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## ENGAGING THE POST-TRUTH CRISIS IN EDUCATION AFFECTIVELY: ELEMENTS FOR A PSYCHOANALYTICALLY INFORMED PEDAGOGY

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“I’m the president, and you’re fake news!” Trump has declared on countless occasions, most recently when he lambasted Washington Post reporter Phillip Rucker for questioning a report from the Department of Homeland Security that suggested the new coronavirus can be suppressed by heat and humidity.<sup>1</sup> More recently still, Trump publicly pondered whether injecting disinfectants could aid those suffering from COVID-19. As testament to the number of people who want to believe in Trump, no matter how preposterous his proclamations, Governors and other state officials around the country have reported a spike in phone calls about taking disinfectants.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, we are in unprecedented times, where leadership from the White House is literally life threatening, trust in our cherished news media has been consistently disintegrating, and the hatred, fear, and anxiety attached to left/right divides are seemingly less contained than ever. As we navigate this global pandemic, a pandemic of health, wealth, truth, hate, and fear,<sup>3</sup> it becomes more crucial than ever that we learn to identify and dismiss fake news, mis- and disinformation. It is not just our democracy that is at stake, but our very lives are on the line. How might we engage students in productive dialogue about this pandemic, and other pressing political issues, in this time of truth and trust crisis, with steadily increasing polarization here and around the globe?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Edward Moreno, “Trump Hits CNN and Washington Post Reporters as ‘Fake News’ During Briefing,” *The Hill*, April 23, 2020, <https://thehill.com/author/j-edward-moreno>.

<sup>2</sup> “Poison Control Center Calls Spike After President Trump Suggests Injections of Disinfectant,” *Democracy Now!* April 27, 2020, [https://www.democracynow.org/2020/4/27/headlines/poison\\_control\\_center\\_calls\\_spike\\_after\\_president\\_trump\\_suggests\\_injections\\_of\\_disinfectant](https://www.democracynow.org/2020/4/27/headlines/poison_control_center_calls_spike_after_president_trump_suggests_injections_of_disinfectant).

<sup>3</sup> Inciting racism by referring to COVID-19 as the China virus, Trump stokes hate and fear during a health crisis. For more on why the pandemic is one of hate and fear, along with health and wealth, see Arundhati Roy, “The Pandemic is a Portal,” *The Financial Times*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy’s *The Political Classroom* is an illuminating illustration of the urgency behind educating students for deliberation about controversial topics in an age of increasing polarization. They provide rich insight into effective strategies with which to engage students, highlighting how ideological diversity or the lack thereof, impacts student civic engagement. They do not, however, provide strategies for analyzing the affects that are attached to political ideologies that render students resistant to a change in perspective, an approach I advocate for in this article.

At the end of 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary announced ‘post-truth’ as word of the year, and since then, the concept has been invoked around the world to describe the growing anxieties surrounding the current crisis in truth we find ourselves in, wherein emotion appears to have replaced fact in the shaping of public opinion.<sup>5</sup> We are witnessing what seems to be an unprecedented increase in the spread of fake news, alternative facts, and “affective feedback loops” that have hate on the rise, increasing left/right divides.<sup>6</sup> Now more than ever, we need to attend to the ways in which identities are emotionally exploited for political and ideological ends. “While propaganda and news media have always sought to hook our emotions as a means of grabbing attention, the targeting of emotion and affect is today central and prevalent within the ongoing media battle to shape, influence, and control public and political opinions.”<sup>7</sup> Much groundbreaking research across disciplinary divides clearly identifies the “targeting [of] our emotions via personalized social media messaging as the new frontier of propaganda.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that the relationship between digital propaganda and manipulated emotion has come to public awareness, not enough attention is being drawn to the need for critical media literacy projects in education that include understandings of how our emotions are being targeted and manipulated.<sup>9</sup>

Because psychoanalysis sees emotional life as our most significant resource for learning to think,<sup>10</sup> and in learning to think differently, in this article, I explore what psychoanalytic theory can bring to the “truthiness” table. I suggest that psychoanalytic insight can be extremely helpful in the creation of new pedagogies that enable us to better navigate this climate of hate and fear,<sup>11</sup> the epidemic of “affective information warfare” we currently find ourselves in.<sup>12</sup> Psychoanalysis has always been concerned with the ways in which perception is passionate and defends against difficult knowledge. It has always followed emotional investments, calling attention to the particular, complex,

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Hess and McAvoy, *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Megan Boler and Elizabeth Davis, “The Affective Politics of the ‘Post-Truth’ Era: Feeling Rules and Networked Subjectivity,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 27 (2018): 75–85.

