

FASCIASTIC ARCHITECTURE:

A conversation between Qigong (Dominic Pettman)
and Psychoanalysis (Carla Nappi)

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Editor's Introduction

In this *Capacious* 'Dialogue,' Dominic Pettman and Carla Nappi uncover some of the embodying sensibilities and incorporeal resonances that might be strung between their pandemic coping mechanisms of *qigong* and psychoanalysis respectively. Pettman and Nappi's capacity for locating commonalities and divergences across these different practices of care—alongside their own specifically-lived meshings of world-and-self—makes for a compelling and generative conversation. As they probe their way toward crosswired potentials for healing and coping, the transference/countertransference between the analyst and analysand joins with the subtly shifting energies of *qigong* to convey insight into the living tissue of inter-/extra-human relation. Producing between them, experientially and conceptually, something akin to what Gilbert Simondon meant by 'transindividuation' but also spun slightly otherwise, Pettman and Nappi enact a collaborative feeling-thinking aloud where affect is ever-present, on the line, palpable.

—Greg Seigworth, co-editor-in-chief

DOMINIC: In this conversation we're going to stage a brief encounter, as it were—or non-encounter—between two very different practices: *qigong* and psychoanalysis. We do this because we have a hunch that there's something to be gleaned by putting incommensurable elements or approaches together; especially when both are ways of thinking about embodiment (as well as embodying thought). So to say, we're going to see if there's an overlap in the Venn Diagram here between *qigong* and psychoanalysis, when it comes to questions of health, mindfulness, somatic focus, practices of attention, organology, and so on.

Surprisingly, perhaps—given your expertise in histories of Chinese medicine, and my familiarity with Freud's legacy in critical theory—you will be speaking on behalf of psychoanalysis and I will be piping up for *qigong*. We do this because we're both complete newbies at both disciplines (if we can call them that, for convenience), and are keen to get more of a handle on what we perhaps only now sense intuitively.

Does that sound right to you? Any opening preambles or gambits?

CARLA: Sounds right! I hesitate to claim expertise in anything, these days—I'm not sure I'm terribly interested in expertise as a kind of relation—but it is true that I've researched and written about Chinese medicine and its histories for a couple of decades. And I should be clear that my engagement with psychoanalysis is as a patient/practitioner, and not as a theorist per se. (That bears mentioning here because I find that what I have to say about analysis as experience, and what colleagues who have studied but not experienced analysis have to say about things, are often quite different.)

DOMINIC: Very good! In *qigong*, one of the first things a novice learns is 'the grand opening.' In this gesture, you lift your arms mindfully from your sides—as if making a vertical snow angel—before continuing the motion over your head and into a prayer position. This movement is designed to open the body to the *qi* energy that is all around us all the time: to make the body more receptive to the flows in the environment before embarking on any specific routine. The grand opening is designed to counter the habitual instinct of the body—of the self—to turn inward on itself; to operate in a way distinct from, and sometimes even against, the world. So it's in that spirit that I'm opening this dialogue with you today. I'm inviting a whole host of forces into the room, through the wires of the internet, and between us, so that we can explore some ideas that I instinctively feel are connected, but currently lack the clarity or knowledge to join the dots.

As already intimated, we have a hunch that there are potentially illuminating resonances to be found between *qigong* and psychoanalysis, even as they emerge in very different contexts, and for very different reasons. (Although maybe not *quite* so different, when you boil it down.) I came to *qigong* quite recently, as a coping mechanism during the pandemic. I've been practicing at least ninety minutes a day, however, and credit it with keeping me sane and relatively healthy (*touch wood*) during the extended lockdowns and subsequent para-agoraphobia. I also know that you decided to embark on a psychoanalytic journey in that fateful year of 2020, and you also credit this form of therapy with similar salutary powers.

(As a side-note, I must admit, to this point in time, I've resisted the analyst's couch. For one thing, I'm cheap; and for another, I'm from an Anglo-Australian background in which it is implicitly understood that leasing one's mind to the latest iteration of Viennese witch-doctory still seems exotic and unnecessary. [Especially as my own tribe has no truck with 'feelings.'] By the same token, I understand you are also resistant to practicing something like *qigong*, at least on your own steam, since you are a specialist in Chinese history and culture—especially early modern Chinese medicine—and it would just be too on the nose to participate in something so close to your expertise.)

In any case, let's overthink this situation together.

