

### Special issue

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# The Cold War and the Rise of Political Correctness

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**ABSTRACT** *The year 1968 saw an outburst of revolutionary spirit, which seemed to presage great changes for the better. Instead, idealism has given way to a culture of fraudulence and simulation, which began to be identified in different parts of the analytical world in the 1960s. It is this that has become the phenomenon now known as Political Correctness, which characterizes Orwell’s world of 1984, far more of a reality now than 40 years ago.* Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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If one had to choose one key word to characterize the spirit of the events of 1968 it would probably be ‘Liberation’. But while everyone shared a vision of a better world with freedom from prejudice, exploitation, oppression and so on, there were some very different ideas as to what the world needs to be liberated from.

On the one hand, there was the kind of tyrannical oppression operating in the Eastern bloc where people simply attempting to cross the border to the West were shot dead.

On the other hand, the hippy culture, which was only able to come into being as a byproduct of pampered affluence, was pursuing a naive, utopian notion of freedom, which effectively meant an infantile abrogation of all responsibility. Consequently, someone like the playwright Tom Stoppard, recently arrived in Britain at the time, was somewhat puzzled as to what the youths in the West were protesting against as, compared to where he had come from, they *had* freedom. The Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, after only a short acquaintance, expressed the opinion that people in the West had found freedom only to throw it away again.

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Arguably, the student riots in Paris could be seen as representing something of a middle position. While no countries in the West could be fairly described as repressive compared to the Eastern bloc, there was undoubtedly something unusually rigid and prescriptive in the French educational system, which the youth of France were not prepared to tolerate any longer. The degree of physical violence shown by protesters and the police response was correspondingly greater.

What happened in France was not so much a Revolution as a rebellion, and herein lies a crucial issue: revolution, rebellion and utopian longing, psychologically speaking are quite different animals but look confusingly similar.

We might try to summarize it like this: rebellion and rebelliousness are necessary to healthy emotional development. Friction between the child and parent, the student and the authorities, is essential to emotional growth. Without it one is doomed to remain stuck in the conservatism of latency. The earliest manifestation of this is the word 'no!', with which toddlers will often respond to an offer of something they actually want, so intoxicating is the experience.

Revolution, in the broadest sense, describes the way in which all systems evolve through what Bion termed Catastrophic Change (Bion, 1984, 8–11). An established order collapses, implodes or wears out producing a temporary state of disorder, paving the way, with luck, for a new order. Adolescence is the most familiar time of catastrophic change in individual experience, and the idealism that characterizes it enables the adolescent to cope with the terrors of abandoning the cosy stronghold of latency.

Utopian longing of the sort that characterized the Hippy mentality of the 1960s is obviously a familiar feature both of adolescent idealism and human aspirations in a more general sense, but in its chronic form amounts to a pathological avoidance of reality.

When society conspires to ignore something important, as in Hans Andersen's story of 'The Emperor's new clothes', the denied truth is often highlighted by some acting out.

Twelve years after 1968, when Mark David Chapman shot John Lennon, he was found to be carrying on his person a copy of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. When interviewed by the police he reported that he had bought the book that morning and had the feeling that he *was* Holden Caulfield, the hero of the book. In a way, Caulfield could be seen to personify the spirit of 1968 in his raunchy, irreverence for convention and authority. But what particularly distinguishes *The Catcher in the Rye* (as, perhaps, all adolescent thinking) is the violent hatred of fraudulence in people in authority.

We can obviously read far too much significance into the tragic acting-out of a deluded person such as Chapman evidently was, but it seems clear that he both hero-worshipped John Lennon and travelled some considerable distance with the express intention of killing him. Add to this his focus on the book and the conclusion seems inevitable (as was concluded at the time) that it was what he perceived to be the fraudulence of John Lennon's stance that provoked his action.

New developments in the groundswell of consciousness, so to speak, are often picked up in advance by more highly attuned people, fulfilling the function of the figure that Bion conceived of as the Seer in the group who was necessary for the New Idea to come into being. Within a few years in the 1960s, three quite separate (and apparently unconnected) pioneers in very different schools of psychoanalysis published papers, which have become cornerstones in each respective school of analytical thinking.

The year 1960 saw the publication of Winnicott's 'Ego distortion in terms of true and false self' (Winnicott, 1965, 140–52). In the same year Mary Louise von Franz completed a series of lectures at the CG Jung Institute in Zurich on the subject of 'The problem of the Puer Eternus' (Von Franz, 1970). In 1965, Donald Meltzer gave his paper on 'The relation of anal masturbation to projective identification' to the 24th International Psychoanalytical Congress in Amsterdam (Meltzer, 1966).

