



*THE
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ZOOM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

NICK MERCER

Some early thoughts on online work under the pandemic

Therapy in the online Underworld: shadow food in a shadow land or an authentic return to the mysteries?

Do Covid 19 and therapy share the same 2 metre gravity field?

John Osborne's verdict on *Waiting for Godot* — counter to the general adulation — “A very long chew on a very dry prune”, comes to mind, along with the pallor of the Greek underworld as I sit squinting in an unnaturally hunched position at the tiny screen of my phone with knotted brow, straining to hear the communications of the ghostly figure before me. I indulge the various whims and fancies that drift through my otherwise empty transom — try them on

like suits — now I'm Hamlet on the platform at Elsinore straining to hear the fading voice of the old king as the cock crows and the daylight shines through him, now Socrates back in Plato's Cave — Withnail-like — by mistake — struggling to decipher the shapes and wondering why he returned.

These delinquent wanderings flourish in the lack of that physical proximity — why? Because these ghostly images lack the power of presence — cannot hold — that total immersion in the same air. Language is presence. Like Covid, therapy operates best around 2 metres ... but also, like Covid, sometimes travels mysteriously.

The above were my thoughts a few sessions in, still struggling with the technology and pronouncing with spurious authority to avoid the pain of feeling stupid. Since then, since Friday 13th March to be precise, I've done at least 10 hours a week on Zoom and FaceTime, on phone, laptop and iPad, and seen a whole rich new world open up, one almost unthinkable in the gloom

of the old consulting rooms. Heresies abound. A brave new world, and such creatures in it, I muse, as a woman carrying a baby waves to the screen as she passes through the room, touches my client on the shoulder in gentle apology — a cat appears. Meanwhile at my end the postman calls and I have to answer. Each time, the space resumes without fuss and each time I'm less fazed as the old orthodoxies crumble. And each time the soup of it feels richer, that's the thing that quickens the pulse... that the relationship — the allotted time and space of it — can not only survive outside the physical confines of the room but actually increase in potency by expanding to include the everyday. Much like the realisation of those other rooms — AA and NA — the healing is not just in fellowship, but also in the incorporation of the ordinary — and, more specifically, in the unpredictability of the space — you don't know/can't control who's going to be there — sometimes the interruptions are the free association equivalent — the memorable moment rather than the

central spiel. The mad share that pierces the drift to collective bewitchment.

So, too, in the Zoom sessions — the ringing doorbell, the incoming call that darkens the screen at a crucial moment, the insistent scratching of the cat, the need for a piss — at both ends... for the first time I've had to go for a piss during a session — and be transparent about it afterwards — no use trying to retreat behind a blank screen after that — as tragi-farcical as a bullfighter sprawled in his own gore in the sand, ineffectually waving the muleta at a newly woke bull.

I'll say more on this and don't mean to simply binarise it and say it's good or better than the physical encounter. Of course we need the silence and the privacy as well — and the physical contact — the journey to the place of what is a dead ringer for an assignation year in, year out. The suspense of it all. I've heard the sound of the arriving motorbike, the bicycle being locked up, a certain cough, a pause, and then the shock of the entry phone, the manner of answer, the tone of the voice, the use of the name, the creak of the stairs — all those physical realities that herald and filter the entrance into the room.

There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
(TS Eliot — *Ballad of J Alfred Prufrock*)

Well — unlike Eliot's Prufrock — with Zoom there will be no time. With Zoom a message appears telling me someone's in the waiting room awaiting admittance. I press the key and a second message tells me they're joining with audio, a pause of electronic fumbling — a disembodied voice — and they appear, suddenly, shockingly, in a flash of ectoplasm, usually with a magnified outstretched hand describing a mudra in front of my face as they adjust the position of their screen. It's different. In that receding physical past I've shook hands, hugged, given a barely perceptible silent nod to punctuate the arrival or parting — whatever felt right with that particular person. But with this all niceties are bypassed.

Nonetheless, an interesting way of working... and this new way of working borne out of necessity has a different

gestalt than pre-Covid on-line work. Like the virus, it's new.

And as for 'transference' in the virtual world. Does it operate? Well, a mischievous comparison — pornography — does... evokes a whole story within the spectator provoked by those pristine images of labyrinthine flesh — a newly shocking fusion of bodies in Rabelaisian abandon in a clarity and perspective/ point of view seldom seen in real life, amplified in impact by the new taboo of 'proximity'. That works... albeit a tad one-sided.

So, what are the losses of time and distance — do fixed things like books, plays, poetry work? Things that need to be re-animated. Do they still stir us - evoke the ghosts of autobiography subtly different with each individual?

A resounding yes. So, too, a conversation, prefaced on the idea of a therapeutic encounter to evoke the trauma into visibility and release it with words, to lend it a language other than bodily ailment and the mute reproach of silenced thoughts — a healthy freedom as opposed to thwarted rebellion.

That last an aside, really — more to do with the difference between Freud's analyses of Leonardo Da Vinci and Schreber and his encounters with Dora and The Rat Man than the efficacy of online therapy.

But these encounters on Zoom are neither, especially if fleshed with the memory of previous encounters in the physical. Their meaning and potency is contextual — directly related to the proximity of the plague without. I'm on total lockdown, cannot stray beyond the steps of my house - some of my clients, too - and this concentrates — imbues these encounters with an increased valency.

Many things new become evident — a cat appears, my own, a doorbell rings that has to be answered — a baby cries then appears briefly in the arms of the mother who waves to me as she crosses to another room. Fort-Da. All these can be seen as obstacles to 'the work' (the hushed reverence of which speaks its deadness) rather than the work itself. But view them as a dream-like stage set — a manifestation of the man or woman before you — the pictures, the discarded clothes — the books the cat and the woman and child - and a rare mirror glimpse occurs that

shatters the frame of orthodoxy once considered essential to the rites of psychoanalysis. A good thing.

Last, I'm conscious that practically all the clients I'm currently seeing on-line I've previously seen in the room... even a couple who have come back after years away, so I don't know how different it would be with someone known only through the screen from that crucial first encounter on. Though I'm sure I'll soon find out.

Another last observation of note — in the sudden shock of the initial transition a couple of clients balked, understandably, took time out, then joined with me in exploring the technology together. Thus, we entered this brave new world together and there is something about the transparency of that parity that yields the unexpected. I've seen them struggle with the sound, the camera position and the errant signal — and the occasional reach for the headphones to ensure privacy from their partner in the next room. And they've seen me struggle...oscillate between Zoom and FaceTime — change rooms to be nearer the router in the middle of the session in the early days when the picture froze — rather

than sit transfixed straining to hear a fading voice while pantomiming empathy and vainly hoping the sound will recover before they ask me anything significant (In my defence, that last only a fugitive thought in the flicker of initial panic). Like the virus, this new way of working finds you out — keeps you honest and challenges in a way the old encounters on familiar turf did not. A client with an artist's eye instructs me, *"You're looking down on me...tilt, yes, yes, no...too much, too much...too deferential — back up, up... perfect"*. And I listen. The old saw — embrace humility or suffer humiliation. In short, be seen. It would be good to hear how other therapists are finding their way with what looks like a permanent change for all of us. I share a room with another therapist in Cavendish Square and we were discussing this morning whether we continue or not. The dawning realisation that it's not just us who won't fancy a trip on the tube to Oxford Circus in any immediate future — nobody else will either. Interesting times.

Footnote: Final Diary entries...

The world I wrote from below is gone, perhaps forever.

Friday, the 6th of March, watching the moon, waxing gibbous, crystallise and define at 10 to 5 on a sunny day, ahead of us the plague, coronavirus, COVID-19. like the lull before the storm.

Here we are on Tuesday the 10th of March 2020, not quite in lockdown but it feels inevitable. In Italy the deaths rise and rise the whole country is on lockdown 60 million people confined to their homes unimaginable they reckon we are two weeks behind them and here am I high in my eyrie in Cavendish Square John Prince's Street looking down on the people hurrying to Oxford Circus tube. It's hard to imagine the virus scything through the crowds and more so beneath the ground in the swirling maul of Oxford circus tube but I know it is and I know I'm watching it hurrying past... one can imagine it radiating out from there - the Victoria line the Central line spokes of the wheel criss-crossing the great city interacting with other spokes - everywhere columns of people hurrying along, hurrying out from the big city with the deadly cargo throughout the countryside seaside towns rural towns market towns and villages posh enclaves all open to the enemy within — all Danae to the

stars. I sat in the PA this morning in Hampstead with my antibacterial wipes and my antibacterial gel, my bog rolls and my water in the dawning knowledge I won't be coming back.

Final Footnote

Monday 29th June 2020.

Since I wrote the above I've been working solely on Zoom and FaceTime. I have new clients who I've only met online... only known as a flickering image in the scrying stone of my computer. After 3 months on total lockdown I see myself beside them, hirsute and wild, somewhere between Faust and Ben Gunn — a case of lockdown lycanthropy — and I'm torn between wonder and bewilderment. The encounters feel of a different richness — the defence of distance, the muting of affect welcomed by some. *"I feel freer, it's allowed me to say things I couldn't say in the room"*, says one. *"When will I see you again"*, says another, more a lament for a gone world than a question just for me. *"Yes, I miss you, but also the going there, the being there."* Like some Newtonian law the novelty of the changing locations — seeing where they and I live - and the knowledge that it brings, offers some compensation for

the loss of that shared air, the firefly rhythm of intimacy whereby we minutely mimic and accommodate in stretch and gesture, pulse and breath, the speech and action of the other. In this strange new world I've listened through Tuscan pastures, the grass on the feet like the whisper of a brush on a snare, sheep bells clanking in the background and swallows arrowing by, trudded the wastes of Wanstead Flats, the gulls keening the deserted pitches, a world eerily bereft of meaning where the client becomes a Munch-like figure in a vast flat landscape. I've watched the weight of bookshelves bowing the shoulders and making supplicants of those before me and shared the sense of awe when something shifts and the shoulders unbend, the head comes up and we apprehend each other, perhaps for the first time, with direct eyes — and there's nothing. A moment of equivalence.

These are historic times, and what we do now matters. Much of the old stuff already feels irrelevant. But there's great permission in it — an encouragement to the humility of not knowing what comes next.

