

Corporate Remembering, Corporate Forgetting
Matthew McArdle, Friday, October 6, 2023

*Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
Pastor scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouths
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rut, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop*

(Song by Billie Holiday, poem by Abel Meeropol)

Billie Holiday sung to her nation in 1939 of the 'strange and bitter crop' of racism, hate-murders, and destruction in her countries past and present. Her voice and Meeropol's poetry were able to create 'secret passages' through the conscious defences of Americans black and white. The deep traumas of a nation able to be seen, heard, and felt.

Trauma cuts the skin and deeper tissues. It penetrates surfaces. It burns. It contudes and tears. It fractures and fragments our bodies and our minds. Our bodies compensates, as do our minds. If repair is not possible then further alterations occur to the structures of our organs and minds. Trauma permanently changes us, our functioning, development, and growth. Strictures, limitations, and disabilities develop. We attempt to limit and avoid the pain. This can lead to further damage and limitations to our growth.

Trauma also effects groups and societies. The effects to our 'corporate body' cause damage, limit our function and our capacity for growth.

For the next few minutes I hope that we can think together about ourselves, not just as individuals, but as part of a group. I want us to think about the history of our groups. We may recognise possible traumas that remain 'unprocessed' (undigested and unthinkable) within our groups. These unresolved traumas distort our development and limit our potential.

We all belong to groups. We are group creatures. We are also fiercely 'independent'. I want us to think together about our 'groupishness', our histories as groups, what we remember as a group, what we forget and what we have never (yet) been able to think.

We meet today for the APAS 50TH Anniversary Conference. Our theme is Memory, Mourning & Re-imagining The Future. Some of us are members of APAS. Others are members of other professional organisations. Outside our professional affiliations we all belong to social, cultural, family, political and national groups. Each of us here right now have a relationship of belonging or not belonging to this strange place called 'Australia' and this unusual group called 'Australian'.

Our traumas are part of our histories. History matters. To some extent we are who we are because of our history. In other ways we need to move and live beyond our histories to embrace our unique potential.

History that is unable to be digested, dreamed, and made thinkable remains stored within us as 'undigested facts' which cannot be fully and subjectively experienced. 'Traumatic events' that remain in our psyche (as individuals and groups) cannot be imbued with the meaning and significance that enables us to grow and change. They can remain within us as unthinkable, ever-present presences that cannot be remembered, cannot be forgotten, and cannot be worked through.

Here is a reported history of this group called APAS:

"In 1909 Freud reported having received a letter from Sydney telling him there was a group eagerly studying his work. A Dr Donald Cameron had established a little group and had lectured many times before various Societies on Psychoanalysis. Before acquiring a medical qualification in 1907 he had been a minister of the Presbyterian Church but had had to resign his position on account of his "Freudian Views". Jones notes this as "the first instance, but far from being the last of such victimization."

Two years later at the request of Dr Andrew Davidson, Freud, Jung, and Havelock Ellis were invited to read papers on Psychoanalysis before the Australian Medical Congress in Sydney in 1911. Freud's paper "On Psychoanalysis" was read before that Congress".

(This account is written by Reg Martin , a Sydney psychoanalyst, 35 years ago reflecting the understanding at the time of the early history of psychoanalysis in Australia.)

Maria Teresa Hooke gave an account of further developments in 2010:

'Six analysts applied to come to Australia in 1938, five Hungarian and a German; of the five only two got the visa: Clara Geroe and Andrew Peto.

Words don't convey what transpires from reading the letters and telegrams between Jones and the group of Hungarians: from one side the mobilization of the psychoanalytic community to save them and from the other the despair of the waiting for permits and visa, the fear of time running out, as a failure to obtain those papers was equivalent to a death sentence.

With the arrival of Clara Geroe in Melbourne in 1940 the psychoanalytic spark was reignited, or better it was reignited by the encounter between her and a very active and enthusiastic group of psychiatrists who had been working with Jones in trying to bring a number of analysts to Australia.

As in many countries, it was the working together of local pioneers and of refugees from Europe which established psychoanalysis. In Australia two

psychiatrists: Roy Winn and Paul Dane represented this connection. They had been soldiers in the first war and they became interested in psychoanalysis in response to war trauma, listening to the testimony of traumatized soldiers and shell-shocked veterans.

