

The Function of Hope

epff 11

Donald Campbell

Reality becomes difficult to bear when it threatens to overwhelm our ego resources. That's when we hope, when we wish for something to happen. We all need a sense of hope, hope that reality will not destroy us, but that we will survive, or even triumph. The dream factory of cinema thrives on our need for a happy ending. We hope that even at the last minute the heroine will be snatched from the jaws of death. The bedrock of hope is that we will not die, but be rescued, if not by our own hand, then by another's, or even survive in another dimension.

But in the meantime, here we are at the European Psychoanalytic Film Festival living our lives in the here and now.

One of the films you will have an opportunity to see during the film festival is called *Anna's War* (2018) by the Russian director Aleksey Fedorchenko. In the opening scene Anna, the 6-year-old protagonist, pulls herself out from under a mass of bodies. It appears that Anna's mother gave up her life to cover her daughter's body with her own and protect Anna from being killed. My association was to birth; a baby emerging into the world with mother's effort. For me this graphic opening scene revived the infant's first experience of the real world, which is negotiated through the mother's body.

I will begin my thinking about hope from the developmental perspective that we begin life dependent on the other to survive. The infant cannot survive the reality of its womb world alone. Birth is, among other things, a fight to escape what has become a trap. The child has to fight to survive. Whether the delivery is natural or by Caesarean the baby needs another's help, if it is going to live.

Hope is born out of our drive to survive and is represented in our minds by the presence of a good enough internal object. What do I mean by an internal object? Through gestation and delivery, the baby 'knows' her mother through the physical

experience of the mother's body, the source of nurturing *in* the womb and the push *out* of the womb. This primary, elemental experience is not recovered as a memory, but unconsciously influences the way the child negotiates its way through reality. The child's experience of gestation and birth are only one of many actual relationships (Fairbairn 1944) as well as aspects of the self that are projected onto others (Klein 1937), which contribute to what analysts refer to as a person's internal object. This process of bringing an experience of the other inside the psyche by incorporation or introjection creates numerous internal objects that we experience often as an unconscious phantasy, which we identify with, project and interact with. A review of the development and nature of an internal object is beyond the scope of this paper. (See Jacobson (1964) and Kernberg (1975) for further discussion.) But the point I want to make is that the idiosyncratic nature of hope, and our conscious and largely unconscious reliance on hope, its persistence, its intensity, its believability in our lives is based on the nature of our internal objects.

These early experiences also contribute to questions about hope. Does the child react to the real world with hope of survival? Does the child identify with an object that not only wished it would survive, wanted it to survive, but worked and suffered so that it would survive. The crucial bit in the development of a good internal object that the child will identify with is an object that acts on its wish for the child to survive. In Anna's case her mother acted by sacrificing her own body to protect her daughter, so that her daughter would survive.

Although hope is a factor, I think it is secondary to self-assertion, to the self acting on behalf of the self. Through the rest of the film the little girl survives without anyone else's help. There is no sign that hope will appear from the outside to rescue her. Instead, Anna accepts the bleak, hostile reality of her everyday life, and she survives on her wit, ingenuity and luck, if we believe there is such a thing. A psychoanalytic perspective would support Anna's internalisation of a maternal object that wanted her to live. A mother whose life instinct was stronger than a death instinct.

Honeyland (2019 Directed by Tamara Kotevska & Ljubomir Stefanov) confirms my view that hope is derived from a good internal object. This documentary film conveys a close, caring mother - daughter relationship; evidence of Hatidze the beekeeper's

good internal object. The daughter relates to her mother's needs with the same sensitivity and devotion she gives to the wild bees. She had learned that leaving the bees with half of the honey they have produced would enable them to reproduce the honey that she needed for her livelihood. In contrast, the Turkish farmer, who invades her land with his family and cattle, did not see his relationship to the bees as a mutual interaction in which his need for honey and the bees' need for safe hives and honey could become the basis of a partnership. There are painful scenes in which the bees' hives are attacked and their honey is stolen that parallel the family's failure to recognise and respond to each others' needs. The beekeeper is shown relating to the children with warmth and humour. She tries to explain how the family could succeed with their beehives, only to be dismissed by the father and his business colleague who were driven by greed and an arrogant omnipotence. At the end, the father, who is unable to relate to anyone, is unable to learn from the beekeeper or the failure of his beekeeping, packs up his family and drives away with his cattle.

Anna Potamianou (1997) believes that hope is derived from the individuals' capacity to establish and maintain a good internal object. However, there are occasions when hope masks the ego's helplessness, weakness, and danger of psychic collapse by extreme idealisation of the self as a chosen one. In situations where there is a hyper-cathexis of hope, hope replaces the object. When this occurs, hope is no longer hope of or for something. Hope no longer knows its object. Hope loses touch with reality. I thought this is what happened to the wandering Turkish cattle farmer. He appeared unable to relate in a reciprocal way to any object of hope, to his family, financial success, or the environment.

