



REMEMBER      REPAIR      REUNITE  
MAKING PEACE WITH OURSELVES

Helena Meyer-Knapp [meyerknh@evergreen.edu](mailto:meyerknh@evergreen.edu)

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## INTRODUCTION MAKING PEACE WITH OURSELVES

The thread that winds through is pamphlet from section to section is that we humans have bodies, mine, yours, ours in a highly digitized world, even the bodies of those astonishing people who challenge for medals at the Olympic Games. A few days ago a New York Times writer, Tish Harrison Warren argued that her congregation's services should return to being in person. Not hybrid but fully in person. "Online church, while it was necessary for a season, diminishes worship and us as people. We seek to worship wholly – with heart, soul, mind and strength – and embodiment is an irreducible part of that wholeness." It is the last part I respond to, strongly, and yet . . . being at peace with the actual bodies in which our lives unfold is not necessarily the easiest part of being human. Certainly not in this era of photoshopped realities, but not in fact in earlier times either. So I start here with making peace with myself, impelled by that injunction from the Dalai Lama on the cover, which stays with me wherever I go.

Women's Work, often my last topic, takes pride of place. The kinds of bodies that have traveled this life with me and the efforts entailed in making peace with myself in these bodies could become a very long list indeed. The variations have delivered me in my body to a joyful place "right now" though of course there's more ahead, before we reach The End. I am delighted to know I have a companion in this segment – Pauli Murray, a remarkable writer and activist who devoted herself to ending Jim Crow and also to ending Jane Crow (as she herself called it). I would not presume to comment on whether she found peace with her body, but for sure she worked hard on that very issue.

By contrast I have agonized contemplating recent challenges thrown at women's bodies in Texas and Mississippi. Men in power aggressively and repeatedly assert their right to compel women to carry pregnancies to term. The pages I devote to this issue here are inadequate to the depth of my feelings: In the 50 years abortion has been deemed Constitutional we in this country are nowhere near being at peace with ourselves about women's bodies in so many realms. Regardless, in writing all of this down I realized was ready to propose action, action that rather startled but pleased me.

It will not surprise anyone that I find digital conceptions of human bodies remarkably troubling. Neither Mark Zuckerberg nor Xi Jinping indicate by their looks or their actions that they exist in fully human bodies themselves. More troubling however, are the ways the digital systems these two men favor can damage human bodies. This pamphlet will be sent out as the Beijing Olympic Games get underway, its digital controls maximized.

I've shared several essays about Japanese bodies and their distinctive reactions/lack of reaction to COVID encircling the globe. Summer 2021 the Japanese, many of whom are quite comfortable behind securely closed doors, were forced to open up to the world, fulfilling their commitment to hold the 2020 Olympic Games and ParaOlympic Games, a full year late. They made it happen. TOGETHER. And I loved watching it unfold.





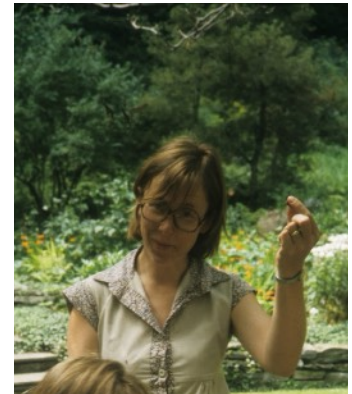
## WOMEN'S WORK: A LIFETIME'S WORTH OF BODIES

Experiencing a long life as a woman means I have been alive in quite a number of different bodies.

Even as an adult and setting aside uncounted outer-directed bodily changes, the interior variations have been huge: monthly menstrual cycles → miscarriages, pregnancy, twin pregnancy → the sharp work of giving birth → breastfeeder → porter balancing ever heavier and more cumbersome loads → 4 years never getting across a street faster than a toddler, → kitchen worker and driver → finally some time for yoga and swimming → greying and wrinkling → menopause – still swimming and doing yoga despite collapsing abdominal muscles → . . . . . Some items on my list have become more vivid recently, seeing my daughter and the others her age undertake the shifts from phase to phase. Right now she lives in “porter with more weight” and “cook/chauffeur.” Many of her contemporaries began strengthening themselves much younger than I. Men’s bodies change too, of course, and yet . . .

I consider a woman’s capacity to change bodily experience and purpose in dramatic ways quite remarkable. Getting closer to the end of my bodily existence, I have been wondering whether the list of attributes has any overarching qualities. Is this one? Women’s bodies keep people alive. Not like doctors, preventing people dying. No. Women’s bodies just go on and on keeping people alive.

