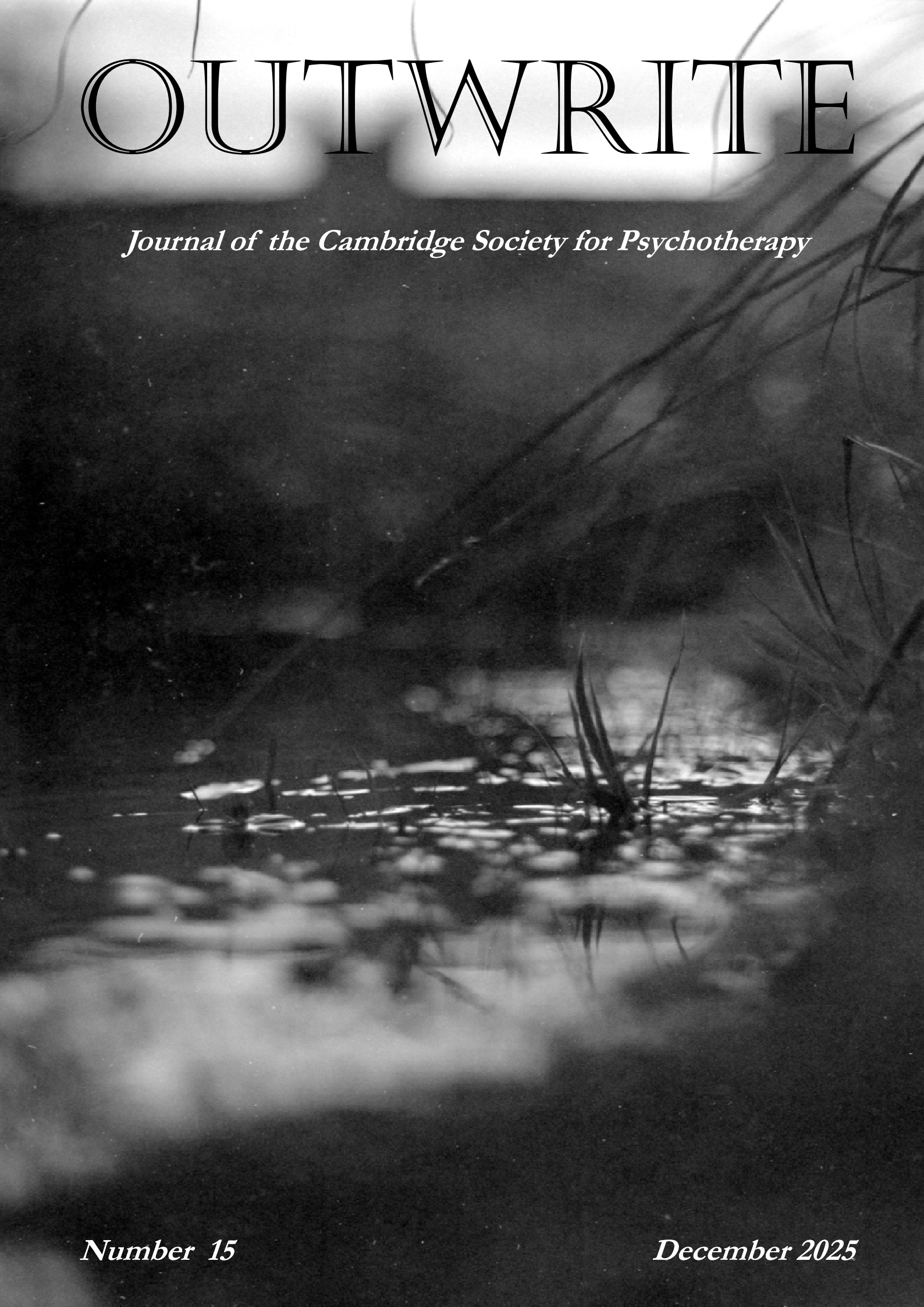
OUTWRITE

Journal of the Cambridge Society for Psychotherapy



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Front cover: *Water Levels* **William Filipski-McDonald**

Editorial

Welcome to OUTWRITE 2025.

We are pleased and proud that we have gathered together such a range of contributions in the issue across not just one, but two dimensions. First in terms of where people are in their psychotherapy careers: from our newest students, to someone reaching retirement and one of our founder members looking back to the embryonic development of the gathering, out of which the Outfit developed. And the other dimension of range and diversity being that we have prose and poetry, drawings, photographs, articles that touch on psychotherapy, others that are more personal, lyrical, socio-political, responses to films, each very individual and indicative of the breadth of our members' interests and approaches to the world.

We would like to thank all of our contributors and hope that our readers will find something that resonates with you or gives you food for thought. Perhaps something you read or discover in these pages will inspire you to undertake creative endeavours of your own. As ever, we await your ideas for the next edition and beyond…

- **The Editorial team: Lucy Isobel, Alistair, Sara and Elizabeth**

Litsa Biggs

Freeing my Gaze

I came home from my first Outfit picnic – my first day as a student member – and sat straight down at the piano; I felt full of energy, and there was a strong desire not so much to play, as to practice.

My children have set me a task – to play the entirety of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata at Audley End House next summer. Every summer we go to Audley End for what I call 'the world's most expensive duck feeding trip' – we pay an eye-watering amount for entry and for six bags of duck food each, but it's worth it to see the enjoyment they get out of it, despite being such 'grown-up' teenagers. We take a whistle-stop tour through the house, and until this year it has been a struggle to get them to pause in the large, informal lounge in which every chair and sofa can be sat on, and in which there is an old grand piano open, and waiting to be played. This time I remembered to bring piano music with me, including the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata, and rather than dying of embarrassment, my children actually encouraged me to play, and seemed to take pleasure in it. It was one of those wonderful moments, which are happening more now that they are older, of being seen by them not just as their mother, but as a woman, with my own interests and abilities. A similar moment took place when we were feeding the ducks; one of my children pointed to a somewhat aggressive duck, saying 'that duck has anger issues, he needs a therapist – mum, he needs you!'. They found it strange at first, but it seems that they are finally getting their heads around this vocation of mine….

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The third movement of the Moonlight Sonata is an enormous challenge – and much more so now, given that my fingers haven't been near a scale for three decades. I started learning it in sixth form, but abandoned the task when I went to university and had no regular access to a piano. I was never particularly keen on or particularly disciplined at piano practice. Rather than taking each section slowly and deliberately until I mastered it, I played pieces all the way through until the good bits became great and the bad bits became passable. I have always assumed that breaking things down, and starting slowly and gradually building up speed was the 'correct' way to practice – but that assumption was dispelled a few months ago when I had a lovely conversation with a professional violinist who was also a piano teacher.

She told me that the key to enlivening, engaging, and motivating practice was variety. There was no need to start the piece at the beginning and move through it sequentially; there was no need to start slowly, before building up speed. It was important to do both of those things, some of the time – and particularly at the beginning of learning a new piece. But it was equally important to feel free to jump between sections, and to vary the speed of play. She said that it was important, whilst learning, to continually keep giving the brain and the fingers different things to do.

This was a new idea to me, and when I sat down at the piano after the Outfit picnic I practised with more determination and pleasure than I think I've ever felt when learning a piece. I jumped back and forth between pages, I played sections fast, then slow, then fast again, and occasionally ridiculously fast just for the hell of it. It was clear that this way of doing things would release me from none of the time, rigour and discipline that it ultimately takes to learn a piece, internalise it, and make it one's own. But it was still a release from a type of confinement, and it brought spontaneity and joy into the process of practice. I could follow

wherever the piece wanted to lead – or perhaps it was my own desire for the piece – or the intermingling of the two.

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I had the same desire to sit down and practice after the first student group meeting on the Monday after the picnic – and it has taken hold of me regularly since. Perhaps the practice – the quasi-methodical approach to a score – acts as a counterpoise to the unscripted, somewhat mysterious process of training. Perhaps it is an exercise in translation, or a kind of containment – the formless swirl of an inner excitement picked up and held in the audible register of fingers on keys, of keys on strings, of vibrations on wood.

Whatever else it is, I have a strong sense that this is not just about working towards my daunting date with the piano at Audley End next summer – but that my practising is a kind of dreaming, a way of unconscious processing. In his book 'The Old Ways', Robert Macfarlane talks about walking as a means of knowing. I wonder whether there are similarities between walking and playing the piano – whether my playing and practising is also a means of knowing something. Something about myself, and something about the things that I am learning and experiencing during these first few months of my training.

Though I cannot really explain it, my practice does feel intimately connected to the process of starting training. If you'd asked me a few months ago, I would have said that practising the piano is not a particularly fitting analogy for training to be a therapist. And yet somewhat counter intuitively, it feels as though practising in *this* way is about truly playing – in Winnicott's sense of the word. It feels like freeing oneself from the inner dictates of form and rule, and engaging in an embodied, spontaneous conversation with the piece.

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I have been playing with a question in my mind, since September; it is not a well-formed question, but it is a wondering about how this learning works, and what it means to train in this way. How does it happen, this process of becoming a therapist? One view that I was offered is that in some ways I am already the therapist I'm going to be; another is that to really engage with the training means to let it change you and mould you. Both are true, I think; whilst at the same time I recognise that the question itself is of its time, and will change into related but different questions, as I go through this process. Or perhaps into the same question but approached in different ways, using different language. I am reminded of Lacan and I wonder if the question itself is an encoding of desire, moving ever forward, not resting, not aiming at an answer but being led curiously, energetically on, until….?

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In the final weeks of preparation before a piano exam, my teacher used to get me to play on the closed lid of the piano. I'd always assumed that this was in order to build finger strength, and to highlight areas of uneven playing (which are incredibly obvious in the presence of the 'thud thud thud' of fingers on wood, undisguised by notes and the pedal). But when I asked the violist about this, she said that she did the same, but for a different reason. She said that playing on the lid of the piano was a way of freeing one's gaze. That even when you know a piece so well that you can play it by heart, the gaze is still drawn to the keys, and to the hands.

I tried it with some of the sections in the third movement of the Moonlight Sonata, but in the absence of the familiar contours of the keys, the fingering fell apart. There was no freedom in not needing to look, because I knew that I wasn't truly playing the piece – the muscle memory wasn't really there yet. It seems that playing 'well' on the lid of the piano is not something that can be done until the piece has been well and truly learned and absorbed into oneself. Freeing one's gaze in this way is *more* than being able to do something so well that you can do it 'with your eyes closed'- it is about allowing both the outer and the inner gaze to wander, to be caught by something other than the body, and the instrument, making the sound. It feels close to Bion's concept of reverie, which I

love; a certain kind of receptivity that allows something to be taken in, metabolised, and then given back. Back to the piece that is held in the hands, and delivered into the air.

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It is very early days in terms of my training, and my ways of understanding, and the metaphors I use to help me think, will change. But at the moment, the concept of playing well on the lid of the piano, integrating something in a way that allows me to free my gaze, speaks to the way in which everything I'm experiencing, reading, and learning, is vital in order to shape me and give me what I need, in due course, to become a resonant instrument for this work. I hope to become – through what is bound to be a highly discomfiting process - more comfortable in myself, more comfortable in the work that I will, in time, start to do, and more comfortable in my identity as a therapist-to-be. Not comfortable in the sense of complacent or unchallenged, not comfortable in the sense of familiar, not comfortable in the sense of allowing myself to fall into acting as though I am, in Lacan's words, 'the one supposed to know'. Rather, comfortable in the sense of feeling at home in myself and in the work, and able to approach the jarring moments of 'not-at-home-ness' with gentleness and faith.

Thomas Ogden wrote beautifully about the practice needed to become 'unpractised', in a way that I think deserves quoting at some length:

> 'We ask of our ourselves (and of our analysands) that we attempt to speak in our own voice with our own words…..paradoxically, it requires a great deal of training and experience to be able to talk in a way that feels and sounds spontaneous, unpractized, uncontrived, undictated by analytic convention or prescription. This is not simply a matter of the analyst's growing, over the course of time, to feel more familiar with, and comfortable in, the role of analyst. An analyst at any stage of his career may come to substitute for the sound of his own voice and the choice of his own words the stale formulaic sounds of "accepted" technique as defined by an affiliation to a school of analytic thought or by a conscious or unconscious imitation of or identification with his own analyst(s), supervisors, or other analysts who he currently respects and admires……..it is a very great achievement indeed for an analyst to develop the capacity to "simply talk" to his analysand…..the analyst's speech must be the creation of a person who is alive in that moment.'

