America in Denial

The Psychology of Russiagate
Editor’s comments

America in Denial

The unexpected election of Donald Trump as President of the United States was, for the majority of voters, a huge shock. Instead of working through the trauma of an intellectually unfit and emotionally unstable personality becoming the most powerful man in the world, many went into denial and grasped at media reports of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to manipulate voters. Last April, special prosecutor Robert Mueller issued a report showing no concrete evidence of conspiracy.

To say people were disappointed would be a vast understatement. But more interesting is to examine the undercurrents that helped the media convince the American public of a “deal” between Trump and Russia. Canadian physician and trauma expert Gabor Maté in an interview explains the intertwining dynamics of discontent and unconscious emotions, giving us a fascinating look at the American mindset. Begins on page 13.

Our feature interviewee, Eva Röttgers, presents an interesting intercultural approach to coaching and workshops in a corporate setting. Trained as a Gestalt therapist, her focus has been to generate holistic, sustainable evolution in an increasingly disruptive world. She has helped companies manage change and organizational development on all levels, including the multicultural aspect. Important for her is teaching people how to reflect on, and work with, opposite poles. Starts on page 3.

Cultural neuroscientist Mai Nguyen-Phuong-Mai argues, in her article on subconscious gender biases, that the latest studies on brain plasticity and evolutionary biology show we all have the potential to become complex beings, with both male and female traits. It’s good food for thought and starts on page 10.

As a foreign correspondent reporting on ethnic divides, Dan MacLeod observed first-hand the dialectic nature of intercultural relations. Each is simultaneously both subject and object; they mirror each other and everything is perception. His tale (on page 16) is of the birth of an emerald, its discovery and loss.

Wishing you an enjoyable read.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief
Interview with

Eva Röttgers

An atypical interculturalist with a Gestalt orientation

The Gestalt Approach deals with the way people perceive and react to outside stimuli. Derived from the German word “Gestalt” (shape, form), it attempts to show how we process information as a holistic, meaningful phenomenon in an apparently chaotic world. The central premise of the Gestalt Approach is that the mind will always generate a global whole through its self-organizing tendencies and habits.

Applying Gestalt principles to the larger picture helps us see human patterns and conflicting needs — how “polarized forces” play out. An example would be a Korean, conditioned with a strong need to work collectively, who has to deal with an American who views the world individualistically. In order to reconcile potential misunderstandings, both parties must adopt their counterpart’s perspective. Gestalt thinking offers an interesting approach to comprehending intercultural differences not only as individuals, but also as groups, organizations, nations.

Eva Röttgers is an interculturalist with a strong Gestalt-oriented background. The focus of her work is managing change and organizational development in a multicultural context. Working as a coach and OD-consultant, she helps improve communication between different levels of hierarchy with differing nationalities.

A member of SIETAR-Deutschland since 1995, she’s been active in developing and organizing small and large group learning processes. She co-founded the Institute for Gestalt-Organizational Development (IGOR) in Frankfurt over 25 years ago and has taught in Germany, Sweden, Norway, France, Russia, Israel and Mexico. Her focus on Gestalt made me curious as to how she operates and, despite her busy schedule, she made time for our interview.

Tell us about your early experiences that led you to be an interculturalist.

I was born and raised in Stuttgart and thought as a child, I had a “normal” German upbringing. Later I realized it wasn’t. My family moved almost every four years which, as you can imagine, was not easy. And living in the dominant Protestant Swabian environment being a Catholic family implied in the Fifties some “cultural” challenges. Additionally, when reflecting later on the conditions of my childhood upbringing, I realized that my mother, a refugee from Silesia, which is now part of Poland, made a big imprint in my life and my personality. Due to the after-war turmoil my parents had to moved to Stuttgart, but my mother never felt at home there.

Later I became interested in her bicultural background and the special situation of the 12 million refugees in West Germany in those years. In that period, it was very seldom reflected on and explained explicitly to children, for sure not in my family. All these experiences, I think, were the roots of...
Eva Röttgers — continued

my interest in intercultural encounters.

And then there was the ’68 movement, which was a cultural clash between the older and the younger generations. Although this movement was also happening in other countries, in Germany it had a special flavor. Suddenly, a lot of the suppressed guilt and shame about German history was in the open and the younger generation was challenging their parents and teachers about their involvement in these cruelties. Their credibility and moral authority vanished. I was still at high school at the time and there were constant political conflicts. In those days, we were acting out our feelings; it was not at all an attitude of exploring them in a respectful manner.

At the age of 19, I had to decide about my professional future. It was clear for me that I did not want to choose a traditional profession like being a doctor or teacher. To find out what could be a more inspiring work with a political impact, I became involved in a pilot project, working with street gangs in Stuttgart. And it turned out that this was what I wanted to do.

To get an adequate professional qualification, I went to Berlin to study Pädagogik-Erziehungswissenschaft, the science of education, what was a new subject for universities. The curriculum was pedagogy, psychology and sociology with the specialty of studying Karl Marx’s Das Kapital extensively. It was for many a quite popular topic in social science – for me as well. For my generation, it was a fruitful way to be against our parents and explore new territories. What’s so interesting today is that, because of the excesses of capitalism, Karl Marx’s ideas are making a comeback.