I came across this photo my of myself the other day, year four of parenthood now also the mother of twins. Lean, oh so lean. Two years of putting my body to work bringing them into the world and getting them to be neo-toddlers stripped me down, while also turning my human frame into something that would have met with approval from those inclined to judgements about whether one fits modern “ideals.” My body didn’t stay that way of course. Thank goodness. Who wants to live in a body that has to nurture unborn and newborn twins year after year?



And towards the other end of adulthood? I resemble those sculptures in museums, the “traditional cultures” women with pretty large and rather drooping breasts. The curators often call them “fertility goddesses.” I see them as women of my age, women who have made a lot of life possible, helped it come into being and then kept it going. Sitting next to the pond in our garden I may not look all that different from the young woman 35 years earlier, but so much is quite, quite different. It’s amazing. The invisibly regenerative uterus that made babies and monthly cycles has become very quiet. My hair is much thinner and it was never very thick to begin with. The body padding which I once carried in my “glutes” as my yoga teacher called them, has moved around to the front and the abdominal muscles under the

padding, which once could support a twin pregnancy, could not do that now. Oh they are plenty strong enough to get me out of a low slung chair, but pregnancy? Not a chance. The body by that pond knows a bit about how to meditate too, how to deepen her sense of oneness with the world. There’s no pond in

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our garden here in Berkeley but the nagging, dissatisfied voice in my head, once so good at echoing all the social chat about women, beauty, normal, healthy etc. has, like the uterus, become much much quieter. Rob sometimes talks about our minds as committees. My "self-image" committee member is reasonably relaxed now, though other members can sense rather too many minor aches and pains.

Pauli Murray, a lawyer and academic, a writer and activist, who reached adulthood in the 1930s and died in the 1970s faced huge hurdles. Hurdles of race were inescapable in North Carolina in the 1920s, though her grandmother proudly revered that part of her ancestry which she shared with the white family that owned her as a slave child. Part white ancestry was not enough to get Murray admitted to the University of North Carolina, no matter that the very same ancestor in her bloodline had endowed the university. No legacy status for "Negros." In Murray's eyes rejection on the basis of race was neither different in kind nor significance than Harvard's rejection of her for graduate study in law on the basis of her sex.

Pauli Murray was also confronted with real, private and intense struggles over gender. She wore pants to work when virtually every woman wore a dress or skirt. She fell in love with other women, for the first time uneasily, for the last time with real joy and long term commitment. She cut her hair short, so as a young woman who jumped the rails at the height of the depression she could persuade all those who met her on the journey to see her as a boy. Were she alive now, one can wonder if she would have found our widespread awareness of transgender existence reassuring. It is certain that even back then, for years she went searching for the medical means to firmly anchor her in the gender category "male."

Murray knew herself to be a writer and her autobiography is a wonderful book. It's astonishing how few among my friends know her name, except that I didn't either. In brief: Long before Rosa Parks, Murray found herself in jail for challenging segregated seating on a Greyhound bus. A law student at Howard University in DC she was years ahead organizing students to desegregate lunch counters. She was advocating the direct Constitutional path along the 14th amendment to end legal segregation by race in schools well before the men at the NAACP were willing to take that route.

Pauli Murray was not in the business of bringing her own children into the world but she was active, active, active in keeping people alive. A young and recently qualified lawyer, she worked tirelessly trying to prevent the execution of a young black man condemned to death. He died, she lost, but she never lost sight of the need to bring both Jim Crow and the deeply entrenched barriers to women's freedoms to an end. Her labors on behalf of life were immensely costly emotionally and physically. Pauli Murray was hospitalized more than once. In her last years, she was ordained one of the first women to become an Episcopalian priest. In photos of her in vestments I dare to hope I see something close to peace.

I met this Wonder Woman first in a movie (a documentary): [My Name is Pauli Murray](#). Netflix. It came out last fall. She is an inspiration in many ways. For our purposes, let me end though with profound sympathy for her struggles in finding hope in her body. These times we live in now are hard for far too many reasons. And yet today's Pauli Murray is likely grateful to be alive in these times. I am grateful as well. My body has done and is doing good work. Indeed maybe "Wonder Woman" is the right slogan for many women's bodies.

