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Special feature: 'The Politics of Psychotherapy'
A series of papers commenting on *The Politics of Psychotherapy: New Perspectives*, edited by Nick Totton (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006).

The Dance of Psychotherapy and Politics

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ABSTRACT *This paper presents a review of and commentary on the edited collection The Politics of Psychotherapy: New Perspectives. Certain chapters and themes are picked up and elaborated upon. The impact of modernist 'audit culture' values on therapy practice are then examined at length. The selective and partial nature of this review article should not mask the rich diversity that constitutes the psychotherapy/politics nexus, which this book admirably represents. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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A PERSONAL (AND POLITICAL) INTRODUCTION

> 'Politics in many western countries is broken and in a mess; we urgently need new ideas and approaches.'
> Andrew Samuels, in Totton (2006, 4)

In his earlier book on the same theme as the current volume (Totton, 2000), Nick Totton offered something of a *tour de force* on the manifold ways in which therapy and politics interpenetrate, inform and influence each other. Almost a decade ago, he was maintaining that psychotherapy had clearly failed 'to germinate the psychologically necessary changes in our communal climate to create radical social change' (Totton, 2000, 27). In reading this book I looked forward to seeing whether things had changed much in the intervening years.

> 'Understanding clients' difficulties as purely internal, personal manifestations can be reductive and disrespectful.'
> Judy Ryde, in Totton (2006, 73)

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Through my phrase 'the dance of psychotherapy and politics' I have the image of therapy and politics mutually informing and co-creating one another – such that whenever there is psychotherapy there will inevitably be politics and wherever there is politics a psychotherapeutic sensibility will enable insights and perspectives that will help to illuminate the nature of those politics. I hope that at least some of this 'intersubjective' dance will be visible in the review article that follows.

From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, many people (including myself) went into therapy work, at least in part, with a varyingly articulated political motivation – as left-radical-libertarians of diverse hues, frustrated by the apparently unending hegemony of 'Thatcherism'; going into therapy (training) at least meant that we could feel we were involved in *some* kind of substantive change – albeit at the individual rather than at the overtly societal level. So it has perhaps come as a great disappointment to many who entered the therapy world from that place to find the same age-old institutional conservatism, career mindedness and self-important bureaucratization taking over our field. These are issues to which I will return later.

After very briefly summarizing the book's contents, I discuss several chapters that especially interested me, followed by a wider discussion about professionalization and the 'audit culture'. One novel idiosyncrasy of this paper is that I have scattered throughout epigraphic vignettes that really struck me as I read the book. I have attempted to weave them into the text without interrupting it; taken together, those vignettes certainly tell a story about my own particular reading of the text, and perhaps about the dance of politics and psychotherapy itself.

Its is inevitable in a review such as this that the reviewer will tend to focus on some contributions rather than others – which is far more to do with the personal connections I made with the material than it is a commentary on the respective quality of the 14 contributions. I found especially engaging the chapters by Bloom (societal trauma) and Totton (chapters on power, and on therapy's institutions); Lees and Freshwater's chapter on healthcare and Berman's chapter on one therapist's engagement with acute political conflict.

SELECTIVE COMMENTARY

In extending the powerful explanatory notion of trauma into the social realm, Sandra Bloom's discussion of societal trauma (Chapter 2) offers new insights into the so-called 'war on terror'. Bloom discusses the links between what she calls 'extremist thinking' and traumatic experience (p. 19), and how trauma can negatively impact on the capacities individually and organisationally necessary for the effective exercise of democratic processes (p. 18). Whilst we must surely take seriously the burgeoning research and clinical evidence on the impact of traumatic experience on human subjectivity, some postmodern caution is also called for. From a Heideggerian perspective, for example, Bracken (2002) challenges conventional thinking about traumatic experience, which uncritically assumes the universality of what he argues to be a limited and *limiting* Eurocentric 'individualized' form of 'treatment'. He further discusses the historical specificity of 'trauma' and the function it serves within modern culture, together with the way in which the cultural legitimacy of the concept itself feeds into contemporary subjectivity. Unsurprisingly, Bracken is highly sceptical about an approach that simplistically medicalizes and objectifies traumatic experience and wants instead to strive for a far more subtle socio-cultural understanding, which

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questions the uncritical assumption of the universal, trans-cultural validity of trauma discourse.

