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Giorgio Agamben and Resistance: bridging the consulting room and the political in the Anthropocene age

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In a recent cross-cultural study, Caroline Hickman et. al. (2021) found that children and young adults experience eco-distress as a result of the realities of climate change and the abject failure of political leaders to take meaningful and effective action. "Young people," they write, "are vulnerable to developing mental health problems through multiple psychosocial risk factors, lack of services, and chronic stress" (p.3). The intersection of mental health struggles and larger systemic political, economic, and cultural realities is not new. Freud recognized the cultural impact of sexual repression on psychic health. Decades later, psychiatrist Franz Fanon (2008/1952), who worked with Algerian patients suffering the effects of brutal French colonization, argued that therapy aims (a) "to *'consciousnessize'* [the patient's] unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification," and (b) "to enable [the patient] to choose an action with respect to the *real source of the conflict*, i.e., the social structure" (p. 80; emphasis mine). Around the same time and on another continent, Ralph Ellison (1995/1953) depicted the aims of a psychiatric clinic in Harlem.

Ellison wrote, "Dr. Wertham and his interracial staff seek a modest achievement: to give each bewildered patient an insight into the relation between his problems and his environment, and out of this understanding to reforge the will" (p.302). Both Fanon and Wertham,[1] building on Freud's work, recognized the intersection of the therapy room and larger political realities, and they aimed to facilitate patients' resistances and resiliencies toward the real social-political sources of their suffering. Unfortunately, more often than not, therapists of many schools, for various reasons, tend to bifurcate the consulting room and political spaces, which, in cases where systemic realities are the main sources of psychological distress, ends up mystifying the sources of patients' suffering and, at the same time, colluding with these political-economic apparatuses[2] (Cushman, 1995;

[1] Sally Weintrobe (2021) comments that "(M)ost discussions of psychology take insufficient account of politics" (p.13). Her observation, it seems to me, is correct, though there are analysts who have sought to address any of a number of political issues, such as analysts who have addressed issues of racism (Altman, 2000, 2004; Dalal, 2002), classism (Gherovici & Christian, 2019; Layton, Hollander, & Gutwill, 2006), and systemic social, cultural, and political realities associated with climate change (Hamilton, 2012; Hoggett, 2012; Kassouf, 2017; Orange, 2017; Pihkala, 2019; Weintrobe, 2021). I add that Andrew Samuels (1993, 2001, 2004) has long been interested in the understanding the development of political selves.

[2] For Giorgi Agamben (2009), the term "apparatus" refers to "a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings" (p.13). Referencing Foucault, Agamben writes that "in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create—through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge—docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their 'freedom' as subjects" (p.19).

LaMothe, 2018; Layton, 2020). Because of the social-political realities of climate change, as Hickman et. al.'s research attests, therapists of all persuasions do not have the luxury of ignoring these systemic apparatuses on patients' struggles, which means, like Fanon and Wertham, we need to reimagine, for some patients, the process of therapy vis-à-vis these larger realities. More particularly, psychoanalytic therapies can serve to facilitate political resistance and resilience toward apparatuses that undermine climate action and that concomitantly contribute to physical and psychological suffering of most human and other-than-human beings.

In this article, the works of political philosopher Giorgio Agamben are used, along with psychoanalytic developmental perspectives, to reframe resistance and to bridge the consulting room with the political-economic realities associated with climate change. In brief, I argue that the capacity for resistance initially emerges within the context of good-enough parental attunement that founds a space of "speaking" and acting together with infants. Put differently, parental attunements provide pre-representational trust and confidence for infants to risk appearing (nascent agency), to risk actualizing their potentiality without exhausting it, which gives rise to pre-representational organizations of singularity that serve later as unthought knowns.

Ongoing parental care facilitates the next step in this process, which is actualization of the capacities for symbolization, mentalization, agency, and *inoperativity*—a central feature of varied forms of adult resistance. The process of psychoanalytic therapy, for some patients, can be conceptualized as providing a space of speaking and acting together that 1) *'consciousnessizes'* [the patient's] unconscious, to use Fanon's term, and 2) elicits unthought knowns associated with semiotic experiences of rapport and singularity that are foundational for the capacity for and exercise of inoperativity in relation to systemic apparatuses that undermine well-being. Indeed, therapy itself can be seen as a process that renders inoperative those social, political, and economic apparatuses that undermine physical and psychological well-being through marginalization and oppression. I will illustrate this view of therapy by providing a brief clinical case.