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Early Zoom Social Distancing

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST IN ME AND THE CORONA VIRUS

CHRISTINA MOUTSOU

Every morning I wake up to dreams I can only half remember of city bazaars full of street food stalls, planes taking me to destinations I have never been to, meeting friends in parties. My brain must be registering what is no longer there, trying to alert me to it. In one of my dreams, I meet three of my friends from the time I was doing anthropological fieldwork in Brussels, who now live in three different parts of the world. I remark how rare it is for all of us to find ourselves in the same place. We meet in a Pakistani café in East London bustling with life.

There has never been, I think, a more ripe time for anthropological research on the effects of globalisation and at the same time, on how cultural context affects all of us. I feel blessed to have a

number of patients from around the world, some of whom I had worked with on Skype only even before. This transports me regularly to other cultures and how strikingly cultural specificity and globalisation have come together during this escalating crisis. What I mean by that is that all my patients, no matter where they are in the world, have now been asked to stay at home.

Yet, where they are and of course, with whom they are, is a significant factor in the experience. Hygiene practices, their relationship with the urban or rural landscape around them, their view on their local government's politics, their position with regards to religion and spirituality, their everyday habits, life as we all know it in our particular context has been shattered, yet the context still matters. Personally, I miss access to water, preferably the sea, painfully. I imagine that those in lockdown near water will have freedom that I just cannot access at the moment, yet, I know this is a fantasy reminding me what home feels like to me.

WHERE IS HOME?

Culture is everywhere at the moment, especially as we are all asked to stay stranded in one place, a place we may realise we don't find easy to call home. In fact, this is one of the pressing questions that has come up for many people. Where is home? And what if one calls home more than one places, places that they cannot longer visit, where beloved ones live?

Living in a highly mobile globalised world meant that up to now, we could all, to an extent at least, pick and choose where home was. We could move effortlessly, not realising that making a choice was going to be demanded of us. I found that for some of my patients, as well as for some of my friends, the question became pertinent, right from the beginning of the crisis. Some had to make a decision very quickly before most flights were cancelled, a decision that brought to the fore a web of relationships that they prioritised over some others. Would choosing to fly to another country to be with family be

seen as jumping ship by their work colleagues and friends where they ordinarily live? Others had to say goodbye to elderly parents living in another country in full knowledge that the goodbye may be final, that they may not be able to attend their funeral in the event of their death.

Ultimately, home for all of us is being with beloved ones. Yet, many stories travelled from Italy about people dying alone in hospitals, not able to see their family, to say goodbye. Stories like that have started becoming a reality in the UK too, especially in London. As much as our access to technology has made us realise in how many different ways connectedness is possible, if only one is open to it, there are limits to how much technology can serve us when it comes to moments of life and death. Babies born under the coronavirus crisis, birthdays celebrated in isolation, illness that has to be endured at home alone or in an alienating hospital environment, surrounded by strangers wearing space suits. We are never too far away from tragedy, from losing our home with one another in the world.

ON IMPRISONMENT AND EXILE

Just at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, and when it was certainly not being taken seriously in the UK, a friend of mine asked me to participate in a literary event in Greece on the theme of imprisonment and exile either literal or symbolic. I remarked that the themes may prove particularly timely, and it turned out that I was right! I think the current crisis highlights for all of us collectively, and each of us individually, where we may be imprisoned or in exile in our life. Of course, there is the literal imprisonment in relationships one may no longer want or abusive family situations and violent couple dynamics, as it has been pointed out by the media already. Or feeling exiled from the country many members of our family live in, even from our lives as we had constructed them before. The freedom to make a choice, which in many ways we had taken for granted in our contemporary world, has now been removed and so, psychically, symbolically or even literally, we are all prisoners or refugees trying to get by.

Some of the stories I hear in my practice are about couples who escaped their everyday reality in order to be isolated

together, yet some of them have found that they have unwittingly built a prison around them and, scarily, they don't know for how long the imprisonment will last. Others are in lockdown alone, and while this may have felt like the right choice to begin with, in the sense that it is better to be alone in enclosure rather than with somebody else who may trigger or threaten you, they are now finding that not sharing the same physical space with others and not knowing when this will end, has locked them into an emotional desert that puts into question their mental survival. And we are only at the beginning.

HUMOUR AND FOOD

I find humour and food have brought my anthropologist and psychoanalyst selves together during the current crisis. Has there been anybody who has not received innumerable jokes on their mobile and who has not been tempted to share with friends and family? Or anybody who has not found that their day revolves around three meals, which now involve planning, cooking and even, fantasising about them? It has certainly been one of the most positive effects of the virus for families and couples, the sharing of three meals a day, every day.

Statistics say that couples who eat together stay together, and certainly, there is no family life that does not revolve around food, admittedly not always in a good way. Anthropologists would say that the sharing of food has been the glue keeping all traditional societies together, yet in our modern urban world, food had often become something to just manage and spend as

little time as possible on during a busy working day.

Food of course, allows us to focus on the pleasure principle, the life instinct and we all need a healthy dose of it at the moment. As for jokes, there has hardly been a time before in our experience, where regulating our feelings seems crucial for survival. Humour allows for the bleakest and the

most unpalatable to be expressed in a form that seems to entertain us at least for a little while. It speaks of the inevitable reality that at times like this, we will all come face to face with what Jung has called 'the shadow', our darkest thoughts and fears. If we can at least laugh about it, it may be that fear will not win over the best of us.

A FINE BALANCE

ALISON DAVIES

Fliss Cadbury and I did some teaching on the PA Introductory Course in June around the theme of ‘Solitude and Community’. These themes had been preoccupying me during this time of lockdown. What I was struggling with was the balance between how much do I value being on my own and how much do I need others. This for me is always in the context of being a painter and a sculptor, as well as a psychotherapist and my need to connect with others.

In our teaching together we looked at Antony Storr’s book “*On Solitude..The Return to the Self,*” and we thought about how, and if, creativity and solitude might sit alongside community and togetherness.

In this context I am offering these two images, painted in oil, that I finished at this time living alone in self-isolation during which, part of that time, my son Timothy was critically ill in hospital with the virus.



Moon and Tears — Alison Davies

When lockdown restrictions were eased and I could meet one other person outside in my garden. I shared my work with an artist friend so that I could have an opening into someone else's view of my yet to be completed work.

This has always proved very valuable in my struggle to finish each painting... and it was and always is a struggle.

The communication from another viewing my paintings reminded me of therapy and the opening up of a way through to a new thought or idea. Julia's encouraging suggestions helped me not to give up or to settle for a painting half achieved ... to push through and develop the next stage that fully expressed what I had to say.

For me painting, is a creative pursuit, has to be done in solitude, but the living around it is done in connection with others. This balance I have been relearning during these past few months.



April Morning — Alison Davies

ROOM FOR CONFUSION

BARBARA LATHAM

Deciding did not paralyse as I chose for Christmas, got spinach rather than sprouts or when I agreed to marry. Yet faced with this decision there's only disbelief that I ever knew how you reached conclusions. Finding I have been staring down the plughole is no help in getting a shopping list. Once I get to the greengrocer, it's obvious dithering is inconvenient -though friendly, their small shop has no waiting room for the uncertain. How then do I begin to make up my mind over the marriage when, two months ago, it was nowhere on my radar that there might be a question?

Before upheaval, barely known threads must have stitched past to present, as if it was meant to be that I felt safe, comfortable and well turning forty-three — with some continuing lifeline held by

tidy connection back to the pictured small girl and the white wedding. Then threads were cut. Their existence had hardly occurred to me, let alone that they could be severed and that making sense might unravel. A taken for granted, unfolding family future abruptly turned to mist. Surges of outrage and hurt briefly shape thought but they subside — collision with clarity returns. I cannot sustain war. Endurance was never my strength and fighting Brett gives only limited satisfaction. Though on some nights, locking myself behind a barricade, flinging out furious, righteous grenades can work, as long as our shared daughters, of eleven and nine, stay asleep. They, too, are bewildered — continuity once ruled their lives as it did mine. The three of us got lost, yet both girls know streets round here and the way they hang together. How could we all have taken a left turn for that cake shop we found weeks ago?

I was, yet again, getting something wrong and taking our daughters with me.

The grandeur of the word betrayal appeals and I would like to stay in the operatic certainty it generates. But as soon as exploding passes I am back to confusion . How did I not know? Yes, Brett lied. Misled, he says and though he never actually told me a lie, repeats sorry, sorry, sorry. And what use is that? Old stories of myself have been stripped away, leaving me suspended in “*so where do we go from here?*” And on what did I base belief that we had solid foundation beneath our life together? Brett, who was meant to love till death do us part, insists he still does. When we made our vows didn't he know he would always love Nicky?

Then what is his declared intention worth now?
How is deciding that to be done?

There is no doubting Brett relished becoming a parent. His own father disappeared in Australia, starting two further families, and dumping his first born young sons.

By his teens, Brett understood, however rich the connection and on-going long nights of conversation with Nicky, he wanted children.

He also claims to truly value being a husband and is all regret at not having risked confiding Nicky's importance from the start. He told himself it protected me from hurt and that I couldn't understand. If we were meeting now rather than back when we were twenty-six, how his sexuality didn't fit one neat channel might more easily be shared. Or so he suggests.

But, that fidelity was fixed for me, and not for him, sticks lumpen in my chest. When I said those words in a church we hardly went into before or after, how could I understand what inhabiting marriage might mean? Yet I wanted our vow to come true.

Surely he recognised his first love mattered enough to remain?

Brett asks if I ever felt short changed. And, if not, is my response only partly that he kept too much from me but also from looking through monster green eyes?

If it is jealousy it has thickened to a solid to fling at him. I don't want it, he should get it all!

While the fact of his other love was masked, jealousy could hardly be an obstacle between us. But, once seen, Nicky diminishes my place — a constant I cannot imagine a way past.

And the picture of our family has fractured — its various images no longer complete a pretty jigsaw, as it did when Brett was my husband and that settled matters.

It used to be easy to believe the girls and I came first and intolerable to grow unsure.

Brett insists he will not leave us. Even if asked to move out, our daughters will remain his centre.

Though where would he live, given we only just manage the mortgage as it is? Nicky, presumably, would stay as soul mate with whom Brett has a different exchange.

