



BOOK FORUM

Within Without: Dreaming New Futures of and for Psychoanalysis

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About a year into analytic treatment, I had a dream that we did it differently. The dream:

Dr. G came to get me from the waiting room, same as always. Once behind the door, her office had changed—it was no longer an office, it was The Office. Every analyst and every analytic patient (in the entire area) was allowed to make use of the space. Dozens of couches with chair pairs of every color, style, height, length were neatly arranged, at some distance. There was no “privacy,” per se, although white noise machines littered the ground. No one was alarmed by this, the lack of doors. I chose a dark green velvet couch, and Dr. G sat down. We got to work.

Outside of the dream, I told my analyst in her consulting room in Oakland. She had neither the old-style Freudian room, with its rugs and statues recalling those of the Father, nor was her room in any particular aesthetic, really. When I offered her the dream, I recall her being merely amused, but I have often returned to it privately: What would it mean to conduct this ritualistic cure with this setup? Or as Freud remarks, “The dream is the liberation of the spirit from the pressure of external nature, a detachment of the soul from the fetters of matter.” This was a dream of a soft liberation of the spirit of psychoanalysis, as much as, through the censors of my waking mind, I could imagine it. In it, our private histories might meet in the air; we might move toward collective analysis, collective treatment. For, after all, our histories aren’t so private. Marcuse writes, “Psychological problems therefore turn into political problems: private disorder reflects more directly on the disorder of the whole, and the cure of personal disorder depends more directly than before on the cure of general disorder.”

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We might be able to make desire and trauma differently legible if we moved toward thinking the psychosocial. My short dream gestured at this notion that we might get a little freer by liberating ourselves from the enclosure that binds analyst and analysand. The cure that has become brittle in its arrangements reappears in the dream—in the wish—as barely transmuted save for this single change. Even asleep, it is hard to imagine otherwise. Nonetheless, my dream asked a version of the question “How might we do care in that ‘flatten [ed] landscape of the human psyche itself?’”¹ How could we challenge the traditional limits of psychoanalysis in order to assess how it is actually practiced and how it might be?

Ankhi Mukherjee poses this question to us forcefully in her stunning contribution, *Unseen City*. Mukherjee argues that institutional psychoanalysis has reduced the psyche to a single note and its disharmonious complexes while compressing the modes in which we might provide the signal cure that has defined itself in the twentieth century. Moreover, its temporalities have been delimited while its diagnoses have been universalized. Mukherjee’s *Unseen City* offers a stark corrective. Beginning with the foundational notion of trauma—coined in 1860 in the French laboratory and exported to the world—Mukherjee, in her interdisciplinary and global investigation, offers us a new an alternative account of psychoanalysis in the present. In *Unseen City*, she extends her generative account of psychoanalysis via all the disciplines that might be home to its method, offering us not just three literary critical chapters on cities “visible but unseen,” itself a book, but also three additional chapters in and of the clinics carrying on what she calls “Freud’s unfulfilled dream of free psychoanalysis.”

The result of these twinned accounts joined together is a wholesale reconception of the boundaries of psychoanalysis and the psyche most of its major accounts offer. “Talk therapy,” Mukherjee writes, might be “reconceptualized as an elaboration of matter, a dynamic production of space and time in the duration of the session. And such acts of traveling psychoanalysis become responsible, when ... responsibility amounts to ‘facing the ghosts.’” In *Unseen City*, Mukherjee faces the ghosts of psychoanalysis while also forcefully arguing for its expansion. To do so, she holds this history in tension with how psychoanalysis has survived itself, been born anew, and yet still demands further reconfigurations. Turning to spaces beyond the private consulting room as a container for these lines of flight from institutional psychoanalysis, Mukherjee offers a definitive study of the psychic life of not just the unseen city, but those historically unseen both within and without the consulting room, but who, nevertheless are.

Psychoanalysis is a time-based (and biased) medium, and I mean this two ways. As a practice, psychoanalysis wishes to excoriate the past through its investigation of the present in service of a future. Secondly, psychoanalytic care (sometimes a contradiction in terms) follows a ritual set in time. In its most famous, normative version, that ritual centers on a single patient who is collected from the waiting room and brought into a private consulting room.

¹ Ethan Waters, quoted by Ankhi Mukherjee.

The patient is told to be free—and freely associate—in order to get a little freer. The cart comes, as it were, before the horse. How the analyst listens is, a priori, a reflection of the socioeconomic, temporal, and political conditions from whence they come. How we generate and respond to the frame is no less conditional. That we listen as medium of cure is not a given, nor are the meanings we make in doing so. And yet, since Freud, the unconscious has too often been treated as free of bounds, of time, of politics.

For all the accounting of psychoanalysis's relationship to time, and the fair criticism that, as it is practiced, its theory too frequently makes recourse to the universal, its resistance to being untethered from its place-based rituals, unglued from its frames, has largely been ignored. Mukherjee's book offers a new account of psychoanalysis's present, especially in its clinical chapters, located in Mumbai, London, and New York, where care is conducted not only out of the office and into the home, but in the garden, the kiosk.

Frantz Fanon writes that we must put the dream in its time; we can say that we must put therapeutic care in its place. In order to have psychoanalytic scripts, frequently there has been this recourse to a homogenizing of the psyche—a proto-algorithmic sorting and reading of what might be happening to and for any given patient or to and for any given analyst in their countertransference. Born of that first gesture—to name the pathological in the hopes of making it the normal—*Unseen City* asks us to trace out both the production and export of those very scripts and the rituals that contain them by tracing psychoanalysis to those places where it remembers that it is not merely interpretive. Instead, as Mukherjee reminds us “it must include elaborations of care.” Psychoanalysis beyond the consulting room has alloyed itself, opened itself up, made itself useful in its time and in its place. Mukherjee's book is a testament to the fact that we must alloy care to move away from inflexible cure.

Mukherjee's signal contribution here—and there is so much in this book that I cannot take up in such a brief celebration of it—helped me rearticulate my own struggles to name and historicize a psychoanalytic purity project, one that homogenizes both practice and patient coevally. Her book arrives at what may be described as an apex of a long-standing dispute between psychoanalysts in favor of a “pure” psychoanalysis and others in favor of a “social” psychoanalysis, especially in the United States. Mukherjee shows that the practice has always been more flexible than even my reductive dream might allow, that we might productively elaborate care in the spaces care forgot. In my own work, I've used the genealogy of teletherapy to stake out the terms of this fight over a proper psychoanalysis. Teletherapy, which I argue has been ubiquitous as a practice since Freud, and which I term psychoanalysis's shadow form, has rejected both the medium of money and the medium of simultaneous space. Like Mukherjee, I join in insisting on these multiple temporalities of care as being their own inheritance. It is no surprise to me, then, that Mukherjee's book ends with the soaring of the teletherapeutic encounter during COVID-19, a necessary turn in years of pandemic, but also the return to the outdoor session, set in a garden. Both of these modes for care allow for the work to go on. In Mukherjee's hands, the little minor tendencies of psychoanalysis, and its mutations into unfamiliar or unrecognizable modalities, are as intrinsic to its history as the supposedly

immutable consulting room that still stands as imago. Another word for ritual, especially in the twenty-first century, might be script. The analysand and the analyst use the script, in the best of times, to play with each other, so that reality might change. We had better use one that is responsive to our conditions and needs, that makes use of all the spaces and times in which such play could happen.

Author biography. Hannah Zeavin is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *The Distance Cure: A History of Teletherapy* (MIT Press, 2021) and the Founding Editor of *Parapraxis*.

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