What did you get out of your studies?
The beginning of the ’70s in Berlin was a very progressive era where we did field and action research work along with our studies. In my case, it was traveling to Denmark for studying innovative approaches and transferring the knowledge to the German social scene. We did a large group project in Berlin by putting all stakeholders together, a hands-on intervention that had real social consequences. Today you would call it a “learning journey” to fuel innovative thinking, what is now widely used in the world of companies. In my case, what prepared me for my later profession was less the content of my studies, but the innovative format and the systemic approach we were taught, which were far ahead of its time.

After my studies, I started as a free-lance trainer. I was 28. Two years later, I took a leadership position at a community center in Berlin to gain experience. I did that for four years and, in parallel, did a Gestalt therapy training.

Why did you do Gestalt therapy training?
In the early ’80s, there were big heated discussions about the “right” approach: change yourself or the system? Peo-
people in the left-wing movement in Berlin had long talks on whether to go into therapy and work on oneself or to go into politics? My approach was more the political one, but having some personal challenges, I decided to do a Gestalt workshop – what was the “thing to do” in those days.

It was very exciting and adventurous: throwing pillows, screaming, lots of life going on. The leader came up to me afterward and said I’d make a good therapist. I said no, I didn’t want to become a therapist. But as my personal challenges continued, I joined the training program 6 months later with the “excuse” that my primary motive was to learn how to help others more effectively. But for the first one and half years, the focus of the training was self awareness and self development. It was within the framework of becoming a therapist.

Part of the 4-year-training was starting to treat individuals and groups under supervision. It wasn’t my initial motivation, but my Gestalt trainer convinced me to do it anyway. Looking back, I’m happy that I followed his advice. Now I am qualified to work on different levels of a system: individuals, groups and organizations.

As my primary intention was to work in an organizational context, I was lucky that one experienced leadership trainer was willing to accept me as a co-trainer. This was another experience of a culture shift in my life, going from the public, social sector to the “profit” world. I was considered exotic in both worlds. You need to remember, this was 1985 and there were very few women in the field. And I lost colleagues and friends, who said “How can you go into the profit world?”

What was it like as a consultant in those days?
What was new in the mid-’80s was the insight that running a company was more than talking about numbers and facts. Some corporations wanted to train their managers to be better leaders. They realized that managing people was important to the company’s success with a focus on soft factors like motivation, communication, emotions and conflicts. It was, in a way, a Gestalt-oriented approach...and that was the training expertise I could offer.

So, you don’t do intercultural training in the real sense.
The main focus of my work is facilitating change processes with people of different cultural backgrounds. So culture is part of the picture....I see to it that all the people concerned are aware of the whole picture, are “in the boat”. Often managers want to implement a certain solution, but they are not so careful in communicating the context and the desired outcomes, what leads to all kind of unintended side effects.

You mean, they haven’t articulated their objectives clearly.
Right. The challenge for many managers is to communicate
more than just the solution; you need to state the objectives, the roadmap, the concerns and context, which will lead to the change requirement. All these important “details” are often not explicitly mentioned. To say simply, “Tomorrow, we will change and you’ll have a different title”, managers find to their surprise that subordinates are not convinced and motivated.

Having worked many years in the field of change management I find that many companies have learnt skilful and creative ways for kicking off transformation processes, but we still find some industries and organizations, which operate in a lean-communication manner. Today, the bigger challenge for most companies is generating sustainable changes in disruptive environments, so that a new developmental level for the whole system has been created.

**But don’t you deal also with intercultural misunderstandings?**

Sure. As I often work with German, Dutch, French, American multinational companies and most business doesn’t only happen in Germany. Cultural issues are important parts of being aware of the “whole picture”. For example, one challenge might be delivery dates. Germans are concerned about always being in time. When the involved parties can have a dialogue about the different interpretations of delivery dates and come up with a shared agreement that they all can live with, Germans then can relax.

Another example would be that Germans engineers might have a challenge with “quick and dirty” methods. Here we need, what we call in Gestalt terms “polarity management” — you have 2 contracting objectives: quality standards and delivery times. My role would be to facilitate a group process that the involved parties find a solution beyond the either-or-dominance of one or the other.

What I’ve learned over the years is that cultural awareness is important at the beginning of a cooperation. When a good foundation of cooperation in a multicultural project is created, the team members will find what works in the actual execution of a task. And – as it is a holistic approach – what might need to be included is the awareness of the other stakeholders (customers, other functions, laws, etc.) and how their cultural imprints might influence the outcome of the whole endeavour.

If, going back to the example I just mentioned, the project is not delivered on time, how would customers in the different cultures react — do they scapegoat or not?

I’ve noticed that today many companies ask for mindfulness training. Do you have an explanation?

