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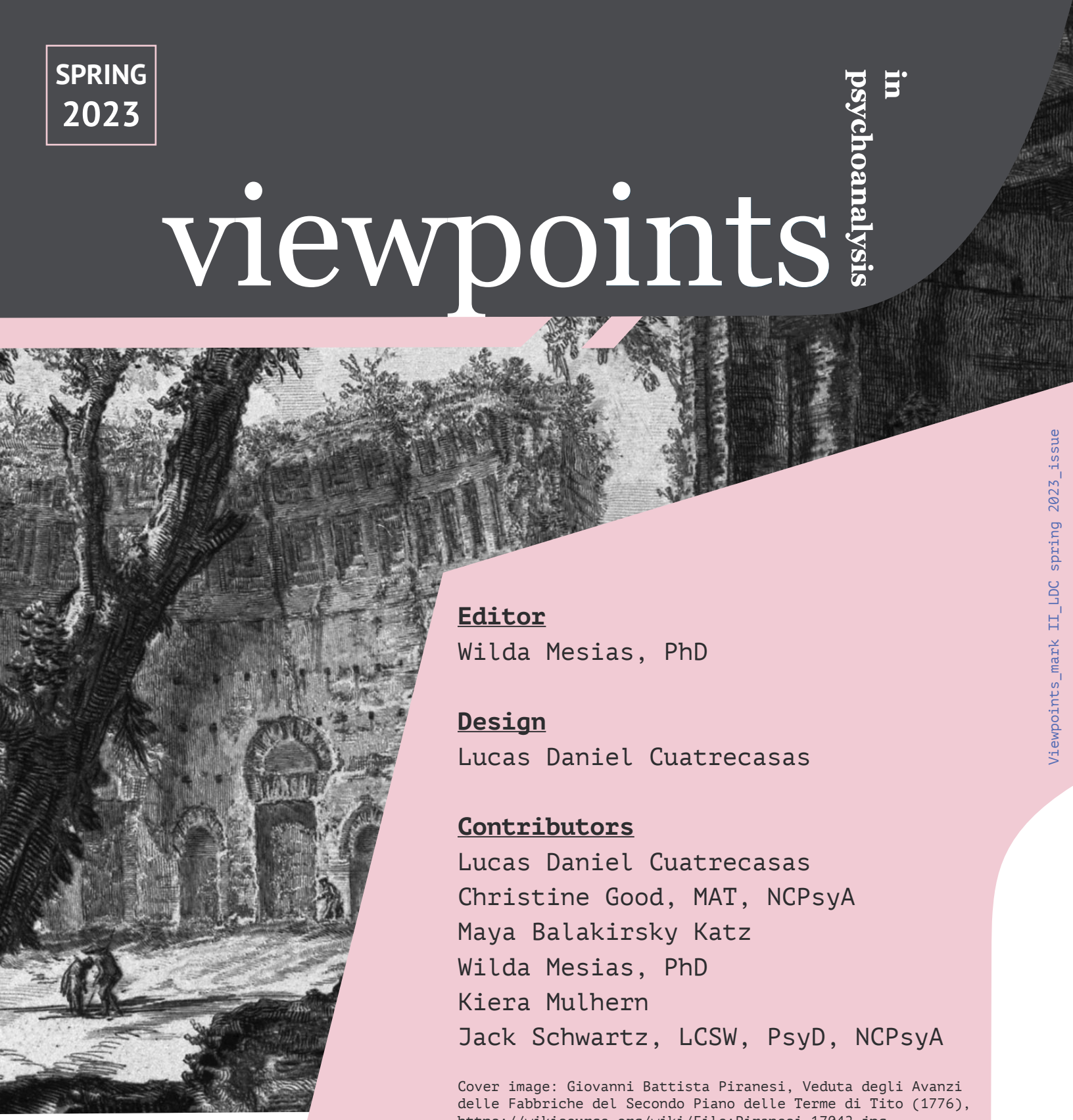
2023

viewpoints

in psychoanalysis



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Viewpoints is a forum for sharing, debating, and analyzing the historical, academic, political, aesthetic, and experimental aspects of the psychoanalytic experience.

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A note from the editor

Wilda Mesias, PhD

During a book sale organized this fall by the Brill library at the New York Psychoanalytical Society & Institute (NYPSI), I was able to acquire a copy of *The Diary of Sigmund Freud 1929-1939: A Record of Freud's Last Decade* (1992). Truthfully, though, this book is much more of a chronicle than a diary, with many of its entries consisting of a single, factual line. For example:

> Tu 3 Dec. [1929] Anna's birthday 34 yrs. . . .
> Fr 27 [December 1929] Pearls for Martha (p. 2)
>
> Th 22/3 [1938] Anna with Gestapo
> Mo 28/3 [1938] Acceptance by England assured (p. 37)
>
> Th 2/2 [1939] Moses printed . . .
> Fr 25 [August 1939] War panic [Freud's last entry] (p. 41)

Freud was a reliable chronicler of his time, and, even with only a handful of words, his sentiments still come through. Freud once said "[t]o this day words have retained much of their ancient magical power. By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair" (1916/1963, p. 17). In Jacques Lacan's "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud" (2006), the letter is the element that separates two words. Lacan's concept of the letter is embedded in his idea that the unconscious derivatives must be read *à la lettre*—to the letter. In this way one can always arrive to one's destination, to an unconscious that is structured like a language.

The articles in this issue of *Viewpoints* analyze and interpret films (one of them the 2023 Oscar winner for best picture, the other a nominee therefor), art, architecture, and the practice of mothering as texts, as language. Each article illustrates the generative potential of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic practice that goes beyond the clinical process. I am grateful to all the authors that have made this issue of *Viewpoints* possible.

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In this issue:

mOthering

Kiera Mulhern
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I don't know what a mother is. It seems no one does (nor, for that matter, who their own mother is). And then there are the issues of the maternal, of mothering, of mother*hood*. Adrienne Rich (1976) and Hortense Spillers (1987) write about a dialectic tension between motherhood, an institution of property assigned by patriarchy to white middle class women, and mother*ing*, a kind of work involving nurturance and survival, a potentially liberatory action. Motherhood as an institution of property is notoriously mobilized by so-called gender-critical feminists, who equate it, in its most biologically reductive sense as the capacity to gestate and birth an infant, with "womanhood" toward violent transphobic ends. Adjacent is the cadre of white mothers who use motherhood as a weapon in the fight to keep critical race theory out of schools.

