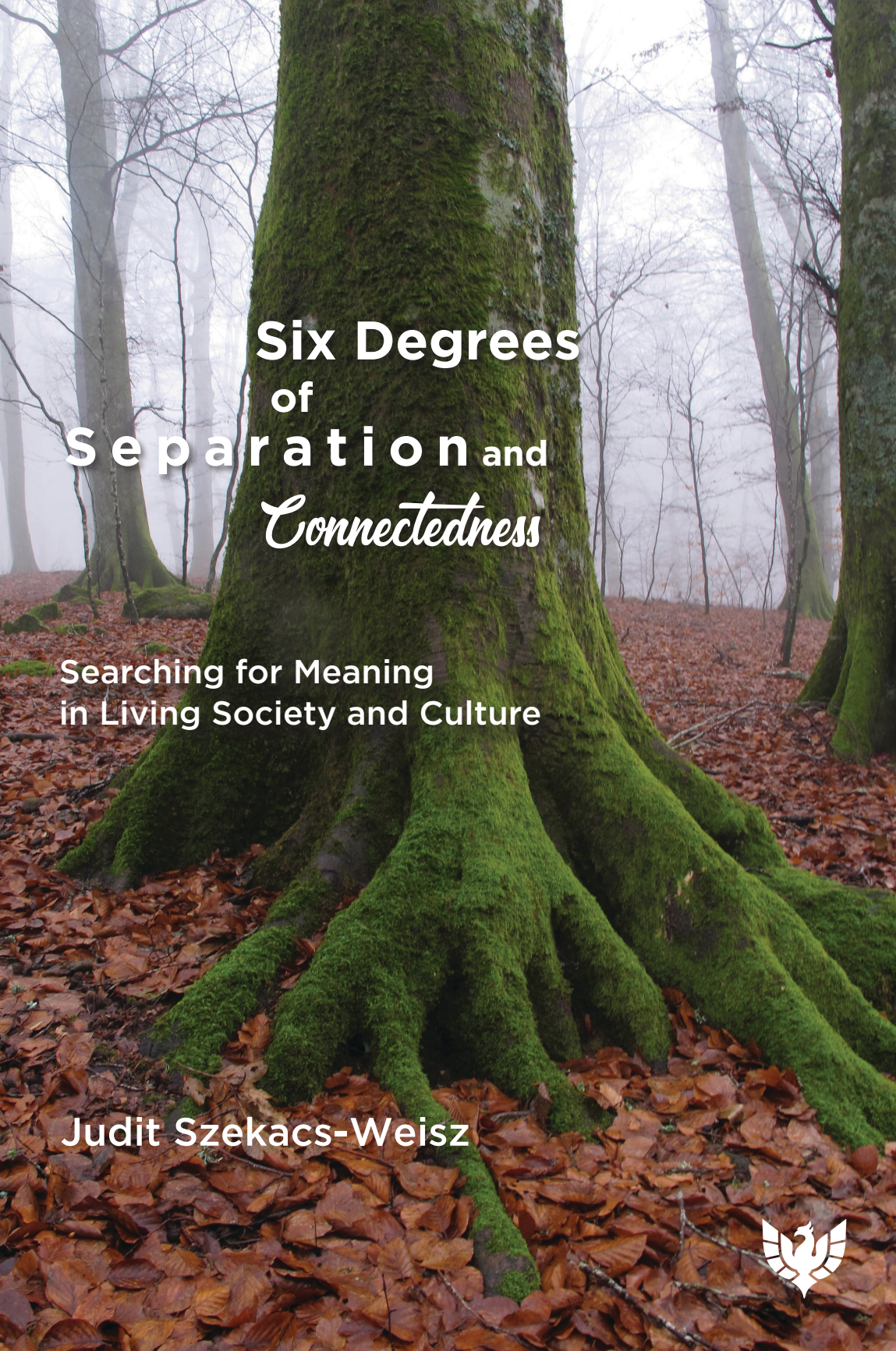




Six Degrees of Separation and *Connectedness*

Searching for Meaning
in Living Society and Culture

Judit Szekacs-Weisz



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Living Society and Culture

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About the author

Judit Szekacs-Weisz, PhD, is a bilingual psychoanalyst and psychotherapist. Born and educated (mostly) in Budapest, Hungary, she has taken in the way of thinking and ideas of Ferenczi, the Balints, Hermann, and Rajka as an integral part of a “professional mother tongue”. The title of this book, *Six Degrees of Separation and Connectedness: Searching for Meaning in Living Society and Culture*, is connected to that history, specifically, a work of Frigyes Karinthy.* She is a founding member of the Sándor Ferenczi Society, Budapest. The experience of living and working in a totalitarian regime and the transformatory years leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall sensitised her to the social and individual aspects of trauma, identity formation, and strategies of survival. In 1990, she moved to London, where, with a small group of psychoanalysts,

* Frigyes Karinthy, a good friend of Ferenczi and a visionary writer, published a short story in 1929 creating the basis for an elementary principle in social networking stating that all people are six or fewer social connections away from each other. This theory became known as “the six degrees of separation”.

therapists, artists, and social scientists, she founded IMAGO East West and later the Multilingual Psychotherapy Centre (MLPC) to create a space where diverse experiences of living and the changing context and language in different cultures can be explored and creative solutions found. She writes about body-and-mind, trauma, emigration, changing context, and social dreaming.

