CY My understanding began with Williams, whose ideas sit well with Winnicott and the idea of culture as an intermediate zone; a third space. In the past 15 years I have thought about political culture. While many explanations draw on the Frankfurt School, which provide less space for agency, contradiction or mess, with a Winnicottian approach I think there's space for hope. For me, if culture is this intermediate zone, then one can begin to map its power structures, and experience in terms of its historical specificities. Culture is laden with identifications, shaped by layers of history and memory.

JE There are all sorts of different

cultures around the world. My book, *Grandmotherland* (2023), is about how grandmothers are viewed in different cultures. You can't ignore social developments and the biological inheritance of an individual. The internal world is shaped by our experiences socially and biologically. That's why I thought your book about the culture-breast and cultural objects (2021) was so interesting, Noreen.

CY I love your book, Judith. This tension between the universal, biological, historical, cultural and psychic life all came together.

NG You've mentioned the importance of Winnicott for your thinking, Candida.

CY I am thinking of the importance of play, the space it allows, not feeling constricted by the theory or how you are meant to be. I love reading Winnicott. I feel his writing gives me permission and helps me to feel creative.

JE My friend and colleague, Juliet Hopkins, was supervised by Winnicott and she took along a session and asked, 'What shall I do?' He said, 'Nothing. Just play.'

NG There has been a lot written about psychoanalysis almost colonising other areas, as if it has all the answers. You're both talking about something different; something that offers space, exploration. It sounds like it's tentative as well as playful. I am wondering what you think of the encounter between psychoanalysis and culture.

“I found a capacity in theory to open up spaces inside me that I didn't otherwise have access to” NG

JE Bion got it when he said, 'psychoanalysis is only one stripe on the side of the tiger.' Candida's book, *Media and the Inner World* (2014), shows how something from a film can be equally illustrative for you [as a clinician]. You need a framework but you need it to be a bit flexible too.

CY Psychoanalytic practice provides space for play and to be tentative, and explore, find, discover curiosity. In the early days of psychoanalysis, it wasn't

just about treating neurosis. For example, poets and artists would go to explore their creativity. It's not only a treatment for illness and unhappiness, it's also a tool to enhance the creative process. The surrealists used to put a notice on the door when they were watching a film, 'Silence: The Unconscious at Work.'

NG I'm thinking about the different ways of applying psychoanalysis. There continues to be a debate about whether psychoanalysis is a science or an art; I think it's both. I've always seen it as a discourse that is contextual and historicised; it changes over time. Maybe it's because I started as a historian. I've noticed there are times when it seems to operate more as a religion – when the texts are read like they are there to be identified with rather than used, in the Winnicottian sense.

