

EDITORIAL

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Creatures of touch – creatures of talk –
we were busy telling the world
what was what – moulding the earth
to our shape – when a front rolled in –
some invisible weather infused
with a harm that leapt from hand
to hand – or spread by word of mouth –
made its lair in the lungs – its roost
on the tongue. For weeks then years
it was hard to belong – to be whole.
And months in between of holding
our nerve – the soul treading water
in heavy mist – the mind in amber –
time keeping step with the drumbeat
of grief and hurt – the daily count.

These lines from Simon Armitage’s poem *Only Human*, written last year in remembrance of the lives lost during the Covid-19 pandemic, capture the despair of that time, which came in waves, the emotional toll of so much grief and loss, the grim getting on with daily life, and the timeless quality of what was endured.

This special issue, “Private lives in a global storm”, was conceived just over a year ago, when the pandemic was easing in ferocity, and we were beginning to be able to think about what we had all been through. This was not the only ongoing global emergency. Indeed it felt as if external disturbance was all around, surrounded as we were by various kinds of global political and social instability, the climate crisis, and then in February 2022 Russia’s invasion of Ukraine which ramped up all of this, bringing terror to so many.

What was the effect, we wondered, of this atmosphere of heightened external disturbance and crisis on our internal worlds, and specifically on the couple and family unconscious? How might this atmosphere affect our patients and our work? What were the particular consequences of these various kinds of global catastrophe? And what concepts can we rely upon to think more effectively not only about the individual’s unconscious relationships with the couple or family, but also the couple’s or family’s relationships with society, culture, and world events?

The articles in this issue address themselves to some of these questions, and raise additional questions of their own. We open with Christopher Clulow’s “The personal, the political, and the psychotherapeutic”, in which the author asks whether therapists’ often limited focus on family relationships is

justifiable, or whether an understanding of psychological processes in couple relationships could inform a broader understanding of political conflict. His article takes in four contexts: the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union; the Covid-19 pandemic; the war in Ukraine; and the climate emergency.

Mira Konina's "Facing a new reality: psychotherapy against the background of war" expands on the third of these realities, describing a piece of clinical work with a Ukrainian emigrant that unfolds against the backdrop of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict. She brings to life the challenges that arise for therapists working with Russian-speaking patients, including the heightened traumatic stimuli that affects both therapist and patient and can make it hard to maintain a therapeutic stance, and she shows how the therapist's couple state of mind can be a powerful tool in understanding a couple relationship, even in the absence of the partner in the therapy.

"Symptoms of normality: boundaries, identity, and symbolisation" by Fabio Monguzzi examines the effect of a series of social transformations and a number of recent crises, including the economy, the climate, the political environment, and the recent war in Ukraine, on the individual psyche and the abandonment of a culture of limit. He notes that we as therapists are now immersed in a trauma culture we share with our patients, and wonders about the meaning of this development.

Kathy Sinsheimer's "Sabina and me: how thinking about Sabina Spielrein accompanied me through the early pandemic" is a personal account of the isolation, fear, and destruction that was ushered in by the Covid-19 pandemic. The author describes her immersion in the life of Spielrein, an early psychoanalyst and contemporary of Freud and Jung, who developed the theme of "destruction as the cause of becoming" in her paper of the same name, but became remembered for her sexual proclivities rather than her scholarship. Sinsheimer reflects on the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the effect of moving online from the consulting room, and describes a piece of clinical work from this time.

In "Family and the turbulent world", Ruth Blay Levisky addresses the impact of the pandemic on the mind of the analyst, and describes the way in which the analyst's internal setting came under pressure as a result of compulsory isolation. She looks at the way in which our societies have been transformed over recent years, including developments in gender identity, and proposes a new definition for the contemporary family rooted in the metapsychological principles of link theory. She puts forward the concept of the link complex, an extension of link theory, in order to try to better understand the diversity of subjectivations.

"The Covid-19 pandemic: mourning in Brazilian families" reports on two therapeutic group projects carried out in Brazil during the pandemic, looking at the experiences of people who had lost family members. It has been put together by Glenda Beigler, Marina Figueiredo, Cristiane Lopes, Flávia Steuer, Maria Inês Tassinari, and Myriam Uchitel, each a member of the working and research group "Faces of trauma" based in the Department of

Psychoanalysis at Sedes Sapientiae Institute. The article movingly describes the process of psychic elaboration of losses in the broader context of trauma that affected us all during the pandemic.

Our seventh article, “How far do current theories and techniques go towards helping the families and couples of today?”, is a review by the author David E. Scharff of his own history of applying psychoanalysis to the understanding and treatment of couples over a career of more than fifty years. He asks what elements of analytic understanding still apply to the changing forms of families in the world, and considers the recent changes brought about by the pandemic.

Our issue contains three book reviews. Robert Monzo assesses *Hating, Abhorring and Wishing to Destroy: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Contemporary Moment*, a series of essays edited by Donald Moss and Lynne Zeavin addressing the theme of the hatred of the other and of difference, including such states of mind as racism, homophobia, and misogyny. Catriona Wrottesley examines the British novelist Maggie O’Farrell’s latest book, *The Marriage Portrait*, a fictional account of a forced marriage from 1560, in which the heroine’s lack of physical freedom was mirrored by the author’s confinement as she wrote the novel during the pandemic. *The Burden of Heritage: Hauntings of Generational Trauma on Black Lives* by Aileen Alleyne, reviewed by Naomi Segal, examines the way in which the legacy of slavery can play out in black families and how the enmeshment of black/white history can leave each dependent on the other for survival.

For the arts reviews, Wayne Bodkin assesses the French television series *En thérapie*, the third version, after *BeTipul* (in Israel) and *In Treatment* (in America), of this psychotherapist/patient drama, this time played out against the backdrop of the 2015 Bataclan terrorist attack in Paris. Martha Doniach examines *The Beatles: Get Back*, a documentary series that follows the making of the band’s 1969 album and film *Let It Be*, and traces the sibling dynamics of the band members. Elle Sidel looks at Petro Almodóvar’s latest film, *Parallel Mothers*, set during the Spanish Civil War.

We are delighted to announce the first ever winner of the New Writer Prize in this issue. Eva Chaska Uchitel Tesch’s winning paper, “What ‘family’ is this? Link, bonds, and intersubjectivity in online family therapy”, will appear in the forthcoming issue of the journal. This prize was established in 2020 to mark the tenth anniversary of the journal and the stepping down of Molly Ludlam as the inaugural editor. We are also pleased to direct readers to a new short recording the journal has produced to introduce the people who put it together. This can be found on the Tavistock Relationships website, and also on the IPI and Phoenix websites: <https://tavistockrelationships.org/blogs-and-resources/journal-of-couple-and-family-psychoanalysis>.