## IN REAL LIFE THERE IS NO INTERMISSION — THE DRUM-BEAT CONTINUES

The drumbeat against women's reproductive rights is loud, as it is once more against affirmative action in colleges, and as it is against truth in school history textbooks, as well of course as in denial about police violence. Though it's loud, I keep the Dalai Lama's dictum in mind. Making peace with no-one but my own body is taking a whole lifetime. Making peace is dangerous. It takes courage. I wrote a whole book about that. Maybe peacemaking is a way to think about quieting these public drums.

A movie about the terrors facing women unhappily pregnant in the the 1960s reawakened a literally dread-full time soon after I arrived in the USA: the early 1970s. Only a few states offered any right to abortion and women all over this country knew our sisters faced life and death risks. The film that stirred it up again is called [Ask For Jane](#). Watch it if you never have (on Kanopy). It's blunt. I was literally unable to reach the end the first time, even though I knew it ends with Roe v. Wade. Remembering what women faced was too hard, sitting alone. Knowing what young women feeling alone face now feels daunting too.

If I am confident that women are truly Wonder Women when it comes to keeping people alive, why am I even talking about opting to end a chance at being alive? Because our Wonder Women status rests on generation after generation of inherited wisdom, endowing us with the skills and indeed the right to make judgements about whether or not to put our own lives on the line on behalf of life itself. Do women make mistakes? Sure. All the time. Do we have regrets? Sure. All the time. In this we are just like men. But it is OUR bodies that have to take a pregnancy through to its end. Not one man has ever done so. And in most traditions, in most places around the world, few men until recently have even shared all that much in ensuring that newborns and children stay alive and thrive.

One fascinating element in play here is that those who describe themselves as “pro-life” say little about what keeping people alive entails, so little about food and carrying and cleaning and teaching/learning.

Enough. What is driving me these days towards the place where despair emerges is the sense that those, whom I experience almost as forces of darkness, seem so unlikely ever to open up space in their hearts for other views. I have not purposely terminated a pregnancy myself but I have had four that disappeared. Three in disappearing filled me with despair much more profound than anything I suffer about US abortion politics. We wanted so much to become parents. And then we did. Three kids. The fourth pregnancy ended itself but I would have taken active steps if it had not. In my early 40s I knew I could not give life to another infant, perhaps even twins. The twins we had already were 10.

While pregnant with those twins a spurious blood test put abortion squarely in front of us, by indicating I might be carrying a severely neuro-untypical child. “Pro-life” people complain about physicians exerting pressure to end a pregnancy. I hear them and agree. I was nearly 5 months pregnant, totally and continuously aware of the life I was carrying. I was far from ready to “terminate” it. Luckily the hostile blood test was the result of double the number of babies not the result of a badly damaged spine. In an instant the threat of abortion vanished.

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But the threat that others might be forbidden to have that choice has not vanished and shows no sign of vanishing. Around the world, women's hopes rise and fall. Argentina and Ireland up. Poland sharply down. In the USA, no matter how many lawsuits go to the Supreme Court, there's always another waiting in the wings.

This year there are two. Mississippi's will shorten the number of weeks during which a pregnancy can be ended, from 24 to 15. Given the experience of that blood test at 4 1/2 months, reducing the time span to 15 weeks I can cope with, even respect, provided there are provisions for exceptional circumstances. The "viability" standard has always been, in effect, a mother versus fetus balancing act.

The new Texas law is quite different. It transforms citizens into vigilantes by requiring all pregnancies to continue if they get past six weeks since the last period. MY GOD!! In my younger days there was no way to test until six weeks had passed. Large numbers of women have menstrual cycles that make a definitive boundary between "late" and "pregnant" impossible to see.

Those of us who used to hope that the US Supreme Court was a reasonably stable fulcrum on which to weigh complicated social issues now have few illusions. This court is allowing Texas to continue setting up vigilantes while the normal series of suits, decisions, appeals and more appeals goes through conventional processes. In the meanwhile lives, who knows how many, will be derailed, lost, damaged, upended.

Drumbeats — of war? Yes, that subtitle has echoes, but not perhaps the ones that spring to mind. I am not about to launch into a tirade against the war on women's bodies. Instead I am going to bring back to the surface insights I came to by studying peacemaking in violent civil and international wars. In those worlds I found some real stepping stones identifiable as pathways to making peace.