If I set a choice as condition for him staying and he accepted my terms, Brett

doubts any more of him could be available.

At thirteen, while fooling around with his best friend, both fell in the river, then came out laughing and dropped onto grass, side by side, looking skyward. When eventually they sat up, Nicky's thick hair was over his face and Brett had a comb in his pocket.

He reached to those dark curls and as he combed, chocked with a tenderness inconceivable before.

A moment echoed at first sight of his child.

Not once has he offered a time of breath suspended intense care for me.

He says how grateful he will forever feel that I wanted to marry him.

But what does that mean?

It is not the claim I used to make that I was lucky to have fallen in love.

Waking one night, I ran to where Brett slept on the floor, after being banned from the shared bed.

"Nicky came to our wedding!" — shouting and shaking him to sit up while other questions flowed.

"What did you feel with both of us there?"

"Which of us roused you more?"

“He wasn’t your best man though he’s been your man for thirteen years longer than I’ve known you.”

With no volume button my voice disturbed the girls and one began to cry. There was an urge to slam open their room yelling, *“This isn’t just about you. I’m bridled with motherhood most of the time and right now I’m not. Stop snivelling, my rage will pass and I won’t kill your damned father, though he has saddled me with more than I can take!”* Instead I locked myself in our recently painted, blue bathroom and left Brett to comfort the girls. They are unused to scenes.

I refrained from pounding on the door by repeatedly slapping my own head.

Brett is distraught watching us suffer. And it does not feel quite fair to destroy things for the children to avoid hard questions with him.

Whatever he did, how far was I not noticing over those fifteen years, which had seemed good?

What had I been unable to consider?

That Brett went off on long fishing weekends three times a year, except the two years of the births, wasn’t a problem and he returned refreshed.

Friends agree on girl time, so it balanced for Brett to see his close friend, except we women didn’t have sex.

Does Brett bugger Nicky? It isn’t all conversation and tenderness between them.

Those few times, mid-fervour, that Brett penetrated my anus begin to look different .

It wasn’t unexciting to be pushed into the disconcerting, though pain lingered several days.

Did he want to do that often? Instead of asking, I wordlessly made clear it was a barrier, which he never pushed through again.

Apart from everything, what changed with my overhearing Brett at six o’clock that Monday night he thought he had the house to himself?

Clearly my compass dropped and broke, leaving me directionless and on the wrong street, unsure how I had ever known where to go.

And I erupt as I have rarely done — or is that never done — in the marriage.

“I tell Brett anything,” rolled out on repeat to friends over the years — a categorical which kept out the actual

cost of my new pink coat, with its bright shell buttons, and the way some thoughts went into storage — a neat dead end.

What is truer is that I freely chatted into his silence.

Who knew what he made of half of it.

Where did real curiosity between the two of us shrivel to too little?

Now turned detective, with Brett under suspicion, I want to search his pockets, his thoughts and his phone.

He asks what I imagine there could be to find in those details.

“You won’t track down more between us that way — and there can only be certainty about your heart or mine if all we look for is an ECG”.

“Yes, Nicky kept his place in my heart but where did that squeeze you out?”

The easy grievance is that he kept something essential from me and now it’s impossible to trust his word.

He weeps at not having seen he must have convinced himself things had to be hidden from women. They could not make room for all the confusions in you. His mother makes many claims to be loving but has brusque ideas, defining what anyone of sense would agree was beyond the pale.

For as long as he can recall, and well before thirteen, Brett saw that somehow he went over the line but luckily she didn't see everything.

Once Brett failed to consider that I might be able to accept his contradictions, that set me up.

What threatens is not just the long connection with Nicky but that he did not share it.

And why didn't I ask?

Having often declared I knew Brett well, I am exposed as a fool.

Did I assume I had most of Brett for myself and the girls?

Possibly. And though I made serious effort to include his plucky mother, it comforted when Brett and I were a pair, sharing reaction to her critical judgements of others or of any damning, indulgent behaviour spotted in our girls, whom she adores.

But there was no sharing Nicky. He escaped my having hands on any steering wheel to help drive his connection with us. From the start he refused to be drawn in as support for our unit.

He stayed outside, taking Brett away, where I had no control.

He not only shifted to the far north, weeks before our wedding, but eluded me and slipped out of place as a family friend.

Why wouldn't he take up being an uncle to our child? After all he didn't have his own.

Old friends and Brett's brother would ask, *"How's Nicky? What's he up to these, days?"* Or *"Seen Nicky lately?"* making me aware they saw him as central to Brett.

Once I asked if the very handsome, dark haired Nicky was gay. Brett said it wasn't clear cut like that and *"Nicky doesn't seek a network, he keeps few people in his life."*

So he kept Brett and didn't show interest in me or the girls.

I have no idea if he resented that I took Brett — and family life took Brett — while he had those trips.

It was a small place and perhaps Nicky had expected a big one.

Did I hope to find out by feeling bad yet still searching Brett's desk ?

An unseemly first.

Whatever Nicky's grip on Brett's heart, he had little foothold in our home, until the Monday evening Brett believed himself alone. He came in from work to a

note telling him the rest of us were out swimming.

We had been but a migraine sent me creeping back to lie in the dark, leaving our daughters with a neighbour.

I heard Brett come in then telephone and heard his tone, though not the words.

It had to be the girls, there was no one else he spoke to like that.

I sat up to listen, loving how gentle Brett could be with his daughters.

It took a moment to wonder why he was calling them. And how?

Though the eldest had recently got a mobile, she wouldn't take it to the pool.

I began to register what Brett was saying and that our daughter was not the one with whom he'd just spent *"such a precious"* Wednesday to Sunday.

Nothing was quite right.

And then too much had to be noticed.

The sister and several friends, who used to tell me how lucky I was to have Brett, now call me too kind and forgiving.

Clearly not seeing that if Brett is deemed faulty beyond repair as husband, great potholes are left everywhere.

If much of Brett went unseen, how good was my loving?

Did he really desire me or simply want a family to which he willingly gave his attention and time?

Yet we enjoyed becoming parents and each other. If Brett is forced to leave, his love for Nicky becomes huge and unsurmountable, putting those years with me in shadow for the girls as well. Soon both will be adolescent and probably see my reaction as narrow, intolerant of a wonderful father.

Since they have no doubt he loves them, as they do him, still cuddling close for stories and to talk, why would Brett's close connection with his oldest friend be a threat?

Besides won't they hate any other relationship I might try? Step families seem full of martyrdom or as messy as this with Brett. No one else will want them as he does. And there will be considerable financial strain just as they want more.

To insist on divorce is to decide Brett's less than honest love for me was inadequate. But what of my own?

Before breakfast it begins to look possible that we could do better with each other, as Brett wants — though it might take as much courage as I've got

to ease a path through jealousy and make room for complexity bit by bit. By evening one question is too hard to wash off - what if it's cowardly to let battle drain out of me and try to keep our marriage?

LOST — THINGS CLOSE BUT NOW DISTANT

LUCY KING

Companionship and the sharing of life.

Lost, irreplaceable; sorrow and tears.

Dreams that are lost, and barely remembered.

Passions now faded and barely recalled.

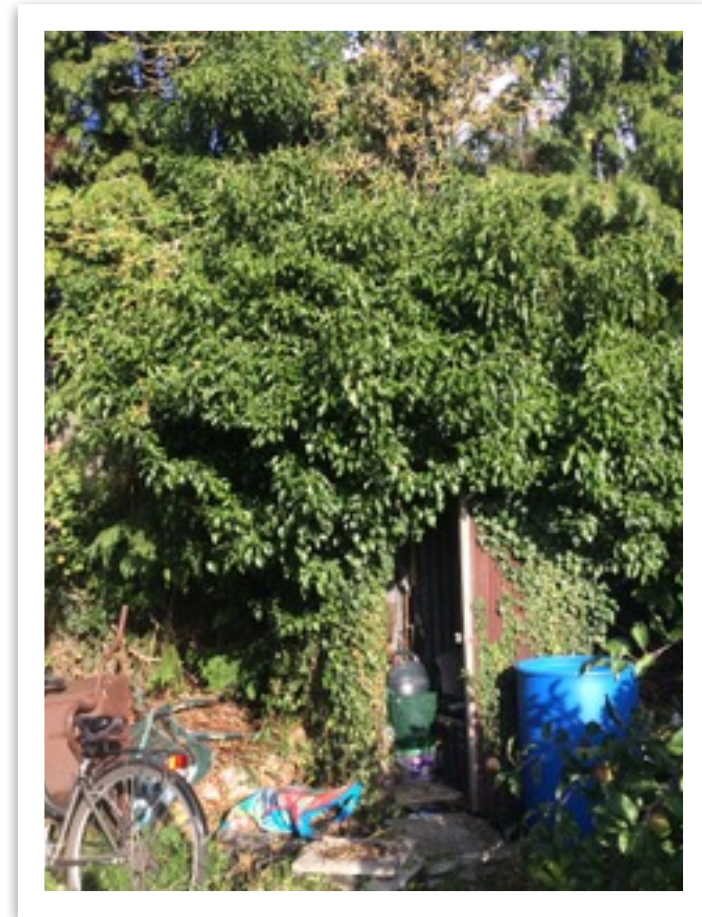
Future receding and barely believed in.

My sons, now only voices, or pictures, or a wave of a hand.

Places of childhood shared, with love, laughter, excitement.

Places of childhood secret, and only my own.

Death, constant shadow. Ever glimpsed obliquely; never in focus; but never not there.



ON QUARANTINE AND EXILE

ANONYMOUS

IN QUARANTINE

London, August 2017

‘The radioactive substance will enter your veins,’ said the nurse. ‘You will need to self-isolate straight after the injection, as you will be radioactive for a few hours.’

I felt an ice cold substance flow forcibly inside the vein of my left arm. The door shut hastily behind the nurse. I lay on my back on the narrow bench in the small windowless basement room.

London, March 2020

‘Stay at home,’ said the prime minister. ‘Protect yourself, protect others, protect the NHS.’ The day that followed was sun drenched. Tiny buds had just started

blooming on the naked branches still stiff from the harshness of winter in our garden pots.

August 2017

A nurse wearing a full body PPE accompanied me to the room with the big white tunnel. ‘Give us a shout, if you need to,’ she said, ‘and we will stop straight away. But try to stay still. That way you will finish faster. You will hear some loud banging noises. Do not get scared.’

