

STRANGE HUMAN LOGIC

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ABSTRACT This review essay discusses the collection *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics: Encounters in the Clinical Setting* (Layton et al., 2006). It approaches the book through the lens of one of its chapters, by Andrew Samuels, and considers seven themes from that chapter. The first two of these are not addressed by the collection as a whole: (1) the politics of the professions of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, and (2) the use by politicians and political groupings of psychoanalytic ideas for furtherance of their own aims and objectives. The remaining five are also themes of the book as a whole: (3) the application of psychoanalytic ideas in a quest for deeper understandings of political processes and problems; (4) political projects of whatever kind undertaken by organizations of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists; (5) psychoanalytic understandings of the growth and development of the political dimensions of the subject-as-citizen; (6) the struggle to apperceive the micropolitics of the analytical session itself; and (7) devising responsible ways to engage directly with the political, social, and cultural material that appears in the clinical session. I close by raising a further theme which Samuels appears to have overlooked: (8) the use of social and political theory in a quest to deepen psychoanalytic understandings of human subjectivity. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics is a groundbreaking book for a number of reasons. It is written by practising analysts, mostly from the US, with a concern to examine the interface between psychoanalysis and the political. Moreover it defines the political in uncompromising terms, that is in terms of the social relations of production and reproduction in a capitalist society. Thirdly, its remit is both theory and practice and some of the best chapters in the book boldly explore the dilemmas posed for clinical practice by taking politics seriously. I felt slightly paralysed in knowing how to offer up the many thoughts that came to me when reading this book. In the end I may have

taken an easy way out but towards the end of this collection of essays Andrew Samuels (Chapter 14) offers what I found to be a very useful (because of the systematic overview it provides) way of thinking about this interface. Samuels offers seven distinct but related and overlapping themes. I intend to structure my thoughts by using his framework and by adding one additional theme, which I think is missing from what he provides – that is the way in which social and political theory can deepen psychoanalytic understandings of human subjectivity. I will take each of his themes in turn, link them to material in this book and add further thoughts of my own and references to other relevant material.

First I will briefly consider two of Samuels' themes which are not dealt with by this collection.

1. THE POLITICS OF THE PROFESSIONS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The classic 'outsider' perspective remains Douglas Kirsner's (2000) book *Unfree Associations: Inside Psychoanalytic Institutes*. From within the psychoanalytic profession itself Ken Eisold (1994, 2003) has probably been the most insightful and consistent commentator, using group psychoanalytic theory to hold a mirror up to the profession's own ragged history. The emergence of the 'relational turn' in psychoanalysis appears to have been important in problematizing many aspects of the psychoanalytic process, and particularly the authority of the analyst. In this light Levine (2003) offers some interesting insights. Indeed Levine's paper is part of a recent volume of the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (JAPA) titled 'The politics of psychoanalysis'. This collection of papers from major insiders and outsiders to the North American psychoanalytic establishment makes good reading. One of the running themes in this collection is the nature of the new pluralism in psychoanalysis. It is becoming almost the new common sense within the world psychoanalytic movement that a 'burgeoning theoretical pluralism' (Wallerstein, 2002) has replaced the old oligopoly of Ego-psychology, classical Freudianism, the Kleinians and the Independents. But just what kind of pluralism is this? Jay Greenberg (2003), whose co-authored book with Stephen Mitchell *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983) is often cited as one of the founding texts in the 'relational turn' in psychoanalysis, argues cogently that a genuine pluralism

requires the capacity for robust and conflictual argument rather than the blurring of differences that often occurs in a culture of liberal tolerance (interestingly enough, in political theory the value of 'liberal tolerance' has also come in for sustained criticism). In the same JAPA collection Eisold (2003) adopts an even more critical position, arguing that the idea of pluralistic psychoanalytic community 'is largely a fiction, an illusion that protects us from experiencing the full extent of the dissolution and fragmentation that has occurred' (Eisold, 2003, 304). In other words, the suspicion is that what we have is uneasy co-existence and the simulation of dialogue but no real learning between cultures (and there are clear resonances here with contemporary political debates in Britain about the nature of our 'multi-culturalism').

