

# The Eupsychian Impulse

## Psychoanalysis and Left politics since '68

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My purpose here is to offer some reflections on the part played by psychoanalysis in Left politics in Britain since 1968.<sup>2</sup> I will attempt a broad and critical characterisation of the major uses to which psychoanalytic theory has been put in political discourse during this period. There will be very little in this that readers already familiar with this field will have not read elsewhere, or concluded for themselves (though they may disagree with my evaluation of those uses). However, I think that the issues of political vision involved here are important enough to justify a review of the field, even one as summarily crude as the following.<sup>3</sup>

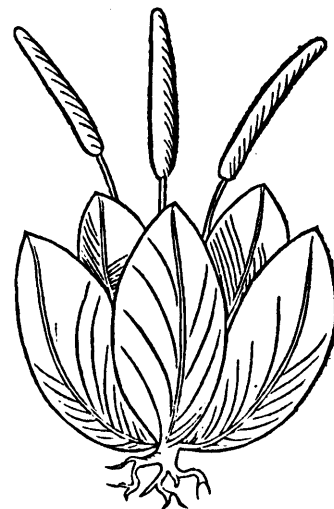
This account is based in part on retrospective research into the publications and activities of this period, and in part on my experience of involvement (since 1974) in work concerned with the problems and challenges posed by psychoanalytic thought for Left politics, and vice versa. Since 1984 my main context for this work has been the journal *Free Associations*; for about six years before that its primary support was in a 'Freud-Marx' reading group linked to the *Radical Science Journal*.<sup>4</sup> This inevitably partial experience means that some areas of work are given less detailed attention than others in what follows, but this will detract from my argument only if I have misrepresented any of the positions discussed. I hope to use personal report illustratively and as an expository convenience rather than as a substantive basis for argument. It would though be an odd thing if some personal reflection did not have an important place somewhere in any intellectual engagement with psychoanalysis.

### SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

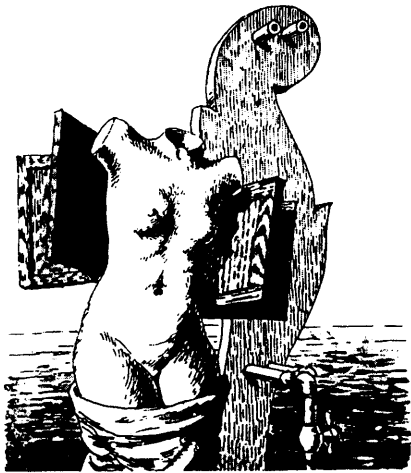
The use of psychoanalytic thinking in political philosophy and in analyses of specific political situations dates back to the earliest phase of the psychoanalytic movement. *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, published in 1901, was concerned mainly with mundane phenomena in the life of the individual, yet was also a first systematic demonstration by Freud of how psychoanalysis could be used to examine non-clinical domains. The second step in its development as an instrument for the analysis of political life was its application to collective phenomena in Freud's first sociological essay, "'Civilised' sexual morality and modern nervous illness" (1908). Here Freud argued that the limitation of legitimate sex to monogamy, the product of civilisation's tendency to increasing sexual restrictiveness, was probably not worth its costs in increased neurotic misery.

In Britain the leading Freudian Ernest Jones was quick to see the potential of psychoanalysis as a framework for political

comment. In 1915, the year that Freud published 'Thoughts for the times on war and death', Jones also published two papers on war (Jones, 1915a and b), thus initiating in British psychoanalysis a tradition of writing about socio-political matters. Jones himself, Edward Glover and Roger Money-Kyrle were subsequently leading contributors to this tradition, for which war remained a major concern and in which a spectrum of reforming ambitions were represented (see Richards, 1986a, for an account of some of this work).



It is in its links with more revolutionary ambitions, however, that psychoanalysis is best known as a contribution to political thought, particularly in the forms of Wilhelm Reich's Freud-Marxism and the Freudian cultural critique of Herbert Marcuse and other members of the Frankfurt School of 'critical theory'. The writings of the Frankfurt School do not though point one-directionally towards *revolutionary* politics as the requisite framework for psychoanalytic insights. Also, the work of more recent American writers such as Philip Rieff (1959; 1966) and Christopher Lasch (1979; 1984), linked in some ways to critical theory, has established powerful claims for more liberal and democratic-socialist directions for psychoanalytic cultural theory. In the history of psychoanalysis itself such directions can also be traced; for example in the minor tradition in British psychoanalysis already referred to, and in the Austro-German beginnings of psychoanalysis. Russell Jacoby's explorations of these (1983) have brought to light the less well-known contributions to political Freudianism of Otto Fenichel and others



from the end of the First World War to the 1950s, and indicate the variety of socialist and communist, revolutionary and reformist politics with which the development of psychoanalysis was closely interwoven until the Second World War.

This evidence of the diversity of political perspectives with which psychoanalysis has been associated should make clear the inadequacy of any dichotomisation between 'revolutionary' and 'reactionary' applications of psychoanalysis in political thought. A substantial amount of Left intellectual effort has been expended within the terms of this dichotomy, usually in order to recruit Freud, despite himself, from the side of reaction to that of revolution. This effort has been comparable to the Marxist inversion of Hegel in order for his insight into historical change to be of service to revolutionary politics. While Hegel had to be transposed from idealism to materialism, Freud has had to be removed from the pulpit of ahistorical bourgeois fatalism and repositioned at the barricades such that his message reads not downwards as a ruling class prescription disguised as natural law, but upwards as a demand for libidinal freedom or the recognition of desire.<sup>5</sup> The notion that psychoanalysis is essentially 'ambivalent' (Ingleby, 1984) improves upon the seizure of its essence for one side of the other, but still does not reflect the complexity of its political meanings.

