

Zoom as the Cuckoo Bird  
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*"It's easier being in each other's presence, or each other's absence, than in the constant presence of each other's absence." (Gianpiero Petriglieri, 2020).*

In constructing this presentation, the image of the cuckoo bird arose organically, its image about the archetype of colonization, as well as the symbol of spirit and the specter of the destruction of the spirit delivered via zoom through Covid, the dis-eased spiritual symbol. The cultural rupture of Covid and the extended quarantine has cracked the proverbial sociological egg of containment infecting the family nest. Grasping the effects of this intrusion may not be known for quite some time.

According to the *I-Ching*, or *The Book of Changes*, the trigram "Chia Jen/The Family [The Clan], represents the laws obtaining within the family...The mother represents the laws within, the father, the laws without. The family is society in embryo; it is the native soil on which performance of moral duty is made easy through natural affection, so that within a small circle a basis of moral practice is created, and this is later widened to include human relationships in general." (Wilhelm/Baynes, 1950, pp. 143-144).

While the evidence is mounting on both sides of the zoom paradigm in favor of and against its use, it is within the technological nest that I examine the impact of zoom as the cuckoo bird and interloper for human relatedness. The maternal attachment process and one's subsequent capacity to attach through subjective relatedness will be examined. Utilizing the work of Harry Harlow, Edward Tronick, Alan Schore, Stephen Porges, and Jung's central concept of the transcendent function, I will circumambulate attachment and the threat of technology on this central paradigm in human relatedness.

Watching a film on the cuckoo in action whips my maternal instinct into overdrive, compelling me to pounce on the cuckoo calling it a psychopathic predator. It is compelling to look closer at the stirring of my instincts and what this might say about the oppressive, colonizing inner and outer other and my maternal instincts to protect human life. Indeed, zoom has the potential to be the cyborg-like mother challenging the carnal mother's capacity to contain and incubate life, robbing the nest of the fully enlivened human experience. She has entered the archetypal field with a tempting smorgasbord of experiences, all attainable online. She is the wire other, the hybrid that cannot relate but seems relatable, that cannot soothe but seems comforting. She is the dark feminine, our capacity to destroy through lack of relatedness, that has supplanted itself through the collective trauma of Covid and is incubating through this extended quarantine, the final birth of the hatchling yet unknown. It is no wonder that the children of the Covid-19 era are being called Gen Z, or Generation Zoom.

The attachment process between mother and infant is *the* central human experience. Attachment imbues the body with spirit, developing our species from inside out and reciprocally outside in. This process is an orchestration between brain, mind and body uniquely delivered through the right brain to the right brain; unconscious contact communicated between the mother and the infant. This sacred connection shapes both individuals' psyches and souls, delivering them into the collective with a well-hewed sense of humanity and their capacity to love. Later, the left-brain hemisphere comes online as the infant develops a sense of self with the mother guiding the way. Current infant research indicates that right-brain-to-right-brain communication does not just develop an infant during the initial years but shapes the human experience throughout the lifespan. Indeed, the right-brained experience is the doorway to our ability to soothe, regulate, attach, feel and build a unique personality through socialization, dreaming,

attunement, and empathy for others. Therefore, experiences that interrupt the unconscious mind, particularly around self and co-regulation can contribute to developmental trauma.

As social creatures, humans need contact with others for optimal mental health. The onset of Covid and subsequent extensive quarantine is having many repercussions. While streaming technology has been around for over twenty-five years, it is the extended quarantine and the ubiquitous use of these platforms that is altering the fundamental way in which we communicate. The numbers reflect the colonization. For example, since the beginning onset of Covid-(20)19, zoom use has exploded: "The surge in paying customers enabled Zoom to hail another quarter of explosive growth. The company...reported that its revenue for the May-July (2019) period more than quadrupled from the same time last year to \$663.5 million, boosted by a steadily rising number of users converting from the free to the paid version of Zoom's service" (ABC News, 2019).