2. THE USE BY POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL GROUPINGS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC IDEAS FOR FURTHERANCE OF THEIR OWN AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Samuels fails to mention that unfortunately the abuse of psychoanalysis by such groupings has been a more persistent feature than its usage. This has recently been well portrayed in the Adam Curtis TV documentary series *The Century of the Self*. Curtis traces the connections from Freud's theory of the unconscious mind through to advertisers' first appeals to unconscious desires and anxieties in the 1950s, on to the development of lifestyle marketing in the 1970s and the emergence of focus groups and political marketing in the early 1990s. By the late twentieth century we are firmly on the terrain of what has become called the 'therapeutic culture' (Rieff, 1966; Furedi, 2004) where psychoanalytic insights concerning attachment, trauma, emotional vulnerability, reparation and so on constantly run the

risk of appropriation by the new forms of 'soft control' technologies of the 'feeling state' (Hoggett, 2002).

Now I will consider the five themes that are addressed by *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics*.

3. THE APPLICATION OF PSYCHOANALYTIC IDEAS IN A QUEST FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLITICAL PROCESSES AND PROBLEMS

This a theme particularly of the central chapters in this volume (Chapters 3–10) where contributors use psychoanalytic insights to illuminate a range of social and political phenomena including the affective dynamics of class (Layton) and race (Walls). However the main thrust of these chapters is to examine the impact of more than two decades of neo-liberalism (and, more recently, neo-conservatism) on everyday life in the US. Pelz, for example, notes the destruction of welfare safety nets and the erosion of the public sphere to the point where the very idea of 'the public' and 'government' became subject to attack. As the containing function of government, the corporation and community is undermined by processes of flexibilization and other neo-liberal responses to globalization, anxiety and rage seeps through the interstices of American society. Pelz and other contributors examine the social defences against the overwhelming feelings unleashed by this survivor culture – addictive attachment to consumption, the organization of denial, the failure to mourn ways of life and belief systems that have been destroyed – defences that, because socially organized, become part of the affective structure of society itself. This then constituted the affective backdrop, what Raymond Williams (1977) would have called the 'structure of feeling', of US society at the moment when Islamic

terrorists targeted the World Trade Center in New York. For Gutwill and Hollander (p. 93) the US is now best described as a 'traumatogenic social environment' and they and other contributors attempt to trace the manic responses of north American society to this severe narcissistic injury.

There is much here to recommend to the reader and the reflection that follows is in no way intended as a criticism of these authors but rather as some food for thought for all of those who are committed to bringing together psychoanalytic and political ways of thinking. Samuels (p. 203) notes the dilemma facing this group – the need to avoid using psychoanalytic terms in a reductive and simplistic way (psychobabble) whilst on the other hand avoiding a style that strives so hard to be accessible that it ends up being bland and over-familiar. For my own part I feel that the main danger is the former – in other words the problem is not that our ideas get lost in translation but that we speak to the converted and avoid the task of reaching out to the non-psychoanalytic audience of activists, intellectuals and policymakers. I could cite quite a number of examples of this in *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics*, where, for example, contributors speak of 'paranoid-schizoid' social formations or use other terms appropriate for elucidating clinical phenomena and apply them unreflexively to political phenomena. I think perhaps, particularly for clinicians who have had no grounding in the social sciences, their forays into the political can seem like a form of emotivism (Rieff, 1966), strong on passion but weak on facts and analysis. Indeed there is a tradition in psychoanalysis going right back to our most formative thinkers of doing 'naïve sociology' – Bion's *Experiences in Groups* is a vivid example. In contrast, when he was at his best, Freud's own forays nearly always took as their starting point the relevant social

theory of the time. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* for example, starts off with a critical examination of Le Bon's crowd psychology then takes in McDougall and Tarde en route to his many fascinating insights on identification. Similarly I felt that contributors to *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics* were at their best when they were giving the reader hard facts about, for example, social inequality and the monopolization of media control in contemporary US or where they were engaging with the interface between contemporary social theory and psychoanalytic theory and using supportive clinical vignettes. Of course this is a tough act but if psychoanalysis has told us one thing it is that generativity emerges from intercourse between different beings (mum and dad originally). Similarly by staging a genuine intercourse between psychoanalysis and social/political theory we are likely to be able to generate insights that illuminate both.

There were two places in *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics* where I felt this kind of intercourse taking place and I'd like to dwell upon them both briefly. The first relates to the attempt by Gutwill and Hollander (Chapter 6) to link psychoanalytic insight to current theorizations of ideology, the second relates to the attempt by Layton and Walls (Chapters 7 and 8) to develop a new mediating concept (neither psychoanalytic nor sociological but both, a hybrid).