Joy James (2016) offers us the idea of *captive maternals*, which is to say anyone feminized into roles of care by the machine of racial capitalism, which cannot function without extracting their reproductive labor:

> In transitioning a colony through a republic into a representative democracy with imperial might, the emergent United States grew a womb, it took on the generative properties of the maternals it held captive . . . to birth a new nation (a nascent empire) that fed on black frames. Centuries later, Black Captive Maternals remain disproportionately disciplined, denigrated, and consumed for the greater democracy. (p. 256)

This exploitation and devouring makes captive maternals most vulnerable to violence and poverty.

Alex Colston (2022) recently wrote a compelling essay arguing that the cultural imagination of the *maternal* and *paternal* as gender-divided categories should be refigured in our understanding into the two respective psychosocial pulls of *incest* and *taboo*. In other words, traits and actions we tend to consider maternal—unconditional love, suffocation, instinctual fusion—are what Freud referred to as "incest," while those we consider paternal—responsibility, prohibition, permission—are what he meant by "taboo."

Mothering has no fixed gender, but it is culturally engraved with popular associations to signifiers like "womanhood" and "femininity." To write about mothering, I think I have to write about femininity and womanhood, though it occurs to me that neither of these things strictly exists. It seems a sticky situation—and in that way rather mother-y, I guess—trying to speak about the connections between primary caregiving, femininity, womanhood, mothering, and

even the pregnant body, without running the risk of slippery equations between these ideas. There is nothing inherent to yoke these notions together, but they are undoubtedly psychosocially linked. Our very subjectivity is constructed through and by patriarchal ideals about the bourgeois, heterosexual, white nuclear family complex. There need be nothing inborn about patriarchal fantasies for them to be inscribed into our beings in complex and varied ways.

Whatever a mother is, she (and I will be using "she" to reflect the feminization of mothering, which is not to imply that all mothers can be called "she") is a scapegoat. In *Mothers*, Jacqueline Rose (2018) traces how motherhood becomes "the place where we lodge, or rather bury, the reality of our own conflicts, of what it means to be fully human" (p. 7). Mothering is messy: blood, placenta, spit-up, and feces remind us of the ultimate flimsiness of the distinctions between inside and out. Not to mention that the blur between inside and out is, in psychoanalytic thought, an essential, pleasurable, and anxiety-provoking aspect of infantile psychic life during the time we are enclosed in the original dyad. One way we collectively defend against the intolerable mess is through a process of idealization and its accompanied devaluation, splitting mothers into perfect angels and all-devouring or all-abandoning witches. As infants, we split as a means of surviving the early-life cacophony of total dependency and fusion; when a mother is the primary caregiver, she is the one who gets split first. That the mother is often the first site of splitting surely has implications for how we relate to mothers on a broad psychosocial level.

As Rose elaborates, moral panics around migrant-mother "health tourists" and single-mother "welfare queens" reveal a deep hatred for mothering people, the other side of the Madonna coin. There is perhaps an even stronger push toward such hatred in our neoliberal climate, which emphasizes personal responsibility, independence, and the staunch enforcement of borders. This is a culture that worships separation and repudiates enmeshment to extreme degrees. One can extrapolate, then—or just plainly see the second a baby starts crying on an airplane—how such a culture might look upon mothers, who are made at once to answer for the messily unbounded love, the me/not-me confusion, it measures individual success against and also to contain the disavowed mourning that comes with cutting the (m)other completely off.

In earliest life, then, undifferentiation and utter dependence produce splitting: good mother from bad, love from hate. We disavow the hated aspects of the idealized mother and the loved aspects of the degraded mother. And what happens to the mother once we do begin to differentiate? Feminists have long contested Freud's model of gendered psychic development—the Oedipus complex and its asymmetric, heterosexual outcomes with different implications for "boys" and "girls"; castration; penis envy—sometimes on the grounds that there is nothing fundamentally lacking in the female body and that to claim as much is to side with patriarchy; and more recently on the ground that there is nothing inherently "woman" about the female body—which, of course, there isn't. There is nothing inherently gendered about subjectivity, full stop. In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Juliet Mitchell (2000), taking up Lacanian ideas about sexuation, instead argues that Freud's model of Oedipal dynamics and superego formation can be read not as a universalist theory of development across cultures and times—nor a bioessentialist claim about what

a woman intrinsically is or lacks—but rather as an examination of how patriarchal oppression is inscribed, in patriarchal cultures, at the site of the family.

In the normotic patriarchal family, a child's first love, Mitchell says, is their mother. But—as Judith Butler (1995) elaborates in their essay on gender melancholia—even before the prohibition of incest comes the prohibition of homosexuality. The child deemed a girl is subtly urged to relinquish love for the mother and is given as a consolation prize the lesser hope of winning the father's love instead. This is a devastating early task compared to that of the "boy" child, who is only asked to temporarily relinquish maternal love. The message sent to each child is that father is the one with the real power, because he has mother, has the object of desire, and that only a boy has the chance to take his place (if only in the distant future, in a new variation on the same heterosexual form).

In this model, castration operates on the plane of fantasy. In the daughter's estimation, father has won the ultimate prize of mother's love; thus, *father must have something I lack* (phallic power and masculinity tend to be fantasmatically attributed here, again inscribed via caregivers by patriarchy). *If my parents act like I should love father more than mother, I must lack that something*; *I must be a girl*; *I am already castrated*. But it must be noted here that castration is not merely a fantasy in the construction of Black subjectivities, for whom castration is historically a very real threat (Yanagino, 2017). To disavow any aspect of subject formation outside intrafamily fantasy dynamics is to reify white supremacist demands on the subject. The family is but one place where normotic culture can make its way into the psyche. In it, say Butler and Mitchell, gender and sexuality norms tend to be transmitted. But man/woman and queer/straight are not the only binaries imposed here, Yanagino adds, expanding on Luce Irigaray's notion of disintegration. The binary of white/non-white is made to be understood too. Polymorphous perversity is yanked away, and white supremacist ideals are inscribed. This story never plays out the same way twice. But that it happens in one way or another in many families—and more importantly, that it exists as a cultural ideal—has to be considered.