Since I've been reading psychoanalytic texts for many years now, I would enjoy testing my own pet theories against your own real-world experience of the practice; just as I think it would be intriguing to test my hopelessly naive grasp of Chinese thought—through the prism of *qigong*—against your deep knowledge of the terms and correspondences that I so casually toss around in my mind, as I close my eyes and soak up the energy of the cosmos.

Some of the guiding questions for this back-and-forth might therefore be something on the order of: 'What does the *qigong* conception of the body have to say to the psychoanalytic account of the mind, and vice versa? What happens when we map the terminology of one 'philosophy' on top of the other? What assumptions does each orientation make about what a body (or mind) is—how it works, what it needs, what it does, and what threatens its functionality or integrity? What might the 'organology' of Chinese thought have in common with a post-Freudian understanding of 'healthy' somatic subjectivity? And how might these very different practices nevertheless have something productive or revealing to say to each other? (or better yet, to say to *us*, in a kind of unusual—yet suggestive—duet?)

I'm sure you have your own questions, just as I'm sure that other questions will emerge during the course of our conversation. But just as there is a niche sub-genre of academic reflections on 'the dialogue between philosophy and poetry' or 'the encounter between art and ontology,' and so on, I sense—perhaps selfishly—that I'll learn something important from constellating key terms such as 'practice,' 'discipline,' 'body,' 'mind,' 'affect,' 'organ,' 'narrative,' 'trauma,' 'transfer,' 'energy,' 'identity,' 'symptom,' 'health,' and so on, with you, and through your specific way of threading such concerns in daily life. (Or what passes for daily life in the time of long social covid.)

To start with something more concrete, can you maybe get the ball rolling by saying something about your first year of psychoanalysis; why you finally decided to give it a try, and what has struck you most about the process?

CARLA: A tarot card made me cry. It was late September in the midst of the first year of the pandemic, and I was on Zoom experiencing my very first Tarot reading, and we got to the Two of Swords and the floodgates opened. This was my first clue that everything was not, in fact, 'fine' and I was also not 'doing fine,' despite my efforts to convince myself otherwise. (I was very extremely highly-not-fine, and I'm not sure if that was obvious to others, but it was so inconvenient to admit it to myself that I simply buried my not-at-all-fine-itude in sensory comforts and coping strategies.) And so when a friend texted soon after, mentioned that her psychoanalyst had a rare opening for new patients, and asked whether I was interested, there was no question. Sign me up.

This was all new for me. And we were doing it in a pandemic. And so after an initial Zoom to set things up, we started speaking on the phone—my analyst and me—three times per week, and my 'couch' was my guest bed or my comfy chair or my desk chair, and I occasionally had to answer the door and move boxes of groceries or whatever into the house during a session. So my experience of psychoanalysis thus far has been shaped by those material conditions.

We started with the Two of Swords, to try to understand what was happening there in my reaction to it. This was my 'grand opening,' in a manner of speaking. And while it involved, as yours does in *qigong*, a pair of lifted arms, in the case of the card those arms are clutching swords, their lift representing not so much of an opening as a closing, a kind of paralysis, a turning inward. The woman with

the arms is seated, and she's blindfolded, and she is faced away from the flowing water just behind her. And I recognized myself in her, and so our task, early in my analysis, was also a kind of 'grand opening.'

It's hard to summarize the experience of the years that have followed the Two of Swords. I think I'll wind up turning aspects of that time over, for us to look at together, gradually in the course of the conversation. (Here are my cards! Come play with me!) But one of the most striking aspects of the experience, for me, has been an opening out to be able to look at my own past without immediately turning away from it and trying to move on. (I've learned, in the process, that I'm very good at going somewhere, that I know how to GO somewhere, but I still have a lot to learn about how to BE somewhere.) It's a kind of opening of the arms, inviting it all in, in a way that feels resonant with an invitation to the cosmic *Qi* to come flow into the body. Perhaps we can think of the past (of our own individual pasts, which are constantly being remade and coming into and out of being in the present) as a kind of cosmic and individual force, akin to *qi*...