Mindfulness in the business world started with Google, where they realized that the accelerated information overflow — with data generation as their business model — was for many individuals too much to digest. The question was raised what we need to learn in order to face
this demand and Google invited all kind of experts to explore this learning field. One answer was meditation and mindfulness training, what created a huge resonance in the company.

As in the Gestalt Approach, awareness of what is happening in the internal and external environment of a system is a core concept. I agree that the approach of mindfulness has made a big contribution to the well-being of individuals and organizations. If meditation and mindfulness training is done skilfully with discipline, people learn a sort of “neutral awareness” without preferences for a certain outcome. This is helpful for embrace conflicting polarities, like speeding up and calming down. Gestalt would go a step further: support conscious choices after having identified needs.

There is, however, one risk I see. If the mindfulness approach is treated only as a method for self-optimization, by which the company tells the trainer: “We want to be saved from the negative consequences of today’s crazy world, so give us the recipe, some tools, so everything will be fine”, adjusting individuals to the environment won’t be sustainable. Mindfulness is also about awareness of the external environment, which means transformation does not stop at the individual level.

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Once you calm down, you can make better decisions. Yes and no. Yes, as the brain is working much better when you are relaxed. No, because I think that the proverb is a little too simple. I’d frame it like this: We live in a complex, disruptive world and you need the capacity to work with both poles, to be fast and calm. Most people get stuck on either side, usually in hectic action, often leading to unexpected, negative outcomes.

I’ve been working with a high-level manager over many years. He thinks, speaks and decides at an amazing speed and he also takes time to listen carefully and quietly for a longer period. And the way he responds you know that he understood very well and pushes the issue to the next level. He can do both, not either-or.

In your trainings, you work with a colorful image of the brain (see page 9). What incited you to have this picture made?

The idea and concept developed over the years while I was doing a leadership program. I saw how difficult it was for people to change their behavior. The participants had insights on how they wanted to behave differently but, in the end, they didn’t change. Learning and insight made little, often no difference. And this is the main problem: many individuals are stuck in automatic responses.

It seems you’re trying to teach the proverb, “In der Ruhe liegt die Kraft” (In calmness lies strength). I continually asked myself why was it so difficult for all of us...
Eva Röttgers — continued

SIETAR is a forum of lively, international people, who are open and eager to learn more about intercultural relations.

They’re open, they want to learn, it’s easy to make contact. It’s a very lively, international community. It’s inspiring to be part of it and I always get new ideas by being in contact with SIETARIANS. This is the positive side.

There are limitations, however. It’s already an accomplishment that interculturalists have put an organization into place. But the inherent weakness of SIETAR, in my view, is like most voluntary organizations, you need very devoted people to make the organization work. And an international organization located in different countries is a special challenge. People come and put a lot of work in and then they’re exhausted and leave. And, more often than not, the next group doesn’t know what was done before. The new people start from scratch with too little opportunity to build from what was accomplished in the past…. And then the progress is very slow and members leave disappointed etc….

Another risk I see in the focus of many in the search for inspiration on the individual level. SIETAR-members’ motivation is mainly to have an exchange with colleagues, gain inspiration, tools, tips for videos etc.

What we need is to focus more being a learning community. I believe Milton Bennett expressed it well: co-creating ideas and activities on a collective level. That would, in my opinion, support us to flourish as an international association of interculturalists.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
A colorful visualization of the brain

A concept developed by Eva Rüttgers

The human brain has developed over the last millions of years the capacity for optimal adaption to environmental conditions. As children, openness to impulses of the surroundings is important for learning, while our caretakers ensure that we are protected from potential threats in our environments. As we grow older, our “psychic immune system” (the ability to take care of ourselves when needed) develops. In a simplified version (illustration on the right), we can note three different layers of the immune system:

1) The habit (comfort) zone of beliefs, where we know from our experiences that we are ‘safe’.

2) The stress zone, where our body provides additional energy to address actual challenges when it is needed.

3) The survival zone, where all energies are mobilized within a fraction of a second when our life is in danger.

Depending on circumstances, our ‘psychic immune system’ determines whether we are open or close to whatever happens around us. This system works automatically, ensuring that our life will remain stable and yet flexible enough to adapt to new circumstances.

Unfortunately for most people, this fluidity gets lost over the years in our life. We become more or less stuck in the ‘comfort zone’. The need for feeling ‘safe’ dominates many of our activities. The beliefs, habits and behaviors, experienced in the past that ensured our safety, will be consciously or unconsciously our favorite choices.

If we look back at the model of the ‘psychic immune system’, we can understand why the preferred response of people in these unsettling times is simply “closing the mind”, believing that a secure future is through protection of borders and maintaining familiar circumstances. On the other hand, having confidence, conviction and excitement about new opportunities, despite feelings of unsettlement and uncertainty, would be a more promising mindset. If we can overcome our traditional neurological wiring, it might provide us with the capacity to take on the paradoxical challenges we are all facing in this highly globalized world.
From dressing up a child to building up a strong person

by Mai Nguyen-Phuong-Mai

Don’t you think like I do? “Great pic, flying in the face of stereotypes: A little girl in blue, unisex clothes, and (gasp) aliens print of some sort. Who needs princess and fairies?”