There are a few clarifications to address before beginning. First, the use of political philosophers to reframe aspects of psychoanalysis is not simply an interdisciplinary approach and endeavor; it is also to claim that these disciplines intersect, indicating that the consulting room and the political sphere are inextricably yoked. They are distinct, but not separate. Second and relatedly, a political philosophical perspective offers opportunities to reconsider, in part, psychoanalytical concepts and therapies, which, given the dire present and future realities of climate change, needs to happen. As Clayton Crockett (2012) exclaims, "We need to experiment radically with new ways of thinking and living, because the current paradigm is in a state of exhaustion, depletion, and death" (p.165). Third, the perspective offered here, in my view, has roots in the very origins of psychoanalysis when Anna O (Bertha Pappenheim) initiated the talking cure by resisting Freud's patriarchal medical approach (Breger, 2000, pp.103-110). Bertha, in other words, rendered inoperative the patriarchal apparatuses by speaking and demanding to be heard. To Freud's credit, he listened, confirming Bertha's singularity—a singularity that founds inoperativity/resistance. Bertha Pappenheim went on to become a well-known

social activist, continuing to render inoperative political and cultural apparatuses that undermined the psychosocial-political well-being of girls and women.

Inoperativity and Political-Economic Apparatuses

To depict the emergence of resistance as inoperativity from a developmental perspective, it is necessary to take some time to unpack Agamben's understanding of inoperativity and how it is related to apparatuses. We must begin with Agamben's reframing Aristotle's view of potentiality and actuality. Aristotle posited a relation between potentiality (*dynamis*) and actualization (*energeia*). We do not need delve into the complexities of Aristotle's philosophy to address how Agamben is using this concept. For Agamben, the Western philosophical tradition has largely "subordinated potentiality to actuality: so, we begin with the actual, speaking humans and their political and artistic productions, and we see potentiality at present as a capacity or skill that is defined by the final action.

We see potentiality as secondary or accidental" (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p.188). This is derived, in part, from Aristotle's notion that "actuality is prior to potentiality" (in Ugilt, 2014, p.26), though this does not mean that Aristotle believed that "potentiality exists only in actuality" (Agamben, 1999, p.180). From Agamben's perspective, there are two features of Aristotle's views. First is that "the very essence of humanity lies in a potentiality that is expressed when it does not unfold into actuality" (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p.289). This is a key point regarding the relation between potentiality and impotentiality. He (1999) writes:

> *Other living beings are capable only of their specific potentiality; they can only do this or that. But human beings are the animals who are capable of their own impotentiality. The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality.* Here it is possible to see how the root of freedom is to be found in the abyss of potentiality. To be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing, nor is it simply to have the power to refuse to do this or that thing. To be free is…*to be capable of one's own impotentiality*. (pp.182-183).

To illustrate this complex discussion, Agamben turns to Herman Melville's Bartleby, The Scrivener. Bartleby is told by his boss to do something and Bartleby replies, "I prefer not to." For Agamben, Bartleby is choosing to *not actualize his potentiality*, which is demanded by his boss who, in my view, represents the demands of larger capitalist apparatuses. The moment of impotentiality means, in part, that Bartleby is not determined and cannot be determined (in the sense of being commanded by others) by the political-economic apparatuses that are aimed at defining his subjectivity and requiring him to actualize his potentiality. Colebrook and Maxwell (2016) add that "To have potentiality is to be capable of not becoming what one has the capacity to be" (p.38) or what one is expected to be.

A second key idea here is "that potentiality is not exhausted in its own actualization" (Ugilt, 2014, p.25). Potentiality is never fully actualized. In other words, potentiality is what marks all living beings, but human beings have the capacity not to

actualize potential (impotentiality) *and* even in actualizing potentiality, never exhaust it.[3] In referencing Agamben's works, Ugilt notes that "Potentiality as such is a potentiality that relates only to potentiality itself; it is a potential potentiality…. potentiality takes ontological priority over actuality" (p.25). While quite abstract, this means that human beings, for Agamben, are not defined or determined by a particular telos. We can say that human beings have ends, but these ends do not determine human beings because human beings *qua* human beings are, for Agamben, defined by their potentiality. In short, "To say that something has potentiality is to say that it does not unfold like a programmed mechanism, and does not simply become what it already is" (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, pp.37-38).

While human beings do not unfold like a programmed mechanism, their subjectivities, as Agamben recognizes, are nevertheless shaped by social, political, and economic apparatuses (Prozorov, 2014, p.24). This is where the concept of inoperativity comes into play. For Agamben, "inoperativity" means to deactivate the functioning of the apparatuses, which does not mean that these apparatuses do not continue to operate or do not continue to have effects (pp.31-34). Put another way, inoperativity vis-à-vis the subject means that she is not captive to the grammar of the apparatuses, even if they continue to have their effects. Bartleby, for instance, rendered inoperative the capitalistic apparatuses by choosing not to actualize his potentiality (impotentiality), though the end result was tragic.