<sup>6</sup> Boler and Davis, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Megan Boler, “Digital Disinformation and the Targeting of Affect: New Frontiers for Critical Media Education,” *Research in the Teaching of English* 54, no. 2 (2019): 187–191, 187.

<sup>8</sup> Boler, 187–191, 187.

<sup>9</sup> Boler and Davis, “The Affective Politics of the ‘Post-Truth’ Era.”

<sup>10</sup> Wilfred Bion, “The Psycho-Analytic Study of Thinking,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 43 (1962): 306–310.

<sup>11</sup> It is my hope that the elements I sketch out for a psychoanalytically informed pedagogy can inspire and be adapted by educators across levels and disciplines.

<sup>12</sup> Boler and Davis, “The Affective Politics of the ‘Post-Truth’ Era.”

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and competing psychic processes at work, wherein affect becomes misdirected and misrecognized as such. By incorporating psychoanalytic sensibilities to difficult dialogue on divisive issues like the global pandemic, ongoing racism, or what the purpose of education should be, we can invite examination of our own unacknowledged attachments and defensive refusals to know or think differently. We can learn to analyze the affect involved in falling into the all too familiar trap of belief confirmation. We can improve our capacities for participating in genuine dialogue as impetus for collaborative investigation toward personal and social transformation in the name of global solidarity and sustainability.

In what follows, I elaborate on the key insights of experts of disinformation operations who reveal that all fake news, whether motivated by profit logic, desire for political power, or just the power of pulling a scam, works by mobilizing negative affect. I then offer a sketch of why psychoanalytic theory is uniquely positioned to help us navigate the post-truth crisis. In approaching the potentially misrecognized motivations behind particular affects and selective mis- and disinformation with psychoanalytic sensibility, we can begin to learn from our own refusals to know, assess the ways in which affect potentially misdirects, and identify where it needs to be followed as a pathway to the truth. I conclude with a brief sketch of key elements for a psychoanalytically informed pedagogy.

#### ANTISOCIAL MEDIA, MANUFACTURED HOSTILITY, AND THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRACY

At the heart of the democratic process is a well-informed, actively engaged citizenry. When misinformation that masquerades as fact abounds, particularly in times of crisis, the very foundations of the democratic process are shaken. There is a growing consensus that social media platforms that enable the proliferation of fake news are one of the biggest threats to democracy.<sup>13</sup> Disinformation campaigns successfully exacerbate existing ideological divides, impede collaborative critical thinking across difference, and ultimately undermine democracy. Many scholars and researchers have turned their attention to the ways in which social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, etc. are specifically engineered to amplify strong emotion, creating the conditions for easy affective manipulation.<sup>14</sup> Ben Nimmo, a

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Robert McChesney, *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy* (New York: Perseus, 2013); Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Hachette Books, 2019); Carole Cadwalladr, “Fresh Cambridge Analytica Leak ‘Shows Global Manipulation is Out of Control,’” *The Guardian*, January 4, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/04/cambridge-analytica-data-leak-global-election-manipulation>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (New York: Oxford, 2018). The 2019 Netflix

pioneer of information operations, demonstrates that state backed and independently monetized click bait scams, succeed by mobilizing fear and anger,<sup>15</sup> conditions under which one's ability to think clearly become severely compromised. Indeed, it is a sad and scary state of affairs that in this age of information, we are more divided, hostile, and misinformed than ever.

The function of mis- and disinformation circulating on social media is precisely to impede thoughtful, critical thinking, garner profit, and ultimately exacerbate existing division and polarization.<sup>16</sup> When mass public opinions are shaped by proliferations of disinformation that destroy trust in our cherished institutions, fear and anger are easily manipulated, and turned into misguided aggression. Because fake news does not work on a rational level, its spread enables groups to disavow dependency and vulnerability, to displace aggression as entirely outside themselves, with hardly anything to impede the acting out of their hostility. This is evidenced by the ongoing toxic campaigns against Muslims, who have recently been accused of inventing and spreading COVID-19 by the Hindu Right in India, in a way that eerily echoes Nazi indictment of the Jews for spreading Typhus in Nazi Germany.<sup>17</sup> Unbridled and misguided aggression is further demonstrated by misogynistically motivated mass shootings and anti-black police brutality in the context of the US, but also when investigative journalists, scientists, and medical professionals—formerly trusted sources of information—are drowned out by online hate mobs that deny credibility to evidence based research, and take license to spew devastating threats and character assaults. In this climate, too often it seems to me, students either come to class coated in partisan ideological armor that gets in the way of their capacity to think critically, or are apathetic to the point where every opinion is equally valid, whether based in fact or fiction.