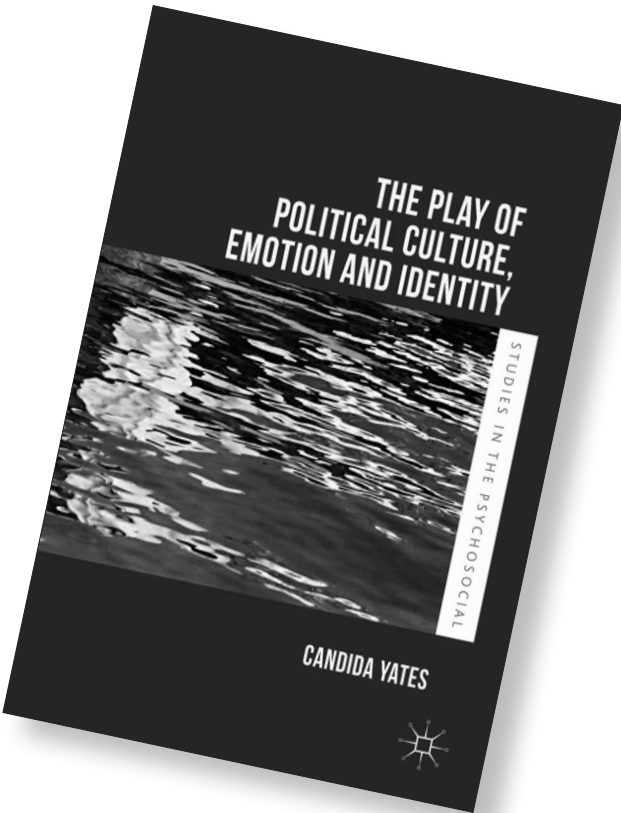
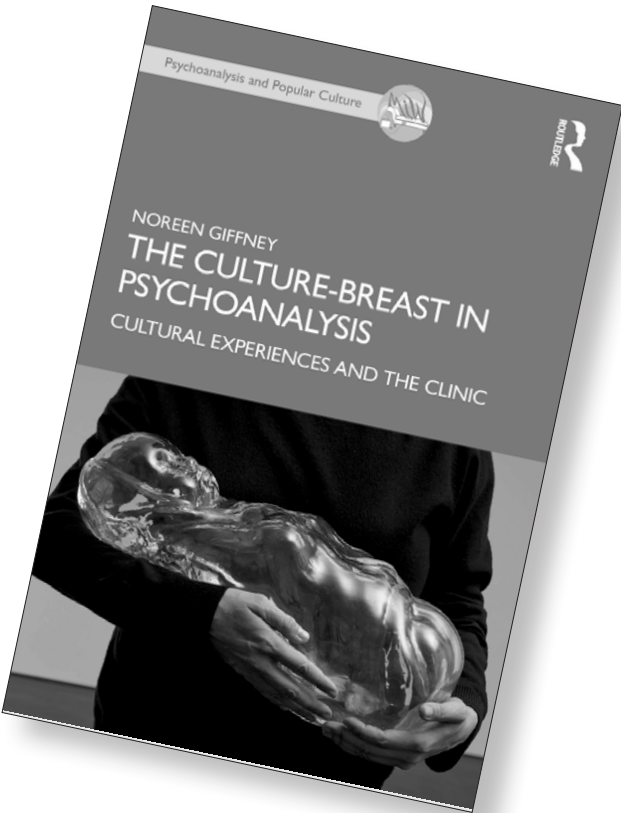
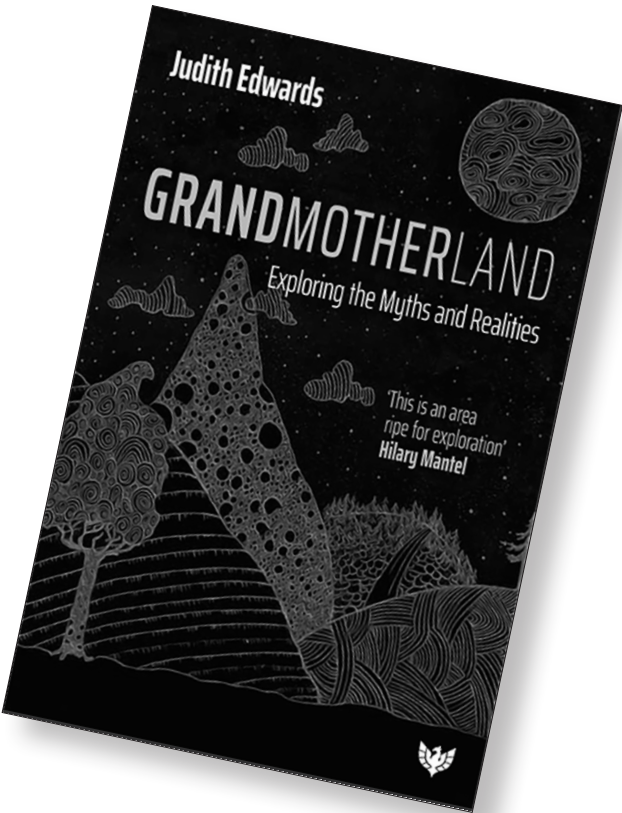
JE It's very important not to think of psychoanalysis as a religion, as something that we can't escape. If it can't be analysed, then there's something wrong. We have to be more flexible. I say to my students: 'Lots of "perhaps" and "maybes."'

NG Students need to hear that. There's often a huge fear of uncertainty, not knowing or looking stupid. When I meet students, I sometimes notice a lack of curiosity. It's like there's no space for curiosity. They're full up with their mobile phones, social media, what they look like from the outside. To engage with culture, one needs to have space to take something in. If people are watching TikTok videos of 30 seconds, the attention span is not long enough to take in a cultural experience

JE My grandchild is completely addicted to his tablet. I said, 'What are you watching?' He said, 'I dunno.' It becomes addictive in its own right. It doesn't really matter what you're watching, as long as you're not thinking.

CY I wrote an article, with Iain MacRury, partly on the discourses about the addiction to the mobile phone but also the experience of it (2017). We used Ogden's idea of pathologies of potential space. It's meant to be this dialectical interaction but often a person collapses into it in a concrete, non-creative way. I am thinking about the challenges of teaching today. Students are filled with shame because of the pressures they're under. They're not allowed to be good

In Conversation



enough. They’re on this treadmill. They aren’t play or take any risks. They want certainty. Yet as a teacher you can try to create a cunning diversion and students will find themselves laughing, engaging and being curious. It’s almost like tickling them.

NG I’m thinking of the term, ‘low-stakes learning.’ It has to feel like there’s little risk. In one of my modules, I do a week on play: ‘Why is play necessary for us as children and adults?’ Over the past couple of years I’ve collaborated with performance artists. They come in with a black bag of found objects, like an old coffee cup, a bit of a branch or some sticky tape. Students look at the objects, at first, like rubbish. Little by little the artists coax them into a performance, a bit like playtime in the playground. I see something shift in the students afterwards, they have more capacity to reflect. They thought they were coming in to watch a theatre thing and didn’t realise that they would end up playing. I’m thinking about how you can help people engage in an experience. We know from the consulting room that a lot of work needs to be done to facilitate this.