I want to stress that inoperativity is, for Agamben (2004), not passive (p.134). That is, inoperativity or "preferring not" does not "affirm inertia, inactivity or apraxia…but [is] a form of praxis that is devoid of any telos or task, does not realize any essence and does not correspond to any nature" (p.33). Inoperativity, then, is any action of impotentiality that does not actualize what is expected by society's apparatuses. Bartleby's "I would prefer not" is one example. Martin Luther King's (and others') nonviolent protests is another illustration of rendering inoperative the violence of racist apparatuses. In other words, King's nonviolent actions were acts of impotentiality in that he was not allowing racist apparatuses to determine his subjectivity; that is, to actualize or act on his fear and hatred. Other recent examples of the impotentiality of inoperativity, with regard to climate change, are eco-villages, where people prefer not to operate out of the apparatuses of neoliberal capitalism.

While Agamben does not use the term "resistance," it is possible to interpret inoperativity as a form of resistance that preserves, in the case of Bartleby, his potentiality by way of living out his impotentiality. Bartleby, in preferring not to, resists his employer and capitalist apparatuses. This said, Agamben's philosophical discussion does not include addressing how people come to actualize potentiality or impotentiality, which leads me to turn to a developmental perspective that offers a way of thinking about the emergence of resistance as inoperativity.

[3] For Agamben (2004), his idea of potentiality/actuality refers to animals, as well. This is his way of attempting to avoid the Western tendency to separate human beings from animals. There are distinctions, but distinctions are not separation.

Psychosocial Development and Resistance

Philosopher John Macmurray (1991) writes that the infant "is, in fact, 'adapted', so to speak paradoxically, to being unadapted, 'adapted to complete dependence'…. He can only live through other people" (pp.8, 51). In infants' unadapted, dependent-vulnerable state, they possess an impulse or motivation to communicate—"the impulse to communicate is [their] sole adaptation to the world" (p.60). Of course, infants' side of the relational communication is by definition without speech ("infant" means without speech), yet good-enough parents "dialogue" with their infants. Dialogue is in quotes because it is not really a dialogue between parents and infants, though both parties are communicating. It is more apt to call this a communicative space, wherein parents have proto-conversations with their infants (Bonovitz & Harlem, 2018; Trevarthen, 1993; Levin & Trevarthen, 2000), which points to a later *potential* for semantic dialogue that is present in their communicative interactions. This communicative space or space of speaking and acting together is pre-political in that infants,[4] while possessing a nascent agency, lack political agency, though it is potential.

Erik Erikson (1982) also considers the first stage of psychosocial development in terms of a "dialogue" between parent and infant, wherein the parents' "almost unrestricted attentiveness and generosity" give rise to the child's basic trust (p.35). On the parents' side of the dialogue, unrestricted attentiveness and generosity represents consistent personal recognition (recognizing children as unique, inviolable, valued, and responsive) and attunement to infants' assertions and this attunement includes repairs or "therapeutic adaptations" (Winnicott, 1990, p.127) to inevitable mismatches between parents and infants (see Safron, & Muran, 1996, 2000; Tronick & Cohn, 1989).[5] These mismatches can give rise to anxiety and mistrust, but when repaired, trust is restored and deepened. It should be stressed that repair is a mutual effort in that infants signal distress—suggesting a nascent agency—and good-enough parents respond appropriately. A notable feature of this perspective is that parents' reliable *care precedes and is foundational to infants' experiences of trust, which is necessary for their speaking and acting together*.

Agamben contends that moving from potentiality to actuality means persons "must suffer an alteration," becoming other than or more than they were (Agamben, 1999, p.179). I suggest that parents' personal recognition and attunement serve as the ground for infants' actualizing their potentiality vis-à-vis nascent agency, which comprises pre-representational or semiotic organizations of self-esteem, self-respect, and

[4] For those readers unfamiliar with Hannah Arendt's (1958) political philosophy, she argues that the polis consists of members speaking and acting together, which is, for her, the space of appearances. Arendt does not consider this space to apply to early infancy, yet it is clear that parents-infants "speak" and act together and children "appear" in this space. By appearing, I mean risking asserting their desires and needs, which implies nascent agency.

[5] Arendt (2005) also argues that political spaces of appearances are fraught with failures or broken promises and for a polis to be viable, there must be apparatuses that support acts of forgiveness that repair the space of appearances. I am suggesting that this parallels the pre-political space where good-enough parents with their children repair relational disruptions.

self-confidence.[6] Put another way, the unfolding of infants' potentiality for and partial actualization of agency is contingent on good-enough parental care and attends presymbolic experiences of singularity and excess (actualization does not exhaust potentiality).