DOMINIC: There are two swords in a foundational *qigong* routine, in fact. My first real lesson was in the *Yi Jin Jing* (which translates literally as 'muscle/tendon change classic'), which combines twelve distinct movements in a pre-defined order. Each movement is given a name, like 'pushing the mountain' or 'pulling the bull's tail,' and corresponds to a vital organ (which in turn represents a key emotion or affect). The seventh movement is called 'Drawing the Sword,' and you kind of squat down before pushing upward again, pulling an invisible sword out from an imaginary scabbard, located between your shoulder blades. You do this twelve times with your left hand, and then the same again with your right hand. After completing the motion, you close your eyes and 'nourish the *qi*' that you just created, visualizing, in this case, the bladder. As you picture the shining *qi*, energizing your bladder, you feel stagnation 'melt into progress.' Of course, as an academic, I can't help but pull at the threads of words and ideas, so my restless literal-mindedness often pops up like an obnoxious puppet. 'But what constitutes progress?' it asks, 'in a world in which the very notion seems to have stagnated—socially, historically, politically, and even temporally, in the time of lockdown?' Moreover, my mental pedant continues unhelpfully, 'what counts as *progress* when it comes to the personal sphere? Progress on one's work? On one's spiritual path?' . . . My teacher does not give much philosophical guidance here, which is probably the right way to go about it—to leave the interpretation of the concept to each practitioner. For indeed, the question of whether we are making objective progress or not matters little, since it's hard to find the right criteria to

measure this. (Especially since most metrics are extremely coercive and normative, if not outright dubious.) So the important thing, on a personal level, is to *feel* that one is making progress; that one is not stuck in a rut, or merely a creature of increasingly entropic habit.

So we're already circling a couple of themes that I'd like to tease out further as we talk, and it might be helpful to name them at this point. One is the borderline between the self or individual, and the wider world: even the cosmos. This borderline can be—like many border zones—a site of tension or conflict; while also helping to illuminate both entities that sit so adjacent to each other. What work do we need to do to maintain this border or boundary in contrast to crossing it? And how does this border help maintain—or, alternatively threaten—the relation? In both *qigong* and therapy, there is a constant toggling—both in the subject and the process itself—between hyper-personalization and depersonalization. We are revealed as very much intimately ourselves, while simultaneously being revealed as extremely generic, and subject to the same forces and flows as everybody else. (A realization that can be either insulting or liberating, depending on your state of mind.)

The second theme is a kind of 'organology' of health or wellness, in these two contrasting traditions. *Qigong*, as I sketched above, is extremely organ-centric. The topography of the body is mapped very much by 'organic' landmarks, and diagrammed between them. (And as anyone who has received acupuncture or reflexology knows, different organs are mapped on to the various points and meridians that span the body, like an invisible subway map.) Psychoanalysis is a very different approach, of course, but it is also acutely aware of how disease or disturbance can be manifested via certain organs, which themselves are forever at the mercy of the great, locked, and chaotic control-room of the mind (especially the unconscious mind.) I'm interested in the ways in which these two different forms of healing praxis 'read' the body, and interpret its various gestures, blockages, flows, and architectures.

CARLA: These thoughts are so timely, for me, and thank you for them. I'm thinking a lot about organs these days. As I write this, my mother was recently diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer. It all happened rather suddenly—the diagnosis, I mean, and also the fallout from it—and we're all stumbling around trying to process it and do whatever comes next and be what we need ourselves and each other to be. We're not very good at it, yet. It's hard, and painful, and

clumsy, and messy. And the first days of conversations with the doctors who were doing tests on my mother were strewn with organs: Where has the cancer spread? Where can they see it? Can they break off bits of my mother to touch it? What is a pancreas anyway?

This kind of experience connects you to people. (That first day, touching down at Newark Airport to see my family after not having traveled—not even a bus!—for more than a year and a half in the pandemic, I felt the deepest sense of connection with the other people walking through the airport, washing over me and through me like a wave, a sense that we were all dealing with, had dealt with, would eventually deal with loss and death and tragedy, and it was something profound and beautiful and moving.) You tell people what’s happening, and you learn about others’ experiences with cancers, with loss. And because there is now a multi-generational history of pancreatic cancer in my family, I’m now understanding my own body, my organs, as they are connected to those of the other women in my family: my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, all living and dying with pancreatic cancer. My sister’s organs and mine, siblings in an adventure we’re now embarking on as we learn about genomic counseling. There’s this sense of specific somatic connection with the women who came before you and the women living beside you...and a fear of the same, and an effort to separate your body, your organs, from whatever toxic net is trying to draw you in.