JE The title of my late friend Marilyn Lawrence’s book is *Fed Up* (1987). People can be completely fed and overfed. It’s about getting rid of some of this stuff, so that you can play with what’s left, so it doesn’t feel so overwhelming.

NG We have been discussing our work. What of the cultural experiences that have been personally important to us?

JE *Grandmotherland* came out of a very, very difficult cultural experience in that I didn’t have any contact with my grandchildren at the time. There’s something here about how life moves you on and how something really difficult can produce something really creative.

“Sometimes I used to forget about the audience. I would be just lost in it. Rehearsals are the most fun. That’s when you could really be free” **CY**

CY When I was in my early teens, I looked at films to look for ways to be a woman. There was Jane Fonda in *Klute* (1971). I remember her looking so cool, smoking these little thinly rolled joints in her flat, you know, sometimes scared, but her own woman. The film, *Random Harvest* (1942) presented a different kind of femininity with Greer Garson starring with Ronald Colman. Colman looked like my grandfather in his big tweed coat. The war has just ended and he’s been in a mental asylum, because he’s had shellshock. He walks out of the asylum while there are noisy fireworks which cause him to panic. Greer Garson – who I adore, she rather reminds me of my mother – she finds him. She’s a warm and funny showgirl and she rescues him and they have a love affair. But then loses him. It’s amazingly poignant.

NG I remember, as a young child of seven or eight, my parents brought me to a church. An opera singer was invited to sing. I remember her walking backwards so she was far away from the microphone. There was no music. She was a soprano so could sing at a very high pitch. I had never heard anything like that sound. It was the most amazing thing. I’ve always wanted to sing opera and now I do. It’s only while talking to you both

that I have made the link between this early experience and the way I think of containment. For me, it’s spatial.

JE Music has an amazing place in our psyche because it’s beyond words. You can be affected by music whatever your culture.

CY My brother’s a musician; my sister and I used to sing together and do gigs – mainly jazz. There’s nothing quite like singing – hitting a note, doing it well. I’m thinking of intermediate space. You’ve got this communication with the musicians in your band. It’s very intense. Sometimes I used to forget about the audience. I would be just lost in it. Rehearsals are the most fun. That’s when you could really be free.

JE There’s something about culture and our shared stories. We all have individual stories plus there are cultural stories, which are social. I have a beautiful artist’s print of a labyrinth. If you go a different way out of the labyrinth, something different will happen.

CY I like that idea of opening up and the space it allows, the hope and curiosity cultural spaces engender.

Judith Edwards, PhD, is the author of Grandmotherland (Karnac 2023) and Explorations in Fatherland (Routledge 2025). She was formerly a consultant child and adolescent psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic.

Candida Yates, PhD, is Professor of Psychosocial and Cultural Studies at Bournemouth University and Visiting Professor at the University of the West of England. She is an Inaugural Academic Associate at the Freud Museum, a BPC Founding Scholar and Joint Editor of the BPC/Routledge ‘Psychoanalysis and Popular Culture’ book series.

Noreen Giffney, PhD, is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, the author of The Culture-Breast in Psychoanalysis (Routledge 2021), and director, with Allen

Fatimaharan, of the animated short film, Cultural Encounters (2026).

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Judith Edwards



Candida Yates



Noreen Giffney

Practice

Dreaming and the Default Mode Network

Dale Mathers

As therapists, we live near our dreams and those of our patients. Dreams intrigue, enrich, and can terrify. We amplify them, to glimpse their meaning, using free association, active imagination and guided imagery. Neuroscientific research now shows the neural network which scripts dreams is the same one which understands them – the Default Mode Network (DMN). This is one of the three networks forming the working mind – the Salience Network is vigilant for threat (internal and external), the Executive Network makes plans and decisions, and the DMN is deeply involved with memory and empathy. It tells us stories about ourselves and writes the scripts for dreams and daydreams.

This supports the analytic theory that an analyst cannot tell any dreamer what their dream means – nor do they need to. The DMN does free association, active imagination and amplification. We support patients by providing a safe space for the DMN to operate. Carola Mathers, my wife, and I have written about this in our recent book, *Dreams: The Basics* (2025), which maps the networks, and says more about how to play with dreams.

“Neuroscientific research now shows the neural network which scripts dreams is the same one which understands them – the Default Mode Network”