It is crucial that we learn to invite students into discussion about affective disinformation operations that incite hostility and deliberately fostered

documentary, “The Great Hack” exposes the ways in which personal data is hijacked and people are targeted with specific ad campaigns designed to speak to their very personal fears and desires, and how this successfully interfered with the Brexit and Trump campaigns. *The Great Hack*, directed by Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim (Los Gatos, CA: Netflix, 2019), Online.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, his reports on Graphika about how information operations have most recently latched onto the coronavirus conversation or his presentation on a recent podcast episode of The Frontline Club. Ben Nimmo, “A discussion on disinformation with Carole Cadwalladr, Ben Nimmo, Jane Lytvynenko,” in *The Frontline Club*, May 8, 2020, podcast, 1:17:04, <https://www.frontlineclub.com/podcast/>.

<sup>16</sup> One need only follow Carole Cadwalladr or Ben Nimmo on Twitter, or consult the numerous reports about the COVID-19 and other “Infodemics” on [Graphika.com/reports](https://www.graphika.com/reports) to see the way these campaigns play out.

<sup>17</sup> Maktoob Staff, “Modi Govt Using Corona Against Muslims Like Typhus Used Against Jews by Nazis: Arundhati Roy,” *Maktoob*, April 18, 2020, <https://maktoobmedia.com/2020/04/18/modi-govt-using-corona-against-muslims-like-typhus-used-against-jews-by-nazis-arundhati-roy/>.

stupidity. One of the most helpful works I have found on how to navigate this tricky terrain is *Unpacking Fake News: An Educator’s Guide to Navigating the Media with Students*.<sup>18</sup> Yet the bulk of this work neglects understandings of the role our emotions play in critical thinking, or its absence. One notable exception here, is H. James Garrett’s taxonomy of fake news.<sup>19</sup> He carefully delineates how emotions are manipulated in various iterations of fake news as “tabloid un-truth,” “targeted disinformation,” and “weaponized phrase” to dismiss credible news reports as fake—one of Trump’s favorite tactics. Garrett outlines how these strategies motivate reasoning, confirm bias, and work on the psychic and affective investments of (antisocial) media consumers. Demonstrating that fake news works not on what we know, but *how* we know it, he calls for the use of psychosocial and psychoanalytic theory to call forth a new way of thinking about engaging students in dialogue on fake news. If it is affect that is hijacked and then evacuated through disinformation campaigns, it seems crucial that we bring analysis not just of sources of information, but also the affects that are attached to them, into classroom conversations.

#### WHY PSYCHOANALYSIS?

With direct relevance to the rise of the alt-right here and around the globe, I’ve come to see psychoanalysis itself as a Holocaust survivor,<sup>20</sup> and that, in its own right, should give us pause before we participate in the all too common impulse to dismiss it outright. This survivor status is particularly important as we seem quite poised globally to repeat some version of this gruesome history, and we ought to bear witness, and learn to listen to those that have been most traumatized.<sup>21</sup> Studying the troubled and troubling history of psychoanalysis sheds much light on the powerful emotional appeal of right wing political movements from Nazism onwards. Grappling as it does with questions of prejudice and desire and what draws people to the right politically, psychoanalysis is uniquely positioned to help us understand contemporary fascist impulses and shed light on how it has come to be that the left seems incredibly ill-equipped to deal with the irrational aspects of political life.

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<sup>18</sup> Wayne Journell, ed., *Unpacking Fake News: An Educator’s Guide to Navigating the Media with Students* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Garrett, “Why Does Fake News Work? On the Psychosocial Dynamic of Learning, Belief, and Citizenship,” in *Unpacking Fake News: An Educator’s Guide to Navigating the Media with Students*, ed. Wayne Journell (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019), 15–29.

<sup>20</sup> I first encountered this notion in Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an Age of Catastrophes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Herzog, *Cold War Freud*. Herzog points out that the survivor status also helps to explain the conservative, regulatory turn psychoanalysis took in the post WWII context of the US since it was traumatized and was forced, or felt the need to repress, its most radical findings.