#### WHY PSYCHOANALYSIS?

In the early 1960s some paths which could have led towards psychoanalysis were struck by some on the emergent New Left, notably Ronald Laing and David Cooper in early articles in *New Left Review*. However, it is since 1968 that increasing numbers of people who would identify themselves as of the radical Left have turned towards psychoanalysis, or have sought to bring together in some way what might otherwise have been their disconnected or divergent interests in socialism and psychoanalysis. Two simple, apparently competing explanations for this development suggest themselves. One is that there was something, in the cluster of political, cultural and philosophical forces which have been identified as comprising the 'moment of 68', which prescribed or pointed towards a political appropriation of psychoanalysis. The other is that the turn to psychoanalysis was a *post*-'68 phenomenon, part of a reaction to an experience of the failure of the millenarian ideals of 'May 68'. An analogy here would be with the reasons for Herbert Marcuse and others becoming interested in psychoanalysis in the 1930s, in response particularly to the experience of what seemed to be the corruption of the revolution

in Russia, and of mass support for fascism in Germany. If successful revolutions were so difficult to achieve, then perhaps there were deep intrapsychic impediments to them which needed to be understood and which psychoanalysis could illuminate.

In other words the turn to psychoanalysis can be seen as either positively or negatively produced by '68, as a direct development of it or as part of the attempt by a new New Left, sadder and wiser, to make a fresh start in the aftermath of '68. I will argue that in general the first of these explanations provides the more basic truth, though it is importantly qualified by the truth, at a certain level, of the second.

I will first of all consider two very different kinds of possible reasons for intellectuals (of any political stripe) to turn towards psychoanalysis.

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC THERAPY

In many cases the decision to enter psychoanalytic therapy, as opposed to seeking some other form of therapy or eschewing all expert help, is determined by a pre-established familiarity with and sympathy for psychoanalytic discourse. However, there may well be some people for whom the experience of therapy came first, and was followed by an interest in psychoanalysis as a theory and as an input to politics. My own impression is that such people are few, which is not surprising given the relatively small and circumscribed scale of psychoanalytic practice in Britain, and the tendency for patients to be already familiar with some ideas about psychoanalysis.

Whether for any particular individual the experience of therapy is the cart or the horse, it is clear that therapy and politics can become intertwined in the lives of some individuals, such that the work of therapy (whether as therapist or patient) becomes experienced as part of a *political* life-project (though probably in some tension with other, more conventionally political, parts of that project). The growth of 'feminist therapy' is the most important example of this phenomenon, but this takes us largely beyond the sphere of psychoanalytic work, within which it is not usual to recognise such a sociologically-defined specialism. Within psychoanalytic work, the only distinctions which can be recognised are those which depend on what the analyst or therapist brings (in theoretical orientation, personal technique) or on the clinical context (e.g. whether long- or short-term work is planned, what the institutional setting is). Otherwise, each patient is unique, and the socio-political categories within which the patient lives (and the therapist), and the belief-systems with which the patient may try to interrogate the therapist or the therapy, are basically material for the analytic work of interpretation.

Thus at least in the case of orthodox psychoanalytic practices, there is a considerable distance between the experience of analytic therapy, and the political project of engaging with psychoanalytic insights and their implications for understanding society. In those few cases where there is some direct and major initiation of an intellectual/political interest by therapeutic experience, it is likely to be in a non-specific way, in that, for example, a helpful therapy may establish psychoanalysis in the mind of the patient as a good thing, a tradition to be regarded with respect.

In his sustained analysis of the relationship between his clinical work as a psychoanalyst and his political commitment as a Marxist (and psychoanalytical) intellectual, the American writer Joel Kovel (1981; 1984; forthcoming) presents an un-

resolved contradiction, in which the problem is not one of mere *distance* but one of *disjunction*: 'Psychoanalysis is a practice which belongs to bourgeois experience in late-capitalist urban society' (1984, p. 152). 'Perhaps someone else will be able to figure out how to do an authentically proletarian psychoanalysis. I can't' (ibid.).

One need not share Kovel's historical judgement on psychoanalysis to concur in his practical judgement that psychoanalytic therapy and political work are at the least *separate* spheres, and may in some way be incommensurable or immiscible. We can take his failure to synthesise his clinical work with his politics to be definitive, and not only for the Marxist position which Kovel represents. In my own case the experience of a (Kleinian) analysis was itself a very important factor in bringing about a shift of outlook, from viewing the world in the totalised terms of a Marxism tending towards the monolithic, to a more pluralistic conception of the autonomy, within historical contexts, of specific social practices. Here in the session, and in the analytic process as a whole, was an instance in which the primacy of the conflict between class interests clearly did not obtain. A practical struggle about being honest with oneself has little to do, for practical purposes, with class struggle (though it may be possible to describe some of its phases in terms of their mediations through class, gender and other social-structural relations). In the intensity of its refusal to become preoccupied with the 'real event', psychoanalysis may be more easily the vehicle for such a change of outlook than would other less reclusive practices, but its autonomy is not of a fundamentally unique kind, being based as it is on a technical procedure, more or less rigorously adhered to.

I am not claiming the complete autonomy of technique from social context (that would indeed be a *volte face* for someone once active in a collective one of whose slogans was 'Science is social relations'); my point is rather that psychoanalytic therapy has a technical interior which, though historically produced and not fully insulated, has a large degree of discursive autonomy from its currently prevailing political exterior. This point helps to explain the generally low participation of psychoanalytic therapists in the public domain, notwithstanding their spontaneous political sympathies (Richards, 1986b). It will also hopefully clarify that the personal change of outlook to which I referred above was not the result of my becoming imbued with a radical-Kleinian doctrine of the pure endogeneity of unconscious phantasy, since specific theoretical positions of that sort are not necessary to establish the technical specificity of psychoanalysis as an interpretive exploration of personal meaning and self-deception.

At the same time I do not want to imply that psychoanalytic experience has no relation to politics; a particular school of clinical work may dispose its participants more towards some political concerns, and less to others. Also, my self-example above illustrates how the acquisition of a particular political conception—of the practical autonomy of social spheres—was facilitated by analytic experience. Moreover I subscribe to the complaint that one of the most serious weaknesses in much of the discussion about psychoanalysis in political theory is that it is cut off from clinical work, and from the major developments in psychoanalytic theory which are—in the empirical, though not unproblematically so, nature of psychoanalysis—closely tied to the clinical literature. While radical theorists have been re-arranging some earlier Freudian concepts, freezing them at one stage or another in the process of their formation and change, many actual psychoanalysts have been transforming the theory in practical contexts. It is only in some areas of the

interchange between feminism and psychoanalysis that clinical experience (which is not necessarily understood by those involved in it as 'feminist therapy')—has been at the heart of the theoretical effort, as evidenced by the recent collection of essays from the Women's Therapy Centre (Ernst and Maguire, 1987).