The cuckoo is a wickedly exceptional bird. It is called a brood parasite because the female can insert its own eggs into a nest of other birds (brambling, for example) while tossing out the host's eggs, unwittingly having the host bird incubate and hatch the cuckoo's offspring. Once hatched, the cuckoo then tosses out the host bird's eggs, forcing the host bird to raise the cuckoo bird in toto. However, some hosts are brilliant and recognize the cuckoo's brazen attempts subsequently tossing out the parasite's eggs, thus saving her offspring from annihilation. The cuckoo, not to be outdone in this maneuver, upgrades the game by creating eggs that mimic the appearance of the host's eggs, making it exceedingly difficult for the host to identify its true offspring. This game quickly becomes what the experts call an arms race in which each bird attempts to outwit the other.

Cuckoos are more successful with host birds who cannot recognize the parasite's egg, consequently maintaining tyrannical control and having their offspring fed and raised by the smaller host bird. One wonders about oppression and its effects: is the host bird feeding the oversized cuckoo because it becomes attached to the egg, or is feeding the cuckoo because it feels intimidated by the hatchling's size and power when it is born? Indeed, during the nesting period, hatchlings can become bigger than the host. Perhaps it is both. Either way, the archetypal experience of colonization is alive in the two birds, each participating in a shared experience of dominance, submission, and propagation.

The analogy here is obvious, and in much the same way, streaming platforms shaped by algorithms are creating a psychically seductive arms race in our human capacity to relate and feel. The cultural trauma of Covid-19 has created a crack in the egg of our existentially human, self-other relationship. Zoom as the cuckoo bird has inserted itself into our relational paradigm and has upped the ante in this arms race between humans and the artificially intelligent world.

Zoom, or the wire mother, interrupts our capacity to openly feel and communicate in a normal way. Indeed, it seems to affect our instinctual attachment process by creating a psychic skin of vigilance in the participant(s). This psychic skin consists of neurological tracking, a subtle but draining process whereby the viewer and viewed constantly scan the screen for information being communicated both consciously and unconsciously. The psychic skin becomes a veil in which the participant is less able to access emotion as well as emotional vulnerability inherent in human relationship. The constant tracking contributes to a lower frustration tolerance, particularly when the technology becomes unreliable. For instance, aggressive projections are common in zoom, delivered through technological disruptions: According to Manyu Jian of the British Broadcasting Company, reports that "Delays on the

phone or conferencing systems of 1.2 seconds made people perceive the responder as less friendly or focused" (2020, p.2). Additionally, according to Gianpiero Petriglieri, an associate professor at Insead,

Being on a video call requires more focus than a face-to-face chat, says Periglieri. Video chats mean we need to work harder to process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, The tone and pitch of the voice, and body language. Paying more attention to these consumes a lot of energy. 'Our minds are together when our bodies feel we're not. That dissonance, which causes people to have conflicting feelings, is exhausting. You cannot relax into the conversation naturally' (2020, p. 2).

Zoom affects emotional perception as well. Too much silence and signal delays create negative perceptions of the other. Zoom contributes to one's sense of self-consciousness, knowing that one is being scrutinized on screen. Neurologically zoom creates fatigue in the eyes and a drain on the right and left brain, commonly known as brain drain (Jiang, 2020). Indeed, zoom may provide an incubation experience to the birthing of an AI hatchling similar to the parasitic cuckoo, an act of trickery so cleverly implemented that only the deep feeling conscious individual could detect the difference between the two.

In his article entitled, "Embodied Self and its intentional world", author Warren Coleman proposes that the mind extends into the instruments humans utilize in its expression (2015, p. 6). Algorithms in the streaming platform(s) could become the new psychic appendage being grown into mind, something similar to a new post-human mind, a new genome. The hatching of this genome will set up an arms race between the human and the AI mother, threatening maternal attachment. As the two become rivals in the egg mimicry process, recognizing the organic human psyche becomes challenging to detect. One paradigm is where human connection trumps deep right-brain-to-right-brain attachment. This idea is critical for mental health workers to understand.

Depth psychologists focus on the etiology of trauma and the de-integration, integration processes of psychic development. In so doing, we rely on our innate capacities to deeply listen, observe and work with the patient's mind, body and spirit connections assisting them in the orchestration of these three levels. In such a manner, we know that the archetypal field and the subjective third from which the orchestration arises can only happen when two beings are united in the participation mystique of being. It is a face-to-face, embodied experience, where the right-brained unconscious cosmos develops. Yet, somewhere between the field of subjective and objective, container and contained, zoom may foreclose on one's capacity to dream due to subtle body interruption in mind/body connection, the galaxy of the mother. For people with trauma histories, zoom may constellate anxiety, dysregulation, schizoid withdrawal and dissociation.