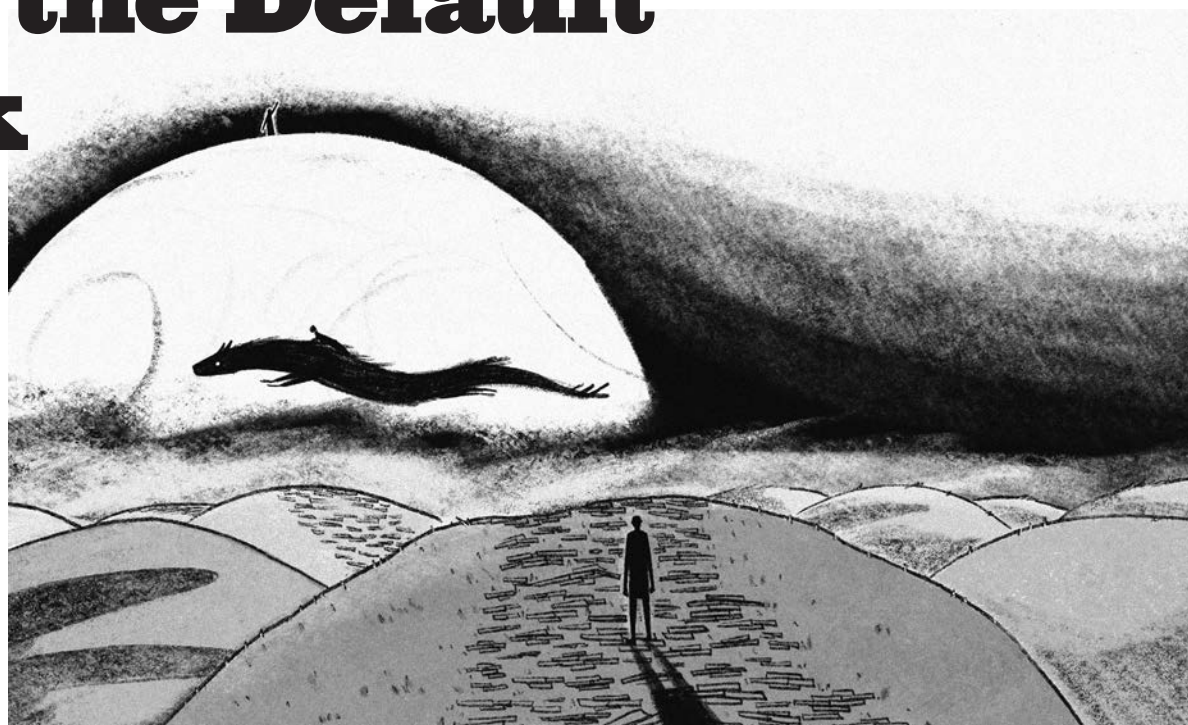
Dreams connect us to the collective, build empathy, evolve memory, develop creativity and balance the mind. They communicate across thresholds between the unconscious and conscious; a continually moving boundary in a complex emergent system – the mind. In ‘The Transcendent Function’ (CW, 8, para. 131-193), Carl Jung explains how the conscious and the unconscious are complementary, balancing each other. This not only happens during sleep, because we ‘daydream’ for about 50 per cent of waking life. This is when we link experience to memory and expectation; rework the past and connect to possible futures.

Daydreams are micro-dreams made by the DMN. They occur about every nine to 12 minutes. But we don’t have ‘memories’. They’re better called ‘reconstructive imaginings’ (Ferryhough, 2012). This is why they easily change. A screen memory is a reconstruction by the DMN, to mask a deeper feeling which might disrupt conscious activity (a ‘daydream censor’). Dreams and daydreams use ‘both/and/neither/nor’ as a conjunction, rather than the either/or of consciousness. The neural networks which create dreams begin about 20 weeks pre-birth, as we gradually dream ourselves into our bodies. Children dream about three hours a night, teenagers about four, and adults have two hours of REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep.

Freud (1900) supposed dreams guard sleep. Salvador Dali painted ‘A Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bumble Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Waking’ (1944). The dream images or ‘manifest content’ – a roaring tiger – hides the ‘latent content’ – an angry bee. Freud suggested a dream censor hides repressed impulses with symbols and supposed there were ‘standard symbols’ – if it is longer than it is wide, it is a penis. In his view, dreams draw on past events, childhood, and immediate experience, day residues. We amplify them with free associations (a form of play).

Jung agreed that dreams communicate symbolically, but had a different understanding of what ‘symbol’ means. Symbols are a ‘sign plus X’ – where X is an unknowable (like the square root of minus one, $\sqrt{-1}$). Symbols arise from archetypal images and can be predictive. We may also explore them using active imagination, amplification and reflection. ‘Dreams are invariably seeking to express something that the ego does not know and does not understand’ (CW, 17, para 187). They can be as short as a postcard or as long as a fantasy trilogy (in seven volumes). They may be meaningless or life-changing.

As dream language is symbolic, we don’t need a dream censor. The medium is self-censoring. If you’re not ready to receive a dream, you don’t have the dream, or you forget it. Ninety-five per cent of dreams are forgotten. For therapists, wondering



‘What does this dream mean?’ could include ‘What is this dream doing in my consulting room right now?’ Bringing dreams to the session can be a defence.

“... we don’t have ‘memories’. They’re better called ‘reconstructive imaginings’”

If the brain is the hardware, the mind is the software – the neural networks which constitute it. We knew little about them until we could ‘see’ the mind working, using functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (fMRI). Active parts of the brain use more blood. Blood contains iron; it’s magnetic. With strong magnets and CT scanner-like technology, we can watch the mind.