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As the weeks have gone by, and as I've started to settle in a little to the Outfit, and to a new rhythm to my life, my practice has changed. Now I intermingle the first movement of the Moonlight sonata with my practice, switching for a time into something familiar, something known, playing rather than practising, starting to get my body used to moving from the gentle, deep touch of the first movement, into the exultant – and currently still very chaotic! – movement of the third. And in a way that I can't really describe, but feel to be true, that first movement is becoming different, and better. Not necessarily technically better – but more textured, more deeply understood. I suppose it's unsurprising, though I've never really thought about it before – that getting to know the whole piece gives a much better emotional understanding of and connection to each part. I can bring something of my engagement and struggle with the third movement, of my knowledge of where the piece is going, into my playing of the first movement. I can situate it in something larger than itself, in a narrative larger than itself.

The biggest challenge with the third movement of the Moonlight Sonata, once I've learned the notes, and once I can play it at anything resembling the intended tempo, will be to play as one who is alive in the moment, creating something that speaks. And if the playing is unlovely, and the children are mortified and ban me from playing at Audley End ever again, I know that I can still go back and be, at the very least, a therapist to ducks.

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Photograph: Litsa Biggs

Litsa Biggs

Winter Swans

Tomorrow, I'll be going to see the swans. I'm hoping
they'll remind me there is something in me capable of taking flight.
Something that can rise above, and with clarity of sight
discern a place to land, and rest, and feed.

But which am I? The mute returner to its well-known waters day by day?
Or the home-sick whooper, a displaced migrator waiting out the winter,
looking for a mate with whom to take to wing?

They do not fly by instinct – just like I've been taught to travel,
so they too were shown the way. They fly in concert with a brave endurance
and they do not question whether they will tire, or freeze, or fall.

I know I'll stand in stillness, distant swan calls
in the dusk and cold, waiting for them to overfly me.
For our paths to cross in vertical air, necks outstretched,
a wild cry and human tears, rising in our throats.

Beth McCabe

All of us Strangers: a Reflection on Grief, Integration and the Return to Self

********** Spoiler alert **********

***All of Us Strangers* is a 2023 British romantic fantasy film written and directed by Andrew Haigh, produced by Searchlight Pictures. It is loosely based on the 1987 novel *Strangers* by Taichi Yamada**

Introduction: A Quiet Confrontation

All of Us Strangers stayed with me long after I left the cinema – more than just a film, it felt like a quiet confrontation with parts of myself and my experience, and that of others I knew or was working with. Grief, memory, longing, the ache of childhood wounds and the slow, uncertain path back to aliveness – all unfolded so intimately on screen that I felt exposed, seen, and strangely comforted. What follows isn't a neat summary or analysis, but a reflection on what the film stirred in me, and the difficult beauty of what it means to truly come home to oneself. What began as a casual trip with friends quickly revealed itself to be something far more personal and affecting.

First Encounter: The Film's Immediate Impact

Drawn back to the cinema after a long absence, I first thought it was admiration for Andrew Scott and Paul Mescal – but on reflection, I think I sensed it would speak to something deeper in me. At first, I saw just the surface of the story. A somewhat depressed man struggling to mourn the parents he lost in childhood (Scott playing Adam) meets another kind but lonely man, seemingly cut adrift from his family (Mescal as Harry). They dare to be vulnerable with one another, to care for and come to love one another. In one scene, Harry encourages Adam to take a bath when he's feeling unwell. He gently coaxes Adam toward the bath, his voice full of care and concern. Adam hesitates, uneasy beneath the weight of such open tenderness. But Harry's touch is patient – fingertips tracing gentle reassurance over skin too long untouched. "Better?" he whispers. That intimacy, so affecting, also blurred the line between external relationship and inner healing fantasy.

The scenes of the developing relationship intermit with Adam appearing to revisit his childhood family home, where he finds his parents as they were before they died: alive, young, smoking and drinking, and putting up Christmas decorations sometime back in the early 80's. Adam's character is a screenwriter – is this something he's writing? And then, another blow – Harry, too, appears lost. Found decomposed in the basement flat, as if their love had never begun. Had their tenderness and shared desire only ever unfolded in the quiet theatre of Adam's fantasy? Is his longing for love so deep-rooted, so woven into his unconscious, that it can conjure the love he needed from the shadows, one that feels more real and alive than reality?

All this is set to a rousing, very cleverly curated and moving score including iconic songs like *You Were Always On My Mind* by the Pet Shop Boys and *The Power of Love* by Frankie Goes To Hollywood, as well as the haunting *Small Town Boy*

by Kele ("run away run away run away…"). A closer look at the soundtrack now helps to reveal the deeper, more nuanced, complicated and painful story being told (but the music review is another essay!).

I left the cinema moved, crying and confused. What was I identifying with? I wasn't a gay man, nor had I been orphaned – so what was I connecting with? Were his parents ghosts? Was he psychotic and hallucinating? Whether Harry was 'real' seemed less important than what his presence exposed – the ingenious way the film mirrored the mind's refusal to face unbearable pain, and its longing to transform it through connection. The more I sat with the experience, the more I realised the film wasn't asking for literal understanding – it was inviting emotional recognition. I wanted to write about it.

Rewatching and Reframing: Letting Go of Literal Meaning

After the first wave of emotion had passed, the film stayed with me. Watching it again, I began to see that its meaning ran deeper than plot alone. Even after two more viewings, I'm unsure what's truly happening – or maybe I no longer need it to make sense in a literal way. Instead, what I see is the incredibly difficult process Adam has of bearing his losses, of his actual parents, and more crucially the acceptance of their shortcomings. The loss of what he didn't have when they were alive and can never retrieve. Of what he has had to deny in himself – and for himself – to survive. In a hugely poignant scene with his father, (a brilliant Jamie Bell), they both realise the weight of what wasn't. This is an extract from the screenplay:

His Dad remembers it well and his eyes bubble with tears. He comes over to his son.

DAD

I'm sorry I never came into your room when I heard you crying.

ADAM

Really. It's okay.

DAD

It's not okay though, is it?

ADAM

Dad. I get it. It was so long ago.

But all of a sudden, Adam feels like he's back again, a young boy balling his eyes out in his bedroom not sure why everyone thinks he's a freak.

DAD

Do you want a hug now?

ADAM (voice cracking)

Yes, please.

Dad gets up and Adam follows. He lets his father hold him tight allowing his body to relax, collapse into his arms.

Adam catches sight of the two of them in the mirror above the fireplace. Adam can see himself as an ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD BOY being held by his dad.

What struck me most in this moment wasn't just the script – but what it revealed about Adam's psychic structure, and my own. The longing Adam carries for the attuned, tender care and acceptance of his mum and dad is a profound need that remains unresolved. Before he can give them up with grace not bitterness, he must allow himself to fully feel that ache: the raw primitive desire for unconditional care and acceptance. Only through mourning can he begin the work of internal reparation – surrendering the fantasy while preserving their goodness. The essence of the depressive position – a psychic integration that often begins in adolescence – is this recognition of the fallibility of one's parents whilst retaining affection for them. For Adam, this has been put off his whole life. His struggle to achieve this in adulthood resonates deeply with my own – the painful tension between idealisation and disillusionment, and the slow labour of letting go. As I let go of the need for literal clarity, I began to see the characters differently – not just as separate people, but as fragments of a larger self.

Adam and Harry: Grief, Integration, and the Self

As I leaned further into the emotional terrain the film explored, I began to understand Harry not just as a character, but as a part of Adam – and perhaps, a part of, but a stranger, to all of us.

When we meet Adam initially, he is not living. In closing down to survive the unbearably painful loss of his parents as a child, he has closed himself off from and to the vitality of all things. He has looked out at life from his apartment windows, watching his neighbour, Harry, from afar, too afraid to allow him in (literally - Harry knocks on his door and is turned away). In daring to connect with Harry, he is connecting with a part of himself he has split off and denied for so long. The part that is deeply lonely and desperately longs to be taken care of and accepted.

After scenes with his parents, where the acknowledgement of what wasn't can be felt, and survived, Adam begins to come alive, to find his hunger and passion. He begins to assert himself, his renewed vitality opening him to both connection and the raw terror of old wounds. In one chaotic scene, after taking ketamine at a club, Adam relives the tremendous fear of the traumatic night his parents were killed. He isn't clear who, where, or when he is. Is he regressed to the child Adam? Is he the needy part of himself he has long denied? Is being finally held, by Harry who loves him, enabling him to process something that has haunted him for so long? It is in this merging – this reaching across inner divides – that the film delivers its most wrenching and revealing moments.

Recognition and Release: The Emotional Climax

This is an extract from the screenplay:

HARRY

You kept screaming out for your parents in the club, over and over again. And I didn't know what to do, so I took you back here and just lay with you until you fell asleep.

Adam is grateful for the care but is close to breaking. Tears build in his eyes but he tries to keep it in.

ADAM

I don't think I'm very well.

HARRY

No. I don't think you are.

ADAM

Am I sick?

Harry leaves a beat then...

HARRY

You look scared.

The emotion in Adam finally breaks.

ADAM

I am scared.

Harry pulls him close as Adam's tears turn into sobs that sound like howls of pain.

What once felt like loss now begins to resemble return. In revisiting the pain, Adam reclaims something essential. The pain and difficulty of Adam's journey to come back to himself bring tears to my eyes as I write this. This scene mirrors my therapeutic process with striking emotional and symbolic resonance. I was moved not just by Adam's collapse – but the way he was held in it. Harry's capacity to stay, feels like what I have sought in therapy: someone steady enough to withstand the storm without trying to silence it. Someone who can bear to witness to the fractured self – the terrified child, the long-denied need.

The first time I watched the film I was devastated by the ending. How could Harry be taken from Adam, after all he's already been through? But now I get it. Harry was but a part of himself that had been hidden away in the basement of his psyche, left to bear the burden of his grief and need alone and unloved. Far from losing him, he finds him.

Adam returns from saying goodbye to his parents and looks for Harry. For the first time he goes to Harry's flat in the basement of the building they share. Entering the flat, he is reminded of the night he turned Harry away at the door and realises what he did, leaving Harry to die alone with *his* fear and pain. Harry as we have known him so far enters and he too realises that he's died in the bedroom.

This is an extract from the screenplay:

HARRY

I was so frightened. That night. I just needed to not be by myself.

ADAM

And I'm sorry I was so scared. To let you in.

But Harry's focus is now on the bedroom behind. As if he remembers what happened to him, as if somehow he's always known.

HARRY

I'm in there, aren't I?

ADAM

Let's just go upstairs.

HARRY

I can smell it, taste it in the back of my throat.

He looks at Adam not in shock, nor anger, but terrible sadness. His face collapses on the brink of tears.

HARRY

How come no-one found me? Where are my friends? My brother and sister. Where are my mum and dad?

ADAM

I found you.

HARRY

But I don't want you to see me like that. Not like that. In there.

Harry seems so ashamed with himself, disgusted almost -- with the very idea of himself. Adam knows what to say. He has never been so sure of anything.

ADAM

You are not in there. This is you, here. With me.

Adam grabs hold of Harry as he breaks into sobs. Letting out the pain he has stored for so long. Adam knows that all that matters in this moment is that he eases Harry's pain. That is what love means.

As Adam finally reaches for Harry, he's also reaching inward—to claim a long-forgotten part of himself.

Full Circle: From Fragmentation to Wholeness

In the final scene they are back in Adam's bed, in a reversal of the earlier scenes where Harry looks after Adam. It is no longer so devastating in this new way of viewing. Adam finds the courage to welcome this part of himself, to love him and by doing so, saving himself. Still scared, uncertain, but fully alive to it all.