As early as the 1930's Harry Harlow's work with infant rhesus monkeys attempted to demonstrate the variant behavioral and psychosocial effects of isolation on monkeys deprived of maternal care. When isolated and offered a wire or cloth-covered mother for nurturing and soothing, the monkeys chose the cloth-covered mother. The cloth-covered monkey preference provided "contact comfort" for the primates suffering in isolation for up to 12 months. The wire monkey was preferred exclusively for weaning whereby the cloth-covered mother was relied on for all other comforts. Of course, variants of pre-attachment processes vs. no prior socialization also made a difference in the monkey's capacity to re-calibrate post isolation. Regardless, the body of the mother was vital in soothing the infant. Harlow's work set the foundation for a psychological exploration of one's capacity to love formed during the attachment process between baby and mother and the effects of isolation on one's ability to socialize and re-engage in the world. Fear is the common denominator experienced in quarantine, whether monkey or human.

According to Harlow (H.), Harlow (M.), and Dodworth (1965), while "human behavior is more complex, more variable, and subtler than that of subhuman primates, one should, nevertheless, find insights into the problems created by human social isolation from study of social isolation in monkeys" (p. 90). Moreover, the symptoms of the effects of isolation on monkey's are similar to those of humans,

These monkeys suffer total maternal deprivation and, even more important, have no opportunity to form affectional ties with their peers. We have already reported the resulting progressively deepening syndrome of compulsive non nutritional sucking, repetitive stereotyped movements, detachment from the environment, hostility directed outwardly towards others and and weirdly towards the animals own body, and inability to form adequate social or heterosexual attachments to others when such opportunities are provided in preadolescence, adolescence, or adulthood (p. 90).

The researchers extend their theory to humans suffering in isolation: "Human social isolation is recognized as a problem of vast importance. Its effects are deleterious to areas to personal adjustment, normal heterosexual development, and control of aggressive and delinquent behaviors. Isolation generally arises from a breakdown in the family structure resulting in orphaned or semi orphaned children or in illegitimate children who, for one reason or another, are raised in institutions, inadequate foster homes, or occasionally, in abnormal homes with relatives" (p. 90). Furthermore, from the effects of quarantine during a pandemic are the concerning statistics published in *The Lancet*. In the article entitled "The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence", Brooks, et.al, contend that research from the SARS (2003), MERS, Ebola (2014), and H1N1 (2009, 2010) outbreaks reveal significant impacts of quarantine on mental health. For example,

A study of hospital staff who might have come into contact with SARS found that immediately after the quarantine period of nine days ended, having been quarantined was the factor most predictive of symptoms of acute stress disorder. In the same study, quarantine staff were significantly more likely to report exhaustion, detachment from



others, anxiety when dealing with febrile patients, irritability, insomnia, poor concentration and indecisiveness, deteriorating work performance, and reluctance to work or consideration of resignation. In another study, the effect of being quarantined was a predictor of post-traumatic stress symptoms in hospital employees even three years later (2020, p.913).

Furthermore, the research contends,

A study comparing post-traumatic stress symptoms in parents and children quarantined with those not quarantined found that the mean post-traumatic stress scores were four times higher in children who had been quarantined than in those who were not quarantined... All other quantitative studies only surveyed those who had been quarantined and generally reported a high prevalence of symptoms of psychological distress and disorder. Studies reported on general psychological symptoms (rated on Weiss and Marmar's Impact of Event Scale-Revised), emotional disturbance, depression, stress, low mood, irritability, insomnia, post traumatic stress symptoms, anger, and emotional exhaustion. Low mood (660 [73%] of 903) and irritability (512 [57%] of 903) stand out as having high prevalence (p. 913).

While the evidence is in regarding the effects of long and short-term quarantine, it is also important to recognize that streaming platforms have contributed in many ways to the collective well-being of the human population during the pandemic; it is the aftermath of the pandemic that is of concern. Might these platforms become a dependent manic defense against relatedness born of the fear of Covid-19 and variants? How does the wire mother intermingle with our own maternal instincts?

