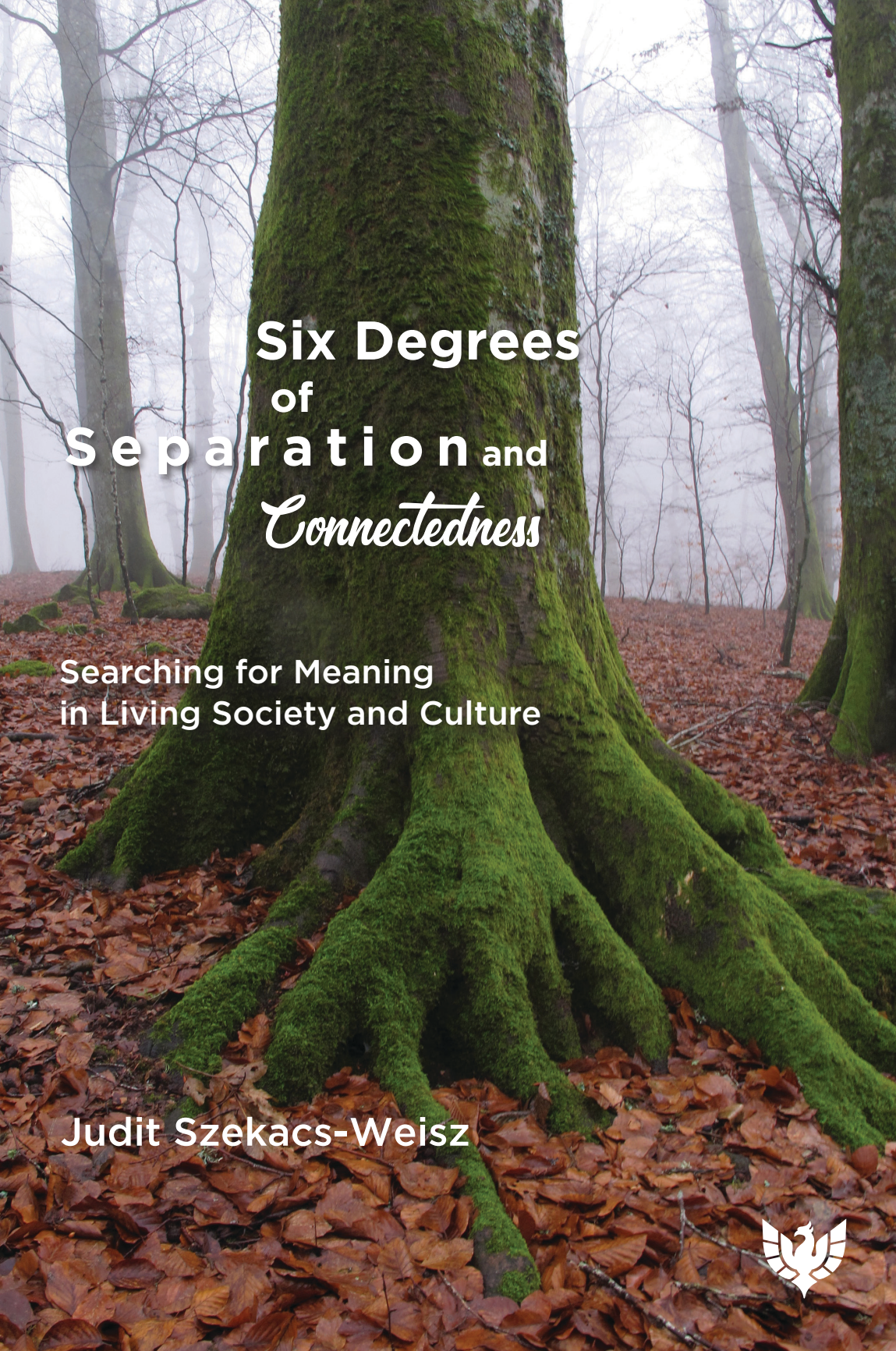

Six Degrees
of
Separation and
Connectedness
Searching for Meaning
in Living Society and Culture
Judit Szekacs-Weisz

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firing the mind

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About the author

Judit Szekacs-Weisz, PhD, is a bilingual psychoanalyst and psychotherapist. Born and educated (mostly) in Budapest, Hungary, she has taken in the way of thinking and ideas of Ferenczi, the Balints, Hermann, and Rajka as an integral part of a "professional mother tongue". The title of this book, *Six Degrees of Separation and Connectedness: Searching for Meaning in Living Society and Culture*, is connected to that history, specifically, a work of Frigyes Karinthy.* She is a founding member of the Sándor Ferenczi Society, Budapest. The experience of living and working in a totalitarian regime and the transformatory years leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall sensitised her to the social and individual aspects of trauma, identity formation, and strategies of survival. In 1990, she moved to London, where, with a small group of psychoanalysts,