Another main area of her interest is the history of psychoanalysis especially Sándor Ferenczi and the Budapest School. With Tom Keve, she edited *Ferenczi and His World: Rekindling the Spirit of the Budapest School* and *Ferenczi for Our Time: Theory and Practice*; with Ferenc Eros and Ken Robinson, *Sándor Ferenczi–Ernest Jones: Letters 1911–1933*; and, with Ivan Ward, *Lost Childhood and the Language of Exile*.

Preface

Judit Szekacs-Weisz is a formidable presence in the world of psychoanalysis; an inspirational ball of energy, fizzing with ideas and the drive to get things done. It is my absolute honour to be the publisher of her latest book and to write its preface.

Judit started her life in Budapest, Hungary, before making her way to the UK. As a bilingual psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, she has always had a keen interest in the influence of language. In 1996, having met with other colleagues similarly interested, she co-founded the IMAGO Multilingual Psychotherapy Centre (MLPC), a clear manifestation of her innovatory drive and determination.

Building yet further on her interest in the subject, her revolutionary edited work *The Lost Language of Childhood* drew on the—at the time—neglected themes of language, migration, loss, memory, and oblivion, and the effects of unrecognised individual and collective trauma. Published over twenty years ago, the book remains as relevant as ever and enables the reader to reflect on and comprehend the seismic sociocultural and political changes we continue to face.

It was this book that brought Judit and I together, and I was delighted to be able to reissue the work and keep it alive for a new generation. Her latest work is a carefully collated collection of fourteen fascinating papers written by Judit over a number of decades, some published for the first time in this book. Split into four evocative parts—Strategies of survival and staying alive; Looking at fairy tales, art, and dreams; Lessons from history; and Back to real time—there is a sense of looking at the world anew. Judit embodies this as she revisits words and ideas that have grown and developed since they were first put to paper, offering us further reflections on their meaning.

This collection of papers brings a flavour of Judit's varied but cohesive concerns, written in her inimitable conversational style that draws the reader in to her world. Read on to discover—and savour—her evocative connections between the personal and professional that will inspire new ways of thinking.

Kate Pearce
Publisher, Karnac Books

FOREWORD

Six degrees of separation and connectedness as an offer of mutuality

Ken Robinson

I have long admired Judit's thinking about trauma and emigration, and their impact on language, identity, and psychotherapy, together with her tireless capacity to put it into action in the real world. I am also already familiar with some of the papers in this book, with their often wonderfully aphoristic style and fine eye for quotation, but reading them here is rather like visiting an exhibition of work by an artist whose works I am used to interacting with—Rembrandt's self-portraits come to mind, no doubt because, to use Judit's own words, she is always, like Rembrandt, "busy writing [her] own life" (p. xix). Here, in *Six Degrees of Separation and Connectedness*, as in my imagined exhibition, papers already known are curated afresh, reframed by those that surround them to create a new creative and dynamic context in which they inform each other. Judit refers to Gadamer's conviction that play is fundamental to human life. He understood that it is basic to art as existing dialogically in a community of artists, performers, and audiences. Brecht understood something similar. To read Judit's book is to be invited not just into a dialogue with its papers, but into the dialogue between them, as themes

emerge, are elaborated upon, and cross-fertilise each other in an enriching hermeneutic circle. To quote Judit, we move “in a space where objects can be constructed and deconstructed, observed and explored in different ways, visions formulated, and creative solutions found” (p. 66). In the more narrowly psychoanalytic sphere, we are also in the world of Winnicott, whose ideas on transitional phenomena and space are germane to Judit’s project. And it is not always appreciated how important the playground of art was for Freud, who, like Judit, thought that artists and psychoanalysts were “valuable allies” in their explorations of our lives at depth. In these papers, Sándor Ferenczi, the Balints, Imre Hermann, and Tibor Rajka, along with Winnicott, rub shoulders with the painters Lajos Gulácsy and Magritte, the satirist George Mikes, the film makers Bunuel and Ildikó Enyedi, Camus’ *The Plague*, fairy tales, and J. K. Rowling. Like Freud, in both his Vienna circle and the Café Landtmann, and Ferenczi, in the Grand Café, Budapest, Judit has enjoyed the stimulus of artists as well as analysts and social scientists, working with them to found IMAGO East West and explore diverse experiences of living across different cultures, languages, and traumas, and their impact on identity.