A caveat. If we Americans are to succeed in making peace among ourselves over women's bodies and babies, we are unlikely to avoid danger while we do the work. Peacemaking is dangerous

Many people already see themselves as trying to make peace. Non-profit groups like Better Angels and Public Conversations bring "ordinary" people into seminar rooms to meet up with others with whom they disagree, in the hopes of fostering respect at a minimum, if not actual agreement on some new approach to the topic. In legislatures and medical associations, those who disagree try to hammer out policies and criteria for judgement, even though the outcomes are sometimes reduced to bare knuckle, majority-rule votes. At other times there are serious attempts at action that is genuinely integrative and humane. Despite the best efforts in all these forums, the opposing trenches remain dug in, showing few signs of a willingness to concede on either side. This is arms race management not peacemaking.

I have long believed and actively so, that my abortion decisions are private,  
just between me, my family and my physician.

I wonder if liberals, this is certainly true of me, have quietly hoped and assumed that if abortion's right to privacy kept racking up "wins" then those who opposed us would one day concede. Now, nearly 50 years

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into Roe we should be clear that's not the case. I wish for the Argentines and the Irish that it be true for them, but Poland offers a warning that it may not be. And China offers a different warning: In China the government feels entitled to control women's fertility for the sake of the state, originally to prevent more babies and now to compel them. Whether or not women have babies is a high stakes issue that in the last 100 years has also become a public issue, no longer a private matter. And we in the USA are stuck in intense conflicts including violence about the issue. What will it take to bring us peace?

The book I wrote about peacemaking pivots around specific events as recent violent wars were ending which, though markedly different each from the others, nonetheless shared some patterns.

First “non-linearity.” Previous attempts at peacemaking do not determine the peace project that ultimately succeeds. Furthermore, surprisingly small events can have huge effects. Think butterflies' wings and the weather.

Second. The people visibly guiding the combat are not particularly likely to be able to initiate serious efforts at peacemaking, That kind of work falls to leaders outside the center, sometimes to aspirants to leadership who have something to gain from a new, more tranquil environment.

Third. It takes negotiation, negotiation with people one really dislikes and distrusts to make peace possible.

Fourth. There will be plenty of people on all sides who resist making peace, ready to turn themselves into spoilers to undermine forward progress if and when peacemaking comes to be a likely option.

Fifth. Though visibly combatant leaders rarely initiate peacemaking, for peace to take effect it must be agreed to by visible leaders. Quite likely some will be successors to combatants, now newly in power.

LAST. Let me make space for this to be visible. **It is the loser in wartime who sets the timing of a peace.** Winners have to go on and on fighting regardless of the certainty of their ultimate victory and huge losses can occur between “winning” and “ending” a war.

Transferring this thinking to our struggles over abortion.

Suppose I accept that my belief has LOST. A once private decision is now, irretrievably, a public matter. There is apparently a global consensus on this matter.

Suppose further that I have never thus far explicitly acknowledged that I am “on the losing side.” To do so means that it falls to me take active steps to seek peace and the making of a new social contract in tandem with abortion's active opponents.

Suppose instead that I that opt to feel aggrieved: my ideas are correct. I deserve to go on fighting for them . . . We would then still be mired in more of what I was calling “arms race management.”

Before proceeding further on with that seemingly endless struggle, let me spell out some reminders about relatively recent, meaningful changes (peace?) in closely connected “social consensus” issues

(1) **Birth control.** When I first came to this country contraception was still controversial. Planned Parenthood's struggles included challenges to their right to provide services even to adults. The Catholic Church, so active still in abortion issues, has become much quieter about contraception.



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(2) **Equal access to marriage.** Millions in all races once suffered under laws against marriage across racial difference. Though it's not vivid to many people in the USA now, it is worth remembering that before struggles over "Gay Marriage" there were plenty of laws against Gay Sex. Those are now history.

(3) **A child without a marriage.** Let me never underplay the extended, enormous demands any child makes on her mother, and yet, to give birth without a mate in 2022 is much less likely to lead to social exile than it was in 1973, the year of Roe.

### WHERE DOES ALL OF THIS LEAD?

I am beginning to accept that I am on the losing side in abortion. I want to find ways to make peace. While I might want to keep on trying to win, I yearn still more to see us make peace with ourselves, we in the USA. That means I and my allies must seek out those who advocate public control of abortion, to try find a picture of a future on which we can agree.

Where might one find leaders interested in taking up the burden of designing a new social contract? One possible answer is among medics, in general. Not Obygyn and abortion providers, but medical people more widely. All medical practice is framed by social controls, and our COVID years make that vivid, but perhaps the medical professions might get out in public on this issue. A quiet campaign then to get the AMA to speak up? Nurse leadership??? EMTs??