A few years ago, Facebook CEO’s daughter turned one. I couldn’t help but notice a consistent message from Mark and Priscilla. Baby Maxima often wears blue (stereotypically a boy’s color), unisex style, without gender abiding prints - aliens, in this picture. When Maxima was born, she was photographed with the book “Quantum Physics for Babies.”

We are all influenced by subconscious stereotypes, and in turn, project them onto our children. How often do we buy dolls, cooking and nursing toys for girls but cars, building blocks and superman costumes for boys? What really makes us praise girls as “pretty” and boys as “smart”? Why do we chastise daughters for being “unruly,” but feel that “active” sons as nothing short of natural?

How often that girls are taught to do chores while son are free to play videogames? Why do we overprotect daughters to the point of near captivity but let boys roam around to gain experience? Why girls can’t be girls but “boys will be boys”? How often do we expect our girls to focus on raising family and boys on becoming breadwinner?

We say: “everyone makes a choice”, but can we face the fact that all choices are influenced by the social environment, and the very choices of parents, friends, celebrities, and everyone else? Go to the very bottom of that question, is it a baby’s own choice to be born, to be raised in a certain family and culture, to get the first toy, go to a certain school, read a certain book and uphold a certain value?

Upbringing and education are often characterized by cultural values and subconscious bias that will influence and weigh on children for life. Even when parents are conscious of stereotypes, it is hard to escape them from a society full of gender biases. Children take role models from friends in kindergartens, television, grandparents, and every single other adult around them.

Humans are social animals. When a child sees boys playing with cars, girls playing with dolls, their mother busy with housework and their father with driving…etc., the child would slowly change their thoughts and behaviors accordingly.

The media surrounding children is full of biases and
From dressing up...  
— continued

stereotypes. In movies and fairy tales, young pretty girls wait for their princes to come so their life can be fulfilled. Men should be rich, royal, or warriors to stand any chance to mate (!). Turn on the TV and most advertisements take advantage of lazy stereotypes to find way into consumers’ brain. If an ad for detergent features a husband, consumers may have a slightest chance of cognitive dissonance. And so, let’s avoid it.

Children are much more insightful. In a viral video, a girl points out the blatant gender bias. T-shirts for boys have “Be a hero” and for girls’ are “I need a hero”

However, companies are increasingly aware of this social change. Campaigns have been based on progressive values of equal opportunities to attract highly educated and liberal parents.

For example, Toy ‘R’ Us now has catalogues with girls playing soccer and boys cooking. In “Frozen,” both princesses are strong and confident women. A prince is not even the final goal of life, and the ultimate power is sisterhood.

The dangerous thing about gender bias is that it creates a terrible gap between being men and being women, so much that these two seem like completely different species. Popular books such as “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus,” or “Why Men don’t listen and women can’t drive”, or the whole gaga of “male brain” and “female brain,”... etc. completely miss the latest advance in neuroscience and the idea of “brain plasticity”. It sells the simplified idea that biological gender identities are hardwired from birth, and if a girl grows up in forest, she would still like pink clothes and wait for a prince to come (fairy tale shows it).

Well, truth is, if left in a forest, her best scenario is to be rescued by wolves, and to end up being a feral child who crawls in all four. Culture is the driving force of humankind. It is stronger than genes when it comes to behavioral adaption.

In fact, the only thing that separates human and animal is that animal is guided by genes, and humans are mostly guided by a culture. A great book on this subject is Wired for Culture by Mark Pagel, praised by Nature to be the best book written on culture so far.

Evolutionary biology and neuroscience have shown us that there is no such clear biological borderline for gender. Male and female are only two lazy labels we put on
to simplify a very dynamic interaction between biology and social environment. In fact, everyone has the potential to become a very complex being, with both male and female stereotypical traits.

Back to our story: So if humans are mainly guided by a culture, why don’t we create a culture that has fewer stereotypes and prejudices for children? Instead of letting subconscious biases control us, we can consciously minimize the consequences.

A child can play with dolls and learns to care for others, play cooking and learns to help parents with chores, play teacher and learns how to share knowledge and communicate effectively, or play superhuman to understand the value of compassion when having power. These qualities are gender-less. And progressive parents will understand that toys are crucial to carve personality.

Of course, our children will grow up and stereotype-ridden societies will continue to influence them, just like us and everyone else. No one can escape subconscious bias totally, but we can definitely become AWARE of the fact that we are all under its spell. From then on, we would pay more attention to our words and habits. It can all start with the kind of clothes we dress our children up, or the first toy we put into their hands.

Overcoming bias starts by becoming aware.

Dr. Mai Nguyen-Phuong-Mai (or Mai Nguyen) is Associate Professor at Amsterdam School of International Business (AMSIB) where she has been working since 2008. She’s involved in diverse research projects. Her research interests include Diversity Management, Asian corporate culture, Middle East and Islamic culture, Face-work Negotiation, and Instructional Design.