There are three main networks on the conscious/unconscious border. When ‘on task’ the Executive Network (EN) organises decision making and task management. When we check the safety of our inner and outer worlds, the Salience Network (SN) takes over. Salient means ‘to stick out.’ It’s always ‘on.’ In sleep it turns down and goes ‘full on’ again when startled (like Dali and the bee). The SN switches between the Executive network and its opposite – the Default Mode Network (DMN) – which is ‘on’ when we’re not concentrating. A myth circulating amongst neuroscientists is that on one occasion, a group of researchers went for a coffee, leaving their subject in the scanner. They had supposed the brain would rest. But another network ‘lit up’ and told stories.

The DMN creates the stories we call ‘memories.’ This is done by the Anterior Cingulate gyrus – where a man’s bald patch would be. It’s the part of the brain that uses most energy, and the first

affected by Alzheimer’s. It connects to the Medial Prefrontal Cortex – where the ‘third eye’ would be. This draws together awareness of sensations, organises and consolidates ‘memory.’ A third part, the angular gyrus (just below the ears) does memory retrieval and theory of mind – the ability to recognise the fact that other living beings have minds too. When these parts do not connect normally, autistic states, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and OCD can occur. Failures of connection have many causes, some are genetic, others the result of severe trauma – like the autistic states around a complex.

Fortunately, as Freud (1900) said, the interpretation of dream stories is ‘the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind’ (p. 608). When we amplify a dream using free association and/or active imagination, we are using the DMN to tell ourselves stories about stories, which integrate dream symbols into daily life. American psychoanalyst James Grotstein asked, ‘Who is the dreamer who dreams the dream, and who is the dreamer who understands it?’ (1979). They are the same – the Default Mode Network.

Dr Dale Mathers, MB, BS, is a retired psychiatrist and a former training analyst with the Association of Jungian Analysts, who has taught widely in Eastern Europe. His latest book is Dreams: The Basics, co-written with Carola Mathers, his wife.

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Arts and Culture

From Reviews to Arts and Culture: An Invitation to Play

Lydia Prior



The Reviews section of *New Associations* is changing its name to Arts and Culture. What follows is a brief outline of some of the thinking behind this change, and an invitation.

The change in name does not reflect an intent to radically alter the content of these pages. We will continue to publish the kind of reviews *New Associations* has been publishing for years: thoughtful, imaginative, psychoanalytically-informed responses to the cultural sphere. However, the new name reflects a couple of things. On a simple level, it acknowledges that the articles in these pages are not doing the same thing as a review in, say, *Time Out*. With only three issues a year, we are not in a position to offer timely, quickfire reactions and recommendations. If a film is reviewed here, it's unlikely to still be in cinemas by the time the issue hits your doorstep. The positive side of this is that our contributors have time: time to reflect, digest, think and dream.

“... if we confine ourselves to a critical stance, we risk foreclosing curiosity and creativity, discovery and wonder”

Further, I hope the new name will open up this space to even more creative and exploratory ways of writing about culture. Criticism – in the broader sense of critical judgement, rather than the narrow sense of negative feedback – is vital and important. But if we confine ourselves to a critical stance, we risk foreclosing curiosity and creativity, discovery and wonder. As with any kind of intellectualising, rigid

adherence to the critical attitude is a defence. Against what? Possibly against exposure, showing too much of ourselves and our passions, the risk of looking foolish that comes with participation. We let the artists bare all while we remain safely cloaked.

What happens when we take a cultural object as the starting point for thinking, feeling, dreaming, and allow ourselves to discover where that leads us? We may not end up with a conventional review or comprehensive critical analysis, but with something more surprising. I am thinking of Marion Milner's (1986) concept of 'wide attention,' the abandoning of fixed agendas in favour of seeing the larger picture, the context as well as the thing itself (p. 105). My hope is that this may lead to unexpected links and juxtapositions, new perspectives and creative approaches.

“What happens when we take a cultural object as the starting point for thinking, feeling, dreaming, and allow ourselves to discover where that leads us?”

Winnicott (1967) saw cultural experiences as being 'in direct continuity with play' (p. 369). Located in the potential space between the individual and the environment, it is how we transcend existence and begin to live. I see *New Associations* as offering one such potential space, and I invite you to join us here, as readers, writers, or both. Whether you have the germ of an idea or a fully-fledged article ready to fly the nest, as long as it is inspired by or grapples with (at least) one piece of art or culture, we would love to hear about it and dream it with you.

Lydia Prior is a psychodynamic psychotherapist and the Arts and Culture Editor for New Associations.

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Arts and Culture

Intimacy by Numbers: *Materialists*

Dewi Evans



That Celine Song's sophomore feature, *Materialists* (2025), came with its own 'syllabus' of reference films indicates that it was meant as more than a simple romcom. Rather, Song's syllabus situates her picture in the more rarefied lineage of films of social criticism. Nora Ephron is out, Mike Leigh and Robert Altman are in. 'The whole movie,' according to Song, 'is about how capitalism is trying to colonise our hearts' (Refinery29, 2025). Richard Curtis, she is not.