It is important to stress that all of this takes place in relation, which means that singularity/excess is accompanied by an embodied sense of environmental rapport. Since excess, singularity, and rapport are semiotically organized, they can be framed in terms of what Christopher Bollas (1987) called unthought knowns. Simply stated, for Bollas, the unthought known is "that which is known, but not yet thought" (p.4) and "constitutes the core of one's being" (p.60). Bollas is using this term to explain adult experiences of rapport, which are connected to "the time when communicating took place primarily through this illusion of deep rapport of subject and object" (p.32). I am adding to his notion by suggesting that rapport is yoked to one's embodied, environmental experience of singularity and excess, which will, as seen below, serve as a seed of inoperative resistance.

There is one other point of concern. A reason for indicating that agency is nascent is that infants, while having the potential for impotentiality, are not yet able to exercise impotentiality. That is, while having the potential capacity for inoperativity, infants are unable, at this point, to actualize inoperativity. Does this mean that infants are unable to resist? I think there is evidence in infant-parent research of infants appearing to resist intrusive parental interactions (Ackman, 2002; Ginot, 2012). It is also possible to hypothesize that, in routine moments of speaking and acting together, infants resist, at times, parents' ministrations. All of this, however, is a precursor to the resistance of inoperativity, because agency and freedom are not yet actualized.

To understand the movement to inoperative resistance, I begin with parents and especially those parents who care for their children in the midst of oppressive political-economic conditions, such as racism. These situations illustrate inoperative resistance in stark relief. Then I will pick back up with children, using an emended version of Winnicott's (1971) transitional objects. The parents of Ruby Sales and Martin Luther King Jr. cared for their children in the midst of the brutality and terror of the Jim Crow South. Ruby Sales recalls those early years and her parents care for her:

> I grew up in the heart of Southern apartheid. And I'm not saying that I didn't realize that it existed, but our parents were spiritual geniuses who created a world and a language where the notion that I was inadequate or inferior or less-than never touched my consciousness. I grew up believing that I was a first-class human being and a first-class person, and our parents were spiritual geniuses who were able to shape a counterculture of black

[6] Political philosopher Axel Honneth (1995) argues that a good-enough polis possesses apparatuses that provide citizens self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence, which are foundational to political agency. I am suggesting that the precursors to this agency are rooted in parent-infant relations.

> folk religion that raised us from disposability to being essential players in society.[7]

Martin Luther King Jr. (1998) similarly reflects on his childhood, especially the first conscious memory of the pain of racism. King wrote,

> My mother confronted the age-old problem of the Negro parent in America: how to explain discrimination and segregation to a small child. She taught me that I should feel a sense of "somebodiness" but that on the other hand I had to go out and face a system that stared men in the face every day saying you are "less than," you are "not equal to." (p.3)

Both Sales and King, as well as millions of other African American children, experienced the care of their parents (and communities) that founded senses of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect in the midst of political, cultural, and economic apparatuses that aimed at marginalizing African Americans from public-political spaces of speaking and acting together—attempts to enforce actualization of subjugated subjects. Their parents, in other words, acted on their impotentiality by rendering inoperative racist apparatuses in their care for their children.[8] Children's potential for inoperative resistance is initially evident in good-enough parents actualizing inoperativity through their care. Children, like Ruby, then, because of their parents' care, develop an embodied, global experience of rapport and singularity, which later serves as a seed for their inoperative resistance.

The question remains regarding how children move to actualizing their potential for inoperative resistance. Winnicott's notion of transitional objects can help elucidate this movement. The first transitional object[9] (e.g., blanket) represents parents' techniques of mothering or parental care (Winnicott, 1971, p.11). During moments of anxiety and separation from the parent, the infant "omnipotently" uses this initial object "to hold himself, to carry along with himself a part of his intimate and pleasing sensory experience; to *keep all parts of himself together* as it were" (Brody 1980, pp.580-81; emphasis added). I suggest that the parts of themselves held together are embodied experiences of singularity—embodied, pre-representational senses of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect. Put differently, infants' belief in omnipotence attends the fantasy of rapport with the object that founds infants' actualization of nascent agency.

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[7] Ruby Sales — Where Does It Hurt? | The On Being Project - The On Being Project accessed 14 December 2021.

[8] This does not mean that the parents and children did not suffer or that the parents' care was not impacted by racist apparatuses, as indicated in Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) memoir where he writes, "It was a loving house even as it was besieged by its country, but it *was* hard" (p.126). See also Kiese Laymon (2019).

[9] The earliest selection of a TO is in "accordance with its consistency, texture, size, volume, shape, and odor" (Kestenberg & Weinstein, 1978, p.89). The child unconsciously chooses a TO that represents the parent's care for the child and the earliest selection is, as Kestenberg and Weinstein suggest, an object that is not a cultural object—for example, a blanket or soft toy.