More leadership potential lies in America's congregations. Without in any sense hoping that they might become a single unified voice, it's important to remember that congregations were pivotal, in slowly, slowly turning Gay marriage around.

I wonder if nurses and doctors, priests and rabbis meeting locally and nationally might take up the mantle the way that Nuclear-oriented Physicians for Social Responsibility, alongside the local Catholic Archbishop in the Pacific Northwest took on the mantle of trying to end the Cold War. Our work back then was easily characterized as "pro-life" but make no mistake it was neither un-controversial nor easy.

It asks courage of me to admit that I am on the losing side in the USA over abortion.

To say I feel defeated is the easy part. What is much less easy is accepting that this defeat imposes on me and my allies the obligation to take the initiative in starting a peacemaking project. Even as I promulgate this notion and think of a congregation in Olympia to which I have strong bonds, I know that it will be very hard for that congregation to take a public position, directed towards peacemaking on abortion, harder even than all of our work in support of Gay Rights when it began 30 years ago.

Peacemaking over abortion will likely entail dangerous, sometimes even secret work.

I started this segment naming several other current "drumbeats." My professional life makes me deeply concerned about the re-awakening of US history textbook wars, "critical race theory" etc. The loose page with this pamphlet has a blurb about a hopeful talk I have prepared on making peace with ourselves about US history. Let me know if a conversation or public lecture is of interest.

## DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS — FROM THE DIGITAL TO THE ALL TOO REAL

Today's New York Times (Jan. 30th 2022) ran an couple of article that spoke to the digital anxieties that have come over me, though from different angles, when thinking about both Xi Jinping and Mark Zuckerberg. Broadly, these two seem to agree that it there is much to be gained (by them if by no-one else) once they persuade or compel billions of people to transform their human presence in the world to a digital simularcrum of their embodied selves.

Let me get a prejudice out of the way at once. Neither Xi nor Zuckerberg appear, in most photos, to live a fully embodied existence. No facial lines, no emotions.

Much more seriously, here's Zuckerberg in January 2022 describing a new AI breakthrough, confident that it will profoundly enhance people's daily lives:

***"People experience the world through a combination of sight, sound and words, and systems like this could one day understand the world the way we do. This will all eventually get built into AR glasses with an AI assistant so, for example, it could help you cook dinner, noticing if you miss an ingredient, prompting you to turn down the heat, or more complex tasks," Zuckerberg said.***



Clearly he is missing critical facts of life: Embodied human experience includes smell, touch and taste. All three are vital components of cooking dinner, vital elements of keeping people alive.

As to the truly “meta”physical and mysterious parts of existence? Since he believes he is entitled to claim “Meta” as the name for his business and the mathematical symbol for infinity as its graphic, I can only shudder at his combination of arrogance and blindness. I gasp, but it is an anxious gasp, without the slightest hint of laughter. The negative consequences, political, emotional, spiritual that emanate from Mark Zuckerberg's ambitions are far too worrisome.

Each of us probably has our own lists of reasons to deplore his approach. I took my rather minimal on-line presence out of his Facebook world years ago. And yet, my artist cousin's wonderful visual work extends into places it might never reach without Instagram. By contrast, there are uncounted numbers of girls whose respect for their embodied selves has been annihilated by on-line social ranking schemes. Lest anyone suggest this is an unforeseen side effect of Facebook, one need only remember that just such a ranking scheme was the very first project Zuckerberg put online.

The political chambers of democracy are inundated by wild stories promulgated on Facebook from which the company profits financially, careless or even encouraged by the destruction of traditions of civic discourse. Politicians in the USA and other democracies seem to imagine that they can control this digital monstrosity. If our elections in 2016 and 2020 were profoundly damaged by Facebook, and they were, I dread 2022. Facebook once even planned to launch a global

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digital currency system, operated beyond the control of any governments. When last heard from Diem was collapsing, perhaps because it had been planning to rely on government securities to back its fictional funds. The rest of the Facebook/Meta empire keeps on and on growing.

Across the Pacific Ocean, Xi Jinping's China "embodies" a different but equally troubling view of human existence in a digital world. The transformation of each specific Chinese body into a digital reality is now inescapable, thanks originally to a virus, but now permeating the entire society.

COVID requires that everyone carry a "health" app on a smart phone. Without a phone, without an app with a QR code certifying one's health status, ordinary Chinese people cannot set foot outside. The health app acquires information about one's health status from mandatory testing. At all times, one's movements are constantly tracked, officially for contact tracing to control the virus. Almost no-one among China's 1.4 billion people has in fact been sickened by COVID since 2020. The virus QR code can and does glow Red whenever "the authorities" chose to curtail a person's freedom of movement.