Overall, then, some personal experience of psychoanalysis, and strong links between the communities of clinicians and of intellectuals, are prerequisites, or at least very desirable conditions, for interesting and useful work on psychoanalysis and politics. Yet the clinical and political domains are fundamentally distinct, and simple, direct movement from one to the other is not on the whole possible.

#### THE SEARCH FOR A PHILOSOPHICALLY SATISFACTORY PSYCHOLOGY

Philosophical debate about psychoanalysis has tended to be mainly in the philosophy of science, which is perhaps symptomatic of the general cultural response of marginalising the substantive and moral questions raised by psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, the debate about scientificity has provided for some people an approach to psychoanalysis. For myself, an attachment to a particularly scientific form of Marxism-Leninism, which persisted until the mid-1970s, meant that I was looking for scientific truth, and hoped to find that psychoanalysis was epistemologically more sophisticated and sound than other schools of psychology, trapped as they were in empiricism and positivism. (It was of course very helpful in this that the judgement of *bourgeois* philosophy on psychoanalysis was in general so damning.) Accordingly I attached great importance to the advocacies of psychoanalysis found in the Left scientism of Louis Althusser (1965) and the feminist scientism of Juliet Mitchell in 1974. A little later I found that the realist philosophy of Rom Harré (1974; 1977) and Roy Bhaskar (1975) expanded and improved the philosophical armamentarium with which to instal and defend psychoanalysis in the citadel of science.<sup>6</sup>

However, this kind of philosophical preference can serve only as a rationalisation obscuring other reasons for turning to psychoanalysis, or as the basis for an empty and formalistic approach to it. I had already become interested (through experiences in training as a clinical psychologist) in varieties of psychoanalysis (the Kleinian and object-relational schools) which are very little troubled by the question of scientificity. They occasionally advance a claim to a particular scientific method (e.g. in Harry Guntrip's formulation of what a 'psychodynamic science' should look like<sup>7</sup>), but on the whole they are notable more as expressions of a certain kind of psychological humanism. By this I mean that they tend to stress elements of human need and feeling which for most practical purposes can be regarded as universals; that they see the individual subject as a basic entity, as potentially coherent and as a moral agent; and that they at least implicitly support the notion that the most fundamental kind of discourse is moral.

Of course none of these features is necessarily incompatible with some kind of concern with scientificity. However, there is an important difference of emphasis, and the compassionate understanding and emotional truth of this humanism came to seem of greater value for me than the search for *scientific* truth, notwithstanding the tendency of some object-relations writers particularly to slip into somewhat sentimental and rhetorical styles of humanism, in which the individual or Self is naturalised and elevated into an absolute principle, rather in the manner of Rogerian 'humanistic psychology'.

Moreover, despite the growing interest in realism, the issue of scientificity has now lost some of the topicality it had on the Left in the 1970s, insofar as that was generated by the Althusserian influence. Work on a number of fronts continues, however, and the characterisation of psychoanalytic method and epistemology remains an important task. The consideration of psychoanalysis in terms of realist theory has been carried forward by David Will (1980; 1986), Andrew Collier (1981) and Michael Rustin (1987). An explicitly humanistic perspective, proposing *biography* as the core discipline of psychoanalytic human science, has been put forward by Robert Young (1986; 1987). And while the Althusserian flame may have flickered, the torch of Lacanianism which it helped to light continued to burn quite fiercely, such that from some viewpoints one of the main commendations of psychoanalysis is its allegedly *anti*-humanist theory of the subject, or its claimed potential for circumventing the humanism/anti-humanism debate (Henriques et al, 1984).

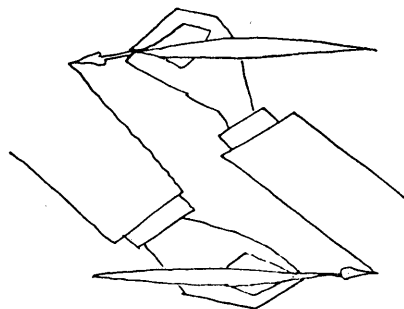
One other bridge from philosophy into psychoanalysis must also be mentioned, since it is part of a body of work which has been steadily gaining influence since 1968. This is the work of Jurgen Habermas, who in fact provides the most explicit and elaborated model for a philosophical appropriation of psychoanalysis. Habermas (1968; see also McCarthy, 1978) proposes that psychoanalysis is the *only* example of an emancipatory, self-reflective science, or rather that it is once shorn of Freud's theory of biological instincts, a physicalistic misunderstanding by Freud of his own discoveries. Russell Keat (1981) provides a critical discussion of Habermas' use of psychoanalysis, arguing that he departs from Freud in ways other than those which he announces. Joel Whitebook (1985) makes a similar criticism of the neglect of the *body* by Habermas, whose 'etherialised' picture (Keat) of the psyche, in which the unconscious functions only as the source of distortions of communication, is certainly far removed from the pictures of mental life found in British psychoanalysis (and, in a different way, from the Lacanian picture). This may partly account for the lack of impact here of his reading of Freud. Despite the interest in his work as a whole, it has not been a springboard for a wider engagement with psychoanalysis.

### THE MULTIVALENCE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Thus neither personal experience of therapy, nor philosophical commitments, are in themselves likely to provide much of a basis for a political appropriation of psychoanalysis, and if for particular individuals they are important factors then they may each be linked with one of a number of very different kinds of psychoanalytic politics. This was the conclusion drawn from the brief historical background sketch given earlier, namely that psychoanalysis is available to diverse and often quite divergent political appropriations. There is a notional common element in all these appropriations, which is some kind of stress on unconscious interiority. Mitchell (1974), however, argued persuasively that in the cases of Reich and Laing no real conceptual commonality with Freud existed, since the genuinely interior, unconscious and psychological dimensions were lacking in the work of the more 'political' thinkers. Jacoby (1975) offers a somewhat similar critique of the Adlerians, neo-Freudians and ego-psychologists as well as the Laingians. Even if this commonality is not regarded as superficial, it is very secondary in political terms. What can be the political significance and value of a concept of 'the unconscious' if it can be inserted with equal conviction into both historical materialism (e.g. Schneider, 1973; Lichtman, 1982) and

classical liberalism (e.g. Badcock, forthcoming)?