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Freud's God

Maya Balakirsky Katz

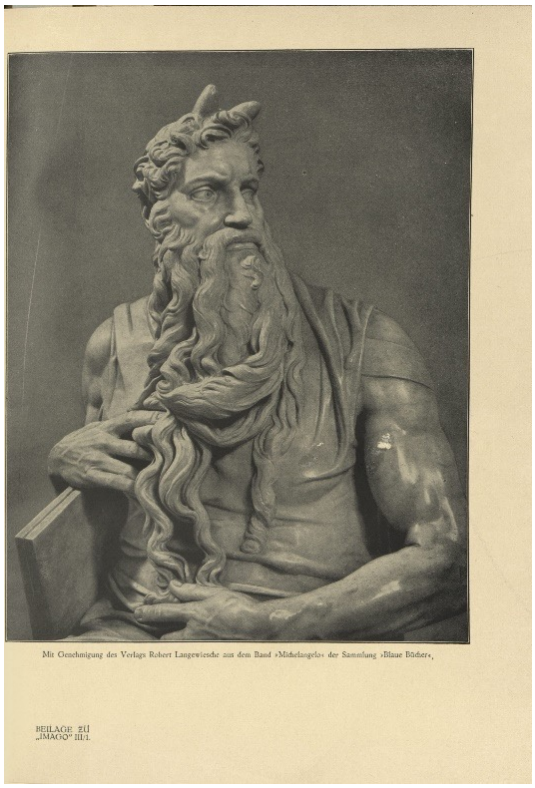
Per the custom among the first psychoanalytic contributors to serialized publications, I return in this installment of *Viewpoints* to fulfill my earlier promise to show you a highly eroticized object. So, here I am, to show you the God of Freud. I know that sounds like quite a promise (not a vow), and I'm sticking to it.

I profess (this is my actual job) that Freud was a devoted servant to יהוה, the Tetragrammaton YHVH that Freud pronounced AHAVA ("love" in Hebrew).[1] In 1906, Freud found C.G. Jung and other like-minded people whom he could talk to about the sacred nature of LOVE. Naturally, they were predominantly Christians.[2] The conversation, which began impassioned, ended in a classic Christian-Jewish dispute. By 1914, Freud felt that he had finally recognized that Jung and his circle were driven by antisemitic prejudices and that they could not see this in themselves either. That's the thing about antisemitism: people really are blind to the PRESENT, probably because they are working so hard for the future. Freud also knew that blind spots were universal and "holes" depend on which side of a "whole" one is seeing.

So, before Freud parted from Jung forever (depending on one's attitude towards eternity), he took his case against what he saw as Jung's Lutheranized "future-oriented" libido straight to the Pope in Rome. Michelangelo's Pope. The really fiery Pope who forced the greatest artist Christendom had ever produced on his back for four years to paint the ceiling of his chapel. The one for whom Michelangelo made a statue of the man that allegedly unleashed his fury upon the Israelites for making a statue. Freud's essay "Der Moses des Michelangelo" ("The Moses of Michelangelo") (1914) is his most misunderstood essay, for it contains so many subterranean labyrinths of myth, metaphor, literature, and religion that it almost feels impossible to ascertain all its implications.

In this short essay, the founder of the "Jewish science" of psychoanalysis confronted the "Aryan science" of German-language art history. Freud finally spoke about all the things he felt he could not say out loud: the perfection of the Divine force; how that force is a Mother; that WE are the Fathers blocking our own way to LOVE; that there is no purpose in trying to manifest the Creator, for its FORCE courses within each individual.

[1] According to Jewish law, the publishing of these four letters turns this magazine into *sheimos*, sacred waste, requiring burial upon disposal.
[2] Apparently, there is nothing extraordinary about Christians talking to each other in very small circles, so we do not write books about this demographic data point.



Reproduction of Michelangelo's Moses in Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914).

Illustrations for Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914).

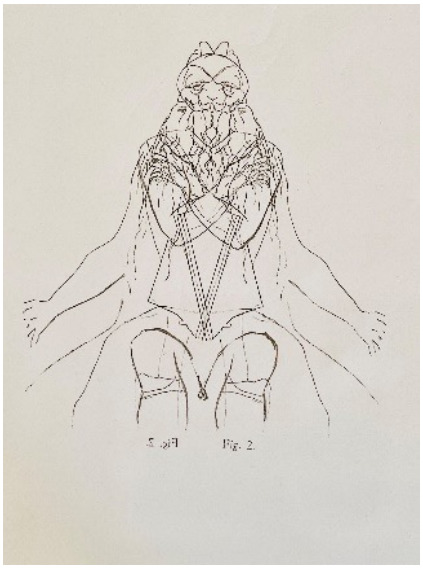
In this essay, Freud is dealing with the debate on "signs" that was splitting his little collective into pieces over the question of whether psychic material can be revealed from an external source or can only be generated within the psyche. I must state in advance that I make no attempt to answer this question. I can, however, show you what Freud did with signs in this essay, which is also visually demonstrated in the four illustrations of Michelangelo's Moses he commissioned and hand-edited.

Freud's answer to the question of the origins of psychic material is found in his four illustrations, which are also really eight, maybe 64. Freud's illustrations are a paper puzzle, a form of game very popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Freud's bourgeois milieu. The text in the essay gives readers strict instructions for how to look at the images, how to fold them, how to flip them over and push them towards one another. Freud's publication of a hand-maneuvering exercise sought to show readers how memory stores **partial** perspectives (visual signs) as whole. The pages of the original *Imago*

issue in which Freud's essay on Michelangelo first appeared are translucent enough to be held up to the window and cheap enough to be purchased in multiple copies (honestly, Freud was giving them out for free). Following Freud's explicit instructions, we can gently flip over each image and push it towards its doppelgänger on the other side. The new image that magically emerges before our eyes is what Freud theorized a "thing-presentation," the duplication of a perceptual sign into a whole that is then inscribed into memory. If we follow Freud's instructions and gently push each of the four images towards their "doppelgänger" (its flipped-over pair), we are rewarded with the frontal face of Moses from these three different and mutually exclusive perspectives. When this procedure is followed with Figure 1, one sees the Hero-Prophet. Freud shows that this view of the attitude of Michelangelo's sculpture has made its way into the annals of art history, citing to Fritz Knapp's heroic visionary of the "huge frame," Thode's "Titan" and "superman," Steinmann's "royal priest," whose "proud head" Herman Grimm saw "carried high on his shoulders."

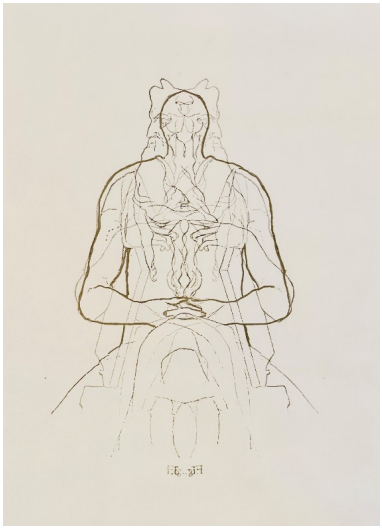
"The Prophet." Reconstruction of Figure 1 for Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914).