The ceiling of the white tunnel was only an inch away from my breath. The noise deafening, as though my coffin was being sealed with nails. Is this what death sounded like?

March 2020

‘My oncologist informed me in writing that as a stage four cancer patient, I would not get hospitalised, if I contracted Covid 19. I am now self-isolating for twelve weeks.’ The young woman, condemned to death already by

her oncologist, is smiling at the camera, while her underage children can be seen faintly in the background.

Would I get the same response if I got sick? Will I also be told I am a lost case? Self-isolation at home is the only safe option then. I refuse.

IN EXILE

August 2017

It rained cats and dogs when I got out of the white tunnel in the basement. 3 pm and it was already dark as though it was November. True British summer weather. The hotel was two squares down the road.

‘Can I have the cheapest room please? It is only for a few hours.’

The receptionist sent me a strange look. It is usually young couples who hire a room for a few hours only, she must be thinking. Or maybe the suicidal too?

The bedsheets are white and stiff, just like the sheet on the hospital bench. I lay on my back and I stare at the ceiling.

The book stays inside my bag unread, the view outside the window will remain unknown to me. I should stay away from everybody so that I don't contaminate them with my radioactivity, which along with my cancer belong to me only.

April 2020

The last flights to Europe are cancelled. The lockdown is now official. The bridge has lifted, friends and family on the other side. Every day the cases as well as the deaths increase. Five years of austerity in the NHS will now result in witnessing the last breaths of the victims of Covid 19.

Around me, there is green, while I desire the emerald blue of the open sea. I am trapped inside a Victorian house with a dark fireplace below the wall mounted TV, which projects the latest tragedy. I step on black slates. In my dreams, I crave the touch of white cool marble on my naked feet. I sit on a balcony with a view on the city traffic, where I can inhale deeply and with pleasure the exhaust fumes.

August 2017

5 pm. The weather remains dark. Not even a hue of blue in the sky, even though the rain has stopped. We walk holding hands to the consultant's office. Time is suspended until we find out what the sentence will be.

'Your cancer is stage two,' says the consultant. 'Perfectly treatable, maybe curable.'

In a while, we will be walking back home, where the children are waiting for us. The death sentence has been postponed for now. The exile may end if I manage to exclude the cancer from our lives, from the tender beginning of their lives. The exile in my dark thoughts will be there for ever.

April 2020

22 °C. I lay on the hammock in our garden under the olive tree. The virus has not found me yet. Who knows, maybe this will pass too.

I dream of the melancholic scent of rain fallen on dry ground during a warm

night, the crowds in the city's open food markets in an early morning, the whispering of bodies mingling in the dusk at the seafront. I dream of noise, chaos, mess, encounters, life.





Remotely Experiencing by Lara Giussani

WHITTINGTON HOSPITAL

CAVELL WARD

NEFELI TSAKONA

Bernadette. Hands
twitching, fingers plucking,
eyes peering behind
square-rimmed glasses.
In a little girl's voice
she makes requests
that go unheeded:
*Music? Some music?
...so awfully quiet...
Is there music?*
With cropped hair
standing on end from
hours of painstaking
brushing, she perches

on the bed;
short-sighted surveyor,
forgotten coquette;
the urine sack beside
her filling by the hour.

A vacant bed, then Eveline
with old man at her side:
fast asleep,
newspaper in hand,
Santa-Claus belly
held up by old man's
braces.
Beneath the pink robe
hitched over two
scrawny thighs, her
nappy shows.
She cries when it's
injection time,
flaps clipped arms

in fright then
promptly forgets,
until the next one's due.
Propped up on pillows,
safeguarded by a sleeping
relative,
her gaze wanders sweet
and empty,
carefully avoiding
the windows.

Under the whiteboard:

Doctor Mitchell
Diet Normal
Name Joanna
sits in Cleopatra-like silence
eating her food with small,
measured bites.

A spectral belle
lies dormant
beneath the shaky
geometry of
deep-etched wrinkles.
Plump out her
cheeks' hollowed grooves
and she'd be
beautiful.
A fork is balanced
neatly between scissor
fingers and pale
tapering nails
cut rounded at the tips.
The task of biting/
chewing/swallowing is
executed with precision;
blue eyes staring straight
ahead, mouth working
soundlessly, legs crossed,
slipperd feet together,
This small act of

isolation amidst the
choral hymn of
muted sighs
surrounding her.
On stick-insect legs
she makes her way
to the bathroom,
taking those ten
stiff steps with the
concentration of
a debutante
attending her first
ball.

A stranger in no-man's
land, mouth hanging
open, the remnants of
yesterday's dinner
staining flaccid
lips and whiskered

chin, Efthyia - or
so they spell it - is
dead to the world;
snoring softly, dreaming
of grandchildren
and chores that
need doing.
On the floor next
to her dormant
body, a rejection of
the ruling currency.
Some may call it
nihilism, cynicism,
anarchism, but the
spattered crumbs of
a chewed pill
remain, either way,
her final gesture of defiance



Locked down by Andrea Heath

—
*company parted,
tears soaked the wireless, leaving
connections unstable*

—
Robbie Lockwood
—

LOCKDOWN AND AWAY

URSULA TROCHE

I experienced this weird and complex period of Covid19 lockdown from my new home far away from London. I had come here, to the edge of England on the northwest coast by the Irish Sea and near Scotland, in an adventurous bid to find more time and space for writing and art, with fellow artist who was likewise looking for space. So we both moved from our respective places, which was moving in itself. The town is called Maryport, I hadn't even heard of before, and that's exciting too: to move to a place you didn't know existed. It's been both a seaport and a mining town, and feels much further away from the Lake District than it really is. In our second year here, lockdown struck, but we had already been used to be far away from friends (the silly side of moving somewhere new). Whilst being 'isolated' from friends a prior to lockdown then, I had meanwhile come to find a different kind of



familiarity, which took me back further, i.e. to my childhood. That familiarity was the sea. The sea looked just like it did on our holidays as kids, to the nearby North Sea. Maryport is neither in the same country nor by the same sea, but it was still surprisingly familiar. The sea is a deep connector. That sea space became more or less the only accessible outdoor space then during lockdown. Our local spaces might have become an anatomy then. The rocks on the beach became more real

and started looking like beings, with a life. Animals took over the town which seemed as empty as a ghost town, seagulls crossed the roads walking, not flying, just like we do.

DIVIDED SPACES

I wonder if lockdown brought us together because we had been divided earlier by Brexit. Whereas Brexit became a taboo subject, often discussed only in the respective right circles, lockdown didn't



cause the same divisions. The issue was non-political enough to be mentioned and even seen as an opportunity to move on from Brexit — which was of course mistaken because Brexit is still going on, undoing long-held alliances. R. D. Laing wrote about the Divided Self, and now we have the Divided Nation! So how might self and nation relate?

And the personal is political on a new level - or is it not new, is that what it was like in the Thatcher era? I try to imagine

and wonder, but doubt it as well, though I may be wrong.

As to the personal is political, though I could be wrong.

DREAMS

The first three nights after the referendum, I had very significant and surreal dreams, but I only remember one of them now (I will look up the other two when I find the notebook in which I

wrote them down): I was with two friends and we stayed in a house near the coast. In the morning we went down a little cliff to the beach, and built ourselves a tent of sand — maybe a sandcastle but actually more of a hut or an igloo. We went in, and my one friend and me decided to go to the beach with glasses of champagne — whilst the other friend stayed behind in the sandcastle. We went to the shore, stood in the water and drank our champagne, then we went back to the sandcastle, thinking we had been silly. But a little while later we did it again! After that all three of us decided to go back to our house beyond the beach.

I had this dream before I moved to this seaside town, which was another interesting twist in what followed. But the beach hasn't been a site of division but of connection to my childhood. So there's lots of twists and turns here.

LOCK AND UNLOCK

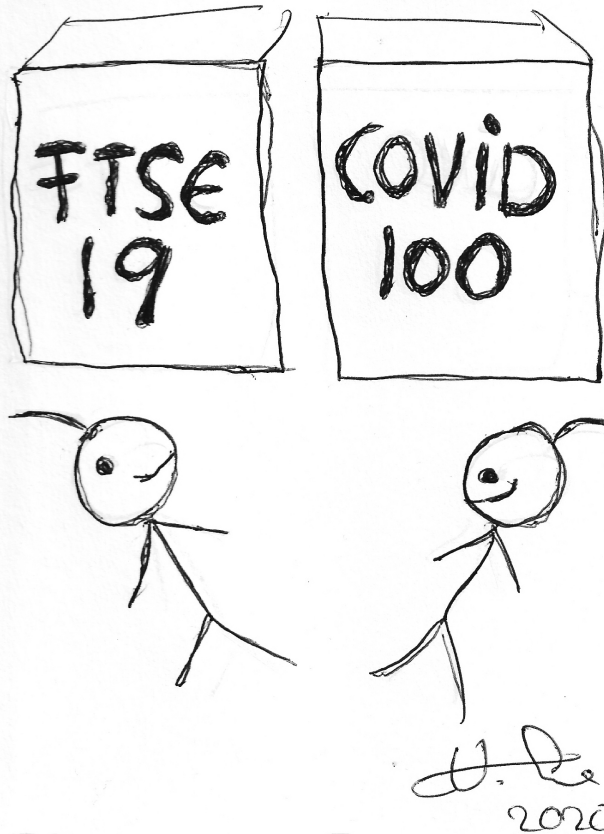
Back to the silence of lockdown: I imagined how we might have arrived at a point like the ancient Aztecs, who vacated their whole cities every 52 years — and now we almost did exactly for the

first time, with the streets devoid of people and us in hiding. As if the next step would have been to go somewhere else, uncontaminated. I counted 52 years backwards and found that was 1968: there was a revolution then, so is this the new revolution?

And then it did come, in the face of Black Lives Matter! Just like in 1968, it came in the month of May. Old inequalities have to be finally discarded! It opened a space where we can speak about experiences with the race issue and its effects more openly. This is now acknowledged to deserve a space for discussion, and that is liberating. So there's more room and less suppression, of this often-hidden dimension of experience. Black Lives Matter in a way does the opposite of Brexit: it challenges division. Whilst Covid-lockdown is like Brexit everywhere, we all don't have freedom of movement without our equipment and distance.