This is actually the wrong question, although it is based on a fact which must be observed, namely that psychoanalysis does not bear with it a stable set of political values which act as a constant factor in different combinations with other intellectual elements. It does not follow from this though that it has no political effectivity; although it has no *general* political impact, it is at least potentially important in the *specific* contributions it makes to particular political outlooks, in the ways it may extend, infect or enrich them.



These contributions are not a matter of logical affinities between abstract forms of discourse (e.g. the question of the philosophical compatibility, or otherwise, of psychoanalysis and Marxism) but of whether there are the people around able and willing to do the intellectual work required to establish cooperative relationships between psychoanalytic thinking and any particular kind(s) of political perspective (e.g. the question of whether sufficient philosophers are interested in establishing the compatibility of psychoanalysis and Marxism). In other words, the political value of psychoanalysis is a historical, conjunctural matter, its content and impact open to negotiation between contending social forces. Of course the particular forms of psychoanalysis may lend themselves more easily to certain kinds of appropriation, and some political traditions may be hostile to all forms of psychological thought, but these limits are very broad ones, and even quite well-defined schools of psychoanalysis have been claimed by very different political interests.<sup>8</sup>

The right question to ask is therefore an empirical one: what has been the political significance of psychoanalysis in those theoretical appropriations of it which have been made?

There are, I suggest, three very broad problematics or political agenda from which people have sallied forth to lay hands on psychoanalytic theory. They are distinct and will to some extent be discussed separately, though the main argument advanced here is that at an important level they draw upon a common source, psychodynamically and ideologically. Empirically, they have no doubt been frequently associated with each other in individuals' political outlooks. For each I will suggest an alternative (and in my view, preferable) reading of psychoanalysis.

### FEMINISM

The feminist interest in psychoanalysis has been one of the main reasons for its coming to be placed on the agendas of the Left. This interest, to the extent that it has been a positive one, was at first mainly in psychoanalysis as an instrument for the critique of patriarchy and for the promotion of anti-familism. Work here was mainly around the classical Freudian texts, and was usually either part of the Lacanian 'return to Freud' (see below) or was seen to involve an inversion of Freud similar to

that described above, though here the emphasis was on Freud-the-patriarch rather than Freud-the-bourgeois (if such a distinction were recognised). Partly through the influence of Kleinian and object-relational ideas, the feminist critique of gender difference shifted its focus to mothering and to the gendered division of labour in child-care (Dinnerstein, 1976; Chodorow, 1978), developing a highly influential rationale for the abolition of that division as the key to the general subversion of gender identity and the overthrow of patriarchal power.

For almost everyone, the first Other is a woman. In Dinnerstein's view, influenced by Klein, the infant's first experiences of the Other necessarily bring terrifying intimations of its separate individuality and mortality. As a defence against this, the realm of sensuous experience embodied by the (m)other is rejected in favour of rational worldly activity. Hence the splits between heart and head, feeling and reason, private and public. Woman is continually invested and reinvested with the first half of each of these splits, and man with the second, so that both gender identities are dangerously impoverished and fearful. Chodorow's thesis is similar, but stresses the mother's different catheches of boys and girls. Daughters are more narcissistically identified with, while sons are related to as different others. Thus boys are driven back into a harsh separateness in which they cannot adequately feel with or for others; girls are unable to differentiate themselves sufficiently and to transcend their pre-Oedipal mother-love.

It was in these forms that the feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis was, for a period around the end of the 1970s, a major influence upon many of us interested in the political meanings of psychoanalysis. However, these ideas, despite their still current dominance on the Left and their popularity beyond, have been subjected to powerful criticism. For example, Jean Elshtain (1984) found these uses of psychoanalysis to be schematic and prescriptive, while a paper by Jane Temperley (1984) showed that a more thoroughgoing engagement with Kleinian theory can see *specific* patterns of early psychic development, not intrinsic to the *general* structure of heterosexually-differentiated parenting, as major sources of the damage represented by adult 'femininity', or rather by particular organisations of femininity. (And it might be said that the clinical literature has always been replete with evidence that this is the case for 'masculinity'.) Thus some alternative positions are being articulated, linked to wider and more sympathetic re-evaluations of gender difference, and more concerned with clinically-observed qualities of parenting than with abstract notions of patriarchal power. In many readings of it, psychoanalysis teaches that gender is the most fundamental dimension of identity, and that a model of cooperative complementarity, based on good relations between the sexes, can be posited as an ideal for human relations generally.

#### 'THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL'

The hope that the theory of the unconscious could provide a deeper and more truthful version of this statement was at the heart of much of the feminist involvement in psychoanalysis, and was also a crucial element in the motives of those coming from other, though overlapping, political directions. Earlier versions of the personal/political equation had tended to collapse the personal into the political, but as time went by it became clear that this would not do. Working in the mental health field I was unavoidably impressed by the inaccessibility of personal madness to political analysis, let alone to political intervention, as long as one worked only with a rationalistic psychology of 'environment', 'stress' and other similar con-

cepts. Psychoanalysis was thought to promise to deliver the mediations; the concepts of internalisation, introjection and identification, for example, seemed to offer a vocabulary for talking about the political and historical constitution of our inner worlds. The concept of the unconscious was the key to a new way of understanding the *totality* of our social life, in that it could illuminate how the social outside gets into the psychic inside, and vice versa, and provide the most sophisticated account of how the personal and the political are interwoven. The essential unity, beneath our segmented experience, of all oppressive structures, and of personal and political domains, is implied by this view, which thereby is a point of convergence of an otherwise disparate set of libertarian, (post-)structuralist and critical theory perspectives.

However, this project from the start was in a deep tension with itself. The attraction of psychoanalysis was that it provided the most radically personal and internal account of subjectivity, in comparison with which most other theories of personality seemed banal. But for that same reason it was likely to buck the theoretical burden it was being required to carry, whether that was the Marx-Freud synthesis or some other programme of specifying an inner-outer dialectic. Psychoanalysis has a radical disinterest in the external. (I am referring here to its core conceptual range, not to the interest shown, in particular cases, in the significance of external events by individual practitioners, who may or may not be justly criticised for one-dimensionality.) This leads to several points of tension in the project of totalisation.