In the last few years, she has taken interest in cultural neurosciences together with her study at King’s College London in a Master program on Applied Neuroscience. In May 2017, she published a book with Amsterdam University Press titled “Intercultural Communication – An Interdisciplinary Approach: When Neurons, Genes, and Evolution Joined the Discourse”.

This is the first text book in the field of IC that incorporate some basic insights from newly emerging disciplines. It advocates a fundamental change from seeing culture as static to a more responsive paradigm of seeing culture as dynamic. It challenges the dominant school of static culture with scientific foundation in neuroscience. Since the date of release, she has been invited to keynote at multiple conferences. Her up-and-coming book with Routledge in August 2019 is another attempt to enrich the field of cross-cultural management with insights from brain science.

She can be reached at dr.nguyenphuongmai@gmail.com
In this interview at The Greyzone.com, Dr. Gabor Maté discusses with his son Aaron the psychological reasons why so many Americans were disappointed in the conclusion of the Mueller report. His son begins by asking about the general mood of the American people.

GABOR MATÉ: What’s interesting is that in the aftermath of the Mueller thunderbolt of no proof of collusion, there were articles about how people are disappointed about this finding. Now, disappointment means that you’re expecting something and you wanted something to happen, and it didn’t happen. So that means that some people wanted Mueller to find evidence of collusion, which means that emotionally they were invested in it. It wasn’t just that they wanted to know the truth. They actually wanted the truth to look a certain way. And wherever we want the truth to look a certain way, there’s some reason that has to do with their own emotional needs and not just with the concern for reality.

And in politics in general, we think that people make decisions on intellectual grounds based on facts and beliefs. Very often, actually, people’s dynamics are driven by emotional forces that they’re not even aware of in themselves. And I, really, as I observed this whole Russiagate phenomenon from the beginning, it really seemed to me that there was a lot of emotionality in it that had little to do with the actual facts of the case.

There is no question that for a lot of people in this country, the election of Trump was a traumatic event. Now, when a trauma reaction happens, which is to say you’re hurt and you’re pained and you’re confused and you’re scared and you’re bewildered, there’s basically two things you can do about it. One is you can own that I’m pained and I’m hurt and I’m bewildered and I’m really scared. And then try and look at what happened to bring me to that situation.

Or you can instead of dealing with those emotions come up with some kind of explanation that makes me feel better about them. So that I’ve got this pain. I’ve got this bewilderment. I’ve got this fear. So what I’m looking at, what does it say about American society that a man like this could even run for office, let alone be elected?

What does it say about American society that so many people are actually enrolled in believing that this man could be any kind of a savior? What does that say about the divisions and the conflicts and the contradictions and the genuine problems in this culture? And how do we address those issues?

You can look at that. Or you can say there must be a devil somewhere behind all this, and that devil is a foreign power, and his name is Putin, and his country is Russia. Now you’ve got a simple explanation that doesn’t invite you or necessitate that you explore your own pain and your own fear and your own trauma.
America in denial...  
— continued

Donald Trump, a traumatized persona

So I really believe that really this Russiagate narrative was, on the part of a lot of people, a sign of genuine upset at something genuinely upsetting. But rather than dealing with the upset, it was an easier way to in a sense draw off the energy of it in to some kind of a believable and comforting narrative. It’s much more comforting to believe that some enemy is doing this to us than to look at what does it say about us as a society.

I mean there was a massive denial of the actual dynamics in American society that led to the election of this traumatized and traumatizing individual as President, number one.

AARON MATÉ: Because you think Donald Trump himself is traumatized?

GABOR MATÉ: Oh, Donald Trump is a clearest example of a traumatized politician one could ever see. He’s in denial of reality all the time. He is self aggrandizing. His fundamental self concept is that of a nobody. So he has to make himself huge and big all the time and keep proving to the world how powerful and smart, what kind of degrees he’s got and how smart he is. It’s a compensation for terrible self image. He can’t pay attention to anything, which means that his brain is too scattered because it was too painful for him to pay attention.

What does this all come down to? The childhood that we know that he had in the home of a dictatorial child disparaging father, and a very weak [mother]...

AARON MATÉ: Fred Trump, his father.

GABOR MATÉ: Who demeaned his children mercilessly. One of Trump’s brothers drank himself to death. And Trump compensates for all that by trying to make himself as big and powerful and successful as possible. And, of course, he makes up for his anger towards his mother for not protecting him by attacking women and exploiting women and boasting about it publicly. I mean, it’s a clear trauma example. I’m not saying this to invite sympathy for Trump’s politics. I’m just describing that that’s who the man is. And the fact that such a traumatized individual can be elected to the position of what they call the most powerful person in the world speaks to a traumatized society.

And like individuals can be in denial, a society can be in denial. So this society is deeply in denial about its own trauma, and particularly in this case about the trauma of that election. So one way to deal with trauma is denial of it. The other way is to project onto other people things that you don’t like about yourself.