And what actually stops movement? China of course is not covered in digital gates with automated readers. No, the enforcers are the "grid" personnel, the people who guard the gates to apartment complexes, (supervising the lives on average of 250 people) the guards who control access to hospitals and stores, to movie houses and colleges, to schools and restaurants. Enforcers on the

ground cannot tell whether the health warning is spurious or real. Any alarm requires them to stop a person going wherever they intended to go.

There are billions of people on the ground helping to manage what Chinese leaders according to the Times have begun calling a City Brain. As he watches the "Brain" in Hangzhou think, this picture of Xi ironically, is one of the few where his presentation of self looks almost human. His mask doesn't sit well on his face,



Mr. Xi visiting the Hangzhou "City Brain" in March 2020. Ju Peng/Xinhua, via Getty Images

his skin has blemishes and his posture is a bit flabby. China this month starts another stint as host of the Olympic Games. Xi will attend in regal style for the opening, reinstalling his unlined face and resetting the stiff stance.

Beijing is topographically flat and normally has a desert-like winter climate, typical of the eastern edge of Eurasia. Temperatures will be cold but every surface on which the games unfold will be

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artificial, water brought to the site to be turned into snow, or ice as required. Even the “snow” is actually tiny ice pellets that can really hurt the skin. Fake cold water has been the Olympic “normal” for a while. International sporting impresarios refuse to risk conditions that might hamper athlete performance. Koreans made artificial snow and ice in Pyongchang in 2018. We have already entered a climate era with less snow than 50 years ago and fake is likely the future of any future Winter Games. China is no more environmentally reckless than many winter sports venues these days.

Fake cordiality however, of the kind the Chinese are demanding, is something quite new and hopefully never to be repeated.

Participants will have to bring smart phones to China so that they too can be monitored by one of the health apps. Olympic leaders including Americans have been advising phones that can be left behind in China, so as to avoid bringing Chinese spyware trackers back home. This would also save participants from harassment over anything they might be on a phone from some earlier time.

Athletes been informed by Chinese officials that they face “severe punishment” if they are caught making direct comments about matters the government refuses to hear discussed. This Chinese mind control system tried to assert itself the 2022 Australian tennis Open, with China protesting T shirts in support of Peng Suiai a tennis star caught up in a harassment drama. In the end the shirts were allowed and 1000 were donated to spectators during the women’s final, but China’s digital reach beyond its frontiers is clearly plenty powerful.

NBC, the US television network broadcasting the Games is not sending commentators into China at all. Their commentary will be written and spoken and indeed filmed outside the country. Clearly there are COVID hassles to be avoided but this decision damps down political risks as well.

One minor component of traditional international sports cordiality will not take place. Some governments have opted not to participate in the “send a high official to the opening ceremonies.” As of this week this includes only a small number of fairly predictable places: Denmark, The Netherlands, the U.S., Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Britain, Taiwan and Canada. It will be interesting to see whether the tally changes by opening day. France? Germany? The Alpines, the Nordics, Latin America? where do any of them stand right now? Russia and Putin are of course diametrically opposite. Whether Putin invades Ukraine before or after his Beijing visit remains to be seen. I would guess after, so that China need not respond and so that China’s time in glory suffers no dimming.

I doubt that I will watch any of these Games, neither on NBC nor on replay on the Olympics’ own internet feed. China’s digital controls on real bodies are too alarming for me to lend my support this time around.

## WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE — JAPAN AND THE OLYMPICS

It saddens me to have written down in black and white that I won't be watching the Winter Olympics.

Rob and I have watched both winter and summer pretty faithfully for 50 years. Sometimes more and sometimes less, but some every time since we turned on our first television in '72. Though I am not a winter sports buff myself, there are moments I remember with pleasure. The opening ceremonies in 1994 Lillehammer, Norway — a parade of elves and other magical forest beings. As Wikipedia puts it “Artistic content was made to present a range of Norwegian culture, included [Sami joik](#), [Telemark skiing](#), fiddlers and folk dancing, simulations of traditional weddings and their processions, and [vetter](#) from [Norse mythology](#).” From time to time I rewatch the Torville and Dean Ravel Bolero, ice-dance masterpiece, performed in 1984 in Sarajevo. Then the capital of the Bosnian part of Yugoslavia, Sarajevo on television looked like such a joyful place. Having watched the games a few years earlier, the terrible violence which engulfed the place once Yugoslavia began breaking apart was all the more poignant.