So it all started with trauma.

Winn and Dane trained in London with the British Society and became the first analysts in this country, instrumental in establishing the first two institutes, in Melbourne and Sydney.

Clara Lazar Geroe had trained in Budapest at the school of Ferenczi and was analysed by Michel Balint.”

Clara Geroe told to Judy Brett in 1977 (an interview titled “The Reluctant Immigrant”):

“I came to Australia because Hitler came to Europe. We had a happy and well ordered life and I had no intention of migrating. When Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia Dr. John Rickman of the British Society came to Budapest to advise us how to get out and where we should go.

We heard of countries about which we knew almost nothing and New Zealand was one of these. It was suggested that we should try as there was a lot of interests in modern educational ideas in New Zealand, more so than in Australia at the time.....

It became more and more urgent and finally only I was able to obtain a permit, not for New Zealand but for Australia, Then the war broke out and the permit was cancelled. I was so ambivalent about leaving that I was glad we could stay, but after some months our permit was renewed. We left on an Italian ship for Australia.”

So, psychoanalysis arrived in Australia with much enthusiasm from Europe, yet our European ‘founders’ came with their own traumas and ambivalences. It is hard not to imagine parallels between the arrival of psychoanalysis in this country and the arrival of Europeans on these shores at an earlier time. The ‘arrivants’ brought not only their own traumas and ambivalences, but also issues of migration and loss, the leaving behind of wars and difficulties, also, hopes and dreams for new and different futures, yet fears of this strange and unfamiliar place. This fear of the unfamiliar brings with it the wish to recreate the familiar. Did the arrival of psychoanalysis bring to our shores a certain ‘Europe-centred’ (pre)occupation? I wonder what the underlying traumas and conflicts that may still inhibit the foundation and development of a true and unique **Australian psychotherapy and psychoanalysis**.

Between Mumma and the Teddy Bear

A two-year-old girl Lucy has discovered that her teddy bear has special powers. Unlike her other playthings teddy, now called “Cuddly”, can share her thoughts and feelings. He will become a special presence for years to come as she negotiates a world that extends beyond her mother and then later beyond her family home. Lucy’s experience is relatively stable and trauma free, yet she needs ‘Cuddly’ to make her experiences bearable and understandable.

Mary comes to her session after several years of therapy having rediscovered her favourite book from childhood; “The Magic Faraway Tree”. Not only has she rediscovered the book but has found out (for the first time) that there are more books in the series. Mary can begin to explore through Enid Blyton’s books the loss of ‘childhood innocence’ that has damaged her growth through childhood sexual abuse.

Tom is 8 years old. He sits and plays while his therapist watches and listens. He begins a drama that is now becoming more regular. Two parents appear and then a dinosaur arrives and destroys everything. He is beginning to represent the frightening family violence that has occurred in his home.

Do we as psychotherapists and members of this society have the teddy bears that we need? Do we have the “Magic Faraway” series for our history? Do we have the creative play spaces to make the traumas of our past able to be not only seen and heard, but even ‘played’ with? ***Do we have adequate ‘reflective, transitional, cultural space’ within our psychoanalytic society and psychotherapy community to do the necessary psychic work with our own histories, our patterns of destructive repetition, our losses, and our traumas?***

Thought Containers

During her session, to both our surprise Jane starts quoting a poem.

*“ Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
Helped The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.”*

Associations emerge, like those to a dream. It becomes clear to us both that Jane is finding, maybe for the first time, her unique way to connect with and express experiences of being with her depressed mother in early life.

The Second Coming by Yeats has also helped generations of people begin to face our destructiveness as humans. From the occupation of Ireland by the British, to the Irish uprising, to the First World War Yeats was expressing his fear, possibly despair of the damage we have done. His words still speak to us today. History since the early 20th century has sadly repeated. The history of Europe, the history of Asia and the history of this continent, Australia, is painful and overwhelming to face.

Jane was able in her therapy to use Yeats poetry as what Bergstein calls ‘thought containers’. This enabled the therapist and patient to work in healing, structuring and ‘bridge building’ ways. The ‘thought container’ created a bridge for what was previously unreachable and unthinkable.