When this procedure is repeated with Figure 2, we see what Freud's march of art historians described as a hideous satyr: Max Sauerlandt characterizes the great statue as an animal-like Moses "with the head of Pan" whose "brutality" is visible in "the animal cast of the head" as he sits, in Carl Justi's words, "as an agitated man" left "[q]uivering with horror and pain," or, in Heinrich Wölfflin's description, as a figure consumed by "inhibited movement."

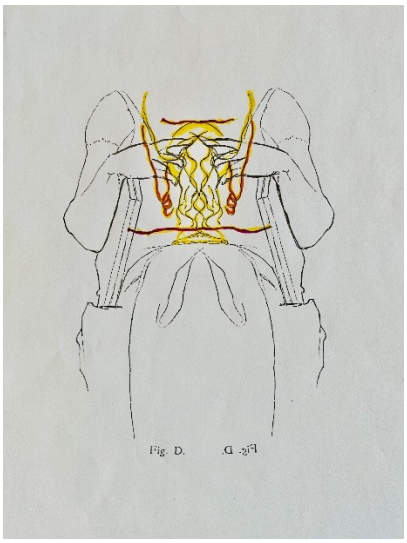


"The Satyr." Reconstruction of Figure 2 for Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914).

If we repeat this procedure with Figure 3, that is, the FRONT side of the statue, none of the earlier impressions and emotions is visible. In fact, our narrator confesses, nothing really happens at all. It is as if "the stone image bec[o]me[s] more and more transfixed, an almost oppressively solemn calm emanate[s] from it." When we complete the image Freud made in FRONT of Moses, sitting in the dead Center, we see the figure of a blank man.



"Man." Reconstruction of Figure 3 for Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914).



Reconstruction of Figure D for Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914). Colored by Maya Balakirsky Katz.

I know this is all so crazy—I mean for like the five of us Freud scholars who had no idea what those images were supposed to represent—but I didn't forget that I promised the rest of you Freud's G-d. After all, Freud left us with four illustrations. The last one (maybe the first one) was labeled "D," presumably for Deus. I know what you're thinking. There's NO FACE. I never promised to bring you the head of Freud's God!

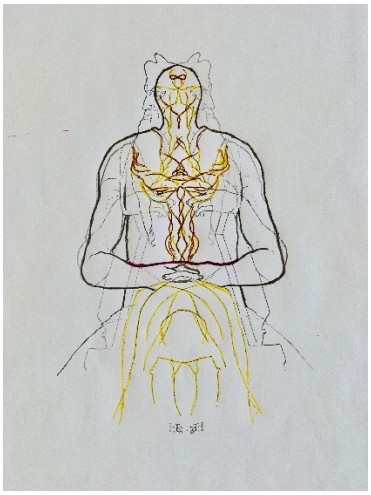
Without a face, how did Freud's readers know how to put it together? It's the fingers. The ones Freud borrowed from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. As we slowly and intentionally bring the images closer to one another, the outstretched index fingers will begin to draw towards each other. It won't be magic in the sense that Ouija boards are magic; it will just be what Michelangelo taught us to do about 500 years ago when he taught us the art of illusion. It's a breeze now. And when we do that . . .

. . . When we look at the reconstructed image of Freud's G-d, we find a true believer.

While Freud wholly rejected Jung's claims that psychic material is generated and implanted by an external source outside the Self, Freud's images reveal a very serious and sincere attitude toward religion. In Freud's faceless image, the Original Source is perfection. In Figure D, each and every line is necessary. There are no lines one must discard in order to see the illusion. The Source requires no fancy folding or manipulation. A magical transformation happens nonetheless: the knot of Moses' beard unravels, and a perfect divine energy emerges from the Source. Instead of knots, we find a beautiful force that emanates between the two fingers of the Creator. On each side of the beautiful energy that emanates from the center of the One Source lies what our narrator described as "a kind of scroll," which once doubled creates the suggestion of a Torah scroll. The hands lie atop the Tablets, but the Torah scroll emanates from the face of God.

We see a visual of a sun-like sphere rising to the horizon of the divine clavicle and sinking beneath the horizon of the divine waistline,

below which it rests in a genital-like tripod containing BOTH SEXES. The bisexual nature of LOVE is more visible when you fill in the Divine force with the image of Man.



"Man." Reconstruction of Figure 3 for Der Moses des Michelangelo, Imago 3, no. 1 (1914). Colored by Maya Balakirsky Katz.

It is a revelation, the sort of Revelation Freud believed in.

With this one little riddle, we can begin to see our own holes in the Freud-Jung debates today. Much has been made of Freud's accusations of Jung's antisemitism, but Freud professed that personal blind spots were universal and that "holes" depend on which side of a "whole" one is seeing. Freudians and Jungians have operated largely in separate spheres for over a century due to divides over Freud's scientism or Jung's spiritualism, but we have been barking up the wrong tree. The solution to this little puzzle also tells us something about how we narrate our own histories. Freud's original readers saw his illustrations as clear as day. It is WE who have forgotten, we who have suffered the ravages of collective amnesia. When we remember, it is painful that we have denied Freud the realm of the spiritual. It is also beautiful to challenge the "splits" in the psychoanalytic historiography of the Freud-Jung split. It is ALL the feelings. The only consolation I can offer my own readers is that when it comes to remembering our collective pasts, we are doing it together. We have each other to share our stories with.

Leaps of Faith

Jack Schwartz, LCSW, PsyD, NCPsyA

A Review of Everything Everywhere All at Once

2023 Oscar winner for best picture

Everything Everywhere All at Once, A24, https://a24films.com/films/everything-everywhere-all-at-once

Startling, clever, exhaustingly silly, sometimes hilarious, the inventive, narratively incomprehensible sci-fi spectacle *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (EEAAO) is also a surprisingly moving existential meditation on the power of acceptance and the question of what gives life meaning.

From the directing team called the Daniels (Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert), EEAAO unfolds as a story about a beleaguered laundromat manager, Evelyn (the astounding Michelle Yeoh), a middle-aged Chinese-American immigrant who is overwhelmed by a profoundly disappointing life. She and

her timid husband, Waymond (the mopey Ke Huy Quan), own a floundering coin-operated laundromat. They're under audit by a literally monstrous IRS agent (the almost unrecognizable Jamie Lee Curtis). Evelyn's disapproving father, Gong Gong (the cranky James Hong), who is visiting from China, makes it clear he was never a fan of Waymond. Then there's Joy (the delightfully morose Stephanie Hsu), Evelyn's twenty-something daughter, who wants to bring her girlfriend to dinner, but mom still doesn't accept her daughter's queerness and blames Gong Gong's generational disapproval.