This is an extract from the screenplay:

Harry looks at Adam, glad he is not alone. Both of them glad to not be alone.

HARRY

I'm scared.

ADAM

I know.

HARRY

What do you think happens now?

ADAM

I don't know.

HARRY

How long will this last?

A beat. A memory of something Adam's Mum said to him.

ADAM

I can't answer that. I suppose we don't get to decide when it's over.

(then)

For now, why don't I just hold you a bit longer.

Harry looks as if he may be about to say something but decides against it. They don't need to declare their love. Actions are enough. Harry turns over and lets Adam hold him from behind. The same position Harry was in downstairs. But now he is no longer by himself.

As the final scene fades and the music lingers, I'm left not with answers, but with something much more human: a deeper capacity to feel, to hold, and to live. Those moments of merging, of parts long kept apart beginning to reach for one another, felt almost too intimate to witness. And yet, it's exactly what the therapeutic process makes possible. The film ends with 'The Power of Love' played again, the lyrics finding new meaning now.

[The song is available to listen to here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtdRv6GT9Zg]

Conclusion: The Depth of Pain, the Possibility of Love

In writing this, I noticed the pull between wanting to make sense of the film and simply being with its impact. This mirrored my own therapeutic process – where insight and feeling, analysis and presence, must find a rhythm together. The film invited me to inhabit that space more fully. It is much clearer to me now what I was identifying with. The depth of pain sometimes needed to truly live. We do ourselves, and those we work with, a disservice by avoiding the richness that comes from the true confrontation with ourselves. It's in that painful integration – when grief, fear, and love are all allowed to coexist – that something begins to change. And maybe that's where recovery really begins: not in forgetting what happened, but in finally being met there. The release and strength in this surrender truly allows us to love deeply. I am grateful for the part therapy and my therapists have played and continue to play as I chart this course myself. I feel privileged to witness such work in others, and humbled to help create the holding environment it requires.

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Hilary Taylor

On Retirement

In the Outfit we communicate eloquently and at length with each other about the process of becoming a therapist as we write our application letters and graduation letters. But we hear much less from each other about the process of stopping being a therapist, probably because it's not a decision that requires support and approval from our colleagues, unlike embarking on the training or graduating from it. But to me, as I negotiate the process of retirement, it feels just as significant a milestone, and I would find it helpful to share some of my thoughts and feelings about it.

I am pretty much retired now, with just one last piece of work continuing for the next few months. Looking back, it has been a gradual process which started with my move from Cambridge to Manchester nearly 8 years ago now. In those pre-Covid days I didn't entertain the possibility of working online, so my move entailed ending with all the people I'd been working with in Cambridge. I wasn't sure whether I would manage to start a new practice in Manchester, so the possibility of retirement has been around for me since then, and I had begun to imagine what a life without therapy in it might be like. However, I knew that wasn't what I wanted yet, and I managed to make new contacts and networks and start working again some months after my move. But I decided to be clearer about my hours and days of working than I had previously been, and define myself as working part-time, leaving days in the week free for other activities, which soon arrived to fill them. Starting afresh made this easier. Because of the long-term nature of our work, it's often hard to make these kind of changes along the way. When we start out as therapists, we are keen for any work opportunities that come along, needing to be flexible to build up a practice, and then those patterns can become difficult to reset.

I have found the reaccreditation process helpful in thinking about where I am in relation to my work. I engaged in this for the first time shortly before I moved, and it was useful as part of my ending as a therapist in Cambridge and my thinking about the possibility of a new beginning. I also used my reaccreditation group as a resource to draw on as I worked to build new support networks in Manchester, which took time, and wasn't always easy. At the time of my last reaccreditation 3 years ago, though I had no concrete retirement plans, I had already become cautious about the new work I was taking on, trying to avoid anything that looked as if it might be very long-term (though of course it's often difficult to predict this). During that reaccreditation process I became aware that, thinking 5 years ahead to the next one, I would need to consider whether I still wanted to be working then, when I would be 78. The timescales of reaccreditation help to concentrate the mind on these issues.

Last summer I took another step along the road to retirement when I decided to stop taking on new work. If possible I wanted to finish with the people I was seeing at a time of their choosing rather than set a fixed date for my retirement, though I didn't rule that out, and I had already been beginning to communicate to people in various ways that I wasn't able to offer the kind of open-ended commitment that I had offered earlier in my therapy career. For example, one person was considering embarking on a therapy training, and I needed to let them know that I couldn't commit to seeing them through that. With another person, as issues of trauma and

possible abuse emerged early in the therapy, I felt I needed to make it clear that I would be retiring in the foreseeable future, while reassuring them that I would give them at least a year's notice of any decision.

I've been working in peer supervision with two colleagues as they have also gone through the process of retirement, and we have supported each other through the transition. They have chosen to set a fixed date rather than end gradually as I am doing. Setting a date gives the therapist more control over the process, but she then has to deal with all the endings at the same time, which is an emotionally demanding task. One of my colleagues made this easier for herself by phasing her final sessions over several weeks. My approach has meant that the exact timescale of my retirement has been taken out of my hands, and it has happened rather more quickly than I was expecting. On the whole the endings have been good and timely ones, and because they haven't all come at the same time they have kept the focus more on the individuals concerned than on me and my retirement. I guess when we finish any therapy there are mixed feelings; the satisfaction of a job well done, alongside the recognition of what is still unresolved, and the loss of a relationship which has become significant to us as well as to the people we work with. And when we retire those mixed feelings are redoubled in spades. I think perhaps that my colleagues who have chosen more organised endings tend to cycle between these different feelings, while for me they have been more mixed up together – or maybe that's just the difference between looking from the outside and experiencing from the inside.

So why have I decided to retire? There are plenty of therapists older than me who are still working, and I find the work as fascinating and engaging as I ever did. But I have always felt that one of the most important things we can do as therapists is to show up regularly and reliably week after week and month after month and stay alongside the people we see in whatever process emerges between us without introducing our own agendas. The realities of ageing and mortality make it harder for me to feel confident about being able to do this. Life does not feel open-ended any more. Like most people in their mid-70s, I have my share of health issues, none too serious so far, but nevertheless reminders that my body's smooth functioning can no longer be taken for granted. I'm fortunate that for most of my life it has served me well. If the body keeps the score, I don't know how much longer my innings will last. I also find that as I get older I have less energy, and I need to decide how I want to use it. The work of therapy is demanding, and in recent years I have found myself less able to take this in my stride. I want to have enough physical and mental energy left for the other aspects of my life; family, friends, community, culture, creativity.

What will I miss about the work? I recognise in myself a curiosity about other people's lives which has been there since I was a child. On train journeys, I remember looking out of the window at the backs of other houses and their gardens, and wondering about the differences from my own. Tin baths hanging on the wall, different gardens, different lives. What would it be like to live there instead of where I did? I can now recognise (though if course I didn't at the time) that it was these kinds of questions that led me to embark on a social work training after leaving university (where I had studied English Literature, another series of windows onto other lives). Thinking about it as I write this, I reflect that at the time of those childhood train journeys, my parents were leading very different lives from their own parents, like many of the generation bringing up baby boomers like me in the 50s, and were struggling to deal with those differences. My mother had had what in those days was called a 'nervous breakdown' and had been hospitalised, and I was a five year old on my way with my father to the school where he taught rather than to my own local school. Things were suddenly different and I was trying to make sense of it.

I didn't know when I started writing that paragraph that it would end there…but the work of my own therapy continues in me like a yeast

that started working years ago and is still alive, sending up unexpected bubbles of insight and recognition. I pause to thank my therapists, and I hope it is like that for the people I have seen for therapy too.

I did know that what led me to train as a social worker, and then a therapist, was the part of me that had been accustomed to looking after my depressed and anxious mother, and I also know that many, if not most, therapists have a similar backstory. A poetry appreciation group I belong to recently chose the theme of 'Memory', and someone brought this poem by Gary Whited, an American poet who is also a psychotherapist:

Farm *

My mother stood at her kitchen window
facing north and wringing her hands

Heavy like iron that I thought
I could unwind her gnarl of worry

When my father fixed fence along the creek
he expected supper She unwound

her worried hands to make it
A mix of potatoes meat and sorrow

My father ate everything
except the sorrow-

My brother and I divided it
He being older

took the smaller share
Evening came

I walked to the barn
to gather the cows

I will also miss the creativity of therapy, those moments in the therapy room where I have felt something shifting, something new emerging, and known that I have played a part in bringing it about. I recognise that my creativity takes place in the space between myself and others; I'm not very good at solitary creativity. So the challenge now for me is to find new ways of being creative, and to be able to sit with the space left by the loss of my role as a therapist and be curious about what might emerge to fill it.

Most of the people I've recently finished with have been young, in their 20s and early 30s, and an important part of the work with them has been about finding an authentic direction and creativity in their lives. Perhaps they can teach me something? I shall miss them, and their energy. For me, the task now is to find creativity in ageing, and a new role for the therapist part of me, which is never going to be ready to retire.

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William Filipski-McDonald

Water Levels

"At first sight, in the poetry of Edgar Poe, you can believe in the variety of waters sung so universally by the poets. In particular, you can find those of joy and those of suffering. But you take only one memento. Heavy water never becomes light water, murky water never clears. On the contrary, the story of water is a very human story of water that dies. Reverie might sometimes start looking out over limpid water full of immense reflections, babbling with crystal clear music. It concludes sinking in a water that is sad and sombre, sinking in water whispering strange funereal sounds. Reverie by water, as it collects up its dead, dies itself like a whole world submerged."

– Gaston Bachelard's *L'Eau et les Rêves*, Livre de Poche edition (translated by William) p.59

"Paul Claudel, in his project for a Subterranean Church of Chicago, is sure to find at the heart of the Earth a true essence of water, a water of religious substance. "If one digs into the ground, one finds water." The bottom of the font, around which crowd row upon row of corrupted souls, will be filled up by a lake … this subterranean lake dreamt up by the visionary poet, will give us also a subterranean sky… Water in its symbolism knows how to reunite all. Claudel says further: "All that the heart desires can be reduced to the figure of water." Water, the greatest of these desires, is the truly inexhaustible divine gift.

These interior waters, this subterranean lake from which arises an alter, will become "settling pond for polluted water"…"

– Gaston Bachelard's *L'Eau et les Rêves*, Livre de Poche edition (translated by William) pp.170-171

"Where do we find our first suffering? It is born in the hours spent internalising the great accumulation of the things we leave unsaid. But nevertheless, the stream will teach us to speak, despite the pains and memories. It will teach us euphoria through euphuism and energy through poetry. It will repeat to you, at every instant, some well-rounded word rolling over pebbles."

– Gaston Bachelard's *L'Eau et les Rêves*, Livre de Poche edition (translated by William) p.218.

Lucy King

In the Beginning

"At the heart of it was a wish to ask basic questions about how people can best become psychotherapists and to allow a degree of doubt and uncertainty, experimentation and individual differences in the answers."

As a founder member of the Outfit, I thought it might be interesting – and maybe even valuable – to give an account of how I came to that initial gathering of people who had been invited to discuss Peter Lomas' radical ideas about setting up a student-centred therapy training programme. I am not going to write anything that is in any way a formal history of the Outfit because Peter Lomas has already given such a history in his 1998 book: *Personal Disorder and Family Life*, in which there are 2 relevant chapters:

1) "On setting up a Psychotherapy Training Scheme" (pp. 237-246)
2) "The Teaching of Psychotherapy" (pp. 247-255)

Before becoming a Founder member of the Outfit

I had come to Cambridge in 1970 as a research biologist on a 3-year postdoctoral grant. Halfway through this, I was lucky enough to get a research fellowship at a historically all-male college, about to admit its first women. I was appointed as someone prepared to live in and support this initial cohort of female undergraduates due to start the following year.

As well as supervising students from both Clare and Newnham (including Deborah Wilde), I had a pastoral brief and over time it became clear to me that this was much more conducive to me than staring down a microscope at fungal spores for the rest of my working life.