Some of the changes we have witnessed are great, others aren't. I was amazed how the virus could get on top of economics. We had given nature a chance then, but it didn't last long. This one (attached) got published in the Quarantine at Gaada, a great

THE SHOCK EXCHANGE



community organisation in Shetland. In this way I could 'draw' a line between from the Solway to Shetland, from me to there. (I drew this line twice, with a contribution in the first issue of their Quarantine (thanks, Gaada!). That line from here to Shetland is probably the same as from here down to London. Here, remotely, the middle.

SHADOWS, THE SUBCONSCIOUS AND PLAY

So here we are with our masks, our sanitisers and our subconscious. To feel or not to feel the irony of this is another question. We might have been trying to be our real selves and not to hide behind a mask, but putting actual masks brings it home how difficult it is to hide. What if I have to sneeze with my mask on? Like I once did in the train. I used to think about this as possible problems when I started life modelling, being naked - and now it turns out this is a bigger problem when covering up! Another irony. Of my little art installations I do around town here, I have done a lot of 'shadow work', emphasising the double meaning of it. Meaning I went out in the bright lockdown-sunshine, and played with my and other people's shadows on the

seawall. The centre piece of the seawall between the town and beach is very tall, and has that kind of charm of a brutalist build of the 1970s. I call this wall section 'the Berlin Wall' and it is my main canvas from which to work and dance with my shadow, and that of found objects, contrasted with shapes in the wall itself. Filming my shadow self whilst walking and making shapes on the wall becomes both performance and spontaneous choreography. There are endless possibilities, like the recesses and interiors our minds and their landscapes, imposed on townscape. The shadows only come to light in the light! The subconscious is even more difficult to see. In this way, shadows become mirrors too, but reaching further as well, beyond the frame. At the end of the wall, the shadow continues - on the ground.

I am waving at you all with a couple of lit up seaweeds: one in its intertidal forest, and one stranded on the sand.



Blessed by good weather by Andrea Heath

AN EXPLANATION AND RE-ORIENTATION TO BEING

BRUCE SCOTT

Introducing my YouTube Channel

During lockdown, when I had to revert to SKYPE work with all my patients, I thought more about the usefulness of technology during this time. As many realise, technology is a double-edged sword; it can be positive as well as negative. I had seen how SKYPE during lockdown had kept open a vital therapeutic conversation, a conversation that goes on between the therapist and their patients. Personally, not being a

fan of SKYPE therapy, I gradually became more comfortable with this way of working. In no way however I am advocating SKYPE to become the “new normal”; I do not believe we should adhere to a “new normal” and we need to see people in the flesh. As a result of my positive experience of online work with patients and the raging information war re COVID19 (e.g., operation fear mongering from the UK government) amongst other things, I felt that an online presence would be a good way to disseminate ideas and thoughts in a quick and accessible way. One of my prime concerns was the rise in technological therapeutic approaches infiltrating Scottish schools - The Adverse Childhood Experiences ideology / ACEs (or Resilience / Well-Being curricula).

It is essentially a blend of CBT and sensitivity / encounter group ideology; seeing the mind as a

machine, seeing ordinary experience (moods, feelings, ideas) as psychopathological and it adopts the coercive nature of certain kinds of group work/group confessionals under a “guru” like figure. I wrote about this in the Scottish Review and I was invited to be interviewed by Richard Lucas of the Scottish Family Party to discuss the ACE movement (links below).

After this I felt it timely to launch my new channel.

Two videos which might be of interest to PA members is:

Martin Heidegger, Being, technology and the problem of ACE aware schooling:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWZtHx2HuHM&t=587s>

Kierkegaard: The Lily and the Bird: Listening to God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmqLAvXu-As&t=1095s>

The ACE movement must address the issue of consent (Article about the Adverse Childhood experiences movement; the school is not a mental health clinic.

<http://www.scottishreview.net/BruceScott475a.html>

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/scotland-learns/health-and-wellbeing-activities/resilience-alphabet/>

Interview with Richard Lucas of the Scottish family party on ACEs-the school is not a psychotherapy centre:

<https://youtu.be/WYqRXPmm3y8>



Zoom In by Andrea Heath

SOME THOUGHTS ON RACISM

MILES CLAPHAM

“Every colonized people - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality, finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the other country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.”

— Franz Fanon, **Black Bodies, White Masks**; 1952.

We are surrounded by or immersed in events and situations that demonstrate racism in all its aspects, whether overt expressions of hatred or disrespect, or

structures of our lives and societies that are founded in racism, and especially slavery. Recently something happened at an event attended by some PA trainees that to those participating showed first the difficulty with listening to exposures of racism, for example in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as professions and in the way it is accessed, and the second difficulty of acknowledging that listening is painful and avoided, or simply denying that no one is listening. This not listening and not acknowledging is exactly the mark of racism, in the listening profession as elsewhere. It is more or less a double bind, and equally maddening.

Let's not waste time here. I am a racist. Not because I hate black people or Jewish people, in fact since I was a child I hated unfairness and any suggestion of pain being deliberately inflicted on another. I have always been opposed to people of colour or others generally being mistreated. I am racist because my life, my white privilege is founded on the wealth Britain gained from enslaving

black people from West Africa, and from the British colonisation of New Zealand where I was born, and in my life I have done little or nothing to undo this.

There are two things to draw out here. First as we all know, there are various forms of racism, there is overt attacking, disparaging, insulting and violence directed at people of colour or ethnic minorities by white people, and institutional and structural racism, more difficult to see, where 'the way things are' in society or globally happen to work inexorably to the disadvantage of people of colour. Overt racism is obvious, and although we tend to assume this is less now than it was historically, it is still very present, in many arenas such as the hate mail received by black MPs, especially black female MPs, and in police profiling of black youth. The difference can be seen in the policing crisis, which is now receiving some long overdue attention. The structural racism is seen in the police stopping and searching black young men 5 times more than white young men, and Asian

young men twice as often. The overt racism is seen in the routine handcuffing of young black men when they are stopped, whereas young white men are generally not handcuffed.

People of colour, white people too although differently, are embedded in a society that is solidly institutionally and structurally racist. A young black man or woman driving an expensive car is stopped over and over again on the assumption the car is stolen. Different, but resulting from the same reasons, is Covid-19. While no-one would say that the coronavirus causing the global pandemic is racist, except as a figure of speech, what it reveals in the huge difference in infection and death rates is the same racist structure, the systemic disadvantage that BAME people are placed in by British society, and globally in other white dominated or post-colonial societies, from the USA to Brazil. We have course have known this for years, in that all health outcomes whatever the illness, including psychological suffering, follow the same lines of disadvantage, poverty and colour, which show in everything from housing to diet.

What does psychotherapy contribute? One trope of psychoanalytic approaches is to talk of 'unconscious racism' or having an 'inner racist'. Is racism unconscious in the Freudian or psychoanalytic sense? Does it help to think about my or anybody else's 'unconscious' racism? One implication of using the term 'unconscious' is that one needs to get to work with one's analyst — the trouble is the white analyst will be 'unconsciously' racist in the exact same way as I am, so he or she will never recognise my racism. We will both continue to live by the same basic assumptions that rarely get challenged. Have we not arrived at the recognition that the racist structures in contemporary white society derive from enslavement, which when abolished mostly became for the black people indentured labour, and today is echoed in the poverty of many black people, the difficulty getting mortgages and owning property, the sorts of jobs taken? The slave owners, including the British royal family, got compensated for the loss of the labour force. The 'liberated' enslaved people got nothing or worse.

Still not acknowledged or recognised is what Fanon describes, the trauma done

to black people by enslavement, by colonialism, by the dislocation of peoples, the cultural destruction, not to mention the destruction of the land, and the meaningful or spiritual relationship to particular places that different peoples have, or had.

Fanon says, "For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other." And yet we saw the policeman kneeling on Floyd George's neck. One cannot speak unless another is listening, or perhaps better, speech is nothing without an acknowledgement, a response — hence the contradictory powerlessness, and yet power of "I can't breathe" (Floyd George is by no means the only one uttering these words under a policeman's knee). We have all heard, too late for Floyd George, but no-one present and who heard could act on these words; the policeman would not hear because he was intent on what he was doing.

Contemporary white society continues to see its way of life as 'normal', just the way things are. The shallowest and still racist response is to say BAME people should be equally represented in all the institutions of white society. 'We' should pull or let 'them' up to our level, to this mythical space we inhabit. Whether by

Fanon, Marx, Engels, Durkheim, Adorno, in now classical critiques, or currently by Gilio-Whittaker, Crenshaw, Hill Collins and many others, white, European society is shown to be racist, sexist, misogynous, greedy, corrupt, and more than a little nasty. Neo-colonialism continues apace, neo-liberal extractive capitalism continues to exploit people and our planetary home at breakneck speed. Democracy, whatever we think of it's over idealised nature, especially when forced at gunpoint, or cruise missile point, on hapless countries designated as sheltering terrorists or having fictional weapons of mass destruction (let's remember we are the ones with the WMD), is displaced by demagogues and wannabe dictators. It's not a good look. Yet our education system trains people to join this 'society', and black, Asian, and ethnic minority students are expected to join in and try to succeed with the white ones, in a 'society' built on their backs. It's not a question of 'their' capability which of course is at least equal to that of white people, but a question of seeing where the path is taking you, taking all of us.

The response I am asked for in response to Black Lives Matter, in

response to the long legacy of slavery, in response to the still needed and continuing Civil Rights movement, which now also becomes a fight for environmental justice, for decolonisation of white society, is to look at myself, and my life. As the open letter to the governments of the EU written by Luisa Neubauer, Greta Thunberg, Anuna de Wever van der Heyden, and Adelaide Charlier says, the climate emergency and all these issues are connected and intertwined. Sharachchandra Lele, giving a perspective from the global south, says we need a Utopian response not an ideological one based on single issues. We need to alter our thinking, and put values in first place in our response. Even green strategies for a response to the climate emergency may be racist, especially in assumptions about who needs to make sacrifices. White, European or North American cultures, assuming their lives can be tweaked but not fundamentally changed, are in these assumptions racist.