One, already discussed above, concerns the relationship of therapeutic experience to the intellectual agenda. Another is related to the theory of narcissism, which has occupied (in my view rightly) a central place in a number of debates during the last decade about the input of psychoanalysis to social theory.<sup>9</sup> The equation of the personal and the political may in some contexts be seen as a narcissistic inflation of the self, consistent with the non-psychoanalytic criticism of the 'personalisation' of politics for which '68' is sometimes held responsible (see, for example, Janice Raymond's critique of 'therapism' and the 'publicisation of personal life', 1986). Not only may *individual* misfortune or responsibility be projected out into the public domain, but personal investments in group and sectional interests and demands may lead to their being presented as a

general interest.

The third and major difficulty which psychoanalysis presents for the personal=political formulation stems not from a particular diagnostic category but from the routine and general nature of psychoanalytic discourse. Let us take the example of domestic violence, and the view that wife-beating is no more nor less than a public, political issue, that of patriarchal violence. This rules out of consideration any specific familial or personal factors, and exploration of how the wider societal dimensions are potentiated into violence in some families and not in others. It empties the particular family of its own emotional content, immobilises those professionals wishing to make helpful interventions, and liquidates the personal responsibilities of all those involved for the violence and its consequences. A psychoanalytic approach is necessarily concerned with putting all these questions back on the agenda, by examining the psychodynamics of the family as a private, partially bounded domain, and seeing the personal and interpersonal specificity of the situation as crucial to understanding it.

In the case of domestic violence, one psychoanalytic hypothesis likely to be of central importance, both in practical understanding and in theorising the personal/political relationship, is that individuals are usually partly responsible for the relationships which they find themselves in. Another hypothesis which, when confirmed, points towards the need for some firm distinction between the private and the public, concerns the conditions for trust and intimacy. In psychoanalytic theory, deep emotional attachments are generally seen as forming slowly, on the basis of repeated experiences of reciprocity, security and satisfaction. These experiences are available only within a bounded (not necessarily physically so) interpersonal space in which the distinctive qualities of the other, in relation to oneself, can be registered.

It has been a main feature of some of the techniques of humanistic psychology that the personal/political boundary is breached at just this point. The best example is probably the encounter group, introduced to Britain around 1970, in which intimacy and confession are demanded in a semi-public setting of people who may be in contact with each other only for a matter of hours. In other words, intimacy and trust are demanded when the conditions for their development—essentially those of longer-term relationships—are absent, and consequently the intimate relating which ensues is necessarily in part fake. This at least is a psychoanalytic view, and correspondingly it is towards humanistic psychology rather than psychoanalysis that some radicals who have remained committed to a personal/political fusion have turned (e.g. in the 'despair workshops' undertaken by peace movement activists).<sup>10</sup>

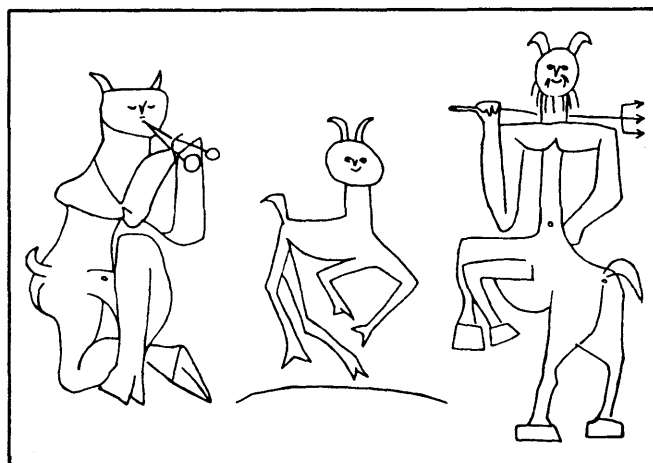
Thus, far from showing us how the personal and political are fused, psychoanalysis offers ways of theorising the in-authenticities which result when the public-private distinction is eroded such that neither domain can sustain the forms of relationship appropriate to it—authentic intimacy in the private domain and authentic civility in the public. In this role, which is one that I would now claim for it, psychoanalysis is at odds with simple equations of the personal and political, and instead is in keeping with more pluralistic understandings of where power is located, and whom it oppresses. This is not to jettison the insights gained in the more totalising moment, nor to abandon the research programmes which we are now only beginning to project in, for example, the historicity of subjectivity.<sup>11</sup> It is thought to introduce a quite different orientation, for which psychoanalysis is of interest to social theory partly because it can inform the argument that the personal sphere not only is

but also *should* be a distinctive segment of social life, and that in general the principle of boundaries and segmentation is a crucial element in good social organisation.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMME

The most general feature of the Left-political context within which interest in psychoanalysis took initial shape in 1970s Britain was the frustration of the aspirations of '68'. For many of us psychoanalysis held the promise of revitalising these aspirations. A major problem with the revolutionary programmes, it seemed was that they had overlooked the *internal* resistances to social change and to socialism, resistances which psychoanalysis could illuminate. Of course this hope had been entertained before, by Reich, Fromm, Marcuse et al; an important difference was that we could bring the conceptual gains of more recent developments in psychoanalysis to bear on the problem, and not be shackled by the limitations of classical Freudianism. Psychoanalysis was the theory which could help to explain why socialism had not yet arrived, and to do so in a way that sustained the belief that when it does it will enable us to *transcend* the world as we know it. Capitalism is still strong because of its anchorage in inner repression, but if that repression could be undone then an unprecedented condition of psychic fulfilment and harmony would ensue, as part of the social transformation.

This political appropriation of psychoanalysis cannot accurately be called utopian, since those who advanced it were generally Marxists for whom the idea of utopia was, at least in theory, impermissible.<sup>12</sup> But to borrow—with due irony—a term from the humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow (1965), it might well be called 'eupsychian', since the transcendent condition to which it aspires, though not necessarily one of social perfection, is one of intrapsychic ease, release and satisfaction.