* Frigyes Karinthy, a good friend of Ferenczi and a visionary writer, published a short story in 1929 creating the basis for an elementary principle in social networking stating that all people are six or fewer social connections away from each other. This theory became known as "the six degrees of separation".

therapists, artists, and social scientists, she founded IMAGO East West and later the Multilingual Psychotherapy Centre (MLPC) to create a space where diverse experiences of living and the changing context and language in different cultures can be explored and creative solutions found. She writes about body-and-mind, trauma, emigration, changing context, and social dreaming.

Another main area of her interest is the history of psychoanalysis especially Sándor Ferenczi and the Budapest School. With Tom Keve, she edited *Ferenczi and His World: Rekindling the Spirit of the Budapest School* and *Ferenczi for Our Time: Theory and Practice*; with Ferenc Eros and Ken Robinson, *Sándor Ferenczi–Ernest Jones: Letters 1911–1933*; and, with Ivan Ward, *Lost Childhood and the Language of Exile*.

Preface

Judit Szekacs-Weisz is a formidable presence in the world of psychoanalysis; an inspirational ball of energy, fizzing with ideas and the drive to get things done. It is my absolute honour to be the publisher of her latest book and to write its preface.

Judit started her life in Budapest, Hungary, before making her way to the UK. As a bilingual psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, she has always had a keen interest in the influence of language. In 1996, having met with other colleagues similarly interested, she co-founded the IMAGO Multilingual Psychotherapy Centre (MLPC), a clear manifestation of her innovatory drive and determination.

Building yet further on her interest in the subject, her revolutionary edited work *The Lost Language of Childhood* drew on the—at the time—neglected themes of language, migration, loss, memory, and oblivion, and the effects of unrecognised individual and collective trauma. Published over twenty years ago, the book remains as relevant as ever and enables the reader to reflect on and comprehend the seismic sociocultural and political changes we continue to face.

It was this book that brought Judit and I together, and I was delighted to be able to reissue the work and keep it alive for a new generation. Her latest work is a carefully collated collection of fourteen fascinating papers written by Judit over a number of decades, some published for the first time in this book. Split into four evocative parts—Strategies of survival and staying alive; Looking at fairy tales, art, and dreams; Lessons from history; and Back to real time—there is a sense of looking at the world anew. Judit embodies this as she revisits words and ideas that have grown and developed since they were first put to paper, offering us further reflections on their meaning.

This collection of papers brings a flavour of Judit's varied but cohesive concerns, written in her inimitable conversational style that draws the reader in to her world. Read on to discover—and savour—her evocative connections between the personal and professional that will inspire new ways of thinking.

Kate Pearce
Publisher, Karnac Books

FOREWORD

Six degrees of separation and connectedness as an offer of mutuality

Ken Robinson

I have long admired Judit's thinking about trauma and emigration, and their impact on language, identity, and psychotherapy, together with her tireless capacity to put it into action in the real world. I am also already familiar with some of the papers in this book, with their often wonderfully aphoristic style and fine eye for quotation, but reading them here is rather like visiting an exhibition of work by an artist whose works I am used to interacting with—Rembrandt's self-portraits come to mind, no doubt because, to use Judit's own words, she is always, like Rembrandt, "busy writing [her] own life" (p. xix). Here, in *Six Degrees of Separation and Connectedness*, as in my imagined exhibition, papers already known are curated afresh, reframed by those that surround them to create a new creative and dynamic context in which they inform each other. Judit refers to Gadamer's conviction that play is fundamental to human life. He understood that it is basic to art as existing dialogically in a community of artists, performers, and audiences. Brecht understood something similar. To read Judit's book is to be invited not just into a dialogue with its papers, but into the dialogue between them, as themes

emerge, are elaborated upon, and cross-fertilise each other in an enriching hermeneutic circle. To quote Judit, we move "in a space where objects can be constructed and deconstructed, observed and explored in different ways, visions formulated, and creative solutions found" (p. 66). In the more narrowly psychoanalytic sphere, we are also in the world of Winnicott, whose ideas on transitional phenomena and space are germane to Judit's project. And it is not always appreciated how important the playground of art was for Freud, who, like Judit, thought that artists and psychoanalysts were "valuable allies" in their explorations of our lives at depth. In these papers, Sándor Ferenczi, the Balints, Imre Hermann, and Tibor Rajka, along with Winnicott, rub shoulders with the painters Lajos Gulácsy and Magritte, the satirist George Mikes, the film makers Bunuel and Ildikó Enyedi, Camus' *The Plague*, fairy tales, and J. K. Rowling. Like Freud, in both his Vienna circle and the Café Landtmann, and Ferenczi, in the Grand Café, Budapest, Judit has enjoyed the stimulus of artists as well as analysts and social scientists, working with them to found IMAGO East West and explore diverse experiences of living across different cultures, languages, and traumas, and their impact on identity.