Harlow's studies demonstrate that beings prefer the bond of the carnal mother to the wire mother. Indeed, zoom can serve and exacerbate one's emotional and psychological needs as well as anti-social tendencies developed in the face of collective trauma. Fear creates a regression, something which one can utilize zoom for in order to avoid facing relational fears. This avoidance is important to explore in the context of therapy. In the book *Screen Relations*, author Gillian Isaacs Russell discusses regression in the face of fear:

Fear for her survival sends a child back to the carer who offers a secure base, regulating her fear. The secure child is then enabled to go out into the world again, with freedom to explore and develop. Unregulated fear inhibits exploration, including the development of a mental life and a full recognition of the other. By extension, clinically the therapist must provide for the patient a secure base where the therapist is able to contain her anxieties, from which the patient may eventually feel free to venture out in exploration of self and other (2015, p. 129).

Donald Winnicott contends: “The holding environment... has at its main function the reduction to a minimum of the impingements to which the infant must react with resultant annihilation of personal being. Under favorable conditions the infant establishes a continuity of existence” (Winnicott, 1965, p. 47). The psychoanalyst is charged with providing a secure container in which the psyche of the couple (mother/infant) can unfold uninhibited through a sense of mutual trust. This feeling of security extends into the consulting room, an environment thoughtfully created by the therapist, providing physical comfort with a feeling of aesthetic serenity. Streaming platforms change the alchemical vessel and its viability. Once a passive member of the fire tending, the patient becomes actively responsible for providing a safe container. Doorbells, barking dogs, and other distractions can inherently interfere with the organic *temenos* created in the couple.

Russell quotes Celenza in asking an important question regarding teletherapy: “*Where is the analysis?*” (Celenza, 2005). Within this context lies the existential question of where the subjective, embodied experience is being contained in time and space (Russell, pp.134-135). Zoom creates a gap between self and other leaving one to encounter the not quite here or there experience. For many traumatized patients this existential phenomenon can be disorienting leaving the patient somewhat anxious or dysregulated. According to Stephen Porges in his book, *The Pocket Guide to Polyvagal Theory*, “If we are not safe, we are chronically in a state of evaluation and defensiveness. However, if we can engage the circuits that support social

engagement, we can regulate the neural platform that enables social engagement behaviors to spontaneously emerge" (2017, p. 50), This synchronization of circuitry is something Porges describes as neuroception; something easily disrupted if attained at all through the streaming process. According to Porges: "Neuroception is the process through which the nervous system evaluates risk without requiring awareness. The automatic process involves brain areas that evaluate cues of safety, danger, and life threat" (2017, p. 19). One may imagine the sense of hypervigilance created in a zoom-womb container which is fragile at best, thus unconsciously creating enactments of a patient's prior traumas. These enactments and circuitry problems within the wire connections of the computer can cause disruptions, creating possible psychic fragmentation.

The critical research of neuroscientists Allan Schore and Stephen Porges contributes to the scaffolding built by Harlow's theory of attachment. Schore's brain studies confirm what psychiatrist Carl Jung understood implicitly; that the archetypal world is the bedrock of the psyche. Schore, in his book, *The Development of the Unconscious Mind*, the right brain unconscious begins its human journey through the infant's first primary experiences with the mother. The realm of imagination and emotional experience forms first in the baby's right brain. The right brain development can be severely disrupted in trauma or maternal deprivation. Through touch, eye contact, vocal soothing, and safety in maternal reverie, the attachment bond shapes the nest from which the baby will gain its wings. While co-regulation and the attachment process are critical during the formative years, we now understand through the work of Schore and others that relationship-building extends throughout the lifespan, making the capacity to attach, soothe and regulate essential for the ongoing development of the unconscious right brain (2020, p.8). Moreover, since the right brain begins its development two years prior to the left

brain, this makes the co-regulatory experience of analysis a critical intervention in maintaining and repairing the right brain unconscious from trauma. The analytic relationship bridges the mind, body, brain experience, an orchestration of emotional and psychological movements designed to assist the patient with adaptation created from developmental difficulties and trauma.