Do we have and can we create ‘thought containers’ within our groups, organisations, and society for what is otherwise be unthinkable, unbridgeable, and unreachable? What do and would these ‘thought containers’ look like?

Our Group

Some would argue that the place for the psychoanalyst is in the consulting room and that national and world affairs are the domain of others. Freud, however, suggested that the most important role of psychoanalysis may, in fact, be outside the consulting room, in the consideration of groups and society. I believe this leaves us with an important question to consider at the 50th anniversary of APAS and at this juncture in our society and nation: ***Who are we now?***

Who we are relates to our history. But the stories we often tell ourselves about our history hide unknown and to date unthinkable truths.

Two thousand years ago a Greek play-write wrote Oedipus Rex. The audience was confronted with an abandoned child who survived only to later murder his father and marry his mother. The roots of Freud’s psychoanalytic ideas were already present in the wish to kill our fathers and sleep with our mothers. Aggression and sexuality were at the core of this new psychology. However, the abandoned, abuse, neglected child at the centre of the story has often been ignored. As Freud moved from his trauma-based theory of illness to the intrapsychic phantasy, the centrality and prevalence of actual child abuse was pushed to one side. Trauma and abuse are present in our consulting rooms each day, as they were in Freud’s day.

Interest in psychoanalysis among a small group started very early in Australia. However, they were cut off and isolated from the ‘centre in Europe’. For a long time, Australian psychoanalysis has been seen and maybe seen ourselves as a poor outpost. Yet this denies the rich and enduring history of the continent on which we live.

Freud and his followers in the late 19th and early 20th century began deep exploration of the human psyche. Some ideas that arose were seen as acceptable and fitting with this new ‘science’, others were not. Some followers remained. Others like Jung and Adler went off separately and their ideas have remained very separate ever since.

In the consulting room (a safe protected space with a boundaried frame) we have Freud’s discovery of repetition in the transference to guide us in the uncovering of past unresolved traumas and to work them through. Can we also do this outside the consulting room in our groups, organisations and as a nation?

Only in a true Work Group can enable traumatic, undigested events to have a place for the first time.

The Workspaces we need for our traumatic histories are the ‘Mumma and teddy bear’ spaces of passion, myth, and creative imagination.

Thought Containers for Groups

After 50 years of APAS and more than 100 years of psychoanalysis do we have the required workspaces to work through and mourn our mistakes and failings? Can we look thoughtfully and creatively at what we as clinicians have done and thought? Can we learn from our mistakes? Do we have the in-between-spaces to work with the previously unthinkable and unreachable? What do they look like? What can they look like?

'Thought containers' for our previously unthinkable histories need to be imaginative like Lucy with **'Cuddly' the teddy bear** and playful like Tom's drama of **parents and the dinosaur**. We need to maintain true culture and art at the centre of our psychoanalysis and institutes. Then we can draw on Yeats, Keats, TS Eliot, and Les Murray. We can utilise the plays of Shakespeare, the art of Da Vinci, Van Gogh, Caravaggio, and Turner. We can hear and respond to the symphonies of Mahler. We can watch and dance in our hearts with the Bangarra Dance Theatre. We can listen to the poetic sermons of Martin Luther King. We can feel in our being the lyrics and voice of Archie Roach when he sings "they took the children away".

From the art of McCubbin, Nolan, Cossington Smith, Boyd and Whiteley we can learn about certain aspects of Australia. But, as we embrace Namatjira, Tjapaljarri and Petyarre new truth emerges. Patrick White, Peter Carey, and David Malouf inform us. Yet, Melissa Lucashenko's "Too much lip" and Alexis Wright's "Carpenteria" open us up to new worlds. There are the play-writes, the poets, songwriters, and musicians. It is from this broad and deepening culture that we can think the unthinkable, feel the un-feelable and imagine the unimaginable.

There are new spaces we can be part of. Many already exist. Some need to be discovered for the first time. Fuller histories can emerge. Traumatic events can finally be known and experienced. Destructiveness can be acknowledged and owned. Damage done can be attended to. Loss can be embraced and unexpected futures can be imagined.

My hope for the next 50 years of psychoanalysis in Australia is that we can be part of and create more of these places.

I would like us to finish with the voice of Gurumul.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKC-Jd7KN64>
(Bapa by Gurrumul)

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