At the IRS audit it's revealed that timid Waymond is secretly a dashing "verse jumper" (an inter-universe traveler), who has come to recruit Evelyn to battle against the evil superbeing Jobu Tupaki to save all existence from annihilation. Jobu Tupaki has concluded that all life is meaningless and therefore there is no point to it, thus a device has been constructed (no reveal) that will drain all meaning from all existence. And it just so happens that Jobu Tupaki is an alternate evil version of Evelyn's daughter Joy.

The central idea is that there are countless universes that coexist, like an infinity mirror effect; our known universe is just one version, one reflection, of an infinite collection of other universes. In this narrative the alternate versions of ourselves may resemble the version we see (although in some universes not), yet all have different personal trajectories, along with different character strengths and weaknesses. The alternate selves reflect all the paths the person never traveled; all the roads not taken. For the disheartened Evelyn, once she accepts she can jump universes, she discovers different selves that show her what her life could have been if she lived differently: often more glamorous or exciting (a movie star or a singer) or interesting (a chef, a martial arts expert, a lesbian woman with hot dog fingers). The key Evelyn we see is a character encumbered by the disappointments of life, whose choices have been directed by fear, self-doubt, and conformity, never allowing herself to flourish and truly live. With the opportunity to "verse jump" she witnesses many alternate versions of herself that are remarkably powerful, incredibly capable, and passionate.

When the "verse jumper" Waymond reveals that Evelyn is the "chosen one" who will fight against Jobu Tupaki, at first all she can muster is "why me?" The answer to that question has something to do with the many poor choices, disappointing paths, and dead ends she has accrued, all of which have paradoxically positioned her as the one being uniquely qualified to stop the cataclysmic Tupaki. And yes, this is a kung fu, martial arts movie.

Behind the kaleidoscope of jumping universes, visual puns, and existential conflict with Joy's cosmic depression, there is a transformative philosophy that coalesces in the final act: of all the universes and possibilities we could have had, the best one—in a sense, the only one that matters—is the one we live in, the one where we can make a difference, the one that provides meaning. The only caveat is that we have to conquer our greatest fear.

EEAAO begins as a nightmare of a deteriorating family, devoid of joy (pun), and what is to follow is much like a series of free associations, in a psychoanalytic sense, to that nightmare, forcing a deeper confrontation with disillusionment, as well as with generational prejudice and what is to be done with it. Using an object relational paradigm, the film depicts the split-off elements of the self that Evelyn

must confront and eventually incorporate to free herself from her despairing existence and by extension provide herself with the emotional tools needed to reconnect with her troubled daughter and her own true sense of self.

The film essentially depicts the psychodynamic process of reconciling the bad rejecting objects and the good accepting objects: the endless working through that Evelyn has to undertake in an effort to establish a true self, free of disillusionment and with the potential for hope, leading to a chance to rescue her daughter from her alienated suicidal/homicidal journey, while simultaneously coming to terms with her forlorn husband's wish to be heard and loved.

Although Evelyn begins to see that her life could be different, Evelyn must first identify with and embrace her daughter's cosmic depression, must literally "become" Joy/ Jobu Tupaki. The film, in a knowing plot turn, represents the idea that the solution is not retaliation—not killing off the badness, which Evelyn is encouraged to do—but rather the opposite: to identify with and become one with the badness, in other words to become not only psychologically/emotionally in touch with her daughter's alienation and rejection, but to experience these feelings within herself, forming the basis of true empathy, which becomes the foundation for healing. Thus we travel full circle back to the laundromat, where the final confrontation/reconciliation occurs.

If this sounds confusing, it is. Yet the film offers a very emotionally touching, dramatic, heartfelt closure between the daughter and the mother, which requires a letting go of the past and a true acceptance of the other and the possibility of a future where differences are embraced.

As Freud pointed out there is no notion of time in the unconscious. Past, present, and future collide in an amalgam of instinctual and external realities that often emerge in the form of a dream or in this case a nightmare. Even if we want to avoid the nightmare, push it aside, repress it, the film reminds us, through Evelyn, to find the courage to confront our nightmares, our inaction, our internal bad objects of prejudice, self-depreciation, and conformity, and in so doing we can create a better "universe." Essentially the film suggests that the universe only exists in our imagination as a construct, a projection. We create our own universe, provide it with our own meaning, often formed by the messages we receive and internalize in our formative years (a recurring motif) and through the love of those we cherish. And with courage, openness, and help we can we work through our issues to live our best life and encourage the next generation to live their best lives too. This of course brings us to the heart of the conversation we label the psychoanalytic process, in which unconscious and conscious instinctual/relational/ generational energies present as something we must at once embrace, build from, and eventually grieve.

The filmmakers behind EEAAO have taken a two-hour-plus riff on the common phrases of disconnection "you don't know me," "we live in different universes," or even "I am my own worst enemy" and carried it to cosmic proportions. There are many in-jokes and playful refences to other films, especially Kubrick's *2001*, Spike Jonze's *Adaptation*, and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (which starred Michelle Yeoh). And of course the multiverse-jumping business is common movie fare these days. Yet I would feel remiss

if I didn't mention that here the multiverse-jumping business seems like a direct descendent of Douglas Adams' classic, cosmic poke at all things everywhere, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, where the main action involves a spacecraft called the Heart of Gold, powered by the Infinite Improbability Drive that allows those commanding the ship to travel anywhere in the universe at any time. This of course mirrors a key narrative device in EEAAO, where improbability mechanics is the secret to verse jumping.

EEAAO is a rambunctious metaphoric kaleidoscope presenting both a nightmare that shows a family at a tipping point and the ensuing process of resistance and working through (via visual free association) of generational oppression and the depressive struggle that follows it. It is the story of a depressed woman shedding the baggage of oppressive ideology and rigid familial roles in a battle to free herself and offer the next generation a chance to live a better life.

Although the endless kung fu sequences are fun, the whole multiverse engineering of the film can feel tedious, manic, and over-the-top silly. Yet, despite its head-scratching plotline and cheesy visual effects, the film is a dream machine, an exploration of the self, and a coming-of-age story, as well as the story of coming to terms with generational trauma and generational acceptance. EEAAO also tells us that if we can find enough courage and maybe some help, we can find a way to take a leap of faith, and perhaps we can do almost anything.

Art on Art

Wilda Mesias, PhD

A Review of Tár

2023 Oscar nominee for best picture

Tár, Focus Features, https://www.focusfeatures.com/tar/watch/gallery

Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.