Fortifying Polyvagal theory is the work of Edward Tronick and the still face experiment, demonstrating what happens when the mother's regulatory capacities (eye contact, vocal soothing, and kinesthetic touch) fail the child for any length of time. Tronick's work sheds light on Porges' Polyvagal theory and neuroception. Tronick's research reveals that a psychic collapse occurs when the mother turns her face away from the baby. The baby falls into disrepair without the holding environment created by the mother (Tronick, 2009).

The neurological stimulation of the vagus nerve, which controls the eyes and facial muscles and runs down into the heart, provides the couple with a bi-directional flow of connection between the head and heart, producing what Porges calls co-regulation, or sense of safety between the mother and child. This nerve is exceedingly essential in trauma work because it creates the vital sense of safety necessary for a co-regulating bridge within the analytic couple as trauma repair ensues. Trauma repair cannot occur without the mind-body-spirit connection formed in the subtle body through the polyvagal paradigm. According to Porges,

Polyvagal theory provides the vehicle for explaining the importance of physiological states as an intervening variable influencing behavior and our ability to interact with others the theory provides an understanding of how risk and threat shift physiological states to support defense. Moreover, and perhaps most important, the theory explains how safety is not the removal of threat and that feeling safe is dependent on unique cues in the environment and in our relationships that have an active inhibition on defense circuits and promote health and feelings of love and trust (2017, p. 43).

On zoom, the subtle body may be more challenging to access due to the misalignment in eye connection, subtle facial expressions, and the embodied presence of the couple meeting face-to-face. Indeed, zoom as the cuckoo bird is a calculating imposter with an arsenal of ways in which it can up its game of trickery with the host bird's (participant's) capacity to recognize the cuckoo's eggs (the zoom mother). Herein, an analogy of the cuckoo's trickery may be apt.

The cuckoo bird can produce its own eggs to mimic the host egg's exact appearance. With this ingenious adaptation, the cuckoo can rob the nest without the host bird being able to identify the cuckoo's eggs. One wonders how the host mother might be able to locate and identify the fake cuckoo egg from her own when egg mimicry is so remarkable. Some birds can discern more intricate egg patterns through tetrachromatic vision. Tetrachromatic vision allows for ultraviolet and violet light, enhancing the bird's capacity to detect egg forgery (Kalaugher, 33-34). How does zoom perform this feat of trickery as the wire mother? Indeed, for some patients, this fake mother may not be as much of a threat to psychic integrity as with other patients. Early trauma work with patients who need consistent eye contact, soothing, and containment from the analyst may not do well on zoom-like platforms.

According to Mosconi, et.al. in the article "Longitudinal study of amygdala volume and joint attention in 2-4-year old children with autism", suggest that "that failure to orient faces, and more particularly to the eye region of the face is inherent in multiple aspects of social impairment unique to autism" (2009, p. 510). According to Schore, right-brained amygdala enlargement indicates a conditioned, hypervigilant response to fear (2020, p. 71). Individuals fixated on safety may find zoom psychologically and emotionally taxing, thus increasing the likelihood of dissociation, a coping mechanism born from overstimulation. Curiously, one may begin to inquire about the long-term effects of quarantine and right brain atrophy due to lack of

socialization and the physical and spiritual connection of which zoom is only a pseudo replacement.

According to Jungian thought, the seat of the psyche lies within the archetypal unconscious, or what Schore would consider the right brain. Within the archetypal realm, the symbol formation function pumps its contents within the psyche. There is continuous vigorous debate about the capacity to access the subtle body while utilizing zoom. The subtle body exists in the psychic field between the physical and spiritual realms. To become ensouled and thus fully human, the analyst and patient must have access to the field of feeling. This archetypal field can become inaccessible when the couple is too distressed from tracking the intricacies of the relationship on a zoom platform. It is a substantive question as to whether or not the patient can even dream their life into being, especially if the subtle body and delicate feeling function is foreclosed by the Cyborg mother.