The Olympics have always been about more than sport, particularly so for someone like me who works on peacemaking and international relations. That the summer Olympics took place in Berlin in Hitler's time transformed the sprint victory by Jesse Owens, an African American, into a vital stepping stone in the history of race and public recognition. Sarajevo's Olympics, while the Cold War raged, were nonetheless the first time since the onset of that conflict that Games were held in an entirely Slavic & Socialist country. Following as they did the Moscow Summer Games in 1980, which had been ensnared by Cold War politics, the deeply joyful and tranquil time in Sarajevo offered hope for more peaceful times. Decades earlier, in 1966, the Tokyo games at which Japan showcased its bullet trains, also held international significance, marking the re-entry of the aggressor in the Pacific War into what we still sometimes call “the community of nations.”

Olympics understood from the outside and Olympics from the inside are different experiences. The 1988, Games in South Korea were pivotal in that country's turn towards an “open” political system. (I am using the word “open” here by contrast with China's current “closed loop” system. The words democratic, socialist and communist no longer seem much help in describing civic life). Korea had no experience with open political life — a feudal-style monarchy endured until the end of the 19th century, followed by 50 years of coercive Japanese colonization, followed by a brutal civil war and two, tough military dictatorships which kept both Koreas isolated and poor. The Games were the turning point in South Korea's domestic politics, doing for Seoul what they had done for Tokyo, serving as an invitation into the community of nations. Elections have not created political nirvana, but Koreans south of the DMZ remain aware of how much they owe to that Olympic opportunity. There were even hopes, sadly now faded, that the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyongchang would further an easing of tensions between the two Koreas.

Olympics officials organizing for London in 2012 and Tokyo in 2020 (still called 2020 though they were carried out in 2021) faced domestic discontents with little sense that the games were above



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all an opportunity. In recent decades the ecological and financial costs have become contentious and any city in a politically open country hoping to make a bid will face domestic struggles. Whatever pride there was in “winning” the bid dissipates inexorably as costs and delays, faulty designs and still more “unanticipated” costs scatter widespread doubts that the games themselves could possibly unfold smoothly and joyfully.

In London the immediate run-up was threatened by endless scandals and fears about security, whether there would be enough, who was getting rich when they should not be etc. Boris Johnson was Mayor and Londoners by then knew him to be much more of a showman than an administrator. We were in London that summer and our in-person experience was nothing but positive. Brits know how to pull together when pressures mount. (That’s one reason they are SO furious with Boris Johnson’s partying while the rest of the country pulled together in lock-down for COVID). Volunteers in fabulous pink and dusky purple jackets popped up all over the country to ease travel, answer questions, get people to and from the Games and their other tourist destinations. Heathrow Airport even built a special temporary terminal to get athletes safely out the day after the Games ended. Locals loved the opening ceremonies. Dancing hospital beds in praise of the National Health Service, Mohammed Ali to light the flame and a video of Daniel Craig/James Bond discussing security with the Queen. In person, the Queen uttered the ceremonial opening words and for a brief while all was well with the world.

Tokyo 2020 faced hurdles far beyond what even the most pessimistic doubter ever envisaged. COVID struck the winter before. On board a cruise ship, Diamond Princess, returning to port in Yokohama on February 3 Japan faced its first experience of people sick with what had by then revealed itself to be a terrifyingly dangerous disease. China’s existing “closed loop” traditions had censored information about the Wuhan disease illness for most of January, but their lockdown and mask mandate on Jan. 23, in a flash, spread alarm across the entire world. Before the end January virtually all of China was under lockdown. Japan was first outside China knowingly to encounter COVID though Italy and Iran found themselves engulfed soon after.

This is not the place to retell the journey of Japan’s travails through COVID except to say that they held the caseload to a truly minimal level for over a year. The Games were quickly “postponed,” the country cut international travel virtually to nothing, with their frontiers securely closed I found myself telling people Japan had reawakened its Tokugawa identity. It did so with remarkable ease. Still once summer 2021 and the Games loomed over the horizon, the people we knew were, for the most part, aghast. Simply write off the billions of yen invested in Olympic sites and plans rather than let potentially infected athletes and ticket holders into the country seemed to be the public’s consensus opinion. Japan’s government, perhaps unwilling to lose face, perhaps simply committed, refused to listen to the protests. The Games would go ahead, even after the new Delta variant of COVID, first surfacing in South Asia, proved itself significantly more contagious.