Pablo Picasso (1939, p. 10)

The 2022 art film *Tár* is suffused with anagrams. In one scene, the film's title character, Lydia Tár, creates the anagram "at risk" from the name of a former student of hers, Krista. In another, Lydia's assistant Francesca creates the anagram "rat on rat" from the title of Lydia's upcoming book *Tár*

on Tár. Besides "rat," though, the other possible anagram of Tár (in English) is "art," an anagram the film hints at, even if it never explicitly sets it forth.

Tár is a spectacular film that leaves ample room for speculation and touches on controversial themes, some *au courant*, some longstanding: the #MeToo movement, cancel culture, divergences between millennial/Gen Z culture and boomer culture, the role of social media in shaping opinions, and, perhaps most significant, whether there should exist a separation between creator and creation.

Apropos of this last theme, a few weeks ago, Dr. Candace Orcutt shared with me her article "Masud Khan: The Outrageous Chapter 4" (2019). In this article, Orcutt writes:

> Khan's own work now tends to be dismissed, although it consistently demonstrates Khan's genius for explicating the genius of his time. In particular, his work on the schizoid personality, the "hidden self"—extending the thinking of Fairbairn, Guntrip, and Winnicott—further details the theory of the Self as the primary psychic component. His concept of "cumulative trauma" predates by years contemporary theory on the influence of dysfunctional relationship on the early development of personality. His book on perversion is innovative, notably in depicting the distortion of transitional phenomena in the unintegrated collage of early development, with the fetish as a miscarriage of the transitional object.
>
> How can such significant achievement lack due recognition? Those familiar with Khan's story will probably respond as follows: "He was anti-Semitic, he slept with his patients, and his obnoxious social behavior was untreatable through psychoanalysis." There is a basis for all these arguments, but are they enough in themselves to justify disregarding valuable writing? And how valid are the arguments in themselves? (pp. 489-490)

The figure at the center of *Tár*'s exploration of these questions, Lydia Tár, is a brilliant, world-renowned maestro, EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony winner), professor, mentor, and benefactor. The movie opens with Adam Gopnik from *The New Yorker* interviewing Lydia on account of the upcoming performance of Mahler's fifth symphony that she will conduct and the release of *Tár on Tár* on the date of her fiftieth birthday. The long-awaited performance (postponed because of COVID-19) is only a month away, and rehearsals are about to start. Before Lydia walks onstage to be interviewed, we see some of the compulsions she exhibits throughout the movie: she mutters unintelligible sounds, grimaces, brushes her face and sides, deeply concentrates, sanitizes her hands. She then swallows some pills, attempts to control her anxiety, and enters into character.

Through the interview with Gopnik, we learn that Lydia is one the most important musical figures of our time. She is a piano performance graduate from the Curtis Institute, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard, holds a PhD in musicology from the University of Vienna, and spent five years performing ethnographic fieldwork among the Shipibo-Conibo people in Peru. She began her career as a conductor with the Cleveland Orchestra (one of the so called "big five") and was a protégé of Leonard Bernstein (a Mahler expert). She created the "Accordion Conducting Fellowship" for female conductors, and, since 2013, she has been the

principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. Although Lydia has conducted all of Mahler's symphonies with different orchestras, the fifth is the only one that she has not conducted as the principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. This final Mahler performance will allow Deutsche Grammophon to offer in one box set all of the Berlin Philharmonic's performances of Mahler's symphonies conducted by Lydia.

This interview foreshadows many of the key questions the film explores. Gopnik mentions issues of gender bias, diversity, equality, interpreting Mahler, and time and the role of a conductor. On the last point, he suggests that people might see a conductor only as a "human metronome." Although Lydia somewhat agrees, she elaborates on the role of time in a piece of music: "Time is the thing. Time is the essential piece of interpretation. You cannot start without me. See, I start the clock. Now, my left hand shapes, but my right hand, the second hand, marks time and moves it forward. . . . Now, the Illusion is that, like you, I'm responding to the orchestra in real time . . . The reality is that, right from the very beginning, I know precisely what time it is and the exact moment that you and I will arrive at our destination together."

Perhaps this is exactly what happens in the film. As we move though the narrative—doubting at times what is real and what is more a product of Lydia' subjective experience—Lydia is conducting, shaping, moving. We, as the audience, arrive at the destination together with her. In a description of the Shipibo-Conibo people's understanding of time's relationship to music, Lydia explains that "the Shipibo-Conibo only receive an *icaro*, or song, if the singer is there, right? On the same side of the spirit that created it. And, in that way, the past and the present converge. It's the flip sides of the same cosmic coin." In this, she believes she differs from Bernstein, who, according to her, believed in *teshuva* (a Hebrew word at times translated as "returning" or "repentance"; the ten days of *teshuva* from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur mark a significant time for repentance and returning to the path of righteousness).

However, Lydia does not seem to believe that one can go back in time and transform one's past deeds. In many ways, there's an inevitability in what appears to happen to Lydia in the film—what the audience might view as her self-destruction or destruction by others, precipitated by her alleged romantic relationships with her students or mentees. There is no repentance or regret on Lydia's part; just that moment in time when past and present converge. Somewhat reminiscent of the "block universe" theory of time, the film acts as a four-dimensional block of time that already contains all that has happened, is happening, or will happen. Time itself does not correspond to our physical reality, and our conventional perception of time as linear is an illusion (just like how, per Lydia, the audience perceives the conductor as responding to the orchestra, rather than perceiving the conductor as always knowing and anticipating, with the orchestra responding to that anticipation). Put otherwise, the film contains all the letters needed to compose a word, a single unit of meaning; the sequence in which we read those letters, the particular anagram we choose, corresponds to the meaning we perceive.

In speaking about the Italian-French conductor Jean-Baptiste Lully, Lydia notes that, to mark time when conducting, he would pound a long, pointy staff on the floor, and that, on one occasion, he stabbed his foot

while conducting. Lully then died of gangrene from the incident. In a similar vein, as the film unfolds, we begin to see how Lydia has figuratively stabbed herself in the foot, as many of the transgressions she is alleged to have perpetrated begin to come to light. But Lydia has no intention of changing course, even after Krista kills herself. Lydia approaches a young cellist with whom Lydia has become infatuated and begins the process again. Lydia's partner, Sharon, is a witness to—and is effectively complicit in—this process. Sharon is totally aware of Lydia's infidelities and seems to have a dependent, ambivalent relationship with Lydia. In the end, Sharon leaves Lydia. An open question is whether Sharon perhaps had been (along with Krista and Lydia's assistant Francesca) orchestrating the destruction of Lydia all along.