Gutwill and Hollander introduce the reader to that contemporary strand of thinking about ideology that moves from Gramsci to Althusser (where it merges with Lacan) and then on to Žižek and Laclau and Moufe. For the latter, ideology is often reframed in terms of a ruling (hegemonic) discourse that 'hails' (pulls, seduces, sucks in) the subject so that they take up their position as 'woman', 'black', 'working class', and so on. Ideology therefore exerts a kind of gravitational pull

on us, or as Gutwill and Hollander put it, ideology is 'subject-seeking'. In the UK over the last decade writers like Skeggs (1997) and Reay (2006) have explored the different kinds of subject positions that, for example, working-class women take up in relation to these discourses. But, as Stuart Hall (1996) noted some time ago, this form of analysis has reached an impasse. In particular, it lacks a depth of psychological understanding of the human subject. Psychoanalysis could make an enormous contribution here particularly when you think that the idea of 'positioning' is central to contemporary Kleinian and Relational approaches to the transference/countertransference. Who is making whom feel what? Who is putting whom into what role (position)? What kinds of mutual enactment are going on? How are actors being seduced, nudged, coerced into positions by the projective identifications of the other? These kinds of questions are central to current psychoanalytic technique. The parallels with analyses of ideology are striking. It is to the great credit of Gutwill and Hollander that they take the reader to the brow of the hill from where a glimpse of the possibilities is clear. The frustrating thing was that they then took the reader back down again having enjoyed no more than a glimpse.

In contrast Lynne Layton and Gary Walls develop Layton's novel mediating concept, the 'normative unconscious', in a way that generates new insights and questions. Layton (2004) has developed the concept of the normative unconscious to demonstrate that the unconscious, properly conceived as a part of the inner world dynamically resistant to thought, is as much a product of contingent and therefore political factors (such as cultural norms, collective trauma, events/dynamics specific to one's family) as it is the product of universal factors such as the Oedipal Complex, the incest taboo, and so

on. Among these contingent factors Layton includes norms (regarding gender, sexuality, class, etc.), which operate unconsciously to reproduce relations of hierarchy and inequality that leave a residue of humiliation, loss and shame in the inferiorized other. Layton argues that we first learn our place (become 'positioned' by these norms) in the crucible of the family, where fear of loss of love prevents us from accessing the feelings, thoughts and behaviours which might lead us to challenge or transgress them. To the extent that these are unconscious norms I am reminded of Laing's point about there being 'rules against knowing about certain rules' (Laing, 1969). Mothers, fathers, those that are significant to us, become unwittingly enlisted in enforcing these rules, our emotional dependence on them for love and recognition sustains the emotional sting that encourages rule abidance.

In their separate contributions to *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics* Layton and Walls examine a dimension of this normative unconscious that they call the 'unlinking norm', which directs us to destroy the links that connect emotional experience to external reality. Layton explores this in terms of the unlinking of the psychic and the political in the practice of psychoanalysis itself whereas Walls uses the concept to analyse the mysterious process whereby, as citizens, we sustain an apparent ignorance about things that we know about at another level. Walls argues that whereas we repress troublesome internal communications, in a way analogous to defences against trauma, we use the mechanism of dissociation to manage troublesome external realities. Walls notes that more primitive defences such as denial may also be involved and in a later contribution to the same volume Katz (Chapter 10) explores this in terms of Žižek's notion of disavowal, as she puts it 'the perverse pleasure of knowing about reality, and

knowing that you know, and yet continuing to act and ignore it' (p. 147).

Denial constitutes a perverse relationship to reality. Considered sociologically there is good reason to believe that whereas industrial society was built upon the social organization of repression, post-industrial (consumer) society is built upon the social organization of perversity – as educated types living in a media-saturated society we 'know' the facts about global inequality, climate change, corporate hegemony and so on and yet somehow these facts remains just that – facts lacking meaning or significance. Susan Long (2002) has recently examined perverse structures of knowing and not-knowing in the modern corporation. However to my mind the sharpest critique of the pervasive cynicism and complacency that now corrodes liberal capitalism remains Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* (see his 1984 article for a summary).

4. POLITICAL PROJECTS OF WHATEVER KIND UNDERTAKEN BY ORGANIZATIONS OF PSYCHOANALYSTS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