Judit’s work belongs to a tradition of paying attention not just to psychic reality, but also to historical (often multigenerational) and environmental reality and their interrelation. In this respect, she applies John Byng-Hall’s concept of the family script to the social sphere to good effect. Home is where she starts from and home being Hungary, her thinking is informed particularly by the Budapest tradition. She has done an enormous amount to bring that tradition into the British (and international) psychoanalytic domain, building on Michael Balint’s efforts after years of suspicion after Ferenczi’s death about his clinical experiments. She has worked hard to engender interest in the Ferenczi archive after it transferred to the Freud Museum London and to open up the Balint papers in the Archives of the Institute of Psychoanalysis—it was one of my last tasks as the Institute’s honorary archivist to help reassure

André Haynal that they would find a safe home in the archives. I share with Judit a commitment to ensuring that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana, 1905, p. 284), a commitment that gave birth to the Living Archives Project, and, amongst other achievements, the publication of the *Sándor Ferenczi–Ernest Jones: Letters 1911–1933*.

At the heart of Judit’s inheritance from the Budapest tradition is her placing “love and primary object relations (“the mother–baby dual union”) ... as the basic conditions of all further development” and her charging the analyst with being a “basically good object” with all that implies for theory and clinical practice (p. 4). As one who traces a part of his psychoanalytic inheritance back to Ferenczi as my analytic great-great-grandfather, I am touched by her boldness in a world that can still belittle this position. Drawing particularly on Ferenczi’s work on trauma and his earlier foundational paper “Stages in the development of the sense of reality” (1913b)—she breathes fresh life into it—she visits and revisits how we survive trauma, personal and societal, by, for example, splitting or even atomisation, or not remembering our history, or with “borrowed identities” (p. 51). Sensitive to the horrors of trauma, she remains equally sensitive to the protection that our defences offer, no matter what their cost. But I cannot do justice to the quality and insight of Judit’s discussions here—their wisdom is in the detail—nor can I represent her ability to create clinical narratives that take us to the heart of the patient.

The fundamental opposition of primary love and the basic fault is echoed and re-echoed in a series of related binary polarities, protective survival mechanisms ranged against the harmonious: the injunction “do not remember” against “continuity of being”, the cloak of mediocrity against creativity, splitting, isolation, and emptiness against mutuality. The latter, mutuality, Judit reminds us, is an important concept, that Ferenczi was the first to recognise. It is “an opposite of a ‘basic fault’” that can be transformative as, as it were, “the ‘magic component’ of primary love” (p. 47).

Mutuality finds its way into Judit's fascinating account of social dreaming and, too, into her discussion of the Harry Potter fairy tale. In it, she sees an opportunity to share "a story of traumatised generations. ... where ideology, power manipulations, and politics invade everybody's life" (p. 48). As she emphasises, "sharing makes the trauma bearable" (p. 47).

Questions about language figure prominently throughout Judit's papers, the linguistic disorientation that comes with emigration, the extent to which language can express—maybe incarnate is better—the experience of trauma, especially where it is at the level of primary object relationships. How do we enter the world of the other when their words have become empty of affect? Signifiers without emotional signifieds? Here, we might have to listen differently, to a language that came before the development of a verbal self, a language of the senses, of rhythms, that can be inscribed in the body and its movements, perhaps the rhythms of breathing. These and other possibilities, she gifts us. As a thank you, I shall describe how they have revitalised my understanding of working with one of my own patients who emigrated not from one country to another against a background of totalitarian opposition to personhood, but from one class to another, and one dialect to another. He suffered from a fractured sense of identity.

When Judit describes working with a Hungarian patient in the Hungarian language after years of not doing so, she writes: "I tasted words and phrases like long-forgotten delicacies, enjoyed the poetics, syntax, the plasticity, and creative potentials of Hungarian grammar" (pp. 9–10). Working with my British patient who had to negotiate his own form of linguistic dislocation, taught me about the taste of words. In his original Yorkshire dialect, his mother tongue laid down in the third trimester of his intrauterine life, his words had a "mouthfeel"—I borrow the term from writings about food. When he was eleven, he passed what was then the Eleven Plus examination and entered a very middle-class grammar school where speaking in dialect was ridiculed and

punished. He was made to speak in RP. So, he had two languages, one outlawed, the other imposed and empty. He could use his first language at home but increasingly he felt it lost its vibrancy for him. RP poisoned it. He realised in our work that he began to feel that he spoke as a parody of his former self.