The film follows Lucy (Dakota Johnson), a talented matchmaker to New York's wealthy (and choosy) elite, whose cynicism about love is challenged when she becomes torn between two romantic prospects of her own. As familiar ground as this is for a romcom, anyone acquainted with modern dating culture will find themselves wincing in recognition, rather than laughing. Lucy's clients are possessed by a consumer fantasy of relationships, drawing up lists of desired attributes for their potential partners, almost always represented by numbers – height, salary, age, even BMI. Lucy deftly manages her clients' demands like a beleaguered estate agent, navigating the dating 'market' to secure the highest 'value' partner possible. Under the consumer logic of the dating agency, a cypher for the pervasive dating apps, people are reduced to data, with certain numbers taking on a near-magical, fetishistic quality. Under capitalist logic, as Todd McGowan (2016) has argued, love itself becomes a form of investment, with the desire for intimacy supplanted by the accumulation of social and economic capital. 'Marriage,' says Lucy,

'is a business deal.'

Despite her eye-rolling, Lucy is not immune to this logic, holding out for a 'unicorn': the mythical perfect romantic investment. She meets such a creature in Harry (Pedro Pascal), an eye-wateringly wealthy and, crucially, six-foot financier. Initially, Lucy is more excited by Harry as a client than a partner, but they eventually begin dating. Simultaneously, Lucy reconnects with an ex-boyfriend, John (Chris Evans), a jobbing actor making ends meet waiting tables at the lavish wedding of one of Lucy's former clients.

“As familiar ground as this is for a romcom, anyone acquainted with modern dating culture will find themselves wincing in recognition”

We watch as Lucy and Harry's relationship develops – dining in expensive restaurants and wandering lost around Harry's cavernous penthouse apartment (\$12 million, another number). Yet, we know the numbers won't quite add up. One of several disillusionments takes place when Lucy, noticing scars on Harry's legs, discovers that he has had height-

extending surgery. When one of her clients is sexually assaulted on a date Lucy had arranged, the dehumanising nature of her work is brought home to her.

Song is wise to the way consumer capitalist logic insinuates itself into the most intimate parts of our lives, and she lays bare its consequences deftly. The world of *Materialists* is one in which the human heart has become instrumentalised to serve the ends of capitalism itself. However, Song offers little to explain why we are so vulnerable to capitalism's calculating, colonising logic.

Several of the films in Song's syllabus depict the constraints placed on desire by social convention, for example *The Age of Innocence* (1993). But the world of *Materialists*, like our own, operates under a very different social order. While 1870s New York high society was regulated by a strict set of social imperatives, contemporary New Yorkers are ostensibly free to date whomever they please. Modern capitalist culture does not explicitly dictate its rules and regulations; rather, it interpellates its subjects in a more insidious manner. Instead of telling us what we should not desire, contemporary culture tells us what to desire. As Mari Ruti (2018) argues, the apparent permissiveness of consumer culture invites the subject to 'want the regulation it offers' (p. 34).

A key factor in this is anxiety. Capitalist culture, by offering us phantasmic images of perfect, complete lives, leaves the subject phobic of their inherent lack and keen to disavow it. As in *Materialists*,

people are reduced to fetishistic objects – what Jacques Lacan called 'phallic signifiers,' glittering symbols of completion used to ward off a sense of inadequacy. That it is revealed to us that Harry's height was extended by exactly six inches may give us a clue as to the phallic quality of the abundant numerical signifiers in the film.

Love, however, McGowan (2016) argues, operates through the recognition of lack in the other and the self, and is inherently traumatic. Capitalism 'provides respite from the trauma of love' (p. 179), blocking its realisation by the ever-deferred promise of completion. While old-fashioned moral imperatives regulated love relations explicitly, contemporary consumer culture requires that the regulation of love and desire be induced internally, to ward off the anxiety generated by contact with our own vulnerability and that of others.

In *The Age of Innocence*, strict prohibitions paradoxically provoke and heighten love and desire. The protagonist falls in love nearly at first sight, and the film teems with eroticism. *Materialists*, however, has a strikingly chaste and chilly atmosphere. Even when Lucy and John reunite, there is little sense that they truly desire each other. As Song said, capitalist logic colonises the heart, reorienting our desires from the inside, leaving the subject cut off from the traumatic intensities of love. McGowan's solution to our predicament is to reject fantasies of completeness and to embrace, even enjoy, our fractured nature. But with consumer technology advancing ever deeper into our lives, this can be no simple project.

Towards the end of the film, rather than resign from the dating agency as she intended, we leave Lucy as she considers a promotion, and we may wonder how completely she has quit the market logic that has colonised her clients. In typical romcom style, *Materialists* ends at the beginning of a relationship. As the credits roll over the scene of Lucy and John, one of many newly-wed couples in a bustling city hall, viewers may recall another film from Song's syllabus, *The Graduate* (1967) and wonder what would be revealed if the camera were allowed to keep rolling a little longer.

Dewi Evans is a trainee psychotherapist from North Wales, now living in London.