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Psychoanalytic theory has always grappled with how unstable our theories of subjectivity are; it teaches us about how enjoyable it can feel to be the master race and how much resentment is born if and when people are expected to give that up. It draws our attention to issues of resentment over charges of guilt and the dangers of suppressed and repressed historical memory. It gives us a chance to delve deeper into the enigma of human subjectivity(ies), (un)conscious and/or unexamined motivations, and what can and should be done about them. In short, psychoanalysis, “in all its contradictions, absurdities, and self-revisions,” can contribute a great deal to the particular problems of emotional manipulation, ignorance, apathy, desire, aggression, and relations of power, for “in probing the history of psychoanalysis we also probe the history of sexuality and the riddle of the relationships between the sexual and other aspects of human motivation—from nonsexual longings for safety or for interpersonal connection to anxiety, aggression, and ambition.”<sup>22</sup>

Ever preoccupied with emotional health (without clear consensus on what that is exactly) and ways of living that are intense deviations from well-being, concerned with the promising and perilous avenues affect can take, practicing analysts and psychoanalytic theorists alike have been engaged in trying to help us identify neurotic and pathological tendencies on both subjective and cultural levels. Sandra Buechler’s work,<sup>23</sup> for example, shows that as a culture, we are suffering from the loss of sadness—our culture pathologizes normal sorrow while our lives are characterized by loss. How do we live loss and why do we, culturally speaking, refuse to grapple with it, and what are the consequences? Very concerned with the work emotions can and should do, she writes about how hatred can rescue people from depression, claiming it’s better than apathy. If hate is a defense against helplessness, then we need to learn the art of hating,<sup>24</sup> to learn how to use it towards non-destructive ends. We need to learn to analyze forms of hatred that are unbound, unexamined, and misdirected but note that it does not always only have to be repressed. Buechler is a big fan of justified anger as well, which she sees as a motor that gets us going and can be directed towards wrong done and the discovery of new modes of how to live better.

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<sup>22</sup> Herzog, 15. Also of particular interest here are Michal Shapira *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Eli Zaretsky *Political Freud: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Warwick Anderson, Deborah Jensen, and Richard C. Keller, eds., *Unconscious Dominions: Psychoanalysis, Colonial Trauma, and Global Sovereignties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) to name but a few. The recurrent themes in these important texts include analysis of the problems of desire, violence, and relations of power.

<sup>23</sup> See Buechler, *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Problems in Living: Addressing Life’s Challenges in Clinical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> See Gerald Schoenewolf, *The Art of Hating* (Lanham: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991).

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Psychoanalysis' insistence that the sexual and economic realms are simply not categorically distinct provides grounds for retheorizing the emotional pulls by which all politics function. Todd McGowan's work is instructive here as he points out that one of the reasons that capitalism is so successful is that it is structured like our desire, forever promising satisfaction that never comes, to keep us always disappointed and wanting more.<sup>25</sup> Echoing Buechler's insistence that we acknowledge sadness and grapple with loss, McGowan warns us to be especially critical of the (capitalist investment in) the quest for happiness, which is "nothing but a moment before you need more happiness" (in the wise words of Don Draper from *Mad Men*). Further, he suggests that we need to consider "enjoyment as a political factor"<sup>26</sup>—we have spent too much time thinking about (the will to) power in politics, he says, without thinking about how people and politics are also motivated by enjoyment. He ponders whether Trump's base votes against their own self-interests because on some level they actually enjoy screwing themselves over. Trump is quite successful at mobilizing their enjoyment of exclusion, and of his own continued transgressions of ethics and morality.

Providing us with a toolbox for cultural criticism, Herzog shows how the "battles within and around psychoanalysis provide a language for thinking about the changes in the way we understand what counts as truth."<sup>27</sup> Her intellectual history of psychoanalytic theory accounts for how, in the years that followed Freud's exile, there developed what seemed to be irresolvable tensions between the therapeutic and cultural-diagnostic potentials of psychoanalysis. She shows how detractors of Freud, and his disciples alike, were engaged in such very heated debate. In the late 1960s, when folks the world over were still grappling with horrors of the holocaust (and the exile of psychoanalysis itself from Germany), Anna Freud and several other key figures agreed that psychoanalytic theory needed to dedicate itself to the study of human aggression, and develop clearer links to show how psychoanalysis ought to be applied to social problems.