The foreclosure of archetypal space by the Cyborg mother is symbolic of the cuckoo who has tossed out the incubating, fertile, host egg for the wire other egg. In the analytic temenos the egg-container becomes infused with a dryness produced by the electric other, robbing the vessel of its cooking capacity. Body and psyche remain separated due to the body psyche dissonance of zoom-the transcendent function potentially becoming locked in the body. This is not to say that the symbolic realm or transcendent function is *completely* disabled, but the gate to the archetypal may become jammed, a trickster-like energy flipping the electric/carnal switch off and on, on and off short-circuiting access to the transcendent. Indeed, this paradigm deserves more reflection regarding the location of the subtle body on streaming platforms. Can this notion of the subtle body *adapt* during a crisis such as Covid, evolving and transmuting space and time, making technology a wire mother who might be preferred during the weaning of the natural

mother, a transitional object in a developmental push? The pivotal realm of debate lies in the access to the subtle body between the analyst and analysand.

Jungian analyst August Cwik emphasizes the location of the subtle body during teletherapy. In his article "The technologically-mediated self," Cwik discusses the benefits of technology platforms such as zoom and points out that regardless of the difficulties, these platforms perform well in various conditions, such as during the pandemic, serving as a good enough mother. Cwik (2021, p. 15) reflects on Jung's ideas about the subtle body:

Jung refers to the imagination in different contexts which may be seen and experienced in different ways on zoom. Cwik points out that 'Jung (1935) discussed the difference between our current understanding of the imagination and the alchemical *imaginatio*. The Alchemist thought of the imagination as a hybrid phenomenon more half spiritual/half physical in nature. This type of imagining was considered a physical activity that could be fitted into the general cycle of material things. 'We have to conceive of these processes not as the immaterial phantoms we readily take fantasy pictures to be, but as something corporeal a subtle body a spiritual semi-spiritual in nature' (Par. 935). This notion of the subtle body connects with the somatic unconscious-a transcendental concept involving the relationship between mind and body.

Cwik discerns where the subtle body exists, a critical notion when pondering the location of the transcendent function. Here, he quotes Jung in *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar given in 1934*,

The part of the unconscious which is designated as the subtle body becomes more and more identical with the functioning of the body, and therefore it grows darker and darker and ends in the utter darkness of matter... Somewhere, unconscious becomes material, because the body is the living unit, and our conscious and our unconscious are embedded in it: they contact the body. Somewhere there is a place where the two ends meet and become interlocked. And that is the [subtle body] where one cannot say whether it is matter, or what one calls 'psyche'. If we are willing to suspend disbelief, then our technologically mediated self has the potential to carry aspects of this subtle body, and imaginal body that becomes closer to the actual self and body of the patient-then there can be actual potential to deeply affect the body (2014, p. 441).

Conversely, if the body is only partially accessible, from the head-up for instance, where one cannot fully feel the other's presence because eyes are not connected and the full formed living body is occluded by techno-psychic skin, then zoom is performing nothing more than a weigh station for the psychotherapeutic process, something which risks dissolution from frustration if continued for too long.

The ongoing cost-benefit analysis of streaming platforms is paramount in the mental health community because the algorithmic upgrades refine the human experience to such a degree that eventually, mimicry between the real relationship and the technological zoom replacement image provides the arms race few people may recognize. Could this unconsciously affect how we feel, altering the depth and perception of the feeling function? With the metaverse technology burgeoning and bubbling underneath the collective psyche, an explosion of this kind of technology is impinging on our culture zeitgeist, ready to explode into our daily life. As holographic technology begins to merge with our psychic reality, our human experience and relatedness will be exceedingly challenged and altered in ways we are not psychologically prepared for.

While we consciously understand that nothing replaces the mother's gaze, what happens when fear keeps us from going out into the world due to an existential threat like Covid-19, long after the virus has been eradicated or contained? Once again, we turn to the cuckoo bird. The strength of defenses and adaptation relies on the host species ability to evolve. Some host species have keen egg rejection instincts resulting in the parasitic species evolving equally strong mimicry skills to defend against egg rejection. However, other hosts do not exhibit such strong rejection defenses and as a result the parasitic species will show no evolved mimicry skills. This is an important statement for it indicates as far as the technology is concerned that complete



rejection of zoom may set in motion an arms race between the human experience and technological mimicry. In contrast, complete acceptance and dependence on the technology for relatedness could end in technological colonization. Perhaps the third, more viable option may consist of a paradigm of discernment in adaptation regarding whom this technology helps and hurts.

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