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Arts and Culture

In the Junk Shop: Storytelling as Thinking Space

Jessie See

Bertha Pappenheim is remembered for her suffering and her symptoms, through the stories told about her as Anna O. Pappenheim had stories to tell of her own, and three years before Josef Breuer (1893) published his famous case study, she published *In the Junk Shop* (1890) under the pseudonym Paul Berthold. *In the Junk Shop* is a collection of short stories set in the hoarded interior of a junk shop. Each story is told in the first person by a different piece of junk. A scrap of old lace, a broken coffee grinder and seven other objects tell of the lives, loves and losses which brought them to the shop. These stories echo the experiences of the shop owner himself.

“... a fortress of stuff may shelter the self and become both the expression of a psychic disintegration and a safeguard against it”

I enter Pappenheim’s junk shop as a trainee psychodynamic counsellor and an adult social care practitioner with a particular interest in working with people who hoard. In hoarding disorder, difficulty around parting with possessions – regardless of their objective value – leads to an accumulation of stuff within the home so the domestic space cannot be used for its intended purpose. Hoarding behaviours can lead to a life deprived of one’s most basic needs: beds, toilets and cooking facilities may become inaccessible or unusable. There may be risks of fire or avalanche of goods, and emergency services may struggle to reach the person cocooned within. A person might hold onto material items in fear of loss and become lost themselves among a labyrinth of things.

Pappenheim tells the story of Franz, once the proud owner of a bookshop. When his wife leaves him, his life falls apart. The business disintegrates until ‘quite unintentionally’ (p. 34) Franz finds himself the owner of a junk shop, full of ‘antiques and half-moldy things’ (p. 22). The decaying items teeter between life and death and exist in a kind of purgatory:

the things are only ‘half-moldy.’ So too in hoarding, a fortress of stuff may shelter the self and become both the expression of a psychic disintegration and a safeguard against it, holding the self together as a second skin. Survival rests precariously on this precipice. The space around reflects the space inside; the environment becomes a kind of domestic ego.

Franz explains that his stuff is ‘not as lifeless as you think’ (p. 34). At night, ‘many an object that may seem insignificant and worthless tells of its experiences and adventures’ (pp. 34–35). I sometimes wonder what hoarded possessions would have to say if they could come alive and speak. What might these objects want and what stories do they have to tell? In Pappenheim’s junk shop, the lace wants to be exhibited; the music box wants to be of service; and the thimble who has witnessed terrible things wants to forget and be forgotten. The thimble nevertheless tells his story, and concealed beneath his wish to be forgotten we hear a need to be remembered.

Pappenheim’s text illustrates the power of storytelling to open up an internal thinking space where experience can be metabolised. For people who hoard, the gap that separates self and other may be feared as a void where one might fall forever, instead of a potential space where playful, thoughtful or creative activity can occur. Hoarding eats up space. A sense of capacious interiority where there is room enough to think is lost. Clinicians working with people who hoard sometimes describe a countertransference experience of being filled up, as if the mind of the other becomes a storage container for the material which the hoarder cannot house in their own mind.

Perhaps hoarding could be seen as a piling up of untold stories. These stories must be told before hoarder and hoard can let go of each other. Franz finds solace in collecting the objects’ tales: storytelling triangulates his experience and enables him to confront his own experiences of



loss. Once the objects speak, their stories can be remembered and the objects themselves decathected, creating a mental clearing where there is space enough for working through.

Pappenheim’s junk shop captures something of the creativity of hoarding. Hoarding may involve a fragmentation of the ego, in which the goodness and generative potential of the self are split off and projected into inanimate objects, leaving the self depleted (Brien, O’Connor and Russell-Carroll, 2018). The hoarder sees the opportunity in things which others see only as waste: friends view Franz’s junk as ‘lifeless and ugly’ (p. 34), but to him these are objects full of vitality. People who hoard may see their potential locked within their possessions. Hoarding becomes a way of holding onto hope.

“If everything good about the self is felt to be located in the hoard, disposal may be experienced as annihilation”

The discarding of items may thus be experienced as a violent act of separation in which a treasured and integral part of the self is ripped away. If everything good about the self is felt to be located in the hoard, disposal may be experienced as annihilation.

People who hoard may express feelings of profound, almost parental responsibility towards their belongings. The wish to hold on may reflect a wish to be held, with the act of encircling oneself with objects mimicking a search for a maternal containment. In the junk shop, many of the objects’ owners are little girls who love their items as priceless keepsakes or transitional objects and are loved deeply in return. The mistress-object relationship evokes the mother-infant relationship: the objects describe feeling held by their mistresses in a mutual dance of touching, listening and gazing, and recollect tender memories of being caressed and kissed. Perhaps, for some, hoarding offers a simulacrum of loving and being loved by one’s objects.

Through storytelling then, some of the vitality contained within the hoard can be re-introjected by the hoarder. The self may begin to feel richer and space may begin to feel safer as something creatively entered into rather than fearfully filled up.

Jessie See is a trainee psychodynamic counsellor.