It is perhaps worth noting that three of the first women fellows at two of these pioneer colleges – Clare and Kings – later trained as psychotherapists. One did nevertheless remain as an academic, post training at the Guild, but two trained at the PA and built up careers as therapists. It makes me wonder whether this served to confirm to those opposed to admitting women to these ancient all-male establishments that it was a mistake and women could not be taken seriously as academics. I do however remember being told by the Master how much happier and more relaxed the atmosphere in college was. It was also the case that the medic who showed me round and admitted that he was against the admission of women later changed his views entirely.

During my role as a research fellow I therefore took myself off to do an evening course in counselling at University College London under the auspices of the BAP, the most orthodox of psychoanalytic psychotherapy organizations. By today's standards the course was a rudimentary affair, an evening a week for a year. At the end of it I was asked to join their staff-student liaison committee which gave me a very negative experience of the way these senior psychoanalytic psychotherapists interpreted and pathologised each other's opinions in a way that shocked me. I later had other really horrible experiences of orthodox psychoanalytic behaviour including

from someone training at the Tavi who seemed unable to usefully discuss or offer advice about how I might choose a therapist. Whatever I said, he would remorselessly interpret in a ridiculously narrow way. For example, when I said I didn't want to go into therapy with someone who might accuse me of penis envy or having a masculinity complex, he responded by saying this showed that what I really wanted was to know about my therapist's sex life. I found this inescapable barrier of insistent interpretation not just frustrating but infantilising, to the extent I ended the evening in tears. Just the kind of therapist I do not want to be, as there was absolutely no attempt to engage in any proper/ ordinary dialogue. He was a Kleinian and the experience left me wondering whether the 'primitive' feelings Klein talks about were actually elicited from patients as a result of the relentless interpretating Kleinian psychoanalysts inflict on their patients.

During my time at Clare and Kings, I also worked as a Samaritan and, amongst others, befriended someone who had experienced several psychotic breakdowns in which he had been sectioned, and locked up – in the last case, isolated in a room with no doorhandle on the inside. At this point he effectively lost the will to live. He did not actually kill himself but persuading him not to took a lot of long late-night phone calls.

The Philadelphia Association

My introduction to the Philadelphia Association came through a friend who had a breakdown and took refuge in one of the PA's therapeutic households. As a result, my partner and I started to go down to PA study programme workshops and events. Events that were lively, convivial. An organization with an explicit aim, through these households, of offering asylum; places of sanctuary to deeply troubled people. Hospitality rather than hospitalization.

The first thing we went to was a Merleau-Ponty reading group. It was facilitated by someone who made no claim at all to any expertise on the book, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. It was just a matter of us all struggling together to understand the difficult text. In the ten-week group we only got partway through the preface! Despite this minimal progress, I think we all really enjoyed this cooperative endeavour. It felt an inspiring format and I think this experience was a crucial part of my responding positively to Peter Lomas' and David Ingelby's plan to set up a student-centred training. A group of people learning together instead of being formally instructed in a conventional, hierarchical manner. My final decision to go into therapy with a therapist with a view to applying for training at the Philadelphia Association, came, not just out of my very favourable experience of attending PA Study Programme events, but after attending a showing of the film 'Asylum' about one of the PA households and a discussion about the film and the PA given by a founder member of the PA.

I already knew quite a lot about RD Laing from *The Divided Self* and his work on families, having read several books and seen the film 'Family Life'. I had also attended one of his packed meetings in which he spoke of his approach to psychosis. He was something of a cult figure at the time.

I should add that David Clark, (my fellow Outfit founder member and Margaret Farrell's husband) presided over a liberal and therapeutic regime at Fulbourn Hospital, a world away from the current sorry situation there (even in terms of the physical environment since the expansive and pleasant gardens have been sold off).

When I had finished my stint at Clare, I got another research grant not in a lab but assisting a psychologist who wanted a biologist to help him look at the effects of contraceptive-pill failure on the developing foetus. This was a project I was interested in having for years been part of a contraceptive advice group. This grant allowed me to do 6 hours teaching and I got permission to do some hours counselling instead. I got a placement at the University Counselling Service where I went on to work and teach part-time for about 35 years. Within a couple of years, however,

I became sure I wanted to do more training beyond the various CPD workshops I had already attended.

A radical approach to psychotherapy training

When Peter Lomas was thinking of moving to Cambridge, he wrote to my partner Paul to ask his advice about whether it was a place where he was likely to be able to build up a practice. Peter had been living in Sussex and was feeling isolated. Probably, as he became increasingly critical of orthodox psychoanalysis he became less and less likely to get referrals from the psychoanalytic establishment. There were at this point very few psychotherapists in Cambridge and therefore the prospect of building up a practice here seemed pretty good.

I was delighted he decided to move here as I had read and really loved his book, *True and False Experience*, and I therefore, when I started my training, asked him to become my supervisor. We got on well, and when he brought together the group to which he introduced the idea of a student-centred training, I really liked the idea and enjoyed our many discussion meetings. I must confess however, that I was much less convinced of the planned training ever becoming a reality. I couldn't quite believe that anyone would be foolhardy enough to join us as a student. I very much remember David Ingleby and I interviewing our first student – Liebe Klug - in the attic of my house in Carlyle Road where I first started practising. David Ingleby was very much a driving force behind the project as he wanted to train with us although this didn't happen, as he got a professorship in Holland and moved away. The name, the 'Outfit' was originally a jokey 'non-name', part of Peter's desire we did not take ourselves too solemnly, but it somehow escaped into the world and everyone (except the UKCP maybe) now uses this to refer to us.

It was a very diverse gathering including psychotherapists, psychiatrists, potential students, supervisees. Quite a number of these dropped out prior to our actually making these ideas a reality, including some like Sian Morgan and Roger Bacon who left (for transference reasons) but returned having completed their training at the Guild. I was already a trainee at the Philadelphia Association. Peter was my training supervisor.

For the first few years the students and 'Hangers on' as Peter called the trained people in the group, met together, but it became increasingly clear that the needs of the two groups were different and so after a while the student group met separately for 3 weeks a month and the 'big group' became monthly.

As a Founder member already some way through my training, I did not, of course experience being part of the student group which in the words of the 'Information for Members' in 1999, was never a purely positive one:

> 'This space can feel welcoming and exciting, but it can also feel vertiginous, neglectful, confusing, leaving people cautious and uncertain.'

Later it speaks of our deliberately allowing a degree of uncertainty, doubt, experimentation and individuality in the answers to questions that arose in our discussions. All psychotherapy trainings ask trainees to put themselves in question – at least we hope they do. The Outfit deliberately set out to put the notion of training itself in question, querying whether the conventional wisdom of teachers and taught, agreed bodies of knowledge and lengthy apprenticeships necessarily produce the most responsive, imaginative or independent-minded psychotherapists.

A learning community: a progressive education approach

This description of the Outfit suggests a parallel with the last gasp of progressive education. This parallel seems relevant. Progressive education is concerned with the education of the whole person – hand, head and heart - not a bad aim for us too as therapists, in contrast to the all too common, almost exclusive emphasis on the

academic – and worse still, on exam results. Education of the whole person and the cultivation of curiosity fall by the wayside in this process. It becomes subservient to a desire to succeed in accordance with externally derived standards; in this case, the narrow and reductive one of the proportion of students obtaining certain grades.

This allusion to the ideals of progressive education may have been an aspect of its philosophy that drew me towards Peter's ideas of a learning community. I come from a family steeped in this approach to education. Both my parents were teachers at a progressive school that I attended as a pupil. (Michael Evans, a retired member of the Outfit, was also the son of a staff member and a pupil at this school).

Although the UKCP speaks of psychotherapy training being at a postgraduate level, beyond the need for student-therapist to be literate and able to read theoretical texts, there is no evidence that people with academic backgrounds make better therapists. In fact, habitually thinking along academic lines may narrow someone's focus and their awareness of what may be going on in the consulting room. Just as preliterate children who cannot read notices may instead be more observant of aspects of the visual environment the rest of us tend to overlook and fail to register.

The idea behind the Outfit was to set up a learning community in which people could be allowed as much autonomy as possible in their path towards becoming a psychotherapist.

At the heart of it was a wish to ask basic questions about how people can best become psychotherapists and to allow a degree of doubt and uncertainty, experimentation and individual differences in the answers.

There are a number of telling critiques by writers from both within and without the psychoanalytic establishment who point to the shutting down of creativity in psychoanalytic training institutions as a result of their hierarchical structures (Kernberg, 1977, Kirstner, 2000, Roustang, 1982). Although these all focus on the US, most of what they criticise is equally relevant here. I think the Outfit, from its foundation, places a high value on creativity through its lack of authoritarian orthodoxy.

Challenges

Studying to become a therapist is inevitably arduous and fraught with doubt, self-doubt and insecurity. Much as we might sometimes long to be told what to do, therapy is not about knowledge as much as understanding and learning to be attentive to the other. Clothing ourselves in theoretical knowledge – or even past experience – may indeed diminish our 'just being' with that particular person.

Applicants seeking admission to psychotherapy trainings are generally expected to be people who can demonstrate a considerable degree of maturity, substantial life experience, intellectual ability and self-awareness. It seems somewhat ironic that most trainings then subject students to hierarchical training conditions that are unnecessarily infantilising rather than encouraging and utilising these qualities. People's individual therapy together with anxieties provoked by embarking on training and starting to see their first patients are likely to make most students feel vulnerable enough at the best of times.

On the whole I think our students are likely to behave like adolescents rather than young children. Characteristically, adolescents alternate between desires to be allowed increasing independence from parental control, but with an abiding wish for parents to remain available as a safe port in any storm.

Psychoanalysis has built up a great deal of accumulated wisdom which we would be unwise to discard but it should not be used as a rule book. Guide-books are useful pointers towards what to look for but if we use theory as something to grab at to soothe our anxieties, it

may mean we are not fully present in the *particular* encounter.

Studying within the Outfit is never going to be an easy option.

It requires courage, determination and resilience. A willingness to take the challenge of thinking and *rethinking*. Listening and learning through discussion with peers. The questioning of ourselves and others. A tolerance of uncertainty and unknowing (as does the practice of psychotherapy). It does not mean a lack of rigour or woolly thinking that is doomed to lack sharpness.

All this means it is essential that the people we admit are really up for it. And can cope with it. First and foremost, that they know how the group functions and they have applied because they are truly attracted to the philosophy of the group and its implications, and not just because it is conveniently located and inexpensive.

Peter writes in his account of setting up the group that it is important to give people a way of choosing us as much as we choose them and for the whole student body to have a chance to meet candidates, with at least one student being involved in the more formal interviews. Very time-consuming bites out of the student group's time.

> 'We are looking for people whose commitment to becoming a therapist is strong, who appear to have the necessary sensitivity for the work, and who, by virtue of their world view, are likely to feel at home in a group of this kind.
>
> It is the last of these criteria which has made selection an arduous and time-consuming task. In particular, the fact that students need to be able to teach each other means we have to select those applicants who will be receptive to the needs of the group and its individual members.' (Lomas, 1998, p.243)

I suspect that all too often this last requirement is not taken on board by a proportion of students who seem to be mainly focused on their own progress rather than having a major responsibility towards the whole group which may imply generosity towards others who seem less able, or congenial to them. Not at all easy. Indeed, our first 'Agonised Appraisal' was triggered by a small number of students who *never* came to the student group and didn't think they had to – we had never, after all, laid down any requirements at all. I am reminded of my headmaster who explained that having few rules made *us all* responsible for the school's smooth and peaceful functioning. If you want young people to grow up into responsible members of society, you most effectively do this by encouraging them to be responsible.

All this is very difficult as the dynamics of groups can become fraught, and it then becomes tempting to fail to attend regularly or slide through the training as quickly as possible sometimes virtually unchanged as if with a non-stick surface. Others so lack confidence that they have to be virtually pushed towards graduation.