The three papers, from their very different perspectives, were each addressing the same issue, namely the increasingly ubiquitous pathology of a kind of delusional, narcissistic mind-set. Winnicott described it as the False Self, which in its most severe form 'sets up as real and it is this that observers tend to think is the real person'. Von Franz, in her focus on the male version of this, describes it as 'a form of neurosis which HG Baynes has described as the "provisional life", that is, the strange attitudes and feeling that one is *not yet* in real life.' Meltzer in his paper sums it up as 'a type of character disorder seen with relative frequency among the many intelligent, gifted and outwardly successful people who seek analysis, namely of "pseudomaturity".'

It had long been observed that the kind of problems with which people presented for analysis had already changed radically from the time of Freud. As Christopher Lasch wrote in 1979

in the last 25 years, the borderline patient who confronts the psychiatrist not with well-defined symptoms but with diffuse dissatisfactions, has become increasingly common. He does not suffer from debilitating fixations of phobias or from the conversion of repressed sexual energy into nervous ailments; instead he complains 'of vague, diffuse dissatisfactions with life' and feels his amorphous existence to be futile and purposeless. (Lasch, 1980, 36–7)

This fundamental problem of rootlessness, identity crisis and existential angst had long been recognized. CG Jung had observed that most the people who consulted him were educated, successful people who did not suffer from any identifiable psychiatric condition. The reason why they came was always the same; life had lost its meaning. What the papers of Winnicott, Von Franz and Meltzer were homing in on was a very fundamental defensive pathology which got mobilised in response to this. While there was little difficulty in recognizing the phenomenon, what was at the heart of it and how it could be treated was another matter.

Winnicott, in his paper, seems to see the infant as a victim of the mother's lack of imagination and inability to empathize, deficiencies were seen as somehow robbing the infant of its sense of authenticity and selfhood. Von Franz's analysis of the Puer Eternus does not see him as a victim, and is big on the way in which the problem involves a delusional identification: he just somehow *knows* that he is magical and special, and consequently life is wasted waiting to be recognized. But, characteristically of classical Jungian psychology, she has nothing to offer in terms of the mental mechanisms and internal processes that are giving rise to the delusion and keeping it going. She quotes Jung as saying there is only one cure for the problem – work – but hesitating and saying 'is it really as simple as that?'

It was Meltzer in his development of the insights of Melanie Klein (by whom he was analysed) who got to the heart of the matter in his seminal paper. A delusional sense of identity is achieved by the projection of oneself into an object – whether an actual or

imaginary person – so that there is an unconscious belief that one has magically become them. When it is an actual person, the most notable telltale signs of the projective identification is the unconscious mimicry of their body language and mannerisms. I once had a tennis partner who was an agile and powerful player on the court but at times when he walked around in certain company he had the stiff and restricted movements of his elderly, arthritic analyst.

But it is when projective identification involves an imaginary, idealized Object – such as the Hero or the Perfect Mother – that the mechanism lends itself to the mentality of the fundamentalist or the ideologue. One of the most familiar forms of this is the so-called Altruistic Surrender where a person attempts to escape from and to deny major psychological problems and deficiencies in themselves by establishing themselves as the Expert who sorts out those problems in other people. Dr Meltzer once observed in a resigned tone ‘The more shallow and superficial people are, the more they seem to think they are God’s gift to psychoanalysis!’

This pathology now occurs on a pandemic scale, its most noticeable manifestation being Political Correctness. This involves, in effect, the establishing of a fantasy ‘Correct Object’ – totally liberal, egalitarian, and free from all prejudice of any sort. The unconscious belief is then that if you are careful to profess the kind of views and attitudes such a person would have, you somehow magically become them.

In a little sets of reference books I have on philosophy, the twentieth century is given the title, I think appropriately, *The Age of Analysis*, and I have often wondered what would be the most appropriate one for the twenty-first century. I am afraid that it would have to be something like ‘*The Age of Simulation*’ or possibly even ‘*The Age of Fraudulence*’.

What Winnicott, Von Franz and Meltzer were identifying in the papers was effectively a new phenomenon, the tendency of the individual to retreat narcissistically into an artificially induced tribal mentality. This was vividly described to me by a pioneer in the treatment of delinquency, Frank Lyward, as being when people ‘think and behave on their own as if they were in a football crowd’.