I’ve been talking a lot, in psychoanalysis, about the way I’m processing all of this as a physical experience. The way I’m feeling the inside of my body as a congested space, swampy, strewn with a kind of phlegm. Thinking about the difference between digestion (the way I had framed my goal for processing these experiences), and congestion (the way I actually felt inside my body): the one a kind of integration and metabolism into the self, the other a bodily response to a sense of invasion by things that aren’t meant to be inside you. Maybe my body is having an allergic reaction to the ghosts of past traumas experienced by the women who came before me. Maybe it’s a manifestation of a kind of boundary between myself and the wider cosmos, myself and my own history (the history of my family), where that boundary is marked by a visceral reaction to the ghosts of organs that aren’t supposed to be there. What do you do when you feel that your insides are being haunted by organs that aren’t your own? And that your body is mounting a defense against them? And that the effluvia of that defense is filling you up and sticking you in place? (Is that a kind of stuckness? What does ‘progress’ out of that state look like?)

In my psychoanalysis so far, we have never talked very much about dreams, and this experience is somehow changing that. I'm dreaming of damp, swampy houses, of mildewy fabric and furniture in disarray, of ambivalent senses of home, of the inevitable loss that comes with a sense that you belong somewhere, to someone, with someone.

I'm wondering about the dreamscapes that accompany your qigong experience, and I'm struck by the contrast between the well-ordered choreography of your *qigong* experience, and the swamp and chaos that my psychoanalysis is trying to guide me into and through.

DOMINIC: As you know, I'm terribly sorry about your mother's diagnosis —far more sorry than the phatic conventions of commiseration require. Indeed, this touches directly on one of our themes: the extent to which one person's grief or sorrow is shared by those who care about them. I have never met your mother. Through this one degree of separation, however, I have become aware of a kind of invisible postpartum umbilical cord that suddenly connects all three of us. The body, in other words, is never limited to the physical organism, but extended into psychic, empathic space.

Otherwise, that's a beautiful experience —in Newark, of all places! What an unexpected location for an almost mystical epiphany. The way you describe this sudden and profound sense of connection to arbitrary, generic humanity reminds me of a neologism that's gaining popularity: *sonder*. We can trace this term to John Koenig's (2021) *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, where it is defined as, "the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk" (123). *Sonder* is thus the inverse of what the young folks are starting to call, MCS, or 'main-character syndrome'—a default mode for most of us natural narcissists.

In any case, these recent experiences of yours are prompting me to really ponder the *qigong* concept of *san jiao*, which was explained to me as the organic 'cling-film' that holds the organs together, inside the body, and also acts as a kind of medium or conduit for these same organs to communicate, and work together. (In so-called

Western medicine, we would call *san jiao* the fascia.) There's a special movement, as part of the *qigong* routine—called 'crouching tiger'—to encourage the *san jiao* to transition from a state of fragmentation into one of cohesion and harmony. I wonder, then, if we might think of affect as a kind of psychosomatic *san jiao* or fascia, holding people close, and in place—so they don't jumble around like a bunch of loose potatoes—but that also works to keep each individual distinct from each other. (For you can't have communication without at least some form of minimal separation or distance.)

Psychoanalysis is replete with instances of people *projecting* themselves outside of themselves, and often even losing themselves in the process, inside an/other. I'm thinking here, especially of that mysterious mental-emotional catapulting operation known as *cathexis*, where we launch our intangible selfhood like a projectile into the heart of the being of the privileged other. Hence we fall in love, just as we bungee jump into affection. For the Freudian, the patient's integrity and autonomy are both always at stake, and also forever in question.

Clearly metaphors are decisive here, as they are everywhere, since metaphors orient and structure our thinking. For Freud, the subconscious was a seething cauldron, and the memory, a mystic writing pad. For critics of Freud, his method described little more than a sad family drama, trapped in the limited gestures of a kitchen-sink theater. For *qigong*—or at least for the form of *qigong* I'm familiar with—the body is often described as a sponge, floating in an ocean of *qi*, and soaking up the universal energy. Neither psychoanalysis nor *qigong* qualify as a science, though it's possible to earn qualifications in both. But they both attempt to free the spirit or psyche (which literally means 'soul,' let's recall) from stagnation, repetition, suffocation, and repression. They both seek to encourage a healthy circulation of mental and physical energy from various blockages, in the body and mind. (So to say, both psychoanalysis and *qigong* are fundamentally anti-Cartesian, since they understand the mind and body to form a mobius strip.)