Now, it’s only a matter of historical fact. And no serious person, no serious student of history can possibly deny how the United States has interfered in the internal politics of just about every nation on earth.

AARON MATÉ: And interfere, by the way, is a kind term. We’re talking about what actual physical manifestation.
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GABOR MATÉ: I’m talking about mass murder.

AARON MATÉ: Exactly. It’s mass murder in many cases.

GABOR MATÉ: For example, in Chile, there’s an elected government that America cheerfully overthrows, even boasts about it. Not to mention the current interference in Venezuela, the internal politics. Not to mention, how as you’ve pointed out, many others have pointed out, and [Time] boasts about it on its cover, about how United States helped Boris Yeltsin get elected.

AARON MATÉ: “Yankees to the rescue.”

GABOR MATÉ: So even if it’s true what the Russians have even if it’s the worst thing that’s alleged about the Russians is true, it’s not even on miniscule proportion of what America has publicly acknowledged it has done all around the world. And so this rage that we project, then, and this bad guy image that we project onto the Russians, it’s simply a mirror a very inadequate mirror of what America publicly and openly and repeatedly does all around the world.

Now, you may think that’s a good thing to do. I’m not arguing about that. I’m not arguing politics. All I’m saying is projection is when we project onto somebody else the things that we do ourselves, and we refuse to deal with the implications of it. So there’s denial and then there’s projection.

And then, there’s just something in people. I can tell you well, your mother can tell you this that in relationships it’s always easier to see ourselves as the victims than as the perpetrators. So there’s something comforting about seeing oneself as the victim of somebody else. Nobody likes to be a victim. But people like to see themselves as victims because it means they don’t have to take responsibility for what we do ourselves.

AARON MATÉ: I can relate to that, too.

GABOR MATÉ: Yeah. I’m just saying the effect of somebody else. So this functions beautifully in politics. And populist politicians and xenophobic politicians around the world use this dynamic all the time. That whether it’s Great Britain, or whether it’s France with their vast colonial empires, they’re always the victims of everybody else. The United States is always the victim of everybody else. All these enemies that are threatening us. It’s the most powerful nation on earth, a nation that could single handedly destroy the earth a billion times over with the weapons that are at its disposal, and it’s always the victim.

So this victimhood, there is something comforting about it because, again, it allows us not to look at ourselves. And I think there was this huge element of victimhood in this Russiagate process.

The second part of the interview can be read at: https://thegrayzone.com/2019/05/07/gabor-mate-russiagate-interview-transcript/

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Il était une fois...

Émeraude

by Dan MacLeod

She didn’t know where she came from or that she came from anywhere, just that she was. Was, in the earth, enclosed, asleep, asleep from birth but born, born yet not alive, until the river moved, the earth became broken and she was. Herself, a separate piece of something, tasting oxygen, feeling heat in the sun, cold in the night, slipping from bank to bed to sleep under water again for seventeen years.

...The boat slides into shadow, he likes that, pulling the oars in a long sweep and then pulling them in to glide at the edge of the lake in the green shadow of trees, sun rising behind, a glowing netherworld of pines bleeding light on a silver mirror, closeness of air, silence.

It was a light he’d seen before. In the forest, years earlier when he was four, his first times out in the world, afternoons alone exploring the miles of woods, discovering secret pockets, magic spaces of emerald light decorated with pine-cones. That shade of light six years later as the boat glides to stop on the waveless water, suspended in time, amber air, greenish twinge of pine.

Those years recede in the quickening wash of multiplying others but the glow of light remains. Though that color, memory of color, is impossible to remember, a picture in a book of fairy tales. We remember in images born to fade, why there are paintings in caves, why we remember photographs, not the moving picture of people in our lives. But the feeling of memory never leaves, sight and sound and smell and skin and feelings. A kingdom made of a forest glade of magic emerald light.

...She felt ice and cold mud in dark water, then light, heat, air. She was sleeping, was awake and alive.

...It was in the way of the light that he saw her, a glint of green at the edge of the river. He stopped dead, became a photograph seen in the future taken by someone else, her. He looked for a long time before seeing if she was real, not a trick of light or the emerald light of memory. In the green of his eyes, the heat of his hands, in the heat and light of herself, she was. As true an emerald as ever existed in the world.

He saw himself in her and she was reflected back in his eyes. The fit of her in his hand, pulsing against pulse, a rhythm to them. He raised her up to the sunset, his eyes her color of light and she tumbled from his hands into the river and her color was lost to her as she was lost to him. And he searched and searched and could not find her, searched until he breathed the water and joined her in the earth of their bed.

Émeraude

et les deux se retrouvèrent pour toujours ensemble au fond de l’eau, mourus

Il était une fois...
Discussion and conflict over the welcoming and acculturation of migrants and immigrants has reached new heights in many quarters and corners of the world. There is frequently a lack of appreciation of the contributions that newcomers make to a society, but there is as well a need for the kind of storytelling and experience-sharing that can motivate newcomers to overcome fresh obstacles and succeed in an alien environment. Dr. Fiona Citkin has provided just such a collection of stories about extraordinarily successful immigrant women in the USA that dispel ignorance toward immigrants as well as remove the hesitancy to pursue success on the part of newcomers.