While the kind of research mentioned by Bloom regarding the effect on the brain of traumatic experience is suggestive, there are other ways to conceptualize causality in this field – not least, Bracken's counterintuitive view that, far from traumatic events necessarily *causing* resultant symptoms, it is at least as plausible to reverse the causality and see the focus on the traumatic event in question as being *the result* and not the cause of, other psychiatric symptoms like depression and anxiety (Bracken, 2002, 205). Factoring this kind of perspective into Bloom's important work on trauma could surely only deepen and extend it.

> 'In one way or another…all therapists are carrying out a political programme in their work with clients. Therapists have their own…beliefs about how people should be and live.'
> Nick Totton, in Totton (2006, 88)

The question of power is central to any consideration of politics, of course, and few people in the psychotherapy field are better placed to offer a critically engaging discussion of therapy and power than book editor Nick Totton – both at the level of therapy work itself (Chapter 7) and in terms of the institutional machinations around power (Chapter 9) that characterize perhaps all human institutions – with psychotherapy (broadly defined) certainly being no exception. Indeed, one colleague of mine who, over the years, has served as an independent consultant to a number of internecine conflicts within the therapy world, once said to me that there are few more fertile sites for the generation of neurotic and psychotic material than groups or organizations of therapists! While possibly exaggerated, this view points up a thought that I have caught myself thinking – that paradoxically, might there be some group-dynamic process that occurs such that therapists gathered together generate issues that become conscious precisely because they are therapists, which in other groups of non-therapists might never come to consciousness? This kind of view might be consistent with a Bion-derived approach to groups and the unconscious but I don't have the time to pursue it here. Certainly, Totton himself refers explicitly to therapy's institutions 'malfunctioning', and their 'remarkable unwillingness to apply to themselves what psychotherapy knows about group dynamics' (p. 108) – but I have a hunch this might only be part of this particular story; and anyone who has read the extraordinary thousand-page story of the Freud-Klein 'Controversial Discussions' from the 1940s (King and Steiner, 1992) cannot but be left with that impression.

> 'Thinking about psychotherapy and politics must surely entail thinking about the politics of psychotherapy itself.'
> Nick Totton, in Totton (2006, 120)

Totton's analysis of the therapy institutions and their dysfunctions and discontents is typically robust and provocative. We read that psychotherapists tend to 'leave their theoretical understanding at the door when entering their own institutions' (Totton, 2006, 108). One possible further explanation for this might be that because therapists spend so much of their professional time managing and containing the unconscious (both of their clients

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and in terms of their own countertransference) that when they then enter a container (their institution) that, in phantasy, can manage *their own* unleashed unconscious, they cannot but let it go and with a vengeance! It might also be, of course, that (as Totton quotes Roger Kennedy, 113), 'analysts [and therapists more generally – RH] are notoriously prone to particular sorts of character problems which limit their capacity to be ordinarily human and social' (cf. Sussman, 2007) – and I believe this, too, is a view against which we would be ill-advised to defend too strongly.

But whatever the explanations of this curious and counterintuitive phenomenon might be, we as practitioners and activists are left to deal with the consequences, which Totton outlines at some length – and not least, 'competition, rivalry and dominance games' (p. 109), and the hoary old question (as it has now become) of professionalization and the bumpy drive towards regulation.

The cozy-sounding 'cover story' for psychotherapy professionalization, that it is predominantly 'for the good of, or for the protection of, the client/public', has long since been convincingly discredited (not least by Totton himself in various writings) and such an *apparently* client-centred view sits most uneasily with what actually happens in psychotherapy institutional processes and what might be driving those processes. On this kind of view, then, if anything, we might expect the drive towards therapy's professionalization to be *more* dysfunctionally and self-interestedly driven than in professions that don't routinely work with and are subject to unconscious dynamics – and at least some of the critics of professionalization (myself included) have consistently argued that this is indeed the case.