The biggest question for us as psychotherapists is not whether we are personally racist exactly but whether psychotherapy as a practice is racist; whether racism is in the institution and in

the structures that underwrite psychotherapy? I am racist, not because I think terrible things about people of colour or Jewish people or anyone in particular. But I respond differently to black people than I do to white people, sometimes more fearfully, sometimes over friendly. I have prejudices towards some white people too, because I am middle class, but this is not racism. We can think about questions like access both to psychotherapy for people of colour, and to trainings. Both are more likely to be sought by white people, by middle class people. But the question is not just about access, it is the structure of the practice. Fanon was a psychiatrist, he saw the futility of psychiatry and psychoanalysis for people under the yoke of colonialism, and the utter futility of the black person's question, 'how am I to be human?' when every (white) one around them assumed they were not human, not fully at least.

What path do we want to be on, together, with Black, Asian, Jewish, Maori, First Nation Australians and Americans, and everyone else? How can we achieve racial justice, social justice, climate justice, in the white world with the continued and often explicit

assumption that the white, European, North American way of life is superior, ultimately the way everyone, if they can make it, should live. It won't happen because it is literally impossible for it to be that way. I don't have a solution, although I rather feebly understand that each of us needs to become decolonised, each as appropriate to our 'race' and our position. We white people need to give up our privileges — we need to stop living as colonialists.

Fanon says strongly:

The disaster of the man of colour lies in the fact that he was enslaved. The disaster and inhumanity of the white man lie in the fact that somewhere he has killed man. And even today they subsist, to organise this dehumanization rationally. But I as a man of colour, to the extent that it becomes possible for me to exist absolutely, do not have the right to lock myself into a world of retroactive reparations.

I, the man of colour, want only this:
That the tool never possesses the man.
That the enslavement of man by man cease forever; that is, of one by another.

That it may become possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be.

The Negro is not. Any more than the white man.

~

DIFFERENT FLOWERS, ONE GARDEN

LAURIE FITZGERALD

Acrylic on Canvas, 2020

This piece was created as part of the Crafted Conversations Project run by KORI and College Arts, two youth work organisations committed to nurturing the potential of young people. The painting came from the shared lockdown experiences of 10 women - the artist included. Questions covered topics such as life before lockdown, the joys the sorrows and what they want for themselves and the world going forward.





The Thursday Clap by Andrea Heath

COMMUNITY PHOTOTHERAPY

CARMINE PARRELLA DEL LOEWENTHAL

'Hello Del, I am going to die, and I am scared' This was said to me by Roberto from a hospital bed in Lucca Italy, looking at me with eyes sometimes rolling and at other times as if pleading with me to say that it was not true as his teeth chattered with anxiety.

I had met Roberto one year earlier (pictured in photo), before he had liver failure, when visiting the community phototherapy programme run by the psychologist Carmine Parrella at the Mental Health Centre in Lucca. This was when Roberto was a mental health patient and a particularly keen and able photographer. During that year he had come to my house in Brighton where he met his cousin, to see the photographs (my son had put up for him) as part of our exhibition,
PHOTOTHERAPYEUROPE

Going to see Roberto dying in hospital was difficult — in facing his death (and through this, my death). However he had visitors, many the result of friendships built through our phototherapy community. What was too difficult, was that I couldn't, and I don't think any of the other visitors could, face the old man in the next bed, dying alone.

This chapter describes community phototherapy as practiced by Carmine Parrella at the Mental Health Centre in Lucca, Italy. The chapter arises from Del Loewenthal interviewing Carmine, mainly in Lucca, particularly when on his visit to learn about Community Phototherapy as part of the EU funded Leonard Project
PHOTOTHERAPYEUROPE.

This chapter has started by describing the last occasion Del went to Lucca when Carmine and Del visited Roberto who was dying in hospital to whom this book is dedicated. The chapter ends with the transcript material from the photo diary that Del made on community phototherapy with Carmine's help. However the central part of this chapter is Carmine describing to Del his work developing Community Phototherapy.

(Del's questions have been omitted so as not to break the continuity).

There is a certain integrated chaos in Carmine's work and sometimes this interweaving makes it difficult to describe. However, amongst the themes considered here are: What Carmine understands by community phototherapy; the influences that have led to his approach; his use of still photography, video and digital storytelling in a community context; and his development of various therapeutic groups. At the time of visiting, these therapeutic groups were as follows: a large multi-family social group (Monday evening), the group of the multi-media journal (Monday morning and Wednesday lunchtime), the Photo biographic group (alternate Mondays), the After Effects Group for learning about advanced digital techniques in editing video (Thursday evenings), the Clubbing group for evening and weekend activities (twice a week), the Play back theatre group and the Zephro group which is a company that employs patients, trained as photographers to work particularly in schools.

WHY COMMUNITY PHOTOTHERAPY — ENGINEERING THE SOCIAL BOUNDARY

For Carmine, photography has to do with communication and narrative. He considers this is the way the world functions and is increasingly based on visual communication. Photography can be a powerful key to represent the world, to tell a story to the world (digital illiteracy is now a form of exclusion). There are levels: individual (looking through the camera plus mirror); social/ small group (what we do together with our cameras); then there are larger levels such as schools in Lucca (what we can do with our cameras), City of Lucca (for our communities), Italy (how we can communicate with other communities fighting on the same issue); and international (how we can join internationally others doing the same thing) -‘The client, their families, my daughter and you from London can be part of this’.

Carmine considers that phototherapy is a medium to activate the healing process. The psychological sense of community - this is the theory of Mcmillan and Chavis (1986). If it works at a social level, it will bring about a



Roberto Brunini — Del Loewenthal

change at the individual object level. Community Phototherapy is part of a wider therapeutic process. Social therapy (Kreeger, 1975) is the engineering of the social boundary. As a consequence, Carmine worked to modify, not the people, but the way

people meet and connect. Carmine says he is interested in the way that these connections affect the minds of people. However he doesn't attempt to go through the minds of people, but their basic need to be part of the community. For Carmine it is of prior importance for

we all need to be part of something to exist.

Carmine is also influenced by Mark Spivak (1974; 1987) and his multi-contextual model (1992). This is to base

the programme on what they have, not what they do not have. The mental health organisations have to adapt to the person, not the other way around.

The community can do this, not the institution.'

One of Carmine's strategies is, after a few minutes, to offer people to be part of something and at a level that can be acceptable and sustainable, but open to possibilities of development. What is new in this programme is that people can modify the setting. Carmine starts with a project with rules, but he does not know after 6 months how the therapeutic process will change all these rules. So he thinks he knows where he starts, but he does not know where he will end. It is as if this creates a massive, useful, therapeutic tension whilst recognizing that it can be a strong boomerang if it is not managed properly. 'If you do not manage a team properly, they turn into a nightmare and you are in a mess if they feel manipulated'. 'Phototherapy, the medium I use to activate the photo, could be gardening, sport, theatre, fashion - but I decided to use video. So why such photography? What is specific about photos? First, photos are an act of seeing - this is very important for psychiatric patients because they are seen by others in the community as dirty and dangerous. We can change the direction of the sight so the patient has the right to see the other and objectify



Roberto's Wall — Del Loewenthal

the other, whereas usually, they are on the receiving end of being objectified. We give them back the power to see the other. The camera gives the same world as being on a bus — you can see the world but the world cannot see you. So the patient feels protected by the camera — the camera is like a mobile shield but lets these people be touched by reality, with sunglasses that protect them. At the same time, photography is a creative act and there is something about this, and their relations. Photography can happen just through a relational process. Phototherapy is the intentional use of the therapeutic potential of photography. I choose photography as it is a cultural object and can be used after the shooting session. So, I have a cultural object, for example, a school's yearbook which is able to be activated, or revitalised, in the new situation what was active in the previous situation. So, photography can help create a connection between what is here and now, with what was there and then. This can be educational or therapeutic. Educational is when I want to improve certain skills to reach a competence or expertise for social roles. Whatever helps me be part of the community - for example, doctor,

journalist, father—this role must be internalised for the society we want’.

‘I speak of theory when the sense of the personal entirety is broken. When the identity is broken, then from this process starts the psychopathology. Something is happening to me which is not me, but which affects me. So there is a gap between what I am and how I am feeling and how I would like to be. So the therapeutic process is in the middle of deep, personal, family, social and cultural processes, because I can find photographs in every field, for example, everyone has an identity card which you always keep with you’.

THE EARLY WORK IN SCHOOLS

Before coming to Lucca in 1992, Carmine had worked for several years as a psychologist in a substance misuse unit where over time it became clearer to him that the people treated had had no one with them in the critical moments of their lives as adolescents and whilst a lot of effort was put into the substance misuse unit, there appears relatively few results. So in 1995, he began work with a school in Lucca and attempted to create a system that could include

everybody in a ‘community growing process’. He states that, ‘Here, I could work with those with serious problems as part of a community rather than them being seen as the black sheep of the school. The schools were also interested in prevention: I said you don’t need psychologists, but you need psychology. You need to be competent in psychology — if everybody works together you will not need to see, individually, psychologists.’

Carmine described how he attempted to develop ‘active listening for everybody, for example during seven years in one school, he was only called once by a teacher to an individual situation. ‘The community managed situations of emotional crises on their own, with supervision. This was through the belief in the potential of the therapeutic community. Here, a target is declared in the community and then everyone agrees to be committed to that target, no matter who they are.’

Carmine suggests that it is easier to start with the school and then take this outside. The students can use the school for the community, as is now happening with the Centre for Mental

Health where people can come in the evening and learn, for example, how to use the Special Effects programme when making videos, who previously had had nothing do with mental health. Within the school, Carmine saw his role as promoting a process of participatory democracy (particularly influenced from South America). Here, for example, he trained teachers to use focus groups of students to devise the agendas and targets for assembly meetings. At the time the Italian government had a law for student participation and such community approaches helped achieve this. In 2002, Carmine started to put this community approach into the Mental Health Centre. Also in that year he volunteered to take part in a programme putting psychiatric patients back into the community in Romania and used video as part of the therapeutic approach in combination with the drama therapy approach of Sue Jennings (1993) who was leading the project. The successful aim of the programme was to use art therapy within the context of a psychiatric hospital in Romania and for the local Gipsy community who suffered from social exclusion. For Carmine, the video tool has to be for the community, otherwise he is

concerned that psychotherapy creates exclusion for those who cannot afford it. The rehabilitation programme in Lucca has the same goal as individual psychotherapy, but on a community basis.