Depending upon what is meant by 'political' and by 'organizations' the area covered by this theme can be large or small. Considered loosely it would include the clinics set up by Freud's followers in the 1920s and 1930s to provide free psychoanalytic treatment for working class men and women (Danto, 2005) and a wide range of psychoanalytically inspired community mental health projects since the Second World War (Clarke et al., 2006). If we substitute 'groups' for 'organizations' then there have been a few recent examples of groups of analysts engaging in explicitly political projects. Perhaps the most celebrated is the work of Marie Langer (formerly a leading figure in the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association) and others in

establishing community health and mental health projects across revolutionary Nicaragua in the late 1970s and 1980s (Langer, 1989a, 1989b). But we should not forget the work of Hannah Segal and other leading British analysts in establishing Psychoanalysts Against the Bomb in the 1980s in Britain. In many respects Argentina has been the test case both for the political acquiescence of psychoanalysts and for their political engagement. Nancy Hollander's chapter 'Psychoanalysis and the problem of the bystander in times of terror' in *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics* provides an illuminating account of the slippery slope of analytic neutrality under conditions of dictatorship. But it also provides information about a group of politically engaged psychoanalysts who have recently become involved in Grissinopoli, a large workers and community cooperative that has grown out of the wave of recent factory occupations which arose when Argentina's economy collapsed in 2001.

5. PSYCHOANALYTIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SUBJECT-AS-CITIZEN

Both Lynne Layton (Chapter 7) and Muriel Dimen (Chapter 13) develop the same fruitful idea – psychoanalysis has so far focused upon love and work but should it not properly be concerned for love, work *and civics*? In other words when therapists and analysts look for signs of success in their work with a patient is it sufficient to look for an enhanced capacity to love and be loved and/or to be creative in one's working life, should we not also be looking for an enhanced capacity to engage ethically in the wider world – i.e. in civil society? If someone lacks curiosity about the social and political reality in which they are immersed, if their capacities for critical social thinking seem undeveloped, if

their reparative impulses remain firmly focused on the family and do not extend to strangers (the basis of solidarity) or to the physical environment, then to what extent do such patient's demonstrate therapeutic success? If these are not our concerns as therapists then are not our ambitions confined to producing happy individualists whose relational capacities have somehow become attenuated to the purely private sphere?

6. THE STRUGGLE TO APPERCEIVE THE MICROPOLITICS OF THE ANALYTICAL SESSION ITSELF

An understanding of the 'two-way street' of the micropolitics of the session has been considerably facilitated by developments in the 'relational current' in psychoanalysis, a current that many contributors to *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics* are clearly identified with. One of the great strengths of this book (a strength that is also relevant to the next theme) is the ability of many of the contributors to ground their arguments in detailed clinical vignettes, and it is this that sets the book apart from similar volumes where the contributors are largely academics. What is particularly interesting is the way in which the micropolitics of the session become doubly complex when the 'small p' politics of the session are infused by the 'large P' politics of the outside world. And this brings us to Samuels' seventh and last theme.

7. DEVISING RESPONSIBLE WAYS TO ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL MATERIAL THAT APPEARS IN THE CLINICAL SESSION

Many rich examples of the analyst's struggle to work through the dilemma of how/whether to work with political material are provided

in *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics*, from an example of a disempowered patient who seems oblivious to the disempowerment of shop workers whose picket line she crosses to examples of patients who seek reassurances from their analysts that their political feelings (rage, despair, etc.) are an okay thing to explore.

Taken together, the book's treatment of themes 6 and 7 left me reflecting on several aspects of my own practice as a therapist, particularly regarding two of my patients whose lives have to some extent been blighted by the practices of the companies that they have worked for. One of these patients was quite uncritical of her company and the very poor pay and target-driven pressures that it visited upon its staff and managers. Reading this book prompted me to reflect that sometimes therapists engage in enactments by *not* linking the inner to the outer world. This particular patient, who had become pregnant, was terrified of telling her boss for, as a junior manager, the message coming down through the company was that you should be devoted to the business not to a baby of your own. I knew about our Labour government's advocacy of the 'flexible workforce' and its resistance to many forms of employee protection that are commonplace in Europe. So I knew that my patient's fears were partly realistic but at the same time could see how her boss represented an aspect of herself that had previously played a part in her depressive breakdown and hospitalization. I often found myself feeling angry on her behalf about the company and was able to use this as a way of exploring her dilemma in knowing when her angry feelings were real and legitimate and when they were an externalization of her own damned up grievances about her early family experience. But because of my own training I was acutely aware of my own inhibition about making these kinds of links, an inhibi-

tion to some extent offset by my own experience of being in analysis with someone who often made creative use of my own political feelings. So both she and I were struggling with our own dilemmas and for me this was the great strength of many of the contributors to *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics*, that is, their ability to convey to the reader the dilemmas inherent in making these kinds of connections and the fine line between enactments resulting from unwarranted political intrusiveness and enactments resulting from an unwarranted silence. Again, perhaps, one of the tenets of the relational school is helpful here. The point being that enactments are always occurring, the task is to be aware of them and to be able to use them as material relevant to the task.