Winnicott did not differentiate between the transitional objects of early childhood and those of later childhood or adulthood.[10] Let me then suggest that a secondary transitional object emerges as children start to make use of cultural symbol systems. The object, which is selected from the cultural field, continues to represent parents' technique of caring and remains under children's omnipotent control. However, children's capacities for mentalization, narrative/symbolic organizations of experiences, and interpersonal agency are in the process of moving from potentiality to actuality. The secondary transitional object provides a space for children to speak and act together and to experience a sense of rapport with an object under their omnipotent control. In the process, children, who are vulnerable, gain confidence in making use of the symbol systems while speaking and acting together—exercising their agency. The exercise of agency includes initial acts of impotentiality. Since the object is under the child's omnipotent control, inoperativity can be seen in decisions not to play or to change the play with the object. In a child's imagination, the transitional object makes a demand for the child to do something and the child's response is "I would prefer not to." The child can risk impotentiality because there is sufficient trust (in fantasy) that rapport with the object will not be obliterated. I add that a child's very ability to exercise inoperative resistance is founded on parents' consistent good-enough care that provides a space for a child to actualize agency and a concomitant sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, all the while without losing a sense of rapport with the parent-object.

The secondary transitional object sets the stage for the next step, which is children learning to exercise their agency in public-political spaces of speaking and acting together. In many cases this transition is unremarkable, because children "discover" that their self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence (singularity) and agency are affirmed by the public-political apparatuses. Moreover, their exercise of impotentiality or inoperative resistance, while a bit anxiety evoking, does not threaten their rapport with others in the public realm. In other words, ideally the political-social-cultural field handles children's inoperative resistance. But this is not the case for children who grow up in oppressive political situations where the exercise of inoperative resistances vis-à-vis the political apparatuses results in varied forms of social, cultural, and political coercion and violence. I mentioned Martin Luther King and Ruby Sales above, but we can include other activists like Rosa Parks, Frederick Douglass, Fannie Lou Hammer and many

[10] There are two difficulties with Winnicott's use of the term "transitional objects" in referring to cultural objects (in particular religious objects). First, on its face, Winnicott's assumption that transitional objects are present in adult life (e.g., religion, art, and science), vis-à-vis illusion and reality, seems correct. However, the psychosocial achievements of adulthood clearly indicate that adult object usage and the infant's use of objects are not identical (Busch, Nagera, McKnight, & Pezzarossi 1973; Brody 1980). For instance, Winnicott states that the TOs in infancy and childhood are idiosyncratic and not shared. There is a solipsistic aspect to the child's use of the TO, even in the presence of caregivers. The "TOs" of adulthood, on the other hand, are often shared. Second, Winnicott contends that the TO of infancy represents the "technique of mothering," which does not necessarily fit well with adult cultural activities. When, for example, we consider religious objects, we find that they are much more complex with regard to use, function, and representation than the transitional objects associated with infancy and childhood. Nevertheless, I would argue that transitional objects in adulthood represent, in part, unthought knowns.

others. These activists were able to exercise inoperative resistance in the face of considerable negative responses, including death threats and the assassinations of colleagues (Patterson, 1982). They rendered inoperative, in other words, the apparatuses of white supremacy. They were able to do so, I suggest, because they carried the unthought known of what "constitutes the core of one's being" (p.60)—a deep rapport that attends senses of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence.

It is important to stress that inoperative resistance does not mean that oppressive apparatuses no longer have their effects, which is clear when one reads the history of racism in the United States. Agamben is claiming that inoperativity concerns persons' decisions not to actualize what the apparatuses are demanding or expecting. For example, King's nonviolence included recognizing and treating racists as persons, which meant King made inoperative the apparatuses' illusions of black inferiority and white superiority. King, we can imagine, said, "I would prefer not to construct human beings as inferior or superior." While he and many others worked to resist racist apparatuses, these apparatuses continued to operate, having significant negative impacts on millions of people (Porter, 2020).

I want to add one more point, using Martin Luther King as an illustration. In his autobiography, King recalled an evening when he lay his head on the kitchen table, psychologically and physically weary. He confessed to God his weakness, lack of courage, and fear. In response to his pleas, King (1998) heard a quiet, assuring voice say: "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you. Even until the end of the world" (pp. 77–78). King recalled, "At that moment I experienced the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything" (p. 78). I interpret King's resolve to continue resisting the forces arrayed against African Americans as inoperativity that is linked to early experiences of singularity/excess and relational rapport—unthought known. This experience of speaking and acting together with God constituted the core of his being (Bollas, 1987, p.60)—a core grounded in embodied, relational experiences of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, which were not connected to racist apparatuses. There was a deep sense of rapport in this experience, which in my view is connected to an unthought known. In other words, King's renewed agency, fueled by this unthought known, was, in part, an agency of impotentiality vis-à-vis the apparatuses racial injustice.