THE CAMERA AS A MIRROR

For Carmine, the use of photography is to provide a mirror. In the process of mirroring, something happens of importance for a person as the image enters into resonance. 'We try and expose clients to emotional similarities but we have to deal with their defences. The photo easily goes round the defences, so if there is a person who is scared of the world and it is difficult for them to manage their relationship, they put a distance between themselves and the world. The camera generates a positive attitude to the world. I am seeing the world, rather than the world is seeing me. I am no longer passive as the camera gives me power. So having a camera is something about having the power to represent the other. And the other is now scared as their image can be manipulated'. 'There is something in your life that is important. The question is how does one focus on it? As with psychoanalysis, one

speaks of what comes to mind. The camera breaks the psychological process so that everything is confused or something is so important it destroys all other things.' Carmine had a patient who, in three sessions, made a photo diary of (his dream to have a dog that could find truffles), whereas previously no one could find out how to motivate this patient. The focus can be emotional or aesthetic. Visual diaries speak to the person making them. In family therapy it is said that 'I understand what I said when I see the effect that it has on the listener. In individual therapy, the person talks to the therapist and the therapist acts as the mirror — whereas here, the photo diary acts as the mirror and the person making it is affected by this. Most of the work is to help the other make a dialogue with their deep self. We search in the world for images of ourselves that are abandoned and forgotten'. Carmine considers that day after day he tries to reveal patients' capacities to see and feel. For him, this is the core: so the patients can feel again the personal vision of themselves and their lives through seeing and feeling.

The skills are present in the community so the community can cope with their

own problems. This is the concept of social capital — the community processes the self-activated resources. The setting can be changed by the group and the culture. When a client says ‘I have nothing to do all day long’, I ask, ‘Do you have a lot of time? This capital — it’s like having money’. The question is how to use the capital and how, through phototherapy, I can change this capital into social capital.’ The mirror is more the photo and you discover something about yourself as in phototherapy. The mirror here instead is the social dynamic that is activated from making a photo project’.

THE KEY EXPERIENCE IN SHARING

Carmine, influenced by Jung (1995), remarks ‘I am trying to distinguish the image my mind makes under my own wishes from my own destiny. You can have images but these can be of one’s ego, not of one’s destiny. The key is experience and sharing, so I take the responsibility to read the signals that appear on my path when, for example, I pay attention to what I have dreamt regarding the representation of a message that I will try to understand. Photo diaries, as digital memories, can take many forms’.

‘In Romania there was a psychiatric patient spending a lot of time lost in a portrait photograph, and then I realised that the photograph was the only thing that told him he was alive. He, as with all the psychiatric patients, could only go outside the hospital in pyjamas, so that they could be easily recognised. But only a few had family who could afford to visit. They were forgotten. The nurses were few and only provided for basic needs. Two questions arise: The first is: what gives this man the proof and sense that he is existing? The second question is, what gives this man the feeling that he does not just exist to suffer? Some psychotic patients feel they are immersed in suffering and think this is their life. Basaglia (1997) writes of a patient’s asking ‘Are we mad because we are suffering so much, or are we suffering so much because we are mad?’

‘We are trying with phototherapy to give to the person a tool to experiment with the feeling of existing. Sometimes the people who are mental health patients don’t think they exist and can’t have the luxury of seeing if psychotherapy helps their experience of existing. For too long, nothing happens. Also, even when

occasionally there are resources, in psychotherapy, being in front of another person is too much for them. Today I told a client whom I had not met previously, ‘you know you have beautiful eyes — like those of Gregory Peck. And I would like to take a movie of you in a way that Fellini would’. I was not trying to seduce him. I know nothing about him and his psychiatric illness. Just that he has beautiful eyes’.

OUR ENTIRENESS

Again for Carmine, the website that comes from the mental Health Centre at Lucca has the same function as the photograph in the Romanian hospital. A place must be created where the person can put some part of themselves that they cannot keep inside of them by themselves. So everyone is encouraged to put in this space an object that represents part of themselves, that can’t live inside them. The client can then go every day or every week to where they have projected something of themselves and can feed from this with the help of others. This is common to all arts therapies but through photographic digital media, whatever the client produces becomes a cultural object and has a cultural effect. There is a story that

if someone broke a window that is not repaired then in a short time, all the windows will be broken. If you want people not to destroy the windows, then you have to transform the windows into something the community can identify with and they are then not aggressive towards them. This is not just aesthetic beauty, but relationships as art. So through the attempt to create a good object in an artistic way, a new model of relations between people is created — the group.

The attempt to create the object gives the relation between people a new chance. So the idea is that through the wish to build this good object, an impetus is given to the individual and the group. It is necessary to build an ideal that is possible. For clients to attempt to build between what they think they are and their ideal is too big. So the ideal of the self disappears. At the other extreme, they have to maintain an ideal of themselves as low as possible — anything else is usually too much, from within themselves or within their environment. 'We have to help people to relate to their thoughts. This is our job as psychologists. If you are in a wheelchair and your spine is broken, I have to work

with your feelings about your legs. I have to help people with their internal situation, whatever that is - for example, schizophrenia. If you want to meet yourself and your spine is broken, you have to meet your entireness. This is a project that is common to all human beings, whether clients of the mental health service or not. Both you and I are the same - what keeps one entire in one person's life can be different in another. The volunteers in the Mental Health Centre are here for their own entireness. Community phototherapy has to find a process that is able to work contemporaneously on two levels, because they are two sides of the same coin. One is the therapeutic side and the other is the evolution of the human being. The more one focuses on the therapeutic and the more one focuses on the technique, the more one loses connection with the environment and the community resources. There is a volunteer who was a fire-fighter, who has a critically ill brother. This might be seen in terms of that there is a force in the community that is guilty — he loves his sick brother, but cannot do anything for him. Maybe he can return, in time, to volunteering to helping with photography and video for our Lucca Mental Health

Service. Without this opportunity, there just remains a pain for him — yet this can be transformed into a resource for the community. One becomes like a gardener who doesn't know what seeds will appear. Nobody is refused, even if they may be seen to create problems'.

TECHNOLOGY AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

'Our website and journal are transitional objects between the individual and the community. So it is not so important how many people click onto the website for the clients are able to click onto this and for them it is proof enough that they exist.

There is the evolution of technology. In every field we have different kinds of techniques. A large collectivity is able to use all the resources, including technology to valorize its own human potential (Levy, 1999). For Duccio, (1996) the book is as a self-object. This is a place where therapy, education and culture can meet with the narrative of self. Therapies without hope create chronic patients (Spivak, 1982). Paulo Freire (1993) writes of the pedagogy of the oppressed. This is at a time of the same cultural wave of Basaglia (1987) and also, from Brazil, the idea of

participatory democracy. There is also the human being as a social performer. Performative photography would be a kind of photography that helps people perform. This is the same as Basaglia but now working with new forms of repression/stigma and aggressivity, before it was the psychiatric hospital. We must focus on the psychological aspects of this — the way the people organise their relationships: the mind of the person. If I am a psychologist, I have to study forms of marginalisation — what stops and destroys human potential. The thinking is of the group. A collective approach means you have to lose your power'. This is from Mariano Loiacono, director of the "Centre for Social Medicine for alcohol and drug addiction and *disagio diffuso*" who Carmine finds a most important influence (Loiacono, 2000).

'Healing has to be made with everybody in terms of what needs they really have. When I think of phototherapy, I do not think just of techniques. But this can be strange for a therapist — it always needs to be community based and it cannot be institutional — it's like a flower that comes out and is destroyed continually'.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Digital Storytelling and the effect of mirroring

Carmine initially used photography in psychotherapy in digital storytelling, where one creates a story with sounds, music, voice and text. Here the images are chosen by the client from magazines, then scanned and the client speaks of her associated feelings, adding text and music. The potential richness of this approach might be seen from the following fragment. The client chooses a photograph of a child sleeping. 'This is me as a child and the cover has been put on me by somebody to protect me from what others are saying, and this is a photo of me as an old man. I would have liked if my grandfather had put the cover on me (but he didn't). When I was a child I needed to be caressed'. Carmine: 'What do you need now?'. Client: 'Still to be caressed'. For Carmine, these photographs are like symbols in a dream, only the storyteller has the key. The aim of the storytelling is to let the symbol's dialogue between the symbol,

as in the young child and the old man. And then, between the symbol and what they mean for the storyteller. 'In this case the object is not on photographic paper, but multimedia which can also be projected onto a screen. The object is what continues the symbol for the client. What does it mean for the client to have the object? It is a space where at least something is clarified, where something can be symbolized. It is like a transitional object — like for a child, if I have the teddy bear, which is like the safety of the mother. It can, for example, contain the destructive part of me, or activate the part of me that can protect it. It can help where people cannot. These clients are so depressed and this digital storytelling is a way we can dream together'.

Case study 2: Community Phototherapy

One practice here is to give a camera to each client and they take photos during the week and then make photodigital stories. Carmine recounts how in the first group everyone took photographs — first in the corridors and then outside. When they saw the photos, there was great satisfaction. Later, they moved into

the town. Compliance became high and more people arrived and kept asking 'When are we going?' One of the clients was a shepherd when he was young, who experienced a lot of violence from his family and he developed obesity, so eventually he could not walk or go to the bathroom. He joined the group and though he could barely walk, with the stimulus of making photographs, he came to photograph the town, despite his difficulties. He did this for two years, but the problem was, he went back home and the family did not want to let him go, because of the money they received. But eventually he was able to live in a Community apartment and he was able to walk and have self-esteem. Before, he was illiterate and had hardly been to school. At the end, there was a photographic exhibition in the town which showed his photographs and he was part of a community and recognised as a photographer. There is a photo of him looking happy in front of his photos and he was known for being particularly able in photographing people. Since then, a complex weave of changing therapeutic groups have been established. Thus for example, those who do not possess the social skills to take part immediately in the above

described community phototherapy, can first work on a one-to-one basis with for example, a tutor helping them develop their writing skills. Also a client and family members can take part in the regular Monday evening therapeutic group. They can also look at particular issues arising between them in the play back theatre groups and can eventually, through the cooperative Zefiro, work as photographers in schools. They can also attend social groups where people working at the mental health centre and their families can for example all go and have a pizza with their clients and their families and friends. Such groups involve people saying to each other, 'how are you?', 'what are you doing', 'if you can come, or don't come, it makes a difference.' And this is different for as one client said to the group 'I believe in you because you believe in me.'