> 'Perhaps the kinds of people who make good therapists are not the kinds of people to run good organizations.'
> Nick Totton, in Totton (2006, 113)

Not that we should be overweeningly or too masochistically self-critical about all this, for as Totton presciently points out, therapists occupy a peculiarly uncomfortable position in modern culture – for 'on a macro level, society tends to look to psychotherapy for cures to problems that it is unable or unwilling to work through . . . so we are expected to resolve deep social problems without addressing their causes' (p. 116). Or put more bluntly: 'society's injunction to therapists could be summed up as: Make us 'better', without rocking the boat, without us depending on you, without costing too much and – above all – quickly!' (Totton, 2006, 116).

An alternative to the institutional intrigues of the nascent 'profession' is the Independent Practitioners Network (IPN) (Totton, 2006, 118–20), in which Nick Totton and I have both been involved in since its founding in 1994. Whilst no one – least of all IPN members – should be under the illusion that we have found a Holy Grail that adequately answers the deep problems of institutionalization that Totton identifies, there does surely have to be a better way to regulate and contain this peculiar work we do; and as a kind of 'New Paradigm' organization-that-is-not-one, the IPN may well have at least something to offer mainstream thinking about just how we might healthily organize the activity of psychotherapy in a quasi-institutional way. Certainly, if Totton is anything like right in his characterization of therapy's 'institutional state' as there being 'something genuinely scandalous about the prevalence of authoritarianism, bureaucracy, manipulation rivalry and mutual

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contempt' (p. 120) (as they say, apart from that, all is well!), then radical new thinking is surely urgently needed.

> '...*by making the struggle over power a central focus of the therapeutic encounter*, we can...turn a structural problem into a creative aspect of therapy.'
> Nick Totton, in Totton (2006, 83)

Totton also has interesting things to say about the 'power politics' of the therapy process itself (Chapter 7). He claims – and I think few would disagree – that 'the structure of psychotherapy builds in stubborn problems of power and control, irrespective of the good intentions or otherwise of the practitioner' (p. 83). I agree that power and control are an inevitable aspect of the relational dynamics of *any* relationship, and so in that sense they are very likely to become an aspect of any relational therapy experience, whether overtly or otherwise. Put differently, on this view therapy can, at least in part, become a 'mutual experiential inquiry' into how, with this particular client and this particular therapist at these stages in their respective lives, issues of power-control become manifest in the developing therapy relationship.

Stating this much is the (comparatively) easy bit; what is far more difficult is the thorny issue of informed consent, and whether, if the client were to know *beforehand* with the knowledge they had gained *after* going through the experience, that power-control would be a central issue of the work, whether they would choose a therapy experience in which they were – for they might well *not* wish them to be. And can it be an ethical move for any therapist to assume that power-control *should* be worked with, for a therapy experience to be effective, or even complete, for the client? I have written elsewhere about what I term 'material generation' (House, 2003), where the focus of a therapy experience becomes far more a matter of issues being generated through the assumptive base and imposed milieu *of the therapy frame itself*, rather than being issues of concern that the client takes to therapy. (Of course, the two may sometimes, or even often, coincide; but it would surely be a therapy-centred move to assume that they always and necessarily do.)

I'm also less sure than Totton is about his claim that 'all therapists are carrying out a political programme in their work with clients' (p. 88) and that therapists are always necessarily steering their clients towards it. I think it is a sustainable position to argue that whilst we may all unavoidably inhabit a political position and even in some sense support a political programme, it by no means *necessarily* follows from this that we will *carry it out* with our clients – for that seems to me to be an unduly pessimistic view about the extent to which human beings have the potential to transcend their own personal and parochial concerns and place the needs of the Other first, à la Levinas (cf. House, 2005). Similarly, to argue that it is inevitable that therapists will be 'operating from a set of beliefs' (p. 89) does not, for me, necessarily entail that we will be trying to influence or 'steer' clients in the direction of those beliefs (pp. 89–90). These seem to me to be quite crucial questions about the possibilities and limitations of therapy practice that would merit a full argumentation and thinking through in the pages of this journal.