Inoperative Resistance and Climate Change

This discussion of inoperative resistance now turns to climate change, its impacts on psychological well-being, and therapy as cultivating inoperative resistance. The scientific data regarding climate change is readily available and it is overwhelming and frightening.[11] Add to this the array of powerful political and economic apparatuses (e.g., nationalism, new iterations of imperialism/colonization, and global neoliberal capitalism) that psychoanalysts (e.g., Hamilton, 2012; Hoggett, 2012; Orange, 2017; Weintrobe,

[11] For those who may be interested in some of the research, I suggest the following website: Sixth Assessment Report (ipcc.ch) accessed 1 December 2021; NASA: Climate Change and Global Warming accessed 1 December 2021.

2021) and others (e.g., Klein, 2014; Kolbert, 2014; Moore, 2016; Northcott, 2017) have recognized as obstacles to climate action-social-political and economic hegemons that continue to exploit billions of human beings, other-than-human species, and the earth. Indeed, the realities of climate change continually reveal the prevalence of classism, racism, sexism, speciesism, and other forms of marginalization and oppression. This said, even among the economically and politically privileged, rates of eco-distress, eco-anxiety, and eco-despair are rising, especially and understandably among the young (Hickman, et.al., 2021).

When considering the raft of scientific evidence and systemic obstacles, one scientist, responding to a reporter's question about the chances of redirecting the trajectory of climate change, said, "We're fucked" (Dufresne, 2019, p.93). And yet, there are numerous examples of groups (e.g., Green Peace, Extinction Rebellion, Global Green Growth Institute) engaged in climate protests and actively engaged in seeking remedies that are independent of the apparatuses of capitalism and nationalism. There are also eco-villages in Europe, Africa, the United States, and other locations throughout the world. In my view, these groups are rendering the apparatuses that obstruct climate action inoperative. They are collectively "preferring not" (impotentiality) to actualize these apparatuses' expectations or demands (e.g., capitalist subjects).

Let me shift from this macro perspective to the consulting room. The American Psychiatric Association[12] recognizes that climate change negatively effects mental health, and many therapists of all persuasions are encountering patients who are experiencing eco-anxiety, eco-grief, eco-despair, and eco-betrayal (Whitcomb, 2021). Of course, it is important to help people cope with various feelings and thoughts associated with climate change. The key term here is "cope." Coping may mean finding ways to manage feelings so they do not interfere with one's living with a sense of meaning and creativity.

This is certainly important, but it is only part of the answer. Consider Fanon's situation of working with Algerian patients suffering the effects of vicious French colonization. As a psychiatrist, Fanon was not simply interested in helping people cope with their suffering through therapy and medication. He also helped patients become more conscious of the real social-political sources of their suffering with the added aim of choosing an action toward those sources. Mental health clinicians working in the Lafargue clinic in Harlem similarly recognized that the aims of therapy entailed consciousness raising and facilitating resistance and resiliency toward the real sources of systemic racism. If Fanon and the Lafargue clinic had only been interested in helping patients cope, they would have colluded with the apparatuses of oppression and mystified the sources of their patients' sufferings. To cope and to choose an action toward the real social-political sources of suffering were the therapeutic aims. The various "actions" could fall under the headings of revolutionary violence and nonviolence, both of which can be considered attempts to render inoperative the apparatuses of oppression.

When it comes to climate change and the global apparatuses that not only impede taking effective action, but also undermine the mental and physical health of millions of people, therapy, in my view, should have the twin aims of helping people cope and facilitating awareness toward the real sources of suffering. Patients then can choose an

[12] Climate Change and Mental Health Connections (psychiatry.org) accessed 17 December 2021.

action toward these sources—an action that renders these apparatuses inoperative. To simply focus on patients' developmental history and unconscious fantasies is not sufficient and, worse, it can collude with apparatuses and mystify the sources of their suffering. In brief, given the realities of climate change, I suggest, that for some patients we conceptualize psychoanalytic therapy as aiming to 1) empathically process eco-distress and eco-grief (coping), 2) raise consciousness about the possible illusions patients hold vis-à-vis climate change and its sources, 3) facilitate the identification of social, political, and cultural apparatuses implicated in patients' sufferings, and 4) foster patients'[13] capacity for inoperativity vis-à-vis the real sources of climate change and obstacles to climate action.

Psychoanalytic therapists are well acquainted with the first two aims, which are necessarily prior to the third and fourth aims. The capacity for inoperativity may be strictly individual in the sense that a patient decides "to prefer not" to engage in social, political, and economic activities that are clearly linked to climate change. A patient may decide to leave her job, because the company is a known polluter or an oil and gas company. While the exercise of individual inoperative resistance is fine, in the era of climate change with all of its macro-obstacles, inoperativity is best practiced in groups where people can experience emotional support in their varied actions of resistance to hegemonic apparatuses.