In the case of the Outfit, our unorthodox, student-centred structure may fuel insecurity and students may look for reassurance from outside authorities. We seem to feel impelled to prove that however bizarre our teacher-less learning methods are, we can turn out therapists 'as good as' graduates from more orthodox trainings. Unfortunately, since it is difficult to make such a judgement, this can translate into a need to turn out therapists who are *indistinguishable* from graduates from more orthodox institutions. Despite all the difficulties, nevertheless, I think we turn out good therapists.

We have over time become more organised in having minuted business meetings, an AGM, a treasurer, a planning and graduation advisory group, and so forth. I know there have been suggestions that these groups effectively take on the role of a training committee. But I hope we resist the UKCP's pressure towards this. I've experienced training committees including years of being on one and I don't think they are nearly as effective a way of getting to know and judge a

student's progress and readiness to graduate, as our innovative pairings, clusters, midway conversations (if only they actually happened in all cases), and extended graduation processes: graduation groups, spread out graduation letters, involvement and feedback from anyone who wants to contribute. These are all ways in which we remain fairly unique in all members – students and trained members - having *equal rights* to participate, just as we all are invited to be involved in the admission process by all seeing the applications and invited to contribute appreciative enquiries.

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Collagraph: 'Barras' Isobel Urquhart

Adam Bertscher

Celebrating Masculinity: Ending of shame and towards a positive and constructive outlook

Social media is increasingly saturated with expressions of toxic masculinity. Figures who exemplify this, such as Andrew Tate, frequently attract widespread attention and intense public debate. Only recently did I take the time to listen carefully to one of his interviews, which I found to be aggressive, pseudo-philosophical, confrontational, and provocative, to say the least. Individuals like Tate are now appearing widely online as 'men's coaches,' offering self-help guidance to young men.

A term I had only recently become familiar with is the 'manosphere,' which I encountered through the BBC Three documentary *Men of the Manosphere*. The documentary explores online content and communities that discuss, share, and construct ideas of masculinity, which frequently veer into toxic territory.

From watching the documentary and listening to young men describe their experiences within the manosphere, three primary factors appear to draw them in: 1) a lack of meaningful friendships in the offline world, with these online communities providing a space for emotional connection; 2) a search for purpose, motivation, and self-improvement; and 3) a desire for advice regarding sex and romantic relationships with women. Although these factors are interconnected, men may be drawn into the manosphere predominantly through one of these pathways rather than all three equally.

Ultimately, it appears that the popularity of these coaches and figures points to an underlying sense of uncertainty or absence within the identity formation of some young men, alongside an attempt to give form and direction to aspects of masculinity and their powerful libidinal drives. It is therefore unsurprising that these figures have developed significant followings and resonate with many young men globally.

A significant cultural response has emerged in relation to toxic masculinity, visible for example in the #MeToo movement and in critiques often grouped under the label of the 'woke agenda.' However, a compensatory dynamic also seems to be developing, in which some young men experience a sense of moral scrutiny or social marginalisation for being male while pursuing sexual and romantic relationships. Jacob Johanssen, a scholar of psychoanalysis and masculinity, has argued that the rise of such toxicity can be traced to a defensive reaction among men who feel threatened by certain strands of feminism, which they may erroneously interpret as misandry.

As Jacqueline Rose has noted, shaming is not always an effective ethical tool; it can just as easily provoke defensiveness, resentment, or further cruelty rather than genuine reflection or behavioural change. This raises the question: is this what is occurring when men feel that their masculinity is being publicly shamed?

At the same time, shows like Netflix series Adolescence highlights a hidden and rapidly expanding online space in which young men are seeking romantic or sexual relationships but are unsuccessful, pejoratively called incels. Within this space, some men experience a deep sense of

rejection, shame or marginalisation associated with their unsuccess and injured masculinity.

In this context, figures such as Andrew Tate can be seen as responding to, and capitalising on, this shame. Although his rhetoric is often divisive and confrontational, some of his appeal appears to lie in themes of personal responsibility, purpose, and self-discipline – qualities from which certain men derive a sense of reassurance or direction.

To what extent can we step back from the edge of toxic masculinity and cultivate a bold, unapologetic, yet healthy and affirming vision of masculinity that young men can take pride in and aspire towards? Such a form of masculinity might retain traditionally associated qualities – risk-taking, strength, bravery, courage, resilience, and decisiveness – while also embracing emotional intelligence, sensitivity, and a deeply necessary human capacity for connection. How can we guide young men toward constructive, ethical, and emotionally grounded expressions of masculinity, rather than allowing resentment, shame, and alienation to push them toward its more toxic extremes?

I can relate personally to this search for positive masculine expression. As a teenager, I encountered self-improvement approaches in this area through the book *The Game* by Neil Strauss, an exploration of the the 'pick-up artist' community – another subculture within the manosphere that discusses strategies such as 'peacocking' (wearing distinctive or attention-grabbing clothing or accessories to stand out) or 'push and pull' (alternating between showing interest and withdrawing it to create tension and increase attraction).

On one hand, these strategies could be – and at times were – misused in manipulative ways, encouraging shallow, objectifying behaviour characterised by the 'collection' of sexual conquests, multiple partners, and false promises of love, resulting in emotional harm and heartbreak. On the other hand, these strategies can also be understood as tools for developing social confidence, playfulness, improved communication skills, and greater insight into relational dynamics.

When applied constructively, they may form part of a broader process of men's self-development, fostering more authentic social connection, increased enjoyment of life, and healthier romantic and sexual relationships. Like many tools, their impact depended on how they were used: they could either degrade or enrich a man's life.

The good news is that scholars in masculinity studies and psychology are seeking to reframe masculinity as a resource rather than a problem. For example, clinical psychologists Mark Kiselica and Matt Englar-Carlson propose the *Positive Psychology–Positive Masculinity (PPPM)* model, which identifies male strengths — such as courage, protectiveness, problem-solving, humour, and generativity — and uses these as starting points in therapy with boys and men, rather than treating masculinity itself as inherently pathological.

John Barry and colleagues in the field of male psychology describe 'positive masculinity' as a strengths-based, prosocial approach in which traits such as risk-taking and physical courage are understood as valuable when connected to responsibility, care for others, and contribution to community life.

Similarly, Richard Reeves, in *Of Boys and Men*, focuses on structural challenges — including education, labour markets, and changing family roles — and argues for supporting boys and men in ways that do not demonise them, but instead help them adapt to contemporary realities while maintaining a healthy sense of masculine identity and purpose.

Taken together, these practitioners and scholars broadly support the view that masculinity itself is not the problem; rather, the issue lies in how it is socially scripted and channelled.

A useful way to understand this issue could be through Jacques Lacan's psychological metaphor of 'symbolic castration.' Lacan argued that becoming a functioning member of society requires accepting

limits on one's desires and behaviour – the recognition that one cannot have or be everything. This process occurs when an individual enters the 'symbolic order,' the realm of language, law, and social norms, structured by what he termed the 'Name-of-the-Father,' representing authority and responsibility.

In contemporary culture, it can appear that young men experience a form of social 'castration' when their desires for success, sexual expression, and recognition are repeatedly shamed or treated as inherently suspect. The problem arises not from the need for limits, but from the absence of healthy channels through which masculine energy can be expressed and integrated, such as meaningful relationships, purposeful work, creativity, physical activity, service (e.g. being the protector or provider), and community belonging. When such outlets are lacking, these energies do not disappear, but risk being redirected into more harmful forms.

This dynamic can contribute to the growth of misogynistic online subcultures, grievance-driven political movements, and the appeal of public figures who exploit feelings of resentment by promoting extreme, exaggerated versions of dominance and masculinity. In this context, young men may feel caught in a contradiction: they are expected to accept social limits and behave responsibly, yet simultaneously experience shame for doing so, without access to any healthy alternative outlet. This leaves them feeling excluded, confused, and deprived of a clear social role.

The challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate male desire, but to offer healthier alternatives and structures through which they can be consciously lived and constructively expressed. This includes creating spaces where boys and men can speak openly about sex, shame, and vulnerability; supporting role models who embody both strength and care; and nurturing communities and institutions that recognise masculine drives and help shape them into responsibility, protectivity, creativity, and love, rather than domination or withdrawal. This is the project we should be working towards: not a world without masculinity, but one in which masculinity is named, understood, and consciously embodied – rather than being either demonised or left vulnerable to its most toxic distortions.

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Isobel Urquhart

The Motorbike to Norfolk (on trauma)

To follow a trail of curiosity.
you chose a Kawasaki, an earlier model
than the one most people favoured.
Yours lighter, cheaper, underpowered but still,
riding in older age, heavy to steer,
having to rest to ease your ankles, riding the quieter route
home.

The sunlit fields, that late Autumn afternoon,
bathed in stillness, the westering sun calming
what you can always hear, somewhere at the back of thought.
That alarm bell that went off – oh, years ago –
ringing, ringing, ringing.

Collograph 'Swan' Isobel Urquhart

Saeida Rouass

The Gnawa of Morocco; Slavery, Possession and Dance

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On any given night, as the sun begins its descent over the city of Marrakesh and the *muezzins* call the faithful to prayer over the city's ancient rooftops, domestic and international tourists leave their boutique riads, hidden within the maze of alleyways in the old medina. They walk towards Jemaa el-Fna, or *The Assembly of the Dead* in Arabic, the infamous square where entertainers gather. Established in the 11th century, the square was used as a site for public executions. Today, thankfully, public executions are no longer a part of the nightly entertainment in Jemaa el-Fna. Yet, the henna girls, storytellers, al fresco eating stalls and even the drag performers that populate the square remain, carrying on with the nightly theatre of trade, song, and dance.

Each year, over 8 million international visitors flock to Morocco, with a large number of them coming from Europe. They see it as the European gateway into Africa, and vice versa. Historically an important stop in international trading routes, Morocco was where traders brought salt from Mali and Niger along the Sahara and to the country's coastal towns. Marrakesh, once a major stopping point on the Trans-Saharan route, is today a place where tourists disembark from EasyJet aircrafts at Marrakesh Menara Airport and delight that after a short 3-hour flight they are, incredibly, in Africa.

Marrakesh's geographic location means it has always been a place where people from different cultures meet, haggle, trade, and, sometimes, exploit each other. As international tourists descend on Jemaa el-Fna, they may be forgiven for failing to see the coded history of interactions that play out in the square. Amongst the snake charmers and storytellers are roaming music and dance troupes, who are distinctive in their multi-coloured outfits and cowry shell adorned caps. To tourists, they may appear as no more than acrobats, as they somersault, backflip, and jump into human pyramid formations. Yet, these 'acrobats' harp back to a time and trade that most would prefer to forget.

At its height as a stopping point for Trans-Saharan caravans, traders did not just buy and sell salt in the markets of Marrakesh. They also bought and sold people, men, women, and children were traded in the slave market adjoining the square. According to Moroccan scholar Mohammed Ennaji, around 20,000 black Africans were captured and transported across the dunes of the Sahara each year and sold in cities such as Marrakesh, Essaouira, and Fes, where there were well established slave markets. In those cities, brotherhoods of slaves would form and to the sounds of melodies from home and through the movement of body, they came together in the dead of night to hold vigils in commemoration of their heritage, journey, and plight. Today, their descendants call themselves the Gnawa of Morocco and can be found roaming Jemaa el-Fna.

The Gnawa of Morocco, be they in Jemaa el-Fna entertaining the tourist crowds or performing to the 500,000 visitors at the annual Gnawa World Music Festival in Essaouira, are the descendants of West African slaves, who when ripped from their homes brought with them a spiritual heritage

coded in melody and movement that they turned to in order to survive the horrors of slavery. To see them as nothing but street entertainers would be to sweep aside the memory of slavery and the resistance to it that is imbued in every beat of a Gnawa brotherhood's drum and in every twist or jump in a member's body as he moves to the sounds of his ancestors.

A Gnawa brotherhood is typically made up of musicians playing the drums, the *guembri* (a three-stringed bass lute) and the *garagab* (metallic castanets), and dancers. They are presided over by a master known as the *ma'llem* and a female overseer known as the *mqaddema*. The term "Gnawa" is thought to refer to the 9th century kingdom of Old Ghana and has come to mean 'the black people.' The name is both a marker of colour and a reference to the ancestral homes of the brotherhoods: Niger, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Nigeria.