> '...notions about what is "real" and "normal" in society...are social constructions driven by relations of power and control.'
> John Lees and Dawn Freshwater, in Totton (2005, 125)

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Having worked in the NHS as a counsellor for approaching 20 years, and having been subject to the institutional processes that characterize that medical organization's challenging relationship with the psychological therapies, I was particularly interested in John Lees and Dawn Freshwater's engagement with healthcare (Chapter 10). There seems little doubt that in the emerging mental healthcare system, 'management, containment and control has [sic] a higher priority than healing' (p. 122), 'labelling is generated through and by powerful societal institutions' (p. 125), and therapists could conceivably start to become agents of social control in the politicised healthcare system (p. 122). For those of us used to trenchantly challenging the ideology of an uncritical 'modernity' in all its manifestations, it is quite terrifying to read the Health Professions Council view that, in order to practise, therapists in that system will need to 'conduct evidence-based practice … participate in audit procedures … formulate specific … management plans … and conduct appropriate diagnostic or monitoring procedures …' (HPC, quoted in Totton, 2006, 126). I return to the 'audit culture' below.

At worst, argue the authors, we will be 'overcome by a theorized or medicalized view of ourselves. Yet we are unable to see this because of the pervasiveness of the dominant discourse' (p. 129). This might be an overly pessimistic view and might underestimate the multiple sites of resistance to the medical model's hegemony that its modernist discourse is generating; and I agree with the authors that we can use these shifts as 'an opportunity for change and transformation' (p. 131) – for, after all, what is the alternative? I believe that there is a great deal more to be said about all this and, again, this journal is well positioned to publish such work.

In his engaging Chapter 12, Emanuel Berman offers a very convincing counterweight to the arguably naïve view that politics has no legitimate place in the consulting room – for, he argues, there is a need 'for analysts in all countries to confront openly major issues in their country's history, when these issues have unavoidable psychological implications for their analysands and for their society' (p. 149). Indeed, Berman goes further, arguing that we cannot understand patients if we neglect the ways in which history and politics have shaped their destiny: 'I do not share the opinion that psychoanalysis deals exclusively with inner, psychic reality' (p. 151). If some psychoanalysts, of all people, are now taking this view, one wonders just how other therapeutic approaches can conceivably continue to exclude the political and the cultural from the therapy experience. Just how long it might take for this new sensibility to be reflected in therapy *trainings* remains to be seen for there are still arguably formidably powerful forces operating to retain therapy's intra-psychic mentality, to the extent, perhaps, that it helps to lend legitimacy to the distinct professional identity desired by many psychotherapists.

> 'The analyst's political involvement … can become a stimulus for fruitful intersubjective analytic exploration with each analysand.'
> Emanuel Berman, in Totton (2006, 158)

DISCUSSION: LACUNAE AND EXTENSIONS

There are a number of important political themes that I would personally like to have seen given more attention in the book. It would have been interesting and highly topical to have

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seen at least something more on the Richard Layard/CBT/'happiness' agenda (or 'the politics of happiness'? – or was the book perhaps assembled just before this really took off as an issue?). Some psychoanalytic insight into the politics of 'spin' would also have been welcome and the way in which the way things *appear* now dominates over *substance* and authenticity in modern public life. This is surely one of the most pernicious cultural developments in a very long time, and one that has arguably done untold damage in/to the quality of modern public life.

I would also have liked to have seen a critical analysis of the 'audit culture' and the associated 'low-trust' society, together with the pervasive cultural anxiety that is presumably a major factor underpinning it and which seems to be scarcely containable by the political process. (Interestingly, even surprisingly, 'anxiety' does not have an entry in the book's index.) After all, the audit culture and its accompanying managerialist ideology are saturating every aspect of public and, increasingly, private life, and therapy is by no means immune from these pernicious trends. Witness the current obsession with 'evidence-based practice', for example, in which what should be *most* in question – the very notion of 'evidence' itself – is routinely taken for granted and uncritically assumed to be unproblematic (e.g. House, 2007; forthcoming).