I'll have to think about dreams a little more, since I don't have a ready response at this moment. (My dreams are often so banal and so obvious as to be caricatured, to the point where I feel it's probably redundant to have them analyzed.) But obviously your swampy sub-psyche is telling you something important about the topography of your soul (*vis-à-vis* the souls of those close to you). Indeed, you're reminding me now how many dreams I have where solid ground gives way to a dangerous body of water!

But to return to dry land for a while, I am interested in correspondences, and the vital role they play in both these approaches to human hermeneutics and intervention. For while Freud famously quipped that “a cigar is sometimes just a cigar,” the wry humor relies on the assumption that most of the time a cigar is precisely something else. The shrink is thus ever on the lookout for errant objects, saturated in buried meanings. A shoe may correspond to a feeling that corresponds to a time that corresponds to an atmosphere that corresponds to an event that corresponds to a symptom that in turn adds up to an unconscious and internalized libidinal economy. Whereas in *qigong*, an organ corresponds to an affect that corresponds to a color that corresponds to a movement that corresponds to a symptom that adds up to a suboptimal holistic flow. (Or lack of flow.)

Given your deep dive into early modern Chinese medicine, do you see any suggestive parallels between these types of psychosomatic correspondences? Or is it simply misguided to compare and contrast them? Is this merely apples and oranges? . . . Moreover, is there anything inevitable or ‘objective’ about the way that certain organs are mapped onto certain affects or symptoms? In our own old European legacy, we still think of courage as somehow located in the gallbladder, or melancholy in the spleen. Just as leeches are making a comeback in some modern hospitals, since they do in fact have excellent blood-congealing and cleaning properties, might there be something actually, empirically *true* about some of the old humoral understandings of the body?

CARLA: I love the idea of affect as a kind of fascia that holds people close. And in my experience of the history of Chinese medicine, the kind of correlative correspondence that you mention (with a symptom correlated with a color, a season, an organ, etc., often subsumed under the rubric of the ‘5 Phases’ or *wuxing*) also acts as a kind of fascia that does that. The *wuxing* might be understood as a kind of cosmic fascia, holding not only people but all things under heaven (as the saying goes) close, in a sense. And insofar as *qigong* is efficacious as a healing practice, it relies on that fascia as substrate for its effects.

If understood that way, then both *qigong* and psychoanalysis might free the psyche, as you put it, by grounding or rooting it within a context of relationships that the practitioner/patient finds themselves within: in the one case with the cosmos and everything inside of it, in the other case with the analyst and a story-telling fabric of people, objects, experiences, and ideas from the past, present,

and future. In both cases, the self is what it is only and always as it emerges from a system of constantly metamorphosing relations with others, where the possible metamorphoses are bounded by certain rules or norms that govern the entities in the system.

In my experience, the frequency of psychoanalytic meetings (3–4 times per week, every week, for years) is crucial for making that possible in an analytic context: people without experience in analysis are always shocked by how often I meet with my analyst. And if your model for psychotherapy looks like meeting with your therapist for an hour every three weeks, I get it: psychoanalysis sounds like a part-time job. And it is a huge commitment of time and attention. But that frequency is necessary in order to collaboratively make the tissue, the fascia, that allows the work to be done. And that work extends to not only how you experience the relationship between your thoughts, or your experience of your relationships, but also how you inhabit your physical body. So I think there's a kind of correspondence at work that shapes things at the level of organs, there, too.

DOMINIC: The idea of analysis itself building up the 'tissue' (discursive, affective) necessary for the continuation and deepening of the process itself intrigues me. As already mentioned, through the power of inwardly-focused attention—and the corresponding movements—fascia allows all those separate organs to function fully as a *qi*-infused organism. A lot of the practice is about reinforcing proper relations, scales, and boundaries. When meditating, we are encouraged to think of our body as a sponge, floating in an ocean of *qi*. We are to invite fresh infusions of this universal energy into our system. When practicing as a group in 'real life,' we might also practice 'group healing' in which the famous 'ommm' sound links everyone in the room, in a kind of improvised chord/cord; or—better—sonic fascia. On the one hand, you are 'working on yourself' as it were—piece by piece (even as each piece is indexed to the whole). But on the other hand, you are working with alterity: other people, the environment, the weather, the time of day, the time of year, the world mood, and so on. At the end of the day, however, you must do 'the grand closing' to 'seal in' all the good *qi* that you just borrowed from the universe. (An action which leaves you still tingling with a sense of recent cosmic connection, but also a re-traced sense of subjective distinction from the General Flow of Things.)