Previous encounters with Arab traders and colonisation, meant that those captured and marched across the Sahara into servitude were already Islamised or Muslim when they arrived. In Morocco, these men, women, and children were met by a country steeped in Sufi traditions, including brotherhoods with well-established lodges, or *Zawaya*. Although familiar with Sufi brotherhoods from their home countries and aware that affiliation to a local *Zawaya* was likely to offer protection and integration, to this day the Gnawa of Morocco do not associate with any particular Moroccan Sufi brotherhood. Instead, they took Bilal ibn Rabah, a former Ethiopian slave freed by a friend of Prophet Muhammed, as their ancestral saint and built a permanent shrine to him in Essaouira.

This is by no means an accident. Bilal was tortured for converting to Islam and within the tradition is celebrated for scripting the call to prayer and being appointed as the first *muezzin*, or person who calls the faithful to prayer. But, perhaps more importantly for the Gnawa, the former slave is revered for his sense of dignity under oppression and unwavering faith. By taking Bilal as their ancestral saint, the Gnawa brotherhoods ensured that their forced servitude and dislocation from home would exist as part of their religious lineage and their cultural consciousness. Bilal's story is one of spiritual truth, perseverance and a sense of conviction in Islam that allowed him to escape from slavery and ultimately find freedom.

And so, the Gnawa do not refer to themselves as Sufis in the conventional sense but instead identify as 'the people of the *khla'*, or the hidden part of creation in which the jinn and spirits reside. Typically, brotherhoods hold what is known as a *lila*, meaning night in Arabic. Starting after sunset and ending in the early hours of the morning, the Gnawa and their patrons hold communion with the spirits of their ancestors. A *lila* has seven phases, each seeking communion with a particular spirit that enters the body of a participant through the use of certain melodies, call and response lyrics, colours, and the burning of incense. It is about inviting a spirit to possess the body so that the person afflicted may conquer it. As the spirit takes possession, the body of the possessed enters into a trance like state and the person begins to move and engage the spirit until one masters the other.

The *ma'llem* starts the ceremony by asking, "who will open the door?" Once a person accepts the invitation, the master guides the musicians and dancers through the seven phases of the night, watching for changes in the room, as new spirits take possession of different bodies. Subtle alterations in melody and the calls of the *ma'llem*, cause the bodies to alter their rhythm and movements. The *mqaddema* also plays her part by supporting the possessed through their movements. Each of the seven phases is represented by a colour and honours particular spirits, light blue represents the colour of the sea spirits, black is the colour of the men of the forest and red is for Sidi Hamu, the one who demands blood. As each spirit world is invited in, the possessed adjust their movements; knives are drawn to imitate the cutting of flesh, women lose themselves in the swinging of their long hair, men

jump and hide, guided by the melodious calls of the master.

The Gnawa do not believe it is possible to rid a person of a spirit nor do they seek to do so through the *lila*. This is not an exorcism. The possession ceremony is known 'as working the spirits, because' when the spirits have been worked, the possessed are said to have mastered their demon, if only for a moment. For many, the symbolism is obvious: the possession ceremony invokes slavery and through it the terror of slavery is kept alive. Passing through the seven phases, members experience affliction, divination, propitiation, protest, resistance, and relief. The wounds of slavery are given a voice and, consequently, a process through which to heal; the emotional, physical, social, and psychological scars are felt, processed, and passed down. The 'working of the spirits' aims not to exorcise the trauma, but to master it, to heal its wounds again and again through the movement of the body. This speaks not just to the scars left by slavery in the individual, but also acknowledges the intergenerational trauma and the need for descendants to know about this history and to heal from it, too.

Today, because of the demands of tourism and the newfound global appreciation of Gnawa music, questions are being raised about whether the Gnawa's inclusion in the Moroccan cultural landscape is a form of co-option. Events like the Gnawa World Music Festival claim Gnawa culture as part of Moroccan heritage, overlooking the ways in which these practices emerged as a consequences of the Gnawa suffering from centuries of subjugation and exclusion. The answer is not a simple yes or no. To reduce the integration of the Gnawa to co-option or appropriation is to deny the ways in which the brotherhoods have worked to negotiate their identify and presence in Morocco. They no doubt understand the risks involved in navigating the poison chalices of tourism and commercialization. For generations brotherhoods have been selective in what they perform for entertainment and what they reserve for the *lila*, often restricting their performances to the non-sacred or praise of saints when performing for a visiting crowd.

However, in recent years, amongst women from low-income households in Morocco, the Gnawa have found a new audience for *lilas*. These women often call on the Gnawa brotherhoods to hold *lilas* in their homes for the women in their networks afflicted by spirits and jinn. For many of the brotherhoods there is nothing unnatural about this demand, the women's demand for private *lilas* also speaks to their need to master a different form of victimhood and oppression. The possession ceremonies become a space in which women can heal from the wounds of capitalist patriarchy and work the spirits so that they, too, may one day become masters of their own destiny.

The Gnawa brotherhoods through their ceremonies have found a way to gain mastery over their experience of forced dislocation and slavery. Movement has and continues to allow them to gain ownership over their bodies and experiences. And, as the world begins to place more demands on the brotherhoods, they will, as they have for generations, look within themselves and to the past to find the resources to navigate and overcome new challenges. It is anyone's guess who else they may empower in the process.

Sian Morgan

The Minotaur

The figure of the Minotaur stands at the boundary between the Greek and Roman civilisations and engages the themes of sacrifice and the monstrous with which the present essay is concerned. The Minotaur is invoked in Dorothy Dinnerstein's book on the effects of exclusive maternal care, 'The Mermaid and the Minotaur '(1977). The figure may well have been in Freud's mind when in his essay on female sexuality, he speaks of his difficulty in understanding the pre-Oedipal stage in girls:

> 'Our insight into this early, pre-Oedipal phase in girls comes to us as a surprise, like the discovery in another field, of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization which lies behind the civilization of Ancient Greece.
>
> Everything in the sphere of this first attachment to her mother seemed to me so difficult to grasp in analysis […] Nor have I succeeded in seeing my way through any case completely.' (1977 [1961] [1931] pp. 371-373)

In the first chapter, 'Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother of *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993b, pp.10-11), Luce Irigaray says:

> The relation to the mother is a mad desire, because it is the dark continent par excellence. It remains in the shadow of one culture, it is night and hell […]. Her desire, the desire she has, this is what the law of the father, of all fathers moves to prohibit […] whether moral or immoral, these fathers intervene to censure the mother's desire. […]
>
> And where we do we find the symbolic of life in the womb, the first corps-a-corps, the body to body relationship with the mother? In what darkness, what madness, is this relationship abandoned? […]
>
> The devouring monster we have turned the mother into is an inverted reflection of the blind consumption, she is forced to submit to: her womb, her breast gapes open as a result of gestation, the life which has issued from them

> without reciprocity. Does murder, whether real or cultural, serves to erase the debt? To forget the dependency? To destroy the power?

The story of the Minotaur[1] is a myth that takes in elements from Minoan Crete, reflects the contest between Crete and Attica (H. J. Rose, OCD 1949): the myth we receive has a Hellenistic cast. The story has been variously interpreted, but in all accounts the symbolism is that of the destruction of a *hierosgamos,* a sacred marriage, a divine union of opposites: breaking the union of instinct and consciousness, feminine and masculine. The myth can be seen as a story of women, of triples, and of the moon, being overthrown by men. Jane Harrison, a brave Edwardian, was a scholar who tentatively undermined the dominant patriarchal interpretation of the myth of the Minotaur: she asserts that the story marks a shift from matriarchy to patriarchy and the betrayals by which the story is marked, depend on the confusions involved in the switch from matrilineage to patrilineage.

The Minotaur can be read as a telescoped history in which the goddess is replaced by the gods, whose offspring are killed off by man. The story contains references to an ancient moon-bull cult, the sacred marriage of the sun (cattle are sacred to the sun) and moon (Pasiphaë) 'Minos 'also means 'brazen', so there is perhaps a reference to the sun, and perhaps also an overtaking of the neolithic by the bronze age.

A simple interpretation is that the story shows the sun, Minos, taking over and imprisoning the moon, Pasiphaë, (as aspect of the Triple Goddess, and related to Persephone, as Hecate, Queen of the Night and Death. There are clear links to the story of Persephone being seized and swallowed up by Hades and having to go underground).

Another is that the story is of a powerful male swallowing up a female who expresses sexual and reproductive desire. (Her desire is designated as monstrous, and she and her monstrous son/ phallic power are trapped within what might be described as the labyrinth[2] of the masculine symbolic (death as eternity)).

The murder of the Minotaur and of Pasiphaë represents the takeover of Minoan Matriarchy and the rites of the hierosgamos by Hellenic civilisation, in part represented by the final overthrowing of Poseidon by Zeus. It takes the form of a dark perverted 'hierosgamos' where the mother is forced into a merger with her son (whose image becomes that of the devil) in the labyrinth of the father.

The startling image at the centre of the story is the union between Pasiphaë and the white bull which may be interpreted as a sacred marriage between sun and moon (e.g. Graves 88. 7), a 'hierosgamos'. Jung (CW14, 1963, p.91) remarks that 'incest was the hierosgamos of the gods, the mystic prerogative of kings', but in the Minotaur story the sacred union is presented as profane, its offspring a monster, and mother and son are imprisoned in the labyrinth, the womb which is represented as death. Theseus is the son of Poseidon by a daughter of the moon. Theseus is able to navigate the labyrinth because his sister Ariadne gives him a thread, in effect an umbilical cord, but Theseus makes use of it to kill his brother and betray his sister.

[1] There are innumerable associations that can be made to the Minotaur, but one that has particularly struck the writer is the depiction of the Minotaur in Picasso's drawings of the 1930s, where the Minotaur is released and embraced as a representation of man's animal sexuality. What I notice as significant about these drawings is that it is only the male victim who is released into freedom to express his desire, for it is at this point (see Roger Penrose's biography of Picasso) that Picasso's images of the female are subject to distortion and violent disintegration. The Minotaur myth seems to represent the contradiction of maternal desire, which might constitute a part of her subjectivity, were they not so vigorously repressed. The mother can also seethe with passions, with hatred, with monstrous feelings; it seems that if she refuses to conform to the male ideal then she is annihilated.

[2] The labyrinth is the 'place of Labrys', a double headed axe that symbolised the waxing and waning of the moon. It is believed to be a symbol of the Triple Goddess, later adopted by the male priesthood of Apollo at Delphi. The depiction of the labyrinth on the Cretan coinage is commonly interpreted as a representation of the womb.

The slaying of the Minotaur can be interpreted not as a heroic triumph of light over darkness but as the moment when the hierosgamos, the sacred union of opposites is violently broken. The Minotaur represents the unintegrated instinctual self, born of the divine union between Pasiphaë and the bull. What is conquered by Theseus is not only monstrosity but also the possibility of reconciling human consciousness with animal instinct. In the story of the destruction of the Minotaur, our imagination is led to disavow the body, instinct, the feminine and the maternal. The story represents matrilineage and matriarchy as monstrous, with Theseus (Zeus) as the agent of its destruction. The death of the Minotaur in the 'womb' of the labyrinth represents not only the collapse of the hierosgamos but can be read as an act of symbolic matricide, foreclosing the rhythmic, bodily ground of meaning, producing a culture of control and abstraction which defends against dependence and mourning for the loss of the maternal body and a creative relationship with nature.

Case History

Pryderi[3] the maternal symbolic: the Minotaur and the Labyrinth

The figure of the Minotaur offers a symbolic framework for understanding the psychic consequences of early maternal loss, the foreclosure of instinctual experience and the stunting of symbolic life. In my reading, the myth of the Minotaur marks a decisive moment in Western cultural history when the maternal symbolic is violently suppressed and replaced by a rational patriarchal order which reimagines the womb as a site of death rather than creation. This cultural repression parallels the developmental consequences of early maternal unavailability, when the parents' capacity for holding, containment and rêverie is impaired, with the consequence that the infant's felt experience lurks in the body as a potential for somatic terror. When the infant's continuity of being is thus ruptured a defensive 'false self' develops, around compliance, performance, hyper rationality and muscular forms of survival.