CONCLUSION

Carmine works more on a community rather than an individual level. Though as someone coming from a more individual perspective, I have concerns that sometimes what is right for the system may not be right for the

individual. However, Carmine's work shows the importance of looking for optimisation as well as when individuals may need to free themselves from some system, for example, their family, and maybe need to be part of another - for example, work. The response is overall more positive coming from a more positive psychology approach influenced also by humanism, rather than existential or psychoanalytic. There is more of an expectation that individuals can work things through by being in groups other than initially, where they may get one-to-one work in terms of skills training. Also by being caught up with the group there is sometimes less space left for dwelling on individual concerns. Confidentiality is expected to be maintained by all, including visitors, which I found very hard to feel safe with. Elements of the work such as patients and staff often socialising and carrying out the photographic work together, reminded me of my early days at the Philadelphia Association (established by RD Laing), but with the significant difference that the patients in Lucca are under medication and that this experiment is taking place within the medical system.

With regard to transferring the Community Phototherapy to somewhere like the UK, three factors seem important. First, the ideas themselves: on more than one occasion Carmine said to me when we talked about a particular therapeutic situation, 'this could heal the community'. This is radically different to just working on a one to one basis. The second important factor is the motivation of the people using community phototherapy. Much of what happens at Lucca in terms of community intervention would appear to rest on Carmine's ability to have relationships with mental health patients which the patients want to sustain. I was both struck by how families can drive someone mad (Laing and Esterton, 1970) and how the community has the potential to alleviate this. On the detrimental side, there were situations I encountered which might have been further helped by a more analytic understanding. Furthermore, the medical model ran alongside in an unquestioning way this community phototherapy. There was also the question that whilst mental health patients look more normal if they are photographers, in that it is expected that photographers will move out of step with

those they are photographing. Nevertheless, does this sometimes lead to inappropriately reinforcing unsocial ways of being?

I found myself caught up in this last aspect when I was taking photographs. I tended to look for when these patients humanity might be glimpsed through their pharmaceutical haze, rather than take what might be more representative of their experience. But there again, there was little medical interference with the activities taking place as community phototherapy. So, for example, the community made videos where they chopped off each other's heads or where the seaside photographer kept asking his customers to take a few steps back until they fell over the edge of the cliff! It is difficult to imagine such activities being funded by the National Health Service in the UK. Also, I went to an after-school meeting where teachers considered the proposals for psychiatric patients who had trained photographers to work through a co-operative as paid school photographers often unsupervised with the young children helping them produce photographic year books etc. Not only did all the teachers after a discussion vote unanimously for

this to happen, but a regional politician wanted to be seen to be there to support the idea. It is difficult again to see this happening in a UK context where it is increasingly difficult for a child to be alone in a classroom with a teacher, let alone with a psychiatric patient. There seems a greater acceptance in Italy that everything is part of politics as evidenced for example by Carmine, taking his patients, to live in an imprisoned mafia bosses house in Sicily. Carmine is also not reticent in acknowledging such more obviously 'political' influences as MacMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community and social capital to Paolo Freire in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1993) with his concepts of *entireness* and '*lets make something together and learn what is happening between us and within us from experience and not from a course.*'

This is not to say that such work is easy and always successful in Lucca, but there does seem to be a more general sense of a community. To give just one example, a particular pleasure for me was to go along to the mental health centre on a Tuesday night where the director who has a particular interest in

Opera can be found singing with the patients.

On that first day in Lucca the year previously, I went with patients of the centre who were learning to be photographers. In photographing them I ended up identifying with them and realised that we all have barriers to being with one another which these photographic projects whether teacher or learner, therapist or client, help each other through a sense of community. On the Friday evening, Carmine phoned round to invite people out for a pizza. There were about 12 of us made up of clients, parents, staff, Carmine, his daughter, me, a brother and the boyfriend of a patient - this had some similarity with my experience of the Philadelphia Association in London, many years previously (Cotton and Loewenthal, 2011). At the end of that first week I used digital storytelling, facilitated by Carmine, to describe that first day. It consisted of photographs I had taken that day and each with the following text:

...Soon more people arrive...

Including Roberto, one of the Centre's official photographers

... and we are ready to set off!

To go outside...

... onto the City wall

... with the opportunity to meet others!

... which sometimes looks like it might happen...

The next photo might symbolise potential loneliness and the barriers to the vitality that is also there...

Will a meeting be possible?

Yes? Sometimes?

... and other times we can at least be together walking towards our project...

Even though some may only be able to see it through a pharmaceutical haze...

Our project is to photograph an exhibition at the Cathedral and to put it out in the newsletter which is also on the web for everyone to access

We are all in the world but there is a watchful eye from those who have 'less of the haze' though perhaps we are all there for our 'entireness'

One of us points out another member of the City's attempt to communicate!

Nearly there...

Another volunteer, Alessandro, joins us

Now the photographers begin to work...

We are on our own...

But sometimes there is a meeting

Other times the haze lifts less....

But there can be glimmers...

Yet enclosures...

But at least there are chances to meet

And experience the beauty (and pain) of each other, nature and art...

But to what extent do we need to explore what we dread?

And that which we are unsure is help or hindrance

How can we keep open for those who experience wretchedness the possibility of a better way of being?

Digital photography provides one way we can share being creative together

... even though we may not find it easy to meet...

Perhaps some are starting to see more clearly...

... ways through

Most of us experience barriers...

Here there is a potential meeting

... and perhaps here even more so?

To be able to experience something of Spring...

... and to walk (sometimes beautifully) together...

Back to the Mental Health Centre...

First for lunch...

And then to start putting the stories on the web page where all our views can act as a digital mirror (for safety and discovery) and be shared in the group and with the larger community

In learning more about digital photography (photo-books, photo-diaries, video-diaries, web pages) in Lucca it is hoped that all may find further ways of healing and meeting

Here's to future meetings!

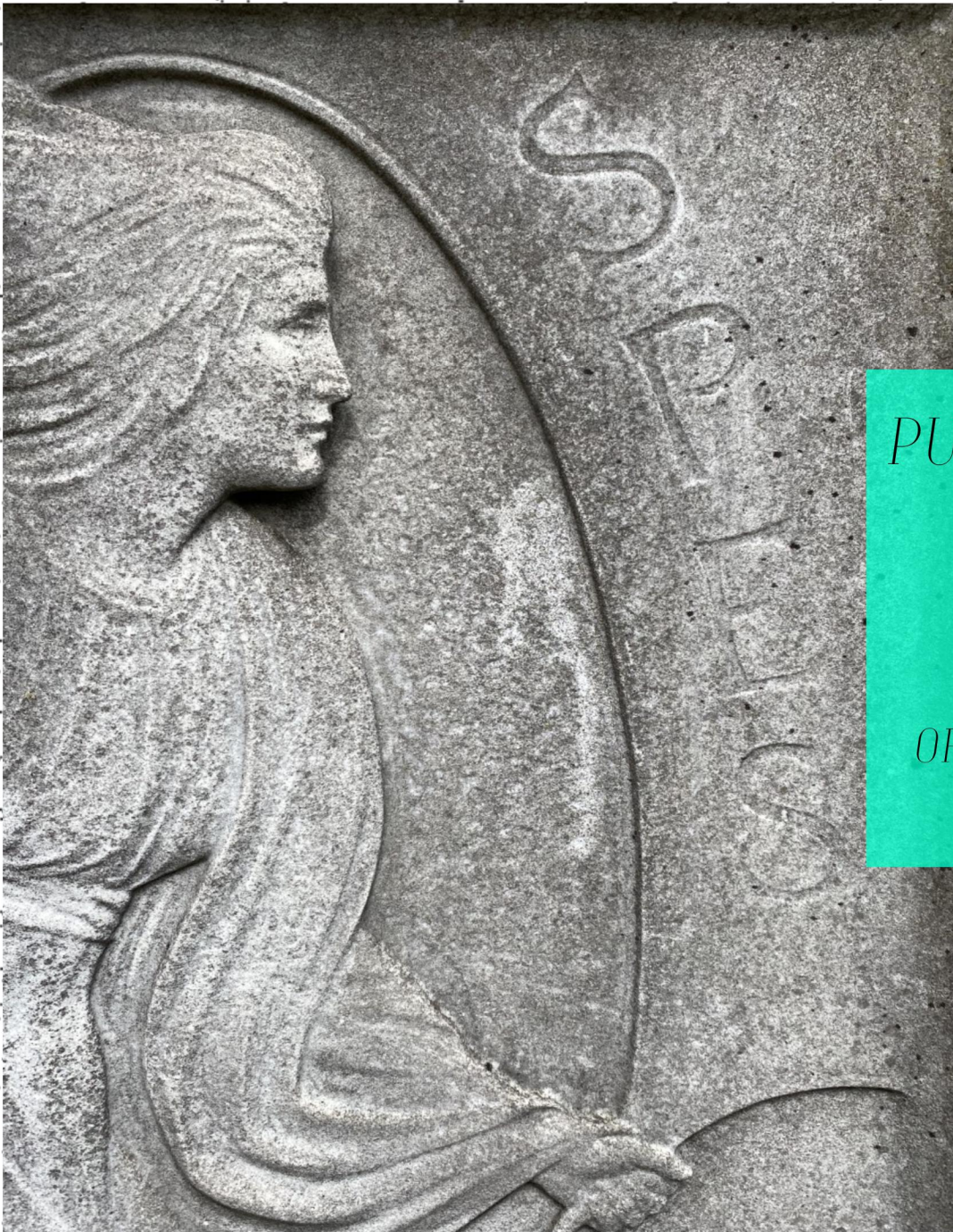
A Visual Presentation of Community Phototherapy

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/
0B-16piY3cXw2XzBNczZuaUpWT28/view?
usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-16piY3cXw2XzBNczZuaUpWT28/view?usp=sharing)

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