In the case of psychoanalysis, there is a lot of talk about transference and counter-transference, where the analysand projects a lot of 'stuff' onto the analyst, which in turn is reflected or refracted back in various ways. But if we continue the fascia metaphor or conceit, there arises a question to what degree the process might be considered to be transindividual, or co-constitutive. As we may ask with

all intimate, dynamic relationships, is there a kind of ‘inter-body’ or ‘meta-mind’ being created between two monads . . . a bridge that recreates or redefines the two sides of the bank that it is spanning in real-time (so to speak)?

You’ve written a book about a foundational medical text, and the way that pharmacological knowledge is produced through discourse; through narration, and the act of cataloging, writing, describing, and so on. Your latest book ingeniously stages a meeting between a group of translators who lived and worked in different contexts, but whom—thanks to your own methodological innovation—are now exhumed and learning from each other. (Or arguing with each other, or both.) These are all forms of transduction, I suppose, or transindividuation.

Can you say a bit more about how your ‘philosophy’ of knowledge creation and sharing also influences the way you approach ‘the talking cure’? Can you see connections to your key themes or techniques, when it comes to making sense of your own past, rather than the past of, say, ‘China’ (considered, falsely, of course, as a unified entity). Does your habit of teasing at the loose threads also apply when thinking about your own history, on the level of the self, of the individual?

CARLA: As a historian, one of the most interesting aspects of the psychoanalytic process, for me, is how it throws into relief the relationship between something we might call ‘the past,’ and my own past. This is where scale becomes interesting. My own past comes into being, as object, insofar as it’s shaped by the past of my family: not only the scales of the dialogic (in terms of the psychoanalytic encounter) and the familial are relevant here, but also the generational becomes a vital scale to think with, especially when you’re looking at histories of trauma and the way they shape histories of selves, families, generations.

Time and its materiality become a crucible for a kind of alchemy with individuals and their combinations, and this creates what we retrospectively identify and understand to be ‘history’ at these scales. The historical individual exists in, and is created by, time. And we know that time works differently at different points in the generation of an individual: think of the difference between the temporality of germination, for example, in contrast to the temporality of growth and harvest, in vegetal histories. Germination, growth, maturity, harvest: these are distinct ways of bringing forth an individual through energetic and material relations in time. And so, if history is an art of storytelling in time, and time itself doesn’t

stay stable in the course of the history of a single plant or person, it follows that making sense of the past (my past, our past) at different scales is always going to be a creative and provisional act. There is no one true story. There are ways of getting history wrong, but there aren't, I would argue, ways of getting it right. The psychoanalytic encounter seems to work along those lines: it gives a patient access to experiences of time that might otherwise remain distant or unknowable, and access to a collaborative storytelling partner that helps to identify and relate objects and individuals that swim in those temporalities.

I keep using the term 'scale' here, but perhaps that deserves some rethinking, too. Like time periods and historical eras, which don't exist of themselves but instead serve as tools to work with and lenses to look through when we try to tell stories about the past and its relationships to the present and future (...whatever and whenever those are, as I'm not sure the present or future exist in any real, experienced way...) maybe scale functions similarly. The self, the family, the generation, the nation, the planet: we can think of all of these as simply ways of relating and combining individuals in time, if we understand 'individual' to be something like the object in our immediate view that we recognize as an object when we look, and that disappears when we look away.

DOMINIC: This makes me think of those grueling training regimes and rituals that one might encounter in Shaolin Temple, and other such disciplinary centers. Time becomes the medium of literally in-corporating techniques that both enhance the powers and sensitivities of the self, while evacuating the snares and false detours of the ego. The more organically you can embody a tradition—connected by the fascia of pedagogy—the more successfully you simultaneously shed and honor your own singularity. Perhaps if *qigong* and psychoanalysis were indeed personified, and encountered each other while walking in opposite directions in the forest, they would recognize a certain *yin* within each other's *yang*. Psychoanalysis might walk on understanding itself as a martial art of the mind, while *qigong* would intuit itself as a dynamic, physical form of psychoanalysis. (More a case of 'psycheanalysis,' involving the whole soul.)