The eighteen success stories, told about women arriving from every corner of the globe, with which the book begins, are not the end of the matter, but just the beginning, as the author goes on in the second part of the book to highlight seven values which led to the success. She proceeds even further in part three to provide a kind of handbook to assist the newcomer in managing one’s inner and outer resources to go forward.

I would rather strongly suggest this book as a model of meeting the need for providing inspirational and informational stories and cultural advice in the many cultures that are receiving, hosting and educating newcomers, both women and men and preparing their populations to accept and include them.

Realistic challenges of challenges faced and how they are being met are best told by the immigrants themselves as they are experienced in treading the path toward desired success. Such accounts should fill the needs of both migrant and indigenous audiences as new neighbors to learn and go about discovering and connecting with each other, sharing their values and their aspirations. It is my hope that readers keep finding these stories in themselves and others and take them apart to examine their hidden treasures and living energies. I am reminded of the quote I found in a children’s book Crow and Weasel by Barry Lopez, years ago, “Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves.”

Most importantly, it is imperative to recognize that being and becoming acculturated into an alien environment is not abandonment of one’s native culture. Rather it is about truly discovering these in all their dimensions as they are highlighted in new environments, understanding them in new ways, and seeing how these contribute to one’s strengths and flexibility as well as enrich one’s self and one’s neighbors.
In *The Descent of Man*, Grayson Perry has provided readers with an entertaining yet surgical look at the current stresses of masculinity, its so-called crisis and stereotypical toxicity. There is nothing wrong with men per se, but they easily fall victim to a cultural imprisonment where their values and behaviors are distorted, exaggerated, narrowly framed and put on a slippery slope to depression, anger, and violence toward self and others.

Rather than a scientific psychological or socio-cultural analysis, Perry provides us with the truth-telling and innovative perspectives of an artist as he sorts through the everyday of the male experience. Not bound by the meta-narrative that punishes flexibility and holds out unattainable awards for machismo, he is free to dress as he likes and mess as he likes with the cultural dogma that guards men and leads to our disposability. We have rights to be different, and the book not only concludes with but is a manifesto of these rights to a fuller manhood. Manhood does not have to be played as a zero-sum game, and Perry is himself evidence to this claim.

By pointing out the popular acceptability of blending contemporary masculine ideology with “common sense”, Perry challenges us with a practical example of how the metanarratives that constitute our realities and become unassailable, undeniable, unconscious and self-justifying frames. They are accepted as nature, as the way things are, no matter how painful and destructive they may be. Perry powerful delivers an insight that those of us who claim to be students of and teachers about culture need to add to the cutlery needed to cut into it, taste it and digest it as well as dare to explore new recipes for cooking it up.

Perry exposes how what we hold as “common sense” challenges us with an assumption: “Gender feels as natural as breathing. How could it be learned?” Not only do we perform our roles in the drama of life, but we are given a script to follow. As the author notes, “Our most basic, most ancient cultural form is the narrative. Stories affect us at the deepest level. We all hold the stock of myths, legends, folktales, gossip and epic dramas within us.” This is what we inevitably resource as each of us struggles to be “a good man.” Gender is performative.

There is a lot to not like about the current definition of masculinity. The author does not mince words nor hold back his anger and disgust about the flailing and failing fashions that we grasp for as success symbols in the search for manhood. Despite his critical incisiveness, however, Perry is an optimist. The book is sprinkled with provocative cartoons that both illustrate and explore contradictions and new directions which the text addresses. In all, a pleasure to read, a work of art to admire.

Reviewed by George Simons
Lately, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in archetypes and personality templates. Some are revisiting Carl Jung’s archetypes and others, particularly concerned with the decline of male identity, harken back to Joseph Campbell’s heroes. We are looking for something, perhaps something we sense we have lost. Paul Schafer’s work offers us a fresh approach to identity formation information, a new model, if you will, something that pulls old models together and allows them to work for us again.

Put briefly, The Cultural Personality expresses Schafer’s belief that human beings should be holistic, centered, creative, altruistic, and humane. If this sounds abstract and vague, perhaps a bit too touchy-feely, this short essay is about the thinking and behavior that give the cultural personality substance, flesh and bones, heart and soul. The author begins our journey by a hard look the demands of the current context in which we live. This necessitates the emergence of the concept of the cultural personality and its resultant behaviors, namely living out this model in our everyday words and actions. All this in slightly less than 100 pages.

We are immersed in and we are culture, as well as being its makers, so why should we not be known as such? One contemporary temptation is to abandon the hard-won riches of humanity, to escape into a naysaying individualism, deliberately not knowing whence we came and where we are going. The alternative temptation is to adopt a narrow protective, populist shell, excluding all culture but that proudly touted as one’s own. Many young people today are either floating meaninglessly “above it all” or immersed in the meanness of Generation Identity.