I have been waging a relentless campaign against the audit culture in several different spheres (for example, education and therapy) since the late 1990s, drawing in particular on the kinds of critiques set out in Mick Power's seminal 1990s texts (Power, 1999; see also Cooper, 2001; Kilroy et al., 2004). There are at last welcome signs that the audit culture and its control-obsessed practices are beginning to fall apart at the seams; yet I find it surprising, and deeply concerning, that a forensically critical deconstructive sensibility has not been brought to the way in which the audit culture has infected the therapy world in all manner of ways – not least through the CBT/happiness agenda and the extraordinarily naïve 'outcomes' claims that have been made for the superiority of CBT-type approaches over other modalities (House and Loewenthal, in press). A kind of 'trance induction' has arguably been active with the audit culture within therapy, with erstwhile critically minded practitioners seemingly taking the highly problematic notions of 'evidence' and 'evidence-based practice' as uncontested givens.

Within education, Lynn Fendler develops the kind of critique that has been notably missing in the mainstream therapy world. Below, I reproduce part of her incisive critique, substituting 'therapy' for 'education' terms (as precisely the same arguments apply):

> Now there is a reversal; the goals and outcomes are being stipulated at the outset, and the procedures are being developed post hoc. The 'nature' of the [client's experience] is stipulated in advance, based on objective criteria, usually statistical analysis. Because the outcome drives the procedure (rather than vice versa), there is no longer the theoretical possibility of unexpected results; there is no longer the theoretical possibility of becoming unique in the process of becoming ['treated']... In this new system, evaluation of [psychotherapeutic] policy reform is limited to an evaluation of the degree to which any given procedure yields the predetermined results... (Fendler, 1998, 57)

Andrew Cooper (2001) has been one of the few therapists directly to engage with the audit culture. In his seminal 2001 paper, he wrote:

> We now live in a relentlessly superintended world, a quangoed regime of commissioners, inspectors, and regulators... [quoting Peter Preston], [and] important questions of truth, meaning and authenticity

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> are sacrificed on the altar of compulsive reassurance of the critical superintendent…Fundamental principles about freedom, autonomy and citizenship are threatened by this state of affairs… Obsessional activity…is essentially about control rather than creativity…These systems may be contributing to a deterioration of standards, while maintaining a pretence that they are achieving the opposite. (Cooper, 2001)

There surely exist very considerable dangers indeed in therapy training and practice (broadly defined) engaging with this pernicious *Zeitgeist* – one which is arguably quite antithetical to the core values of quality therapeutic work. As Totton discusses in Chapter 9 on the institutions of psychotherapy, in the therapy field the issues of accreditation, state regulation and the 'professionalization' process have played an escalating role since the early 1990s. For some years, many of us have repeatedly challenged the debilitating effects upon therapy practice that soulless professionalization entails (see, for example, Mowbray, 1995; House and Totton, 1997; Postle, 2007).

> '…a few master psychotherapists at work in our ethically challenged postmodern cultural world… deserve every cent [of the vast amounts of money they earn]…they help thousands of ordinary people and give moral psycho-education to millions across the world…*without being registered psychotherapists*. I am, of course, talking about Oprah, Tricia and Dr Phil.'
> Petruska Clarkson, in Totton (2006, 106, italics added)

I have argued at length elsewhere (House, 2003) that what I would define as progressive therapy practice requires what might be termed a 'post-professional' enabling framework that encourages, as fundamental prerequisites, innovation, diversity, pluralism and self-regulation – progressive values that are embodied, for example, in practices like 'formative' (as opposed to didactic) assessment procedures within higher education. These are surely questions that are intensely and unavoidably political in nature, and which deserve our urgent and concerted attention.

> '…therapists are completely crazy in their professional politics and the way they organize themselves radiates craziness.'
> Andrew Samuels, in Totton (2006, 11)

Certainly, I believe that the audit culture and its associated practices have a quite deadly effect upon the delicate, subtle soul-qualities that give therapy practice at its best its uniquely distinctive characteristics – features that a materialistic 'modernity', with its regulation- and credential-mindedness is arguably placing under great threat, as an 'over-professionalized' psychotherapy and counselling practice uncritically threatens to embrace these pernicious cultural forces.