Two major routes to this condition have been mapped out. One is via the overthrow of the capitalist State and the undoing of the repression which is the psychic base and effect of its authority—the Reichian route of which Kovel is today's most eloquent advocate. The other is that which leads away from the capitalist market, and leaves behind the psychic splitting which is the consequence of engaging in instrumental exchange relationships with other persons. Erich Fromm (1947) was an early guide to this route, which takes one through the extensive post-Weberian critique of rationality, and is one of the main highways of critical theory. This latter route is sometimes seen



as leading towards the reestablishment of social authority in a re-moralised world, and may not include a critique of repression, in which case (e.g. Richards, 1984) it would diverge from the more libertarian path of the first. Often, though, the two routes are felt by their would-be travellers to be running in parallel towards the same destination, where the deep psychic organisation of the majority will be different to what it is now.

This is certainly a simplification, though it falls far short of parody. I am referring most obviously to Reichian and some Marcusean doctrines, though I have not indicated the important differences between the two. Whereas Reich's attack on the ego, on 'character' and repression was unrelenting, Marcuse sought to salvage 'basic' repression, and his hostility to the ego was historically relative. But there is little argument that Marcuse as much as Reich was interested in a wholesale transcendence of our current structures of repression.

Traditionally posed against this revolutionary appropriation of Freud is the view that psychoanalysis offers both an analysis of why 'revolution', as theoretically imagined, is impossible, and a diagnostic critique of revolutionary politics and of the personal motives at work in them. In many of its specifics (though not as a general rule) the latter has been welcomed by the psychoanalytic Left (indeed, has sometimes been seen as the major contribution psychoanalysis has to make), but the former, understandably, has not. Yet this kind of selectivity is hard to maintain, since the two anti-revolutionary arguments are linked. The theory of the post-revolutionary society is simply an intellectual expression and a flip-side of the same delusions and defences which are active in the paranoid machinations of sectarian politics.

It is not possible here to rehearse the main forms in which this attack on the revolutionary impulse has been put; I will however make mention of a recent exchange in which the two traditional antagonists have once again been tested against each other. In the mid-1970s, when the Left's romance with psychoanalysis was at a peak in France, two analysts working in Paris wrote a book in which they posited a fundamental opposition between Freudian theory and the ideas of Reich, which they rejected not only as anti-psychoanalytic but as exemplifying clearly the omnipotence of the revolutionary imagination. *Freud or Reich?*, by Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Bela Grunberger, has recently been published in Britain, and a commentary upon it written by Joel Kovel (1986). Despite the clinical sophistication and intellectual breadth of the combatants, this exchange demonstrates the limits of this debate as it has been characteristically constructed. Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger combine a clear-headed argument for the intrinsic anti-utopianism of psychoanalysis, and an analysis of Reich's regressive wish to dissolve the Freudian insistence on conflict, with an outlandish assertion of the endogenously individual roots of social life. Kovel, on the other hand, disposes most effectively with the claim for the primacy of internal factors, but does not respond to the substance of the critique of Reich.

Even Philip Reiff, the most profound expositor of Freud's anti-utopianism, does not provide a fully adequate alternative to the terms of this debate, since in his account the *whole* terrain of politics is at risk of reduction to the search for consolation. Nonetheless, to complete the catalogue of shifts in my personal views with which this article has been laced,<sup>13</sup> I must now report that psychoanalysis has come to seem to me (in part through my reading of Reiff) primarily to be a doctrine of tragedy and forbearance—to be none the less political for that, but to be opposed (at least in the context of the liberal democracies) to programmes of revolutionary political change.

It is difficult even to allow these programmes the status of innocence, since I think we must now admit, to put one aspect of the matter rather crudely, that the impulse to destroy a society is usually a basically destructive impulse, whatever altruistic and reparative motives it may trick into acting alongside it. Even where a more benign language of social transformation is used, one which in its imagination of the transformative scenario does not give licence to envious or retributive feelings, then a psychoanalytic scrutiny would still be uncharitable, focussing on the grandiosity and denial of the political vision.

This is by no means an apolitical counsel of despair. For example, Jeffrey Abramson (1984) makes an interesting attempt to proceed from Reiff's exposition towards the recovery from Freudian theory of a more 'communitarian' vision of psychic development in which the satisfactions of public life play an essential and honourable part. And there are a number of other suggestions in the literature of recent years about the directions which a *positive* psychoanalytic input to political thought might take.

### PURSuing TRANSCENDENCE

All three agendas—the feminist, 'personalist' and revolutionary—have in common a wish to transcend some existing set of structures or boundaries. The distinctions between men and women, private and public, libido and action are all under attack—to a great variety of ends, but all sharing in some vision of transcending both oppression and misery. In the Left's use of psychoanalysis, from Adler and Reich on, social justice and individual happiness are characteristically fused together. It is assumed that a single, psychoanalytically-informed political project will necessarily change both inner and outer worlds to the same degree. The construction of a basically non-oppressive social order, it is assumed, will result in (or could only be achieved along with) radically different states of mind from those obtaining at present. This eupsychian prescription is most obviously spelt out in revolutionary Freudo-Marxism, as noted earlier, but is also present in the other agendas—in visions of a healing psychological androgyny, and in psychoanalytic contributions to the study of the capitalist totality and its 'social reproduction'. The vision of *psychic* emancipation, as an integral part of social liberation, is as much a part of the scholarly and intricate work of Habermas as it is of sub-Reichian banality.

Eupsychian images of fulfilment, wholeness and happiness therefore underly and unify many of the concerns of the psychoanalytic Left, including and especially the attacks on patriarchy and on repression. The lifting of repression promises to remove not only unnecessary frustration but also the painful experience of being divided against oneself. The ever-provisionally *integrated* self offered by psychoanalytic therapy is spurned or devalued as mere palliative; the desire for a *unified* self predominates, and may interact with the desire for an idealised social unity (Alexander, 1984). Any programme for the dissolution of structures of authority and difference in the external world may carry, for its proponents and opponents alike, the unconscious meaning of the dissolution of *inner* structures and divisions, whether or not such psychic de-differentiation is explicitly advocated, but in much of the work I have been discussing the transcendence of inner conflicts is often consciously the aim.