The Minotaur myth can be understood as a psychic construct that is created when primitive, instinctual life is cut off, buried and denied symbolic mediation in the life of the infant. There is a foreclosure of integration between consciousness and the animal psyche. Such foreclosure manifests in states of panic, bodily dread, dissociation and violent self-control, states that feel monstrous because they are unrepresented in a shared symbolic order. The labyrinth can be understood as a metaphor for a psychic structure that forms when early containment fails, when there is no bodily memory link back to the womb. It is from within this mythic field that the case of Pryderi can be understood.

Pryderi came to see me because he was suffering from breathless panic attacks which would erupt randomly associated with eating. He was in his fifties, an oil executive who had taken early retirement: he was dapper, neatly dressed in formal male attire. He had kind but anxious eyes. Pryderi was born in West Wales during the second world war: it was a landscape shaped by Welsh speaking communal life and non-conformist spirituality, on the cusp between an ancient rural Wales and the exploited landscape and population of the South Wales coalfield. He was born at a time when the old world and modern world were colliding; the hospitable communities both rural and industrial, built around nonconformism were disintegrating; Welsh was being eroded as a mother tongue and British culture was becoming estranged by various media from its mythology and ancestral rhythms.

Pryderi's mother Mair who was the youngest of sixteen children, (many of whom had died in infancy and early childhood) had grown up in an

[3] I chose the name Pryderi, from the Welsh pryder ("care, thoughtful concern"). He is the lost-and-recovered child in the Mabinogion, symbolising the restoration of rightful identity. I reference him here as a culturally Welsh alternative to Greek myth, a figure from my former patient's own tradition that emphasises his task of reclaiming inner legitimacy after dislocation.

atmosphere saturated with grief. She was a wonder child, born after the deaths of her siblings. Her father died soon after she was born. She developed artistic yearnings, for which there was no place in her culture, so her life was overtaken by fantasy and barely contained passion for something she could not articulate. Like Pasiphaë she bore within her an inexpressible desire.

Pryderi's father, who had once aspired to be a priest, was forced into coalmining at a time of economic depression, and had become hardened and sickened by a labyrinthine mining environment: a masculine underworld where men worked at unearthly hours, in a foul environment, and who were barely capable of sustaining emotional relationships above ground.

Pryderi was brought up in a mean, miner's cottage, cold and without proper sanitation, in an impoverished community.

Pryderi's birth was preceded by a still born baby girl, longed for by his mother. His mother was consumed with grief when he was born and was unavailable to him. When he was eight, another daughter was born, much wanted but after her birth his mother became acutely ill, was hospitalised and Pryderi never saw her again. His new sister was sent to live with her mother's family. His mother's body, already compromised by bereavement, fantasy and frustrated desire, vanished. The womb, like the labyrinth became aligned with death rather than life. His father collapsed within the labyrinth of his own grief.

Pryderi grew up with no container for anxiety and loss, no symbolic mediator between sensation and meaning. His instincts were untransformed: over time, he experienced his instinct as a 'bull-like' force which threatened his stability and created a sense of mounting panic. Rugby became a temporary salvation. Through disciplined training he fashioned himself into a cultural hero, a Theseus of his time, armouring his psyche, becoming admired and seemingly invulnerable as an international athlete.

He could not symbolise but developed a muscular armature to omnipotently defend his yearning and loss. He could not mourn but anaesthetised himself in ribald, drunken, misogynistic camaraderie and worship of bodily prowess. Pryderi lost his mother tongue, the Welsh language on his upwardl,y mobile trajectory. He lost touch with the instinctive rhythms of his land, its stories and spirituality, building instead a life financed by an oil company, obsessively clean , greedy, seek and quite racist, chasing a golf ball while masking internal desolation.

When Pryderi came into therapy in his fifties, he was experiencing severe panic attacks. His body, once a fortress of his false self was declining and had become the site of unbearable anxiety. He had recently had a hernia operation on the site of his navel. The place of the most primitive connection to his mother had been obliterated.

We agreed to meet twice a week and eventually as his confidence in the process grew, he used the couch.

The transference oscillated between longing and terror. I felt as if I might be an Ariadne figure for him, offering a thread out of the labyrinth/womb of his grief, back into meaning. At the same time I could be a devouring maternal figure who might expose his need and then would disappear. With considerable time, reverie and relationship, these fears began to diminish and Pryderi began to reclaim parts of himself that had long been exiled: he began to be able to express his rage and his profound grief, to get back in touch with his Welsh language, his feeling body, his tenderness and his spirituality. He began to draw, at first in the graveyard of his local church. He took long walks along the coastline where he lived. He had long been frightened of the sea, but these walks helped him find a sense of peace in nature and within himself. He developed a strong uncanny connection with the world around him, so much so that when he would return from his local pub in the evenings, an owl would fly down and sit on his shoulder. I spoke to him about the myth of Blodeuwedd. Blodeuwedd, the woman of flowers

who was transformed into an owl by the magician Gwydion. It is the story of a mother who blocks her son's desire, illustrating how frustrated maternal need can distort a child's capacity for authentic intimacy. I invoked her as a Welsh mythic parallel to my patient's difficulty in separating from a dead mother, whose unmet longings had shaped his identity.

In retirement Pryderi drove a charity bus for dementing elderly people: he commented one day that many of his passengers seemed so lost that he speculated that some forms of dementia might be a defence against the pain of memory. Pryderi had had little or no conscious memory of his mother or of his life before she died. Gradually some good memories came back. He had gone to the graveyard of the chapel where she was buried, on top of a mountain near the village where they had lived. The view from her grave was immense, towards the sea in the far distance. Larks sang there. One day he was moved to walk from there across the mountain, through some woodland, past his grandmother's watermill, past a ruined village and some standing stones to his aunt's old farm. He then remembered with pleasure the very long walk he and his parents would take to that farm on a Saturday afternoon, to a place of animals, of belonging and hospitality. Eventually his 'Minotaur' was no longer a creature to be feared and destroyed but gradually could became a part of him to be welcomed home.

Pryderi's story shows us how when maternal desire is suppressed or broken, when instinct is rendered monstrous, when culture colludes in a disavowal of the body, feminine meaning, maternal power and the womb, the psyche constructs an internal labyrinth in which the instinctual self is confined, both that of the mother and the child. It is only there, in that dark womb space, which may be reentered in psychotherapy, where instinct and loss are merged that symbolic life can be born again.

The Minotaur myth reveals an enduring psychoanalytic value. It provides a symbolic map for understanding the fate of the instinctual self under conditions of trauma, cultural constraint, and maternal loss. It also suggests that the task of analysis is not to emulate Theseus, but to take up the more difficult work of retrieving the thread in the dark: attending to what has been exiled, listening to the monstrous as a form of communication, and restoring the maternal symbolic as a vital ground for psychic life.

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Alistair Cormack

Paula Rego: Visions of English Literature

Castle Museum Norwich 18 October 2025-18 January 2026

Paula Rego: Visions of English Literature showcases three series of prints by the Portuguese-English artist: Nursery Rhymes, Peter Pan and Jane Eyre. My understanding of visual art is fairly rudimentary. However, I feel justified in venturing into the territory in this case as the subject matter is explicitly literary (my home turf) and obviously of interest to psychoanalysis.

In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim offers a Freudian reading of fairytales – this is what he has to say about Beauty and the Beast:

> …all is gentleness and loving devotion to one another on the part of three main characters […] a child's oedipal attachment to a parent is natural … and has the most positive consequences for all, if during the process of maturation it is transferred and transformed as it becomes detached from the parent and concentrated on the lover. (Bettelheim 1977: 307)

Rego's work offers a furious corrective to this vision of sweetness and light. The depictions of childhood and early adolescence in these prints, present a world of knowing sexuality and violence. There are no neat transformations, but rather abrupt disjunctions, violent upheavals. Furthermore, the images I want to pay particular attention to seem angrily to envision a world beyond the 'natural' oedipal attachments Bettelheim blithely describes, to an inhuman nature that is sexual but also red in tooth and claw.

Her print that accompanies Baa Baa Black Sheep is among the most disturbing and arresting images in the exhibition. (Paula Rego, Baa, Baa, Black Sheep, 1989 | Cristea Roberts Gallery) We may be reminded of Iago's racist warning to Brabantio at the start of Othello: 'An old black ram is tupping your white ewe.' The black sheep of the nursery rhyme, in Rego's vision, is obviously a figure of masculine – though not necessarily human – sexuality, rising head and shoulders above the young girl he embraces and looking down on her complacently. But there is no fear in the attitude we can discern in the girl, though her face is turned from the viewer; one hand tenderly sits beneath his foreleg, the other is raised ready to cast a spell, or grasp his neck. The most telling detail is the small human male figure who is bizarrely crammed into a space at the ram's back – in a cave or perhaps a rip in the fabric of the picture. His body seems to be craning to see what is going on, his face, though obscure, could be expressing anger, jealousy. He is cartoonish, while the two main figures are lovingly detailed. The whole image is full of danger and desire. It is a sexuality that seems to threaten the human oedipal world of the tiny man, and it is in no way simply benign. It brings to mind Angela's Carter's rewriting of Beauty and the Beast, 'The Tyger's Bride', in which it is not the beast who becomes human, but beauty who becomes animal.

A companion to this image comes from the set Rego made for *Jane Eyre*. This novel has been a major location for feminist and psychoanalytic criticism, certainly since Gilbert and Gubar's groundbreaking *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Rego says that she came to *Jane Eyre* after having read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys's prequel which gives the shadowy figure incarcerated in Rochester's

oubliette a vivid independent life. Nevertheless, the prints Rego makes are not in this more mainstream feminist tradition. They mostly focus on Jane's early life – her experiences in the house of her cruel aunt and at the miserable Lowood School, or seem concerned with Jane's ward, Adele. The image I want to focus on takes an oneiric swerve from the material of the book (Loving Bewick From 'Jane Eyre - The Guardians' - Hornseys Gallery - Ripon, North Yorkshire) . At the novel's start, Jane has sequestered herself behind a curtain on a windowsill, avoiding the noisy petulance of her cousins, and is immersed in the world of a book,

> Bewick's History of British Birds: the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; of "the solitary rocks and promontories" by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape. (Jane Eyre, Chapter 1)

But Rego, in the vividly named 'Loving Bewick', does not imagine Bewick as a book, but an outsized pelican, and the Jane of the image is not a child but an adult. Jane is seated and the bird stands on her knees with its bill suggestively about to enter Jane's mouth. Her eyes are closed, her face strained and frowning. The 'loving' of this book, which the child Jane so clearly presents in the novel, becomes a sexualised feeding. It is only looking today that I realise the picture could well be a self-portrait; the lines of Jane's face decidedly remind us of a young Rego. Once again, I see the image as a vision of a sexuality that defies the oedipal masculine world; infant Jane's escape of her adoptive family becomes adult Jane's escape from Rochester into an imaginative and enigmatic realm of desire.

The final images I want to discuss are from the series on J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, a book Rego adored as a child. There are four prints of 'Sewing on the Shadow' in the exhibition. It is a moment that clearly fascinated Rego and one she envisioned in different ways. They have common features but are subtly different. In all of them, Wendy sits patiently and diligently doing her work of repair. In three Peter is prone and in one he stands, offering Wendy his ankle. In two he smiles, in one he seems impassive and in one, her first, his face is half turned away and there seems to be a sullen rage. To my mind, this is the most interesting of the four images. (Roseberys London | Paula Rego, British 1935-2022- Sewing on) Wendy's eyes are black holes in this print and the only shadow cast is hers, not Peter's. The shadow is perhaps the most striking element of the image. It picks out her ponytail, high on the back of her head, but what is projected is slender, bringing to my mind some Egyptian image of an Ibis or Thoth. What does it mean to sew on the shadow? In this image there is a grim acceptance of something dark and mythic, the sewing is a lonely ritual held by the bright moon which dominates the night window. If in Barrie's tale, the shadow is capricious and playful, here it is a frightening and enigmatic figure. It is closer to Jung's conception of the shadow – that which we deny about ourselves and hastily project onto others; to have it sewn back on is a process whose presence in the nursery is troubling. All the same, the other images challenge this reading; in the three alternative prints there is something matter of fact and domestic about the scene, perhaps suggesting that an accommodation with the shadow is best achieved through play.