I suppose I'm circling a couple of inchoate thoughts or questions: the first being something about the extent to which psychoanalysis is not the narcissistic, individualistic indulgence it is so often caricatured to be, but rather something much more transductive, collaborative, or (however you want to imagine this) 'pluralizing.' Does it play with, stretch, test, etc. the borders of self—whether historically, in the present, or in a hoped-for future—in order to help reinforce the potential and flourishing of the individual? Or is there a larger cohesive project going on, on a different scale or register?

The second inchoate thought or question is related, in terms of the vulgar distinction between body and mind. Again, psychoanalysis is considered to prioritize the mind, even as many symptoms present themselves through the body. (How could they not?) . . . But might there be a way to be a bit less blunt or Cartesian about health, and not divide things up as, on the one side, physiological health, and on the other, mental health. Of course there are many practitioners, in many traditions, that consider themselves ‘holistic’ because they see a person as a mobius strip, when it comes to the impossibility of definitely separating the mind from the body. But have you found that you think of your body differently since you started analysis? Might certain physical symptoms or manifestations (or even pathologies) be something other than an effect caused by a psychic blockage or trauma?

(I’m thinking how Funkadelic have a song: “Free your mind and your ass will follow” . . . but Freud’s legacy—especially Wilhelm Reich—sought to flip this equation in certain ways . . . “free your ass, and your mind will follow.”)

CARLA: So, I’ll start by saying that I definitely don’t experience psychoanalysis as a ‘narcissistic, individualistic indulgence’: as a human, a writer, and a historian, I really have experienced it as being vital to all three of those selves. There’s something about the way vocalized language—and here I’m thinking of your ‘sonic fascia,’ as the voice is crucial—changes what/where/how the body is, how it’s experienced, what its boundaries are, and who it encompasses.

(One really fascinating aspect of all of this, as I mentioned earlier, is that I began psychoanalysis via cell phone during the pandemic, and we’ve continued as such. I’ve never met my analyst in person: I’ve never been to his office. We talk about this aspect of our analysis, sometimes, and I think the COVID era of medical and therapeutic treatment has raised all sorts of new ways of thinking and practicing the relationship between the physical and virtual experiences of the body...and perhaps further undoing (or at least changing) what so many of us often assume to be a divide or difference between the virtual and physical. There’s a lot you can do, in other words, just using the [tech-mediated] voice.)

I’m struck by your description of the *san jiao* as ‘cling wrap,’ and I’m thinking about whether and how that phenomenon translates to the analytic setting. I think, for me, there is an important kind of work that the practice of analysis does as a kind of bringing-together: not necessarily in creating a ‘meta-mind’

or transindividual, because I do have a clear sense of the distinctness of analyst and analysand in that relation. But maybe there's another sense in which there is a kind of binding together in that analysis (for me) does help alleviate a sense of being alone in the world: you're always there with not only your analyst but also your past selves, the selves that emerge from your various relations...so what kind of binding is that? I think the conversation does become a kind of collaborative weaving, but when I think of fabric I think of openness and porosity, and when I think of cling wrap there's a kind of plastic closedness that doesn't quite work in this context. I'm not sure that it's the fabric (or fascia) that's important, so much as the weaving or tissue-forming process.

DOMINIC: Yes, agreed. The weaving process itself is key!

What we're calling fascia, or *san jiao*, has an extra-somatic equivalent; no less essential for being hard to see or grasp. This is a way of pointing to the various abstract, but consequential, tissues that scaffold and connect us: language, gesture, affect, mood, empathy, attention, love, Bjork humor, media, technology, education, ideology, the social contract, the superego, architecture, and so on. Indeed, they don't just *connect* us, after the fact, but *create, shape, and generate* us in very literal ways—the synapses creating the nodes. (It's the task of media studies especially to log the distinctive affordances of each, so that we're not simply talking in vague, hot-swappable generalities.)

In this context I think about singing, especially singing with others. The voice is arguably the most intimate and personal part of ourselves: a sonic signature of our singularity. But it is also a way to weave ourselves with others to the degree that we lose ourselves; at least temporarily, and in the best sense. (So we can return to ourselves restored and re-energized.) In his book, *Morning Star*, Karl Knausgaard (2021) uses the example of a choir to illustrate his belated epiphany that, "Meaning wasn't in me, meaning wasn't in another, meaning arose in the encounter between us" (64). Another Scandinavian, Bjork, also equates singing with a literal bonding function, not just between mother and child, but also Icelandic citizens in general. (Or anyone interested enough to learn the songs.) For his part, and in a different register, the Reverend Al Sharpton puts this specific fascia into a more urgent and historical context, in the recent documentary, *The Summer of Soul*: "Gospel was more than religious," he notes. "Gospel was the therapy for the stress and pressure of being Black in America. We didn't go to a psychiatrist, we didn't go lay on a couch, we didn't know anything about therapists, but we knew Mahalia Jackson." This brings us back to psychoanalysis, suggesting that even lying on a sofa, and attempting to articulate one's personal pain, is a bodily