To pronounce “us” as “[ʌs]” in an RP accent is to experience the word differently from pronouncing it as “[ʊz]” in a West Yorkshire accent. In terms of phonetics the lips and tongue are positioned differently into produce the two phonemes. Another example, again in an RP and West Yorkshire accent, would be “water [wɔ:tə]” and “waeter [waetə]”. If someone has grown up speaking with flat As it will be hard to say “water” instead of “[waetə]” and feel that the word taps into the full range of experience and meaning that “[waetə]” has come to hold. Subjectively “water” and “[waetə]” are not the same, nor is the feel of the words in the mouth, their “mouthfeel”, the same. It might not be recognised until it is lost but a word, with its mouthfeel, has personal meaning and value that underpins a sense of identity, of I-am-ness. We configure our worlds with our language, but to lose its mouthfeel is to suffer a challenge to, perhaps an assault on, our identity.

I choose both examples because they come from a poem by Tony Harrison, “Them and [ʊz]”, which puts words to the cultural and linguistic dislocation of grammar school pupils who, through the 1950s and early 1960s (and perhaps beyond), like my patient, were pressured to relinquish their home accents in favour of RP. Tony Harrison grew up in Leeds in a working-class environment, was educated at Leeds Grammar School, and went on to read Classics at Leeds University. His poem embodies the results of the increasing linguistic displacement that undermined his sense of identity. Its clever, witty mixture of classical Greek, Yorkshire dialect, and RP is an uneasy neither-here-nor-there collage, the voice of a personality that does not know where it belongs. As part of our work together, I told my patient about Harrison’s poem, and he sought it out (and further poems). Its expression

of alienation and rage, as well as Harrison's fearsome determination to remain authentic through acts of linguistic rebellion, went some way to giving my patient relief through mutuality, but it could not heal his dislocation any more than Harrison's discovery that "Wordsworth's matter/water are full rhymes". Its emphasis on just how much the transition to another language is felt in the body is fundamentally important. When Freud wrote of the ego being first and foremost a bodily ego, he was writing not only of the roots of the ego as a psychic apparatus but of the self. I hope that this pays tribute to how much, although she is particularly concerned with East–West emigration and trauma, Judit's work is valuable beyond that.

Judit's work with others is intertwined with understanding her own journey as a Hungarian "professional survivor" whose "history made [her] learn the arts and crafts of survival" (p. 13), from growing up in Hungary with its successive, repeated traumas, personal and societal, to finding her way through the more recent challenges. She instances the impact of "[t]he deconstruction of our concepts about space, time, dimensions, body and ego boundaries" (p. 72) in our current century, whether that deconstruction has come with our use of screens, with postmodern challenges to our sense of reality, or more generally with the experience of Covid. One of the effects of trauma, especially where it is reinforced by a totalitarian injunction not to remember, is disembodiment. Personally and societally, we might resort to dissociation, for example, so that our knowledge of past and present unbearable experience does not destroy us at a personal level or destroy state control at a political level. This is where *remembering*, one of the central aims of psychoanalysis from its inception, becomes so important. *Remembering* is such a vital activity and concept. It lies at the heart of this book. We remember (*re-member*) what has been split off or dis-membered. Continuity of being, continuity with our pasts, is a fundamental achievement. And, where mutuality has been forbidden, we can band together as members of a

revolutionary remembering group—we *re-member*. To remember is to become once again alive as a bodily self. Judit's final chapters on "Mindless bodies—bodyless minds" and the "Covid chronicles" offer a far-reaching and wide-ranging series of meditations on the danger that we all face now when the process of re-remembering is under such threat. As such they offer mutuality in the true Ferenczian tradition.

Introduction

East and West, home is ...?

This book has been in the making over many years.

Sometimes one writes papers, then books. At other times, one is busy writing one's own life. It depends on the most important task of the given period of our existence.

Anna Freud most likely would call these developmental tasks. Ferenczi, perhaps, would observe them related to the stages in the development of the sense of reality and the elaboration of trauma. Obviously, such issues belong to the area of individuation and separation.

How far do we have to go to find our own voice? Our shape and style?

How many roads must a man or a woman walk down before they can call themselves more or less whole?

How is the texture of one's existential, intellectual, and emotional life woven together?

How many threads have to be put together to give out a meaningful pattern?

While looking back, looking around, and looking forward, these are among the questions one asks ...

When I was encouraged to collect some of my published papers I decided that if I'd ever do it I would try to embed them in my personal narrative: "my story". To place them in the context of my experience of relevant historical and social events the way I lived them and felt the urge to chronicle them; to write about them.

Being a psychoanalyst is a fact of life, I could say. One observes the world outside and inside applying binocular vision to capture what is relevant, looking with both eyes and trying to make sense of the experience according to these diverse dimensions.

Gordon Lawrence would speak about a multiverse of meaning ... and not only in the domain of our dreams.

After many decades in time and crossing a few lands in space, surviving mutative changes in social systems and orders, I feel the time has arrived to begin the journey and brave also the unknown and surprising that is always linked to the bits that are familiar.

Shall we start?