> '…as things stand, we are hardly in a position to tell the rest of society about its shortcomings.'
> Nick Totton, in Totton (2006, 120)

So why, to date, has there been comparatively little engagement with these crucial issues in the therapy world? Might it be, I wonder, that there is some kind of insidious process operating in modern culture such that we all end up '*thinking like a state*' (Scott, 1999) – with all of the limiting and distorting consequences of that mentality? These are surely the

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kinds of questions that culturally, critically and *politically* engaged psychotherapeutic thinking at its most incisive is very best placed to engage in; and to the extent that we don't do it, and we fail to take a stance of principled and informed non-cooperation in relation to these issues, the therapy field is most surely in for very big trouble indeed.

> 'I . . . have the impression that those who rise to power in training institutions, whether psychoanalysts or psychotherapists, often suffer from a need for power . . . They will do anything at anyone's expenses to have and retain power.'
>
> Robert M. Young, in Totton (2006, 110)

We surely have enough experience by now, for example, to know that virtually all technocratic intrusions into human systems generate all manner of often unconscious 'material' around power, and routinely precipitate quite unpredictable side effects, which commonly do more net harm than did the pre-existing shortcomings the interventions were supposed to address. Accreditation, 'credentialization' and statutory regulation are indeed merely further instances of the 'audit and control' culture.

Crassly positivistic and technocratic conceptions of service evaluation – what Kilroy et al. (2004, 1) refer to as 'the reduction of (qualitative) thought to (quantitative) product, (critical) education to (utilitarian) skill-set' – are surely singularly inappropriate means of evaluating efficacy in the peculiarly unique and idiosyncratic field of psychotherapy. What our field should surely be embracing is the most radical thinking in relevant and associated fields (for example, Trifonas, 2004), rather than uncritically mimicking the worst features of the 'surveillance culture'. The kinds of epistemological and methodological critiques that will be necessary are at last beginning to be made within the field (House and Loewenthal, in press) – but, I find myself asking frustratedly, where on earth they have been all these years? Might it be the case, for example (and I am speculating here) that some process commonly occurs in which we are all in some sense *infantilized by the state* and haven't yet found a mature place to take up in relation to overweening state intrusion into human experience and life itself? – and might this be especially so in the post-9/11 cultural milieu of acute and often largely unprocessed anxiety, which may well have triggered off all manner of unconscious phantasies (in the Kleinian sense) for us all, such that we have been unwittingly drawn into unconsciously relinquishing our capacity for self-efficacy and self-determination to a polity all too eager to project its own anxieties on to us, and then step in, in an ill-fated attempt to assuage that projected anxiety?

These are the kinds of questions, then, to which analytic and psychotherapeutic thinking might have a significant contribution to make, if we are not to sleepwalk into a thoroughgoing surveillance society. And to follow Andrew Samuels' important work in this realm (Chapter 1), as the audit culture proceeds to penetrate every aspect of public and private life, these are also questions that will surely manifest in the consulting room, and with which politically committed and aware practitioners surely cannot fail to engage with their clients and patients.

There are also interesting institutional questions about the extent to which a *radical countercultural space* can be preserved in a psychotherapy field which becomes increasingly professionalized and subject to the audit culture (cf. Mowbray, 1995). Some humanistically inclined 'institutionalizers' might wish to argue that it *is* possible to retain their

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original radicalism within an institutionalized and professionalized therapy field; but I have severe doubts about that myself.

