

Neutrality ? Bystanders and the Refusal to Witness: Psychoanalytic Perspectives. Ukraine Gaza and Grenfell. David Morgan UK Igor Romanov Ukr Claudia Frank Germany

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Abstract Content (EN)

This talk will be on the psychic life of bystanders and how individuals, institutions, and societies can remain passive in the face of atrocity, systemic neglect, and unfolding catastrophe. From what is becoming a genocidal devastation in Gaza to the war in Ukraine and preventable deaths at Grenfell Tower uk and from climate collapse to the erosion of democratic norms, the bystander position is not one of overvalued neutrality complicity.

Psychoanalysis does offer some unique tools to interrogate this condition, but unfortunately can also emulate it. Concepts like denial, disavowal or projective identification, splitting, and institutional melancholia illuminate how unbearable realities are managed by turning away, locating blame elsewhere, or clinging to our defensive illusions. Yet psychoanalysis also paradoxically offers resources for reparation, mourning, and ethical witnessing.

So what unconscious processes shape the bystander position in relation to political violence, systemic racism, and the climate crisis? How do our institutions reproduce cultures of silence, and more importantly, how can they be made to speak, and what distinguishes witnessing from voyeurism, solidarity from identification, neutrality from complicity?

What can psychoanalysis contribute to breaking the paralysis of bystanding, both in its own institutions and others, and to foster the courage to act?