Poor Japan. How could any officials and administrators be expected to pull off an international event in the midst of a global pandemic. Poor athletes. How could they be expected to reach the

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heights of achievement with movement outside the Olympic bubble reduced to nothing, with their fans and families prohibited from cheering them on in person. Poor support staff, having to carry out transport, cleaning, cafeteria meals and the like in the midst of thousands of athletes and coaches from all over the world, bringing who knew what varieties of COVID into Japan in their luggage. So many bodies facing real physical and psychological risks.

When the time came, in my seat at home and I hope for many of the people on the ground in Tokyo, fears evaporated. It was time to run and to dive, to twirl and to leap, to ride and to fall. It was time to move scoreboards, and transport umpires, it was time to clean locker rooms and sweep roads. It was time to kneel when not needed and to leap into action when needed. It was time to make difficult judgements and to cheer triumphs. So many bodies doing so many things, together, safely.

Memorable moments? A small burst of British national pride watching two men dive synchronized off a 10 meter board to win a gold medal. Simone Biles walking away from a gold medal competition to keep herself safe. Every winning athlete draping their own medal around their own neck, so as to remain socially distanced during the ceremonies. Two pole vaulters hugging as they opted to share the gold medal rather than subject themselves to a final “jump off.” This 13 year old Japanese girl, Momiji Nishiya who won the skateboarding gold, one of quite a few extraordinarily young, talented, joyful participants.



And COVID? By the time it was all over nearly 800 people got sick, only 46 of whom were athletes. In China today four days before the opening, 119 people associated with the games including athletes have already tested positive.

Japan never instituted a closed loop system of the Chinese variety, though like the Chinese they never allowed anyone into a venue not associated with the Games. Whereas images coming out of China today are of people in full body suit PPE, Japanese people were simply uniformed appropriately and fully masked.

In Tokyo, as in London, the opening ceremonies at the Games were startlingly moving. I really recommend watching them if you never have. (<https://olympics.com/en/video/opening-ceremony-ceremony-tokyo-2020-replays>) It takes too long for every team to enter the stadium but on replay one can skip forward. For the rest, the ceremonies were quiet, beautiful, funny at times, earnestly good natured, and technically skilled. The Motto — “Higher, Faster, Stronger — TOGETHER” speaks volumes. And at its climax, the Japanese took technical “together” to new heights, lofting into the sky above the stadium a globe made of drones, those in blue picking out the shape of all the continents, the globe rotating quietly and peacefully above them all.

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Making peace with ourselves. What do the Olympics add?

In both Tokyo and London, they served both to agitate and ultimately to calm and ease some a kind of unsurprising instinct for national self criticism, quite common in both places. For a brief period it was possible to revel in ones sense of collective good will and entertainment. Surely both of these Games represented a time for making peace with themselves.

Some countries have seen an invitation to host the Games as an affirmation of respect from other nations and governments, this is action at the scale of making peace among ourselves as nations. This was certainly true in Japan 1966 and South Korea 1988. It was quite likely true in Beijing in 2008. The opposite can occur as well, as we know from Berlin in 1936 and rather more mildly from Moscow in 1980.

These days sporting passions are often global, athletes in all disciplines traveling the world through a succession of championships. As I write this, national soccer teams are in the midst of regional “play-offs” to chose the teams that will actually be in Doha for Football’s World Cup 2022, surely the most significant gathering of nations there is. World Cups in other sports, skiing and wind-surfing for example, largely pass un-noticed beyond that sport’s aficionados. But the Olympics bring everyone to the big stage, together at the same time in the same place. With newfound commitment to para-olympics they even bring the differently able and the conventionally able together. Such an array of co-existence across massively significant differences really is a form of humanity itself managing, if only briefly, to be at peace with itself.

And I, with my “peace expertise,” what do I think the Olympics do for peace?

I think they ask us to be hospitable. To be determined. To have courage. To be generous.

Olympics in COVID times ask require adaptability and a good sense of timing.

For those readers to whom this list looks familiar, congratulations. It makes up a good part of the eleven abilities I have characterized as “peaceabilities,” foundations on which making peace with ourselves rests.

Why do I feel I cannot join the Olympic swirl in China this year? Not because I doubt that physical and embodied triumphs will bring wonder and tears to all who participate.

No. Because the Chinese government threatens SEVERE PUNISHMENT for Honesty. That too is on the list of critical peaceabilities. Honesty has been driven underground if not entirely out of the 2022 Beijing Olympic Games.