In the midst of the devastation to the hives, the death of the bees, the departure of the child she had developed a relationship with, and the death of her mother, the now solitary beekeeper returned to the mountain hive of her wild bees. I didn't feel that Hatidze *hoped* to find honey in the wild bees' hive. She just *knew* the honey would be there. Perhaps you could say that Hatidze's hope was anchored in her experience and knowledge, and, as a consequence she had an inner confidence, and was at peace in her world. I thought this was conveyed in what for me was the most striking moment of the film; the last picture of the beekeeper sitting alone on the top of her mountain - serene.

Potok (2017 Directed by Agnieszka Holland) translated into English as ‘spoor’, begins with a quote that our destiny is determined by our horoscope. Is there a place for hope when life is already predicted?

Ms Duziejko, a grandmother figure who lives alone with her beloved dogs, is repeatedly rejected by authorities who not only dismiss her worry about the safety of her dogs, but ignore her repeated complaints about hunters who are killing animals in the off-season when the animals should be protected by the police, the politicians and the church.

When hope for a peaceful and legal solution fails, Ms Duziejko does not give up, but she identifies with the aggressors and becomes a hunter who kills the hunters on behalf of the prey, leaving the tracks of animals around the bodies. Although she poisons the mayor while dressed as a wolf, I tended to see her in the film as a wolf metaphorically dressed in sheep’s clothing. However, from the point of view of the deer, the warthogs and the foxes, she is an Avenging Angel. Or, from the point of view of those who share her anger at the corrupt representatives of law and order, she is a Righteous Vigilante who is judge, jury and executioner. From the point of view of the girl who is abused by her boyfriend, she is a Feminine Champion who beats the men at their own game.

In the end Ms Duziejko gives up any hope for reconciliation between the hunters and the haunted and fakes her death by blowing up her house, thereby defeating attempts to arrest her. *Potok* ends with a less than convincing scene of a happy family, all the good people in the film, sharing a meal around a big table.

Hope is based on a wish to survive, or rather an anxiety about not surviving. The beekeeper, Duziejko’s animals and Anna, in *Anna’s War*, encounter an external reality, really bad external objects, that threaten their survival. At other times it is an internal reality, the introjection of a bad internal object that we fear. Whatever the source of our anxiety about survival, hope can become a dangerous solution when we become dependent on the other to survive, and fail to develop ourselves. In fact, hope can be a defence against facing our anxieties about using our resources on our own

behalf. A patient's extreme hope that psychoanalysis will rescue them may function at a defence against addressing their anxiety about working on their own behalf in their analysis.

In the scheme of things hope is usually in the background. We take it for granted and we carry on with our daily lives. This is the internal hope that is largely *unconscious*. It is unconscious in our everydayness.

However, we are more likely to become *conscious* of hope when our psychic or physical survival is threatened, when we are in a crisis. Or, when our anxieties about survival are aroused by personal crises, in identification with victims in the news, actors in films, or experiences in the arts that stimulate unconscious fears. Those fears may reflect a doubt about the strength or presence of a good internal object. To compensate for these fears, we may look outside ourselves for hope in the fantasy of an omnipotent other who will rescue us. It may be a person, an ideal, a movement, or a belief. This hope may be confirmed by an improbable happy ending, the arrival of a superhero in the nick of time, a political leader who will keep us safe and meet our needs, or a violent redeemer.

I have some sympathy for Frank Sinatra when he said that he was for whatever got a man through the night. Does hope that is based on a good enough internal object enables us to carry on, to not give up, and like Anna, Ms Duziejko and Hatidze the beekeeper to find a way to stay alive? Some of us may watch the films at *epff 11* and listen to the discussions and be disturbed, or relieved, inspired by an other's hope, or discover an insight that helps us to carry on.

As I said at the beginning, we all need hope. Hope that we will be happy. Hope that we will be successful. Hope that we will be healthy. Ultimately, we hope that we can postpone our ending as long as possible. The realities of unhappiness, failure, sickness and death would be too painful without hope.

But even as we hope for rescue that hope is impossible to pin down, it is never certain, it is as elusive as a feather. Christopher Cokinós wrote a book entitled *Hope is*

a Thing with Feathers. He begins by quoting the first 4 lines of Emily Dickinson's Poem 254 (written in 1861).

Hope is a thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—

He then proceeds to write about the extinction of six species of birds.

When we are unable to save ourselves, we hope the other will save us. But in the end hope lets us down. There is no external object or good enough internal object that rescues us from our death. We do not survive. We all face extinction. But we need hope to live up to that moment.

References

Anna's War (2018) Director Alexey Fedorchenko

Cokinos, C. (2000) *Hope is a Thing With Feathers*. London: Penguin.

Dickinson, E. (2016) *The Complete Poems*. London: Faber.

Fairbairn, R. (1944) Endopsychic structure considered in terms of object relations. In: *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (1952) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul pp. 82-137.

Honeyland (2019) Directors Tamara Kotevska & Ljubomir Stefanov

Jacobson, E. (1964) *The Self and the Object World*. New York: International Universities Press.

Kernberg, O. (1975) *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*. New York: Jason Aronson.

Klein, M. (1937) Love, guilt and reparation, In: *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*. New York: Free Press (1975) pp 306-343.

Potamianou, A. (1997) *Hope: A shield in the economy of borderline states*. London: Routledge.

Potok (2017) Director Agnieszka Holland