We need to turn inherent and ambient culture from being a burden on our lives to a treasure house of resources. In a world knowing violence and pain as well as commodification of all sorts and at every level, this may not be easy. We have a choice, not simply of which mask to wear but which persona to create. Yes, we become individuals, we achieve uniqueness, but not through the sour emptiness of rejection but rather through the transparency and embrace of enlightened perception, which, if we are to believe what current neuroscience is telling us, becomes not just something we have but something we are.

The pages of The Cultural Personality model what they preach, delving richly into worldwide cultural resources and the wisdom of those who have yearned for, ingested and broadcast them throughout the ages. Too often, I hear the claim that abandoning one’s cultures allows one to claim to be a “cosmopolitan”, not realizing that the word cosmos means ‘the world” but it contains the sense of its beauty, order and integrity. We thank the author for reminding us to embrace it.
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Editorial
Eva Röttgers
An atypical interculturalist with a Gestalt orientation

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Events, Workshops, Congresses
IESEG and IACCM conjoint CONFERENCE in Paris
31 October – 2 November 2019

Intercultural competencies for a disruptive VUCA world. Exploring creativity, innovation, resilience and resistance in intercultural research, training and management

While globalisation with its quick flows of people, information and technology has been a fact for many years and many lessons have been learnt, the ever-increasing scale and pace nonetheless adds to the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) the world finds itself in today, with the challenges posed seemingly increasing rather than decreasing.

The conference theme thus focuses on creativity and innovation as we want to explore new approaches and ideas to familiar problems that nonetheless present themselves anew every day.

Exploring these VUCA dynamics and how intercultural competence is and can be used to navigate these challenging waters therefore seems to be more important than ever. The conference aims to continue the dialogue between scholars, trainers and practitioners as all three groups will contribute valuable insights to this discussion and to explore together new and creative ways of promoting and embedding intercultural competence in organisations and to managing in a VUCA world.

We are looking forward to seeing you in Paris.

Conference Chairs: Grant Douglas (IESEG, France) and Barbara Covarrubias Venegas (IACCM and FHWien, Austria)

Web: iaccm-congress.ieseg.fr
Contact: iaccm2019@ieseg.fr
Events, workshops, congresses

SIETAR Europa Webinars

June 18th, 2019, Tuesday 18:00-19:00 (CET)
Speaker: Manuela Marquis, Mithun Midhha
Topic: “Intergenerational Mastery for M&As: Building the bridge as you walk!”
Mergers and Acquisitions (M&As) have been in vogue for a long time and there are many more to come. What images come to your mind when you think of a merger between international companies? Have you been通过 creative chaos, intended misunderstandings and lost identities? This webinar includes best practices like 7 ways to build a constructive M&A and 7 ways to avoid potential pitfalls in your next organizational transformation.

July 16th, 2019, Tuesday 18:00-19:00 (CET)
Speaker: Ursula Brinkmann, PhD
Topic: “From Clashes to Creativity: Team Readiness for (Culturally) Diverse Teams.”
Research shows that the worst and the best teams have one thing in common: the diversity of backgrounds of their members. Diverse teams have more clashes and conflicts than less diverse teams, and so often fail to perform. However, diverse teams can also outperform less diverse teams in being more creative and innovative. This webinar invites you to join us on the journey from clashes to creativity, and to learn more about how we support (culturally) diverse teams to make this move.

Bath, United Kingdom

10-14 June 2019
Developing intercultural training skills
This course is designed for experienced trainers from fields such as language training, communication skills training and management training, who wish to learn more about the theory and practice of intercultural training, both to integrate intercultural topics into their current training and also to deliver their own intercultural training courses. Information at: www.lts-training.com/ or contact adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com

Paris, France

31 October - 2 November, 2019
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Exploring creativity, innovation, resilience and resistance in intercultural research, training and management. Many lessons have been learnt, the ever-increasing scale and pace nonetheless adds to the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) the world finds itself in today, with the challenges posed seemingly increasing rather than decreasing. The conference theme focuses on creativity and innovation as we want to explore new approaches and ideas to familiar problems that nonetheless present themselves anew every day. Web: iaccm-congress.ieseg.fr

Puglia, Italy

July 22 - 26, 2019
Cultural Global Labs, The focus and purpose of Cultural Global Labs is to bring together a learning community in different parts of the world, with an emphasis on co-creation of meaning. It is a transformative learning experience that blends intercultural concepts, theories, and frameworks with experiential travel. You will engage and create connections with like-minded people, both in workshops designed to facilitate intercultural learning and promote professional and personal development, and through experiential travel activities. The link to the event with all the details: https://voomago.com/cultural-global-labs/

CCC - Break

June 18th, 2019, Tuesday 11:00 - 11:40 am (CET)
Moderator: Birgit Griese-Saarinen, Joanna Sell
Topic: “How can silence in communication be interpreted and how can we adapt to it?”

Online Everyday

The SIETAR Europa group, discussing
How do men in your culture tend to react to tragic news?
on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession. To join, click here: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2740568

For more information, contact George Simons at diversophy@gmail.com