Alexander Mitscherlich, a German physician, who viewed psychoanalysis as the discovery of a new way of developing human solidarity, has much to teach us about how we might engage students in navigating the epidemic of emotionally charged political memes, fake news, mis- and disinformation they are bombarded with daily. His work on how aggression and hostility have been harnessed for disavowed and entirely destructive political ends by socially constructed stupidity is particularly compelling in our

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<sup>25</sup> See in particular, Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Todd McGowan, "The Lust for Power and the Logic of Enjoyment," *Crisis & Critique* 6, no. 1 (2019): 205–225, <https://crisiscritique.org/april2019/todd.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Herzog, *Cold War Freud*, 2.

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current context.<sup>28</sup> His work on aggression might be able to help us better understand and mitigate the alarming pace at which we are barreling towards our own self-induced, self-destruction. With direct relevance to the project of learning how emotions are manipulated, back in 1969 he wrote:

Methods of education must change if the ultimate goal, to produce adults who are able to make independent decisions, is to be reached. But, as history teaches us, this progression of educational stages does not usually take place. On the contrary, it is stupidity, which has generally been produced by the ruling powers—on a grand scale and with astounding efficiency. . . . Archaic pedagogical methods lead always to failure. They do not sufficiently teach us how to analyze affect; rather, they foster the acquisition of mechanisms of repression and displacement and contribute to the damming-up of a surplus of aggressive drive energies. In this condition the citizens are easily exploited. In an era of seemingly boundless technological progress—which also includes the increasing availability of effective measures for extensive and subtle psychic manipulation—we have retained the fundamentals of a static type of education by rote. . . . People who have gone through this type of education tend to develop into nonpolitical citizens.<sup>29</sup>

Because I find his psychoanalytic study of aggression and education particularly insightful in thinking about new pedagogies that can pathologize and/or productively engage emotion and ignorance in education, I provide a brief sketch below.

#### ON AGGRESSION

Post-WWII psychoanalytic theorists and analysts alike created much work to study the aggression of large groups, and the ways in which conflicts in society can actuate or mitigate it. Many began to study and speak publicly about the behavior of the German people during the Nazi rule and its aftermath, calling for investigation into how human nature (the subject of much debate itself) and “universal aggressive propaganda could dovetail into each other in a quite specific manner to allow the unthinkable to become a reality.”<sup>30</sup> Mitscherlich had a very particular vantage point on this phenomenon as a German neuroscientist and psychoanalyst, who became a minister in the first German government formed by the American Occupation, and headed the German Medical Commission to the American Military Tribunal at

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich, “On Hostility and Man-Made Stupidity,” *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 19, no. 4 (1971): 819–834.

<sup>29</sup> Mitscherlich, 827.

<sup>30</sup> Herzog, *Cold War Freud*, 4.

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Nuremberg. Out of this experience he created three volumes, which documented and then publicized the array of unthinkable Nazi medical war crimes.<sup>31</sup> Mitscherlich won the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1969 for his groundbreaking work examining authority and aggression in German culture pre- and post-Hitler. His monumental study redeemed and revitalized psychoanalysis in Germany and across the globe.<sup>32</sup> The bulk of the work is based on the complicated question of how best to understand the problem of human aggression, man-made stupidity, and the theorization of what we can and should do about them.

In the speech he gave upon accepting the Peace Prize entitled, “On Hostility and Man-Made Stupidity,” he argued that two main factors account for the early success of Nazi Germany: our “easily aroused hostility and ineradicable stupidity.”<sup>33</sup> The “combined operation of hostility and deliberately fostered stupidity,” he wrote, are “in particularly urgent need of examination.”<sup>34</sup> He emphasized that we must assume that in many of us there is a strong and “easily activated proclivity toward destruction and especially toward self-destruction.”<sup>35</sup> It is exactly these proclivities that render us so susceptible to the lure of war and to the lure of aggressive, violent, and antisocial, self-destructive behavior. He argued that the goal envisioned by all civilizations, as soon as basic needs and desires are met, consists in mitigating the hostile and destructive forms of human aggression by fostering relationships and sentiments of compassion and understanding of the motives of others as counterweights. But, he vehemently contended, stupidity blocks this progress. When education succeeds in manufacturing ignorance, which, unfortunately, happens all too often, this lends powerful support to hostile aggression because it arouses the urge to find a scapegoat.