What I describe here only touches the surface; the exhibition offers hours of fascination to the viewer. If you are unable to make it, the Hayward Gallery have printed an accompanying book with excellent essays by Marco Livingstone, Rosanna McLaughlin and Marina Warner.

Paula Rego: Visions of English Literature - John Sandoe Books

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Jasna Levinger-Goy

Between FOMO and Carpe Diem

When psychotherapists discuss their work, they usually focus on various issues and therapeutic approaches rather than on specific age groups or generations. However, one generation stands out due to its distinct behavioural traits: those born around the same time as social media's emergence. I am referring to individuals born roughly in the mid-1990s (and give or take about 5 years), the generation often labelled 'internet natives.' Commonly known as Generation Z, they are sometimes also referred to as the 'Instagram generation.'

While it is risky to generalise, my experience working with clients from this demographic (certainly not all of them and certainly not restricted to them only) suggests specific shared characteristics I haven't come across as much before. However, these characteristics, although prevalent among Gen Z, are slowly creeping into the rest of the population. Serious research is needed to understand the causal factors behind these quite widespread changes, but as a psychotherapist, I have observed several recurring traits. Grouping these traits might be a helpful way to initiate further discussion and exploration.

1/ Virtual Living in Place of Real-Life Experience

Virtual living seems to be the most prominent feature. Reality is often replaced by virtual reality and the boundaries between reality and virtual reality become blurred. Alienation from reality is more and more noticeable. Experiences are increasingly acquired indirectly, through videos or digital simulations, rather than through personal, real-world experience and interactions. Hence 'living in one's head' or in a kind of fantasy world is ever more present. Real immediate experience is replaced by what Rosen (2024) calls 'mediated'[1] experience, often AI generated. Whether it is an escape or just a side effect of the increased acquisition of 'mediated' experience time and research will tell.

One of the aspects of this alienation from reality is the widespread presence of 'contactless' activities. It has become the norm not only in transactional activities, but also in areas such as learning new skills and, ultimately, in how we communicate with others. Face-to-face communication is increasingly rare, leading to 'social discomfort', and even an inability to interact with people in close proximity. Interpersonal skills are an obvious casualty of online and AI mediated life. Real-world social interactions have been minimized, and this scarcity often contributes to the rise of 'social discomfort' and anxiety.

Even direct interpersonal sexual experience often becomes intimidating and is frequently delayed or replaced by masturbation while watching pornography. On the whole the engagement with real life is reduced. The reality of our 'worldly' universe is increasingly substituted by the Metaverse. As Rosen (2024) points out, Metaverse claims in its 2023 advertisement: 'The Metaverse may be virtual, but the impact will be real' (p.207). The prevalence of imagined and fantasy life creates the illusion of engagement and participation. The true experience is replaced by the virtual one and readily accepted as genuine experience. It is common to use Metaverse to replace actual travelling and visiting foreign countries, for instance, or 'experiencing' art by visiting online galleries in place of the real ones etc. It is rarely mentioned that although it offers some experience it certainly does not offer the complete genuine experience. I suggest we could label it 'Ersatz' experience. Communication with many, on screen,

sitting in one's bedroom, gives people a false sense of real-life communication. For people with such a propensity, digital experience is a substitute for real-life 'body' experience. Hence, they do not feel that they are missing anything. To quote Rosen again summing it up as: '… a trend that has already replaced empathy with 'click-here' charitable efficiency, emotions with emoticons, and self with selfies' (p.138).

2/ Idealism and Utopian Thinking Combined with Naivety and Literalism

The online world, including and maybe supported mainly by social media, enables the creation of idealised, almost childlike versions of the world around and of oneself—the lines between reality and curated fantasy fade away. As Rosen states, 'More and more people mistrust their own experiences. More and more people create their realities rather than live in the world around them' (p.2). An unchecked belief in perfectionism or utopian ideals — fuelled by curated online narratives — leads to dissatisfaction with 'good enough' solutions. Constant exposure to polished versions of others' lives fosters chronic comparison, often eroding self-esteem and inflating insecurities. Striving to achieve the ideal can jeopardise achieving at all.

3/ Indiscriminate Trust

Another tendency is to take information at face value, with minimal scepticism and critical thinking, which leaves the 'Instagram' generation, for instance, vulnerable to misinformation. Doubt and curiosity are often underdeveloped in favour of quick immediate consumption. Common sense is usually lost, and only literal meaning is discerned; curiosity almost killed. This could lead to absurd decisions, conclusions and solutions as well as an urge for quick fixes and **now** and immediate gratification! There's a widespread tendency to believe online content, influencers and trends, without sufficient vetting or critical appraisal. This is significantly increased because there is considerable mistrust of official sources. The need for questioning is gone; a questioning mind is almost abandoned. Critical thinking is not encouraged. Such trust, albeit misplaced, gives those people a sense of security, which is otherwise challenged. The sense of transiency has replaced the sense of permanency while anxiety creeps in. Mortality suddenly came into the forefront, the end of life or the world, for that matter, as predicted by various online sources - frequently catastrophizing - seems imminent hence the need for carpe diem.

4/ Unselective Overconsumption of Information

We are all inundated with an overwhelming influx of news, memes, and updates, often devoid of context, yet often also presented with both vivid images and sounds. This is another cause of the increase in instances of anxiety. The lack of filters or discrimination leads to a paradox where being 'over-informed' fosters ignorance; our brains cannot process such abundance of information. Superficial knowledge of many topics replaces the proper understanding of any single one.

Access to infinite streams of content encourages breadth at the expense of depth. Topics and interests are skimmed over instead of explored in detail, leading to shallow understanding, unselective acceptance and abdication of common sense. Alongside that, the 'big hurry' mind-set discourages questioning contents and focused thinking. There's little time to fully process or query information, as new content demands attention constantly. Algorithms prioritise engagement over substance, preventing users from challenging the sources or thinking critically about what they consume. Rapidly shifting attention between apps, topics, and posts makes it difficult to engage deeply. This leads to the phenomenon of 'second screening' (Goldsbrough, 2024) which is quite widespread. The result is fragmented focus and a decreased ability to concentrate or reflect. Every spare moment is filled with external content – scrolling feeds, streaming videos, or gaming. Boredom is both unknown and unacceptable. Boredom, which could spark creativity and introspection, is now seen as a void to be filled and avoided.

Having superficial exposure to many fields can create a false impression of being well-informed,

masking the reality of expertise in very few areas. Digital existence creates the sense of 'belonging to the world,' of possessing the correct information and answers, while those 'digital consumers' actually suffer from algorithmic restrictions which reduce them to life in a 'small digital village' (Levinger-Goy 2019).

5/ Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Addiction

There is a strong need to be in the loop constantly, to be 'on top of things', 'well informed,' and not 'left out' or the first to know. Hence, being separated from smartphones and every other 'life support' digital source causes anxiety and even withdrawal-like syndrome. This can be explained by the fact that teams of tech experts devise ways to capture consumers' interest and attention, thus creating digital additions. Unfortunately the stories that attract the most attention are those dealing with negative news, doom and gloom, general catastrophizing, that appeal to fear and anger. Along with addiction, not surprisingly, they generate a great amount of anxiety. Social media platforms are specially engineered for addiction, making users spend excessive time on apps, often at the expense of offline relationships and responsibilities. Sometimes, the result is a lack of sleep and time for any other meaningful activity. Digital addiction, not only in the case of online gaming, is ever present and even recognised as a mental health issue. It also means constant exposure to curated, idealised lives on social media, creating an acute awareness of what others are doing or present as doing. That causes self-questioning, self-doubt, and often low self-esteem due to unfavourable outcomes compared with the curated 'reality' of others. This addiction, just like every other addiction, can be pretty harmful.

6/ Reliance on External Instructions

Digital sources are both 'lifelines' and 'life guides'. People often look for external validation or guidance for fundamental aspects of life – be it through self-help books, fitness trackers, or detailed 'how-to guides' – leading to a dependency on predefined steps rather than self-directed learning. There is also a propensity to take all the instructions to the extreme and literally. This leads to reluctance to take the initiative. The ease of finding quick answers or solutions online diminishes the motivation to explore independently or take proactive steps in life. People need 'life manuals' to feel safe. They do not trust themselves, their thought processes or their instincts. More and more often they pose a question such as 'How do I …?' to ChatGPT for instance and then blindly follow offered answers/instruction.

The often false curated safety of online spaces and the safety of 'sheltering behind the screen' frequently translates into a reluctance to take risks or venture into unknown or uncomfortable territory. Trying out is replaced by safe options. Even in terms of the relationship with their own body, they rely on external instructions, monitoring, and evaluating at the expense of tuning into their bodies and using common sense. Obsession with tracking and optimising physical metrics like sleep (length and depth), heart rate, or number of steps made, among others, reflects a mechanistic view of the body, sometimes overshadowing emotional or holistic well-being. Following social media advice or searching what 'Dr Google' suggests often leads to hypochondria and desperate attempts to mend or 'oil the machine', as the body is seen.

7/Algorithmic Grouping

Authenticity is a victim of algorithmic grouping. Content delivery systems to create echo chambers and groupthink reinforcing existing beliefs while limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. Inflexibility which frequently creates 'ideological' division between '*us*' who are '*right*' and '*others*' who are '*wrong*' is not uncommon. The pervasive influence of algorithms and peers encourages conformity, often leading to the mass adoption of trends or causes without deep understanding. The uniformity encourages 'cluster behaviour' and offers a sense of belonging while excluding the other 'clusters'. It insidiously creates an 'exclusive group' of private 'group totalitarian existence'

pretending to be liberal. However, Harari states in the broader sense and the future: 'The rise of machine-learning algorithms, however, may be exactly what the Stalins of the world have been waiting for. AI could tilt the technological balance of power in favour of totalitarianism.' (Harari 2024, p.339. This certainly does not mean that everything created by AI is harmful. There are many significant benefits of digital technology and AI, but overseeing their development and application seems necessary.

Conclusion

Many of these traits have always been present in one form or another, but there seems to be a vast difference in time and quantity when information, news, and knowledge acquisition are concerned. In the pre-digital era, in terms of quantity, the sources of information and knowledge came from newspapers, journals, and books. By default, accessibility was somewhat limited. One would/could subscribe to several newspapers and periodicals, regularly buy books and/or borrow them from a library or friends, but that certainly restricted the quantity, and the finite availability naturally encouraged focus. Time is a less obvious issue, although to read a book or even newspaper and journals, one has to allocate a certain amount of time and often space. For instance, with 24/7 access to a smartphone, neither time nor space seems to be much of a problem. One can check their phone between two activities, sometimes during another activity. Face-to-face interaction, on the other hand, is a more complicated issue. When and why it all started could be debated, but there are some indications that the COVID-19 lockdown opened the floodgates of life of isolation. Working from home where possible remains attractive to some degree. Online shopping, online food delivery, online video communication, etc., and even the availability of online pornography make solitary existence not only acceptable but sometimes preferable. Virtual interaction with friends takes over face-to-face interaction. What are the detrimental consequences remain to be seen, but social relationships, the ability to interact successfully and efficiently with others seems to be one of the apparent casualties. Social skills are insidiously disappearing from the arsenal of human skills. Another detrimental consequence is the prevalence of a combination of FOMO and carpe diem. Both urges caused by constant exposure to catastrophic news which creates the fear that life might end the next day or next month or next year; that time is short. The life between FOMO and Carpe Diem leaves very little space for thinking, let alone critical thinking, as well as for moral judgements and evaluation of one's actions or reactions, and definitely not only for gen Z. This seems to be the emerging 'social order'. Research in this area is not only necessary but urgent, too.

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