experience: to cease biting one's tongue, to let the larynx take the shape of your trauma (for everyone has trauma, to differing degrees), to sing this experience and burden into a different kind of exo-somatic being, is a soulful achievement. The question then becomes one of valence: how many connections can you cultivate and sustain—for what purpose, and for how long—between not only yourself and a therapist, but a choir, a community, a generation, and so on?

The question—or even mystery—that has obsessed me my entire adult life, is individuation. How does it happen? What stubborn private particles allow for what we call 'character' or even 'spirit,' in contrast to the generic nature or condition of being? How does singularity trouble or emerge from Giorgio Agamben (1990) called "whateverbeing"? And how does whateverness per se insist or persist in the individual? (An individual who is also, always already, "dividual," as Deleuze insisted). This is why I think the recent work on transindividuation is so important and fascinating. It allows a political critique informed by a deeper understanding of ontological condition. (And I mean 'political' in the sense of making a clear diagnosis of the challenges we face—challenges deliberately assembled and exacerbated, in many ways, by the elites—to hinder us living up to our potential as bodies, minds, souls, together). Freeing ourselves from tyranny—as those inspiring intellectuals in the 1960s and 70s saw—was not simply becoming Marxist, and seizing the modes of production, but also becoming neo-Freudian, in the sense of taking more control of the means of (self)-perception. (Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Frantz Fanon, early Wilhelm Reich, etc.)

In short, I wonder if we need to ultimately choose between Team Leibniz, in which the individual is very much a monad, withdrawn from any true communication or contact, or Team Spinoza, in which the individual is but an extension of the one indivisible substance . . . all different fungal shoots, connected to the same mycelium. Rather than toggle between self and world, or self and society, what about smaller units or sub-systems: the dyad, the polycule, the sense8, the phalanstery, and so on? (Something Roland Barthes (2013) became very interested in, later in his life—the 'medium-sized community.')

We all know, on a cognitive level, that we can't control the world, but we *can* control—at least to a significant degree—our relationship to it (something not quite captured by the word 'agency'). But *feeling* this knowledge, and incorporating it, living it, enacting it—well, that is another matter.

One way we can create pathways to alternative futures is through language. If we can name something, we can bring various corollaries or iterations into being. This is one of the main lessons we're belatedly learning from Sylvia Wynter: that language is not merely cultural or symbolic but can literally penetrate and inhabit the body—and especially the neo-cortex—acting as a Trojan horse for racist reflexes, among other semio-physiological phenomena. This more-than-linguistic power of language is also one of the reasons why I have a high tolerance for Lacan's terrible puns, even in French. So to say, 'fasciaism' is a rather awkward term. But it could also name a counter-force to fascism. *Fasciasm*: a very different kind of connecting tissue that works on the body politic in non-exclusionary, compassionate ways.ⁱ

CARLA: I've gone through so many variations, over the years, of attempts to make sense of my own sense of individuality: where is it, how is it, where does it come from, what responsibilities does it entail. What conditions or circumstances—what contexts—drive us to feel that asserting our individuality is important, why do we seek to be recognized as individuals by the other, and in what does that individuality inhere: is it something that exists at a given point in time? Or is it necessarily diachronic, only emerging from, or as, a particular genealogy in time? (In other words, is my individuality always an ongoing process, resisting static description?).

I keep being drawn back to your image of the mycelium, that sometimes vast network out of sight that sends up the fruits that we see and recognize as (sometimes tasty, sometimes toxic) individuals. Am I just a fruiting body of something much larger and ultimately unmappable that holds me and forms me, that sends me out with one mission: send something out into the world, that it might land somewhere and itself become part of the mycelial network, and on and on... I find myself thinking, lately, amid the general mortality stuff marking the past year or so, of what it might be that I send off into the world before the fruit of me rots back into the ground to nourish the fungal fascia—is it a fungal fascia? And I keep coming back to this: be here, say what you have to say. That sounds so easy, doesn't it? So simple. And some of us find it so hard to authorize ourselves to do it.

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