We are not talking here about the mass hysteria of a Nuremberg rally, but something more chronic and insidious. It is not imposed by any external totalitarian regime against which the individual can rebel but has installed itself in the group mentality with an efficiency which no Politburo or military junta could hope to achieve.

The net result is a massive paralysis of thinking, especially in the social domain. Because political correctness and its underlying mentality involves an evasion of real thinking and the mental conflict involved, all that remains are ‘correct’ prejudices or endless lists of obsessional guidelines.

For the diminishing number of people who have developed a real capacity of thinking, discussion and debate, even privately, becomes almost impossible because so many questions are heresy or taboo even to ask. Here are a few examples of questions that cannot be publicly asked:

- Can the political Left be as tyrannical and repressive – or even more so – than the Right?
- Can racial prejudice exist against white people?

- What is the female equivalent of misogyny and why isn't there a popular name for it?
- Are some children much better off in the care of their father than their mother?

The problem is not just the application of prejudices instead of thinking but the general inability to juxtapose opposites in a way that is necessary for any real thinking to take place. This is illustrated by another aspect of the political correctness phenomenon, and that is the complete inability to understand the concept of tolerance. The word is tolerance, derived from the Latin for 'to carry'; it means to put up with something, which by definition implies that that is not what you feel like doing.

Because political correctness is all about the evasion of conflict, tolerance has come to be almost equated with approval. But if I am tolerant when my neighbours' teenage children play Heavy Metal music very loudly at midnight, it does not mean that I suddenly decided I like it. It is an infernal bloody nuisance but, because they are teenagers, I have decided to put up with it in the interests of neighbourliness and forbearance.

Being tolerant is closely allied to being liberal and here the rot set in in a big way. Without any terms of reference, liberality becomes licence, which in its turn paves the way for relativism and ultimately the disappearance of any value system.

This may have a bearing on the way in which the traditional distinctions between the main political parties not only seem to disappear completely at times but even to get reversed.

Family life and personal relationships, however, are the areas where these tendencies have had the most dire consequences. Just as the political correctness culture has resulted in a loss of freedom of thought worse than external oppression, so the liberation of women from subservience to men has mainly resulted not in a *revaluing* but a *devaluing* of the Feminine, as women becoming increasingly identified with male values.

In 1979, while on a visit to Norway, I came across an incident that deeply shocked the worthy inhabitants of Bergen. A young mother turned up at a child minder's two hours earlier than usual and was told it was not convenient for her to collect her child until the usual time. This aroused her suspicions and she insisted on entering the premises to find her own child together with three or four other toddlers deeply asleep under sedation. It turned out that the children were routinely being given a knock-out drop with their milk when they arrived, which was calculated to last just long enough to keep them asleep until they were due to be collected.

It seemed to me that this was symptomatic: far from fathers, and Society as a whole, being more involved in child care, mothers now had the right to be 'free' of their children in the way that traditionally fathers had been. Children were coming to me thought of unconsciously as unwanted pets or even dolls, which could be put back in the box when their owners were too busy doing other things.

The Robertsons' research (Robertson and Robertson, 1989), the work of Bowlby (1973) and realizations about the importance of bonding have since become an even more Inconvenient Truth than Global Warming. As with Global Warming, only more demonstrably, it seems to me that we are sawing through the branch we are sitting on, because good-enough parenting is not a skill set but a vital experience that can only be provided by parents who themselves have experienced it. A cycle of deprivation is now operating that produces

increasingly feral children, who in their turn are even less able to give *their* children the essential emotional experience for healthy development.

At the height of the French Revolution, the decision was made to decimalize the week and have 10 days instead of seven. The main reason why this didn't catch on was that units of time, such as weeks, hours, and days were not somebody's arbitrary decision, but a reflection of the way the Universe operates. The same is true of child development and to try and impose some artificial and more convenient conditions in ways that blithely ignore the imperatives of several million years of evolution, is equally absurd. At the heart of it is the omniscience that cannot learn from the experience of history.

With the end of the Cold War, the West has inexorably come closer to Orwell's world of 1984 as civil liberties join the list of endangered species and State interference in private life proliferates. There is a likelihood that the interlocking crises of overpopulation, global warming and diminishing resources will lend themselves to more authoritarian control and depersonalization. At the same time, they may also contribute to the opposite effect by galvanizing people into a more genuine quest for meaning and a real value system – the quest that has to be at the heart of any psychotherapy worthy of the name.

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