Judit's work belongs to a tradition of paying attention not just to psychic reality, but also to historical (often multigenerational) and environmental reality and their interrelation. In this respect, she applies John Byng-Hall's concept of the family script to the social sphere to good effect. Home is where she starts from and home being Hungary, her thinking is informed particularly by the Budapest tradition. She has done an enormous amount to bring that tradition into the British (and international) psychoanalytic domain, building on Michael Balint's efforts after years of suspicion after Ferenczi's death about his clinical experiments. She has worked hard to engender interest in the Ferenczi archive after it transferred to the Freud Museum London and to open up the Balint papers in the Archives of the Institute of Psychoanalysis—it was one of my last tasks as the Institute's honorary archivist to help reassure

André Haynal that they would find a safe home in the archives. I share with Judit a commitment to ensuring that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana, 1905, p. 284), a commitment that gave birth to the Living Archives Project, and, amongst other achievements, the publication of the *Sándor Ferenczi–Ernest Jones: Letters 1911–1933.*

At the heart of Judit's inheritance from the Budapest tradition is her placing "love and primary object relations ("the mother–baby dual union") … as the basic conditions of all further development" and her charging the analyst with being a "basically good object" with all that implies for theory and clinical practice (p. 4). As one who traces a part of his psychoanalytic inheritance back to Ferenczi as my analytic great-great-grandfather, I am touched by her boldness in a world that can still belittle this position. Drawing particularly on Ferenczi's work on trauma and his earlier foundational paper "Stages in the development of the sense of reality" (1913b)—she breathes fresh life into it—she visits and revisits how we survive trauma, personal and societal, by, for example, splitting or even atomisation, or not remembering our history, or with "borrowed identities" (p. 51). Sensitive to the horrors of trauma, she remains equally sensitive to the protection that our defences offer, no matter what their cost. But I cannot do justice to the quality and insight of Judit's discussions here—their wisdom is in the detail—nor can I represent her ability to create clinical narratives that take us to the heart of the patient.

The fundamental opposition of primary love and the basic fault is echoed and re-echoed in a series of related binary polarities, protective survival mechanisms ranged against the harmonious: the injunction "do not remember" against "continuity of being", the cloak of mediocrity against creativity, splitting, isolation, and emptiness against mutuality. The latter, mutuality, Judit reminds us, is an important concept, that Ferenczi was the first to recognise. It is "an opposite of a 'basic fault'" that can be transformative as, as it were, "the 'magic component' of primary love" (p. 47).

Mutuality finds its way into Judit's fascinating account of social dreaming and, too, into her discussion of the Harry Potter fairy tale. In it, she sees an opportunity to share "a story of traumatised generations. … where ideology, power manipulations, and politics invade everybody's life" (p. 48). As she emphasises, "sharing makes the trauma bearable" (p. 47).

Questions about language figure prominently throughout Judit's papers, the linguistic disorientation that comes with emigration, the extent to which language can express—maybe incarnate is better—the experience of trauma, especially where it is at the level of primary object relationships. How do we enter the world of the other when their words have become empty of affect? Signifiers without emotional signifieds? Here, we might have to listen differently, to a language that came before the development of a verbal self, a language of the senses, of rhythms, that can be inscribed in the body and its movements, perhaps the rhythms of breathing. These and other possibilities, she gifts us. As a thank you, I shall describe how they have revitalised my understanding of working with one of my own patients who emigrated not from one country to another against a background of totalitarian opposition to personhood, but from one class to another, and one dialect to another. He suffered from a fractured sense of identity.

When Judit describes working with a Hungarian patient in the Hungarian language after years of not doing so, she writes: "I tasted words and phrases like long-forgotten delicacies, enjoyed the poetics, syntax, the plasticity, and creative potentials of Hungarian grammar" (pp. 9–10). Working with my British patient who had to negotiate his own form of linguistic dislocation, taught me about the taste of words. In his original Yorkshire dialect, his mother tongue laid down in the third trimester of his intrauterine life, his words had a "mouthfeel"—I borrow the term from writings about food. When he was eleven, he passed what was then the Eleven Plus examination and entered a very middle-class grammar school where speaking in dialect was ridiculed and