As Lydia and Gopnik discuss, it's believed that Mahler wrote the fourth movement of his fifth symphony, the adagietto, for his wife Alma when he was very much in love with her (later on, she had an affair with Walter Gropius—Mahler sought Freud when his marriage was having difficulties). When Leonard Bernstein conducted this movement at Robert Kennedy's funeral in 1968, he played it "as a mass" lasting 12 minutes. When Lydia is asked how she would play it, she responds that she would play it not as a mass, as her mentor did, but as a song of young love. When she is asked how long the movement will last, she states 7 minutes. Evidently, love and fidelity do not have a long-lasting hold on Lydia. Love is transient. However, what Lydia does believe in is the power of music.

In yet another magnificent but controversial scene, Lydia and a young Julliard student, Max, engage in the following conversation after Lydia opines that "[g]ood music can be as ornate as a cathedral or bare as a potting shed" and that conducting music should "actually require[] something of you." She asks Max about Bach's Mass in B minor; he responds that he is "not really into Bach."

> Lydia: Have you ever played or conducted Bach?
>
> Max: Honestly, as a BIPOC, pangender person, I would say Bach's misogynistic life makes it kind of impossible for me to take his music seriously.
>
> Lydia: Come on. What do . . . what do you mean by that?
>
> Max: Didn't he sire like 20 kids?
>
> Lydia: Yes, that's documented. Along with a considerable amount of music. But I'm sorry, I'm . . . I'm unclear as to what his prodigious skills in the marital bed have to do with B minor. Sure. All right, whatever. That's your choice. After all, "a soul selects her own society." But, remember, the flip side of that selection closes the valves of one's attention. Now, of course, siloing what is acceptable or not acceptable is a basic construct of many, if not most, symphony orchestras today, who see it as their imperial right to curate for the cretins. So, slippery as it is, there is some merit in examining Max's allergy. Can classical music written by a bunch of straight Austro-German churchgoing white guys exalt us, individually as well as collectively? And who, may I ask, gets to decide that?

Lydia then asks Max to indulge her and join her at the piano, where she proceeds to play Bach. She says that there is a humility in Bach and that music is not an answer but a question

that involves the listener. Max compliments Lydia on her piano-playing but states "white, male, cis composers . . . just not my thing."

"Don't be so eager to be offended," Lydia responds. "The narcissism of small differences leads to the most boring conformity."

A video clip of this exchange is ultimately marshalled on social media as evidence against Lydia's character. Despite the intensity of the dialogue, the recording on social media takes that dialogue out of context and distorts and rearranges it to create a message that fits. (It does not matter that recording this exchange violated the rule of a technology-free zone inside the school.)

Much of Lydia's background is not provided to us. We do understand that she does not visit her mother when she is in New York, postponing her visit to "next time." However, almost at the end of the film, she returns to hide out at her family's modest home, where we see that her name isn't even Lydia. I have read that one piece of information that was left out of the movie is that Lydia's mother was deaf and that Lydia has misophonia (Arthur, 2022). Lydia's acute sensitivity to sound takes on new meaning in a world where her mother was deaf. Perhaps the director, Todd Field, did not want the audience to have too much insight into Lydia's character. This is one of the great things about this film. Lydia says that playing Mahler's fifth is like reading tea leaves and that we don't know his intention. The intention of *Tár* is likewise open to multiple interpretations, multiple avenues. For me as a psychoanalyst, the omission of Lydia's mother's deafness points in various directions. Perhaps one of them is Freud's character types. However, the idea that attracts me the most is that of art and artist, creator and creation.

There is no doubt that Lydia created herself; just like she composes music, she is the author of herself. But as her alleged transgressions catch up with her, the surrounding society, and, in particular, social media, also shape her—social media as "the architect of [the] soul," as Lydia puts it. Her Wikipedia page is edited; video clips of her interactions are edited to create a narrative. Amid public backlash against Lydia, there is even a suggestion from the Accordion fellowship's board that Lydia should compose her own version of the story. Even at the end of the movie, when we see Lydia in a role so far removed from that of the principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic—now (spoiler alert) as a conductor of videogame scores—we see how she takes her role seriously. She studies the score, she lectures the orchestra, and she owns the podium; the podium is her home.

Creator and creation. Do the human misdeeds that are rooted in human development, in a relational past, in trauma, in a social milieu, in the vicissitudes of our instincts, in death and life cancel (as cancel culture does) a gift, a talent, a possible sublimation? And, as Lydia says, who gets to decide that? One might say "who gets to cast the first stone?" In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961), Freud contends that "love thy neighbor as thyself" is a strong defense against human aggression and an impossible expectation of the cultural superego; denial of aggression is displaced in the judgement of others, in casting many stones (pp. 109-112). Freud saw hostility among groups of people, polarization among people that are more similar than different, as a manifestation of this innate disposition for aggression and a desire to claim a distinction of identity. Freud referred to this as the narcissism of small differences (1930/1961,

p. 114) (“Narzißmus der kleinen Differenzen” (1930/1991, p. 474)).

Lydia is a fictional character that, hopefully, makes us question not only this narcissism of small differences but also whether human fallibility may obscure a sublime creation, whether it is music, art, or psychoanalytical writings.

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Fibromyalgia and Sound Sensitivity

The sound . . . it permeates through the barrier of my skin, to move in and around the organs of my body. It moves beneath the surface of my scalp entangled in each hair follicle. It stops my voice from screaming. I feel muted and off balance as if I am not anchored to the Earth with two feet. I need something to close my ears, to protect my mind, body and soul. I strain to keep it out.

Christine Good, MAT, NCPsyA

Deathward Plots

Lucas Daniel Cuatrecasas

56 Leonard Street, Iwan Baan, https://iwan.com/portfolio/56-leonard-street-new-york/#16306

"All plots tend to move deathward," says the fictional academic J. A. K. Gladney in Don DeLillo's novel-turned-movie *White Noise* (1986, p. 26). This quip is both a knowing wink (it is understood that many of DeLillo's novels are centered on deathward motion) and an elegant, if vague, truism about art itself. To organize life is to ossify it. A plot circumscribes, contains, and, in doing so, gives only the illusion that it reflects the unbounded life it seeks to capture.