Finally I will consider an eighth theme that Samuels appears to overlook.

8. THE USE OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEORY IN A QUEST TO DEEPEN PSYCHOANALYTIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

Psychoanalysis has been repeatedly enriched by advances in the natural sciences. Freud drew strongly on the work of Helmholtz and other natural scientists of his time and today there is a traffic criss-crossing the land between psychoanalysis, neuro-science and complexity theory. But what of the social sciences? In the past attempts to explicitly incorporate Marxist and other social theories has often led to the marginalization of the practitioners concerned. Thus, following Karen Horney's removal from her faculty position in the New York Psychoanalytic Society, a group of analysts including Eric Fromm left the Society in protest and were later to establish the William Alanson White Institute. This in turn led to the development of the psychotherapy and psychoanalysis doctoral programme at New York Univer-

sity, which became the seedbed for many subsequent developments now covered by the concept of 'the relational turn' in North American psychoanalysis. So, in an odd way, in the US over a period of 50 years the marginalized have now to some extent become the mainstream. Not surprisingly, psychoanalysts outside the US (Kleinians, Lacanians, etc.) have been suspicious of the 'relationists', the main accusation levelled at them being that they have abandoned drive theory and no longer work with the repressed/dynamic unconscious. Lynne Layton (2004) has addressed these charges in an interesting examination of Juliet Mitchell's critical exchange with Lynne Segal. I would make the following points here:

1. There is absolutely no reason why drive theory is incompatible with a relational perspective. Contemporary object relations clinicians no longer work within the bio-energetic model of the drive of early psychoanalysis but more along the lines of the Klein/Bion model where desire is construed in terms of the vicissitudes of love, hate and knowledge. Such desires affect and are affected by every relational encounter. Phenomena such as self-hatred and narcissism can be understood both as part of the grain of who we are and in terms of the way in which actual social relations are able both to bring out the best and the worst in us. Disentangling the complex interpenetration of existential and social factors is one of the most difficult aspects of clinical work. It is extraordinarily difficult to work with the burning grievance of a patient when she is still caught up in the destructive family relations, which contributed in part to the development of this grievance. On the one hand we mustn't let families get away with soul murder but on the other we mustn't lose sight of the contribution of the patient's own (self-)hatred and the moral narcissism that also lies behind the litany of complaints such patients make.
2. I am struck by how rarely analysts within the Kleinian and Independent traditions themselves refer to the concept of repression these days. Having written this I thought I needed evidence to justify myself. I took two edited collections from my shelf at random. Interestingly enough Robin Anderson's (1992) *Clinical Lectures on Klein and Bion* doesn't mention 'repression' once in the index; Elizabeth Bott Spillius's (1988) *Melanie Klein Today: Volume 2* does give six single-page references to 'repression', one less than 'reprojection' and 21 less than 'splitting' (similarly there are huge numbers of references to reparation, projective identification, projection, phantasy, omnipotence, etc.). Similarly, when I did my own training recently I was surprised how little seemed to be written these days about dreams and dreaming. So I wonder to what extent 'mainstream' psychoanalysis these days still makes use of the concept of the repressed unconscious as opposed to the split off, dissociated, denied, etc. This is not to dismiss the concept of the repressed unconscious and the continuing power of Oedipal and other universal conflicts. But Layton (2004) makes the point that it is the actual enactment of these conflicts in relational dramas of real families which determines whether the subject that emerges is marked by ordinary unhappiness or neurotic misery. And for this reason the social and political comes back in. Children in Western democracies today grow up in families, neighbourhoods and schools that are far removed from those that existed in the formative years of psychoanalysis. The repressive, patriarchal and hypocritical middle-class family of

late nineteenth-century Europe has given way to a family in which paternal authority is increasingly problematized and where desire is stimulated and commodified rather than repressed. I think it is no coincidence that contemporary clinicians refer far less to repression these days. I think that it follows that we need to unlink the unconscious from repression. The unconscious remains ubiquitous; it is present in every enactment, repetition compulsion, psychosomatic symptom and dream as well as in racial hatred, exterminism, Islamophobia, equanimity in the face of environmental catastrophe and countless other political phenomena that cannot be explained using limited, rationalistic forms of reason. What cannot be thought constantly returns to haunt us. But what cannot be thought is not simply the repressed, it is also the denied and disavowed, the split off, the projected and enacted. Unlike Spock in *Star Trek* we are creatures defined by psycho-logic and psychoanalysis remains the one discipline devoted to the study of this strange human logic of ours.

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