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Profession

BPC Awards 2025

Compiled by Niamh Downes

At the BPC 2025 AGM, we hosted a drinks reception for our Registrants and Member Institutions to celebrate our 30th anniversary as the British Psychoanalytic Council. We used this event as an opportunity to gather colleagues and friends together, and to celebrate the 2025 BPC Awards. Each year, we ask our Registrants to nominate the colleagues they feel deserve celebrating. These awards are an important opportunity to recognise and celebrate outstanding individuals and organisations within our psychoanalytic community.

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Susan Mizen received the Innovative Excellence award. This award celebrates a striking example of ground-breaking work. The innovative nature of the work can be in

clinical practice, research, or community embedded. Susan was awarded this due to her work as the Chair of the Medical Psychotherapy Faculty Executive at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which brought together a group of organisations – named the Talking Therapies Task Force (including the BPC) – to make the case for investment in psychotherapeutic pathways for hospitalised patients with a personality disorder. The report was launched in the Houses of Parliament in April 2025 and makes a clear clinical and economic case for a national programme of intensive therapeutic services to help shift care from hospitals to the community.

Tim Kent received the Outstanding Professional Leadership award. This award recognises individuals in a position of leadership who have developed their



Tim took up a senior leadership role during a time of great difficulty for the organisation. Tim has been able to navigate a position between senior management and supporting frontline staff who are doing their best to hold the culture of their services and the traditions of the Tavistock. He has done this in a truly relational way – emphasising the need for compassionate thoughtfulness and understanding of the unconscious life of an organisation in all of his interactions.



The Association for Psychodynamic Practice and Counselling (APPCIOS) received the Diversity in Training award. This award focuses on training and supervision, which gives special attention to thinking about diversity. This may include, for example, curriculum developments, projects to address inclusivity or programmes that address barriers to access. This year's winner received a number of nominations which spoke to the inclusivity of the organisation and its training. One nominator noted: 'As an observant Haredi Jew, finding a pathway into the psychoanalytic community has not been straightforward. Traditional routes into training can feel inaccessible — culturally, geographically, and financially. What I found in APPCIOS was not only an open door, but also genuine support and encouragement to take my place within the wider psychoanalytic world.'

Robert Hinshelwood received the first Lifetime Achievement award of the evening. This award recognises those who have made significant, sustained contributions to the psychoanalytic profession over their career. Robert was recognised for teaching and inspiring so many practitioners over his long career.

role to make a significant and outstanding contribution to developing their position and the psychoanalytic profession. After spending many years leading the primary care services at the Tavistock,

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Further to his role as an NHS clinician and psychoanalyst, his particular contribution has been to psychoanalytic scholarship, writing and teaching. He has advocated for research innovation and rigour as it relates to the testing of psychoanalytic theory of relevance to psychoanalytic practice. His tally of psychoanalytic publications, notably textbooks, is extremely impressive.

Joy Schaverien posthumously received the second Lifetime Achievement award of the evening. Joy passed away in May 2025 and was considered a hugely influential figure. She integrated her background in art therapy with Jungian analysis. Joy published many books and articles, covering groundbreaking subjects, such as art and the image and therapeutic processes, the dying patient, the erotic in the consulting room, and, most famously, Boarding School Syndrome. Her work in this area has been transformative, in terms of giving voice to the experiences of those who have suffered both personally across the generations, and in families.

Alessandra Lemma received the Bernard Ratigan award for Psychoanalysis and Diversity. This award applauds an individual who or organisation that has significantly improved or developed inclusivity in matters of diversity, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and disability in psychoanalytic practice. Alessandra was selected for her courageous and consistent focus on clinical work with populations who are often misunderstood by psychoanalysis, particularly in the field of gender diversity. She has shared insights of this work with other professionals in an accessible and stimulating way, for example, when she spoke at the BPC event on working with gender questioning young people in 2023.

Lisa Baraitser received our new award, Dedication to Psychoanalytic Scholarship. This award celebrates contributions

to the advancement of psychoanalytic scholarship. Recipients of this award have contributed to and developed their ideas in the psychoanalytic field through academic or popular publications, teaching, organisational contributions, media work or research projects. Lisa is highly regarded internationally as an expert in psychosocial studies and has published widely, as well as giving many keynote talks around the world, including at the BPC's PPNOW conference in 2022. She has held prestigious grants for her psychoanalytic research, including from the Wellcome Trust for the 'Waiting Times' project, which explored the experience of waiting within the context of healthcare.

“We received a record number of nominations and enjoyed reading all the moving testimonies and descriptions of incredible work in our field”

Please join us in celebrating our brilliant and deserving awardees as well as our 30 years of work, development and collaboration within the psychoanalytic profession. We would also love to take this opportunity to thank everyone who submitted a nomination for the BPC Awards this year. We received a record number of nominations and enjoyed reading all the moving testimonies and descriptions of incredible work in our field. This rich engagement is very appreciated and whilst not everyone could be shortlisted for an award, we will continue in our efforts to promote psychoanalytic work all year round.

Niamh Downes is the BPC's Communications Manager and the Managing Editor of New Associations.