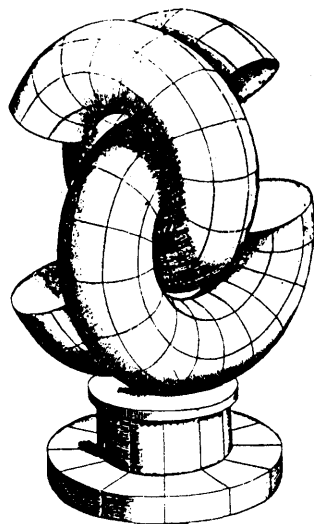
I am here suggesting some psychoanalytic reflection upon the psychoanalytic Left and its aims, albeit with due caution and care not to disguise political dismissal as diagnostic in-

sight. Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger suggest that underlying Reich's politics, and any other promises of heaven on earth, is the narcissistic wish for fusion with the ego-ideal. They advance a strong form of the hypothesis that utopian politics are at root an expression of emotional need, by claiming that the aim of such politics is the restoration of the experience of narcissistic perfection. One does not have to accept their political judgements, nor even their specific psychoanalytical formulation, to take this hypothesis seriously and consider that the eupsychian tone of much radical psychoanalysis may be the product of deeply regressive wishes, and of omnipotent beliefs that the pains of separation and vulnerability can be avoided. Take for example the closing statement of *Repression*, a book in which Gad Horowitz (1977) argues carefully for a moderation of Marcuse's theory such that the ego and genital primacy are reestablished as indices of health, with re-erotisation and pre-genitality envisioned as deployed *within* the ego's organisation of libido. Despite these substantial revisions, the wish for transcendence is preserved, to emerge fully in his closing description of the 'communist man' as one for whom 'the pain of separation is no longer experienced as the essence of selfhood' (p. 214).

This can be seen only as wishful thinking when set against the increasingly well-documented post-Freudian conception of selfhood as intrinsically rooted in the pain of separation, though also—crucially—thereby rooted in the satisfactions and compensations that can come from struggling with separateness and from building bridges to others. Again, the alternative to transcendental eupsychianism is not necessarily reactionary despair, since the makings of quite optimistic fortitude are to be found in the psychoanalytic tradition precisely as it focusses on the constitution of subjectivity in the experiences of loss and guilt.

### THE LACANIAN INFLUENCE

In my discussion so far the main bodies of work implicitly centralised have been the classical Left Freudianisms of Reich and critical theory, and some psychoanalytic feminism, with a counter-plot emanating from British psychoanalysis. What then about that range of political appropriations of psychoanalysis that emphatically distance themselves from all this? Despite a growing mood of reevaluation in the British Lacanian constituency, the French influence is still strong and widespread. Both the journals founded in the 1970s with the aim of incorporating psychoanalysis into a politically-defined project (*m/f* and *Screen*) were strongly Lacanian, as are some non-clinical psychoanalytic societies founded in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup>



At first sight it seems that my argument about the transcendent impulse is not relevant here. A major complaint about Lacan has been that far from holding out a promise of a eupsychian paradise in some future society, he did not even concede the possibility of moderate psychic improvement through psychoanalysis in the present one. The inevitably fractured, alienated condition of the human subject is routinely enunciated in Lacanian texts, and the similarity with an existentialist negativity has been noted (Rustin, 1982).

However, a number of convergences with other strands of the Freudian Left can be noted, some of them at points found on the agendas discussed earlier. Firstly, Lacanian theory has been very suitable for incorporation into the attack on the patriarchal family, which Lasch (1981) sees as having been the central purpose of the Freudian Left. Secondly, the radical decentring of the subject and the evacuation of the subject into language is, at a very intellectualised level, a manoeuvre equivalent to the collapsing of the personal/political distinction. Thirdly, the psychoanalytic critique of the market, though most often associated with critical theory, has received analogous formulations within Lacanian paradigms (e.g. Gallop, 1982) via the equation of the Symbolic with the realm of exchange. Fourthly, and most importantly, the Freud-Marxist tirade against repression and against the ego is profoundly matched by Lacan, whose bitterness against ego-psychology exceeded that of Marcuse, and who built upon it a theory of the ego as intrinsically narcissistic and paranoid (e.g. Lacan, 1966; Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986; see also Bird, 1982). Also, the Marcusean critique of heterosexual 'genital tyranny' and celebration of polymorphous sexuality (Marcuse, 1955) is comparable, as rhetorical cultural analysis, to the Lacanian description of our uncertain sexual identities.

Points of similarity are sometimes noted also between Lacan and British psychoanalysis, which has also developed a picture of the ego as necessarily split. Here however the differences are more important: the multiple egos of object-relations theory are not the equivalent of the shifting identity of the Lacanian subject, but are the dynamically-interrelated agencies of the mind. Whereas Lacan concluded that if there is inevitable multiplicity and conflict within the psyche, then there can be no stable identity nor integration, most other schools of psychoanalysis (not only ego-psychology) have continued to believe (as, it might be claimed, did Freud) that coherence and stability can be achieved, though they must be continually reestablished as the dominant moment in the inner struggle with fragmentation.<sup>15</sup> Since the Lacanians dismiss this hope as adaptationist, humanist fiction, it leaves them with only a romance of 'desire' (equivalent, perhaps, to the lurking naturalism which Russell Keat [1986] finds in Foucault, and likens to that of Reich). At worst, it leads to an extravagant Nietzschean celebration of psychosis (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972). It also leaves them with a shadowy transcendent image of psychological de-alienation. The locus of transcendence, for semiotised psychoanalysis, is not so much, for practical purposes, in the political institutions of society as in the literary and cinematic text and its deconstruction, but it is none the less transcendent for that, as can be seen in its precursors in the Surrealist movement (Macey, 1983).

Thus, although Sally Alexander (1984) suggested that Lacan's thought may yield insight into the utopian 'mentality of transcendence', this possibility cannot be understood as one of psychodynamic clarification of a particular pathological state of mind but as one of reflection upon our collective and absolute lot—transcendence is largely ruled out on metaphysical grounds as an actual possibility, yet it is all that the



Lacanian political imagination has to work with.