Thus, political and social radicals, who often came into the therapy field precisely because it offered a creative and fluid 'subversive space' in which our most fundamental presuppositions about society and human experience could be thought about and challenged, are now asking whether there is anything more that people like ourselves can do to 'rattle and shake' the New Therapy Establishment – for example, exposing their abandonment of the radical roots from which much innovative therapy activity has sprung. How might we appeal directly to the radical heart of therapy work in this age of acute cultural anxiety, with all the primitive material it seems to plug into and the institutionally reactionary 'acting out' it seems to precipitate? Or has the therapy field changed so much and are the motivations of most practitioners now so different from the radical roots (careerism as opposed to human potential development, for example), that seeking to change the trajectory of the field is pretty much a waste of energy and we're better off just doing what we do; and if like-minded people discover and join us, fine. These are the kinds of unavoidably political questions that radically minded practitioners are increasingly asking themselves.

> 'We cannot understand our patients…if we are not attentive to the way history and politics shape their destiny in subtle and complex interaction with intrapsychic factors.'
> Emanuel Berman, in Totton (2006, 151)

More generally still, in *The Politics of Psychotherapy* I would have welcomed some systematic attention given to analytically inclined, humanistic and New Paradigm critiques of modern Western political systems. Psychotherapeutic and analytic thinking promises to throw a great deal of light on such issues and, to the extent that we are all subject to and impacted by negative cultural forces, such thinking surely has direct relevance to what is brought to, and unfolds within, the consulting room.

A deep and arguably corrosive cynicism towards politics has recently grown apace (hand in hand with the rise in the 'politics of spin' and the victory of appearance over substance) and psychotherapeutic and analytical thinking might also have a great deal of light to throw on this crisis in democracy's very legitimacy.

> '…what…seems to be happening in the 21st century is a profound paradigm shift from hierarchical ways of being to more complex equalizing processes of change.'
> Jocelyn Chaplin, in Totton (2006, 160)

Finally, I want to suggest that there might be important *transpersonal* dimensions to these issues (cf. Samuels' call for a resacralization of the political). The crassly profane, chronically immature politics that characterize 'modernity' are arguably in abject crisis – and there is a question as to whether psychotherapy has anything to offer in the urgently needed development of a kind of spiritually informed politics. Critical transpersonal thinking and sensibility might well have a great deal to contribute to such developments – and, as Samuels suggests, the deepening understanding of the dialectic between that which is most personal and that which is most general and universal might be one that therapists are most suitably positioned to explore.

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> 'The kind of involvement... we should strive for is based on utilizing our expertise in listening for a fresh examination of political reality.'
> Emanuel Berman, in Totton (2006, 157)

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

> 'Can our psychological insights contribute to political understanding, even to political influence?'
> Emanuel Berman, in Totton (2006, 152)

There are all manner of diverse ways in which the worlds of therapy and politics intersect and it is inevitable that many interesting and relevant connections cannot be covered in a book of this kind. What is reassuring is the existence of the diverse therapeutically informed social-activist initiatives featured in this book, showing in turn that therapy, psychology and psychiatry have by no means completely abandoned radical activism.

> '... individual practitioners and, indeed, psychotherapy as a profession, need to be prepared to interrogate and deconstruct the cultural politics associated with their practice.'
> John Lees and Dawn Freshwater, in Totton (2006, 123)

At the global level, the West's extraordinary Iraq 'adventure' is perhaps a sobering commentary on the degree to which 'emotional intelligence' and psychological insight have signally failed to infiltrate the world of international politics and the imaginations of its principal leaders, with current world events (notably, the 'war on terrorism') continuing to unfold in the way they are.

I enthusiastically welcome Nick Totton's committed engagements and initiatives with the realm of politics – but I also think there is a need to go further. For example, we urgently need a comprehensive psychosocial critique of the audit culture. An engagement by psychotherapy with the possibilities of a spiritually informed, 'transmodern' or 'New Paradigm' politics would also be welcome (e.g. Wood, 2003; Pribor, 2005), along with the form(s) the latter might take as we voyage through and beyond the death throes of Late Modernity. There are some fleeting signs in this important book of such developments: culturally aware therapeutic and analytic thinking is arguably uniquely placed to carry forward these engagements and I look forward to seeing these issues take increasing prominence in this important and path-breaking journal.

> '... what is transformative is ultimately beyond... a method and beyond words.'
> Arlene Audergon and Lane Arye (2006, 146)

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