Recently, a number of commentators have identified such deathward motion as increasingly central to contemporary architecture—an art form concerned with narrative (and, pun intended, plots) as much as literature is. These commentators emphasize, specifically, the designs that characterize a species of ultraluxury, "superprime" housing that has become conspicuous across major cities worldwide. There are several typical indicia of such superprime housing architecture: it boasts eye-catching yet ultimately conservative design elements, often courtesy of a brand-name architect (a "starchitect"); it is situated such that it provides otherwise scarce views of iconic urban landmarks (e.g., New York City's Central Park); it is by definition marketed to very high net worth people. Prominent examples include the buildings south of New York City's Central Park colloquially known as "Billionaire's Row," the "Jenga tower" located at 56 Leonard Street farther downtown in New York City, the St George Wharf tower in London's Vauxhall district, and the One Hyde Park complex in London's Knightsbridge district. The genre's epitome is perhaps the Billionaire's Row property known as 432 Park Avenue, designed by Uruguayan architect Rafael Viñoly: a slender, reticulated monolith that is nearly 150 feet taller than the Empire State Building (Chaban, 2014).

Although these properties are built as spaces in which to live, there may in fact be no life inside them. These properties, though structured as condominiums, are often—perhaps usually—held as assets for investment purposes, not used as actual homes. This point has led the literature to characterize these buildings as, in various ways, dead or barely alive. Thus, a 2018 article in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* uses the neologism "necrotecture" to describe this "socially dead space in which human habitation and social attachment are almost absent even after sale" (Atkinson, 2018, p. 3). Similarly, architect and urbanist Matthew Soules (2021) has used the figure of the zombie to characterize this species of half-dead architecture whose "density . . . is significantly below designed capacity" (p. 51) but that, nonetheless, "is predicated on the viability of its host's livelihood. London is a magnet of international investment capital in real estate precisely because it is considered a safe and stable investment over the long run. Investors believe it will live forever" (p. 81). Moreover, in keeping with their zombie-like nature, these (un)dead buildings are capable of spreading their condition. Thus, sociologist and coiner of the term "global city" Saskia Sassen (2015) has explained that such urban development engineered for investment purposes "inevitably kill[s] much urban tissue: little streets and squares, density of street-level shops and modest offices, and so on." Indeed, the literature typically associates urban superprime housing with specific, well-defined social harms: among others, piling on more unaffordable housing in global cities already stricken with crises of housing insecurity, eroding the local specificity of existing neighborhoods, and facilitating tax avoidance and money laundering (Atkinson, 2018).

Soules views 432 Park Avenue, in particular, as a monument to the deathward pull of finance capitalism. In Soules's conception, the ultimate horizon of finance capitalism (in its current Silicon Valley iteration) may be a transhumanist future in which humans transcend their mortal bodies to live eternally in a frictionless, relentlessly monetized ether. Against that backdrop, "432 Park Avenue is a totemic object—all spirituality and no carnality—teetering between different worlds

432 Park Avenue, Rafael Viñoly Architects, https://vinoly.com/works/432-park-avenue

432 Park Avenue, DBOX, https://dboxcg.com/portfolio/432_park_avenue

and different times as an avatar of capitalism's spiritual drive to move us all into deadened worlds of perpetual profit without even the pleasure of our bodies" (pp. 181, 183). In a striking promotional image of 432 Park Avenue, showing an empty marble bathtub in front of a large, square window with a spectacular, downtown-facing view of the New York City skyline, Soules sees "a twenty-first-century sarcophagus for the absent body of finance" (p. 188).

Amid these criticisms, it would seem at best banal—and at worst repulsive—to remark on the aesthetic beauty of 432 Park Avenue and some of its peers. And yet some of these buildings are gorgeous. The controlled, perfectly harmonious segments of square windows that form 432 Park's silhouette, a vertical transmutation of the street grid that organizes the city over which the building towers, are sculpturally compelling at the very least, if they are not stunning. Something similar could be said for Herzog and de Meuron's 56 Leonard Street, the shifting, Jenga-like forms of which decompose and reorganize the buildings around them. Looking at 56 Leonard uptown from Church Street, you might (or might not) be struck by how, in presenting itself as a seemingly unstable mass of glass and metal, the building achieves something close to the effect of a good jazz improvisation on a popular song: not just reinterpreting a pattern of notes we already recognize but also, perhaps, revealing a purer formal truth that lies behind that pattern. Less immediately obvious are the aesthetic merits of One Hyde Park, whose wedge-like complexes look a bit like a fleet of errant warships descending on Knightsbridge. Other examples

of superprime housing fall at varying points on the spectrum of insipid to sublime. But such buildings' principal role as physical deposit accounts in the seven-plus-figure range, and their real social costs, seem to make their beauty secondary or even trivial.

But, then again, isn't these buildings' proximity to death inextricable from their occasional beauty? As buildings that are for the most part uninhabited, the value of their design, as a factual matter, lies not in providing a home to people, but, rather, in providing a return above the risk-free interest rate or, at the very least, an asset whose value will remain relatively stable over time. Freed from the rhythms and demands of human life, these empty, dead homes effectively become sculptures. In that sense, these superprime structures are, as we might read Soules to suggest, already ruins (pp. 75, 78). Indeed, it's in this removal from the time and scope of human life that this architecture achieves its aesthetic power.

Freud's interest in ruins is well known, with various texts in the Freudian corpus using ruins as an analogy for unconscious material (Trigg, 2012). (Take, for example, Freud's invocation of the ruins of "the Eternal City," Rome, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961).)* Yet, perhaps unsurprisingly, a distinct chain of Freudian concepts also links the image of a decaying material world to the unconscious desire for death in particular. As Freud explains in his archeologically-tinged meditation "On Transience" (1916/1957) the sadness we feel in considering that beautiful objects will not last forever ("A time may indeed come when the pictures and statues which we admire to-day will crumble to dust . . . ." (p. 306)) is actually a form of anticipatory melancholia, a pain experienced in incorporating an object that will inevitably be lost. Indeed, as Freud explains elsewhere (1916/1957, p. 251), the melancholic's relationship to the lost object is often mediated by an aggression toward the lost object that the melancholic masochistically turns against themselves—a manifestation of the death drive (Freud, 1923/1961, p. 53). In other words, the more that external objects become, in our perception, removed from the timescale of a human lifespan (whether because we outlive them or because they outlive us) the closer those objects become to the realm of both the unconscious and the death drive itself.

This is the realm of deathward-moving architecture. Even though these buildings' repeating, rectilinear, often neo-Futurist forms bespeak a clear desire to organize the fluid, organic, unbounded urban environment around them, this organizing impulse is not, as a practical matter, directed at creating a space to be inhabited. Instead, these contemporary ruins are directed at less tangible, less definite, and more purely aesthetic ends. A deathward-moving architecture certainly has a plot, but we don't, and maybe we can't, know what it is.

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Bosco Verticale
Milan
Stefano Boeri Architetti

Picture by LDC