It is important to point out that, for Agamben, inoperativity does not immunize one from suffering the slings and arrows of the apparatuses. Inoperative actions toward the obstacles to effective climate action deactivate these apparatuses in the present, yet these apparatuses can and do continue to inflict environmental damage. Inoperativity, in other words, is not contingent on the goal of overturning the apparatuses, even though that might be desired. "To prefer not," then, is analogous to a categorical imperative in that one simply prefers not in the present without expecting or hoping that rendering an apparatus inoperative will result in the demise of the apparatus.

Case Illustration

Linda is 32 years old, married with two children (ages 5, 7), and an engineer. In the space of one year, Linda was offered a significant promotion that required both more travel and entailed heavier work demands, and her mother was tragically killed in a car accident. Linda was close to her mother and she sought therapy to deal with her grief, as well as the new challenges she faced at work. I will skip over the work she did to adapt to her new work schedule and to her process of grief and focus on the sessions that ensued after she brought up the subject of climate change. The issue of climate change, I need to point out, was not the only topic in these and later sessions. So, I am condensing our conversations to focus on Linda's experiences regarding climate change.

At one session, Linda arrived frazzled. Over the weekend, while her husband, with some other fathers, took the kids to the zoo, Linda began reading a current scientific report on the present and future realities of climate change. The data was overwhelming

[13] Let me stress that I am referring to a particular segment of the patient population. That is, my proposal does not refer to all patients, just as Fanon was referring to patients where it was clear that the sources of their suffering were social, political, and economic.

and Linda began feeling more anxious, especially when she considered her children's future. It was not that she was oblivious to climate change, because it is and was often in the news. Years earlier, she and her husband had had conversations that led to purchasing hybrid vehicles, recycling, not using harmful chemicals on their lawn, etc. That evening, when the kids were in bed, Linda related to her husband her thoughts and feelings about the report. He listened and agreed that, at times, he, too, worried about the future, but he managed this by simply focusing on caring for her and the kids. To Linda, this way of managing anxiety was not sufficient, at least for her.

During that session, Linda wondered if the harsh reality of her mother's untimely death had awakened her to how fragile life is and that the scientific report simply confirmed it in ways that she had not previously been conscious. Later, she said she felt as if her grief about her mother and grief about climate change were difficult to separate. At one point, she remarked that human beings are the car wreck vis-à-vis the earth, and we talked about the anger, fear, helplessness, and tinge of despair associated with that comment.

Linda returned to the "car wreck" metaphor in a later session, saying she realized that she and her husband were part of the problem. The history of and current data on climate, she noted, highlights Western nations, especially the United States and its involvement in the proliferation of capitalism and profligacy. A kind of collective guilt (and helplessness) framed this conversation, as well as specific eco-guilt that she frequently travelled by jet for work and her family flew to various vacation spots. "It feels," she remarked, "that no matter what we do, climate change is still going to get worse. I really fear for my children's future." There was a hint of bitterness and resentment in her voice, which I asked about. Linda replied that she was also angry at government leaders who have not and are not doing enough.

These feelings, at times, accompanied various fantasies, which, for Linda, were not always understood as fantasies. For instance, as an engineer, Linda had read some of the geoengineering ideas about climate change, believing that some of these ideas offered a glimmer of hope. When she provided concrete illustrations of these ideas, I asked her about how feasible they were, given her engineering expertise. To me they sounded fanciful or at least impractical. Linda admitted that the likelihood of actually implementing some of these ideas was unlikely. Another fantasy emerged when she listened to Elon Musk, who said that human beings must become an interstellar species if they are to survive.

While this may not be a fantasy, I thought Linda's interest in this was connected to her feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. If human beings could become an interstellar species, there was some hope. I made some interpretation to that effect and Linda responded with some anger, "Are you trying to dash what hopes I have?" I replied that there is a difference between wishing and hoping, and that wishing often emerges when people feel helpless and hopeless, but resist acknowledging both. "But then what am I to do?" she shot back. "Yes, that is the question," I said in response.

There are any of number of ways to understand the process of therapy vis-à-vis Linda's feelings, thoughts, and actions regarding climate change. Therapy, in my view, provided a reflective space of speaking and acting together to explore and address

Linda's conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, and questions—in this case, around climate change.[14] I also understand this process as facilitating her capacity for inoperative resistance. When Linda began talking about her feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, guilt, resentment, anxiety, and fear, she was not exercising her capacity for inoperativity. Indeed, when she delved into the science, politics, and economics of climate change, the more she felt powerless and hopeless, which accompanied a sense that her life and the lives of others *were being determined* by hegemonic apparatuses (e.g., global capitalism, U.S. imperialism). Put differently, Linda was well aware of the real social, political, and economic sources of her distress and the distress of other human beings and other species. However, knowing the sources (and illusions) was, as Fanon noted, not yet resistance or, in Agamben's perspective, not yet inoperativity or impotentiality.