For a number of reasons, then, the Lacanian development is appropriately included in a discussion of psychoanalytic Leftism and the pursuit of transcendence. Jacqueline Rose (1983, p. 11) observed that 'The political use of Lacan's theory therefore stemmed from its assault on what English Marxists would call bourgeois "individualism".' The assault is however not only a philosophical one on the 'myth' of the unitary, coherent subject; it is also an emotional and political one on the ego and its cultural representatives. Onto the rational ego of the 'bourgeois individual' is projected much that is limiting, bounding, untruthful, frustrating and oppressive, and here we have the most striking parallel with German and American traditions. It is useful to refer again to the lucid work of Joel Kovel, whose most powerful influences are Reich, Marcuse and his clinical experience, and who has on that basis brought American Freudo-Marxism and the psychoanalytic castigation of the bourgeois individual to its most sophisticated form, and yet who also has absorbed into his language some key Lacanian terms and thus created a neo-Reichian discourse of Desire.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS

Political radicalism is linked to the eupsychian impulse by the assumption that social oppression and personal unhappiness more or less reflect each other, with the social as the ultimately leading moment. Challenging oppressive social relations has been seen as necessarily involving *psychic* transformation.

Any social changes which were effective in reducing the misery of those millions of people in the Third World living in or on the edge of destitution, or in making life and health more secure anywhere, would bring in their train inestimable relief of mental suffering, and reduce the mental disorder which is the precipitate of suffering. To that extent the causes of justice and happiness are one. But a measure of security from the pains of hunger or torture is not by any means the same as the psychic transcendence of the pains of loss and guilt. The prescription of psychoanalysis by the Left has been in the main according to this transcendent, distinctly metropolitan, project (though reports of psychotherapeutic work in Nicaragua have recently introduced a different note).



This eupsychian project is not the same as, and cannot be hitched to, the socialist project in the liberal democracies. The latter must include plans for changing the social arrangements for *responding* to distress, but it is an error to confuse these with the totality of the distress and its sources. This is not to say that much mental disorder in our present society is not socially produced and historically specific in content, but it is to stress that some considerable part of the social means of its production may be (to borrow and extend a term from Joel Kovel) 'transhistorical', or pansocial—at least in the universe of modernity. The management of unhappiness is clearly and directly a matter of mutable social institutions (and is of great political significance in that unhappiness may assume many different political expressions, depending on how a culture is able to manage it), but the reconstruction of basic forms of the psyche is something else. This sounds like Freud, though it is more the Freud of *Civilisation and its Discontents* than that of "Civilised" sexual morality and modern nervous illness'. It is the Freud who pointed towards a possibility for uncoupling political visions of justice from the intolerance of psychic conflict and pain.

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### Notes

- 1 This paper grew out of a short talk given at the Radical Philosophy Conference in London in 1986, as part of a workshop on psychoanalysis.
- 2 My focus here is on tendencies in *British* Left-political culture in the last twenty years. However, since an indigenous British body of work in this area has been emerging, rather slowly and patchily, only since the mid-1970s, many of the intellectual reference points in the following account are non-British (and most are pre-1968!). For that reason, at least some of the points to be made here will apply to other national contexts as well, insofar as debates there have been organised around the same sources and paradigms.
- 3 No such review seems to have appeared to date, though there are a small number of widely-read articles defining important positions, e.g. Rustin, 1982a and b; Lasch, 1981; Rose, 1983. Part III of the recent book by Stephen Frosh (1987) covers some of the same ground as this paper.
- 4 Here, as in many other contexts, Juliet Mitchell's 1974 book was a starting point—see Waddell et al, 1978.
- 5 This inversion of Freud has to be distinguished from the efforts of Jacoby and others to reclaim Freud and the early spirit of psychoanalysis—humanistic, intellectually outgoing and culturally committed—from the fate of professionalisation and technicisation which, Jacoby argues, overtook it in the exigencies of fleeing fascism and relocating in post-war America. This historical analysis of the politics of psychoanalysis does not prescribe any particular view of the psychoanalysis of politics.
- 6 This meant that the present incumbents of the citadel—behaviourism and other schools of empirical psychology—had to be booted out, which could be accomplished, I hoped, with the critique of empiricism—Willer and Willer, 1973; Richards, 1977.
- 7 Guntrip (1961) was particularly explicit about his philosophical influences, chief amongst whom was the Scottish philosopher of the 'personal', John Macmurray. *Radical Philosophy* archivists can find an interesting resume of Macmurray's thought in Conford, 1977.
- 8 Compare for example the use made of Guntrip's work by cultural critic David Holbrook (e.g. 1972) with that by feminist therapists Eichenbaum and Orbach (1982).

- 9 The best known and most controversial position in these debates is that of Lasch (1979; 1984). For two different evaluations of his work, see Barrett and McIntosh (1982), and Richards (1985). See also the symposium on narcissism reported in *Telos* 44 (1980).
- 10 The 'despair work' of Joanna Macy, for example, is a mixture of humanistic psychology and eco-mysticism. See Macy, 1983; Childs, 1986.
- 11 Victor Wolfenstein's (1981) analysis of Malcolm X's autobiography, and the work of Peter Gay (e.g. 1985), are outstanding examples of how psycho-historical work might develop.
- 12 It does though seem very appropriate to speak, as does Rose (1983), of a 'utopianism of the psyche' with reference to the call of Irigaray and some other feminists for a return to a condition of psychic oneness.
- 13 What I am saying overall at a personal level is that I now remain involved in psychoanalytically-oriented intellectual work for reasons which are in some ways the opposite of those which originally led me to it. I do not assume that others will have as perverse a relationship to the subject as this, and I am not clear about the extent to which this personal movement is an age-related emotional change, a trajectory of the political times, or the outcome of psychoanalytic teachings. My hope is that these fragments of intellectual autobiography illustrate some significant moments in the Left's post-'68 relationship with psychoanalysis, and the diverse options available for engagement with it.
- 14 For example the Cultural Centre for Freudian Studies and Research in London, and the Oxford Psychoanalytic Study Group.
- 15 This view of the self does not though necessarily involve a conception of an *original* whole, contrary to the implication of Mitchell's definition of humanism (1982, p. 4) as entailing the assumption that 'the subject exists from the beginning'.

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