More specifically, he claimed that there are three particular psychic processes at work when aggression becomes misdirected and extremely dangerous. The first is displacement, the process whereby one’s group (or one’s own) affects are displaced onto others, where the logic goes: it is not I, not we, who hate(s); it is the other/others who are doing the hating. The second psychic process in this equation is projection, the process of projecting inner conflicts outward, elsewhere, where the logic (or rather illogic) goes: it is not I, not we, who trespass(es) against law, conscience, and humanity; it is the other/others. The process for misdirecting bad affect is denial, the process whereby we think we simply cling to the notion that we do not have the disgraceful desires, or history(ies), which have been so unfairly attributed to us. Each of these three

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<sup>31</sup> See Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. Beverly Placzec (New York: Grove Press, 1975), xi.

<sup>32</sup> Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, xi.

<sup>33</sup> Mitscherlich, “On Hostility and Man-Made Stupidity,” 823.

<sup>34</sup> Mitscherlich, 823.

<sup>35</sup> Mitscherlich, 822.

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processes, he argued, reinforces the others and evades recognition. Thus, they are important factors in the service of self-deception, so that we must learn to analyze uses that are and have been made of them. We all have aggression, but once people have succeeded in seeing all aggressiveness as entirely outside themselves, there remains hardly anything to impede the acting out of their hostility. What he describes is a situation of socially induced ignorance and aggression that seems quite poignant in the here and now.

With direct relevance to the post-truth crisis educators must help students (and themselves) navigate more successfully, Mitscherlich warned that wherever we discover that information is being demonstrably withheld or manipulated, we may conclude that structuralized stupidity (various investments in ignorance) is the desired result. How might we ask students to apply this insight to their encounters on social media? Helping us think through viable post-truth pedagogical strategies, he noted that aggression and ignorance are fundamental forces of life, but emphasized that human belligerence could be blunted with the help of an analysis of its motivations. While there are forms of ignorance and aggression that cannot ever be entirely abolished, the dangerous forms can be illuminated, their grip loosened.

#### ELEMENTS FOR A PSYCHOANALYTICALLY INFORMED PEDAGOGY

Because psychoanalysis asks us to be curious about the ways in which affective responses are often defenses designed to protect us from that which we find threatening, from that which we do not want to know, it has much to offer educators learning how to help students navigate the post-truth crisis in pandemic times. The psychoanalytic technique of “collaborative dialogue,”<sup>36</sup> analytic listening, and a “language of empathy”<sup>37</sup> has a long history of enabling analysis of misrecognized or misdirected emotional investment, stimulating a process whereby we can learn to think and see ourselves and the world differently. “The psychoanalytic ethic in this work is built by the idea that to tolerate the opening of the mind requires listening to the conflicts of meanings audible and inaudible just at the point that they reach defensive mechanisms of closure.”<sup>38</sup> In this climate of crisis and uncertainty what we need now more than ever is an “affectionate and forgiving theory of learning capable of containing the frustrations and the aggressions of drives made from love and hate that take their shape in conflicts, anxieties, defenses, and desire for an education yet to come.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Karlen Lyons-Ruth, “The Two-Person Unconscious: Intersubjective Dialogue, Enactive Relational Representation, and the Emergence of New Forms of Relational Organization,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1999): 576–617.

<sup>37</sup> Anna Aragno, “The Language of Empathy: An Analysis of Its Constitution, Development, and Role in Psychoanalytic Listening,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 56, no. 3 (2008): 713–740.

<sup>38</sup> Deborah Britzman, *A Psychoanalyst in the Classroom: On the Human Condition in Education* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 30.

<sup>39</sup> Britzman, 30.

In learning to teach with psychoanalytic sensibility, we stay close to the emotional situations of learning that magnify what divides the conflicted subject, and highlight the human condition of wishing to learn as much as we wish to resist new and difficult knowledge. We can engage these dilemmas collectively in classrooms, where rather than searching for a bias-free truth, we can ask who do I/we trust and why? Where does their bias lie? What is the purpose of this source of information, who is the intended audience, and what is the underlying message? More importantly, if what I am encountering is inciting fear and/or anger, is it justified, or designed to do just that, and to what end? We need to invite conversation and reflection about how we are attracted to what feels true, and begin the process of collaborative dialogue, productive disagreement, and analysis, not just of sources of information, but the affect(s) that are attached to them. We want a desire-free truth, so if we realize desire is part of truth, we might learn how to read it better.

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