One way to understand the process toward exercising inoperative resistance is first to acknowledge that her eco-despair and eco-helplessness were responses, in part, to hegemonic apparatuses that aim to determine subjectivity—to actualize potentiality without remainder. Therapy, by contrast, is a reflective space of speaking and acting together that evokes moments of rapport (unthought knowns) wherein Linda actualizes her potentiality, resulting in experiences of singularity and excess (actualizing potentiality does not exhaust it). In addition, good-enough therapy offers a space to exercise impotentiality. There were, for instance, many opportunities for Linda to "prefer not" to accept my interpretations or questions. Therapy is, if you will, an apparatus that facilitates experiences of singularity, excess, and persons' capacities for inoperativity and impotentiality.

A few months after Linda began talking about her thoughts and feelings regarding climate change and after numerous conversations with her husband, she said she was planning to resign from her engineering position and take a job for a regional clean energy company. She and her husband knew and accepted that the new job would entail a salary cut, but there would be less travel. Also, by working for this company, she would be in contact with others who shared her desire to find ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. She, along with her husband, had also, in the past month, made inquiries into joining local environmental groups. Linda remarked that she felt "lighter" knowing that, for her, the work was more meaningful, because she believed she was doing something about the climate, even though it might not be enough. Nevertheless, at times, she continued to struggle, understandably, with feelings of guilt, helplessness, and betrayal, but they were less intense.

In my view, conversations with her husband and her decision to resign can be interpreted as evidence of a shift to public-political inoperative resistance. Linda "preferred not" to work for a company that ignored climate change. Of course, the company she joined was also engaged in the capitalistic system, which, for Jason Moore (2016), is the primary source of the climate emergency. It would be extremely difficult to

[14] Let me stress that therapy was not the only or the major source of change. There were many other factors, such as conversations with her spouse, friends, and colleagues, which can also be framed in terms of unthought knowns of rapport, excess, and singularity, as well as impotentiality and inoperativity.

"prefer not" to engage in capitalism, but Linda chose to accept work that was aimed at mitigating future climate disasters. I also view her seeking out and participating in local environmental organizations as further evidence of her capacity for inoperative resistance, which was affirmed and sustained by collective inoperative resistance toward the real sources of her and others' distress. These groups "prefer not" to operate out of the political-economic status quo. They resist, nonviolently, the political-economic apparatuses that are obstacles to climate action. Collective inoperative resistance, from my perspective, provided Linda with spaces of speaking and acting with others (shared purpose and agency), which strengthened her capacity for and exercise of inoperative resistance. In addition, shared inoperative resistance helped her feel less isolated and alienated in the face of hegemonic apparatuses that promote isolation and alienation.

Linda recognized that changes to hegemonic apparatuses (e.g., capitalism), which largely structure societal relations and subjectivity, were unlikely as a result of her actions (inoperative resistance). This is exactly what Agamben points to when he writes that rendering the grammar of apparatuses inoperative does not mean these apparatuses no longer have destructive effects. Impotentiality, in other words, is an act of agentic freedom—to not actualize the expectations of the real sources of suffering. Linda, at times, mentioned that she continued to have feelings of helplessness and hopelessness about the future, but these and other feelings did not deter her from working with others. From my perspective, her inoperative resistance also rendered these feelings inoperative, because she was neither captive to nor determined by these apparatuses. Her impotentiality, in other words, "testifies to the fact that the apparatuses are never all there is" (Garrison, 2017, p.24).

Conclusion

Recently, in a conversation about climate change and therapy, a young therapist remarked that she simply focuses on the individuals' struggles, leaving aside these larger systemic issues. An understandable strategy when one wishes to stay away from feelings of eco-powerlessness, anxiety, and hopelessness, but one I believe colludes with apparatuses of climate change, as well as mystifies (for some patients) the real social-political sources of suffering and, in so doing, can obstruct taking action toward those sources. Given that climate change is negatively impacting the psychological and physical well-being of many human beings (and other-than-human species), we, like Fanon and Wertham, need to find ways to help identify the real sources of suffering so that patients can choose an action toward those sources.

This article is an attempt to bridge the therapy office/process and public-political, economic, and cultural spaces by making use of Giorgio Agamben's philosophical anthropology and psychoanalytic developmental theory to arrive at the notion of inoperative resistance vis-à-vis apparatuses linked to climate change. Psychoanalytic therapy potentially can facilitate the actualization of inoperative resistance toward the real social, political, and economic apparatuses that give rise to suffering.

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